New
Directions in Online Education

ONLINE STUDY

HOME   FREE COURSES   ACCREDITED COURSES   EDUCATORS   MY S

START NO

CHOOSE AN ONLINE COURSE
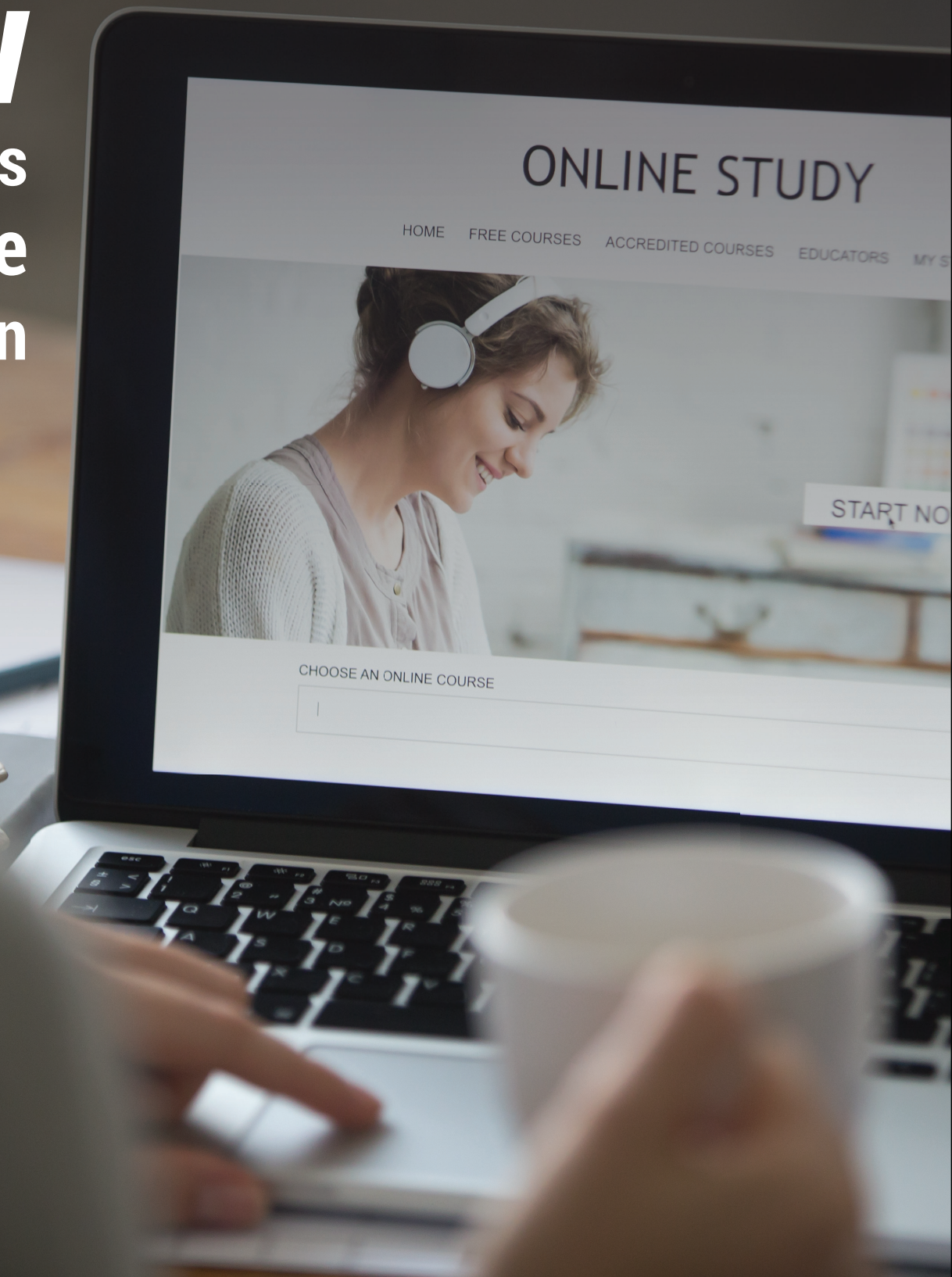
5 keys to building a competitive online program

With more competition, going or growing online can be challenging. You need a proven solution to help you hit enrollment goals, serve students better, and grow your brand.

Define and future-proof programs

Set tuition and fees

Plan marketing and messaging

Establish admission requirements

Integrate with the rest of your institution

Cast a wider network

Partner with Pearson and you'll expand your community to include online learning experts and higher education innovators who can help you grow and make a meaningful impact in more students' lives.

Get our free guide at **pearson.com/opm-five-keys**

Pearson

Introduction

Online education is ubiquitous in American higher education. Some colleges deliver most or all of their instruction online. Other colleges – including institutions with traditional-age students and residential campuses – also have embraced online education. And hybrid education infuses digital elements into in-person classroom learning.

The articles in this booklet explore some of the ways colleges are delivering instruction to students online, and some of the innovations in learning technologies and pedagogy. Increasingly, developments in online education influence traditional face-to-face instruction, so tracking online education has never been more important.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to track the evolution of online education. We welcome your comments on this compilation and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors
editor@insidehighered.com

News

A selection of articles by *Inside Higher Ed* reporters

Collaborating to Add Upper-Level Humanities Courses

By Jean Dimeo // June 21, 2017

Liberal arts colleges see joint online courses as providing breadth of offerings that may be financially impossible with traditional instruction.

Many small liberal arts colleges offer few, if any, online courses because of limited faculty and financial resources and, in many cases, because their missions place heavy emphasis on individual, focused attention on learners. Faculty members and administrators often proudly point to low student-instructor ratios as proof.

But faced with shrinking enrollments and budgets, small colleges are looking for new ways to boost revenues and enhance student learning. A consortium of private colleges is experimenting with one such program, developing and implementing upper-level online humanities courses to be taught across the institutions. A professor at one college teaches an online

Carroll College, in Montana, hopes to attract new students and revenues through online courses.

course, and students at all participating consortium institutions can take it at a distance.

"Liberal arts colleges have had a long history of traditional residential education. It took declining enrollments for a lot of smaller nonprofit schools to take a look at online learning," said Rebecca Hoey, dean of the graduate school and adult

learning at Northwestern College, in Iowa. Hoey and several others are representing Northwestern in the consortium. "They have to look to serving learners in a different way."

Hoey and representatives from 21 liberal arts colleges took part from 2014 to 2016 in the Consortium for Online Humanities Instruction, sponsored by the Council of Independent Colleges. A second group of colleges is participating in the consortium from 2016 to 2018.

Colin Irvine and several colleagues represented Carroll College in the 2014-16 cohort. Irvine, who is the Montana college's vice president for academic affairs and dean, said that while online offerings can be profitable, there are significant upfront costs to consider. The consortium is offering the participating colleges, which offer few or no online courses, the opportunity to learn how to cost-effectively develop and launch online classes.

"This is part of the appeal of the CIC consortium -- economies of scale for both the number of available courses and the shared insights and hard lessons learned to provide small schools a better, more measured chance to enter this market," he said.

Consortium participants also said they envision the shared online offerings as a way to attract more residential students to their small, sometimes rural, campuses because learners will have access to courses not available at their own institutions.

"It will allow us to offer the more classes like the bigger public universities," said David Kenley, a professor of history at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, another member of the 2014-16 cohort. "You can say, 'We only have four historians at our college, but you will be able to take upper-level history classes from many others.' "

A Group Effort

The CIC, which has more than 700 member institutions, formed the Consortium for Online Humanities Instruction in 2014. Participating colleges in the two groups were selected through a competitive process for the first effort.

The consortium is being funded by grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Ithaka S+R, a research and consulting firm, is providing advice to the institutions and is serving as the project's evaluator. Participants meet periodically in Washington, D.C., where the CIC is based. Their travel is paid for, and instructors who design the online courses receive stipends.

Each institution agreed to develop two courses, offering them in the first year to their own students, and then making the online courses available to learners at the other consortium colleges in the second year.

Faculty members from the two cohorts have taught their online classes to their institutions' students. Online courses developed by the first group have been offered to all participants' students, and some online courses conceived by the second group will be offered to member institutions this fall.

