Chapter 32
Emergence of Successful Online Courses:
A Student and Faculty Shift

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to investigate the common characteristics that make online courses high quality. With an increase in online education and the increased attention to national standards and accreditation, there is a need for research to focus on the quality of online education. The literature related to online education suggests that more studies compare traditional courses with online courses as well as ways to affect the social climate of online courses and programs than the quality of online education. Questions to be considered range from, "How much time do instructors spend developing online courses compared to traditional courses?" to "What are the students' perspective of the quality of online courses / instruction?" McGorry (2003) suggests seven constructs "to evaluate quality and learning in online courses: flexibility, responsiveness and student support, student learning, interaction, technology and technical support, and student satisfaction" (p. 162).

INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons for the emergence and growth of online courses and programs, much of it attributed to the ever-changing structure of the economy, as well as the accessibility of technology across the world. Loss of jobs, returning to school to keep a job, juggling a job and going to school, rising fuel costs, and strategic planning in higher education are just a few reasons for the rise in online education. The accessibility of technology to a greater audience has allowed institutions of higher education to reach far beyond their classroom walls. Not only does this help

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with their economic structure, it also allows for the delivery of courses to people who normally may not attend an institution of higher learning. While the premise of providing information to a greater number of people is a wonderful concept, there is a strong concern amongst the community of higher education that these very students are not truly receiving a quality education.

In the following chapter, the details of what online courses should look like are discussed, both in terms of what a successful student looks like and what key components will be included for strong faculty instruction. The literature develops the emergence of online courses in higher education as well as how the economy has driven this development. Preliminary results of student perspectives of what a "good" online course is are discussed, and lastly recommendations are provided when considering the development and delivery of online courses.

BACKGROUND

The economies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries functioned under what Economist Lester Thurow (1996) calls the classical theory of comparative advantage. This theory holds that product location is a result of the reserves of natural resource and the availability of capital and labor for product development. The top ten industries at the turn of the twentieth century focused on natural resources for their production. However, the top sectors of commerce at the close of the twentieth century are those involved in microelectronics, biotechnology, the new material science industries, telecommunications, civilian aircraft manufacturing, machine tools and robots and computers. The economy of the twenty-first century will continue to accelerate as an economy based on the exchange of information processed into knowledge at a rapid pace. Tapscott (1996) suggests that in order to survive in the market of the new economy, the worker must learn how to gather information and apply know-how. In a 2008 study by Allen and Seaman, *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States*, the authors states that "…the impact of an economic downturn on the impact of overall enrollments and the demand for online courses" (p. 8) is correlated. "The results show that institutions believe the economic changes will have a positive impact on overall enrollments and specific aspects of an economic downturn resonate closely with increasing demand for online courses with specific types of schools" (p. 8).

Higher education, particularly graduate programs, it is believed, sees an increase in enrollment during recession. "Bad economic times have often been good for education, either because decreased availability of good jobs encourage more people to seek education instead, or because those currently employed seek to improve their chances for advancement by pursuing their education" (Allen & Seaman, 2008, p. 9). Universities see online education as a means to increase revenue and therefore are strategic in making online options available to students who are their consumers. "Online education is most important to the long-term strategy of public institutions, and least important to the private nonprofits. Likewise, baccalaureate institutions have the lowest rate of believing online is strategic…the majority of institutions of all sizes believe that online education is critical to their long-term strategy" (Allen & Seaman, 2008, p 11). The philosophy behind the implementation does not tend to lend itself to a business model, but rather an academic structure that has been in place for ages (Luzer, 2012). Reflect on the current dilemma at the University of Virginia (UVA), in June of 2012 there was a call for the president to be removed from the university due to her lack of support when the university called for a business model that focused primarily on online education (Rice, 2012). While ultimately her removal failed, this focus toward online classes continues to shift across the realm of higher education. This adaptation of a business model has been placed in more

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