

Chapter 73

Advancing Retention and Engagement Strategies Through Effective Online Mediums

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ABSTRACT

Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the USA continue to play a pivotal role in educating students within the African diaspora as they provide a practical and resourceful platform for students to develop a sense of belonging through community and organizational outreach activities on campus. However, the student population in higher education as we used to know has changed, and adult learners now make up a large majority of the enrolled population. This chapter aims to review the history of online education and will provide a conceptual framework for incorporating online learning in an institution's student success plan for both their traditional and non-traditional students. The author will also review the needs of the adult learners and provide an overview of how the development and integration of online learning programs and collaborative efforts with other institutions through dual enrollment and degree MOU programs can foster growth at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

INTRODUCTION

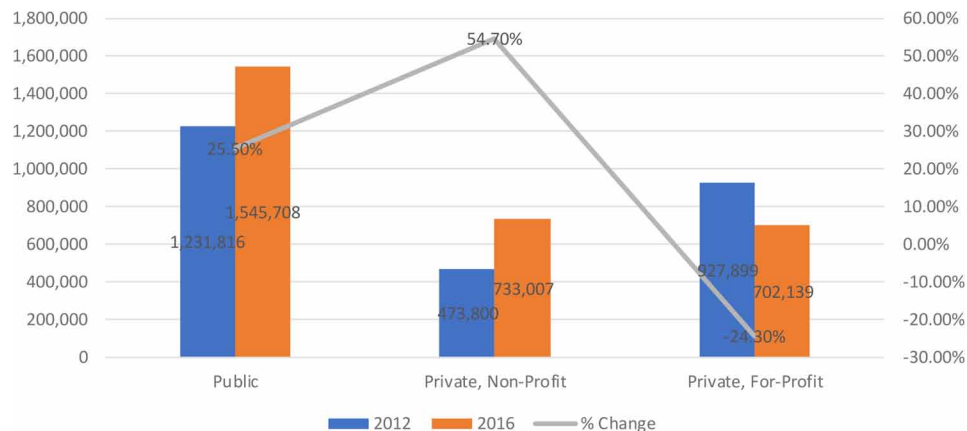
The practice of Distance Education dates back more than 160 years with what we first came to know as correspondence study (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2014). Since then, education media for teaching and learning have advanced, and we have experienced several disruptive technologies that have altered the way we conduct teaching and learning in academe. These tools include Mobile Learning (M-Learning), Game-Based Learning, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Unlike M-Learning and Game-Based learning, MOOCs are arguably the future of online learning (Simonson et al., 2014); however,

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the most widely used is online learning. Although all of the disruptive technologies noted above can support student retention and engagement strategies at HBCUs, for this chapter, the authors will focus on online learning.

Online learning is an ever-expanding phenomenon in education, as, over the past decade, institutions have been creating increasing numbers of online degree programs. However, it is important to note that, while the enrollment in online degree programs are flat or declining in for-profit institutions, more students are enrolling in online degree programs at non-profit public and private institutions (See Figure 1. Enrollment in Online Degree Programs: Public and Private Sector Trends from 2012 to 2016).

Figure 1. Enrollment in Online Degree Programs: Public and Private Sector Trends from 2012 to 2016 (Data Retrieved from WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) Frontiers, 2018).



BACKGROUND

Despite the many barriers, online training has many positive attributes (Bhagat, Leon, & Chun-Yen, 2016), such as “convenience, flexibility, and financial benefits” (Dabbagh, 2007, cited in Kuo & Belland, 2016). Online learning is here to stay and should be integrated into colleges and universities’ recruitment, matriculation, and retention plans. While these advances are not without challenges, more students are enrolling in online classes than in traditional programs (Allen & Seaman, 2016), and more institutions are adding online education as a factor to their strategic plans (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012).

According to Simonson et al. (2015), approximately five million students are enrolled in an online program in higher education, with African Americans making up 19% of that population (CollegeAtlas.org, 2015). Considering the number of African American students in online programs, restricting the marketing and recruitment plan of HBCUS to be more inclusive of reaching the online learner can have tremendous benefits to the growth of an institutions overall enrollment. As such as we discuss the recruitment opportunities, we must also address opportunities for increasing student retention.

With most online institutions serving predominately white populations, it is impossible to ignore the negative impact that a lack of racial and ethnic representation at those institutions will have on students’ ability to feel a sense of belonging and to successfully matriculate at those institutions. In addition to racial issues, socioeconomic factors and family dynamics may also impact the students’ ability to suc-

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