Enrolling and Engaging Online Learners

The COVID-19 pandemic put online education squarely in the spotlight. Although the movement toward greater adoption of distance, online, and hybrid modalities in higher education was already well underway, the pandemic forced temporary remote instruction on a mass scale. This accelerated the adoption and acceptance of online modalities, but also revealed that many universities weren't prepared to develop online courses that delivered engagement and educational value comparable to their on-campus counterparts.

At the same time, this period led to a widespread recognition of the potential benefits of online education and seeded new areas for growth. Specifically:

- Many students prefer the flexibility of online and hybrid instruction.

- Online modalities open up opportunities for universities to reach new groups of learners.

- Online courses can accommodate varying learning styles and needs.

- Well-designed online courses can use technology to enable a depth of learning and reinforcement that face-to-face classroom lectures cannot.

- Although effective online teaching requires that faculty develop and use a different skillset, it also creates opportunities for faculty to share their academic expertise in innovative ways.

As higher education leaders adapt to these new realities, many are realizing that with the right technology and resources, universities can build outstanding online programs that promote student engagement and success, support faculty in their teaching and scholarship, enhance university reputations and rankings, and help universities thrive and grow even amidst rapidly changing market dynamics. Everspring works with universities and faculty to bring our know-how and expertise to their academics, allowing us to build and deliver outstanding online and hybrid programs that meet student needs today and equip universities and faculty for success going forward.

Everspring is excited to partner with Inside Higher Ed to deliver this dynamic compilation of articles that highlight the most dynamic recent changes in higher education and focus on the many ways that higher education is evolving. Together, universities, educators, and the industry partners who support them will pave the way to a "new normal," in which online and hybrid learning are equal partners in delivering high-quality education and are embraced for the immense value, flexibility, and equity they provide.

Jeff Conlon, CEO

Beth Hollenberg, President

Introduction

The enrollment picture in higher education is a challenging one for all but a minority of mostly selective, highly visible colleges and universities whose applications far outnumber the number of traditional-age students they admit.

For everyone else, online enrollments may not be *the* solution, but they are almost certainly part of the answer.

Enrollments in online programs have been growing at a time when the overall number of students in American colleges and universities has shrunk -- and that was before the COVID-19 pandemic, when many institutions shifted to virtual delivery methods out of necessity.

The articles and essays in this collection examine enrollment trends, strategies that institutions are embracing to attract and graduate online students, and the approaches colleges are taking to ensure that their online programs are of the highest quality.

We hope this compilation helps campus leaders and individual faculty members alike identify ways to ensure the viability of their programs and, ultimately, of their institutions.

Please connect with us if you have suggestions for future coverage about this topic.

–The Editors
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everspring | **WILLIAM & MARY**
CHARTERED 1693

Learning Design Spotlight:

We brought the best of a world–renowned campus education to life online. Together.

Everspring partnered with William & Mary to bring the university's academic rigor, faculty excellence and tight-knit learning community to life ONLINE, coupling their longstanding tradition of academic excellence with cutting-edge learning methodologies and technology.

We worked closely with the university and business school faculty to position William & Mary's online MBA students at the forefront of innovation in the region and beyond. The uniquely structured curriculum teaches students to think critically and develop the skills they need to tackle complex issues that arise in contemporary business.

The Result

A cutting–edge MBA program anchored in traditional values

Everspring successfully translated William & Mary's intensive classroom teaching ethos into an engaging and dynamic online program. Building on the success of the online MBA, the university expanded our partnership to The School of Education. Today, Everspring supports a total of 50 courses across William & Mary's schools of business and education, delivering exceptional results:

#4

in Career Outcomes
by *Poets&Quants*

#11

Best Online MBA Programs
of 2022 by *Poets&Quants*

97%

of faculty would recommend
Everspring to a colleague[1]

99%

Student Satisfaction in the
School of Education

95%

Student Satisfaction across all
programs in the School of Business

1. Everspring faculty survey

Half of All College Students Take Online Courses

New federal data show a significantly higher proportion of college learners took at least one course online than previously thought.

By Suzanne Smalley // October 13, 2021

An analysis of newly available federal data shows that a far larger proportion of college students take at least one fully online course than was previously understood.

The analysis, first conducted by the ed-tech consultant and blogger Phil Hill, shows that based on 12-month reporting -- which the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System only recently began collecting for distance learning -- 51.8 percent of students took at least one online course in 2019-20. This number is much higher than the 37 percent reflected in the fall 2019 enrollment data that has been cited in the past, and on which most estimates of the prevalence of online learning have historically been based.

While the 2019-20 academic year includes some of the early months of the pandemic, Hill and other experts noted that the Department of Education instructed universities not to count classes that were moved online on an emergency basis during the pandemic in their survey reporting.

The previous practice of only counting students in online classes who were enrolled at the time of IPEDS's annual fall census understated the true number of distance education learners, Hill said. He

INSTA_PHOTOS/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

noted that distance learners tend to prefer multiple starts to the academic year and aren't as likely to be counted if there is only one point in time during a calendar year when they are tracked. The 12-month enrollment figures are unduplicated, meaning they represent the total number of students who are enrolled during the year, but a student only gets counted once, even if they are enrolled in both fall and spring.

"It just misses everybody who takes an online course in the winter, spring or summer term," Hill said of the fall enrollment data collection method. "Three of the four main academic terms you just don't cap-

ture at all."

Hill said his new data analysis should not be seen through the lens of how the pandemic skewed the previously available 2019-20 numbers but instead as providing a fuller view of the ongoing increase in online education, which was well under way even before the pandemic.

Experts lamented the fact that the department only just began including distance education in its 12-month survey. Historical data to compare to Hill's 2019-20 findings simply don't exist.

Jeff Seaman, the director of Bay

Half of All College Students Take Online Courses (cont.)

View Analytics, a survey company with a long history of work in the education sector, said that prior to 2012, the Department of Education didn't collect any data on distance education, leading Bay View to seek foundation support and gather those data on its own. Seaman called Hill's analysis helpful but said it isn't surprising that the true number of distance learners is far higher than what the IPEDS annual fall enrollment survey captured, given that the latter is merely a "point-in-time snapshot."

Many in higher education have wondered how often students "hop in and hop out" of online coursework, Seaman said, adding that he was surprised to learn that the difference between the fall enrollment and 12-month enrollment numbers wasn't bigger. The number of students enrolled exclusively in fully online programs increased from 3.5 million in the fall enrollment data to 5.8 million in the 12-month enrollment data, or from 17.6 percent of all students to 22.7 percent of them.

"One of the conclusions is that students who were enrolled in distance courses tend to be enrolled in those distance courses over multiple terms, but not all of them, and that explains the difference between those two percentages," Seaman said, pointing out that if a whole different group of students was signing up in the spring, the 12-month number would have been significantly higher than the fall number.

Ultimately, Seaman said, there is nothing surprising about the 12-month number being higher than the fall enrollment number.

"We all knew the number would be higher," he said. "The real exciting thing here is … it addresses the question of how consistent are students in their enrollment pattern, [and] that we didn't have an answer for before."

Jennifer Mathes, CEO of the Online Learning Consortium, a nonprofit association focused on best practices for quality online learning, said the 12-month data are important for accreditors and others trying to ensure online learning is delivering what students need to be successful. She said her organization has long believed the federal data derived from the annual fall enrollment data undercounted online students.

"We have to make sure we're doing right by the students, so when we know what the numbers actually look like, that will help," Mathes said. "More and more students want distance education, so institutions have to be ready to adapt."

The new data also will be important for policy makers, said Russell Poulin, executive director of the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies. He said that knowing how many students are enrolled in online classes will clearly help ensure better professional development training for professors and more support services for students. But making legislators and others aware of the true scope of distance education is also important, he said.

"It helps them see what is the impact and how are institutions dealing with better serving students who are taking online courses," Poulin said. "I think it will be of great interest to people who are creating these federal, state and institutional policies." ∎

everspring | **Santa Clara University**

Enrollment Spotlight:

We built an online MBA to power the professional needs of Silicon Valley. Together.

Everspring partnered with Santa Clara University's Leavey School of Business to build a market-leading program that teaches the skills and competencies students need to succeed in contemporary business. Our approach reflects the university's tradition of social responsibility through:

- **A marketing strategy** that blends strong branding and positioning with a full set of omnichannel tactics to reach new segments of students.

- **Dedicated enrollment services team** that delivers welcoming, personalized student support throughout the student lifecycle.

- **Best-in-class learning design** and course development that delivers robust, highly customized learning experiences, course development and high-touch faculty support.

The Result

We fueled significant enrollment and portfolio expansion

More than half of Leavey's enrollment growth now comes from online programs. The success of the online MBA sparked the creation of a dynamic portfolio of online graduate business programs. Leavey's online business programs are projected to generate $50 million in incremental tuition revenue.[1]

#1
in Career Outcomes by *Poets&Quants*

#3
Best Online MBA Programs of 2022 by *Poets&Quants*

#9
Princeton Review, Top 50 Online MBA Programs 2022

97%
Student Satisfaction[2]

96%
Faculty Satisfaction[2]

99%
Term-To-Term Retention[2]

1. Revenue data is projected through the end of 2022
2. Everspring student and faculty surveys

'Staying Online'

Author discusses his advice for colleges in navigating the evolving landscape of digital learning and his change of heart on MOOCs.

By Doug Lederman // October 21, 2021

The landscape for digital learning has changed dramatically since Robert Ubell published *Going Online* in 2016: an explosion in outsourcing to online program managers, intensifying competition between would-be cheaters and technologies designed to thwart them -- oh, and a global pandemic that turned almost every student into an online learner and every professor into a technologist.

In a new book, *Staying Online: How to Navigate Digital Higher Education* (Routledge), Ubell, vice dean emeritus of online learning at New York University's Tandon School of Engineering, brings together his writings in *Inside Higher Ed* and other publications about a wide range of topics.

He answered questions via email about his new book and the evolving landscape for online learning. An edited version of the exchange follows.

Q: As someone who has led institutional strategy around online education and watched the landscape closely since the late 1990s, do you believe the forced experimentation of students, professors and institutions with remote instruction has significantly (and permanently) reshaped the standing and status of technology-enabled learning? And if so, in

ways that will increase support for it?