More Benefits

Besides additional upper-level courses and the potential for increased revenue and students, faculty members and administrators see other benefits of the consortium's efforts. Kenley said online courses encourage learners to spend more time on task, and allow "students to linger rather than run off after the bell rings."

Online education also promotes methodologies and technologies that may not be as widely used in a traditional classroom setting. Kenley said digital humanities, for example, uses specific research methods, such as data mining, statistical analysis and geographic information systems, and technologies including web design, film and podcast production and online archive creation.

"The skills involved in such research and presentation are increasingly valued in the post-graduate world," he added. "Face-to-face classes can incorporate many of these methodologies, but I think online instruction may make them even more accessible."

Irvine agrees: "The main benefit has been engaging students in new ways and, in some cases, developing different intellectual potentials in students than you would [be able to] in a traditional setting."

Likewise, Irvine said students and staff at his college, which is located in a small city in sparsely populated Montana, will be introduced to dynamic places and experiences with

peers throughout the U.S. through the online courses.

Finally, at McDaniel College in Maryland, one administrator's participation in the consortium led to the institution rethinking its course offerings. Gretchen Kreahling McKay, chair of the department of art and art history and a member of the 2014-16 group representing McDaniel, developed not only an online course, but also a blended class just for McDaniel students. Because of her experiences, the college's president instructed faculty members to consider new ways of teaching courses, and asked McKay to show McDaniel faculty members from various departments how to design and teach a blended course.

Challenges Abound

The 2014-16 group got off to a rocky start mainly because the participating faculty members and administrators had a wide variety of experience with online education -- some had no experience while others were both developing and teaching online classes.

"We made some naïve decisions," said Richard Ekman, the CIC's president. "The first years of the first consortium were pretty hard going. With the second consortium, we didn't make that mistake. This group was ready to go."

Participants in the second cohort all have experience with online education. Also, some members of the first group are being paid to be advisers to the second cohort.

Another obstacle for both groups: consortium participants hail from across the country. "More challenging is the issue of collaboration with the institutions -- the logistical parts and the outreach," said Phil Katz, the CIC's director of projects.

Also, instructors in the first group designed courses based on their expertise, but Katz noted that the courses aren't necessarily complementary with degree programs at other institutions.

Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles has been getting students to enroll in online courses from other colleges. For instance, six students – including one from another college – enrolled in McKay's online Byzantine art course at McDaniel during the spring 2016 semester.

One reason for the low turnout of that course and others, Irwin said, "has to do with the fact that students at small schools, especially in upper-level courses, seek out familiar [instructors]," he said, adding they also look for opportunities to take courses in accustomed formats so they can set themselves up for success.

Still, McKay noted 10 McDaniel students took online courses from other colleges in the spring 2016 semester, including courses in English and religion not available at the college.

Irvin also said that while on the surface small private colleges are relatively similar, they have their own ways of doing things, and the

differences associated with assessments, calendars and academic polices present issues for offering online courses across multiple institutions.

In the second cohort, participants also include college registrars because, as McKay said, the first group still is struggling with marketing the courses, registering students and transferring credits.

Kenley also wonders if some individuals from the participating institutions think the shared online courses may hurt, rather than help, their situations. "Small colleges are struggling with enrollment, and the consortium can be seen as exacerbating the existing problem.… The problem is convincing small colleges that these online courses can enhance our students' education and that we can use that in our recruiting."

Despite the challenges, CIC consortium participants interviewed for this article said the work they did and will continue to do is important. "The first group was enthusiastic and asked to continue on its own," Katz said, noting that two thirds of the 21 institutions in the 2014-16 cohort still are working on the project in some way.

"I will continue to teach online," said McKay, noting that because of the knowledge she gained through her consortium participation, she also re-designed her face-to-face courses. "It can be an excellent teaching tool." ∎

Cast a wider network

You're under growing pressure to expand online and compete with other top institutions, both local and national. Pearson can help you build, scale, and sustain an exceptionally robust online presence.

Today, we work with more than 45 partners and support 250+ online degree programs. We're helping them solve the challenges of access, retention, competition, and engagement, and we can help you, too.

Connect with an online growth expert at
pearson.com/opm

Going All In on Personalized Learning

By Paul Fain // August 1, 2017

A $20 million project from National U seeks to combine adaptive courseware, predictive analytics and competency-based learning with a goal of better serving adult students.

National University is working to create a personalized education platform that combines three of the buzziest innovations in higher education -- adaptive learning, competency-based learning and predictive analytics for student retention.

The California-based nonprofit university is spending $20 million on the four-year project, with a goal of using the new platform in 20 general education courses by next year. If successful, the university said the approach could apply to a broader swath of academic programs.

"How do we create a university that truly tries to adapt to the needs of its students?" said David Andrews, National's president. "We have to have a better model for serving adult students."

The urgency Andrews describes might seem surprising for a university that for decades has been structured with the nontraditional, working adult student in mind. The average age of its roughly 30,000 students is 32, and just 50 are of the first-time, full-time variety. A majority are women and a quarter are veterans of the U.S. military.

National, which has 28 campus locations in California, Nevada and Washington State, is considered a pioneer in online education. About 60 percent of students attend online. And the university was one of the first to allow students to enroll each month, rather than on a semester system.

But the monthly start format is no longer innovative, said Andrews, as a growing number of colleges have borrowed from the playbook of the University of Phoenix and other early entrants into the adult-serving market.

National's board brought in Andrews last year in part to lead the $20 million project. He previously was dean and professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Education. He was also the founding dean of Ohio State University's College of Education and Human Ecology.

"I've tried just about every type of institution, with the exception of a community college," he said.

Several experts said National appears to be one of the first to try to incorporate adaptive, predictive analytics and competency-based approaches with the same courses.

Loosely defined, adaptive learning is a form of courseware that adjusts automatically to individual students' abilities and progress. Predictive analytics involves the use of data to help faculty members, advisers and students themselves stay on track, such as through triggering early-warning alerts when a student slips. Competency-based education

programs drop conventional grading and break courses and credits into competencies that must be mastered.

National said it is exploring other emerging forms of personalized learning as part of the project, including first-course screening assessments and microbadging.

In addition, the university last month created a research and development arm, dubbed the Precision Institute, which will lead the project and support faculty members to study its progress. The university will make that research publicly available.

"We will be bringing in research fellows from around the country," said Andrews. "We don't just want this to be benefiting National students."

More to Follow?

Phil Hill, an education technology consultant, said a key to whether the project succeeds is how well National grasps the challenges it's trying to overcome.

"There's a huge risk that you don't understand the problem," he said, referring to the challenge of designing academic programs around adult learners. Hill also wondered about National's heavy focus on technological solutions. "Will they truly learn and adjust as they go along?"

While Hill was skeptical, citing the many buzzwords National used in announcing the work, he said the experiment is worth watching. "It's definitely interesting. It's a relatively large university that appears to be going all in on personalized learning."

Mark Milliron, the co-founder and chief learning officer at Civitas, which has partnered with the university, said few academic programs include the range of emerging technologies and approaches National is pursuing.

"Those innovations tend to be done in silos," he said, but he predicted that would change. "That's the next phase for a lot of people."

Milliron describes adaptive courseware and what Civitas does in somewhat similar terms. He said "pathway" analytics, like those Civitas offers, are designed to help students better devise a path to and through an academic program. Learning analytics are focused more on course work.

National's attempt to put all the pieces together won't be easy, Milliron said, particularly the competency-based part. That's because competency-based learning tends to require approval from accreditors and to challenge the typical faculty role. Financial aid accounting also can be a challenge for those programs.

"The traditional higher education system is set up to be semester based," he said. "That's how the infrastructure grew up."

Andrews agreed, adding that completion rates can be a challenge in competency-based programs, because of the flexibility they give students to progress through a program at their own pace.

The role of faculty members will be different in the pilot's initial batch of 20 general education courses, said Andrews. For one thing, participating instructors have been asked to find three to five sources of open educational resources for each "microcompetency."

