

Reaching all students: the promise of online education to create worldwide access

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Abstract: Student demand has brought about an increase in online and distance education courses. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which online course delivery and materials are being used in music programs, and the policies in place at those institutions where administrators advocate their use. With standardization of delivery and institutional and technical support, colleges and universities may begin offering degree programs to students worldwide.

Keywords: Asynchronous instruction. Distance education. Online course. Online materials. Online text. Synchronous instruction.

Alcançando todos os alunos: a promessa da educação *online* de criar um acesso mundial

Resumo: A demanda estudantil provocou o aumento dos cursos de educação à distância e *on line*. O objetivo deste trabalho é determinar a extensão do uso deste tipo de curso e dos materiais relativos em programas da área de música, e as políticas praticadas nas instituições cujos administradores advogam o seu uso. Com a padronização do acesso e do suporte técnico e institucional, faculdades e universidades podem começar a oferecer programas de graduação para estudantes de todo o mundo.

Palavras-chave: Educação não sincronizada. Educação à distância. Cursos *online*. Materiais *online*. Textos *online*. Educação sincronizada.

Introduction

With the maturation of the Internet age in the late twentieth century, the public has now become accustomed to and insistent upon instant accessibility of information. This has been compounded by the ability of all people to contribute to the database of resources through the uploading of documents to e-mail and sites such as Wikipedia™, the creation and uploading of web pages to commercial servers, and streaming video to YouTube™. Instant accessibility has increased peoples' appetite for instant gratification and this trend has not been lost on the education industry. Over the last decade, the proliferation of commercial educational institutions of higher learning, self-styled online universities accredited by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), has made peoples' ability to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees at home a reality. While there appear to be no statistics regarding the marketability of graduates from these programs, public colleges and universities have responded to the availability of "instant education" by creating web-based distance education courses and departments to attract and keep students seeking this instructional format. In the United States, the number of degree-granting higher education institutions offering distance education courses increased from 33 percent in 1995 to 44 percent in 1997-98 (NCES, 1999). Although it is not known the extent to which on-demand education is or will be pervasive throughout institutions around the world, it is clear that web-based online instruction has the potential to dramatically transform student accessibility and alter the traditionally accepted model of college and university campus life and learning.



In 2003, it was noted by the National Research Council on Policy and Global Affairs, a panel investigating the impact of information technology on the future of research universities, that students will begin to act as mobile consumers by enrolling with institutions whose course offerings are flexible and more closely aligned with the students' personal and professional needs and time commitments. Four years later, this has become the norm for many educational institutions in the United States as the use of technology has become a new form of literacy, equal in importance to traditional forms of communication. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act requires that states demonstrate that "every student is technologically literate by the time the student finishes the eighth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2001)."

Research continues to show a strong correlation between effective use of technology and student achievement. A study by Sivin-Kachala and Bialo (2000) commissioned by the Software and Information Industry Association revealed positive and consistent patterns of student achievement in all subject areas. Numerous subsequent studies and reports have confirmed these findings indicating that students engaging in greater frequency of technology have higher English/language arts scores, improved grades, motivation and discipline (eSchool News, 2005, O'Dwyer, Russell, Bebell, and Tucker-Seelery, 2005).

While a cause-and-effect model between technology and student achievement is not definitive, it is clear that the use of technology has altered the student-teacher relationship. According to Henriquez and Riconscente (1998) as reported in Honey, et al, teachers find themselves "acting more as coaches and less as lecturers." Prensky (2001) argues that technology has been so pervasive in society that many of the students in today's schools have been surrounded by technology since infancy. These students, as such, are fundamentally different from previous generations (McHale, 2005) and, "are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach (Honey, 1999, p. 47)."

The demand by students for programs and degrees with flexible time commitments and delivery formats has intensified. Faculty and administrators in the health sciences, engineering and educational fields have heeded this call and many now confer degrees on students whose on-campus residency visits are limited to attending graduation. Instructors in the arts, however, appear to be more reluctant to adopt flexible forms of instruction. Opting for a more traditional teacher-student mode of communication, college faculty members have expressed concerns about creating and using online texts and courses. These concerns range from a fear of being replaced by computers, to the threat of fewer jobs, a decline in use of full-time faculty and the lack of respect from colleagues particularly in the areas of promotion and tenure (IHEP, 2000; NEA, 2000). While these concerns have been noted, institutions are continuing to increase the number of online and/or distance education course offerings. A report by the National Center for Education Statistics (1999), citing earlier research by Willis (1995), indicates that the most likely reasons include the potential to increase enrollments and reduce program costs. College and university administrators, and increasingly more faculties have begun to realize that degrees, courses, and licensure programs can now be offered cost-effectively and on an increasingly broad scale nationally and internationally. However, in order for an anticipated worldwide explosion of courses, programs, and degrees to take place, issues of electronically offered instruction such as

standards and principles of implementation, faculty and institution copyright and ownership, and licensing agreements must be addressed before the demand can be met.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which online course delivery and materials are being used in undergraduate and graduate music programs, and the policies in place at those institutions where administrators advocate the use of online and distance education course delivery. Given the cost effectiveness of delivery, scalability features, and the inherent possibility of turning the market into a “cash cow”, more programs, courses, and materials will continue to be developed and implemented with the help of commercial and non-commercial publishers. The result could be an increase in access to information and materials; however, many administrators are at a loss as how to implement equitable standards for instruction, document and compensate this type of instruction in terms of contact hours and teaching load, and overcome the rules, regulations, and logistical planning necessary in order to offer web-based instruction on an international basis.

