

The Growth of Online Education and the Role of
California State University, Bakersfield's
Regional & Online Degree Programs Department

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Our Changing Society

In the day and age of informational and technological advances, we have developed into a society where individuals want everything quickly and at a convenience. We can find convenience stores, fast-food restaurants, and stores with ready-made meals on every corner and online services, for almost anything we could ask for, at our fingertips. One of the many reasons for these changes are that individuals want to be able to spend the least amount of time on tasks such as making dinner, paying bills, cleaning, and running errands so that they can spend more time with their families and participating in various hobbies and recreational activities. Many of these families also have two working parents, leaving them less free time to spend on the things they want to be doing.

In such a society, it is no surprise that the offering of college courses and programs in an online manner has been growing rapidly. Students these days are requiring more flexibility in their college careers, as they would like to see courses and programs that accommodate their other responsibilities such as jobs and family obligations. Individuals that might want to take some college courses or earn a degree do not want to spend a lot of time away from home and their families. They may also work hours that do not allow them to attend regular college courses or if they are not located close to a college campus, they may have the burden of a long commute to reach a campus at which to take courses. These are some of the main reasons that students have been looking for alternatives to attending traditional courses on a college campus.

Offering online courses to students is one of the best ways that colleges can reach out to these students to offer them the education they are looking for and to embrace this changing need in our society. This allows students to take courses from any college or university around the world. They are able to log onto their computer at the time of day that is most convenient to them, whether it be at two o'clock in the afternoon or during the middle of the night, in order to do class work or homework. Students completing online courses are not bound by location or time. This gives them the chance to work their normal work hours, spend time with their families, and complete any other tasks they wish, while using the hours they have available for their classes.

Students also have the opportunity to choose any college or university that they wish to attend, as they do not have to be concerned with finding one they can commute to or moving closer to a campus they wish to earn their degree from. This freedom of choice allows students to find the program or degree that they are interested in taking, regardless of which school may offer it. Traditionally, students would have to determine which school they would be able to attend and then determine which program they wanted to take from that school's offerings.

This new demand by students, to accommodate their lifestyles and obligations, is being met more and more each year as colleges are adding online courses and entire programs via the Internet. There are now a great number of schools that are offering a large number of courses online in addition to entire

degree programs. The course offerings are becoming more diversified as well, as more schools begin offering courses this way and schools that already offer online courses add to the types of courses and programs that are currently available.

The Growth of Online Education

In the recent report titled, Growing By Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005, by The Sloan Consortium, A Consortium of Institutions and Organizations Committed to Quality Online Education, we find information and many statistics regarding online education. The report is based on the responses from over 1,000 colleges and universities and has been conducted over the last three years. The intent of the report is to answer many of the deep-seated questions about the nature and scope of online education. For this report, online courses are defined as course that have at least 80% of their content delivered online.

During this study, it was found that 63% of schools that offer undergraduate face-to-face courses also offer undergraduate courses online and 65% of schools offering graduate face-to-face courses also offer graduate level courses online. This is a significant number of schools, which continues to increase each year. About 50% of the schools surveyed also indicated that they felt that online education was an important part of the long-term strategy for their institution. This number has increase by 7% over the last two years of this

survey. The majority of the schools who did not agree with this were small schools and private, non-profit institutions. The charts below breaks down the percentages of schools surveyed that agree or disagree with whether or not online education is critical to their long-term strategy.

Online Education is Critical to Long-term Strategy

	2003	2004	2005
Agree	48.8%	53.5%	56.0%
Neutral	38.1%	33.7%	30.9%
Disagree	13.1%	12.9%	13.1%

Source: Adapted from Allen, I. Elaine, Ph. D. And Jeff Seaman, Ph. D. "Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005. The Sloan Consortium. 2005.

Online Education is Critical to the Long-term Strategy- 2005

	Enrollment Size				
	<i>Under 1500</i>	<i>1500-2999</i>	<i>3000-7499</i>	<i>7500-14999</i>	<i>15000+</i>
Agree	47.3%	61.2%	66.9%	71.3%	67.5%
Neutral	37.3%	21.6%	26.6%	24.1%	25.6%
Disagree	15.4%	17.2%	6.5%	4.6%	6.9%

Source: Adapted from Allen, I. Elaine, Ph. D. And Jeff Seaman, Ph. D. "Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005. The Sloan Consortium. 2005.