Andrews is working on this himself, for competencies he will teach in the pilot. Instructors will track the efficacy of course material, adjusting it based on what they see.

"We think we can bend the price point" by using OER, he said. "We're trying to create as much variety in those choices as possible."

If National succeeds in creating a new iteration of its adult student-oriented degree programs, Hill said it won't be the first time the university has been on the leading edge.

"They were among the real innovators to meet diverse learning needs," he said. ∎

Try Before You Buy

By Jennifer Goodman // August 2, 2017

Drexel University gives prospective distance learners a free chance to test an online course.

When Melanie Finn considered enrolling in a master's-level class, she knew that online learning would make sense for her busy lifestyle. The elementary school teacher in East Granby, Conn., liked the idea of taking classes from her laptop in the evenings and on weekends. "As a full-time educator with a mortgage, I knew that going to a traditional school was not an option for me," she said.

Having never completed an online course, she wasn't sure what to expect. How would she submit papers? Do research? Communicate with instructors and other students?

She enrolled in a program at Drexel University, her grandfather's alma mater, that allowed her to participate in a week of free training and demo programs to experience the ins and outs of virtual learning. In March, she took part in the one-week Drexel University Online Test Drive course, which allowed her to interact with professors, grad students and alumni. She completed a virtual scavenger hunt, uploaded a paper and got mock feedback on her work.

The test drive helped her realize she would be comfortable learning in an online setting, and she enrolled in a 10-week online educational policy class at Drexel just a few weeks later.

"It was a really good way for me to see if an online learning program would be something I could manage," she said.

Finn's experience is similar to that of many of Drexel's online students who participate in the test drive and end up enrolling, according to Susan Aldridge, president of Drexel University Online, which has an enrollment of 7,300. Since the program launched in December 2014, more than 7,000 students have enrolled in Online Test Drive. (The university's press office said that not all 7,000 completed the course.)

What's more, data show that prospective students who take part are, on average, twice as likely to enroll in an online program (38.3 percent) than are those who do not (19.7 percent). These students are also most likely to finish the first course and complete their degrees online, Aldridge said.

Created in part to address common anxieties around online education, the program allows students to take part in collaborative, threaded discussions with Drexel faculty and staff members and learn more about individual programs, admission requirements and support services.

Because more than 50 percent of the online students have never taken an online course, Aldridge said, the university wanted to ensure they were prepared to navigate in a virtual classroom.

"For many, the idea of completing a degree or certificate entirely online is still a bit intimidating," she said. "But having a chance to explore technology-enhanced education with others who have the same

questions and concerns makes it easier to decide if it's truly a good fit. And that's an important factor in determining their long-term success."

More Demo Programs

Other institutions offer similar programs for prospective students. Two for-profits -- Kaplan University and Capella University -- offer free trial online courses, and Open SUNY provides a demo course that demonstrates many of the online program environments in the State University of New York system. Several institutions, including Arizona State University, provide detailed videos demonstrating online course options.

These types of initiatives offer both students and institutions many benefits, said Jill Buban, senior director of research and innovation at the Online Learning Consortium.

"These test drive or demo programs allow students to be better consumers when selecting an online program," she said. "For institutions, these programs could have the potential to increase student persistence and retention as students self-select their ability and interest in continuing to take online courses after having tried a course, as opposed to after being enrolled as a student in a course."

Trying out classes is especially helpful for learners -- especially those over age 30 -- who appreciate the opportunity to talk with students and alumni, said Kimberly David-Chung, assistant vice president for Drexel University Online's Virtual Student Experience and a developer of the test drive.

"Engaging with other like-minded individuals really helps reduce the anxiety of returning to school, allows them to share their excitement and concerns with the Drexel community, and lets them take a low-risk actionable first," she said.

The Drexel program has given administrators a steady stream of feedback on the concerns of prospective students. Each participant is prompted to answer short surveys about how they feel about online learning in general and the test drive specifically.

"We always ask the students what they're nervous about and then have created content based on what students are telling us," Aldridge said. This led the project team to add or update modules on a variety of topics, including time management, financial aid and career services.

"On the front end, we talk about career-related topics like how to interview for a job or what a 21st-century business card looks like," she said.

The test drive program is staffed by more than 100 volunteer student and faculty "ambassadors" who answer questions and emails and chat virtually with participants. Drexel recently developed a series of training videos to quickly and easily bring ambassadors up to speed.

"The ambassadors really help decrease the amount of staff time that is devoted to the program," Aldridge said.

In the future, Aldridge's team plans to create more robust content for the test drive site, including short animated videos on topics of interest to potential students, such as how to obtain reference letters for the college application process.

For students like Finn, the bottom line is what's most important: "It made me feel a lot more comfortable when the actual class started," she said. ∎

https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/08/02/drexels-test-drive-allows-students-try-out-online-learning

'Access Moves': How One Instructor Seeks Accessibility

By Carl Straumsheim // March 7, 2017

Issues are being brought to the forefront as education becomes more digital. *Inside Higher Ed* profiles a Ph.D. student as she designs her first online course.

How can an instructor design an online course so as many students as possible can benefit from it?

Jessie Male is about to find out. Male, 33, is a Ph.D. student in English at Ohio State University, and she's preparing to teach her first online course. But first, she has to create it.

The course in question is an introductory disability studies course, of which she is teaching a version (English 2277: Introduction to Disability Studies) on campus this semester. Male met with an educational technologist in her department Feb. 23 to discuss the work required to offer the course online.

She is now undertaking the bulk of that work: adapting the syllabus to fit an online setting. Beyond that lie administrative hurdles, including gaining the approval of several faculty committees in order to put the course on the calendar for this fall, or perhaps next spring.

Over the course of several interviews with *Inside Higher Ed*, Male spoke about her approach to course design and how her personal background influences the way she views accessibility issues.

During the interviews, Male spokes about "access moves" -- design choices that increase accessibility to education. Captioning a video lecture is an access move, for example. So is allowing students to revise and resubmit their work, offering students a choice of format to submit their work for their assignments, reducing the cost of course materials, and -- to some extent -- teaching a course online.

"It's interesting to think about establishing an online space of its own as a movement toward accessibility, but it doesn't necessarily became an accessible space unless there are very clear moves that are made to make it as such," she said.

Broadly speaking, Male said, she is pursuing a vision of universal design, an architectural concept that has since made it to education. For Male, universal design means

JESSIE MALE

designing a course to work for everyone -- students with disabilities, students whose career or personal obligations prevent them from studying in person, students with anxiety, students taking a semester abroad, students who prefer reading a transcript over watching a lecture video -- everyone.

"I am very interested in ideas of universal design and not only building an online curriculum specifically for students with disabilities, but for students who might not be able to

access an on-site education space for an array of reasons, whether it's child care, temporary illness, disability or any other circumstance," Male said. "It's interesting to think about how many different students can be further accommodated by an online curriculum."

Male also stressed that her approach to online education is one of many, and that she does not believe hers is necessarily the ideal way to design an online course. She has yet to finalize the syllabus, and she acknowledged that issues related to course materials and student services for now remain unresolved.

"I'm in the process of learning and discovering," she said.

Male is not alone. Many faculty members -- and indeed entire institutions -- are struggling with making education accessible to people with disabilities. Just last week, the University of California at Berkeley said it would cut off public access to video and audio content after a U.S. Department of Justice investigation found it inaccessible to people with disabilities.

Inside Higher Ed will follow Male throughout the process, from the design phase to the classroom and beyond.

Boilerplate Language No More

For Male, the project -- and her specialization in disability studies -- has a personal angle. Both her mother and aunt contracted polio in the 1950s, and they both have post-polio syndrome, a condition where symptoms such as pain and muscle weakness re-emerge years after infection. Her aunt uses a wheelchair for mobility.

"It's something that definitely impacts the family as well and their identities as women with disabilities," Male said. "That's absolutely informed my life, the way I teach, my scholarship."

A glance at Male's syllabus (see a portion on Page 17) reveals one way it differs from many others. The first section students see (after Male's contact information and where and when the course is offered) is dedicated to accommodating students with disabilities.

Much of the syllabus was written by Margaret Price, associate professor of English and coordinator of the disability studies program at Ohio State. Male has made her own changes to suit her way of teaching.

