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WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies

# MANAGING ONLINE EDUCATION 2013:
PRACTICES IN ENSURING QUALITY

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Executive Summary

The Managing Online Education survey was conducted by WCET (the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies) in partnership with BCcampus, Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium, and eCampusAlberta in the Spring of 2013. The focus of this survey is on practices that promote quality in online education, especially in terms of an institution demonstrating leadership or providing services that enhance faculty and student success. Key findings include:

- **Institutions are Adopting Standards.** More than 85 percent of responding institutions have implemented some form of "standards" or "best practices" in their online courses. The distance education standards from the U.S. regional accrediting agencies have been adopted (either partially or fully) by 58 percent of the respondents, followed by state or provincial standards at 49 percent, and Quality Matters at 42 percent.

- **Course Completion Rates Averaged 3-5 Percent Better for On-Campus Over Online Courses.** When looking at all responses, the difference in course completion rates was three percent in favor of on-campus courses (81% completion for on-campus and 78% for online). When looking only at institutions that provided both on-campus and online completion rates, the difference was 5 percent. With the rise of MOOCs, the issue of course completion has risen in visibility. Coursera, a MOOC provider, reported that only 1 in 20 students "who signed up for a Coursera MOOC earned a credential signifying official completion of the course." Some have confused MOOC completion rates with those of "traditional" online courses. These results show that online course completion rates track more closely with those in of on-campus courses than is found in MOOCs.

- **Institutions Don't Know Their Course Completion Rates.** Institutions had trouble providing course completion rates for both online and on-campus courses. Sixty-five percent were not able to provide an on-campus rate and 55 percent did not report an online rate. If institutions wish to improve course completion, they will need to collect these statistics. It's hard to improve what is not measured.

- **Online Course Content is Developed by Faculty.** Even with the emergence of licensed content by publishers and "open content," 83 percent of respondents said that more the vast majority of their courses use content developed by their own faculty. About 60 percent of institutions use open content, but in only a few courses.

- **Many Institutions Require Faculty Development in Teaching Online and Require Reviews of New Courses.** More than half of institutions (58%) require new online faculty to participate in faculty development prior to teaching their first online courses. About half of new (53 percent) and existing (48 percent) online courses are subject to a required review.

- **Institutions are Providing Academic Support Services at a Distance.** The vast majority of institutions offer library services and advising to online students. Fewer, but still a majority, offer tutoring services.
- **24/7 Technical Services are Not the Norm.** Only about one-third (30 percent) of institutions offer 24/7 technical support for students. Given that students work all hours on online courses, the lack of support could hamper their success in the course.
- **More Assistance for Those with Disabilities Needed.** In meeting the needs of those online students with disabilities, it is alarming that sixteen percent have no policy on this subject and another thirty-six percent rely on the faculty to provide support. Therefore, at least half of the responding institutions have no systematic way to assure that students with disabilities are well-served.
- **Institutions are Working on Curbing Online Academic Cheating.** More than three quarters of institutions have a policy on "academic integrity" (preventing cheating on assessments) for online learners. About 40 percent use technologies to authenticate the identity of online learners.
- **Student Orientations to Online Learning are Rarely Required.** Only about one quarter (22 percent) of respondents require their online students to take an orientation prior to their first online course, even though research suggests that experience aids in online course success.

Institutions with online courses are taking many steps to improve both the instructional and out-of-class experience both for faculty and students. Much effort is spent on adopting and implementing practices that are based on "best practices" developed by local, regional, or national groups.

As is the case with all of higher education, there is room for improvement. Perhaps the needed improvement is not as much as some critics might claim.

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Introduction

The 2013 WCET (the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies) Managing Online Education survey marks a return to surveys that WCET has previously conducted with the Campus Computing Project. The survey marks a new direction and new partnership for the survey.

- *Direction:* Previous surveys were long and covered a large number of issues that distance education practitioners encounter in managing their operations. Beginning with this survey, each survey will focus on a theme and will have a limited number of questions. In the future, these surveys are planned to be more agile and timely in addressing the changing needs of the distance education community.
- *Partnership:* Valuable support and assistance has been provided by BCcampus, the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium, and eCampusAlberta. These consortia have been very active in WCET's e-Learning Consortia Common Interest Group. They provided insight into questions to be asked, the tool for collecting survey responses, and in interpreting the results. By including our Canadian partners, this is the first step in expanding the survey in Canada and learning from their practices, as well.

"Distance" and "Online" Definitions

While the term "online" is in the title of the survey, the instrument was designed to be welcoming of all forms of related activities. Participants were provided with this definition:

"Online" -- There are many definitions of "online" courses and trying to straightjacket everyone into one definition would be problematic. Use your local definition, including all blended, online, and distance courses.

While not every instance of "online" education will be the same, it is the authors' belief that the similarities outweigh the differences.

The Focus on Quality

The first themed survey focuses on quality issues in supporting faculty, developing courses, and educating students. While distance educators have long employed many activities in improving online course quality, there has been little effort to quantify these activities. Through these questions, distance educators can have better insight as to what works, what does not work, and what needs to be done. Additionally, some of the questions are aimed at developing data that can be used in response to critics of distance education.

Survey Distribution and Responses

The survey was distributed to WCET members and many others in spring of 2013. For WCET members, the organization's official representative received the survey. The survey was also sent to members of many e-learning consortia and to a list of provosts from throughout the United States and Canada.

More than 240 individuals responded, with 225 completing a sufficient portion of the survey to be included in the final results. Represented in the responses are 41 U.S. states, three Canadian provinces, and Puerto Rico. The overwhelming majority of respondents are from institutions in the United States. Individuals from Canadian institutions accounted for 8 percent of respondents, with those from the United States accounting for the remainder.

Slightly less than 43 percent of the respondents are from two-year institutions, while 57 percent represent four-year institutions. Respondents for institutions offering doctoral degrees and masters degrees as their highest credential account for 31 and 18 percent of the responses. Those from institutions offering a bachelor's degree as the highest credential account for nine percent of the respondents.

Figure 1: Highest Degree Offered
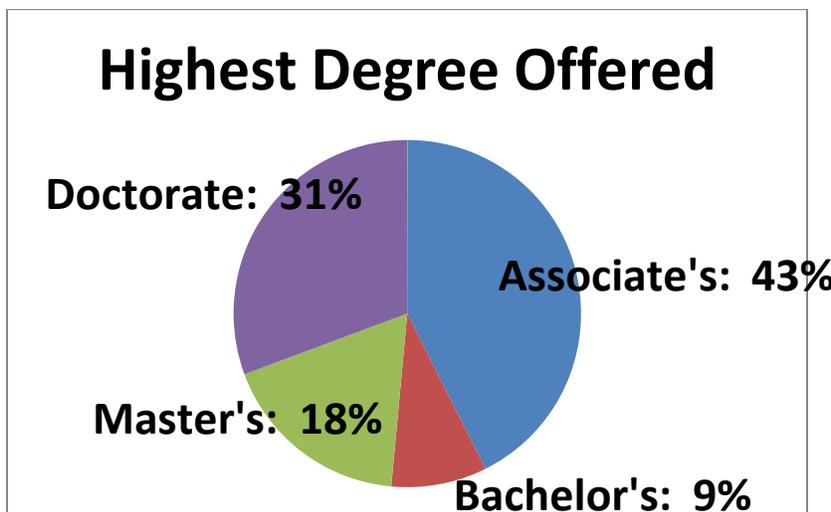
Methodology Regarding Unit of Analysis

In feedback to previous Managing Online Education surveys, several respondents objected to the requirement in those surveys that the respondent represent the entire institution. The organizational structure of online education activities varies greatly across institutions. While some campuses have distance education units that serve the entire campus, many have decentralized structures and practices could vary greatly within the institution.

In response to this feedback, respondents were allowed to complete the survey for a subunit (college, department, or other entity) of the college. If not answering for the entire institution, they were asked to identify subunit that they represented.

This creates a problem in reporting the results in terms of what unit of analysis is used. Since the Managing Online Education survey seeks to help understand how online learning is managed, it was decided to make the response (not the institution) the unit of analysis. This represents the level at which management decisions are made. This makes it possible to have more than one response from an institution, but this happened very rarely.

The majority of respondents – 78 percent – represent their entire institution. Those representing a single college within a university or a single department accounted for 16 percent of responses. These responses are somewhat complicated by the fact that many of those responding that they represent only a single department are from their institution's department of distance learning (or the equivalent). It could be assumed that the overwhelming majority are describing policies and practices that represent their entire institution in their responses.

Thank You!

WCET's deepest gratitude goes to:

- Tricia Donovan, eCampusAlberta, and Kevin Corcoran, Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium for many hours of assistance in re-conceptualizing the survey, choosing questions, crafting the survey language, and insights in interpreting the results.
- David Porter, BCcampus, for his insights in re-conceptualizing the survey and providing the survey software. Again, thank you to Tricia Donovan and her staff for technical operations of the survey.
- Patrick Lane, WICHE Policy, for data analysis, graph creation, and gentle suggestions about the analyses and proper wording of the final text.
- Cali Morrison for final formatting of the document and dissemination to our friends in the press and blogosphere.
- Peggy Stevens for all things web-related.
- The participants of the survey.   The collective information is impossible to obtain without hundreds of people taking the time to provide their local information.

