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UNITED STATES DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Be Proud You Teach Online!

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To tweak a quote from Michael Douglas' character Gordon Gekko in the film Wall Street, "Online teaching is good"!

Nearly all of us who teach online are proud of it, and truly enjoy it. But there are two nagging problems besetting those who teach online: the need for some to feel apologetic for teaching online ("I'm teaching online, but only ... [you fill in the excuse]" or "I'm teaching online, but my full time job is ...[take your pick]") and for many in our society to still diss the value of online education (they are shrinking, thank goodness, but they remain a force). I'm tired of this: tired of running into the apologetic online instructors and tired of hearing from folks in the business and private sector who could give two spittoons worth of value to online learning.

Peek online: you won't find a whit of an article, essay, or story on why folks who teach online should be proud of it, should puff out their chests and defend it. This ends here. I, like you, have a passion for teaching, and we have embraced the online learning environment because we know what it can do, what it can accomplish. And not only are we part of a teaching sector of society that brings and presents new opportunities to students through online teaching, but we also can boldly proclaim to accomplish the same bright spots touted for brick-and-mortar schools.

Teaching online is exciting, it is invigorating, it is special – you need to know all the reasons why for yourself and to parry anyone who guffaws, belittles, or minimizes the value of online learning. And here they are:

We are ...

- **often reaching folks who otherwise would not have a college education.** Geographically isolated, on military deployment, physically impaired, time squeezed with a family and employment: if it was not for online learning these folks would either not have the opportunity for a college education or would find it extremely difficult to keep up. Yet they can now learn from qualified instructors, they can now interact with other college students, they can now receive a degree thanks to online education.

- **offering education in a caring, qualitative, and enthusiastic manner – and doing so 24/7.** The students may not be able to shake our hand or always (or ever) see our face or sit in a chair across from us, but no matter: our concern for their learning, our excellence in teaching and subject knowledge, and our enthusiasm for being in the class comes through loud and clear – and we can do it throughout the day, at any time.
- **presenting discussions and live chats that result on-going learning discoveries.** The more conversation, the more interaction between and amongst people the deeper the learning process goes, for a plethora of course-related material is exchanged, considered, interpolated, and engulfed. This is what makes for a richer learning experience – and this segues so nicely into the world beyond school where interpersonal communication is alive and thriving on discussions and chats.
- **teaching the skills, ideas, information, and strategies that are needed in the professional world.** To thrive society depends on its students to bring with them what companies need to grow, to expand; this does not come happenstance. Courses are set so its learners can take away the depth of its subjects for the long haul, to allow students the tools necessary to be productive members of the workforce and to be financially secure.
- **employing 21st century technology that allows for a myriad of teaching possibilities.** Teaching online taps into the ongoing evolution of computers and software and social networking and the Internet to bring education alive and expansive as never before. Students can virtually go anywhere, explore anything, meet anybody – and in ways never previously considered. Men and women are immersed in all possibilities of knowledge.
- **giving others improved confidence through their increase in learning.** To see a student grow from unsure and error prone in a subject to more confident and with better skills: these are what make teachers continue to teach. To play a part in this evolvment is pure joy, for we help the student become better prepared for all that life will offer beyond our classes. Our fingerprints of teaching stay with these folks far after our last week of class has shuttered – no matter that they might not know they remain, we know they do.
- **improving the lives of others to help them effect positive social change in the world.** Having solid know-how of a subject, experience in interacting with others, and an active mind for creating and jumping on new ideas are keys to the people, places, and things in our world developing and morphing for the better. The online class is an experimental world where students hone and polish these abilities – and all are better for what they do with these experiences.
- **helping to create the next generation of leaders and an improved generation of current leaders.** The online course can be found nearly everywhere, and its numbers are rapidly growing; to lead one needs knowledge of many subjects, an understanding of people, compassion of humanity, and an ethic for honest and sustained doing. We are not born with these qualities, yet portions of each are realized in the

online learning experience – and the appetite to improve on each is whetted to where relinquishment is impossible.

- **helping to foster a true community of multiculturalism and geographically diverse ideas / experience.** Learning the ways varied cultures approach a course subject; discovering new ideas born out of different cities, states, and countries; and understanding different corporate mindsets and approaches from those who work there: all come together in one online course where each person learns to respect the minds and ways of others. There are no boundaries, no passports, no checkpoints – only learners interacting with one another, eager to learn.
- **an integral component of cutting-edge teaching philosophies and strategies.** The online educator brings to life the online class; it is that one person who can enthuse a class to engagement, to excitement, to enjoyment of the learning spirit. Yet without that person to teach the information has no direction, the structure of the course has no purpose, the students exist in an empty shell. But all comes to glorious life when the online teacher pervades – and the online educator will only grow in importance within society as a result of these efforts.

REMEMBER: Spotlights don't find us; we must search them out and turn them on – but only with good reason.