A: Emergency online learning, despite its largely amateur delivery last year, was a really big deal -- shock therapy for higher education. According to a number of recent reports, remote instruction during the pandemic accelerated wider acceptance and expansion of online learning, revealing how quickly institutions have responded to extending online learning and how unexpectedly positively students and faculty have reacted. One survey this spring concluded that a majority of students are surprisingly eager to keep studying online, while faculty say they now feel far more confident about remote education than ever.

Even Harvard, a longtime holdout, launched its first online degree this spring, followed by other institutions, eager to get on board, with many either signing on with OPMs -- commercial vendors who build and market virtual programs -- or planning to launch new online degrees on their own.

But the nation's headlong dive into digital education last year was not an entirely radical departure. Over the last decades, online education moved like an airplane on a runway, taking off slowly at first and then persistently, to occupy an ever
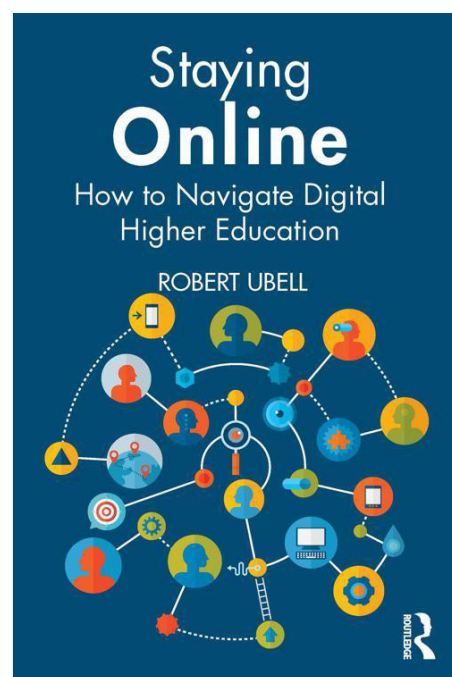
greater share of higher education. If you look at this eloquent graph, cleverly devised by the ed-tech guru Phil Hill from federal data, you'll see how the online wind has been blowing, with residential enrollments sliding as online steadily rises. These trends, evident for decades, but etched in sharper relief in the pandemic, are now more perilous than ever.

Two realities account for these altered directions: the campus downturn is largely a direct result of the nation's skidding number of high school graduates, while the online climb comes from the country's vastly changing economy, swelling with great numbers of students

who must work to go to college, filling virtual classes with nontraditional students.

To earn digital degrees, midcareer adult learners are also enrolling in remote classes to get a leg up on securing a more rewarding stake in our postindustrial economy. Along with fresh batches of 19-year-olds, academic leaders must now pursue nontraditional and midcareer students, Today, digital education has a double duty, not only crucial in securing the continuation of higher education, but as an ethical practice.

Q: If online/digital/virtual learning is going to be a meaningful part of more (if not most) colleges and universities going forward, what are the biggest issues they will have to confront? Are the issues more technological, educational or organizational?

A: All three, actually, since colleges that have not yet joined the rush online will need to get their ducks in a row, making sure they have everything they need in place, with up-to-the-minute digital magic, sophisticated pedagogy to keep students glued to their screens and dynamic leaders, keeping the online ship floating and flexible.

But there's yet a fourth requirement: commercial acumen. Colleges and universities admit they are not very good at it, but they will need to get up to speed to exploit digital recruitment, at which for-profits and OPMs are far ahead; otherwise,

US Higher Ed Enrollment Trends Fall 2012 - 2019
By Student Distance Education (DE) Status
Grad + Undergrad
Source: IPEDS database
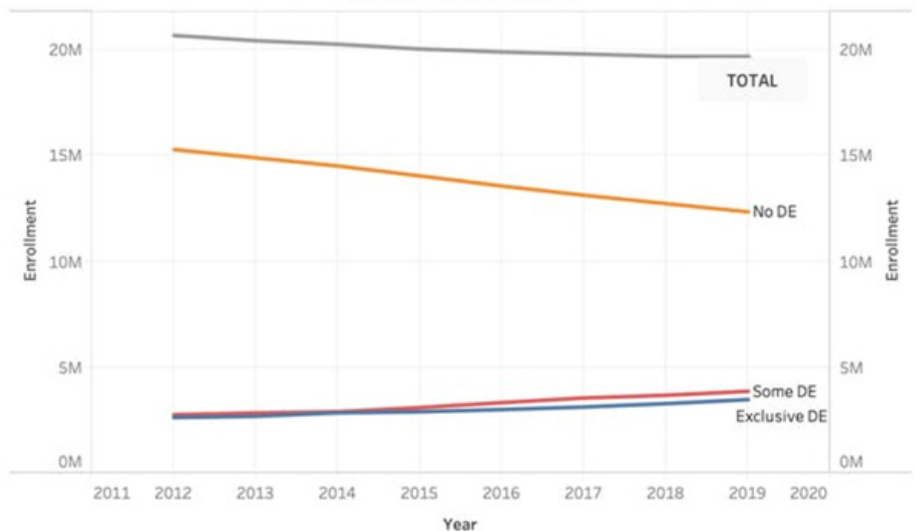
IPEDS database

even if they master the right virtual skills, they may be outmaneuvered. Effective digital recruitment requires yet another art that higher education has been reluctant to practice -- spending serious money on marketing. To succeed, colleges and universities will need to break some stuffy old habits.

Q: You close your new book with an admirably honest chapter about past assertions that, on second thought, you realize missed the mark (at least partially). How did your mind change about massive open online courses and streaming video instruction?

A: Changing one's mind is an essential feature of the human condition. If we get stuck in childhood, rather than being open to experience, how would we ever learn to love olives

or other foods most kids find unappetizing? I dug my heels in opposing MOOCs and streaming video because they both lacked what I held as the gold standard of quality virtual education -- leaning forward in active student engagement, rather than sitting back, passively viewing lessons.

But after years of following how students actually participated online, I learned that digital education is not a one-size-fits-all garment, but a coat of many colors. It turned out that even though learning science tells us that active participation is the most effective way of learning, MOOCs and streaming videos can be a useful alternative to conventional education. Certainty is the bullheaded enemy of mind-changing behavior. ∎

U.S. Graduate Enrollments Grew in 2020

Enrollments rose in fall 2020 despite big drops in incoming international students. Gains among part-time and underrepresented minority students helped fuel the increase.

By Elizabeth Redden // October 18, 2021

U.S. graduate schools saw increases in enrollment in fall 2020 despite a big drop in international students, although there were significant differences across fields of study, according to the latest annual survey of graduate enrollment and degrees from the Council of Graduate Schools.

The CGS survey found that graduate applications increased by 7.3 percent and first-time graduate enrollment increased by 1.8 percent in fall 2020 compared to the year before.

Gains in domestic student enrollment -- including enrollment increases among students from underrepresented minority groups -- drove the overall increase.

First-time enrollment of international graduate students decreased by 37.4 percent, a drop largely attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic's disruptive impact on international travel, while domestic graduate student enrollment grew by 12.9 percent.

The number of new students enrolling full-time in graduate programs decreased by 3.7 percent, while the number of new students enrolling in part-time study grew by 13.5 percent between fall 2019 and fall 2020.

"One of the positive aspects of the pandemic and our age of uncertainty is that graduate programs have gotten much better at flexibility and capacity to accommodate working adults on a part-time basis and online," said Suzanne Ortega, CGS's president. "That had been starting to happen over time, but I think it has really accelerated over the past year."

Ortega said about 43.4 percent of graduate students are enrolled part-time, and those students are more likely to be women and students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

According to the survey, first-time graduate enrollment increased by 20.4 percent among Latinx students, 16.7 percent among Asian students, 16 percent among Black/African American students, 8.8 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native students and 1.7 percent for Native Hawaiians/other Pacific Islanders.

"Although the baseline enrollment number is small, the increased first-time enrollment of underrepresented minority students is encouraging," the CGS report states. "From 2010 to 2020, the average annual growth rate for first-time graduate enrollment increased by 9.2 percent among Latinx, 5.4 percent among Black/African Americans,

Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2010 to 2020

6.3 percent among Asians/Pacific Islanders, and 0.8 percent among American Indian/Alaska Natives."

"I'm really heartened by the real increase in the number of African American, Latinx and American Indian students who are enrolled in graduate education, and I think we just have to celebrate progress," Ortega added. "I do also want to remind readers that in some fields we've still got a long way to go before we reach anything that looks close to proportional representation." She mentioned physical and earth sciences and engineering as examples of those fields.

There were big differences in first-time enrollment trends across fields of study. Mathematics/com-

U.S. Graduate Enrollments Grew in 2020 (cont.)

puter sciences, engineering and physical and earth sciences -- all fields that enroll large numbers of international students -- experienced overall declines in first-time graduate enrollment of 16.6 percent, 15.8 percent and 7.7 percent, respectively.

On the other hand, first-time graduate enrollment increased by 16 percent in business, 9.1 percent in biological and agricultural sciences, 8 percent in health sciences, and 7.7 percent in education.

Rounding out other major fields, first-time enrollment decreased by 5.6 percent in graduate arts and humanities programs, while rising by 6.5 percent in public administration and services programs and 3.1 percent in social and behavioral sciences programs.

First-time doctoral enrollment decreased by 3.8 percent between fall 2019 and fall 2020, while first-time enrollment in master's programs increased by 2.8 percent.

The number of doctoral degrees awarded in the 2019-20 academic year decreased by 0.7 percent compared to the previous academic year, while the number of master's degrees awarded increased by 0.2 percent. The number of graduate certificates awarded increased by 20.7 percent, reflecting continued growth in this area. Between fall 2010 and fall 2020, the number of graduate-level certificates awarded increased by 9.5 percent.

Total (not just first-time) graduate enrollment increased by 2.5 percent across all U.S. graduate programs from fall 2019 to fall 2020, even as total enrollment of international graduate students decreased by 9.7 percent. The total number of domestic students grew by 6.1 percent.

The graduate student enrollment survey was sent to 763 universities; 558 institutions responded, reflecting an overall response rate of 73.1 percent. ■

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everspring | **UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME**

Continuing Education Spotlight:

We empowered a company's global workforce online. Together.

Everspring and the University of Notre Dame developed a series of online professional development courses in data for development for the Pulte Institute for Global Development at Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs, enabling international development consultants to develop their skills in collecting and analyzing data for humanitarian and global development activities.

- We leveraged cognitive science principles and used human-centered design practices to ensure that every aspect of the course sequence was rooted in a firm understanding of the learners; the courses effectively taught the competencies learners needed to engage with data, regardless of their role.

