



The Best Online Degree Programs for Working Adults

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“Should I go back to school?” If this question is on your radar, you may have mixed emotions. Going back to school can help you advance your career and achieve your personal goals, but it can also feel daunting if you’ve been out of the academic world for some time.

The good news is that your professional experience is incredibly valuable, and there’s never a bad time to build your skills through an online degree program.

At Mount Vernon Nazarene University (MVNU), we understand that working adults have different needs when it comes to educational programs. The best online degree programs should cater to these needs while delivering high-quality education.

Let’s explore some important considerations when choosing the best online degree programs for working adults.

Why You Should Feel Confident in Your Decision to Go Back to School

There are plenty of reasons why going back to school is a positive move for working adults. Getting a degree can allow you to:



**Increase
your earning
potential.**



**Sharpen your
skills in your
current job.**



**Qualify for
a promotion.**



**Prepare to
make a career
change.**



**Widen your
perspective
and knowledge.**

If you're feeling stalled out in your job, an online degree program may be the perfect solution to help you move forward. If you're hesitant to take this step, talk to other adult learners who have gone back to school or speak with an enrollment specialist to learn more about making this investment in your future.

What to Look for in an Online Degree Program

Although going back to school is a smart move in many cases, not all online degree programs will serve you equally. Let's look at three major factors to consider when you're comparing online degree programs: affordability, flexibility, and quality.

1. Affordability

One critical concern for many adults looking to further their education is cost. First, it's important to keep in mind that going back to school isn't just a cost, it's an investment.

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), workers can earn more with each level of education they obtain. Workers with an associate's degree earn approximately 19 percent more than those with just a high school diploma. A bachelor's degree has the most impressive return on investment, helping high school graduates increase their earnings by 67 percent! If you have a bachelor's degree and want to pursue a master's, this is also a smart move because you could increase your earnings by 20 percent.

Even if you're confident you're making a good investment, funding that investment can still be a concern. Fortunately, adult learners can take advantage of resources to help pay for higher education. This includes grants, scholarships, and other payment options. In some cases, employers may even be willing to sponsor your education.

If you want to learn more about financing your education, check out [The Ultimate Online College Guide](#).

2. Flexibility

College for working adults can come with some unique challenges. Working adults often have many priorities to juggle, including jobs, family, and activities. A program built with adult learners in mind will be flexible enough so you can make the program fit around your schedule without having to radically alter your life.

Online programs tend to be the most flexible because they give learners more autonomy over their time. As long as you're keeping up with coursework, it doesn't matter when you're getting the work done. You can carve out time to study on the weekends or evenings after work.

If you want to carry on with all your existing responsibilities and activities outside of school, you may want to take just one class at a time. This option can help you earn your degree in a way that fits your lifestyle.

Alternatively, if you want to expedite the process and put more focus on school, you can seek out an [accelerated program](#)—or fast-track a program. This approach allows you to double up on classes to graduate sooner.





3. Quality

When you're investing your time, attention, and finances into a degree program, you want to make sure you're getting a quality education in return. Ultimately, the quality of your education is what matters most in helping you learn and build new skills.

First, make sure the program is accredited. Accredited online degree programs have been evaluated by an outside agency and confirmed to meet rigorous academic standards. Academics aren't the only aspect of quality to pay attention to though.

The best online degree programs for working adults will:

- Equip adult learners with practical skills they can start applying now—not just a degree.
- Build community in the online environment through cohorts or other methods.
- Offer robust student services to help adult learners succeed, including academic advisors and tutoring services.
- Treat adult learners as whole people, not just students, even providing opportunities to help them build themselves spiritually.



Top Degree Programs to Consider

Ultimately, the best online degree program is the one that fits your needs and helps you achieve your personal and professional goals.

If you want to go back to school but aren't sure what you want to study, consider these top degree programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education levels.

Undergraduate Programs

There are many [undergraduate programs](#) to consider. If you aren't sure which career path you want to take, consider these programs, which can all help you land a fulfilling career.

SOCIAL WORK

[Social work](#) is an in-demand and rewarding career. As a licensed social worker, you can help people deal with difficult life situations and challenges such as stress, anxiety, and addiction.

- **Estimated program length:** 27 months
- **Job growth, 2020-2030:** 12 percent
- **Median annual salary:** \$50,390 per year

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

If you enjoy working with children, consider a degree in [elementary education](#). Elementary teachers can work in various educational settings to instruct and inspire young children.

- **Estimated program length:** 27-48 months
- **Job growth, 2020-2030:** 7 percent
- **Median annual salary:** \$61,350 per year

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

A business administration degree is extremely versatile, helping learners increase their business acumen in various ways. If you want to concentrate on a certain area, you can choose one of six majors to accompany your business administration degree:

- Digital Marketing
- Finance
- Human Resource Management
- Management
- Marketing
- Project Management

Here's what you can expect with this degree.

- **Estimated program length:** 27-48 months
- **Job growth, 2020-2030:** 7 percent
- **Median annual salary:** \$61,350 per year

You may also choose to continue your education with a [Master of Business Administration](#). Keep reading to learn more about how a Master of Business Administration can drive your career forward.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project managers are in demand in a variety of industries. If you have a knack for coordinating schedules, prioritizing tasks, and keeping the big picture in view, [project management](#) is a lucrative career well worth considering.

- **Estimated program length:** 26 months
- **Job growth, 2020-2030:** 33 percent
- **Median annual salary:** \$116,000





Graduate Programs

If you already have a bachelor's degree and you want to expand your knowledge or qualify for a more advanced position, you should consider programs at the graduate level. Here are some top graduate programs to consider.

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

A Master of Business Administration (MBA) can open doors to advanced positions in the business world. Choose from the following concentrations to hone the specific skills you're interested in:

- Accounting
- Business Data Analytics
- Logistics Management
- Finance
- Marketing
- Organizational Management
- Human Resource Management
- Human and Social Services Leadership
- Ministry Leadership

In any of these concentrations, professionals can increase their leadership potential and business expertise.

- **Estimated program length:** 19 months
- **Job growth:** Varies by occupation
- **Median starting salary for MBA graduates:** \$115,000

HEALTHCARE ADMINISTRATION

Healthcare professionals interested in pursuing leadership and management roles in their field should enroll in a [health care administration](#) (HCA) graduate program. An MBA-HCA equips clinicians with business and health care courses.

- **Estimated program length:** 19 months
- **Job growth, 2020-2030:** 32 percent
- **Median annual salary:** \$101,340

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN NURSING

Nurses looking to further their education and help educate others should enroll in the [Master of Science in Nursing](#) (MSN) program. In this program, nurses can advance their skills and learn about curricula, courses, program design, and instructional methods. Created for registered nurses who have their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), the MSN in Nursing Education program prepares adult learners to not only teach in academic and clinical settings, but also help establish policies and staff processes for health organizations.

- **Estimated program length:** 19 months
- **Job growth, 2020-2030:** 12 percent
- **Median annual salary:** \$77,440

Continuing Education

Not all college programs for adults are necessarily degree programs. If you don't want to undertake a whole degree program, you can still further your education through MVNU's [continuing education opportunities](#). Attending a workshop or earning a certificate or endorsement can help you stay sharp and can be a valuable stepping stone in your career.

The Best Online Degree Programs for Working Adults from MVNU

The right online degree program can help you achieve your personal and professional goals in a way that fits your lifestyle as a working adult. Want to learn more about how to further your education and sharpen your professional skills?

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