Questions about the survey should be directed to: Russell Poulin, deputy director, research and analysis, WCET at rpoulin@wiche.edu.

QUALITY STANDARDS FOR ONLINE EDUCATION:
THEIR ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

For each of the following standards-based approaches to addressing quality in curriculum design and teaching for online courses, please indicate how you use it.

Summary

- More than 85 percent of responding institutions have implemented some form of "standards" or "best practices" in their online courses.
- The distance education standards from the U.S. regional accrediting agencies have been adopted (either partially or fully) by 58 percent of the respondents, followed by state or provincial standards at 49 percent, and Quality Matters at 42 percent.
- Alarmingly, thirty-three respondents have not adopted any standards. That means about 15 percent of responding institutions are operating in the dark or have ceded all quality issues to the faculty.
- Eleven institutions have created their own standard, which are often based on amalgamations of the other standards.

Over the years, there have been several lists of "best practices," "guidelines," or "standards[1]" for distance education. Typically these documents include items such as fit to institutional mission, faculty development, learning objectives, interactivity, assessments, safeguards against cheating, technical support, and student support services to name a few of the general issues that are covered by these guidelines. There was interest in determining the extent to which these standards have been adopted and implemented. In the question, respondents were asked about the most popular options, but were also allowed to provide other resources that they could be using.

Those popular options included:

- Quality Matters - which provides benchmarks and rubrics for online course design (https://www.qualitymatters.org/).
- U.S. Regional Accrediting Standards - the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions worked with WCET to create guidelines to be used in reviewing institutional distance education activities. The guidelines were revised a few years ago without WCET's

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[1] Note that the word "standard" is too strong of a description for these documents. Typically they are more along the lines of "best practices" or "guidelines" that are to be interpreted in the local setting. They are not strictly "standards" that are to be followed exactly. Instruction is more of an art than a science.

assistance (http://www.msche.org/publications/Guidelines-for-the-Evaluation-of-Distance-Education-Programs.pdf).

- Sloan-C Quality Scorecard - The Sloan Consortium created the scorecard for the administration of online education programs (http://sloanconsortium.org/quality_scorecard_online_program).
- iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Teaching - While iNACOL focuses on K-12 online learning, some colleges have found their tools useful (http://www.inacol.org/resources/publications/national-quality-standards/)
- State/Provincial Standards - Some public systems of institutions have developed their own rubrics. An example is from eCampusAlberta (http://quality.ecampusalberta.ca/).

Table 1: Quality Standards/Guidelines

|	We don't use it	We use it as a resource only	Adopted and partially implemented	Adopted and fully implemented	Number Responding
Quality Matters	24.7%	33.5%	28.4%	13.5%	215
US. Regional Accrediting Standards	22.4%	20.0%	16.2%	41.4%	210
Sloan-C Quality Scorecard	46.9%	43.0%	7.2%	2.9%	207
iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Teaching	67.7%	27.4%	3.0%	2.0%	201
State/Provincial Standards	35.6%	15.3%	12.9%	36.1%	202
Other	64.2%	4.2%	10.0%	21.7%	120

Figure 2: What Is Being Used?
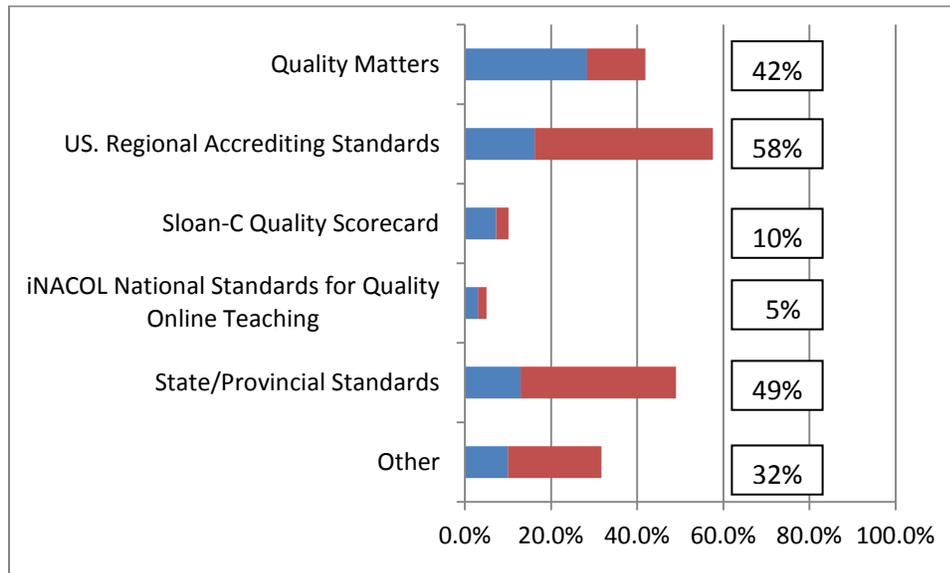
Figure 2 shows the combined responses for those who claimed to have either fully or partially implemented one of the standards. Note that an institution may use multiple "standards" in concert, often taking the best elements from each source.

The "U.S. Regional Accrediting Standards" are the most popular option (58 percent) followed by "State/Provincial Standards." This outcome is not surprising as the regionally accredited institutions need to respond to these guidelines as part of the accreditation processes. While one might expect a higher rate of adoption for the regional standards, those institutions might address these standards only when responding to their regional agency. In their daily interactions with faculty, they might use other "standards" that they feel give additional or more rigorous guidance.

For the "state and province" standards, these are often guidelines that are based upon joint research and agreement across institutions working together in a public system and, therefore, have much local buy-in.

Given that Quality Matters is fee-based and requires more dedication and effort to implement, its adoption by 42 percent of the respondents is impressive. While the "Other" category appears large, this is partially due to about half of the respondents skipping this question. A handful of respondents marked "Other," but their open-ended clarifications indicated that they probably should have selected the regional accrediting or state/provincial options.

Eleven institutions created their own standard. These were based on their own reviews of the research and are often an amalgamation of the other standards listed.

Figure 3: What is Not Being Used?
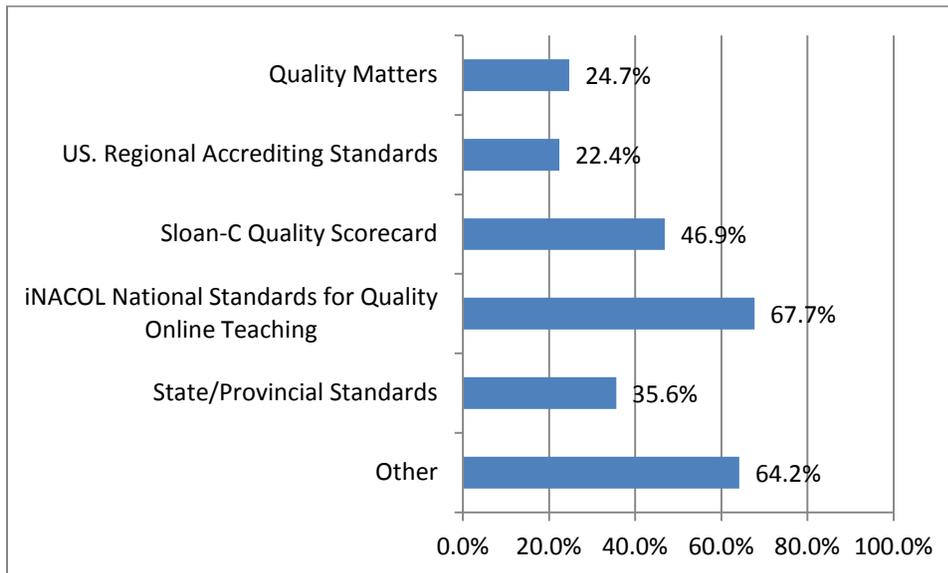
Figure 3 lists those who chose the "we do not use it" response. Since iNACOL is focused on K-12 online education, it is not surprising that its adoption in higher education is low.

Alarmingly, thirty-three respondents did not indicate that they adopted any of the standards listed. Neither did they take the opportunity to respond in the "other" category about any locally-produced or "other" standard that they are using. Taken together, they represent about 15 percent of institutions that responded to this survey, but that percentage is likely an overstatement of those that have no standards.

Some of the respondents might not have taken the time to respond to the "other" question. In reviewing the list of institutions that did not indicate a standard, there are a few large colleges that have a long history of quality online offerings and are regionally accredited. For the remainder, there are many community colleges and bachelor's-level institutions that probably do not have a large online course presence and might not be at the point of having adopted standards.