Methodology

In order to examine the institutional issues connected with online instruction it was felt that a clear picture was needed regarding the types of online courses offered and the institutional policies currently in place. An Internet survey was administered to 364 professors representing all areas of the United States and Canada. The population was taken from the College Music Society directory, mailing lists from professional associations such as the National Association of Music Educators, and lists of professors and instructors currently using online music materials published by Connect4Education. Because the survey was administered by Internet and about 1/3 of the population currently used or had used web-based texts and materials, it was acknowledged that the responses would tend to be skewed towards persons who are “electronically knowledgeable;” however, the primary focus of the survey was the extent to which online courses and materials are being used and the institutional policies and practices rather than numbers of courses or familiarity with online instruction.

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:

Distance education – a course of study in which the instruction is delivered off-campus locations by way of video (live or prerecorded) and/or computer technology; often referred to as asynchronous instruction.

Online courses – a postsecondary course, graduate or undergraduate, in which no less than 90% of the instruction is delivered through online instruction; instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous but in many cases is considered distance education.

Online materials – textbook resources and materials published commercially to supplement a print edition copy of the text.

Online text – a textbook published commercially for complete online delivery; sometimes referred to as a web-based text.



Synchronous instruction – face-to-face instruction that occurs live between teacher and student, usually on campus.

Out of the 364 surveys, a total of 55 were non-deliverable for a final population of 309 (N=309). The first two questions of the survey were for classification purpose regarding size of the institution according to student population and Carnegie Classification. Responses were received from public and private institutions, 2-year junior or community colleges, 4-year degree granting institutions, and colleges and university with various levels of masters and doctoral level programs, as well as a few specialized institutions such as conservatories and schools of music.

Data presentation

Forty-six percent (46%) of survey respondents taught at institutions with student populations of more than 10,000 primarily at 2-year junior or community colleges. The next largest group of respondents taught at 4-year degree granting institutions with student populations between 2,000 and 5,000.

Two survey questions solicited information on the respondent's familiarity and experience with online texts and courses. Almost 39% of respondents have used online courses or used online texts at least once and 40% had taught more than 4 online courses. Of the total population, 45% preferred to use online texts while teaching online courses. Regardless of this number, some resistance was noted based upon the respondent's perception of the course content. In one case, the respondent noted:

“The nature of the content I teach is really interaction driven [...] I can't have the same kind of group interaction via an online course. I do use a lot of online support materials for in class and out of class use – online listening libraries, websites, and online readings.”

The respondents' perceptions about student achievement when using online texts and courses and students reactions to using these materials were favorable. Seventy-one percent (71%) felt online materials and courses were extremely effective or effective in increasing student achievement and 91% felt that student reactions to taking an online course were favorable although some negative reactions were noted.

The final survey questions solicited information about institutional policies, attitudes, and views toward online courses and texts. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the respondent's institutions have no restrictions on faculty use of online materials or methods for teaching online courses with a mix of schools providing grants or release time to faculty in order to develop online courses and materials. A few institutions either prohibited online courses and texts (1%) or restricted online courses to be taught through Continuing Education programs (6%) or during summer sessions (2%). More often institutions restricted instructors from teaching online courses unless they completed a training program (20%). This issue was tied closely to the question of an institutional standard. Although guidelines for the creation and management of online courses are available through the publication *Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs* published by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), many faculties do not appear to be knowledgeable or

aware of these principles. Almost 40% of respondents indicated no knowledge of their teaching institution's policy or standards for online education. While one respondent indicated that the "Institutional academic integrity of standards/rigors was the same as for traditional delivery of courses", the following responses indicate the lack of knowledge or confusion on this issue:

"I am not sure of the policy in regard to what can and can't be taught online."

"May need more policies in this area but they do not exist right now."

The issue of institutional policies stimulated more comments on faculty perceptions about online learning.

"Our institution would like more online courses because of their cost-effectiveness [...] however, due to the nature of my discipline (music education and music technology) in-person interaction is a must and something I and my colleagues won't compromise on."

and

"I think online learning best suits didactic, teacher-centered learning [...] however, I don't teach that way and would never change to fit."