Online Education is Critical to the Long-term Strategy- 2005

	Public	Private, nonprofit	Private, for-profit
Agree	73.9%	41.0%	52.9%
Neutral	21.1%	37.1%	38.2%
Disagree	5.0%	22.0%	8.9%

Source: Adapted from Allen, I. Elaine, Ph. D. And Jeff Seaman, Ph. D. "Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005. The Sloan Consortium. 2005.

These numbers indicate that schools are seeing the importance of online education and are willing to embrace these changes. Online education can be very valuable to the students and can be beneficial to almost any institution. The ever-increasing number of students who want online courses can help to boost any institution's enrollment and help them to reach out to the community and beyond. The growth of such online programs and courses has been rising rapidly and we expect this to remain at a steady increase. From 2003 to 2004, overall online enrollments increased from 1.98 million to 2.35 million. Although this was not as significant as the growth from the previous year, the enrollments do continue to increase and the current growth rate for online enrollments is still higher than the overall growth rate for enrollments in higher education.

Data for Number of Students Taking at Least One Online Course

Time Period	Number of Students	Change from previous year
Reported for Fall 2002	1,602,970	
Reported for Fall 2003	1,971,397	22.9 %
Reported for Fall 2004	2,329,783	18.2%

Source: Adapted from Allen, I. Elaine, Ph. D. And Jeff Seaman, Ph. D. "Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005. The Sloan Consortium. 2005.

With the above statistical data, we can see that there has been a steady increase in the enrollment of online students and schools are becoming more and more willing to embrace this growing trend in education in order to better serve the students. Along with this change in the manner in which courses are offered, it is believed that this changes the way that students are taught and will learn. There are also changes that have to be made in the way courses are set up and in the way students are served by the institution.

Quality Education

One of the main goals for institutions that are offering online courses must be to maintain the quality of the education that is offered. Online courses must have the same quality as the face-to-face courses offered by the institution. Each institution is responsible for the education that is provided in their name and they must meet the challenges of online courses by maintaining their mission, goals, and values. This can be done with the use of technology as long

the institution and its faculty and staff are willing to be innovative and experimental, staying actively involved in student's academic progress.

One way in which institutions can help to ensure quality is with the instructors that will be teaching the courses. It is important that online courses are being taught by some of the core faculty that teach at the institution, and adjuncts are not used for all of these courses. This will help to ensure that the high quality, experienced online instructors will help to maintain the quality of the course content and assure that students are receiving virtually the same education as they would be if they had attended classes face-to-face.

Through the Sloan Consortium's report, it was found that institutions are using their core instructors for online courses over 60% of the time, on average. It was also found that in some cases, the core faculty are teaching more online courses than face-to-face courses. The following tables show the overall breakdown of the percentages of core and adjunct faculty, and mixes of both, that teach courses online and face-to-face at each institution. The second table breaks down the information even further by the types of programs being offered, while the third breaks it down by enrollment size of the institution, and the fourth by the type of institution.

Who Teaches Online and Face-to-face Courses, Fall 2004

	Face-to Face	Online
Core	61.6%	64.7%
Split	24.7%	16.4%
Adjunct	13.0%	18.1%

	Doctoral		Masters		Baccalaureate		Associates		Specialized	
	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online
Core	84.8%	71.2%	68.8%	62.5%	79.1%	60.6%	47.4%	67.6%	65.2%	61.2%
Split	11.4%	12.3%	22.5%	18.5%	14.6%	3.8%	39.1%	3.8%	17.6%	10.0%
Adjunct	3.8%	16.5%	7.7%	18.1%	5.6%	35.6%	13.2%	35.6%	16.1%	28.9%

	Under 1500		1500-2999		3000-7499		7500-14999		15000+	
	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online
Core	58.8%	56.3%	67.3%	67.2%	59.3%	70.6%	54.3%	68.5%	84.8%	77.6%
Split	22.6%	16.8%	25.6%	14.2%	28.5%	17.8%	35.7%	20.0%	13.7%	13.7%
Adjunct	17.8%	25.4%	6.6%	17.9%	11.7%	11.2%	8.2%	11.5%	1.5%	8.7%