For institutions that do not use a "standard," they are not benefitting from the "best practices" lessons or they have ceded all quality issues to the faculty who may or may not be up-to-date on quality online teaching methods. On the bright side, at least 85 percent of respondents are using some form of standard to inform and guide their online education activities.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR NEW AND EXPERIENCED FACULTY

Question: What are your professional development or orientation expectations for <u>faculty prior to their teaching their first online course</u> for your institution?

Question: For your faculty who voluntarily participated in professional development or orientation prior to teaching their first online course, what is your estimate of the percent who: participated in professional development paid for by the institution? Participated in professional development paid by themselves? *(Asked only of those for which professional development was voluntary.)*

The same questions were asked for <u>experienced online faculty.</u>

Summary

- More than half of institutions (58%) require new online faculty to participate in faculty development prior to teaching their first online courses.
- This number drops to 25% for experienced faculty being required to participate in development activities to refresh their skills.
- When professional development is voluntary, not surprisingly, there is a huge gap in faculty participation depending on who pays for it. About two-thirds of respondents said that their faculty participated in development activities paid for by the institution for both new and experienced online instructors. Only about 10% of the institutions said that faculty participated in development activities that they had to pay for themselves.

Figure 4: Faculty Development for Faculty Prior to Teaching Their First Online Course

**Faculty Development-
First Online Course**

Other: 5%
None: 4%
Voluntary: 34%
Required: 58%
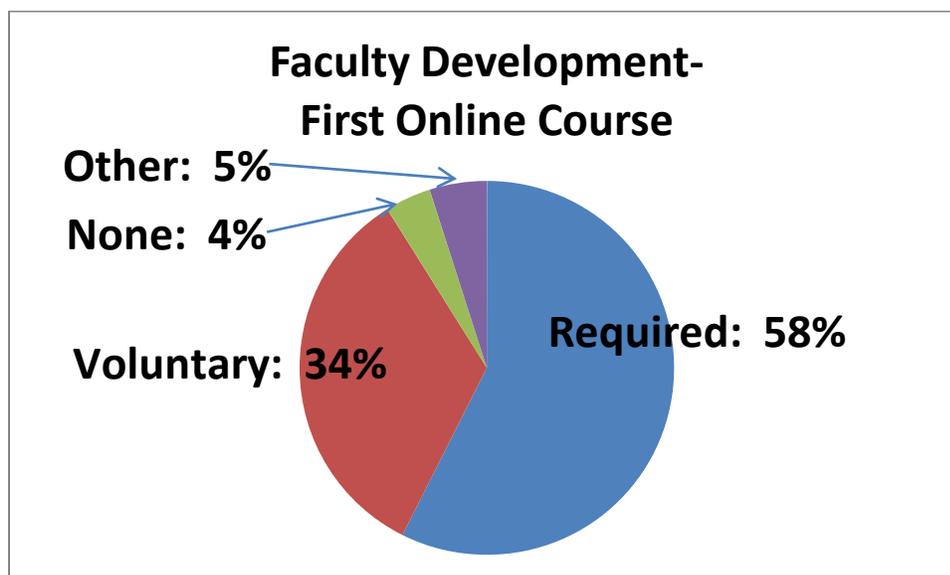
For professional development and orientation for faculty teaching online courses there are varied practices across institutions. For faculty that have never taught online courses previously, 58 percent of respondents indicate that they are required to complete professional development or orientation, while 34 percent say that it is voluntary. Four percent responded that they have no professional development or orientation for faculty teaching online courses for the first time.

For the "Other" category, respondents were asked to explain their selection:

- Two are currently voluntary, but are moving to mandatory professional development.
- A few said that the requirement varies by department.
- "Professional development is required for adjuncts. Due to the faculty contract, it is voluntary for full-time faculty."
- "We require all new online instructors to meet with the Dean of Educational Technology to discuss items pertinent to online learning at our institution, and they are required to be trained in the use of Blackboard, our CMS. We would like to require additional professional development, such as the Quality Matters APPQMR course, but our union negotiations are impeding this initiative at this point."

**Figure 5: Faculty Development for Experienced Faculty**
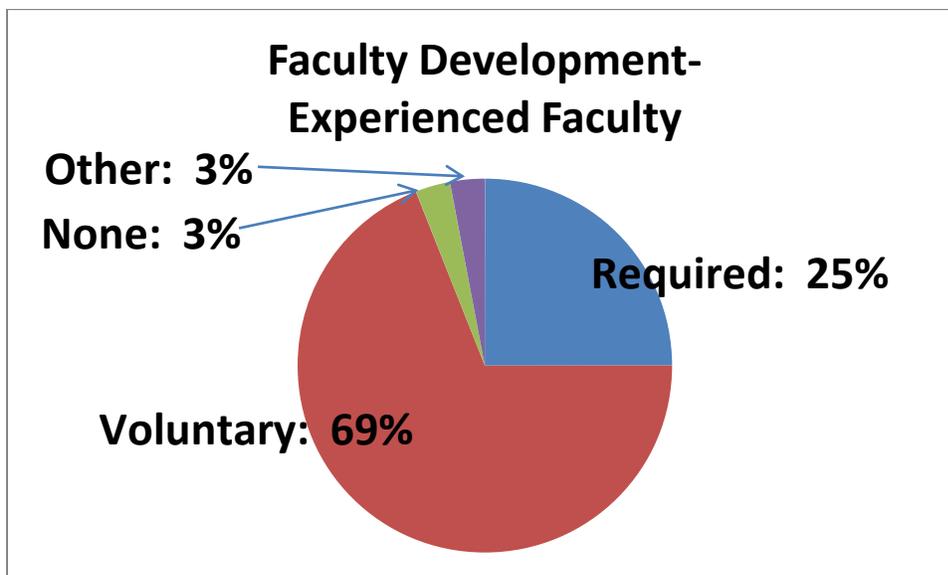
Responses show a marked drop-off for required professional development for faculty that have previously taught online courses. Only 25 percent of respondents indicated that their institution or department requires professional development while 69 percent said that it is voluntary. The "None" and "Other" options each received 3 percent.

For the "Other" category, respondents were asked to explain their selection:

- "We require professional development, but it's about teaching in general, not solely online teaching."
- <<Our institution>> "offers 'skills-based' PD for faculty (i.e. how to use a tool) but not PD for improving facilitation skills in online courses and communities. There is "on request" consultation offered to faculty who request assistance."
- "New professional development activities were developed 2011-2012. At least one mature program requires completion of the first (intro) new activity; one of the most experienced academic departments is heavily adopting both new activities. Otherwise, varies by program for existing programs."
- "Renewal of skills as tech develops is recommended and most want to do so, especially in changes in LMS."
- "Professional development is part of the faculty job description."

Professional Development by Type of Institution

For both new and experienced faculty, institutions that grant Master's degrees as their highest credential had the most stringent requirements for professional development. For experienced faculty, 39 percent of respondents from these institutions said that it is required, compared to 22 percent of those from institutions that grant doctoral-level degrees, and 26 percent of those from institutions that grant baccalaureate degrees as their highest credential. At two-year institutions, 21 percent of respondents say that professional development is required for faculty who have already taught online courses.

For faculty teaching online courses for the first time, at Master's-level institutions, 69 percent of respondents say that professional development or orientation is required, compared to 49 percent at doctoral-level institutions and 52 percent at baccalaureate-level institutions. Of respondents from two-year institutions, 59 percent say that it is required for these faculty members.