- Courses were built on Everspring's EmergingEd platform, a turnkey solution for quickly building and deploying high-quality, engaging online short courses for today's learners.

The Result

We expanded Notre Dame's reach around the world — and in their own backyard.

From the beginning, we created a flexible foundation of rich content that could be modified and used for various audiences and learning needs, including:

- **One-credit courses at the Keough School of Global Affairs**
- **Courses for development organizations**
- **Offerings for development professionals**

We worked with Notre Dame to design, build, and deploy these courses in less than a year so the university could get them in market quickly, and we did so without sacrificing quality. Our partnership has resulted in an effective, expansive set of courses that enrolled learners from 20 different countries and a successful pilot that exceeded Notre Dame's enrollment targets.

Watch our webinar to learn more about our partnership.

UNC's $97 Million Plan to Reach Adult Online Learners

The Biden administration has taken steps to make the U.S. more attractive to international talent, including expanding eligibility for some foreign STEM students to participate in a popular postgraduation work program.

By Suzanne Smalley // December 9, 2021

The University of North Carolina system is leveraging $97 million in pandemic recovery funding to launch a nonprofit ed-tech start-up intended to bolster adult online education in a state with a looming need for more skilled workers.

Project Kitty Hawk is named after the North Carolina beach town the Wright brothers returned to repeatedly before achieving their dream of flight, an apt metaphor for an undertaking that UNC leaders herald as a transformative effort to reach the state's estimated one million working adults who have some college education but no degree. Sweeping in its ambition, Project Kitty Hawk's five-year financial plan projects 120 new online program launches and 24,000 net new enrollments across the system's 16 university campuses by the 2026–27 academic year, according to working papers project leaders shared with *Inside Higher Ed*.

Half of the state's workers are eligible for employer education benefits, which UNC system leaders hope to capture by doing a better job of keeping adult learners in the state. As of fall 2019, Liberty and Strayer Universities topped the list of most popular online offerings sought by North Carolina students, more than 60,000 of whom are enrolled in what the working papers

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

called "high-cost, out-of-state programs." UNC leaders say they want to draw those students into the state system, but in order to succeed, they must better tailor online services and infrastructure to working adults.

Project Kitty Hawk will officially launch after the new year. System leaders plan an equitable revenue share between participating campuses, which will be "well below the rate typically charged by third-party providers."

By effectively creating its own nonprofit online program manager, UNC is trying to avoid the expense of the profit-driven OPM model for building online education programs. OPMs are increasingly under fire from educators and outside experts who believe the companies' business models prioritize profits over educational outcomes and learning. Leaders at UNC assert that by forgoing an outside OPM—which they point out can take as much as 60 percent of revenue in exchange for covering up-front costs—Kitty Hawk will be self-sustaining by 2026 and will rely on what the working papers

call a "private sector–like approach on behalf of a tremendous public good."

The working papers depict a system with a uniquely ambitious vision for Kitty Hawk, which they say will provide "end-to-end support to help universities rapidly design and take workforce-aligned programs online as well as attract, enroll and support learners through graduation." Kitty Hawk will rely on "a central technology and service infrastructure" to help UNC campuses reach working adults, in part, the working papers say, because it will be "less expensive than the traditional approach of more buildings, more personnel, and more programs … or [campuses] doing it themselves."

While a handful of the system's campus leaders hailed the initiative and said they weren't worried about losing revenue or students to a competitive new systemwide hub, outside experts said UNC's plans are at least partly reminiscent of systemwide online efforts elsewhere that struggled to get off the ground, partially because of such competition. They also questioned

what they characterized as an overly ambitious goal to enroll 24,000 net new students in 120 programs with only $97 million in seed money across five years.

"Ninety-seven million is a lot, but not when you hear that they're talking about 120 programs—that's less than a million dollars a program," said Phil Hill, an educational technology consultant and blogger. "The OPMs quite often invest several million per program … They might be biting off more than they could chew. They might not realize just how much time and effort and money is needed to really get these programs running."

Richard Garrett, chief research officer at the higher education advisory firm Eduventures, called the effort "unprecedented." But he added that while the system's effort to centralize rather than create 16 separate online models may seem logical, the track record for doing so has not been good elsewhere.

"The culture of higher ed is decentralized, even among state systems," Garrett said. "There's a lot of pitfalls ahead … It's hard to point to system-level initiatives like this in the online sphere that have thrived as opposed to struggled or been diluted … or, in some cases, failed."

Competition for the Campuses

Administrators at the system's campuses may see the initiative as competing with successful online programs they've already built at their universities, Garrett said.

Just a handful of representatives of the various campuses contacted

> We set the goal of two million more North Carolinians with high-quality credentials by 2030, and we see [Project Kitty Hawk] playing a critical role.

about the initiative replied. Many of the more than a dozen queried did not return emails and calls seeking comment.

University of North Carolina at Greensboro provost Debbie Storrs's response was emblematic of the overall reticence to discuss the initiative. Storrs said in a text message that the system was "in the best position to speak about this initiative."

Allen Guidry, interim vice provost for academic affairs at East Carolina University, said via email that his campus has been "working for some time" to reach adult online learners and offers over 100 undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs online. He said that nearly half of ECU's 28,000 students took at least one online course in fall 2021, and 8,261 took exclusively online courses. About 5,700 of the 8,261 exclusively online learners were 24 or older.

"With our history and success in online learning at ECU, we have certainly watched the development of Project Kitty Hawk with great interest," Guidry said in his email. "We are eager to explore how this entity could add further value to our efforts to scale online learning at ECU."

Asked about the potential for competition as institutions vie for students and revenue, Guidry said that because UNC Online now allows students to access resources across the system, "we really have joined hands in our efforts." UNC Online currently enables students to register for thousands of online courses from the various UNC institutions but is distinct from Kitty Hawk, which will operate as an affiliated nonprofit OPM.

Chancellor Darrell Allison of Fayetteville State University, a historically Black college where about half of the 5,661 undergraduates are 25 or older, said Project Kitty Hawk will be an important addition to the system, which he said must adapt to changing demographic trends.

"We don't have an option—this is the new reality," Allison said. He added

that the days of counting on recent high school graduates to populate a freshman class "are long gone."

Only 9 percent of UNC system undergraduates currently learn exclusively online, and just 13 percent are over the age of 25. UNC leaders believe these statistics underscore the need for a more robust adult online offering.

System planning documents show the statewide growth rate for 18- to 24-year-olds is forecast to be 8 percent through 2029 and just 1 percent from 2029 to 2039, a radical slowdown that system leaders say is in part fueling their work.

UNC system president Peters Hans said he is determined to win back adult online learners who now turn to outside online education providers, many of whom he called "bad actors."

"I think about those adults and the chance for them to get ahead in their jobs, or perhaps start a new career, [and] what a difference we can make towards hitting our state's ambitious educational attainment goals," Hans said. "We set the goal of two million more North Carolinians with high-quality credentials by 2030, and we see [Project Kitty Hawk] playing a critical role."

Hans added that while some of the system's universities already offer online programs targeted to adult learners, the current offerings do not engage them "nearly to the extent I think that we could and should be."

He said Kitty Hawk classes will be high quality and more than "basi-cally Zoom classes." He hailed his senior vice president for strategy and policy, Andrew Kelly, who helped create the blueprint for Kitty Hawk after meeting and speaking with other system leaders and educational technology experts across the country about lessons learned from prior efforts.

The plan "was to create an OPM-like nonprofit," Kelly said, "thereby enabling our universities to build more of those undergraduate programs that can really serve those 25-plus working adults."

He added that Kitty Hawk's nonprofit status will give new programs "more latitude" to merely break even.

But even if programs are allowed to break even, UNC has a tough road ahead, said Iris Palmer, a deputy director with the education policy program at the center-left think tank New America who has studied other state university systems' online education models. Palmer said her research has focused on adult learners and the difficulties many have faced.

How Others Have Targeted Adult Students Online

Many state systems and individual universities have long viewed adult students as an important population to cultivate and have created or expanded online programs to appeal to the demographic. Strategies for building these programs have varied, with some systems electing to take over an existing university to lay a foundation for their efforts and others building a new internal unit, as UNC is doing. Still others have created entirely new institutions, as the California Community Colleges opted to do with their Calbright College effort.

Purdue University, the University of Arizona and the University of Arkansas and University of Massachusetts systems are among the most notable examples of institutions that have bought existing online programs. The model typically requires relying on external—and expensive—OPMs. These attempts to co-opt existing online universities are broadly seen as risky and have at times been riven with controversy.

Purdue's acquisition of the for-profit Kaplan University, for example, spurred an outcry from faculty members who worried about lower educational quality and blurred lines between the university and its online counterpart, Purdue University Global. While many of these new efforts are still too nascent to judge, institutions have faced tough questions about how they intend to achieve their vision for massive new online efforts without sacrificing quality or introducing a troubling profit motive to nonprofit state systems.

An important precursor to the UNC effort can be found at the University of Missouri, which in March united the online programs offered by its four system universities under one umbrella, Missouri Online. The new online platform debuted with 260 degree and certificate programs, and officials promised an additional 22 programs by next year. System leaders spearheading the Missouri effort said the consolida-

tion would increase collaboration and efficiency, though whether that prediction will prove true remains to be seen.

The California Community Colleges' Calbright initiative has posted clearer results—and they are disheartening. Calbright was launched in late 2019 to great fanfare, but it is now under threat of being closed, with a recent state audit finding the online-only institution graduated merely 12 of more than 900 enrolled students in its first year. Calbright leadership was blasted by auditors for making poor strategic choices even when armed with a staggering $175 million in state funding promised through June 2025.

Palmer said her research findings make clear why programs like Calbright have struggled: adult learners often strain to learn online, particularly given the competing pressures they face at work and home. She said faculty mentorship and significant engagement with professors has proven to be vital for these students. Palmer worries that an online-only model could be challenging for UNC, since it is difficult for all but the most self-directed students to stay motivated when learning exclusively online.

Kelly said student success coaches are central to the Kitty Hawk model and that he foresees in-person support to complement the online instruction once the pandemic ends.

Project Kitty Hawk leaders say

> **There's a lot of pitfalls ahead …**
> **It's hard to point to system-level initiatives**
> **like this in the online sphere that have thrived**
> **as opposed to struggled or been diluted …**
> **or, in some cases, failed.**

campuses will be able to opt out of participating, and they made clear they view their organization as a source of support for individual institutions. But competition dynamics are nonetheless a problem embedded in these efforts, Palmer said. With Kitty Hawk anticipating 24,000 new enrollees in five years—which Palmer said in an email is "very ambitious"—the 16 university campuses inevitably will be vying for the same students and revenue.

