

Top 7 Best Online Colleges for 2010

After receiving and reviewing more than 2000 reviews of online schools, OnlineDegreeReviews.org presents the best online colleges and universities for 2010. Our list reflects the input of current and former online college students – *not* university marketing departments. OnlineDegreeReviews.org is designed to provide prospective students with online program reviews that are free of corporate biases.

How was our list determined? Since 2006, experienced online learners have been submitting program reviews to OnlineDegreeReviews.org. These reviews address a range of online program features such as professor quality, educational technology, and student support. Once a school has received twenty student ratings on a scale of 1 to 10 -- and more than one program from that school is represented -- it becomes eligible for the website's list of best online colleges. The schools on our list of best online colleges for 2010 have received a minimum of 30 evaluations each.

What are the results? Students' top-rated selections represent schools from across the United States. Each school on the list is nationally or regionally accredited.¹ Some online institutions, such as Seton Hall University, have rich histories as brick-and-mortar schools. Others, such as Henley-Putnam University, are devoted exclusively to online learners.

Read on for details about our seven best online colleges, plus one that deserves an honorable mention.

1. Our visitors' top-ranked online school is Seton Hall University. Founded in 1856, Seton Hall is America's oldest Roman Catholic university. The New Jersey school is regionally accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Seton Hall's online offerings include: an RN to BSN program; master's degree programs in communication, counseling, educational leadership, and nursing; and several certificate programs.

A number of Seton Hall's online master's programs received an average of 4.5 out of 5 possible stars.² The university's online M.A. program in Strategic Communication and Leadership has received especially high praise for its academic rigor, its

residencies, and for promoting meaningful dialogue among students and lecturers. One reviewer wrote, "This program transforms students into skilled communicators and leaders. If you are looking to stand out and/or move up in your career, this program will be the catalyst." Former students also reported that Seton Hall's online learning environment is truly immersive; they considered themselves part of a true classroom and developed close relationships with their fellow students.

2. The second choice for best online college is Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont. Norwich University, a private school, was founded in 1819 as a military academy. Today it is regionally accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

Norwich offers a number of accredited online master's degree programs. Some programs, such as the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and the Master of Arts in Military History, especially reflect the school's military tradition. The university also offers graduate training in business, civil engineering, and nursing.

Seven of Norwich University's online programs were reviewed by our contributors, and all received between four and five stars on average. Most of the positive reviewers described Norwich University's programs as very rigorous, and detractors agreed: from their perspective, Norwich's workloads were too demanding. Satisfied students also mentioned a highly engaged faculty and networking opportunities. Many observed that Norwich University's online programs are relatively expensive, but those who could invest enough time in schoolwork concluded that they received their money's worth.

3. Our contributors' third best online college is Henley-Putnam University. Henley-Putnam University was founded in 2001 as the California University of Protection and Intelligence Management. The school is nationally accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council, and all of its students are distance learners.

As the school's original name suggests, Henley-Putnam University is devoted to training professionals in the fields of counter-terrorism, intelligence, and security. Three of their bachelor's degree programs – those in terrorism and counterterrorism studies, intelligence management, and

management of personal protection – received an average of 4.5 or 5 stars. Henley-Putnam’s master’s program in terrorism and counter-terrorism studies also received a high rating, but at the time of publication, this reflected only one contributor’s experiences.

Henley-Putnam University’s satisfied students consistently referred to top-notch faculty members, engaging materials, and an easy-to-navigate online program. Students also noted that Henley-Putnam understood the flexible needs of military members and provided great customer care.

4. Our reviewers’ fourth choice -- Columbia Southern University of Orange Beach, Alabama -- is an online-only school that’s accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council. Columbia Southern was founded in 1993 and established its first online degree programs by 1994. Today the school awards dozens of degrees at the associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral levels.

Current and former Columbia Southern University students have assigned high marks to a wide variety of CSU programs such as the bachelor’s degree program in occupational safety and two MBA programs. Reviewers made reference to the school’s rigorous but reasonable assignments, its free textbooks, and a convenient open-enrollment course format. The university’s relatively low cost was also emphasized.

A few detractors expressed concern that credits from this nationally accredited school would not be accepted by regionally-accredited four-year colleges.

5. TUI University, formerly Touro University International, is our contributors’ fifth choice for best online college of 2010. California-based TUI University is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and has additional accreditations for its programs in pharmacy education, osteopathic medicine, and public health. TUI awards bachelor’s, master’s, and Ph.D. degrees for work completed online.

Reviewers assigned an average of 3.5 to 5 stars to TUI’s online degree programs. Common themes of reviews include the school’s affordability, its commitment to members of the

military, and its emphasis on helping students to improve their writing skills.

Some students expressed concern over an inefficient financial aid office and lack of academic rigor in some courses.

6. Our sixth choice, Grand Canyon University, is a private Southern Baptist school in Phoenix, Arizona. This brick-and-mortar university was founded as a non-profit liberal arts college in 1949, but in response to financial hardships it became a for-profit institution in 2004. It's regionally accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Reviewers consider GCU to be among the best online colleges primarily because of its master's programs. Graduate programs in education received especially strong reviews. One student commented, "Overall, the instructors were wonderful, technical support was good, and the office staff was helpful." Another wrote, "I am extremely happy with my education at GCU. It has done essentially three very big things for me: made me a better teacher, advanced my salary, and allowed me to teach on the college level..."

7. Our reviewers' seventh top online college is American Military University in Charles Town, West Virginia. AMU is regionally accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and is nationally accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council. The school offers more than 100 online degree programs and certificate programs, and all are designed for professionals in national security and public service.

American Military University's undergraduate and graduate programs received equally strong reviews, and program ratings averaged between four and five stars. In a representative review, one student wrote, "Overall, it is a solid school. The professors work with you well if you communicate with them. The material covered is up-to-date and relevant. The 8 week course format is perfect for me because I have a full-time job and I can focus on 3 credit hours at a time."

Prospective students should note that ratings for AMU professors are highly variable.

Finally, one more school – Andrew Jackson University – is distinguished by overwhelmingly positive reviews, although it didn't receive enough reviews in 2009 to make our official list. Andrew Jackson University is an online-only university based in Birmingham, Alabama and accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council. The school focuses on career-oriented degree programs in business, communications, and criminal justice. Reviews suggest that AJU's online degree programs are rigorous but reasonable, and students especially appreciate the ability to take proctored exams in their own homes.

For more information about these online schools and many others, visit our homepage at www.OnlineDegreeReviews.org. There you can search for online degree programs, find thousands of reviews, and communicate with other students about online learning.

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Notes

1. Here we've used a five-star scale to describe evaluation averages. The ten-point rankings can be found alongside each program listed at [OnlineDegreeReviews.org](http://www.OnlineDegreeReviews.org).
2. What is accreditation? As described by the [U.S. federal government](#), the goal of accreditation is "to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality." The government does not directly evaluate colleges and universities, but it awards financial aid to students at schools that [certain accrediting agencies](#) have judged to meet educational standards.

There are six major *regional* accrediting agencies in the United States. Online-only schools may become *nationally* accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council and other agencies, and they may also earn regional accreditation. Regional accreditation is generally considered more rigorous than national accreditation. Specialized accreditation is also available for particular academic programs.