Figure 6: Professional Development and Faculty Incentives

Estimated Participation in Professional Development by Who Pays for Development
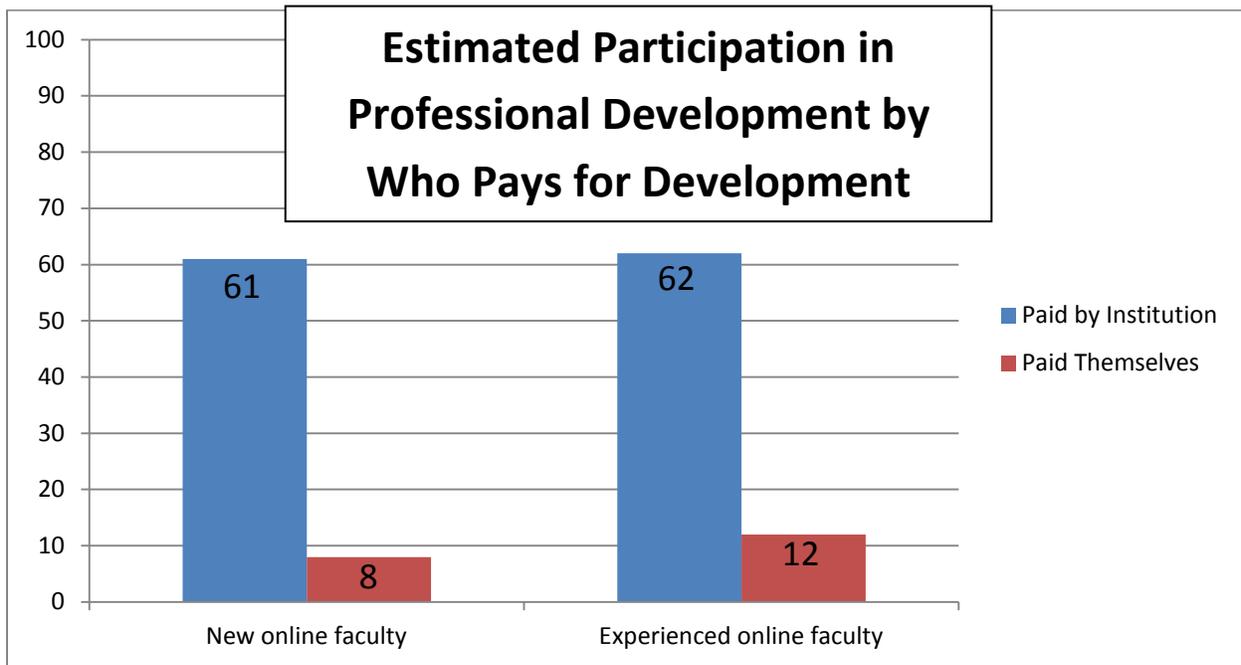
Respondents say that almost two-thirds (61 percent for new faculty and 62 percent for experienced faculty) of faculty participate in voluntary professional development when funding is provided by the institution. The participation in voluntary professional development is much lower (8 percent for new faculty and 12 percent for experienced faculty) when they have to bear the costs themselves.

COURSE COMPLETION RATES OF ONLINE AND ON-CAMPUS COURSES

Question: **For the academic year that included January 1, 2012, what is your average course completion rate for students in <u>on-campus courses</u>? (Respond "DK" if you don't know and "NA" if your institution does not have on-campus courses.)**

Question: **For the academic year that included January 1, 2012, what is your average course completion rate for students in <u>online courses</u>? (Respond "DK" if you don't know.)**

NOTE: While most academic years are the same, not all of them are. We ask you for the year that uses January 1, 2012 to assure that we are getting a full year's data and that the responses collected are comparable.

Summary

- Institutions had trouble providing completion rates with 65 percent not being able to provide an on-campus rate and 55 percent not reporting an online rate If institutions wish to improve retention, they will need to collect these statistics. It's hard to improve what is not measured.
- For institutions reporting both completion rates, the on-campus completion rate was better than the online rate by an average of less than 5 percent.
- For all responses, the on-campus rate was only 3 percent greater than the online rate. Part of the difference was due to high completion rates for online-only institutions.   The high rates for the few online-only institutions suggest that there are lessons that could be learned from them.

Background and Methodology

There is considerable mythology around completion rates for online courses. To obtain real data, respondents were asked to estimate course completion rates at their institutions for both online and on-campus students. While some were able to provide exact data, others relied on estimates. Other than specifying the time period under consideration, the MOE survey did not provide a standard definition of completion rates. Therefore, institutions used local definitions, which could vary.

Another reason for gathering completion rate information, is the low retention rates of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which have drawn considerable attention. In an EDUCAUSE Review article in June 2013, the co-founders of Coursera reported:

> *"...in 2012, the typical Coursera MOOC enrolled between 40,000 to 60,000 students, of whom 50 to 60 percent returned for the first lecture. In those classes with required programming or peer-graded assignments, around 15 to 20 percent of lecture-watchers submitted an assignment for grading. Of this group,*

approximately 45 percent successfully completed the course and earned a Statement of Accomplishment. Thus, in total, roughly 5 percent of students who signed up for a Coursera MOOC earned a credential signifying official completion of the course."[2]

Many observers have conflated MOOCs and "traditional" online education. Some assume the MOOC completion rates are the same as those experienced by other online courses.

A Surprising Number of Institutions Don't Know Their Course Completion Rates
The most troubling and, somewhat unexpected finding was the serious limitations in the availability of data regarding completion rates. This is true both for online and on-campus courses. For institutions with on-campus students, 65 percent of respondents were not able to include the completion rates for those courses. For online courses, the numbers were slightly better, with 55 percent of respondents able to provide an estimated completion rate. If institutions are interested in improving the overall completion rates for credentials (which is a national goal in the United States), it would help to improve the completion rates of courses.

For distance education courses, one problem may be the imprecise labeling of data. As one respondent said: "We have recently come to the conclusion...that we do not have an effective typology for noting online courses in our catalogue so 'we don't know.'" Some institutions do not label the different sections by mode of instruction making it impossible to differentiate outcomes. In distance education's efforts to not differentiate between on-campus and online courses, the ability to differentiate performance outcomes may be limited by the lack of categorization. Such analysis is also hampered by inconsistent categorization across campuses.

Through comments made in the survey and from participants in groups seeing the preliminary results, additional reasons for this lack of data included: the data being "inaccessible" or not readily available, institutions that measure term-to-term retention and not course completion, and results that vary widely across majors within an institution. One disturbing reason suggested was that some institutions do not wish to share this data.

On-Campus Courses Have Higher Completion Rates, but the Difference is Often Not Large

The Overall Average: On-campus Completions Were 3 Percent Higher
The results provide slightly higher average course completion rates for on-campus students (81 percent) compared to online students (78 percent).

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[2] *Koller, Ng, Do, and Chen. 'Retention and Intention in Massive Open Online Courses,' EDUCAUSE Review. June 2013. http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/retention-and-intention-massive-open-online-courses*

Figure 7: Estimated Average Course Completion Rates
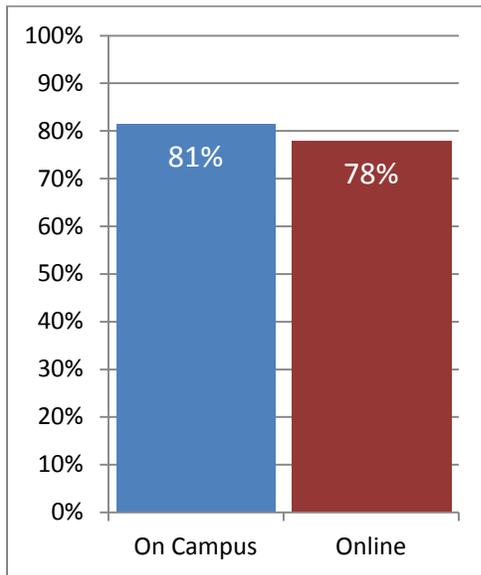
Figure 8: Estimated Average Course Completion Rates by Institution Type
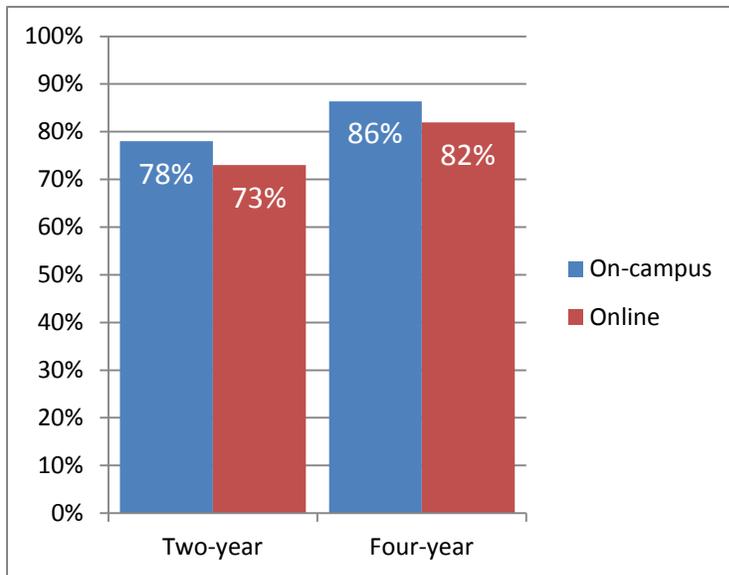
While overall average completion rates for those at two-year institutions were slightly lower than for those at four year institutions, the slight difference between online and on-campus students remains consistent across institutional type. Respondents from four-year institutions estimate course-completion rates of 86 percent for their on-campus students compared to 82 percent of their on-line students. Respondents from two-year institutions estimate 78 percent completion rates for on-campus students compared to 73 percent for online students. In results published earlier this year, the ITC Network, which serves community colleges, reported that

50% of those who responded to their survey observed that completion rates were lower for online courses than "traditional" courses[3].

For Institutions Reporting Both Rates: On-campus Completions were About 5 Percent Higher
Some institutions reported an on-campus completion rate, but not an online rate. Other institutions reported an online completion rate, but not an on-campus rate.   Perhaps the purest comparison is for those institutions reporting both rates:

- On-campus completion was better than for online courses by an average of 4.6 percent and a median of 5.0 percent.
- Twelve institutions reported online completion rates at least 10 percent worse than on-campus courses.
- Twelve institutions reported online rates equal to or better than their on-campus courses.

