WILLIAM J. HALTERMAN

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION

THE NEWEST, FASTEST WAY TO A COLLEGE DEGREE

IF YOU...

- Seek a flexible education designed for your needs
- Cannot par
- Have expe
- Must have n certification

THIS IMPORTA

- Avoid "dipl
- Choose the
- Find out wh ducation program
- Get full cred course work already completed

OVER 100 FULLY ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS ARE EVALUATED WITH COMPLETE INFORMATION ON HOW TO APPLY AND BE ACCEPTED

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William J. Halterman

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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION

PREFACE

WHAT IS NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION?

The term *nontraditional education* comprises a number of different elements such as, but not limited to, the following: the awarding of academic credit for experiential learning; correspondence study that is self-paced; using the world as one's classroom and instructor; the awarding of academic credit simply by examination. In fact, it is not easy to define a field as philosophically broad as nontraditional education.

Title 1 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Section 132, defines nontraditional or lifelong learning as follows:

> Lifelong learning includes, but is not limited to, adult basic education, continuing education, independent study, agricultural education, business education and labor education, occupational education and job training programs, parent education, postsecondary education, preretirement and education for older and retired people, remedial education, special education for groups or for individuals with special needs, and also educational activities designed to upgrade occupational and professional skills, to assist business, public agencies, and other organizations in the use of innovation and research results, and to serve family needs and personal development.

The legislative assistant who drafted this legislation was obviously being certain to cover all bases and possibilities.

Yet nontraditional education can frequently be a faster means of achieving a legitimate college-level degree, providing the individual is sincerely motivated. Moreover, the impetus to lifelong learning has been accelerated in recent years by numerous factors varying from a need to keep job skills from becoming obsolescent, to a desire to keep abreast of our changing times, to a search for personal fulfillment.

Nontraditional education is for you if . . .

- **You seek a flexible education designed for your needs.**
- **You are employed or have other full-time pursuits and cannot participate in a traditional on-campus program.**
- **You have "experiential" learning that can be translated into college credits.**
- **You are interested in further education to pass a certification test.**

Many individuals do not have the time to attend traditional programs that require extensive physical contact with the campus, professor, and other students. It is for this reason that THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION devotes considerable attention to nontraditional, self-paced, "correspondence" institutions. Many of the institutions assessed in this book award college credits after analyzing your experiential learning and educational background, with no additional requirements.

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

There are innumerable guides to traditional education available at bookstores or your local library. THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION is basically designed for the mid-career adult professional confronted with the reality that an advanced degree is required if he or she is to advance in a career. A major failing of traditional guides to traditional universities is that even when those institutions have alternative, correspondence, or nontraditional education available to lifelong learners, little or no mention is made of such programs. This guide has been prepared to help solve this unfortunate case of benign neglect. It will provide you with the current information based on an on-going survey of nontraditional educational programs around the country. To date, programs in forty states and the District of Columbia are included.

While a degree—any degree—is useful, it is worth remembering that the type of degree and the transcript of the student's work are generally more important to an employer than the name of the university or college awarding it. If an employer is seeking a college graduate with certain skills (e.g., accounting), that employer will examine the transcript and not merely take any college graduate. The fact also remains that if the employer has a choice between a college graduate and a nongraduate, the graduate tends to be hired, at least for jobs above a certain level.

It is important to be judicious in applying for admission to any specific program. Simple admission to nontraditional or correspondence programs is not where difficulty arises for the adult interested in lifelong learning. How many of your previous college credits will count? How much, if any, credit is given for experiential learning? Will you be required to take a large number of courses, even if they are self-paced? Will some personal contact be required with the campus? These are only a few of the important questions which the potential student must resolve before enrolling in any nontraditional program. If your needs and future career and personal goals are not thoroughly thought through, the possibilities for wasting time, effort, and money rise dramatically.

There are still academics who have a haughty disdain for the concept of nontraditional education and the degrees that are awarded, whether they teach at a proprietary institution or a state-funded school. There have always been academic conservatives whose undying belief has been that the modern age has diluted the purity and value of academic credentials. Clearly, in an ideal world people would rise on the basis of their abilities and willingness to work, but we are still some distance from utopia.