Following the boilerplate language directing students to the university's Office of Student Life Disability Services, Price added some additional language, which Male decided to keep: *I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, or you might prefer to articulate ideas via email or discussion board. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them.*

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommo-

date each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, or you might prefer to articulate ideas via email or discussion board. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them.

Rather than tuck that and other information the university requires faculty members to include in their syllabi toward the end of the document, Male said the placement sends a message to students.

"This is an 11-page syllabus," she said. "By highlighting it at the top of a syllabus, you're saying to students that accessibility, accommodation, support is highly valued in this space -- and these are the resources that you need."

Male said students in previous classes have seen the language as an invitation to disclose a learning disability or express a preference to learn in a specific way.

"I'm not demanding any level of disclosure, but I'm saying in order for you to be successful and for you to achieve anything you want from this class, it would be very helpful for me to have an idea how you best learn," she said.

Other required language, which in many face-to-face courses could have been copied and pasted without a second thought, is proving more difficult to change so that it fits an online course.

For example, Male's syllabus includes a section about the academic and personal resources available

> **"** I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, or you might prefer to articulate ideas via email or discussion board. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. **"**

to students, among them the university's writing center and counseling services. But those resources are first and foremost intended for students on campus. At the moment, Male said, she isn't sure how to extend those services to cover online students.

"This is also why the syllabus design is a very lengthy process that's lengthy for a reason," she said. "These questions will come up as you adapt."

Changing Grades

In the face-to-face version of the disability studies course, students are graded on a 100-point scale. Their final grade is based on their performance in four short assignments (including an introductory exercise, a captioning exercise, a documentary analysis and a final reflection) worth 30 points; a group accessibility audit, 15 points; participation, 15 points; note taking, 10 points; an artifact presentation, 5 points; and a final project, 25 points.

Not all of those assignments will be included in the online version of the course, Male said.

The note-taking exercise is out -- no need to take notes when lectures are delivered in the form of a video with its own transcript, she said.

The assignment is an attempt to help students take ownership of their own education, she explained. Instead of a student who missed class emailing her to ask what he or she missed, Male assigns a student to take extensive "collaborative" notes from one lecture. The student has to make sure to identify important questions discussed during that lecture and define relevant concepts, then make the notes available on the class's learning management system.

"I really can't imagine how to replicate the kind of goals that I have for the collaborative notes and apply them to an online space," Male said. She added that she will probably add one more short assignment in its place.

While the course is housed in the English department, it is not writing intensive, Male said. Students are free to turn in assignments in the form of video or audio (as long as

they provide captions, of course).

Students also have options for how they can satisfy the class participation requirement. The syllabus makes it clear that students who don't feel comfortable raising their hand can participate "through email correspondence, discussion board, office meetings or short response papers." That means finding out how to grade class participation won't be an issue once she begins teaching online.

Participating in class discussions online counts just as much as in person, Male said. "Why wouldn't it? They're engaging with the materials. They're asking questions. They're responding to each other."

She added, "When I first started teaching … I made a lot of assumptions about what participation was. I assumed it was the way I participated as a college student -- raising my hand, being active in conversations, providing my perspective or opinion, arguing with my classmates, etc. -- really asserting myself as an active presence vocally. That's not the way lots of students want to commu-

nicate or [that] is best for them to communicate."

The artifact presentation and group accessibility audits will also make the jump to online, although in a slightly tweaked forms. The first -- a five-minute presentation during which students talk about anything from an anecdote to a Facebook video related to disability -- will be handled as discussion threads on the online messaging board.

"It no longer becomes a launch pad for discussion, but instead becomes an opportunity for students to be engaging with the outside world and applying it to the questions we're asking in those original course objectives," Male said.

And the group accessibility audit -- where students examine a physical or digital space of their own choosing and evaluate how accessible it is -- will lose the group part. Working with other students will be optional, since students will likely be much more spread out than those taking the course on campus.

"Again, we're thinking about different ways of accessibility and accountability," Male said.

How (and When) to Communicate

While Male may have determined how she will evaluate participation in an online course, she is prepared that the ways in which she communicates with students will change.

First of all, there will be more of them. Prior to this semester, the largest course Male ever taught enrolled 24 students. She currently has 44 students in the face-to-face disability studies course. The online version of that course will also seat 45.

"You're going to find other outlets to foster relationships with your students," Male said. Then, with a laugh, she added, "It's a little bit like [the ABC reality dating show] The Bachelor. You have to find some way of establishing yourself as a person in this space. There are all these 'contestants' [read: students]. What's going to make you stand out?"

On campus, Male offers office hours. Online, she will offer video-conferencing hours to give students some semblance of face-to-face time. But she said she will enforce a window of time for students to connect online -- if that window doesn't work, students themselves are responsible for emailing her to suggest a different time.

In addition to email and videoconferencing, Male will be active on the discussion board. She is also considering a mandatory midsemester check-in, meaning she will have connected one-on-one with each student at least once during the course.

Feedback -- both her own and peer grading -- will be handled in more or less the same way it is in the face-to-face course: through the learning management system.

In other words, even though a fully online course gives students more flexibility to decide when they want to study, Male is not creating an expectation that she will be available around the clock.

"I believe in protecting myself and my time," Male said. "I apply that to face-to-face spaces as well. I tell my students, 'These are my office hours. If they don't work for you, please email me. We'll set up an alternative time.' I don't check emails on weekends. The labor involved in being a professor is exhausting, and it can be all encompassing if you let it."

Access to Course Materials

Access to course materials has been at the center of lawsuits against colleges and universities across the country. Some organizations that advocate for the rights of people for disabilities, such as the National Federation of the Blind, are lobbying Congress to pass the Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM-HE) Act, which is intended to help develop guidelines for accessible course materials.

Male said the purpose of her course is to give students a "taste" of disability studies. Therefore, all the readings in her class are available for free online.

"That's also a question of access," she said. "I don't want to assume that a student can pay $50 for a disability studies textbook."

The course also includes several films, and Male said she refuses to assign one unless she can find robust captions -- not automatically generated ones.

If there are students in her class who are working with the Office of Student Life Disability Services -- for example if they use screen readers or need physical textbooks -- she

ENGLISH 2277
Introduction to Disability Studies
Spring 2017
Jessie Male

Email: male.23@osu.edu
Classroom/time:
Office location:
Office hours:

Accommodations, Disabilities, and Academic Support

The Office of Student Life Disability Services (SLDS) provides services to any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability. Disabled students that have been certified by SLDS will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. **SLDS contact information:** slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

will be notified weeks in advance. But that is not a perfect system, Male acknowledged.

"That's rooted in the assumption that all students are working with disability services, which is not the case, and I would assume not the case when students are taking online classes," she said.

The introductory exercise -- the first assignment in the class -- presents another opportunity for students to talk about how they learn best and share accommodation requests, if any. But that still attempts to address issues after the fact rather than tackle them before class starts, Male said.

"That's something I want to avoid -- the waiting to say, 'This is what I need' -- and move toward a space of universal design and pre-emptively thinking there are students who learn in different ways," she said. "How can I present [information] visually, textually, as audio? Those are modalities I as an educator am still very much learning and working through and evolving."

Despite the many changes needed to teach the course online, the course objectives and desired outcomes will remain the same no matter how the class is taught, Male said.

"These objectives to me would not be successful if they could not translate over multiple platforms," Male said. "That's part of accessibility and universal design -- that there are multiple modalities of design and leaning." ∎

https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/03/07/how-one-instructor-pursuing-accessibility-online-education

Online and Homegrown

By Ashley A. Smith // October 13, 2016

California community colleges unveil online program that allows students to take courses across multiple campuses, a project that replaced a failed attempt to tap for-profit online course providers to meet student demand.

Just a few years ago California's community colleges were dealing with a serious capacity problem.

The state's financial crisis led to budget cuts for the two-year college system, which meant fewer students could enroll on campuses. During that time, roughly 600,000 students were turned away by the 112 community colleges.

While the system's capacity woes have eased as state money is flowing again, the community colleges have turned to online courses to prevent shutting out students in the future.