Completely online institutions reported completion rates of 80, 90, 93, and 93 percent, which is notably higher than the most on-campus or online rates reported. Six completely online institutions did not know their course completion rates.

Table 2: The Distribution of Course Completion Rates
Table 2 provides the distribution of course completion rate responses.

Completion Percentage	On-Campus	Online
Below 60%	1%	2%
60 - 69%	8%	20%
70 - 79%	35%	28%
80 - 89%	32%	29%
90 - 100%	24%	21%
Total Count	72	94

Again the online completion rate slightly lags the on-campus rate. In reporting a completion rate of at least 80 percent, 56 percent of the on-campus rates met or exceeded that mark as compared to only 50 percent for online responses.

NOTE: The finding on course completion rates were based on the data presented to us. Due to the large number of non-responses, drawing firm conclusions about these rates must be done with caution.

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[3] ITC Network, "Distance Education Survey Results; Trends in eLearning: Tracking the Impact of eLearning at Community Colleges." April 2013. http://itcnetwork.org/attachments/article/66/AnnualSurveyApril2013.pdf

REVIEW OF ONLINE COURSES

Summary

- About half of new (53 percent) and existing (48 percent) online courses are subject to a required review.
- Voluntary reviews of online courses are conducted 19 percent of institutions for new courses and 25 percent for existing courses.
- There is no review at all for new courses at 8 percent of institutions for new courses and 14 percent for existing courses.
- Some institutions do not review courses because they aim to build the "best practices" quality principles into the development of the course.

In the previous question, at least 85 percent of institutions indicated that they have adopted some form of "standards" or "best practices" to guide the curriculum design and teaching of online courses. One method of implementing promoting quality is through a review of the courses created. Respondents were asked about their review activities for both new and existing courses.

A word of caution, review is only one method for assuring that courses are meeting the quality standards. Quality guru W. Edwards Deming was fond of quoting statistical quality control expert Harold F. Dodge when he said, "You can't inspect quality into a product.[4]" The quality is there or is not by the time you inspect it.

Respondents reminded us that the development of courses is often the product of teamwork including faculty, instructional designers, and (sometimes) others. They are focused on using the standards and assuring that quality is part of every element of the course. Other institutions have fewer support staff, so a review process makes more sense in their setting as instructional designers (if any) might work on only part of a course. If WCET were to conduct this survey again, a question about the processes used to implement and assure quality would be added.

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[4] http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/W._Edwards_Deming; *Out of the Crisis*, p. 132.

Figure 9: Do you have a process to review all <u>new</u> online courses?
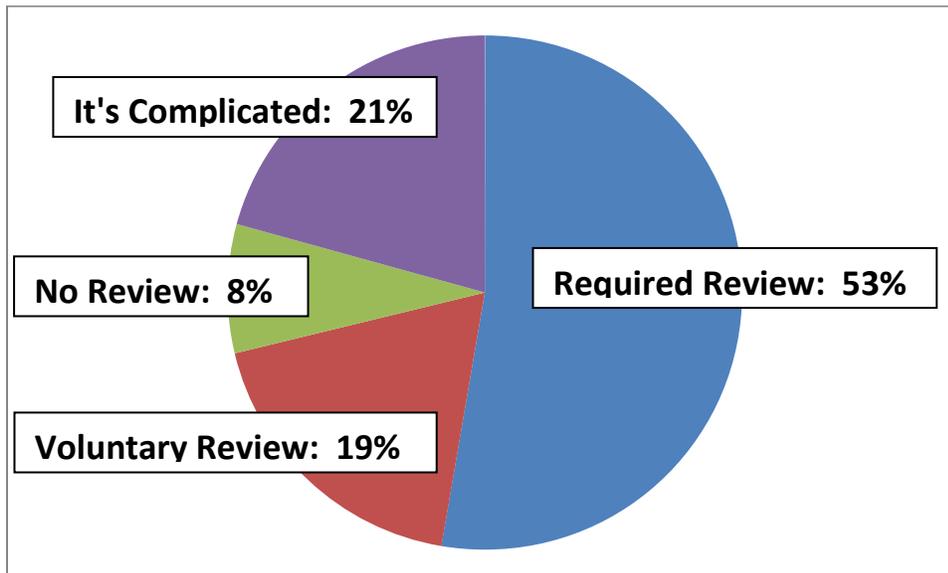
More than half of the institutions have a required review process. Although in the response to the "It's Complicated" option, another ten institutions provided clarifying responses that were really were required review processes. That would add another 4.5 percent to the "Required Review" option. Nineteen percent have a voluntary review. Only 8 percent have no review process at all.

In the "It's Complicated" category, there were a variety of responses:

- For the ten institutions that had required reviews, some of them answered in the "It's Complicated" category because they review the course only after the term has begun.
- Eight are developing review processes that are not fully implemented or are revamping processes that did not meet their needs.
- Some conduct reviews that are at a very "high level," meaning that the review might focus on issues such as spelling and proper web links and less on "best practices."
- Some build it into the course creation process, as typified by this response: "We develop courses with both an instructor (SME) and Instructional Designer. Review is built in as part of the process."
- Some said that a portion of new courses are reviewed. Criteria for triggering a review included faculty v. adjunct, who paid for developing the course, or which department developed the course.
- One respondent said that new online versions of existing face-to-face courses are not reviewed.

Figure 10: Do you have a process for ensuring course maintenance for <u>existing</u> (after they have been taught the first time) online courses?
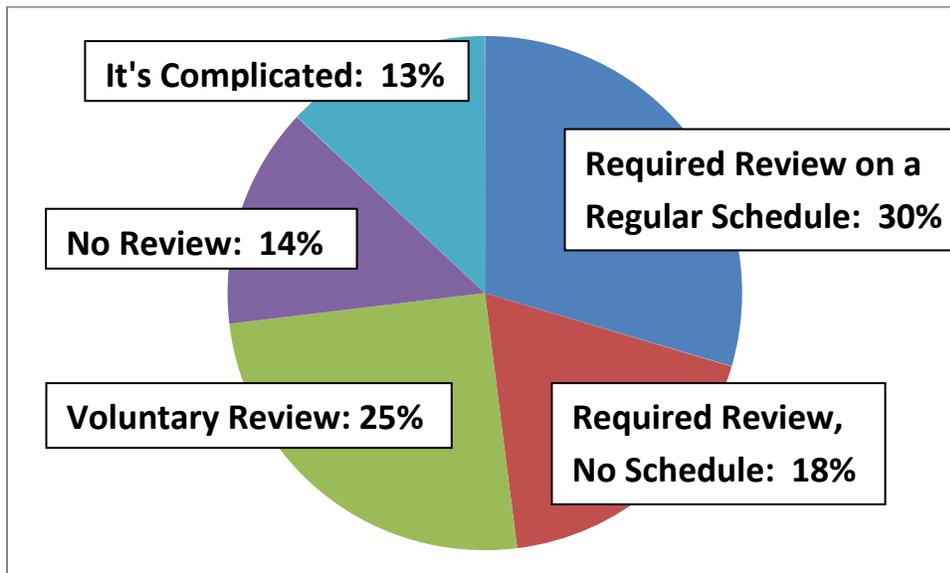
With a growing number of online courses, the burden to ensure that courses still follow "best practices" a few years after their initial development becomes greater and greater. While about 53 percent of new courses were reviewed, similarly about half of the respondents (48 percent) also have required reviews of their exiting courses. The number of voluntary review processes grew, as did those with no review of existing online courses.

In the "It's Complicated" category:

- Unlike in the previous question, there were only three responses that were variations on the "required review" options. One said that they have a requirement, but it is unevenly enforced.
- Nine respondents said that they are developing review processes, as typified by this response: "Our process for ensuring course maintenance for existing online courses is evolving from a voluntary, just-in-time method to a systematic review process with a regular schedule."
- A handful said that course quality is in the hands of the departments or colleges.
- A few said that courses developed by adjuncts are reviewed while those developed by full-time faculty are not.

ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ONLINE LEARNERS

Respondents were asked several academic and support services that they provide to online learners. They were given categories to respond based upon the service.

Summary

- Only about one quarter (22 percent) of respondents require their online students to take an orientation prior to their first online course, even though research suggests that experience aids in online course success.
- The vast majority of institutions offer library services and advising to online students. Fewer, but still a majority, offer tutoring services.
- More than three quarters of institutions have a policy on "academic integrity" (preventing cheating on assessments) for online learners. Only about 40 percent use technologies to authenticate the identity of online learners.
- Only about one-third (30 percent) of institutions offer 24/7 technical support for students. Given that students work all hours on online courses, the lack of support could hamper their success in the course.
- In meeting the needs of those with disabilities, it is alarming that sixteen percent have no policy on this subject and another thirty-six percent rely on the faculty to provide support. Therefore, at least half of the responding institutions have no systematic way to assure that students with disabilities are well-served.

