Not Necessarily "Distant": Traditional Students and Online Courses

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

"M"ost people consider e-learning as synonymous with distance learning, but there is a huge group of people [taking online classes] who are not necessarily distant," he says.

According to Thomas Cavanagh, associate vice president of the Center for Distributed Learning at the University of Central Florida (UCF), "Students don't consider modality as a discriminator," he says. "All education becomes local to the student; students can mix or match to meet their needs."

In the Educause book Game Changers: Education and Information Technologies (available as a free e-book at http://www.educause.edu/research-publications/books/game-changers-education-and-information-technologies), Cavanagh explains a new trend in higher education. While distance or online education has long been seen as a way to provide non-traditional students with enough flexibility to juggle the demands of work and family while they study, today the need for flexibility is extending to traditional, on-campus students. "The growing ubiquity of online learning is eliminating the lines between what was once considered traditional and nontraditional," he writes.

These traditional students yearning for flexibility might be using online courses to allow them to more fully experience their college years.

"Ironically, many of these students leverage the convenience of online courses to more deeply engage in the on-campus experience," Cavanagh writes. This might mean using the flexibility to work part-time, certainly a need in today's expensive college environment, but it might also mean joining Greek organizations and other clubs, playing sports, volunteering, or otherwise engaging in co- and extra-curricular activities. "Where it is offered

"The growing ubiquity of online learning is eliminating the lines between what was once considered traditional and nontraditional."

Preventing for post-modality learning

Cavanagh has five recommendations for institutions confronting this post-modality era:

1. Expand the campus information system. Students need to have an easier time finding and registering for online and blended course options to fit their needs.

2. Reconfigure academic support systems. Services like advising and library assistance should be reworked to support students who are studying online and/or asynchronously.

3. Add multimedia and network capability to classrooms. For many institutions, classrooms will need to be retrofitted with these capabilities to allow for blended learning and to allow students to move seamlessly between face-to-face and online environments.

4. Expand the campus information technology infrastructure. Greater online activity means greater demands on bandwidth, and the IT infrastructure needs to support this.

5. Develop faculty and course-development services. Just as students need support to move back and forth from traditional to online modalities, so do faculty members. "It is not uncommon for a single faculty member at UCF to concurrently teach face-to-face, online, and blended courses, mirroring the course-taking behaviors of his or her students," Cavanagh writes.

In this issue

Online students: Not so distant anymore ............................................ Cover

Monthly Metric: Prevalence of online tutors ................................... 3

Regulation: Seeking authorization while growing a program ............ 4

Accessibility: Stop avoiding mandates ............................................. 5

In the News: Board members in the dark about DL ............................................. 7

A MAGNA MAGNA PUBLICATION
Cover...from page 1

widely at an institution, online learning affords these traditional students much greater scheduling flexibility and enables much deeper on-campus participation," he writes.

Cavanagh has had a front seat at the development of this phenomenon as he observes the students at UCF. In the fall of 2010, the university had over 56,000 students. Of this body, about 2,700 of them were enrolled in a face-to-face, web-based, and blended courses all at the same time. "This is the definition of student behavior in a postmodality era," he writes.

**Dealing with post-modality**

Since students do not typically make distinctions in their education based on modality, Cavanagh believes it is senseless for institutions to do so. "Classifying a student as 'main campus' or 'extended campus' or 'distance' becomes meaningless in an environment where students take whatever courses they need in whatever location or modality best suits their requirements at the time," he says. He adds that "the Sloan Foundation has dubbed this concept 'localness,' meaning that student access to education is always local to them, even if they do so through online learning."

Not only are students crafting their higher education experience to conform to their needs through a blend of course delivery modalities, they come to college with experience and expectations of doing just that. Cavanagh notes that students are accustomed to a certain amount of flexibility in their K-12 programs, using online learning to add courses that their schools do not offer, such as languages or advanced science and math. Some families also construct programs the opposite way, choosing to home school for many subjects, often with the aid of online curricula, but reaching out to local organizations and schools for access to art classes, physical education, sports teams, or academic classes that parents feel unable to assist with at home.

Some states even have a requirement that all students take at least one online course in order to graduate high school. "These states are actually mandating postmodality course-taking behaviors, compelling secondary students to take online courses in addition to their traditional, face-to-face high school classes," Cavanagh says. With systemic behaviors such as this driving online course-taking in K-12, Cavanagh expects that sector to continue to drive a move to postmodality learning. "As these students arrive on our postsecondary campuses, they will already be accustomed from their high school experiences to taking a concurrent mixture of face-to-face, online, and blended courses," he writes. "They will expect (perhaps even demand) that same flexibility and choice from their colleges and universities."