"Once you start to have centralized online programming," Palmer said, "it can be seen as competition; it can be seen as the beginning of some kind of regulation, or throttling, of the online programs that are offered at each individual campus. It's a very difficult thing to pull off."

UNC leaders seemed to anticipate Palmer's line of reasoning; the working papers assert that the organization will not support any institution's plans for new programs without an attempt to "validate market demand."

"New program opportunities can originate from Kitty Hawk's own market intelligence function, emerge from the universities, or be solicited directly from employers and education benefit providers," the documents say.

Kelly emphasized the autonomy individual campuses will have to execute programs. He said the individual institutions will award degrees, offer the instruction and make assessments.

Hill reviewed the working papers and said he came away with the impression that the system hasn't yet "done the hard work" of consensus building.

"They make a compelling argument why we need to invest internally, as in UNC system capabilities," Hill said. "But it raises the question … 'Are we building up capabilities just within this Kitty Hawk initiative? Or are we going to do it as a way of making each of the … campuses better?' And I don't think they've figured it out." ∎

Philanthropies Help HBCUs Take Their Education Online

United Negro College Fund and Complete College America support Black colleges' efforts to upgrade their expertise and replicate their unique educational offerings digitally.

By Suzanne Smalley // October 26, 2021

Historically Black colleges and universities have confronted an unusual mix of challenges as they enter the digital age. Traditionally underfunded, they often have less money available for building digital infrastructure and ensuring online coursework is engaging than many other institutions.

HBCUs also offer a very special brand of education that may be difficult to translate to an online environment. Their model is based on fostering a sense of belonging for students -- and it has proven to be hugely successful at reaching first-generation, low-income students in particular -- but experts are now trying to figure out how to replicate that community feeling on an online platform.

Now, as the pandemic has made clear just how important it will be for colleges and universities to migrate online with effective curricula, philanthropies and private companies are stepping up to support HBCUs. The United Negro College Fund is spending $1.75 million to train faculty on how to better use learning management systems and design culturally rich curricula. And the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is supporting a $2.5 million effort by Complete College America to focus on how to improve digital learning infrastructure

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and bring the unique cultural attributes of an HBCU education to a digital platform.

In May 2020, once it became clear that the pandemic was here to stay, leaders at the UNCF realized there was an urgent need to support faculty at historically Black colleges and universities as they moved to teaching online.

UNCF found a very receptive audience.

"HBCUs are leaning into the online space," Edward Smith-Lewis, UNCF vice president of strategic partnerships and institutional programs, said in an interview. "It's desperately needed."

Smith-Lewis said UNCF officials quickly realized that HBCUs would need support honing faculty members' online teaching skills. Armed with $1.75 million in funding from the Lilly Endowment, UNCF is now training faculty on how to master learning management systems and build culturally relevant curricula. It is doing so, in large part, by providing financial incentives to faculty for participating in the trainings.

UNCF asked four organizations for bids to come on board as a partner: Strategic Education Inc., the parent company of Strayer and Capella Universities; Blackboard; Arizona State University; and the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in

Undergraduate Education. Strategic Education Inc. returned with the best ideas and most affordable proposal, said Smith-Lewis, who also was impressed by the HBCU grad Strategic had in place to run the partnership.

"They have money, they have resources and they have approaches in the online space that have proven to work," Smith-Lewis said of Strategic Education, a for-profit university system. "Particularly on the 'get faculty aligned to high-quality teaching' -- they built these models."

The work unfolded in three stages. First, the UNCF team focused on developing ways for faculty to move paper syllabi online. From there they designed two-, four- and six-week training programs and provided $400, $600 and $900 to faculty members who completed them. Next, they offered training designed to ensure student engagement, offering participating faculty $200 for a four-week course. By November of 2020, UNCF had given more than 550 instructors at nearly 40 HBCUs and predominantly Black institutions training on Blackboard, Canvas or a learning management system-agnostic platform.

UNCF is now in the third stage of the program and is selecting a smaller cohort of faculty members to participate in a six-month development process. The selected professors will create their own online courses in collaboration with workforce-focused instructional designers and coaches with technological expertise to make what Smith-Lewis calls "their own

> We want to find out, is this the moment, the time for institutions to think about what those offerings could look like in the digital space, if it makes sense, and what are the challenges if they decide to move in that direction?

21st-century-ready, culturally rich virtual content."

UNCF will pay the institutions to give participating professors release time, and the fund plans to share the curricula the professors and coaches design with a larger network of HBCUs. Smith-Lewis said this third stage of work, which is just getting started, is driven by the fact that existing online resources don't engage the unique cultural experience that HBCUs provide to students attending in person.

"There is a dearth of online content that has been developed by faculty from Black colleges," Smith-Lewis said. He added that existing online learning efforts at HBCUs do not produce the "lifelong, trajectory-shifting outcomes that we want … Students have to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of high expectations and, most importantly, that there's a community around them as they're learning."

The same ethos is driving a similar effort under way at Complete College America, which is launching a

program designed to translate HBCUs' cultural strengths and uniqueness into a digital environment. By the time the training wraps up, Smith-Lewis said, UNCF will have trained and provided stipends to more than 2,200 faculty members at about 100 Black institutions.

He said the surveys UNCF received from 770 participating instructors, who had an average age of 52, underscore why the training is so needed.

"When we went to look at where our faculty went for resources, most of them said Google when it came to how do you do your professional development online," Smith-Lewis said.

Most faculty members reported feeling comfortable putting their syllabi into an LMS but far less comfortable facilitating tests and evaluations online or even knowing how to teach in a Zoom format, Smith-Lewis said.

Upgrading HBCU Capabilities

UNCF's efforts are among many examples of how HBCUs are now wrestling with improving online

teaching and student engagement.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently provided a grant to Complete College America to support work with HBCUs and better understand how they foster culturally rich experiences for students with a goal of translating that approach to online instruction. Complete College America is a national nonprofit organization that works with states to significantly improve college completion and close attainment gaps for underrepresented populations.

Dhanfu Elston, chief of staff and senior vice president for strategy at CCA, said that the HBCU Digital Learning Infrastructure Initiative will provide seed money to five or six institutions to work with the national organization to build out digital learning infrastructure. Complete College America is also conducting a research project on how to achieve its goal of creating vibrant and culturally rich online instruction through interviews with stakeholders across 20-plus institutions, including CIOs, college presidents, students and others. What the organization learns will be shared with all HBCUs.

Gates is providing $2.5 million to fund the project. HBCUs will receive $1.5 million of that, with the remaining $1 million supporting project operations, including national research on successful HBCU digital learning infrastructure practices, deep research with selected HBCU partners, convenings of the HBCU institutional partners and advisory committee members, and a series of free workshops to share what they've learned.

"The HBCU experience is definitely about the classroom experience, but it's also about the unique cultural experience, the personal experience, the peer learning, the mentorship," Elston said. "We want to find out, is this the moment, the time for institutions to think about what those offerings could look like in the digital space, if it makes sense, and what are the challenges if they decide to move in that direction?"

The philanthropic interest in supporting HBCUs as they move curricula online reflects a recent surge in HBCU efforts to embrace online coursework.

At Clark Atlanta University, leaders recently decided to make the university's entire general education curriculum accessible online. Clark Atlanta also will keep general education offerings available in person. Mary Hooper, the associate vice president who is running Clark Atlanta's effort, said that part of what makes the university's education special is that "visceral feeling" students get simply by walking on campus. She noted that Martin Luther King Jr. lay in state inside Clark Atlanta's Harkness Hall after being assassinated.

Still, Hooper said, there was a recognition by Clark Atlanta's leadership that many students need the flexibility online offerings provide. By the spring of 2022, Clark will offer more than 100 course sections online, Hooper said.

Morehouse College recently announced a collaboration with 2U that aims to bring students who have not finished their degrees back into the fold via online courses.

Last year Zoom Video Communications and South Carolina-based HBCU Claflin University reached a $1.2 million deal to develop a partnership offering paid internships with Zoom; institute Zoom-led virtual engagements focused on technical skill, career path and interview development topics; and provide a member of Zoom's product team to the Claflin Computer Science and Mathematics Professional Advisory Board. Zoom experts also will co-author case studies to be embedded into curriculum. ∎

Read Original Article ▸ ▸   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/10/26/philanthropies-help-hbcus-take-their-education-online

How to Best Assess Your E-Learning Programs

> The pandemic has clearly demonstrated that online programs must be top quality to keep students enrolled and learning, so any evaluation of such programs should be, too, writes Cliff McCain.

By **Cliff McCain** // February 4, 2021

Assessment is a key to success in many walks of life, and in higher education, it is a must because the risks and rewards are so high when dealing with the lives of students. In recent years, online education has undergone significant scrutiny. While it no doubt has become a mainstay in higher education, the effectiveness of such programs is still sometimes debatable.

The impact of COVID-19, however, has clearly demonstrated that online programs must be top quality to keep students enrolled and learning. And to achieve that goal, the assessment of such programs must also be of good quality.

An organized assessment can help raise your e-learning programs to the level you need them to be, especially given the uncertain future. Your goal should be to discover how well students are achieving, how they feel about the program, how effective the instructional staff is and, finally, whether the program is successful over all when evaluated in various areas.

A group composed of both faculty members and administrators should organize the assessment so that everyone has the opportunity to voice their opinion on the delivery and evaluation of the re-sults. Ideally, an outside consultant would conduct the assessment, but not all colleges and universities may have the financial resources for this luxury. Whoever performs the evaluation, the institution's top educational officer, such as the provost, should be involved. Without that person's buy-in, no changes from the results of the assessment will truly happen.

I've detailed below the four key areas that you should assess when it comes to online learning at your institution.