The California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative will debut this fall.

Unlike typical online class systems, the OEI is a collaborative program that allows students to register and participate in online courses across multiple colleges. So if a student needs a course that is overbooked on their home campus, they can go to the exchange and take that same course online at another college that isn't at capacity. The program also provides online counseling to students.

"Community college systems have actually done a lot with online courses, but it's always been in silos and each campus having their own program," said Phil Hill, an education technology consultant and co-publisher of the "e-Literate" blog. "But this is a coordinated systemwide approach where they're all working together for the first time."

Not only is this the first time the community colleges have teamed up for something like this, but they also created the online exchange.

Initially, when the two-year system was confronted with capacity and funding issues in 2013, a proposed solution was to use massive open online course providers to meet the demand.

"There was really a big political, public fight about it," Hill said, adding that Governor Jerry Brown was pushing for the state's public institutions to experiment with for-profit companies and MOOCs for introductory and remedial courses.

But the state's faculty pushed back and warned that some of the for-profit providers and MOOCs were unproven.

The system also realized they could provide more seats to students in online courses at colleges

that weren't at capacity, said Patricia James, the initiative's executive director.

And some of the for-profit companies California considered partnering with -- Coursera or Udacity -- have since largely moved out of the higher education market, Hill said.

Instead of ceding control to outside vendors, the colleges decide to create the Online Education Initiative by giving Foothill-De Anza Community College District, Butte-Glenn Community College District and the California Community College Technology Center a five-year, $56.9 million state grant.

So far eight colleges are registering students this fall for the pilot program and this spring more colleges will start working on the exchange to offer classes for the fall of 2017, James said.

> **Community college systems have actually done a lot with online courses, but it's always been in silos and each campus having their own program... But this is a coordinated systemwide approach where they're all working together for the first time.**

"We'll also have access to students in real time and see where they're going and what courses they're taking," said Jory Hadsell, chief academic affairs officer for OEI. "The home colleges will be much more responsive to how they schedule the enrollment needs of their students."

So far more than 90 of the state's community colleges are interested in participating in some way, Hadsell said.

"We have to look at one student in California as our student, no matter where they live," James said. "We're no longer these little colleges that grew as an arm of high schools to stepping-stones into the four-year colleges."

The system is using Canvas as the primary online learning platform. And the project features a common online enrollment application and student information system for sharing across institutions.

"The enrollment challenges and students not getting access to the classes they need is not as big of a problem now, but that doesn't mean the system doesn't need to do this," Hill said. "We still have to help students get access to the courses they need." ∎

https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/10/13/californias-online-education-initiative-connects-community-college-classes-across

Effective Teaching Online

By Sharon O'Malley // July 12, 2017

Four authors of books about online course development offer guidelines for engaging learners in distance education courses.

Inside Digital Learning asked four authors of books about online education for their expert advice on how instructors and their institutions can excel in virtual course instruction. The authors agreed that the online classroom is different enough from the traditional one that faculty members and adjuncts need to create courses for digital delivery that are substantially different from those they teach on campus. And they said teaching online requires an even keener focus on student engagement than the face-to-face model does.

"Years ago, we used to say the danger of online courses was they were just going to become electronic correspondence courses," said Rita-Marie Conrad, who along with Judith V. Boettcher, wrote *The Online Teaching Survival Guide.* "That's still a danger. As each new wave of instructors comes into this environment, there's still that misunderstanding that this is a new environment."

However, institutions and professors should be encouraging residential students to take classes online. "[Colleges] don't provide an online experience to every undergraduate student, but we're doing them a disservice," said Elliot King, co-author of *Best Practices in Online Program Development* and the upcoming *Best Practices in Planning Strategically for Online Education*.

More and more, employers are offering professional development courses online, he noted. "Learning online is different from face-to-face, and [graduates] won't have any experience. If the college wants students to be lifelong learners, give them the opportunity to" take virtual courses."

In addition to Conrad, Boettcher and Elliott, *Inside Digital Learning* spoke with Marjorie Vai, author of *Essentials of Online Course Design* and editor of Routledge's *Essentials of Online Learning* series.

Here are the authors' top tips for creating engaging and successful online education:

Make It a Group Effort

Even an instructor who has taught the same course dozens of times in an on-campus classroom will spend many extra hours figuring out how to teach it online, said Conrad, a lecturer at University of California, Berkeley. So colleges and universities should offer them some sort of compensation, like a lighter teaching load the first semester or extra pay.

In addition, Conrad added, faculty members need training in how to

design and teach an online course. "Too often, faculty try to lay the technology on top of the face-to-face course, and that does not work well," she said. "It doesn't work for the students, and it doesn't work for the faculty."

Focus on 'Active' Learning

Instructors often rely on long lectures to fill the time in a traditional class meeting. But even the most dynamic lecturers cannot get away with that online, Conrad said.

To engage students who are not in the room during a lesson, the course should mix spurts of discussions, collaboration, video and audio clips, and hands-on exercises with text and possibly brief video lectures, Conrad suggested.

"It's not a lecture classroom online," she said. "It's an active learning classroom online." And she said this blend of teaching and learning tools is new to many professors who have not created active learning environments in their face-to-face classrooms.

'Chunk' the Lessons

Long lectures probably aren't the best way to engage a face-to-face class – and are even more ineffective online, said Vai, an e-learning consultant and former chair of the English language studies department at the New School in New York.

"The student should be engaged," she said, "so no pages of text or an hour-long video." She recommended presenting information in 10-minute "chunks" and agreed with Conrad about the importance of varying the format.

Vai also suggested designing lessons with ample white space; breaking up text with photographs so students can see examples of what is in the text; and incorporating color into section titles.

Keep Group Sizes Small

> "It's not a lecture classroom online....
> It's an active learning classroom online."

In a traditional classroom or lecture hall, some students never participate in discussions or ask questions, usually because they are either shy or are not engaged. Online, said King, academic director of Loyola University Maryland's master's program in emerging media, that participation is required, but can be equally intimidating if students are expected to engage with dozens of classmates.

King recommended a cap of 20 to 30 students in online classes. And he has advised professors to break those students into groups of no more than 10 for purposes of discussions, collaboration, peer critiques and group activities.

"It's much easier for them to co-ordinate their time when there are fewer students," King said. "Everyone has to participate, but the barriers go down because they're only participating with 10 students."

Be Present

"No matter where teaching and learning take place, the importance of the faculty member being there and being mentally present with the students is the most important thing they can do," said Boettcher, of Designing for Learning, her Tallahassee, Fla.-based elearning consulting firm.

That doesn't mean simply responding to questions that students post online. Boettcher said instructors should have a "social presence" in their online classrooms, and encourage students to do the same. She suggested faculty members post their bios in the classroom and also do "some cocktail-party sharing" by telling students which books they are reading and the topic of their research. They also can post photos of themselves working on their laptop at a coffee shop or mention something interesting that happened over the weekend.

"Students should have a well-rounded idea of who [their professors are] as people," Boettcher said.

Parse Your Time

All of the authors agreed that instructor presence is critical to stu-

dent success in a virtual class. Still, noted Conrad: "Online courses can really consume you; I know this from experience."

Responding to every discussion board post by every student in an online class "will crush you," King agreed. "Manage your time in a reasonable way. Don't be available 24/7. Don't turn your class into a one-on-one interaction with 30 students."

Conrad agreed. "Institutions think a faculty member needs to respond to everything" each student posts online. "That's not the way it is."

Conrad, who said she "picks and chooses" what she responds to, noted that if the instructor comments on every post, students tend to write their posts for the instructor, and not for other students. Online discussions, she said, should be between students.

> " Manage your time in a reasonable way. Don't be available 24/7. Don't turn your class into a one-on-one interaction with 30 students. "

Still, she said, the instructor "cannot simply let a course run itself. You're there as much as you are in a regular classroom. But that doesn't mean you're in the course 24/7. Pick and choose where you insert your voice."

Embrace Multi-media Assignments

Students who enroll in virtual courses usually are at least somewhat facile with technology, King noted, saying professors should leverage that by allowing them to use digital tools for their assignments.