In 1979 the president of New York University criticized nontraditional education, stating that "Higher education is approaching the territory of lifelong learning with standards, forethought, and a sense of dignity reminiscent of the California Gold Rush." Concerns for the "dignity" of acacemics aside, such criticism is premised on the idea that the traditional educational system came down in final form from the Mount with Moses and that education does not change over time to serve different populations. Another professor went so far as to state that the nontraditional student is in a much better position to learn and is more likely to do so, when compared to the person in the traditional classroom who may neither be as motivated nor receive much individual attention from the instructor.

Fortunately, not all traditional academics are so critical of new approaches to

education, and there has generally been increasing support for, and interest in, such approaches. The Carnegie Commission on Nontraditional Study estimated that there were thirteen million adults involved in "noncollegiate education" in 1973. According to a survey conducted by the National Home Study Council on correspondence students, the average age of such students is now 35, 84 percent are high school graduates, and more than half have annual incomes in excess of $10,000. According to the Census Bureau, students taking fewer than 12 semester hours of credit are now a majority in postsecondary education.

Traditional academics may oppose such educational innovations, yet these adaptations of the traditional system were preordained by a declining birth rate and the overall aging of the population. The concept of education as something acquired once when young and then lasting a lifetime is outdated and has been discarded by all who recognize the constant need to adapt as the way to survival in an increasingly complex world.

In *The Carnegie Commission on Nontraditional Study: Diversity by Design* defined nontraditional study in the following manner:

> It is an attitude that puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's need than the latter's convenience, encourages diversity of individual opportunity rather than uniform prescription, and deemphasizes time, space, and even course requirements in favor of competence, for the degree learner of any age and circumstance, for the degree aspirant as well as the person who finds sufficient reward in enriching life through constant, periodic, or occasional study. This attitude is not new; it is simply more prevalent than it used to be. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973, p. xv)

It also is a fact that colleges are desperate for enrollments in these times of constricted Federal and state budgets. Nontraditional courses are money-makers, a situation recognized by a number of very traditional universities and colleges. Such institutions have never hesitated to hand out honorary doctorates to wealthy donors and celebrities who might attract donations to the school. The truth is that the demands of the free marketplace have begun to affect the lives of academics, and many resent the situation.

We all recognize that very little often distinguishes people working the same job—*except* that the person with a college education is likely to advance much faster, earn more, have higher prestige, and enjoy a host of other benefits.

A survey published by a leading university in the nontraditional-education field notes that half of their graduates "received a salary increase or a more prestigious position as a result of their degree." Another survey, of United Auto Workers and Steelworkers by the University of Michigan, showed about sixty percent interested in further off-campus/nontraditional education. They were specifically interested in courses that were job-related, such as mathematics, computer science, industrial engineering, or leadership development. The implications of these two surveys are clear.

This book cannot overemphasize the fact that a degree is a degree is a degree, *providing* that it is awarded by a reputable institution. At a job interview it is only rarely that any-

thing more than superficial questions are asked about one's formal educational background. For one thing, most of us do not go into the area of major concentration we studied in college but, instead, are blown about by the winds of fate. One major strength of the nontraditional approach is that the student quite frequently has work experience in his or her field of study. This observer does not view the awarding of credit for such experience as "meaningless" devaluation of academic standards. The time has long past for academics to fully recognize that mid-career professional people with family responsibilities cannot, and are not willing to, spend their evenings and weekends cloistered on ivy-covered campuses with professors—too many of whom know less much about their subject than the student working in the field.

The fact is that after five years on the same job, there is no difference between a college graduate and a nongraduate, *except* in the paths their careers are likely to follow. Studies have shown time and again that college graduates earn more over a lifetime than those who do not attend or graduate from college. The central fact remains that while there is no real difference in the levels of working knowledge between college graduates and noncollege graduates, a degree is the ticket frequently required for career success by a society that often demands credentials rather than takes the time to recognize talent and intelligence in an individual.