Universities can embrace this trend with little fear of its impact on student success. Cavanagh finds that "research indicates that course mode is not an effective predictor of success or withdrawal within a course." In many ways, this postmodality era is demonstrating that a course truly is a course, with no modality modifiers needed.

As a final indication that students expect and adapt to learning delivered through various modalities, Cavanagh points to student behavior regarding end-of-course evaluations. "A course is a course," he says, explaining that students typically have no trouble answering.

*continued on page 8*
Does your online program offer access to online tutors?

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Growing Your Program Under State Authorization

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

By now, everyone working in distance learning is aware of the challenges of state authorization. This umbrella term refers to the need for institutions offering educational programs in states in which they are not physically located to receive the authorization of that state. Many institutions are hoping for help from SARA, the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement. However, until something like SARA becomes a reality, institutions must take responsibility for securing authorization in all the states in which they practice.

At the same time, institutions and program administrators feel they also have a responsibility to advance their online offerings. Laura Diefenderfer is special projects coordinator for online initiatives at Eastern University. In a 2012 Sloan-C presentation abstract, she notes, “In many cases the speed at which the regulations are currently being published is causing institutions to scramble to figure out what they mean for their institution and how they can grow their offerings instead of being stalled by the magnitude of the regulations.”

Diefenderfer identified for her presentation six steps that institutions can take now to grow their programs while anticipating the solution to the authorization issue. They are detailed below:

1. Communicate internally

   To start the process right, institutions need to be sure that all appropriate parties are in the loop. This includes:
   • senior administration
   • the compliance committee
   • deans and directors
   • representation from departments like marketing, admissions, financial aid, and registration.

2. Collect the data

   Diefenderfer’s next step is for the institution to collect data. As she says, the first type of data is “where are we?” — a survey of where the institution has activity, including existing students and instructors, marketing and recruiting activities, and third-party agreements. For Eastern, the last of these includes organizations that this Christian college routinely works with, such as Young Life.

   Looking at these partnerships gives Eastern some idea of opportunities for expansion. If a third party already has a presence in a state, that might indicate an area that Eastern would be suited to serve. Similarly, Diefenderfer notes that they look for opportunities such as location of a junior college whose students might be a natural fit for Eastern. They also look at how well states can serve their existing student population and which states may have more students than higher education capacity. The WICHE report, Knocking at the College Door, helps identify these opportunities.

   Similarly, Diefenderfer looks at the requirements for state authorization in the target states during this, looking at which states might be good options for expansion and how this expansion aligns with the institution’s strategic plan.

3. Communicate with the states

   Diefenderfer recommends developing a template letter, then altering this template after researching state policies. She likes to adapt the letter to reference her institution’s understanding of the state’s policy and ask them to confirm that research materials (such as website) from which this information is taken are up to date. She also reviews Eastern’s activity in the state, including number of students, number of instructors, and any internship or field experience work in the state.

4. Track status with each state

   At this point, Diefenderfer pursues gathering the needed information for each state’s application with a system that is well-organized and redundant where needed. She keeps a hard-copy file for each state to house printed copies of emails and other electronic files. She also maintains a Blackboard site in which all documents are housed, including screen shots or pdf copies of emails and correspondence. Senior administrators can access this site and keep tabs on the progress.

   Additionally, Diefenderfer maintains an Excel spreadsheet in which she records the status of each state as she moves through the process. Finally, she creates a color-coded map that visually tracks the progress on authorization from each state to make it easier for those who prefer their information in graphic form. Colors range from green (current activity approved by state) through orange (enrolling one student could trigger the need for authorization) to red (further action required), with eight levels in all.

5. Build a budget

   State authorization costs money, so Diefenderfer calculates the fees that could be involved from each state. These might include application and exemption form fees, registration fees, per-program and per-agent fees, and surety bonds. This is also the time to project any recurring or renewal fees and request additional budget as needed.

6. Prioritize the expansion

   At this point, some of the research done in the first step joins with the budgetary constraints to make a strategic
Stop Avoiding Online Accessibility Mandates

The issue of accessibility in distance education has been around for a while, but today a far more aggressive atmosphere of Federal regulatory enforcement is forcing everyone to pay more attention.

Under the Obama Department of Justice—starting with the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter—things have been moving more and more quickly. Schools are seeing an increased number of accessibility audits. Sections 504 and 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (regarding electronically accessible information) are taking on new importance.

