Chapter 5
Academic Challenges

ABSTRACT

At the start of online learning, someone said, "Let's go asynchronous." We'll call it anytime learning and make a lot of money. And they did! Unfortunately, there were weaknesses—online learning is boring, lonely, and not well-suited for developing analytical skills. Students experience a sense of isolation that lowers retention. Community colleges and public universities switched to blended learning, which improved student success and retention. However, blended learning is not appropriate for intercontinental classes because it can be a long drive to class. Fusion learning is another option. Fusion classes are face to face, only more intimate than on-campus classes because every student is as close as your computer screen. This chapter discusses the academic challenges of borderless degrees and describes how fusion learning is can make postsecondary education accessible in every country.

INTRODUCTION

Ruth (2010) asked the fundamental distance learning question that has yet to be answered. The question was, "Is E-learning really working?" If the criterion is enrollment, then "the answer is yes." Online enrollment continues to increase steadily while the total postsecondary enrollment has declined in the United States. Online learning is has become popular with students because it is convenient and makes education more accessible. However, that does not mean that students in online courses learn as much as students in

face-to-face courses. In a national study, Allen, Seaman, Poulin, and Straut (2016) found that only 29% of chief academic officers believed that faculty accepts that online learning is valuable and legitimate. Academic leaders were somewhat more positive about blended learning, with 42% rating blended learning superior to fully online courses. When asked to compare the effectiveness of blended learning with face-to-face pedagogy, 36% of administrators rated blended learning higher than classroom learning. Do students in online sections develop the same level of skill as students in on-campus classes? Not all industry thinks so, and neither do all instructors (Callister & Love, 2016; Hart, Friedmann, & Hill, 2018; NC State, 2015).

Community colleges and public universities have begun to are shifted from fully online delivery to blended learning that includes some face-to-face class time. The rationale is to that online courses may not have the same pedagogical merit as blended courses. Bacow, Bowen, Guthrie, Lack, and Long (2012) suggested that institutions continue using fully online learning because it is more profitable, not because it produces better student success. Bacow et al. also noted that institutions do pass on the cost savings to online students by lowering the tuition. Fusion learning was created to deliver the benefits of blended learning without requiring students to travel to campus for class. Blended learning is a practical option for students living near campus, but not for students scattered countries and continents.

Fusion learning provides the same benefits as blended learning – asynchronous plus face-to-face class – without the need to travel. Students can attend class while commuting, from work, or at home. Instead of driving to class and sitting in a row of desks, students and the instructor can be seated on their couch, at the dining room table, or even on a beach. Distance learning by fusion can be more accessible and comfortable than blended learning.

TYPES OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Online learning can be fully asynchronous, blended, or fused. Asynchronous learning consists of emails, texting, and submission of assignments. Blended learning adds a face-to-face component. Synchronous learning can be either by video conferencing or audioconferencing. Blended learning is often used to improve participants' social and communication skills, reduce isolation,

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