On the issue of faculty compensation, copyright and ownership of teaching materials, 94% of respondents indicate that they receive equal load credit for teaching online courses. This may be tied to the respondent's perception of the administration attitude. Fifty-nine percent (59%) indicate that their institution is extremely favorably to having faculty create online courses and materials for a variety of reasons. Equally, the responses indicate faculty members are aware of the administrative pressure to create courses and serve the student population.

"Online or Distance Education is seen as a 'hot' item and is pushed by upper administration [...] Funding for online or distance courses is greater than for campus based courses."

"[Administrators] have to approve, else online universities and community colleges would have all the students."

"We are finding a huge market in online instruction. We have at least doubled the number of Music Appreciation sections we offer each semester."

"Online courses allow us to increase our enrollment. Another factor of location and population is that many of our students work full-time jobs while attending school. Online has been a godsend to them."

Conclusions and themes from the data

Comments from the respondents indicate a misconception regarding the use of online courses, instruction, and use of web-based texts. This terminology appears to signal an "all or nothing approach"



for most faculty members. While many institutions offer complete online instruction through continuing education and/or distance education units, and some colleges and university may be under state restrictions that designate “distance education” to remain completely online, there appears to be little acquaintance with modes of delivery that fall between a completely synchronous (face-to-face) teaching approach and a completely online approach. Many respondents do not appear to have considered 1) a blended format in which students use an online format for the majority of the course but meet for regular intervals for a synchronous presentation or assessment, or 2) online, web-based texts for use with a synchronous course.

In general, faculty members perceive online courses and use of web-based texts to be effective in increasing student achievement. Likewise, the perception is that students are favorable to using online courses and texts. These results concur with current research by O’Dwyer et al. indicating a positive correlation between the increased use of technology and student achievement. Furthermore, the perception of student favorability and achievement supports the NCES report that increased access to courses and programs through distance education will continue to rise. As reported by Hanson (1997) in the NCES review, “distance education learners generally have a more favorable attitude toward distance education than traditional learners have and . . . feel they learn as well as if they were in a regular classroom (NCES, 1999, p. 20)”.

Responses indicate that faculty member’s ability to create and present online instruction and materials is still variable across institutions. While many public institutions are capable of financially and technically supporting an online format, others appear to be handicapped for a variety of reasons including lack of preparation time, lack of funding, and inadequate infrastructure, hardware, and software. This finding is supported by Maguire (2005) who cites the lack of administrative and technical support as primary institutional inhibitors to motivating faculty to teach through distance education.

While institutions appear to have a set of standards or principles for online instruction (60%) with many providing faculty training for implementation (19%) and full faculty ownership of the content (65%) with specific policies that address copyright and licensing (65%), in many cases this information is not getting to the faculty. Several comments indicate that faculty members are unaware of any institutional principles, criteria, or standards.

At most respondents’ institutions, the compensation for teaching an online course is calculated as part of the faculty member’s teaching load or is calculated in the same manner as that used for teaching synchronous courses (94%). In some cases, less 6%, the faculty member receives less credit than teaching a synchronous course and several institutions offer extra compensation when the online course is taught above the regularly contracted load. The equal or increased compensation for teaching online courses indicates administration realization of a burgeoning market for online courses and the cost-effectiveness of this format. In several cases, comments provided by the respondents indicate that online courses are the only means of access for many degree-seeking students, particularly in rural areas or in populations where a large percentage of students are working full-time. This affirms the conclusion found by Sherron and Boettcher in the NCES report that:

[...] the primary benefit of distance education may be that it has the potential to provide access to postsecondary education where otherwise it might not have been available, due to constraints as geography, time, job and faculty responsibilities, or finances (p. 16).

Implications for Music Education

Ramifications for using web-based courses, online texts and materials, and distance education for all areas of music education including, but not limited to music theory, music history, and music education are far-reaching. Online instruction presents itself as a natural vehicle for music instruction. The multimedia aspects possible through online instruction present a paradigm whereby observation; content delivery, reflection, and extension are possible. Material reinforced by illustrative examples, restatement of key ideas, and interrelationships between content increases student learning: the structure of web-based on-line instruction approach allows students to self-pace content and increase reinforcement leading to greater student learning.

With improved infrastructure of hardware and software, accessibility to the World Wide Web will increase. Students from around the globe seeking instruction and information will be able to participate in degree and licensure programs from any institution offering the available coursework provided the university or college administrators have accepted a common standard of creation and implementation of materials and teaching approach, and have established the bureaucratic support systems to serve these students. At all levels, there will be; 1) Increased customization of degree programs; and, 2) The ability of institutions and faculty members to share and exchange licensure and standards information regarding online instruction, teaching standards, and licensure procedures. One outgrowth of this implies that faculty and students from all countries, regardless of economic status, will be able to contribute to the knowledge and research base as networks of programs become more accessible and available. Students will always benefit from the teacher-student relationship; however, the newer structures found in online education, will provide educational opportunities far beyond the traditional campus models and may encourage more students to seek certification and degree programs, or to progress through them more quickly.

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