

Online CTE in the Community College

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ABSTRACT

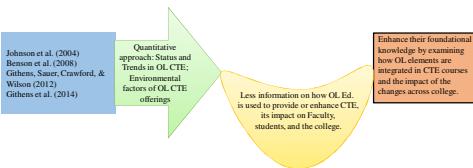
Community colleges serve the most diverse student population with regard to age, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. These characteristics mirror those of students who enroll in career and technical education (Bragg, 2001, 2014) and online courses (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2013). Yet only a handful of studies have been conducted about online technical education in community colleges. Given the continued growth in online education (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Lokken & Mullins, 2015), increasing use of technology in the classroom, and the emphasis on career and technical education (CTE) as a means of increasing degree production, more information is needed about how online education is being used to provide or enhance CTE.

This qualitative study examined how online courses and course elements are integrated into career and technical education courses and how those changes were experienced across the college. Results of this study indicate that despite the continued growth of online education, colleges need to work with faculty and staff to determine where and how that growth best fits with institutional mission and goals; the hands-on aspect of CTE courses complicates the development process.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 2001-2002, approximately 76% of community colleges offered CTE courses through distance education, with 75% of those offered in an online format (Johnson et al., 2004). However, no more than 10% of CTE programs could be completed at a distance (Benson et al., 2008). More recent studies found that only 47.5% of community colleges offer online occupational education programs, with programs considered to be "fully online" when at least 50% of courses are offered in the format (Githens et al., 2010; Githens et al., 2012; Githens et al., 2014).

It is important to note that earlier studies investigated courses rather than programs, and different definitions were used to define an online program, but that still does not explain why there are so few online CTE offerings today.



DEFINITIONS

- **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** - postsecondary education and training designed to provide workforce and job training.
- **Categories and definitions of online education:**
 - "online" = 80% + content is delivered online
 - "hybrid" or "blended" = 30-79% of content is delivered online
 - "web-enhanced" = incorporates online elements, but 29% or less

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Social cognition theory posits that individuals hold multiple views of organizational reality (Cohen & March, 1974; Morgan, 2006; Weick 1995) with a focus on how change occurs (Kezar, 2014).
- Cultural theory focuses on the context of professional norms, individual values, history, environment, and organizational type (Kezar, 2014, p. 33).
- Incorporating online education requires change throughout the organization (Dechant & Dechant, 2010; Garza Mitchell, 2009).

METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

- Research project consisted of a qualitative case study of one community college (TCC) and its experiences with online education in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and courses.
- Interviewed total of six (6) participants for a total of eight (8) interviews; two participants had follow-up interviews.
- Participants were faculty and administrators involved with online education ; identified through investigation and snowball methodology.
- Interviews were conducted via phone in a semi-structured style, allowing for consistency with flexibility to investigate topics of interest.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim, then coded and analyzed for themes.
- Three researchers coded interview transcripts individually and conducted periodic comparisons to ensure reliability
- Themes which emerged from interviews were triangulated with institutional artifacts and supporting documents found online and provided by participants to confirm themes and conclusions.

RESULTS

Three primary themes emerged from analysis of the data

Culture & Identity

- Be on the "leading edge" as an institution to benefit both students and employers
- Put students first (*how they want to learn, more flexible schedule, etc.*)
- Focus on expanding opportunity to learners (*limited time, limited locale or mobility to come to campus, wider service area*)
- Faculty who are fully engaged with online learning (*value it, support it, make it happen*)

Rewards & Motivations

- Limited extrinsic rewards – small stipends available for course creation
- Internal and intrinsic – desire to help students, flexible schedule for teaching, faculty interest in online, provided more face to face time for key elements
- Motivation was from wanting to best fulfill their culture & identity – meet student needs & expand access (*some intrinsic motivation by individual faculty, some requested as part of institutional move to meet student need*)

Hesitations & Limitations

- Some current policies seen as limitation – (*e.g. face to face requirement*)
- Resource limitation – not enough qualified or motivated faculty to meet demand
- "Need to smell the solder" - i.e. some inherent limits of technology to meet program or instructional needs (*some CTE learning has to be "hands-on" by faculty conclusion or industry standard*)
- Not the University of Phoenix



CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- Online learning will continue to grow; colleges need to work with faculty and staff to determine where and how that growth best fits with institutional mission and goals.
- Online learning is a commitment from the institution that will take strategic planning, resource allocation and centralized support to work best for students and to best equip and encourage faculty to move classes online (Dechant & Dechant, 2010; Hornak, Akweks, & Jeffs, 2010).
- The hands-on aspect of CTE courses complicates the development process. To proceed, existing biases and assumptions must be addressed.
- Online education is still perceived as "other" despite its growth and integration into the college.

FUTURE QUESTIONS

- How does online education change a college's identity?
- What student services should and could be offered online?
- Which online elements best serve students?
- What is the student perspective of online CTE? The employer perspective?

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