It is a common mistake for institutions to heavily focus on the academics (teaching, instructional design, assessment) and technologies necessary for online courses while neglecting the other service required for student success. Ideally students would have access to library services, advising, tutoring, assessment support, and any other services commonly found on campus. The questions in this section were designed to obtain a better understanding of how many institutions are currently offering these services.

There has also been a difference of opinion on whether students should participate in an orientation session prior to taking their own online course. The theory is that students might hit roadblocks with technologies, working remotely from faculty or other students, managing their time, and other factors that differ from the normal face-to-face course

Finally, respondents were asked about two key support services: the availability of student support services and who holds the responsibility for assuring that students with disabilities are served properly. These questions were asked in the unpublished 2011 Managing Online Education survey. Results from that survey are provided for comparison purposes.

Our Academic and Student Support Services...

Figure 11: Require learners to take an orientation module before their first online course.

22%
47%
31%
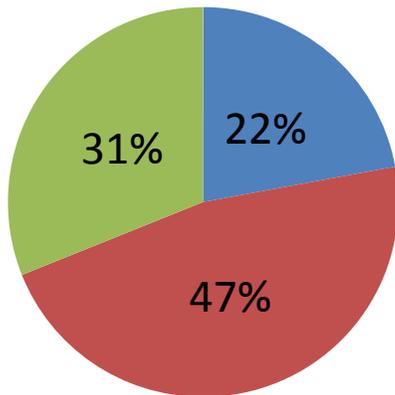
■ YES   ■ NO   ■ PARTIALLY

Almost half of respondents do not require an orientation course of new students. Less than a quarter require an orientation. The "partially" response probably reflects voluntary orientations, in-course experiences, or varied practices across an institution. Research shows that "experience matters" in online course success.

http://wcetblog.wordpress.com/2013/04/25/experience_matters/

Figure 12: Provide library and learning resource services to support online students.

2% 9%
89%
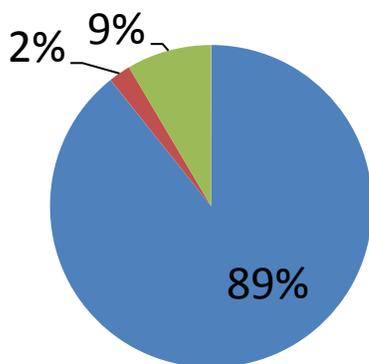
■ YES   ■ NO   ■ PARTIALLY

It is not surprising that nearly all institutions provide online library services to support their students.

Our Academic and Student Support Services...

Figure 13: Provide advising to online learners.

5% 16%

79%
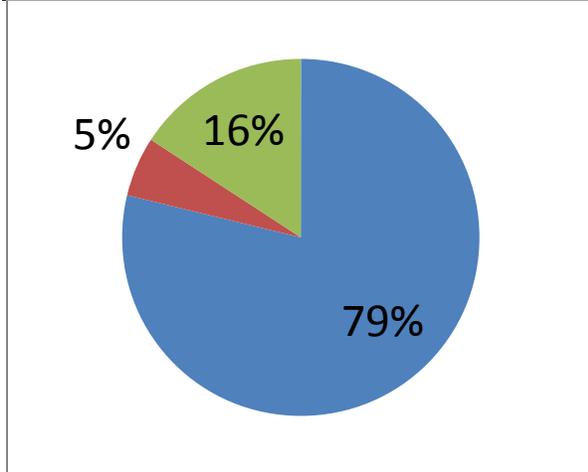
■ YES ■ NO ■ PARTIALLY

More than three-quarters of the respondents provide advising to online students. For the small number of institutions that do not provide advising, it might be because they are not yet offering full academic programs at a distance.

Figure 14: Provide tutoring services to online learners.

29%

12% 59%
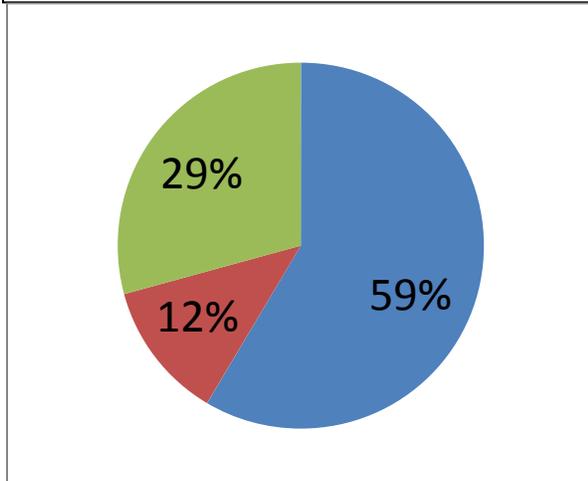
■ YES ■ NO ■ PARTIALLY

Online students need the same support as on-campus students. For students struggling with a course, tutoring is a helpful safety net to help them succeed. Three out of five provide tutoring and 29 percent provide it "partially." This might mean faculty-based student support to some, but it would be interesting to probe this "partially" response in more depth. Those without tutoring are probably short-changing their students.

Our Academic and Student Support Services...

Figure 15: Includes a policy on academic integrity for online learners.
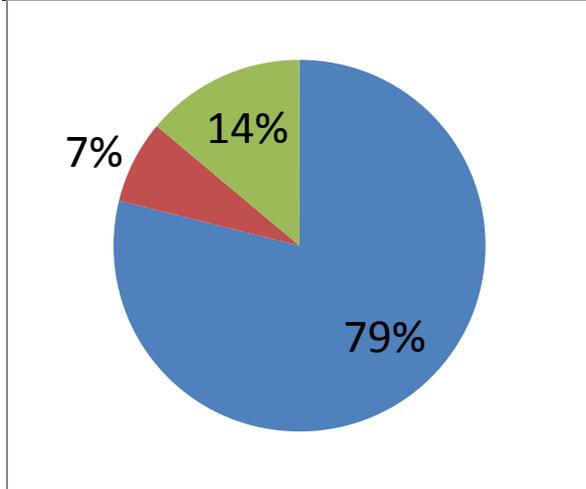
- YES
- NO
- PARTIALLY

In an online course, assuring that the student who takes an assessment is the one who registered for the course is now federal law in the U.S. The vast majority of institutions are addressing this issue.

Figure 16: Uses technologies to authenticate the identity of online learners for assessments.
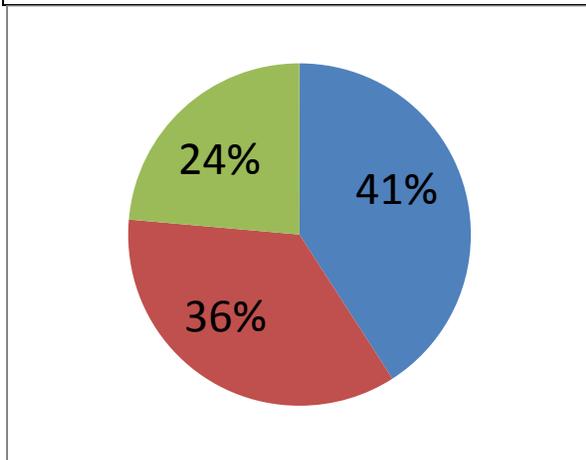
- YES
- NO
- PARTIALLY

There are many ways to ensure "academic integrity." The use of technology (cameras, biometrics, challenge questions) is a relatively recent option for institutions. Forty-one percent are using these technologies. It would be interesting to learn more about the practices used to curb cheating by the other respondents.

Our Academic and Student Support Services...

Figure 17: Identifies proctoring sites for online learners at a distance.
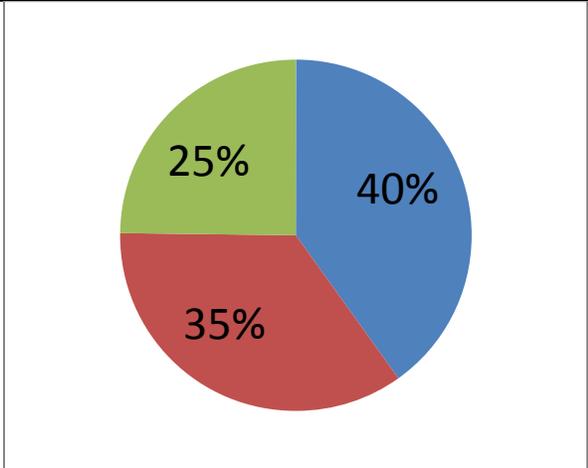
YES   NO   PARTIALLY

Not every online program uses proctoring, but it is informative to learn about the number of institutions that are using this tool to ensure "academic integrity." Some use proctoring as an alternative or instead of the "technology tools" cited in the previous question. As the "technology tools" grow in coming years, it will be interesting to see if less proctoring occurs.

Figure 18: Which statement below best describes the availability of technical support services for your online students?