Fred Lokken is dean of the Truckee Meadows Community College WebCollege in Reno, Nevada and is a former chair of the Instructional Technology Council. Joan Loutalet is the Director of Retention and Support Programs at Truckee Meadows. She has worked in the field of educating individuals with disabilities for over 20 years. Lokken and Loutalet believe there are five important reasons that educators need to stop ignoring Federal accessibility mandates. They are:

1. Accessibility is the right thing to do: institutions have an ethical duty to provide equal access to educational materials.

2. Accessibility is good teaching: accessible materials better address the educational needs of a diverse student body.

3. Accessibility is a retention tool: students with disabilities cannot retain, persist and graduate without timely access to instructional materials.

4. Accessibility is prudent: without adequate compliance you could easily be hearing from the Office of Civil Rights and/or facing litigation.

5. Accessibility is good business: it builds credibility, expands your customer base and assures your technology is current.

Recently, DER spoke with Lokken and Loutalet about the new regulatory atmosphere, and how institutions can make sure they are in compliance with Federal regulations.

DER: Why is there a newly aggressive enforcement attitude?

Loutalet: In 2008 three pieces of legislation set the stage to increase the number of students with disabilities who attend college, and also to change the mind-set of institutions who serve these students: the reauthorization of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and the Higher Education Opportunity Act, and the passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act.

The ADA reinforced the principle that access to buildings, programs, and services for individuals with disabilities is a civil right. The strong language from Congress made it clear that institutions need to be proactive in finding and addressing barriers rather than waiting until a civil rights violation had occurred.

The numbers of students on campuses who have a disability have also increased over the past ten years. A 2008 federal survey found that students with disabilities comprised about 11% of all postsecondary students. The HEOA and various veteran education benefits were expected to increase the number of college students with disabilities.

The HEOA included funding for grants specifically related to students with disabilities. These HEOA grants, along with the increased number of veterans with disabilities receiving education benefits has increased the level of scrutiny for institutions of higher education.

There are also broader social forces involved, such as stronger advocacy groups with increased ease of communication, coordination and organization. Disability studies is a growing field in academia.

We are serving more students with disabilities, they are less isolated, and we are more aware of what constitutes access, barriers to access, and equal opportunity.

DER: Can you give us a typical example of “ramped up” Federal regulatory enforcement?

Lokken: The original ADA was passed in 1990. From its implementation, the requirements of the act met with both resistance and indifference. EOC and court rulings were the primary methods of enforcement as those covered by the Act filed formal complaints and lawsuits.

Major developments that have constituted a “ramping up” include:

- The renewal and strengthening of ADA
- The renewal of the Higher Education Opportunities Act greatly expanded regulation, including elements designed to support the ADA
- In June 2011, the Dear Colleague

continued on page 6
plan for expansion. By weighing the costs, benefits, and risks involved in expansion, the institution can make a decision about where their presence will do the most good.

Ultimately, the institution should formalize a process for approving new locations. This will typically involve work with the school's accrediting agency, which for Eastern is the Middle States Commission of Higher Education (MSCHE). Eastern maintains and publishes a list of locations in which they have a presence, and they also maintain a compliance committee for dealing with these details. Finally, the institution should have a complaint procedure that is detailed on the institution's website with an official grievance policy and list of applicable state contacts.

Dieffenbaker notes that, by and large, the states themselves have been very helpful in providing assistance to institutions seeking state authorization, so the offices handling this issue are an important resource for schools. She also advises keeping good communication with all the involved parties on campus, which in Eastern's case involves hosting annual training sessions about state authorization.

Accessibility...

Letter issued by the U.S. Department of Justice, which specifically addressed the accessibility of readers, but indicated the expectation that all education-related technologies were included.

- A growing number of court cases, especially in the area of educational technologies (most recently, the Texas ruling involving MyMath Lab).

**DER:** What are some factors that have triggered these accessibility audits?

**Lokken:** The primary trigger for accessibility audits is non-responsiveness (or perceived non-responsiveness) on the part of institutions when access issues are raised by students with disabilities. There is a time-sensitive nature to access in a classroom. If a student is unable to gain the same information in the same timeframe as the other students in the class the student does not have an equivalent educational experience or opportunity for success. When there are patterns of delay of access, then there are systemic issues which can be cause for an OCR finding.

**DER:** In what ways do you see Sections 504 and 508 taking on new importance?

**Loustalet:** Sections 504 and 508 are taking on new importance because they give clear guidance on what is meant by access. While 508 technically only applies to federal agencies, it is increasingly becoming the recognized standard.