Assessment area No. 1: student achievement. You should first evaluate how well students who chose to take online classes have performed and how the grades they received in those classes compare to traditional ones. You can use student grade point averages in this evaluation: obtain a record of the yearly GPAs for all students who took at least one online class in the past two semesters and then compare them with the GPAs of those who did not take any online classes. You should also compare the grades that students received in their online classes with their traditional class grades. While some people question the use of grades and grade point averages as a measure of learning, I feel
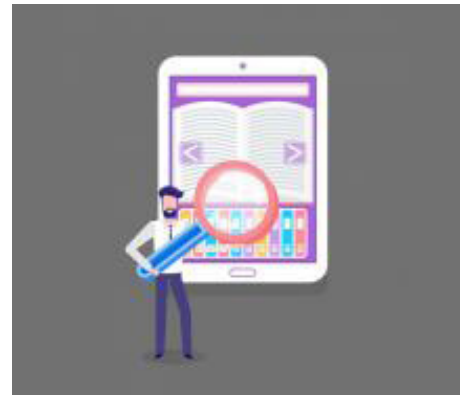
comfortable recommending that you examine such data as one aspect of a four-part study.

Assessment area No. 2: student attitudes. Students' views can impact many areas of education, not the least of which might be their grades. One instrument you can use to measure this area may already be in place: some colleges and universities -- as a service to students, not a mandatory test -- offer a free multiple-choice questionnaire that asks students questions about their academic behavior and attitudes. The final score is an indicator of the students' readiness for online classes.

To assess your e-learning program, you can administer such a test or instrument to all students who take online classes for one year. The results can reveal a wealth of perti-

nent information. Most important, they can show you if students with poor performance in online courses are the same students who were predisposed to low scores according to the instrument. If that's the case, it would be difficult to blame low scores for the students solely on an underachieving instructor or a subpar class.

In addition, the instrument will demonstrate if an overabundance of students who would best be served by traditional classes are signing up for online classes. That information could lead to policy changes about who should be permitted to enroll in online classes. You could also use it as promotional information if the students are succeeding in the online classes despite the roadblocks they may face. By turning an already-in-place instrument around, your institution can gain a wealth of information about online education and the students who take such courses.

Assessment area No. 3: instructor effectiveness. You should also assess the online instructors themselves, as they can obviously influence whether a student prospers in an online class or decides to go a different direction. Issues such as how well an instructor connects with students or how responsive they are to questions can signal their effectiveness.

If you are assessing an online instructor, certain principles should guide the process. Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson developed the "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," which you can apply

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to your online program evaluation. Those principles can help you assess whether the instructor:

1. Encourages student-faculty contact;

2. Encourages cooperation among students;

3. Encourages active learning;

4. Gives prompt feedback;

5. Emphasizes time on task;

6. Communicates high expectations; and

7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

The assessment should come from two different directions and include both qualitative and quantitative information. First, after one year, give students a questionnaire at the end of the class that addresses the seven principles. Ask them to rate the instructor on a scale of one to five on each of the principles and provide an opportunity to include additional comments.

In addition, ask a faculty member

or administrator to evaluate the instructor at least once during the year. This person should provide comments about each of the seven principles and how the instructor did or did not meet them. Hearing in this way from both students and administrators/faculty members will allow you to address any shortcomings and encourage any strengths of the instructor.

Assessment area No. 4: overall program effectiveness. Finally, evaluate the different aspects of the program to determine which are a strength, weakness or simply need to be removed. You can use the elements advocated by Rena M. Alloff and Keith Pratt in *The Virtual Student: A Profile and Guide to Working With Online Learners* -- and shared by Amany Saleh and Marcia Lamkin -- as a guide. Those elements include:

■ The overall online course experience;

■ Orientation to the course and course materials;

■ The content, including quantity

How to Best Assess Your E-Learning Programs (cont.)

of materials presented and quality of presentation;

- Discussions with other students and the instructor;

- Self-assessment of level of participation and performance in the course;

- The courseware in use, ease of use and ability to support learning in the course;

- Technical support; and

- Access to resources.

You should gather information from any student who has taken at least one online class at the institution over the past five years. Send a questionnaire covering the eight principles suggested by Saleh and Lamkin to all such students -- both current and former -- with a scale of one to five used to assess the eight areas. Possible scores of a minimum of eight and a maximum of 40 will come from this part of the questionnaire. Also, allow students to offer additional comments on any issue, not just the eight areas. Obviously, attempting to glean this information from former students is a major undertaking. But with the events of recent months, it is worth the effort to make your online programs as strong as possible.

Administrators like the president, dean of instruction and e-learning director should share the results and then forward them on to any relevant department heads. You should also make the survey results available to all faculty members to help them identify their own strengths and weaknesses. In that process, however, don't include specific names of the instructors or courses to anyone but the institution's senior administrators. They will be responsible with sharing specifics concerning instructors and classes with deans or department heads.

In addition, to ensure the report will not sit on the shelf, the evaluator should ask administrators for a link to be placed on the website with a summarization of the results after a period of six months. That will ensure that your institution has time to develop a plan to correct any weaknesses that are found.

Ultimately, you should emphasize that the purpose of any such an assessment is to identify any weaknesses in the e-learning program and work within your institution to make sure that program is thriving and succeeding. With such an emphasis, you will develop a spirit of collaboration that leads to one goal: quality education for the students. Education is a vital commodity, and few people doubt that it can be a life-changing product. Hopefully, the data you find in your assessment will show your e-learning program will, in fact, change lives positively for many years to come. ■

Bio

Cliff McCain is a learning specialist at the University of Mississippi and a history instructor at both Holmes Community College and Southwest Tennessee Community College. In addition, he recently accepted an adjunct instructor position at Grand Canyon University.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/02/04/advice-how-ensure-online-learning-programs-are-top-quality-during-and-after

Emergency Remote Instruction Is Not Quality Online Learning

Widespread misconceptions have arisen, write members of the National Council for Online Education, but when done correctly, online courses can be as effective as face-to-face ones.

By Members of the National Council for Online Education // February 3, 2022

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, students, faculty and administrators faced challenges amid the urgent pivot to emergency remote instruction. The pandemic and resulting quarantines are large-scale crises unlike anything we have ever faced. During the spring of 2020, more than 4,000 U.S. higher education institutions were forced to mobilize emergency remote instruction for more than 20 million students. Moving courses en masse into a crisis-responsive form of distance learning protected the health of our communities and preserved academic continuity for students. Faculty members and support staff displayed heroic levels of creativity, commitment and courage to make it all happen.

Entering 2022, the Omicron variant created unprecedented surges in the numbers of infected individuals. Once again, many colleges and universities have chosen to start the term using remote instruction to address this emergency. With the return of what was seen as a temporary measure to preserve the health of students, faculty and staff, our organizations feel the time is right to have a conversation on the national level about some widespread misconceptions that have arisen.

Chief among those is the inaccurate use of terminology that has led to confusion for students, their families, faculty, administrators, policy makers, members of the press and the public at large. Notably, people conflate "remote" learning with "online" learning. Quite simply, the difference between the two lies in planning and preparation:

- Remote learning is an emergency measure used to assure continuity of learning. It involves taking a course that was designed for the face-to-face classroom and moving it quickly into a distance learning modality (usually synchronous and held via web-conferencing tools, such as Zoom). Typically, the aim is an attempt to replicate the in-person classroom experience. Most faculty have too little training, support or time to effectively pivot their face-to-face course to one we would characterize as high-quality online learning.

- Online learning is a planned experience over weeks or months where the course has purposefully been designed for the online environment. The accompanying technology and tools have been carefully selected for the educational objectives. Faculty receive professional development and support to succeed in this modality.

In distinguishing between the two,

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we sometimes use the lifeboat analogy—the lifeboat is great if the ship is sinking, but the onboard experience cannot be compared to that of a luxury cruise liner.

Through emergency remote instruction, what many students experience is not the high-quality online learning that has been developed and delivered by countless institutions for the past several decades. Nor has that emergency instruction been guided by the pedagogies and best practices supported by online learning research. For example, purposefully designed, quality online learning considers online presence and multiple forms

of interaction, includes digitally accessible materials, and is well organized in an online course site to guide students along their learning pathway. But as Charles Hodges and his co-authors noted in their important article in the *Educause Review*, "The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning," which explored this topic in depth, for people unfamiliar with online learning the distinction between quality online courses and emergency remote instruction was, and still is, unclear.

Emergency remote instruction is not on par with the online learning that those of us who have long worked in the field strive to provide. We at the National Council for Online Education believe students deserve the best possible experience for their education—and institutional leaders must be committed to delivering top-quality, rigorous and engaging learning experiences, regardless of modality. In fact, some accrediting agencies are explicit in expecting that quality be the same for all modalities or even have additional—more stringent— requirements for online instruction.

High-quality online learning is the result of faculty trained and supported in online pedagogy, intentional instructional design and a host of other important ingredients that we have been fine-tuning for more than 25 years. This work has been guided over the years by research-supported practices, online course and program design guidelines (such as the Quality Matters Rubric, the OLC Quality Scorecards and the UPCEA Hallmarks of Excellence in Online Leadership), and

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tools crafted to support faculty in designing quality courses.

As described in Every Learner Everywhere's book *Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences: A Playbook for Faculty*, high-quality digital learning experiences "are well-organized and thoughtfully designed. These experiences rely on instructional design principles and strategies to align learning outcomes with learning assignments, activities and assessment practice … not only through strategic design, but also through integrating intentional opportunities for community-building and interaction in the digital environment."

Research shows that, when done correctly, quality online courses are as effective as face-to-face classes and, in fact, often lead to greater student success. But while faculty teaching remote classes are trying their best, they simply have not had the necessary development time. And the process to build those courses, and to prepare instructors to teach them effectively, does take

time—a resource not afforded by the rush to respond to COVID-19. At the onset of the pandemic, 97 percent of U.S. institutions reported having assigned faculty members with no prior online teaching experience to remote courses. In addition, many students faced difficulties accessing the technology and internet connectivity needed to succeed, especially when separated from on-campus computer labs and other vital resources. The pervasive stress of a global pandemic only intensified those difficulties.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, before the pandemic, one out of six postsecondary students were fully online students who had already realized the flexibility that learning modality gave them to navigate full-time jobs, family obligations or other needs. Then, during the pandemic, the flexibility provided by using online learning tools in transitioning to remote instruction enabled a significant portion of postsecondary learners a chance to learn with-

out risking themselves, their loved ones or their communities.

We all learned many lessons during the pandemic, including that students want—and need—the flexibility afforded by online learning. Even as students returned to campus, many asked for continued online options—and not just for health-related reasons. They have asked for flexibility in the modality, duration and scheduling of learning that best serves their educational needs. Many students have full-time jobs, are caregivers and were affected by the pandemic in ways that will continue to influence and challenge them. We also learned the importance of preparedness and saw that institutions that had invested in building a foundation of online quality prior to the pandemic—such as basic faculty training for online teaching, student orientation for online learning and necessary technology and institutional infrastructure—reaped dividends for that work. Institutions lacking online experience struggled with their pandemic response, as they did not have a core of faculty, instructional designers and leadership to support the transition to remote emergency mode.