While it's quicker to grade papers than to review student-produced PowerPoint presentations or videos, King said, "a lot of students express themselves better that way." ∎

https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/07/12/7-guidelines-effective-teaching-online

'Volatile' but Growing Online Ed Market

By Carl Straumsheim // May 2, 2017

Online enrollment continues to grow as the total number of students in college shrinks.
The growth is particularly strong at private nonprofit colleges, report finds.

YEAR-TO-YEAR PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN DISTANCE ENROLLMENTS - DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS - 2012-2015
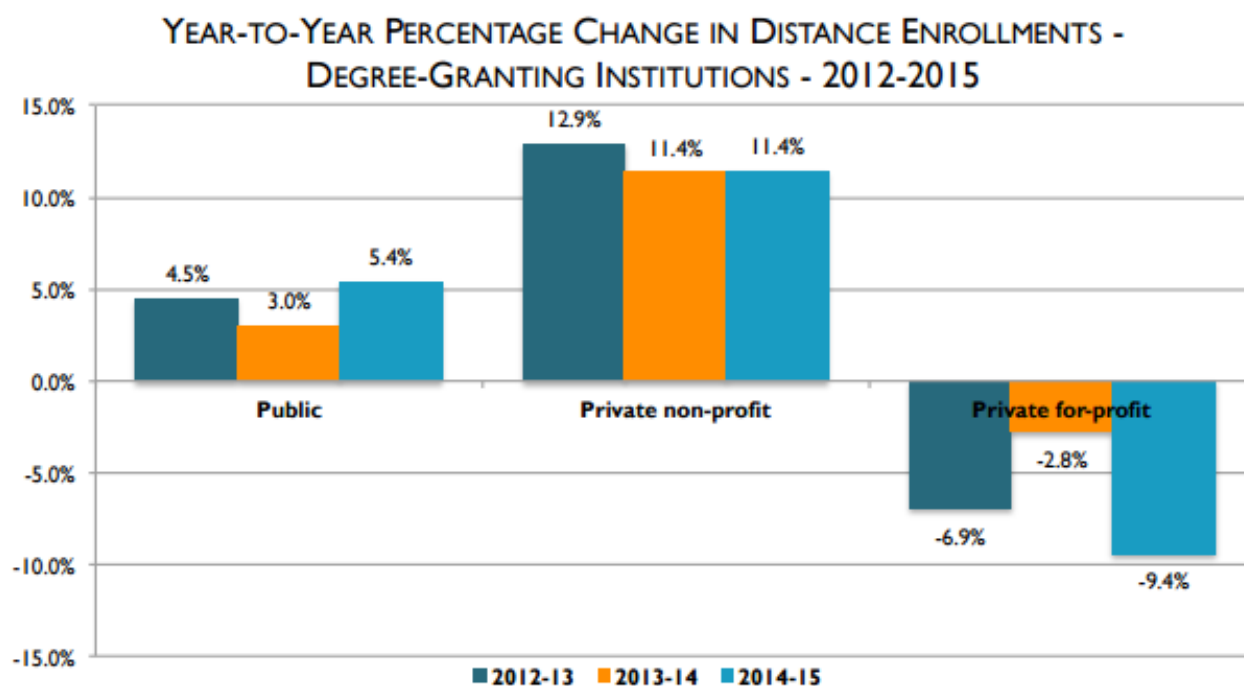
In fall 2012, the University of Phoenix soared above other distance education providers. At the time, more than 256,000 students took at least one online course there -- nearly 200,000 more than the next institution on the list. Southern New Hampshire University, by the same metric, ranked 50th.

Three years later, Phoenix still topped the list, but the number of students taking at least one online course there had dropped by nearly 100,000. SNHU, meanwhile, had seen a roughly fivefold increase, climbing 46 spots to No. 4.

The two trajectories illustrate how the distance education landscape changed between fall 2012 and 2015. While many distance education pioneers in the for-profit sector, such as Phoenix, have seen dramatic declines, private nonprofit institutions such as Southern New Hampshire have made significant gains.

But those extremes don't tell the full story. For while overall college enrollment has declined since the U.S. emerged from the recession following the financial crisis, online enrollment continues to grow across all sectors of higher education, data show.

In fact, about two-thirds of all colleges reported that their distance education enrollments grew from 2012 to 2015. The share is highest among private nonprofits (68 percent), but not that much higher than among for-profit (63.9 percent) and public institutions (63.7 percent). And the 3.9 percent year-over-year growth rate reported in fall 2015, the most up-to-date enrollment data available, is the highest observed during that four-year period.

The findings come from *Digital Learning Compass*, a report analyzing federal higher education enrollment data, produced by the Babson Survey Research Group, e-Literate and the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies. (For more on the report, see coverage in *Inside Digital Learning* from April.)

Jeff Seaman, co-director of the Babson Survey Research Group, said the top-level numbers showing growth across all sectors mask "volatility below the surface." He pointed to the online enrollment growth at private nonprofit colleges, up 40 percent in 2015 compared to 2012, as one example.

The report doesn't explore the factors behind the private nonprofit colleges' success in the online education marketplace (though the Babson Survey Research Group

Type of Institution - Students Enrolled in Distance Education Courses - 2015

14.5%
17.8%
67.8%

- Public
- Private non-profit
- Private for-profit
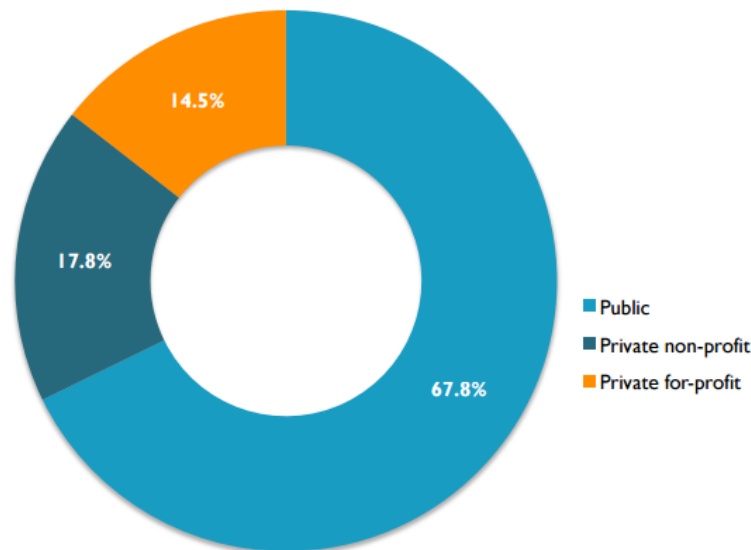
plans to do follow-up reports this year), but Seaman floated two hypotheses: it could be that those colleges are benefiting from large for-profit colleges losing students, he suggested, or that the private colleges' online programs are just now reaching a point where the institutions are able to enroll a large number of students.

Pete Boyle, vice president of public affairs for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, said in an email that he believes both hypotheses have had an impact, but that he leans toward the latter -- that online programs have matured.