2013

24/7: 30%

9-5 Weekdays Only: 19%

9-5 & Some Evenings: 21%

9-5; Some Evenings & Weekends: 31%

2011

24/7: 34%

9-5 Weekdays Only: 12%

9-5 & Some Evenings: 20%

9-5; Some Evenings & Weekends: 35%
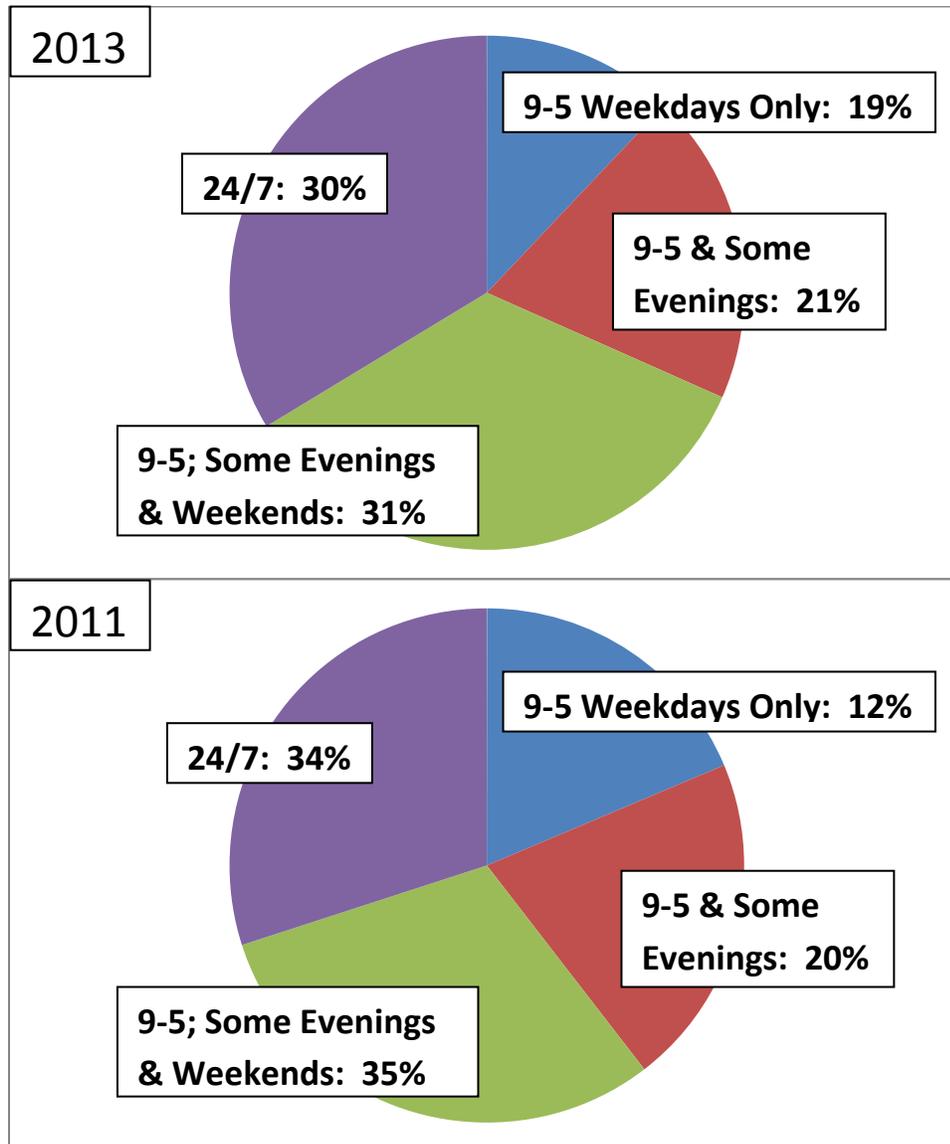
With online students working on their coursework around the clock, it is conceivable that they would be interested in having access to technical support at any time. About one-in-five respondents provide technical support only during weekday, day time hours. Only 30 percent provide 24/7 support. The lack of support may prove to hamper students in maintaining progress in their courses. In comparing the results with 2011, there was a drop in the "9-5 Weekdays Only" category. The changes in the other categories (including a drop in 24/7 support) are small and might be due to sampling differences between the years.

Figure 19: When considering your support for persons with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act or Provincial legislation on accessibility), which statement best describes the current policies and procedures as to whether your online courses meet the needs for those with disabilities?

2013

Other: 15% No Policy: 16%

Inst. Examines Courses: 15%

Each Faculty Responsible: 36%

Inst. Audits Courses: 6%

Each College Responsible: 12%

2011

Each Faculty Responsible: 39% No Policy: 20%

Inst. Examines Courses: 13%

Each College Responsible: 18% Inst. Audits Courses: 10%
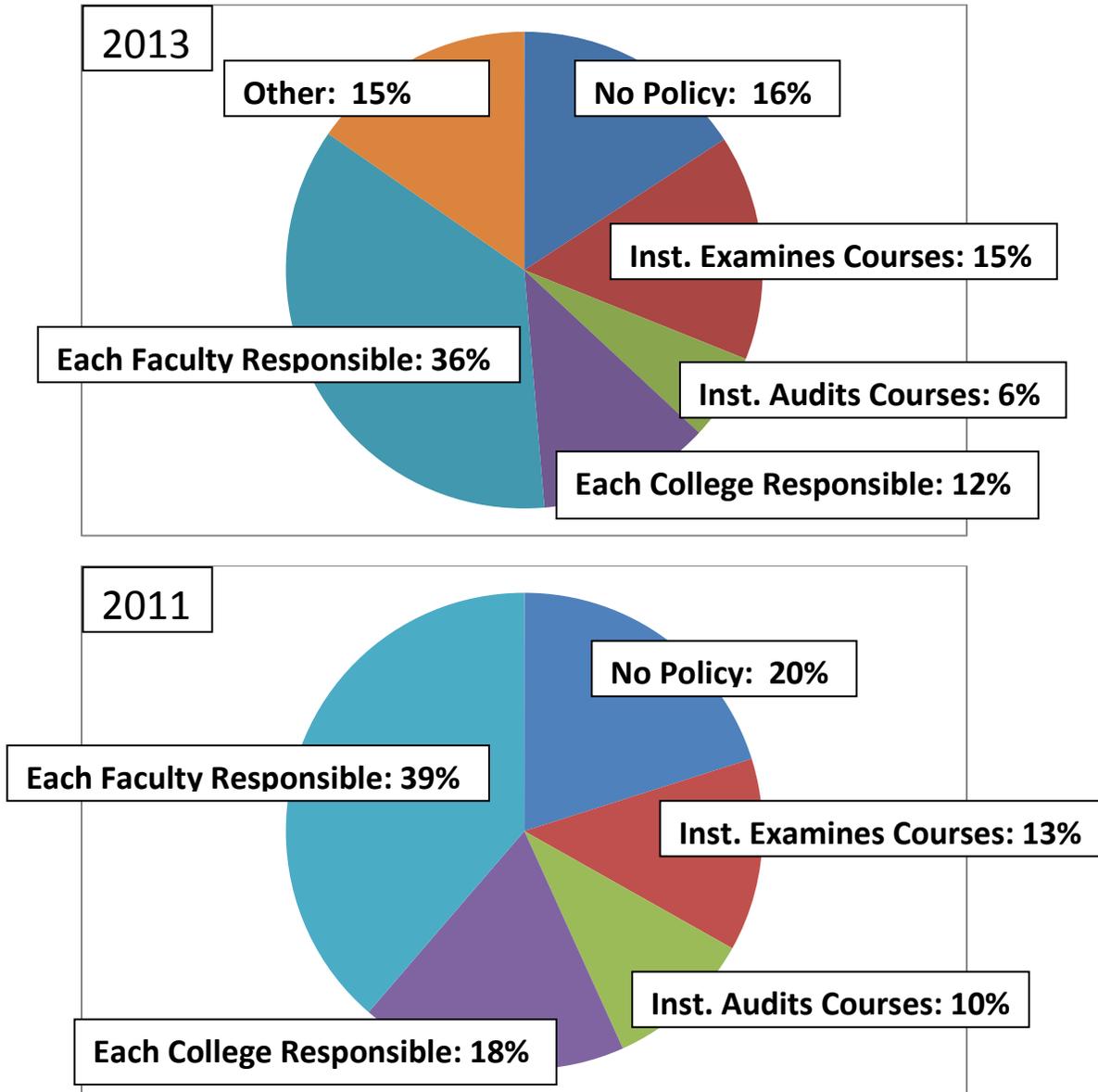
In the U.S., the Department of Education has issued official letters urging colleges to assure that their educational technologies are accessible to those with disabilities. For those in Canada, the policies vary by province. It is alarming that sixteen percent of respondents have no policy on this subject and another thirty-six percent rely on the faculty to provide support. Therefore, at

least half of the responding institutions have no systematic way to assure that students with disabilities are well-served.

