Online CTE in the Community College

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**ABSTRACT**

Community colleges serve the most diverse student population with regard to age, race, 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.

**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.

**REFERENCES**


**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACTS**

- We would like to thank Western Michigan University’s School of Education Tate Mini Grant for the funding which supported this research.
- We would like to thank Dr. Garza Mitchell for her guidance and mentorship with this project. She brought on two new graduate students to assist in this research and has been a fantastic mentor, teacher, and colleague to both of us.

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