"A key part of that maturation would be how to make online pedagogically sound," Boyle said. "One could argue that for-profits jumped in with not enough substance, while private nonprofits focused on the substance first. Institutions devel-
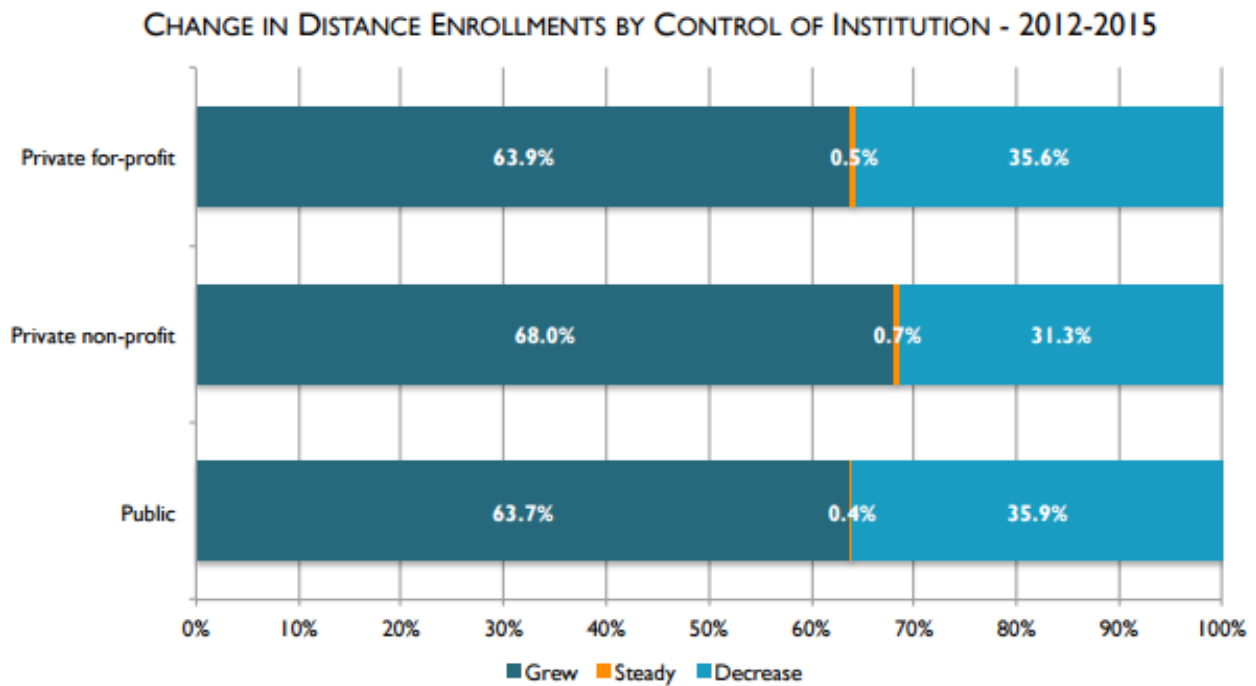
oped programs that had pedagogies that faculty could incorporate into the regular curriculum/mission of the institution. So, there was a maturation in that sense."

The enrollment growth at private nonprofit colleges means the sector has passed for-profit colleges as the second-largest in the distance education market. Public institutions still teach the majority of online students: 67.8 percent, according to the 2015 data. Of the six million who studied online in fall 2015, 4.1 million attended public institutions, one million private nonprofit colleges and about 871,000 for-profit institutions.

The findings also challenge the narrative that the for-profit sector, broadly, is in decline. While online enrollments at most of the institutions in that sector grew in the 2012-15 time frame, the growth was erased by declines at institutions such as Phoenix and Ashford University, both of which have faced scrutiny from the federal government.

Over all, the for-profit sector lost 191,300 online students from fall 2012 to 2015. While the government won't release the next batch of enrollment data until next year, estimates suggest the for-profit sector has continued to shrink.

Steve Gunderson, president and

CHANGE IN DISTANCE ENROLLMENTS BY CONTROL OF INSTITUTION - 2012-2015

Institution	Grew	Steady	Decrease
Private for-profit	63.9%	0.5%	35.6%
Private non-profit	68.0%	0.7%	31.3%
Public	63.7%	0.4%	35.9%

■ Grew ■ Steady ■ Decrease

CEO of Career Education Colleges and Universities, a trade group representing for-profit colleges, said the sector "grew too much too fast" when it attempted to capitalize on increased interest in higher education during the recession. "We had terrible outcomes, and we paid a price for that," he said.

Gunderson said the for-profit sector will be better off if it focuses on training students for careers rather than competing with other types of colleges to offer "online liberal arts education." CECU last year changed its name from the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities to emphasize that focus. Be-

fore APSCU, the organization was known as the Career College Association.

"Any kind of civil war between the different sectors is an absolute waste of time and energy," Gunderson said. "There is more demand than any one of our sectors is going to be able to meet on its own." ■

https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/05/02/report-finds-growth-volatility-online-education-market

Views

A selection of essays and op-eds

Breaking Through the Stigma of Online Education

By Christopher Haynes // May 24, 2017

Christopher Haynes says it's time to stop asking if online learning is effective.

It is time to stop asking if online learning is as "effective" as traditional face-to-face learning. The question has been asked and answered. Asking it over and over again will not yield the responsive, localized, and collaborative answers we need to facilitate meaningful education for an increasingly diverse body of learners.

Teaching and learning work best when faculty, instructional staff, and students are invested and engaged. What is often lost when we ask the "effective" question is that investment and engagement are modality-independent qualities. The educational ecosystem teachers and students need in the decades to come must involve both online and face-to-face expressions. Tethering "effective" teaching and learning to a particular modality restricts the strategic implementation of research-driven pedagogy across college and university offerings.

To support my claim, I pursue two points. First, online education is growing, and this growth poses no substantive risk to student learning. Second, a logic of legitimacy drives the stigma that bars integration of online learning into higher education's core mission.

The "effective" question is rooted in fear of disruption. We need to recognize and acknowledge continuity instead.

Online education is growing. Fast. And there is no established scholarly consensus that online education poses substantive risk to the attainment of student learning outcomes.

In *College (Un)Bound*, Jeffrey Selingo reports the number of students enrolled in at least one online course grew from 1.6 million in 2002 to 6.1 million on 2010 (Selingo 97). I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman's Grade Change presents similar data, showing enrollment in at least one online course reaching 7.1 mil-

lion in 2012 (Allen and Seaman 15).

Rapid growth means online learning, like distance before it, feels the burden of proving its effectiveness in relation to traditional practice. This burden has taken many forms. Most visible are the meta-analyses, aggregating data from dozens or hundreds of studies exploring various metrics of "effective."

The controversial U.S. Department of Education-funded meta analysis, Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies (2009, revised in 2010), is one such endeavor, along with others like Joseph Cavanaugh and Stephen Jacquemin's "A Large Sample Comparison of Grade Based Student Learning Outcomes in Online vs. Face-to-Face Courses" from 2015. Overwhelmingly, results lean toward a familiar refrain -- "no significant difference" -- a conclusion common enough to have become a genre of its own.

Continuing to ask the "effective" question dilutes resources for no clear gain. If the quantities of available data on "effectiveness" equivalency have failed to break down enduring resistance at faculty and institutional levels, what will? This leads me to my next point.

Stigma and perception drive resistance to online education more than data analysis and direct experience. *Inside Higher Ed's* survey Conflicted: Faculty and Online Education 2012 asked faculty and administrators to share their "Thoughts on the Growth of Online Education." 57.7 percent of faculty felt "more fear than excitement," versus 42.3 percent "more excitement than fear." The differential was greater for administrators, at 19.8 percent "more fear" and 80.2 percent "more excitement" (Conflicted 5).

Consider these response options, for a moment. Fear and excitement? This should give us pause. Shouldn't we be asking how faculty

> **Rapid growth means online learning, like distance before it, feels the burden of proving its effectiveness in relation to traditional practice.**

and instructional staff can reorient their pedagogical and institutional strategies to be more on-the-ground, more student-centered, and less focused on their own feelings?

Another *Inside Higher Ed* survey, Faculty Attitudes on Technology 2015, measured responses to the proposition "for-credit online courses can achieve student learning outcomes that are at least equivalent to those of in-person courses." The study found that, overall, 9 percent of faculty could "strongly agree" with the proposition, whereas 27 percent could "strongly disagree" (Straum-

sheim 12). But, when separated by levels of experience teaching online, the responses shift.

For faculty who have never taught online, "strongly agree" falls from 9 percent to 4 percent and "strongly disagree" increases from 27 percent to 35 percent. For faculty who have taught at least one online course, "strongly agree" grows from 9 percent to 19 percent, and, more dramatically, "strongly disagree" falls from 27 percent to 11 percent (Straumsheim 14). Direct experience cuts through stigma: When faculty and instructional support staff are invested and engaged, online education works.

This research reveals just how mired in the logic of symbolic legitimacy and cultural capital online teaching and learning truly is.

Through direct experience, educators and administrators will more confidently build agile and responsive teaching and learning spaces that serve the changing needs of their student populations.

"Effectiveness" is, in the end, built on a shaky premise, that traditional face-to-face teaching is monolithically consistent. We know it is not. A well-designed and carefully delivered online course will facilitate more meaningful learning for more students than a poorly designed 300-student lecture section.