	Public		Private, nonprofit		Private, for-profit	
	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online	Face-to-face	Online
Core	60.7%	74.1%	70.4%	55.2%	39.4%	47.8%
Split	30.7%	17.1%	18.8%	17.1%	25.5%	10.4%
Adjunct	8.3%	8.7%	9.8%	26.7%	34.5%	37.4%

Source: Adapted from Allen, I. Elaine, Ph. D. And Jeff Seaman, Ph. D. "Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005. The Sloan Consortium. 2005.

The quality of online courses not only must be maintained with the use of qualified instructors, but also with the commitment of the faculty and staff to ensure that courses are offered in such a way that students feel that they are a part of the university and part of the program. This can be done on some levels by ensuring that courses are offered in a way that there is sufficient interaction between the instructor and the students and among the students themselves.

There are many technologies that can be used to assist with this interaction. Some of them are email, telephone, chat rooms, and discussion boards. Using a course management system such as Blackboard or WebCT can help to allow for this kind of interaction. These systems offer email communication, discussions boards, and chat rooms within each course. This allows students to have class discussions on given topics, pose questions to each other and the instructor, and have real-time chat sessions. This type of interaction is important in an online setting, as it must replace the interaction that takes place when students meet in a face-to-face classroom.

There are many ways that institutions can build quality online programs for students, but there must be some form of assessment and evaluation of these courses and programs to ensure that student performance in these courses are meeting the intended learning outcomes for the classes, just as they do with face-to-face courses. In the report published by the Sloan Consortium, it was found that 82% of the institutions surveyed indicated that they felt it was just as easy to evaluate the quality of online courses as it was for face-to-face courses.

***It Is More Difficult to Evaluate the Quality of An Online Course-
2005***

	Enrollment Size				
	<i>Under 1500</i>	<i>1500-2999</i>	<i>3000-7499</i>	<i>7500-14999</i>	<i>15000+</i>
Agree	19.6%	20.6%	16.0%	16.6%	9.3%
Neutral	28.6%	49.4%	39.7%	43.3%	47.1%
Disagree	21.7%	29.9%	44.2%	40.1%	43.6%

	Public	Private, nonprofit	Private, for- profit
Agree	16.8%	19.1%	20.8%
Neutral	46.0%	55.1%	58.2%
Disagree	37.2%	25.8%	21.0%

Source: Adapted from Allen, I. Elaine, Ph. D. And Jeff Seaman, Ph. D. "Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005. The Sloan Consortium. 2005.

This being the case, the important thing is that some form of assessment is set up and available for all online courses. Being that these courses are online, the best form of assessment should take place electronically, whether it is through an email or website, or some other similar form. Whichever system is set up should help to determine that students are learning the course content as intended and whether the instructors are doing their part to involve the students in the online learning process as much as possible.

Student Services

Although we have discussed the growing trend in online education and some of the ways that the quality of online courses must be maintained, we are still missing a huge piece of what makes online education effective. This important factor is the student and the services they receive from the institution. Even though institutions must make sure that they have quality courses to offer, if they do not bring in and keep their students, they will not have courses or programs to offer. Institutions exist to serve the student and they need to make sure that they do just that.

Institutions have a commitment to support the student from the time they are interested in a program and inquiring more information to the time that they complete a program or the courses they wish to take. One of the first ways in which this can take place is by getting information out about the institution and the programs it offers. Since online students do not have the opportunity to visit campuses and may prefer to use the Internet rather than call for information, it is vital that the institution has a web site set up with any information they may need.

Although information and many services can be available completely online, others may only be partially so. These services might include counseling, testing, the library, and many others. For such services, information should be available for students so that they know whom they can call for assistance,

whether it is an advisor or evaluator, a live-help number for the library or web services, or information on having exams proctored.

