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Education: To be or not to be (in class) - by Karen Friel

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Education has undergone tremendous technological changes over the past several decades, transforming from a paper, pencil and blackboard situation that prevailed for much of the past two centuries to a technologically based mobile arrangement between students and educators. The Appraisal Institute offers the best education in the appraisal profession and now much of this education is available online. On-line education has soared in popularity in large part due to its convenience but has this led to isolation of students? And are on-line students educated as well as those that interact directly with educators and other students? At the risk of sounding “old school”, I believe that sometimes the most important elements of education may be lost on-line. Appraisal Institute instructors are elite practitioners who have undergone rigorous training to hone their delivery and pedagogical skills. They are first and foremost appraisers, and they are dedicated to sharing their expertise. An AI instructor is more than a lecturer because the course materials are designed to promote an engaging dialogue between the instructor and students. Debate is encouraged. Rather than the traditional Socratic method where the “answer” is teased from the students with questions, AI classroom learning is rich, two way communication that recognizes there are many approaches to an appraisal problem. On-line education by contrast is typically devoid of the richness of a spontaneous student/instructor classroom debate.

Perhaps the most important difference in classroom versus on-line education is student-to-student engagement. The world’s great universities are great because they have motivated students who are engaged and eager to learn from each other, students that challenge and push each other daily. Group learning is now promoted throughout our nation’s educational system from kindergarten to the most elite business schools. Look at the desk configuration in an elementary or secondary classroom today. Desks are no longer lined up in neat rows because learning is not a solitary activity; rather, they are arranged in clusters to promote collaborative student learning.

Educational collaboration is particularly important to the practicing appraiser. While appraising can be a somewhat solitary profession, USPAP nevertheless expects appraisers to know how their peers would handle any given appraisal problem. USPAP’s Scope of Work Rule notes that an

appraisal's scope of work is acceptable when it meets or exceeds:

- The expectations of parties who are regularly intended users for similar assignments; and
- What an appraiser's peers' actions would be in performing the same or a similar assignment.

Appraisal Institute classroom education is one of the rare opportunities appraisers have to understand their peers' preferred methodologies and scope of work. Moreover, relationships built in appraisal classes often last throughout an appraiser's career, providing important sounding boards for those head scratching appraisal assignments.

Admittedly, on-line education does offer some convenience and flexibility in the timing of education that is precluded by fixed classroom schedules. However, I must confess that whenever I have taken an on-line course, I secretly hoped the format would save time. These courses, though, are designed to take the full hourly CE equivalent. Darn. For me at least, they were not a time saver. My peer appraisers report the same unless you are a speed reader or really good at writing quickly.

All appraisers are required to take 14 hours of annual continuing education. Fortunately, we have state of the art education options available through the Appraisal Institute. Make the most of your educational options; enjoy the classroom experience.

Check out what's available by visiting: www.massri-appraisalinstitute.org.

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