

Chapter 4.6

Online Learning: A Transforming Environment for Adults in Higher Education

Patsy D. Moskal

University of Central Florida, USA

Charles Dziuban

University of Central Florida, USA

Joel Hartman

University of Central Florida, USA

ABSTRACT

The authors describe the distributed learning program (Online@UCF) at the University of Central Florida (UCF) that serves a number of adult learners. They present outcomes from several years of research collected by the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness on adults enrolled in online courses. Paradoxically, most educators in online learning focus on millennial generation students, their learning styles, and preference for Web 2.0 technologies. However, research at UCF confirms that online education resonates with adult students because it responds to their lifestyle needs, provides

more active learning environments, and empowers their learning beyond classroom boundaries. This chapter examines the strategic elements required for successful adult online programs and explores components of online student satisfaction. The authors conclude by considering the opportunities and challenges for adults in online distance education.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of fully online and blended courses is contributing to an expanding body of research that examines how students and faculty members

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-830-7.ch005

respond to these technology-rich learning environments. However, the majority of these studies focuses on younger learners and their experience and propensity toward choosing digital, mobile and personal technologies (Dziuban, Moskal, Brophy-Ellison, and Shea, 2007; Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001). This paper considers an alternative population encountered in Web courses—the adult learner. We investigate a large metropolitan university’s distributed learning initiative and how adults are finding expanded educational opportunities enabled by online and blended learning.

More than 73% of Americans report using the Internet regularly (Pew, 2006) and more than 55% of Americans have broadband access, up from 47% in 2007 (Horrigan, 2008). Of those who use the Internet at home, 79% have a high-speed connection. These data suggest that Americans are becoming technologically engaged, if not savvy. Eighty-eight percent of students indicate they access the Internet on a daily basis at a minimum (Student Monitor, 2008).

As a result of this technological proliferation, higher education is turning to the World Wide Web to expand or enhance course and program offerings. In fall 2006, nearly 20 percent of the nation’s postsecondary students were enrolled in at least one online course, and the online enrollment growth rate was 9.7 percent, nearly 1½ times the rate of overall enrollment growth in higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

ADULT LEARNERS

Adult learners do not fit the customary description of the “traditional” college student who is a recent high school graduate, 18-22 years of age, not yet employed nor having family obligations. Adults, on the other hand, are described as “engaged in some form of instruction or educational activity to acquire the knowledge, information, and skills necessary to succeed in the workforce,

learn basic skills, earn credentials, or otherwise enrich their lives” (NCES, 2000). Pioneer andragogy researcher Malcolm Knowles (1973) describes unique adult learner characteristics this way: read to learn, relevancy-oriented, responsible, self-directed, goal oriented, practical, and pragmatic, with life experiences that they bring with them to the classroom. As students, adults are more financially independent, working part time or full time while enrolling in courses. They may have dependents, a spouse, and/or children (NCES, 2002).

However, the characteristics that make adult learners “nontraditional” also create challenges for them in successfully attaining a degree. Often, adult students approach college with an already full plate. Employment and family obligations present time and financial considerations that may compete with the traditional educational experience. Because adults require more flexibility in scheduling, online asynchronous opportunities increase the likelihood that they will be able to successfully complete a degree program.

Silva, Calahan, and Lacireno-Paquet (1998) found four barriers for adults completing a degree: lack of time, family responsibilities, scheduling and location of courses, and cost. Customarily, adults see their work as a primary responsibility, compared to traditional college students who envision college as their primary “job.” These at-risk adults were successful at college completion less than 15% of the time, compared to 57% of those students who were classified as traditional (Choy, 2002). Berker, Horn, and Carroll (2003) found that 62% of these working adults were unable to complete their studies in 6 years, compared to only 39% of full time students. Similarly, an NCES (2002) study of nontraditional students found nearly half of them dropped out of community college, compared to only one fifth of the more traditional students. Clearly, life responsibilities make higher education challenging for this population of students.

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/online-learning-transforming-educational-environment/41385

Related Content

A Cognitive Personal Assistant System to Enhance the Individual-Centric Research Capabilities

R. Gowtham, Sanjay S. P., Shishir Kumar Shandilya and S. Sountharajan (2021). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies* (pp. 1-11).

www.irma-international.org/article/a-cognitive-personal-assistant-system-to-enhance-the-individual-centric-research-capabilities/279571

The Effect of Dance Education on College Students' Artistic Quality Under the New Media

Ruijiang Song, Sufang Liu and Jessica Zoe Zanuttini (2024). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies* (pp. 1-16).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-effect-of-dance-education-on-college-students-artistic-quality-under-the-new-media/337969

Web-Based Seminar Work

Kalle Kangas and Jussi Puhakainen (2000). *Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies: Opportunities and Challenges* (pp. 347-359).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/web-based-seminar-work/31396

EVAWEB V2: Enhancing a Web-Based Assessment Systems Focused on Nonrepudiation Use and Teaching

A.I. Gonzalez-Tablas, A. Orfila Ramos and A. Ribagorda (2008). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies* (pp. 21-32).

www.irma-international.org/article/evaweb-enhancing-web-based-assessment/2997

Evaluation of Interactive College Piano Teaching's Effect Based on Artificial Intelligence Technology

Ying Liu (2024). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies* (pp. 1-16).

www.irma-international.org/article/evaluation-of-interactive-college-piano-teachings-effect-based-on-artificial-intelligence-technology/335079