It would be helpful to have a specific page of the website set up for online or distance students. General information should be included on such a site with requirements needed to take courses or join a program, links or information on how to obtain any necessary forms to apply, contact information for various offices and services, technical competencies or software requirements for taking online courses, estimated costs of courses and fees, and an idea of what classes are available and the content required for the program.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the accrediting association for senior schools and colleges in the western United States, has published on its website what they view as “Good Practices” that need to be in place for institutions offering online courses. As the agency that must approve university programs in order for them to be accredited, it is imperative that schools do what is required by WASC to assure that they are offering well-rounded programs of high quality.

The practices that are promoted by WASC are summarized as institutional context and commitment, curriculum and instruction, faculty support, student support, and evaluation and assessment. The “institutional context and commitment” looks into how the online programs that are offered support the institution as well as how it extends the role of the institution. With the “curriculum and instruction”, although the method of delivery changes for the

courses, the standards of quality for each of the courses should remain. WASC also looks to see that the institution is supporting the faculty in their new and ever-changing role. This may mean that the institution provide technical support and training to instructors, assist them in course development, and take into consideration the change in workloads and compensation needed for the time and effort for developing and teaching online.

In addition to these things, WASC would like to assure that the institution has a commitment to serving the students from the time they are looking into a program until it is completed. Here is a list of many services that should be available for all students, include those that are solely online. This list could be expanded upon depending on the types of programs and courses that are available at a given institution:

- ◆ Pre-registration advising
- ◆ Admissions requirements
- ◆ Financial aid
- ◆ Payment options
- ◆ Academic advising
- ◆ Tutoring
- ◆ Career counseling and placement
- ◆ Degree completion audits
- ◆ Library resources
- ◆ Bookstore services
- ◆ Technical support
- ◆ Services for students with disabilities
- ◆ Campus email information
- ◆ Course delivery program information
- ◆ Student records
- ◆ New Student Orientation

Access to these services should be available for all students of an institution, whether or not they are online students. Some of these services will be available in the same manner for all students, but some will have to be unique to the online student population. As programs grow and develop, institutions may be able to add more online services and may discover better and more efficient ways to meet the needs of this new group of students.

The final good practice that is promoted by WASC is evaluation and assessment of student achievement and of the overall program. This is to ensure that students are progressing and learning in comparison to the expected learning outcomes of the institutions. The evaluation should also be used to measure the overall effectiveness of the program. Some of the ways to measure this can be to look at student retention rates, student satisfaction, faculty satisfaction, the extent to which library and learning resources are available, and cost effectiveness.

California State University, Bakersfield

The Regional & Online Degree Programs Department of California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB) currently offers three online degree programs. One of these is an undergraduate program in Environmental Resource Management and the others are an online Master's Degree Program in Administration and an online Master's in Education with an emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction. Lets take a closer look at how these courses are

offered and what services are currently available for students through the Regional & Online Degree Programs Department in order to assure the quality of the courses being offered, as well as the services that are available to the students.

The online courses are currently being offered through the course management system of WebCT. Using WebCT allows students the ability to email their classmates and instructors through each specific course, have discussions and post questions through the discussion board, hold chats with other students and/or the instructor through the chat rooms, allows timed quizzes and tests to be taken, and allows students to view course content such as the syllabus, assignments, a calendar with deadlines, and links to resources such as Power Points and notes to support the course content. All of these things currently help to involve the students in the courses they are taking through these online programs.

To further ensure that there are quality courses being offered, the Regional & Online Degree Programs Department utilized 75% of core, institutional faculty to teach the online courses. The remaining instructors are adjunct faculty that specialize in the areas of the specific courses they are teaching. These adjuncts must be approved by the department in which the course is being offered in order to ensure that they have the necessary requirements and experience needing to teach their specific course.

In order to make sure that student services are available to students taking these online programs, the Regional & Online Degree Programs Department has a website set up specifically for online students. The website contains general information about the online programs, has pages showing the courses required to complete the program, including the course descriptions, information on the general price range of the courses, and contains the computer system requirements for taking courses online.

The website contains a page of forms that include applications to the programs, a registration form for signing up for classes, an Add/Drop form, a name/address change form, financial aid forms, and a request for unofficial evaluation form. Having these forms available online allows the students to log onto their computer to print off any forms that they might need so that they do not have to have forms and applications mailed to them or have to pick on up in person. For the same reason, the website also included links to the FAFSA, the federal website that allows students to apply for Financial Aid, the current class schedule, and instructions as to how students can register online.

