

Chapter 59

Community College Perceptions of Online Education: A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

When a college's faculty, staff, or students perceive distance learning negatively, the implementation of distance learning can be adversely affected. This chapter addresses the perceptions of community college educators regarding the increased frequency of distance learning at their institution. It explores the current literature on distance education. Key components such as instructor skepticism, ethics, faculty development, and evaluation methods are the crux of the information. Research has been conducted in many different areas and about many different perceptions and points which are examined.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education is an area that has become more scrutinized over the last few years because of the implementation. Many schools have emerged that are completely distance education oriented and many major universities throughout the nation have begun expanding their distance education offerings. With the increased amount of distance education being offered it is significant to understand what has happened in the past, how it has been applied to particular institutions. Understanding the concepts and the things that have happened, good and bad, can be a blueprint for colleges on the cusp of adding more distance education and understanding how to implement the next new phenomenon.

BACKGROUND

Faculty perception of distance education is a significant factor that will have ramifications regarding the faculty and student success. Topic areas that are of concern for faculty, students, and administrators

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are ethics, instructor skepticism, faculty development, instructor challenges, financial affects student behavior and increased workload.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Ethics in Distance Education

According to Lengel, online ethics emanates from computer ethics and the ethical implications of technology (2004). There is a professional, education contract within the online educational environment. Online educators should provide the students with quality and useful education; in return, the students should perform at required levels to receive appropriate credit for the course. However, the student must, in many cases, weigh their self-interests versus the interest of society. Ethical questions arise when the different interests of individuals conflict and create a need for a higher level of principle that is equitable to the rights of all concerned (Schultz, 2005). In an educational institution there is always a chance that students could take liberties and attempt to receive credit without doing the appropriate amount of work. In some cases, the students share work, provide each other answers, and deliberately try and deceive the instructor and institution in an effort to receive a favorable grade on an assignment or test. Distance education is not immune to this problem, and the online faculty and staff that are involved in the delivery of distance education must be aware of these potential issues (Rashid, & Rashid, 2012).

One of these potential issues is cheating. The Ad Council and Educational Testing Service discovered that 41% of Americans and 34% of college officials considered academic cheating a serious issue and is one of the major issues and challenges that traditional and distance education share but combat in different ways (8 Astonishing Stats on Academic Cheating, 2012). The difference in the two statistics may mean that either more college administrators believe that cheating is not occurring, or that they do not believe that it is as important. Distance education classes certainly create more opportunities for cheating than in previous classroom environments. In a distance education setting, a faculty member or instructor is not in the same room with the student, and the added technology allows for enhanced cheating techniques. Cheating, and the seeming inability of online educators to control it, is an ethical issue that must be considered when discussing the viability of distance learning and the validity of grades earned in online courses.

In a 2007 survey of why universities offer online education, 82% said it was to increase enrollment (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). In a 2011 study of 2500 colleges and universities, 65% reported that online learning was a critical part of their long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2011). The 80 year old Southern New Hampshire University is an example of how nonprofit universities can benefit from online education. In 2007, the university had 2,000 students. Currently, in addition to the 2,000 residential students, there are over 11,000 online students enrolled in over 120 graduate and undergraduate programs (Kamenetz, 2012). School revenue went from \$10 million in 2007 to approximately \$75 million in 2012. The financial gain that is experienced in colleges and universities may be part of the reason that college administrators insist that cheating is not a huge problem (Kamenetz, 2012). If they acknowledge the existence of rampant cheating in their online programs, the only courses of action would be to figure out how to stop the cheating from occurring, which may be impossible, or to end distance education at their school. That loss of revenue would be an enormous loss to schools in a time of already tight budgets.

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