

Online Education's Role in Promoting Access & Affordability

Online education will play an increasingly important role in expanding access and making an Idaho college education affordable.

Access

- Until relatively recently, colleges and universities have been designed to serve those who could uproot and/or rearrange their lives to accommodate higher education. This has excluded large segments of society. Online education expands who can now participate in higher education:
 - Online programs reach time-bound students (working adults who need flexibility with scheduling).
 - Online programs reach place-bound students across the state.
 - Even on-campus traditional-age students are increasingly taking 1-2 online courses per semester, giving them added flexibility in their schedules to tend to work and/or family commitments. This helps students stay on track toward timely graduation.

Affordability

- Is online cheaper than face-to-face classes? It depends.
 - Online education requires institutions to invest in infrastructure and support.
 - Instructional designers & technologists
 - Faculty development
 - Technology
 - Online student supportOnce infrastructure is in place, online education provides institutions a way to aggregate demand across geographic boundaries, making educational outreach more cost-effective.
 - Institutions may charge students less, more, or about the same for online courses as face-to-face courses, depending on state funding, the delivery model, the support structure, the discipline, etc.
 - Students who choose online programs will tell you that online education is affordable for them because they did not have to relocate and/or change jobs to participate. They also save significant money on such things as child care and transportation.

Is Online Education as Good?

- There are lots of variables. Just like face-to-face courses, quality can vary by instructor, course, program or institution. But many reports, including meta analysis by the federal government, show that online courses are at least as effective as face-to-face courses. But some studies, including those done by the Community College Research Center, show that certain groups of students struggle in online courses unless strong support is provided.
- Are hybrid courses better? Some studies suggest a blend of online and face-to-face delivery may be more effective than fully online courses. But hybrid courses are not as effective as fully online courses in terms of providing access to remote areas or to people with irregular schedules.

Where is online education going?

- Online enrollments are growing – at the same time face-to-face enrollments are declining.
- Online education is improving, as both pedagogy and technology evolve.
- Online education WILL NOT replace our brick & mortar campuses. But aspects of online education will increasingly find their way into mainstream campus delivery and reshape the traditional classroom experience.

The past week's headlines regarding online education

- There is a debate in the State of Florida about pushing for 40% of undergraduate credits being delivered online:
<http://www.politico.com/states/florida/story/2017/04/florida-embraces-online-higher-education-even-as-political-divisions-run-deep-110900>
- Purdue University has purchased for-profit online provider Kaplan with the intention of creating a new public online university - and expanding access to affordable education:
<http://www.purduenewu.org/>
- Newly released information gives you a sense of national trends with online enrollments:
<https://wcetfrontiers.org/2017/05/02/digital-learning-compass/>