Re-Envisioning, Adapting and Evolving

For this and other reasons, the National Council for Online Education and institutions of higher education owe it to our learning communities to continue to advance high-quality, intentionally designed online learning through which institutions can contribute to student outcomes in new and profound ways. By empowering our faculty members to teach even more skillfully online, we will make courses more engaging and learning more effective. By re-envisioning ad hoc and remote teaching materials, we can offer students new online courses that both adhere to well-established frameworks of quality and expand the opportunities that have made online learning a meaningful experience for millions of learners.

We certainly do not expect all courses to be online in the future, but institutions would do well to support all faculty in leveraging digital learning tools and best practices. We are hearing of more interest in incorporating digital technologies as supplements to face-to-face courses, in blended courses or in new fully online courses. To best employ such tools in serving students, institutions will need to rely on thoughtful technology selection, faculty development, instructional design and application of proven frameworks to best ensure quality online learning.

As colleges and universities offer more online options in response to student demands, they are also challenged to adequately describe the student experience, and ensure quality learning, for each course. Students need to know what learning environment to expect for each, such as how much time is spent face-to-face or online. They also need to know what technologies will be used, including how their instructor and institutional support services will assist them. Those communications with students are made more difficult when people conflate the terms "remote" and "online" learning. Therefore, we call on institutions, researchers and the press to be more reflective and accurate with terminology when discussing or examining a given educational experience

Finally, the pandemic reinforced why online learning is so vital to the future of higher education: through digital tools, students were able to continue learning. Digital tools enabled a new wave of students and educators in realizing the advantages and opportunities of online learning. As online education leaders, we pledge to use these lessons to continually adapt and evolve so that we can meet the needs of future students, even as we help shepherd our communities through unpredictable future emergencies. ∎

Bio
The members of the National Council for Online Education include the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), Quality Matters (QM), UPCEA (University Professional and Continuing Education Association) and WCET (WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies).

Read Original Article ▸▸   https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/02/03/remote-instruction-and-online-learning-arent-same-thing-opinion

Can Online Education Be a Force for Equity and Institutional Sustainability?

❚ Campuses that fail to invest in the digital future will become chronic invalids.

By Steven Mintz // December 1, 2021

Many reviewers, in my judgment, have misread Robert Ubell's new book, *Staying Online*. It's been largely treated as a compendium of practical advice about how colleges and universities can successfully embrace online learning.

Ubell, a pioneer in online program development at the Tandon School of Engineering at New York University and Stevens Institute of Technology, certainly offers a great many sensible recommendations about:

- Formulating and implementing an online strategy, including calculating the right price for an online degree and making solid enrollment and revenue projections.

- Designing, developing, delivering and growing online programs and providing online student services.

- Integrating active learning into digital instruction.

- Mitigating cheating in online courses.

- Managing online course ownership.

- Using data analytics to improve online instruction.

- Deciding whether or not to partner with an online program manager.

But at its core, the book offers a compelling argument that online learning can be a force for equity, despite the widespread claim that low-income and first-generation college students fare relatively poorly in online courses.

Done properly, Ubell contends, online learning can boost outcomes for marginalized students, increase retention rates, improve student learning and stabilize institutional costs.

Staying Online is, in short, a clarion call for institutions to mainstream virtual learning.

In addition, he is convinced that digital instruction can be the savior of many traditional institutions, not just during the pandemic, but beyond, as they seek to sustain and increase enrollment.

Online teaching offers a practical and pragmatic way to address the market forces that are upending institutional finances: the shrinking college-age population, deepening economic inequality, rising numbers of adult learners and stiffening competition among institutions for undergraduates and master's students.

Were it not for lower-cost online education, he argues persuasively, the national decline in postsecondary enrollment would have been far worse than it has been.

As economic inequality intensifies,
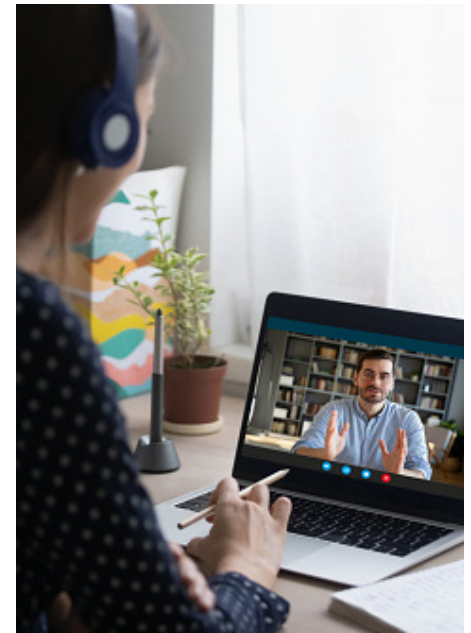
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Ubell contends, it is more important than ever that colleges and universities take steps to bridge the economic divide. That will require these institutions to deliver an education that is more affordable, flexible and convenient than they have historically offered.

Scaled online education, in his view, must be a big part of the solution.

Myth busting constitutes a big part of Ubell's book.

- *Must it cost tens of thousands of dollars to develop effective online courses?* Absolutely not, he insists. High-end production values are far less important than effective online pedagogy.

- *Must a digital education be more*

expensive than a face-to-face education? Certainly not. It's undeniable that some institutions do treat online learning as a revenue generator. But any accurate cost accounting shows that online classes can be cheaper to deliver, especially if campuses are willing to embrace alternate staffing models that allow the classes to be scaled.

- *Must lower-income and other nontraditional students perform less successfully in online classes?* Nope. Ubell cites numerous examples of online students outperforming their in-person counterparts.

But if institutions are to succeed online, campus leadership and faculty must recognize that delivery methods aren't the only difference between face-to-face and virtual instruction. Pedagogy, assessments, curricula and support structures all need to change if online students are to succeed.

In Ubell's opinion, the keys to effective online learning involve:

- Rejecting the notion that effective online instruction should replicate the conventional in-person experience.

- Recognizing that online students differ markedly from their on-campus counterparts; they are much more likely to work part- or full-time, to be older, and to have to juggle demanding work and family responsibilities.

- Re-engineering courses around a more student-centered ap-

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proach to engaging, motivating, instructing and assessing students that emphasizes active learning, peer-to-peer interaction, inquiry, digital exercises, virtual labs and guided projects.

- Treating student support not as an afterthought but as central to academic success in an online environment.

Among the many important arguments that *Staying Online* advances are these:

- **An online education need not be inferior to an in-person experience.** Online learning generally allows students to process information in their own time, to take part in online discussions and ask questions without losing face, and to engage more actively with peers and in interactive activities.

- **A scaled online education can also be a more personalized education.** Data analytics can allow

instructors to identify students who are disengaged, confused or at risk of failure so they can address these challenges in near real time. Such data can also pinpoint material or skills that are particularly difficult to comprehend or master and prompt instructors to develop tutorials and activities to help students achieve proficiency.

- **Cheating is more a consequence of misguided approaches to assessment than it is to students who are unethical or unprincipled.** Here, Ubell is one of many innovators calling for more frequent low-stakes assessments distributed throughout a course.

- **Online learning need not be alienating or isolating.** The design challenge is to make online courses more participatory, collaborative and interactive than their conventional in-person counterparts.

- **Institutions without an online**

strategy will deprive themselves from key sources of future enrollment. One of the greatest benefits of digital education in this century is its capacity to offer greater access to colleges and universities to students who must work while they advance their studies. It allows campuses to serve not only nontraditional students but growing international markets as well.

- **A successful online strategy at the postbacc level requires institutions to convert individual courses into bundles of steeply discounted, connected classes that carry credit in targeted high-demand fields.** He also stresses the importance of branding these programs effectively. Here, he cites the example of Specializations, MicroMasters, Nanodegrees and Professional Certificates.

For many academics, the pandemic has been a wake-up call. It's among those once-in-a-generation occurrences that forces a reconsideration of many taken-for-granted assumptions.

Many of us now recognize that the kind of education that we offered in the past, for all its virtues, hasn't served many of our existing students well, while ignoring the needs of the nonstudents who could benefit from a college education. Cost and a rigid academic calendar are part of the problem, but so too is pedagogy and delivery modalities.

If we truly want to address postsecondary equity, online—or hybrid or low-residency—education must be part of the mix. Short-term certificates and certifications and alternate credentials, too, need to be part of the future.

But as *Staying Online* makes clear, it's not enough to deliver conventional classes online. We need to radically rethink the academic experience and our pedagogies, curricula and assessment strategies. Ubell's most important takeaway: input from the learning sciences and instructional designers and educational technologists won't simply help online students; it will benefit more traditional on-campus students as well.

It's a lesson we should take to heart. ∎

Bio

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Collaboration Is Key to Successful Alternative Credential Creation

A tsunami of alternative credentials is emerging to meet the shifting learning needs of those in the workforce. Higher education is looking beyond the dwindling market of 18-year-olds to lifelong, professional and continuing ed to sustain enrollments.

By Ray Schroeder // February 2, 2022

One million fewer students are enrolled in higher education in the U.S. than before the pandemic began. As Nathan M. Greenfield writes in *University World News*, "Even though much of America's economy opened up in 2021, America's university-aged cohort continued to stay away from college and university in record numbers. The number of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions fell 2.7 percent in 2021, a figure greater than the previous year's decline of 2.5 percent. Compared with 2019, there are almost one million fewer students in America's colleges and universities."

With fewer students, many universities are grappling with lower overall tuition revenue to sustain their operations. In part as a result of the decline in enrollments and associated revenue, many institutions are scrambling to launch alternative credentials to tap the massive shift of adult learners in the workforce, including those who are part of the "great resignation" and have quit their jobs during the pandemic.

As John Steele of *Suitable* writes, the alternative credential movement accelerated through the advent of MOOCs over the past decade. Reaching professionals online, the MOOCs provided cre-dentials, including badges, that served those seeking to advance their careers.

The trend toward smaller-than-degree credentials has taken off. Compared to degrees, they are valued for their timeliness, relatively low cost and lesser time investment. The return on investment is apparent in short order, as certificate holders claim enhanced skills and abilities worthy of greater salaries and responsibilities.

