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American adults see online courses as at least equivalent in most ways

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A majority of Americans believe online instruction is at least as good as classroom-based courses in terms of providing good value, a format most students can succeed in, and instruction tailored to each individual. But they question the rigor of testing and grading, and whether employers will view such degrees positively, a [new survey by Gallup](#) [1] shows.

In a survey this month of more than 1,000 adults aged 18 and older, Gallup asked a series of questions about use and perceptions of fully online courses. (While *Inside Higher Ed* works with Gallup on other surveys, this publication played no role in this survey.)

Five percent of those surveyed said they were currently taking an online course (the survey did not differentiate between whether it was for formal education or training, or for personal edification), with 18- to 29-year-olds, at 8 percent, likelier than their older peers to say so.

Asked to rate online vs. face-to-face courses on seven factors, touching on the courses' reach and quality, more Americans rated online courses as worse than as better than traditional courses on five, as seen in the table below. In this particular question, the survey defined online education as "classes conducted entirely or partially over the Internet," and did not differentiate between courses taken for credit, personal enrichment, or professional development.

But on all but one of the factors -- "providing a degree that will be viewed positively by employers" -- a majority of respondents rated online courses as the same or better.

Still, when asked to rate the "quality of education" provided by four-year colleges and universities, community colleges, and "Internet-based college programs, in which the courses are conducted entirely online," the latter category fared by far the worst, as seen in the table below. Unlike the earlier question, though, that one focused only on fully digital courses, which is not

how most online education is frequently offered -- in many cases by those very same traditional colleges and universities, and blended with traditional ground-based instruction.

[Teaching and Learning](#) [2]

[Technology](#) [3]

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Links:

[1] http://www.gallup.com/file/poll/165434/Online_education_131015.pdf

[2] <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/focus/teaching-and-learning>

[3] <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/focus/technology>