There are also several other links on the website connecting students to various programs or information they might need such as degree audit information with the necessary forms to complete for that, information on WebCT, so they can log in to access their classes, and information regarding BannerWeb, the system which allows students to register and pay for courses online and view their student records and financial account.

When students apply to the University and are admitted, they also receive a letter, which contains more helpful information. Their admissions letter contains information on who they can contact for advising, what their CSUB Student ID number is and what their Runner email ID is. There is also a sheet of information explaining that Runnermail is the email system used by the campus and that they will need to utilize this system to send emails to instructor and staff at CSUB. The information sheet gives them the web address for accessing Runnermail as well as how to log in. The number for the computer help desk is included so that student will know who to contact if they have any problems logging into or using this email account. Along with the letter and Runnermail information, the students are also mailed a University catalog so that they will have information on the policies and procedures of the University, what is required of all students during their program and to graduate, as well as the specific program information such as which courses are required for their major.

Improving services to online students at CSUB

Although the Regional & Online Degree Programs Department at CSUB currently has many great ways that they are serving their online students, there are several ways that they can improve upon and add to these services. For the quality of their programs, an evaluation or assessment system needs to be put in place to ensure that the students are meeting the learning goals and expectations set forth by the institution. The manner in which the courses are

being offered as well as the instructors that are being used should help to ensure that quality, but an assessment must be in place to determine that is actually the case. Using either an anonymous email survey or a web-based assessment program would most likely be the best options for these students. It would allow for students to critique the instructors and the courses and give feedback to the Regional & Online Degree Programs Department. The department also needs to ensure the instructors are evaluating each student's work throughout the courses to make sure they understand and are applying what they have learned in the course. This will help instructors and the institution to see whether the students are meeting the expectations for any given course.

There are several things that can also be done in order to improve the student services provided to the online students at CSUB. One idea is to set up a page on the website or link to a document that serves as a Student Guide for Distance Students. This guide would contain specific policies and procedures that pertain to online students and a list of contact information for staff and faculty as well as departments that the students may need to reach such as Financial Aid, Admissions and Records, the student bookstore, the library, and web services.

In order to better acquaint the students with CSUB and orient them to the online program, it would be ideal to have an online audio/visual orientation. This orientation could be a PowerPoint presentation that included audio notes. The orientation would be linked from the website so that interested students and those just beginning to take classes would be able to obtain all pertinent

information about being an online student. This orientation would contain information on the nature of online classes and what is to be expected of them as a student. They would learn how classes are offered and how to access WebCT, will receive a general overview of Runnermail and how to use that system, and contact information will be included for students with specific questions. This should be a detailed orientation, which should give all the information that students need to begin a program. Any questions that new student might have should be addressed at this time.

Along with the orientation, a WebCT tutorial should be given to students. This can be set up as a WebCT course to walk students through everything they will need to know about using WebCT. This course can be set up with a general username and password such as "guest" so that anyone can log into this course for the tutorial. The tutorial should be referenced in the orientation so that students can take advantage of this information.

All of these ideas for improving the services to online students at CSUB will help to improve the online programs. Students can feel disconnected and unsure of all of the steps they need to take and the systems they need to use when they begin an online program. Adding the orientation and tutorial will help to get more information to the students so that they understand what they need to be doing. This should help to alleviate many of the questions and concerns that online students currently have.

Making these improvements will help to increase the success of the online programs offered by the Regional & Online Degree Programs Department and may allow them to add more online offerings in the future. Better student services will also help to keep up the student retention for the Regional & Online Degree Programs Department and should help to increase enrollments as students are given more information up front about what they should expect if they join an online program.

This paper has shown how the number of online programs has been increasing in the United States in order to meet with the changing needs and desires of society. The Regional & Online Degree Programs Department of California State University has embraced these changes by offering two degree programs online. They are currently working to ensure that students feel included in the University and provided the services they need to be successful. By adding to those services and working on ensuring the quality of their programs, they can look toward the future and the more changes they might encounter with the ever changing demands of this technologically advanced society.

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