**DER:** Can you give us an example(s) of penalties/sanctions that have been imposed for failure to comply?

**Loustalet:** Failure to comply can bring on lawsuits which may carry civil penalties and in some cases damages. Most often complaints trigger investigations by OCR and/or DOJ. Generally, OCR and DOJ will work with the institution to implement policies and procedures that put them into compliance. Addressing an OCR or DOJ complaint is time consuming and costly in terms of the resources it takes to gather information and the amount of stress it puts on the individuals involved.

**DER:** What are some elements that demonstrate a good faith effort to comply?

**Lokken:** Have a process in place, such as an ADA Committee that actively seeks out barriers and makes recommendations for improving access.

Listen to concerns with an open mind — discussion need to be about possibilities — “how” can we assure access? Rather than “why” should we, or arguing if the issues is really an access issue.

- Train faculty
- Have information, including complaint processes, readily accessible
- Adopt clear policy statements

**DER:** What’s the first step(s) in creating a compliance initiative?

**Lokken:** Identify and cultivate allies that include academic faculty and student services personnel.

**DER:** Can you describe one best practice that program administrators can use in preparing to meet compliance requirements?

**Lokken:** Involve the people most impacted: front line staff and students.

Learn the “Five Reasons to Stop Avoiding Online Accessibility Mandates”—and Strategies for Bringing Your Campus into Compliance

Participate in this 60 minute online seminar on Tuesday, November 19, 2013, at 1:00 pm Central.

For more information and to register, go to: http://www.magnapubs.com/catalog/five-reasons-to-stop-avoiding-online-accessibility-mandates
Digital Foreigners in Charge — Board Members Express Need to Know More about Online Learning

October 15th, 2013
By Carl Straumsheim, Inside Higher Ed

Board members are spending more of their time debating issues such as competency-based learning, online courses and technology in the classroom, but many of them feel unprepared to make strategic decisions about the role of technology in their institutions. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges surveyed more than 2,000 board members this spring, finding that 57.6 percent of respondents felt they spent more time discussing how educational technology would impact their institutions than the year before.

As the conversation about technology on campus intensifies, only 19 percent of respondents said their boards are prepared to decide which technologies to invest in. The results suggest board members may not be as up to date on technological innovations as they feel they should be, but that they also have time to catch up. Only 28 percent of respondents say online education is “important” or “essential” to their institutions today, but when asked to look ahead five years, 71 percent of respondents say they expect it will be so.


A Pedagogy for Cross-cultural Digital Learning Environments
October 10th, 2013
by Bernardo Trefios, Hybrid Pedagogy

The recent rise of online education presents challenges in terms of cross-cultural understanding... There is, however, an additional complication in dealing with multilateral instead of bilateral cultural differences. Technology without cultural awareness is a double-edged sword, so being aware of these dimensions is necessary to develop learning environments that harness the potential of contemporary digital tools.


Traditional Education Beats Online in Key Areas, Opinion Poll Finds
October 16th, 2013
By Scott Carlson, Chronicle of Higher Education

In early October, Gallup asked two groups, each composed of more than 1,000 adults, whether they thought “online education is better” in a series of categories. In terms of “providing a wide range of options for curriculum” and “good value for the money,” online education got slightly better scores than traditional classroom-based education. But online education scored much worse in four areas: in delivering “instruction tailored to each individual,” in providing “high-quality instruction from well-qualified instructors,” in offering “rigorous testing and grading that can be trusted,” and—finally, worst of all—in dispensing “a degree that will be viewed positively by employers.”


Five Myths About MOOCs
October 15th, 2013
by James G. Mazouz, Educause Review

MOOCs face a storm of opposition that underestimates their challenge to traditional education. Given their popularity, why are there so many myths about MOOCs floating around? Debunking the myths about MOOCs leaves us free to challenge our assumptions — and our imaginative possibilities — by questioning the seeming inevitability of educational orthodoxy.

Read the rest at: http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/five-myths-about-moocs.

Online Learning Startup Coursera Moves Into China With NetEase Partnership
October 14th, 2013
By Kaylene Hong, the Next Web

The result of this partnership is Coursera Zone, a Chinese-language Web portal which will be hosted on NetEase's open education website open.163.com. Eli Bildner from Coursera's growth team says in a blog post: The aim in creating Coursera Zone is to help Chinese-speaking students more easily find and engage with content from Coursera’s partner universities and institutions. Specifically, Coursera Zone will feature translated course synopses, a Chinese-language orientation to the Coursera platform, Chinese-language discussion forums, and student testimonials. For the translation part, Coursera says it has teamed up with Chinese social networking site Guokr and volunteer translator community Yeeyan.

Read the rest at: http://thenextweb.com/asia/2013/10/08/online-learning-startup-coursera-moves-into-china-with-netease-partnership/.