Unquestionably, there are those who disapprove of nontraditional education because they feel that such degrees are too easy to attain. But while no reasonable person would condone 'diploma mills," it is absurd to condemn nontraditional or continuing education for adults that allows them to undertake serious study part-time, at home, evenings, or weekends and provides academic credit for what they already know. Acquaintance with the ideas of Plato or Bertrand Russell notwithstanding, it is doubtful that the disapproval of academic conservatives is of earth-shattering importance to the vast majority of sensible individuals whose identity does not depend upon having endured a certain number of years of classroom drill. It must be remembered that degrees do not confer wisdom nor knowledge, they are merely the outward sign recognized by society for individual accomplishment.

Education is a commodity. Indeed, it is such a commodity that many colleges and university communities are vigorously selling themselves today as a direct consequence of shrinking enrollments (alas, for academics, the end of the "baby boom") and constricted funding.

The degree fetish that this country has developed is unhealthy for our society. A genuine respect for talent, intelligence, and knowledge is frequently difficult to find, even though the American system is far more open than many others around the world. Fortunately, the United States has not yet gone to the extremes of a class-conscious country such as Great Britain, where upward mobility is much more restricted than here. The degree mania present in our society today is concerned with learning and competence to be sure, but it is also often seen as another hurdle to jump in the endless race to get ahead.

Credit for courses previously completed must be carefully evaluated by a reputable institution to ascertain whether it is applicable to the program and degree you seek. If you have participated in courses or programs, seminars or workshops, if you have expe-

rience gained from military, business, or government affiliations or service—all these must be carefully evaluated to insure that the proper amount of credit is awarded. Any institution that is overly generous with such college credits for life experience should be viewed with a degree of skepticism.

Most nontraditional programs are based upon a core of knowledge in three primary areas: humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. You may have life experiences which can be partially credited toward the fulfillment of these basic requirements. You may also obtain credit through satisfactory completion of general examinations, such as the College Level Examination Program.

At this juncture the point must be made that those without previous college education or experience of some other formal study will not likely do well starting from scratch in a self-paced, nontraditional type of program. The promotional literature of Syracuse University estimates that it "will take seven years for you to complete the 120 semester hours" required for one of its degrees if you have no prior credits. There are, of course, legitimate nontraditional programs that take considerably less time than this, but they are likely to be offered by private, proprietary institutions.

Many mid-career people rightly feel they deserve to receive academic credit for what they have learned in the "school of hard knocks," a fact that is taken into account by this publication. Unless you take advantage by "attending" an institution offering college credits for experiential learning, a college program may simply be too long. For most of us, there are already not enough hours in the day, without the problem of making a long-term commitment of precious time to an educational program.

Nonetheless, simply because a program is nontraditional does not automatically mean that it will offer credits for experiential learning, nor should one assume that these degrees are easy to attain, because such is definitely not the case. In many instances nontraditional degrees can be more difficult to attain than those from traditional universities. Among the schools listed in this book Walden, Heed, and Nova are institutions, for example, with rigorous standards for the Ph.D. degree, compared with the same degree offered by traditional universities.

The would-be nontraditional student must remember that many independent-degree programs limit your options for study. The Lifelong Learning promotional literature of Ohio University states: "It is possible to receive a degree exclusively through courses offered in the independent degree program, although this limits your choice of courses and degree programs." Ohio University is a traditional school with nontraditional/correspondence offerings, which accounts for the limitations. Institutions more clearly nontraditional in character, where the student is involved in establishing his course of study, offer greater flexibility than traditional institutions with some correspondence or external study programs.

One final question you should resolve prior to undertaking any given educational program is whether it is the one that will lead to your ultimate goal. Always make certain that any credential you are aiming to receive at the conclusion of your studies is acceptable for certification purposes by your employer or prospective employer. There could be a major disappointment awaiting you if you don't ask this question first.

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CREDIBILITY, ACCREDITATION, AND DIPLOMA MILLS

One may view accreditation (the means by which colleges, universities, and other school programs are certified) in many ways. Some view accreditation as vitally necessary to protect the quality of education from the open assault of charlatans and hucksters. Others tend to view accreditation as the part of the educational system that succeeds in stifling education rather than promoting it, in the belief that learning and the appreciation of knowledge are what education is supposed to be about rather than worrying about what outside examiners may think.