The real problem educators and

administrators face is how to leverage the considerable historical legitimacy of the university to destigmatize online learning and continue producing relevant and useful educational experiences for their students.

Faculty, administration, and instructional support staff should work together to encourage student-centered design at each stage of the curricular and course development process, regardless of educational modality.

They should also recognize that it is the urgent responsibility of all constituents invested in college and university teaching and learning to make visible the good work being done right now in developing online educational experiences across higher education and to provide space for continuing faculty investment and experimentation.

Online education aspires to more than the predatory neo-liberal nightmare its harshest critics make it out to be. While there are many questions yet to be answered, online education is promising, effective, and vital to the health of contemporary college and universities. ∎

Bio:

Christopher Haynes is an instructor in the Division of Continuing Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2017/05/24/breaking-stigma-online-education

Online Education: What I Got Wrong

By James D. Miller // April 5, 2017

Economist James D. Miller now thinks online education could increase demand for instructors, not destroy their jobs.

In 2011, I wrote Get Out While You Can for *Inside Higher Ed* describing why I thought online education would threaten professors' jobs. Since then I created a lot of online content (microeconomics and game theory), and have spent many hours with my young son consuming Internet educational material. I now realize that I overestimated the appeal of online education partly because I generalized from myself and my peers -- people who intrinsically enjoy education -- and I committed the cardinal sin, for an economist, of ignoring the key tradeoff.

I've been supplementing my son's elementary school education with online learning. (He receives video game time as an inducement and reward.) For Vsauce, his favorite YouTube science channel, I can trust him to diligently watch the material by himself. But to get my child to pay attention to the far drier Khan Academy, I usually have to watch the material with him, periodically pausing the videos to ask and answer questions with him. I don't

Vsauce is a Youtube science channel.

blame Khan Academy for being less interesting than Vsauce; Khan comprehensively covers much more material, while Vsauce only discusses topics that can be presented in a captivating manner.

In 2011, I thought that much of online education was boring, but I expected content creators to eventually succeed in making their material interesting enough to hold the enthusiastic attention of most students. Here I failed to realize that people like me are, of course, going to find educational content more interesting than most students do, and so I underestimated how much improvement would be needed to make online courses as exciting as video games.

I further forgot to take into account that teachers have, for literally thousands of years, tried to make their lectures more interesting and yet, as most of us can attest, we have still not succeeded in consistently producing lectures that most students find more enjoyable.

Of course, computer learning provides new opportunities for improvement and, for example, the game [DragonBox](#) makes algebra almost as fun as a mediocre video game. (My son tells me he agrees with that last sentence.) Still, for good teachers, there will always eventually be a tradeoff between how interesting and how informative material is.

If you can make your lectures more interesting without sacrificing rigor or content, you do it. Similarly, if you can cover more material or increase the difficulty of the material covered without decreasing how interesting students will find your lecture, you cover the extra material.

Therefore, a good, well-prepared teacher will run into the tradeoff between excitement and rigor -- meaning that he will only be able to cover more challenging material if he makes his class less fun for his students. And the learning cost of having a less exciting lecture is that students will pay less attention to you.

The Human Factor

But having a real-human teacher watch them causes most students to pay more attention, and this comes without any cost in rigor. Just by sitting next to my son I can increase his level of attention and I suspect the same is true with most learning.

So even if online education drastically improves, and is able to present in a fascinating manner everything currently taught in college courses, having an instructor -- plus online material -- would allow courses to teach students even more than most of these students could learn from the online courses alone.

Contrary to what I wrote in 2011, I can even imagine online education increasing the demand for instructors, at least at expensive colleges. I still think that internet learning will replace traditional large lecture classes.

As with their textbooks, students at elite and less-expensive schools will mostly use the same material because once you have spent the upfront costs to produce either the online course or the textbook, it is cheap for the copyright owner to make additional copies.

But elite colleges will want to differentiate themselves from what they hope prospective students will perceive as "lesser schools." Today elite colleges do this by claiming that their teachers do higher-quality research and have Ph.Ds. from better schools than their competitors. But will this matter in a world where college students mostly watch videos and do online exercises and tests created by people outside of their college?

I predict that in the near future, elite colleges might do what I'm doing with my son -- give one-on-one tutoring to students where the instructor watches videos with his pupils. This will involve almost zero preparation time for instructors who have a solid understanding of the underlying material. If, say, a student gets a hundred hours of tutoring a year for all her courses combined, then colleges would need one full-time tutor for about 20 students, which is a financially feasible number especially since these instructors would replace other faculty positions. ∎

Bio:

[James D. Miller](#) is associate professor of economics at Smith College, the host of the [Future Strategist](#) [podcast](#) and the author of [Singularity Rising](#).

Online Courses as Good as In-Person Classes

By Fred Lokken // August 2, 2017

Fred Lokken disagrees with a recent "Views" contributor who wrote that online education isn't working -- and provides data to prove his points.

I was surprised by the tone and conclusions of the recent opinion piece by Jing Liu, "It's Time to Ask Why Online Learning Isn't Working," published in "Inside Digital Learning." Perhaps online learning is struggling at major universities -- after all, there is an obsession to turn online learning into profit centers, right? Even the great MOOC movement -- born from our most significant universities -- was motivated in part by a search for a cost-efficient way to teach large numbers of first- and second-year students.

With hundreds and even thousands of students in an unsupervised, self-paced environment, many ultimately do vote with their feet and drop out. There is little social interaction and very little motivation to succeed. Some types of students can adapt to this, but many ultimately don't.

Clayton Christensen of Harvard University has been on record for several years in predicting significant issues for universities; he recently reaffirmed that "as many as half of American universities would close or go bankrupt within 10 to 15 years."

Community Colleges Embrace Online Learning

For community colleges, online education always has been about increasing access to higher education, especially for underrepresented students and active adult learners. And online programs have worked hard to address the challenges of accessibility compliance, quality course design, affordability (with the emergence of a strong OER movement to reduce or eliminate textbook costs), and appropriate training for faculty and students alike.

Transitioning to the virtual learning environment has fostered improved faculty training, student preparation and student analytics. Community colleges have crafted a virtual learning environment that is structured, positive and successful.

Community colleges have always been committed to keeping class enrollments smaller for both traditional and virtual classrooms, and students have benefited with meaningful engagement as well as the ability to foster a social environment with fellow students as well as with the faculty member. Most community college students blend online with traditional to maximize their class schedules as they balance education with full-time jobs and family commitments.

Online Learning Now Mainstream

Since 2010, the U.S. Department

> " Community colleges have always been committed to keeping class enrollments smaller for both traditional and virtual classrooms, and students have benefited with meaningful engagement as well as the ability to foster a social environment with fellow students as well as with the faculty member. "

of Education has recognized that online learning, when used by itself, appears to be as effective as conventional classroom instruction ("Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning," p. xviii)

And the Instructional Technology Council's Annual National eLearning Survey has for the past 13 years tracked the myriad improvements in online education; the most recent findings confirm that "Ninety-five percent of respondents described their online courses as either equivalent (87 percent) or superior (7 percent) to traditional courses" (2016 ITC Annual National eLearning Survey, p. 16).

With more than six million students now enrolled in online classes at our universities and community colleges, online education has emerged as an accepted modality of instruction.

Future Bright for Online Education

The arguments offered in Jing Liu's essay run counter to the validation online programs receive from regional accreditation, the U.S. Department of Education and the success students experience as graduates.

As someone who has taught online classes since 1999 and managed the online program administration at my campus for 16 years, I am personally aware of the progress we have made, the quality of instruction we do achieve, the access door we have opened wider and the difference we have made in the lives of our students.

Traditional and nontraditional students alike have demonstrated a remarkable success in online degree programs. An employer can be confident that graduates of an online program have the same knowledge, skills and abilities as a student in a traditional residential program. ∎

Bio:
Fred Lokken is chair-elect of the Instructional Technology Council and professor of political science at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nev.

https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2017/08/02/online-courses-good-person-classes

INSIDE
HIGHER ED