At Town Hall Meeting, Professors Discuss Future edX Improvements
October 13th, 2013
By Karl M. Aspelund, Harvard Crimson

Professor Robert Lue prompts the audience for questions about edX during a town hall meeting Thursday evening in Harvard Hall. Lue and fellow faculty members discussed courses, research, and objectives of edX going forward. At a town hall meeting continued on page 8

Distance Education Report
November 1, 2013
In the News...from page 7

Thursday evening, HarvardX Faculty Director Robert A. Lue and fellow faculty members addressed how the 16-month-old online learning platform must continue to adapt pedagogically, financially, and structurally to reach its goals—expanding access, improving teaching, and advancing research. Read the rest at: http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2013/10/4/lue-harvardx-town-hall/.

The Internet is Killing the Middle Class
October 12th, 2013
By Kevin Maney, Newsweek
The growing U.S. income gap has little to do with policy or politics and everything to do with technology. A few decades ago, before the Internet, it was hard to get an out-of-town daily paper, so you read the local one. But once the best news organizations became available online, readers and advertisers gravitated to them. While journalists can only dream of getting paid on a par with NBA players, the Internet is dividing that business just as neatly: The leading publications get most of the money and the rest next to nothing. Curious.com will do the same to music teachers. Online courses will do it to colleges. Radio, MTV, all the other networks and iTunes have in turn done it to pop musicians. More and better networks mean fewer dogs and a whole lot of tails. Read the rest at: http://mag.newsweek.com/2013/10/04/the-internet-is-killing-the-middle-class.html.

Stanford GSB to Launch Finance-Based MOOC
October 12th, 2013
By Catherine Zavo, The Stanford Daily
Starting Oct. 14, the Stanford Graduate School of Business (GSB) will launch its first massive open online course (MOOC) called The Finance of Retirement and Pensions. The free public course, to be taught by professor of finance Joshua Rauh, is part of the GSB’s overall strategy to use technology to enhance the teaching and learning experience on campus, as well as have a larger global impact. We definitely view this inaugural MOOC as a testing ground for us, and so wanted to push the boundaries of what a MOOC could do by enriching the ways in which participants can engage with one another and with faculty member Joshua Rauh,” said Garth Saloner, dean of the GSB, in an email statement to The Daily. Read the rest at: http://www.stanford-daily.com/2013/10/03/gsb-to-launch-finance-based-mooc/.

Berklee College of Music Will Offer Degrees Online
October 11th, 2013
by Hispanic Business Online
The college’s award-winning online division, Berklee Online, will offer 120-credit bachelor of professional studies degrees in music business and music production. The music business degree offers courses on licensing, management, marketing, and touring, with a focus on mobile music, streaming, funding, and developing revenue sources. The music production degree provides an extensive background in Berklee’s approach to music production, with courses on the world’s top software programs, recording, engineering, mixing, and more. All courses are taught by Berklee faculty members or industry experts. Read the rest at: http://www.hispanicbusiness.com/2013/10/2/berklee_college_of_music_will_offer.htm.

Northwestern Begins Online Education Initiatives
October 9th, 2013
by Cat Zakrzewski, Daily Northwestern
Medill Prof. Owen Youngman always receives a lot of emails just before and after an assignment is due. Because his massive open online course, Understanding Media by Understanding Google, has thousands of students in around the globe, it has resulted in an inundation of emails around the clock. He and his staff of nine former students have handled 12,000 discussion posts in the course’s first two weeks. Such new challenges are par for the course for professors teaching Northwestern’s first three MOOCs and one for-credit Semester Online course. Two more NU for-credit courses will be offered Winter Quarter, continuing the University’s attempt to incorporate a variety of departments in this new form of education. Read the rest at: http://dailynorthwestern.com/2013/10/02/campus/northwestern-begins-online-education-attempts/.

Covet...from page 2

questions about course quality no matter how it was delivered. When asked, for example, about the quality of interaction in the course, they apply standards appropriate to the course itself, whether it was face-to-face, blended, or wholly online. "Students translate survey questions into the online environment with no difficulty," he says.

In sum, Cavanagh explains that the move toward a postmodality world of higher education is driven first by student preference. Students simply do not perceive a difference in courses based on how they are delivered or how the students are required to study. This combines with state and national policy that Cavanagh says increases the pressure for institutions of higher education to demonstrate efficiency in many ways. Online and blended learning help ease the space pressures on some institutions and also allow students greater access to a wider range of courses. These two forces "overlap in a way that can accelerate" the overall trend, Cavanagh says. For institutions confronting the trend, he advises them to "ride the wave."