The credibility of an institution is an issue separate from its accreditation and the legal status. California, for example, has a law which allows for the creation of private ("proprietary") institutions that are legally authorized to award college degrees, but such institutions may not be accredited by the regional authority. (There has been some controversy in recent years about who accredits the accreditors and by what criteria they do so, but these arguments are not germane and are too arcane for our interests herein.)

A degree may be awarded by an accredited institution, but there is a definite pecking-order among the institutions of higher education. Too many people now survive an education rather than have one that becomes central to their way of life. It has become important to choose an educational program intelligently rather than assume they offer equal value.

Accreditation of colleges and universities, whether traditional or nontraditional, as well as practically any training school or program, is an area where there are no national standards. As noted by a publication from the Office of Post-secondary Education at the Department of Education:

> The United States has no Federal Ministry of education or other centralized authority exercising single national control over educational institutions in this country. The States assume varying degrees of control over education, but, in general, institutions of postsecondary education are permitted to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. As a consequence, American educational institutions can vary widely in the character and quality of their programs.
>
> In order to insure a basic level of quality, the practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting nongovernmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs. Private educational associations of regional or national scope have adopted criteria reflecting the qualities of a sound educational program and have developed procedures for evaluating institutions or programs to determine whether or not they are operating at basic levels of quality.

A good rule of thumb in assessing the credibility of a nontraditional program is that the faster the degree comes, and the more eager the institution is to enroll the student, the more likely that it is worthless.

Simply because a degree is offered in a nontraditional fashion does not automatically mean that your experiential learning and college credits will add up to an instant degree. We cannot overemphasize the fact that a fraudulent degree from a diploma mill is worse than having no degree whatsoever.

Phrases in the literature of diploma mills such as "no-cost evaluation," or an appeal for you to "earn" your degree now by sending the enrollment form—and the appropriate "tuition" fee—are warnings about the probable illegitimacy of the "institution" in question. If it operates out of a post-office box and you cannot locate a campus or very respectable set of offices, do not spend your money. Be wary of those institutions whose faculty has graduated from that institution or from foreign institutions you have never heard of. We have checked the institutions included in THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION by making inquiries to them under a number of different names, from different states, and in some instances, through telephone calls. There is every reason to believe that no diploma mills have slipped past. Anyone experiencing difficulty with any institution included herein, or who has discovered a new and interesting program, is invited to contact the compiler of this work, through the publisher.

Accreditation is not the same as credibility, a fact which deserves emphasis. *Lovejoy's College Guide* has the following to say about accreditation:

> Senior institutions which do not have accreditation by one of the six regional bodies but . . . may have approval or recognition by their state universities, state boards or departments of education. Some of these colleges may have had regional accreditation in past years but lost it because of one weakness or another. Some, conceivably, might have obtained regional accreditation but elected not to seek it. Some are among the nation's oldest colleges, some are commendable new institutions, while others are not impressive because of their limited facilities.

The credibility and acceptability of the nontraditional institution for the adult learner will be of far greater concern than whether it meets criteria such as having enough books in its library—or having a library at all, for that matter.

The National Home Study Council, founded in 1926, sponsors an independent nine-member Accrediting Commission. Shortly after its founding in 1955, the U.S. Office of Education recognized this organization as a "nationally recognized accrediting agency," which currently accredits ninety home-study schools. Private and correspondence institutions may apply for accreditation. The NHSC is the only organization listed by the Department of Education which accredits home-study schools. Very few proprietary schools offer college credit, although California is among the leaders in this field because of a progressive state law which encourages diversity in education, thereby recognizing that the government ought not have a monopoly or absolute franchise-granting power over who may operate an institution of learning. (See Appendix C)

The reader must bear in mind that one can spend years delving into any one aspect of the various elements of the subject of accreditation. The user of nontraditional education will have to be the ultimate judge of the effectiveness of the program he or she chooses.

Each student will have different goals, varying life experiences, educational backgrounds, and interests that differ. Some will not want to spend much time getting a credential for what they already know, while others will be willing to study for a lengthy