Now there are literally thousands of alternative certificate programs, and they are growing daily. Most recently, Arizona State University announced ambitious plans to reach 100 million learners by 2030 through its new online global management and entrepreneurship certificate program. Natalie Schwartz writes in *Higher Ed Dive*, "The certificate program, which will be translated into 40 languages, will be offered through Arizona State's Thunderbird School of Global Management. An initial donation of $25 million is helping to fund the program, which will make the certificates free to learners through full scholarships. Learners will receive a badge after completing each of five graduate-level courses in the program. Completion of all the courses leads to a certificate granting 15 credit hours

ONLINE: TRENDING NOW

that can be applied to degrees at Thunderbird."

While it may seem relatively easy to throw together a few classes that have identifiable market-driven skills and abilities as learning outcomes, in practice creating a successful certificate program involves much more. There is a temptation to merely scan the available demographic data on projected job growth and student interest to drive the design and launch of a new certificate program. However, the most important link in the process is to reach out to business, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and industry leaders to create a long-term, continuing, working collaboration on identifying the needed skills, knowledge and abilities.

The keys to developing a successful online certificate program include:

1. **Know your audience.** Get to know the prospective students. These may well be those already employed in the field who are seeking career advancement. Your rolls of alums may offer a good starting point to seek out

representative samples of these prospective learners. Identify their goals, aspirations and expectations.

2. **Know the employers.** Make sure you include the obvious ones in business and industry, as well as the less obvious ones, including those in government agencies, NGOs and education at all levels. The C-suite and HR leaders at regional and national companies and organizations may be best positioned to predict the specific knowledge, skills and abilities they will be seeking in the coming couple of years.

3. **Understand the growth/decline potential.** Get to know both the optimistic and the pessimistic sides of predictions for the fields in which your certificate holders will compete.

4. **Update and revise content every year.** Engage the professionals at least a couple of times a year to pick up on new developments and emerging trends that your certificate should address.

5. **Teach to the future not the pres-**
ent or past. This is especially important in certificates. Too often we in higher education have been guilty of relying too heavily on textbooks that are already out of date when they are first published. We tap the way things were when we were working in the field, not the way things will be in six months or a year. This means that courses must be updated once or twice every year, without exception.

6. **Design and market to a tightly defined underserved or unserved audience.** You can leave room for others who may join your cohorts, but make certain you satisfy your core demographic group very well.

7. **Carefully follow learning initiatives,** such as the Google Career Certificates program for effective practices in teaching as well as placing your certificate completers.

8. **Recognize that the pedagogy of teaching a short sequence of classes for a certificate is far different from a long-term**
degree program. The learners come to you with differing assumptions, defined desired outcomes and context.

Think of the certificate curriculum as existing in an ever-changing environment. It is not a static set of learning outcomes. Your collaboration with professionals in the field is the anchor for your success in this field. Designing courses for these learners is different without the long list of prerequisites and shared gen ed of degree programs. Artificial intelligence, virtual environments and the changing economy will impact what and how you should teach.

UPCEA offers a free curated reading list on alternative credentials with one item posted every day. It may be useful as you seek to keep up with the developments in this field.

Who is leading the certification effort at your institution? As enrollments shift from freshman-centric to professional-oriented, how can you help? It is time for a certificate in your field? ∎

Read Original Article ▶▶   https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/online-trending-now/collaboration-key-successful-alternative-credential

The Revolution in Higher Education Is Already Under Way

▌Are you prepared?

By Steven Mintz // January 12, 2022

Some revolutions take place with all the stealth and subtlety of Fourth of July fireworks. But others take place silently, and when they're over, their triumph is so invisible and so complete it's as if they never happened.

In retrospect, these revolutions seem inevitable, inexorable and irreversible.

That latter kind of revolution is transforming higher education. We're all aware of certain aspects of that revolution, but its full scope and implications rarely draw the attention they deserve.

The revolution that is currently transforming higher education isn't, of course, the first. During the 20th century, we witnessed several:

■ The shift from elite to mass to near universal higher education.

■ The rapid growth of vocational, technical, career-aligned and pre-professional programs at the undergraduate level (alongside greatly expanded master's, doctoral and professional programs at the postbacc level), displacing the traditional liberal arts core—apparent in the rise of programs in architecture, business, communication, engineering, hotel and restaurant management, journalism, nursing, social work, and technology.

■ The rise of the instrumental uni-versity—the shift in higher education's mission from the narrowly educational to human capital and regional economic development, applied research, and public policy research and advocacy to solve social problems.

What makes today's revolution fundamentally different from its predecessors is that it is taking place across multiple dimensions—demographic, organizational, curricular, pedagogical, staffing and more—and it's contributing to a deepening stratification in institutional missions, student preparation, resources and outcomes.

That a revolution is occurring is not a secret. Just think of the various ways authors discuss the contemporary university:

■ The rise of the neoliberal university: The tendency of universities to act like private sector corporations, which is evident in shifting patterns of institutional governance, the adoption of enrollment management and other practices designed to maximize revenue generation, the relentless pursuit of ancillary income, the growing emphasis on return on investment, and the perception of students as customers.

■ The rapid growth of fully online universities, typically characterized by a narrow, job-aligned curriculum, standardized class-

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es, often asynchronous and "self-paced, self-directed" courses that require a great deal of self-direction, and the replacement of traditional faculty members with less expensive staffing models.

■ The increasing role of vendors and third-party providers in delivering core institutional functions.

■ Then there are those changes in the student body, the professoriate, institutional staffing and cost that we all recognize:

■ The decline of the "traditional" college student, between the ages of 18 and 22, who attends college full-time and has very limited work and family responsibilities.

■ The desperate quest for new student markets, including international students (among those institutions that accept 90 percent or more of the international student applicants are Loyola University Chicago, the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of Kansas, the University of Toledo, Kent State and

Colorado State; among those whose student body consists of 20 percent or more international students are Mount Holyoke, St. John's in Santa Fe and Annapolis, Bryn Mawr, and Earlham).

- The increasing division of the faculty in terms of access to tenure, teaching and service responsibilities, and full- and part-time status.

- The rapid growth of nonteaching professional staff, responsible for advising, career services, psychological counseling, learning support and student life.

- The transfer of costs of higher education to families and the federal government and the sharp increase in student debt burdens.

Taken together, these developments need to be understood as parts of a far broader revolution that is creating a higher education ecosystem that is highly stratified and highly differentiated, with institutions targeting distinct student demographics.

What, then, is the nature of this revolutionary transformation?

- Whereas the earlier revolutions sought to democratize access to an earlier collegiate model, the current revolution is producing a far greater range of educational models that target distinct demographics.

- The deepening disparity in the education that institutions provide is widening in terms of access to faculty, majors, advising and support services.

- At a growing number of institutions, especially Research-1s, the university's undergraduate education function is increasingly taking a back seat to other functions.

- Students, especially at the less selective institutions, are voting with their feet and are concentrating in several broad areas—business, education and health—with a very small proportion in the humanities or social sciences (within the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, just 4 percent of students major in the social sciences).

- The relationship between students and their institutions is growing increasingly transactional, with growing numbers of students swirling among multiple colleges and universities.

- Government is assuming a more active (some would say, a more intrusive) role in oversight and enforcing accountability and demanding more information, especially about costs, debt and graduation and employment outcomes.

- High schools, in increasing numbers, offer early-college/dual-degree programs and electives that (in theory) are equivalent to introductory-level college courses, while third parties (including museums and major technology firms) offer certificate, certification and in certain instances degree programs either separately or in collaboration with existing institutions.

It's all too easy to complain about the changes that are taking place:

- The overemphasis on skills and training rather than upon intellectual curiosity and cultural exposure.

- The invocation of the language of management, efficiency, outputs, productivity and return on investment instead of the academic language of learning, cognitive development and personal growth.

- Declining levels of student preparation and diminishing amounts of reading and writing assigned to students.

But such complaints have no more impact than King Canute's command that the tide recede. I, perhaps like you, enjoy reading books decrying the "managerial" or the "neoliberal" or the "instrumental" university. But what's missing is a path forward.

So what then needs to be done?

1. **Academics need to speak out more strongly for equity.** Whatever the impact of the revolution is upon us (the faculty), its consequences are far greater for students from low-income backgrounds who deserve access to the kind of education best aligned with their interests and aspirations. Cost of tuition and living expenses should not be a barrier.

2. **The faculty needs to understand that their personal interests and their students' learning needs aren't identical.** Many, perhaps most, faculty prefer to teach squarely (I'd say narrowly)

within their areas of disciplinary specialization and research. But many undergraduates would benefit much more from an education that is broader, more skills-focused, more experiential, more interdisciplinary, more project-based and, yes, more relevant and responsive.

3. **"Accountability" isn't a four-letter word.** Irrespective of a higher education's mounting economic and opportunity costs, the academy owes its consumers an accurate and transparent accounting of an institution's mission, its programs' outcomes and the steps institutions are taking to improve these outcomes. It also needs to conduct regular reviews of faculty teaching, research and service, not to undercut tenure protections, but to encourage improvement and ensure that faculty members are contributing equitably to the university's functioning and mission. This strikes me as the least we can do given the very substantial public investment in the college and university enterprise.

4. **Faculty members in the humanities, in particular, need to better adapt to students' shifting interests.** Why can't we better align our courses to students' professional interests, in business, engineering, health care and technology? That's certainly not to say that every history class ought to focus on business history, environmental history, legal history, the history of medicine and public health, or the history of technology—or on topics of high student interest, including climate change or the history of race or sexuality. But I do believe that those of us granted the great privilege of conducting research in the humanities should focus less on cloning ourselves than on nurturing the skills, knowledge and literacies that students who do not become academics will benefit from in later life.

5. **Let's liberate access to advanced education and make it more broadly available to non-students.** Shortly after I left Columbia, several Core Curriculum preceptors established the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research. Modeled, in part, on Britain's Open University, History Workshop and Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the institute remains dedicated to community-based education, often offered at neighborhood bars. Now 10 years old, it seeks to integrate rigorous but accessible scholarly study into adult lives, with courses (or roundtables) on everything from Proust and Dr. Seuss to musical Romanticism and gender, culture and geopolitics in Khrushchev's Soviet Union. Somewhat similar is New York City's Institute for Retired Professionals. Founded in 1962 by a group of New York City schoolteachers seeking an opportunity to learn from one another, it is a cooperative learning program offering peer-taught classes and study groups on topics ranging from the Bauhaus to cabaret music, manhood and adultery in literature.

Everyone as old as me no doubt recalls hearing stories of cigar workers who took part in lessons about Kant or Marx even as they rolled tobacco leaves. The most radical of all revolutions would be to ensure that access to advanced education isn't confined to the academy. Not through MOOCs or MasterClass or public television documentaries, with their lack of interpersonal interaction, but in other ways.

Higher education is too valuable to be monopolized by the young—and postbacc education shouldn't simply be limited to retraining and upskilling. I believe that learning should be lifelong. But that doesn't mean that it should be merely technical, practical and vocational. ∎

Bio
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https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/revolution-higher-education-already-underway

Show Them You Care

| Michel Estefan suggests four ways to help build supportive in-person or online classrooms that generate equity among students.

By Michel Estefan // February 3, 2021

If the pandemic has taught us anything about teaching, it's that effective pedagogy takes the form of a caring relationship. Students do their best work when they feel empowered, supported and connected in the classroom. As the pandemic rages on and students continue to struggle with isolation, stress and uncertainty, the human dimension of instruction bears more significance than ever -- especially for first-generation, low-income and racially minoritized students who often find themselves alienated, even in normal times, in institutions of higher education.

How can faculty members support their students in this moment of crisis when they are also stretched thin and facing risks, challenges and barriers to their careers that parallel those confronting their students? This situation calls for creative approaches to pedagogy that afford faculty manageable ways of making large classrooms feel small and providing historically minoritized students with the support they deserve and need to succeed.

In this piece, I suggest four methods for achieving this: student design, structured flexibility, support pods and proactive mentoring. These methods can help build meaningful, supportive in-person or online classrooms that generate equity among students during

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these trying times.

Student design. The syllabus, assignments and grading rubrics are the core artifacts that structure the learning process in a classroom. But for historically minoritized students, they can often feel more like gatekeepers to academic success than sources of information that promote fairness and transparency. One straightforward way to solve that problem is to involve students in creating those artifacts.

As a first assignment, ask students to annotate the syllabus collectively. Upload the syllabus as an open digital document and ask students to read it, note what they found useful, pose any questions about things that remain unclear and react to each other's comments. Then

use their observations to revise the syllabus and produce a final draft. Instructors have found this to be an effective way to build rapport with students and encourage collaborative learning among them.

You can apply the same approach to any grading rubric or assignment prompt. For example, have students read the rubric and comment on it collectively before they complete the corresponding assignment. This will provide you with valuable information about what's working well with the grading criteria and what you may need to revise. And the students will understand the rubric better and use it with a more discerning lens to complete the assignment.

By imprinting their views on the

core items that organize the learning process, students will relate to the course in an entirely different way. They will feel more committed to produce high-quality work and more invested in each other's success.

Structured flexibility. Over the course of teaching during the pandemic, we have learned that students appreciate and benefit from a thoughtful balance between flexibility and structure. Students have been forthright about how much they value flexibility through asynchronous course components and longer time frames to complete assignments, as well as their instructors' awareness that everyone's lives could be suddenly upended. But given that COVID-19 has disrupted many of the routines of in-person campus life, students have also expressed how much they value aspects of teaching that introduce regularity and consistency in their courses -- including synchronous components, a well-planned assignment schedule, clear deadlines and transparent grading guidelines.

One useful way to create student-centered structured flexibility is a variation on contract grading that offers multiple paths to achieve the course's learning objectives. You provide students with several assignment schedules to complete the course requirements and ask them to select one. Path A may involve two quizzes, two short papers and a final group project.

Path B could consist of a quiz, class presentation, podcast and final paper. This method gives students more control over their coursework, allowing them to choose the assignment schedule that best suits their circumstances and interests while preserving a clear path to classroom success.

Students know their circumstances best, so giving them the freedom to decide how to achieve the course learning goals reduces the chances of having to continuously make unexpected, last-minute changes to assignments or grading policies while the pandemic persists.

Support pods. The value of community for student learning is well documented and so is its specific importance for historically marginalized students. At its simplest, community rests on providing opportunities for students to support and help each other learn. Support pods are a useful way of connecting students that also allows you to scale mentoring for large classes. Place students in groups at the beginning of the term, have them share their contact information and ask them to check in with each other periodically to see how things are going. Request that someone in each pod communicate with you to let you know how the pod members are doing. By having students support each other, you can focus your mentoring efforts on those that may need your help most.

Proactive mentoring. Studies have

shown that mentoring is one of the most effective methods to help people in minoritized groups succeed -- and that mentoring online can be just as effective as doing it in person. But we do need to adjust our mind-set about mentoring.

In our interactions with students, we should strive to make sure they always feel safe, respected and empowered in our conversations, but we should also provide unsolicited support. Anthony Jack's research has shown that low-income students are often reluctant to ask their professors for help. As a result, a welcoming but passive disposition on our behalf isn't enough. For instance, instead of waiting for students to ask about research opportunities, share any information you have, express confidence in their ability to conduct research and offer to help if they think research is something they would like to try out.

As we continue to face the challenges posed by the pandemic, it is worth remembering that the relationships and interactions in the context of which learning takes place have a direct impact on student motivation and academic performance. We all learn best when we are treated as distinct, complete individuals and feel involved in, empowered by and connected to the work we're doing. The methods I propose here are designed to achieve this by placing teaching as a caring relationship at the forefront of our pedagogy. ∎

Bio

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Enrollment Marketing: Digitally Remastered

Prepare your approach and create your content for a new generation.

By Jay Murray // March 23, 2021

Everyone remembers the first time they saw a classic film. Maybe *Star Wars* (I was 8 and wide-eyed), *Jurassic Park* (I was a young admissions counselor) or *Citizen Kane* (in my high school journalism class). Some of us are old enough to remember those films being released for a second (or third or more) time -- "digitally remastered to be enjoyed by another generation!" Now I enjoy watching all the *Star Wars* films with my children.

As we look ahead to a post-pandemic world, enrollment marketers will be left with a choice. Do we move back to the familiar approaches we leveraged for decades or do we boldly acknowledge that those approaches are a distant memory?

Enrollment managers need to do both. We must employ a hybrid approach that integrates the new and effective strategies we've mastered quicker than we ever imagined while simultaneously refreshing our tried and tested tactics.

Redefine the Role of 'In-Person' Experiences

When we consider the place our legacy recruitment tactics had more than a year ago, the focus was on identifying new prospects. The primary purpose of high school visits and college fairs was lead generation -- identify new, interested students to add to our funnel.

Recent data from Common App show us what we already know: the challenge is not identifying prospective students and generating applications. The challenge has been and will continue to be yield, how many we enroll and melt, mitigating the number we lose.

As we open our campuses again and have the opportunity to travel for recruitment programs, we will have to decide, how valuable are the tactics for identifying new prospects relative to the things we can do to continuously nurture these leads? With all of our investments in CRM software, marketing automation, digital marketing, and virtual events ... it's time for a reboot.

Prior to the pandemic, institutions that were hosting virtual events typically did so as a supplemental program on top of in-person events. The focus was filling in the cracks between open house and regional events.

Post-pandemic, this priority will be reversed. Travel for face-to-face interactions still has a critical role to play, but it should occur between digital engagement opportunities.

When data from Eduventures indicate that over 90 percent of students are interested in learning more about potential colleges and universities through a combination of live and prerecorded sessions, it's time we fit the smaller and less

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measurable in-person programs like high school visits and college fairs into the cracks of our enrollment marketing plans and not the other way around.

Next Tuesday, part two of this post will explore aligning enrollment marketing content plans with the post-pandemic future.

Jay Murray is the associate vice president for enrollment services at Western Connecticut State University. A recognized expert in student recruitment and engagement, he has presented on numerous virtual panels and at conferences including the National Association of College Admission Counseling national conference.

This piece is a continuation of "Enrollment Marketing: Digitally Remastered Part 1," where I discussed redefining the role of in-person recruitment experiences alongside virtual ones.

Once we accomplish this task, it will be important to ensure that our content plan aligns with this new reality. Consider today's entertainment juggernauts. In addition to generating great content, Netflix, Disney+ and Hulu also focus on creating a marketing plan and simple user experience for their

audience. Like them, taking great care in how and when we release content we'll ensure that our digital content and in-person experiences are meaningful and impactful.

Move From Events to Engagement

In a recent article, "This Is the Way," enrollment content marketing was compared to the release strategies of popular streaming platforms like Netflix and Disney+.

Higher education institutions rely on the Netflix approach with in-person experiences. In-person open houses are the equivalent of a full season dropped and binged on a single day. Virtual engagement platforms for the past year have been used in similar ways -- virtual events have dominated prospective students' inboxes for the past 12 months.

As in-person experiences return to our repertoire, continuous content production in our virtual environments will be key. We'll need to adopt the Disney+ approach: episodic release of content. Of course, our admissions information sessions and financial aid workshops won't compete with *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (can't wait for this one!) or *The Mandalorian* (loved it!). But we have an opportu-

nity to repurpose our content in a variety of ways to support continuous engagement, conversion and yield. Imagine: Students anxiously awaiting new virtual content from their top college choice, just like they waited for each episode of *The Mandalorian*?

It's time for admissions officers to stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking about our prospects' media consumption habits as we measure the success of our efforts. At the recent "Spring Forward" executive forum sponsored by PlatformQ Education and moderated by *Inside Higher Ed* editor Scott Jaschik, Mateo Remsburg, director of recruitment at the University of Utah, observed that oftentimes they saw more views and engagement with on-demand content rather than in a number of their live events. Using this metric is a great place to begin.

Are You the Disney Vault or Disney+?

We need to refresh our approach to content distribution, and that means keeping up with the habits of our audience. We're all consumers of media. We all have our platforms and devices of choice. Why, then, do we put our understanding of how people prefer to connect

and engage on the shelf when we enter (or dial in) to marketing planning meetings and place so much value on programs that continue to fade in importance?

The Disney Vault was a marketing tactic to create urgency to buy the latest enhanced version of a classic. The vault goes away when everything is available in an on-demand library. Enrollment marketers have an opportunity to do away with their vault and build their own Disney+ by empowering their team to maintain consistent engagement and produce fresh content in support of conversion and yield. Post-pandemic enrollment will require a hybrid approach that incorporates a consistent distribution of fresh digital content paired with meaningful in-person experiences that differentiate our institutions from our peers. The true winners will be those who accept this reality and move forward.

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