In the 2013 question, an "Other" option was added and respondents were allowed to comment on their practice that they did not believe fit into any of the categories provided. The responses tended to fall into four categories:

- The institution has the issue under review and/or a policy is being developed.
- Accessibility is "built-in as part of the design/development process."
- While faculty are responsible, there are support units to help the faculty person.
- Accessibility is addressed on a case-by-case or individual basis: "if a student self-identifies a disability, that student is provided a form to complete..."
- Finally, there was some denial or underestimating of the scope of the problem: "our learning management system is compliant."

While institutions are well-meaning in trying to serve students with disabilities, the cost of compliance and the difficulties of trying to comply with the many variations on disabilities complicate the task. Still many institutions seem to have a long way to go in systematically addressing the issue and there appears to have been little improvement since 2011.

DEVELOPING ONLINE CONTENT

For your online courses, how do you handle the development of online curricula?

Summary

- The vast majority of online courses use content that is developed in-house by faculty and instructional designers.
- About 60 percent of institutions use open content, but it is used only in a small number of courses.

Those in online education have many options for developing and adapting content for their courses. This question helped to ascertain the content options that institutions are embracing. In answering the question, respondents were provided with the following options and definitions:

- "We Develop Our Own Course Content": We rely on full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and instructional designers to develop and design our courses.
- "We License Commercially-Developed Courses": We contract with publishers or other companies to license mass-produced course content, software, and materials.
- "We Use Open Content": We use open educational resources that are freely accessible and openly licensed.
- "We Contract with a Third-Party Vendor for Course Development": We contract with a third-party vendor to create custom courses for our institution.

Table 3: For your online courses, how do you handle the development of online curricula?

	Do not use	Use for less than 25% of our courses	Use for 26%-50% of our courses	Use for 51-75% of our courses	Use for more than 75% of our courses
Develop own content	1.8%	3.1%	3.6%	8.5%	83.0%
License commercial content	60.0%	34.9%	4.6%	0.5%	0%
Use open content	38.5%	50.8%	6.2%	2.1%	2.6%
Contract with a 3rd party vendor	79.5%	16.4%	2.6%	0.5%	1.0%
Other	90.8%	5.0%	0.8%	1.7%	1.7%

Note that more than one type of content can be used in a course and there may be great differences in content mix in courses across each institution.

Figure 20: Institutions Still Rely Strongly on Developing Their Own Course Content
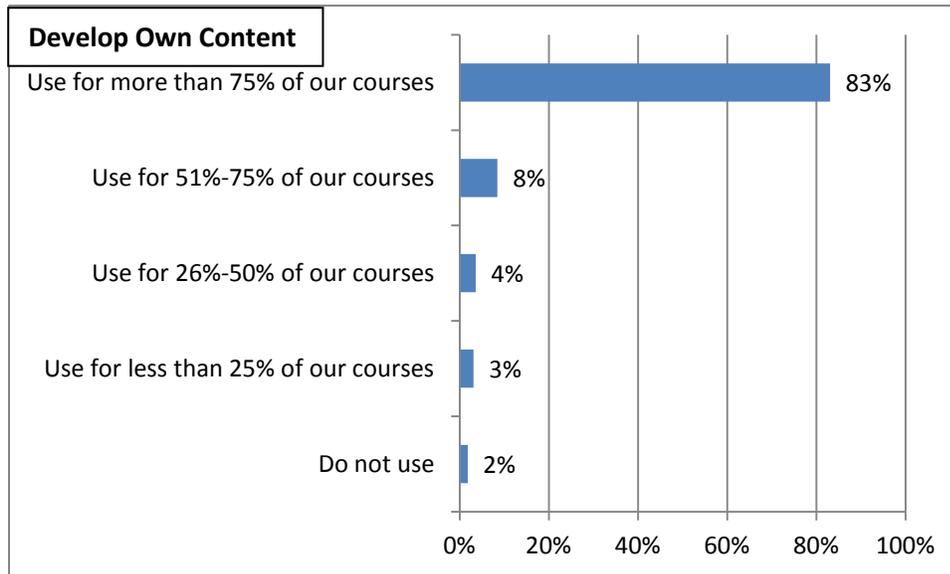
There is still great reliance on content that is created by faculty and instructional designers. Such content is used in the vast majority of courses across responding campuses. Given the adaptation of traditional course models into the online environment, this also could be predictable. Although given the growing number of options, it is a bit surprising that there has not been more movement.

Figure 21: Course Content Types that Institutions "Do Not Use"

Do Not Use (This Type of Content)	
Contract with a 3rd party vendor	80%
Use open content	39%
License commercial content	60%
Develop own content	2%
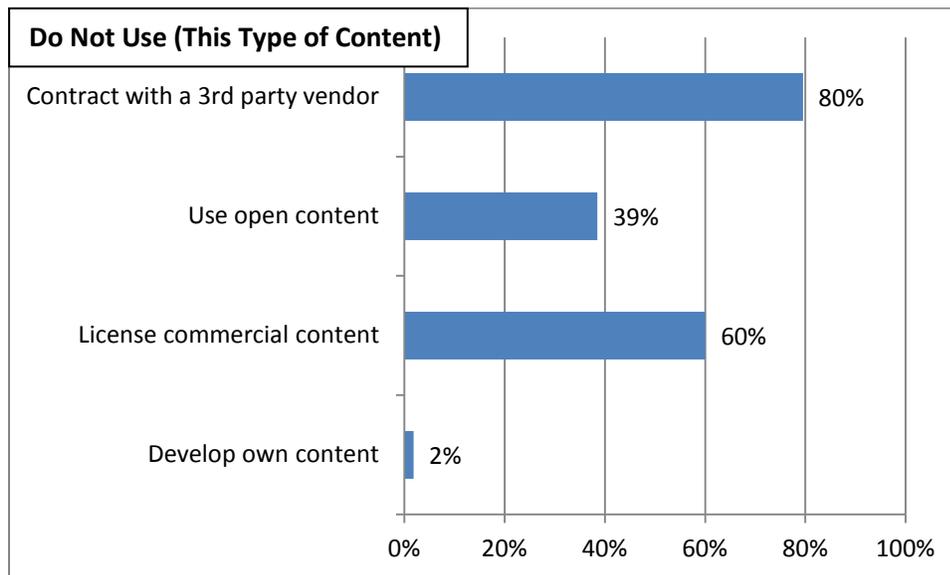
Beyond the "Develop Own Content" option, it is instructive to look at the number of respondents who say that they "Do Not Use" that type of content in any of their courses.

- Contracting with a third-party vendor for content made specifically for an institution is the newest of the options. There are a growing number of companies that create entire courses and academic programs for institutions. Their services are especially popular among those new to online education. Since this is relatively new service, it is not surprising that about 80 percent of institutions do not avail themselves of this option.
- "Open content" has the greatest uptake of any of the non-traditional options with three out of five institutions using it. For most institutions, open content is still used in small number of courses. The open content movement has been growing in the past few years and it will be interesting to see if it continues to grow.
- "Licensed commercial content" has been around for years and publishers have been at the forefront of developing and offering course modules, simulations, and other supplementary materials for years. Even with this history, 60 percent of institutions do not use this content in any of their online courses.

The "Other" responses were not very informative as most respondents choosing this option said that they used a variety of content types and/or they used teams of faculty and instructional designers to create content, which is a variation on "Develop Own Content."

In future years, as alternative types of content become more abundant, it will be interesting to see if there is greater adoption of those resources.

SHARE "OTHER" QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITES

> ## Question: Please share any other activities that you take to ensure and/or assess the quality of your blended, online, and distance courses.

In case the other questions did not capture some aspect of ensuring quality in blended, online, and distance courses, respondents were given the opportunity to describe their quality assurance activities in their own words. With some answers being very terse and others more descriptive, 134 people responded to this question. Even though the responses were open ended, they are quantified below with excerpts of some notable responses provided.

The Most Commonly Cited "Other" Activities

- Twenty respondents cited some form of on-going faculty development including regular workshops, informal "brown bag" discussions in which faculty can share and learn from each other, or faculty mentoring programs in which newer faculty are paired with experienced colleagues.
- Fourteen said that they depended on the faculty evaluation (student input on faculty) as a method of assuring quality. One respondent lamented the lack of faculty evaluation and reported that they "must fix" that shortcoming.
- Twelve respondents cited their review of courses as a source of "quality control." Some cited having rubrics for these review.
- Nine cited extensive faculty development requirements for faculty. Models included: a faculty certification program, a workshop that included a faculty stipend, a three-hour training session, a week-long summer workshop, and an "8-week, 80 hour" program.
- Eight said that they review courses on a regular cycle. One institution said that all courses are reviewed regardless of the mode of delivery. Others reported review cycles of two-to-five years.

Comments of Note

On Faculty Development...

- "We offer individualized on-campus support sessions for the two weeks prior to the start of the online learning semester. These are extremely popular with online learning instructors and it gives them a chance to fine tune their course or skill."

- "We have full time faculty who are paid a stipend to be online lead faculty. They have the responsibility of making sure faculty (full and part) in their content area are meeting the minimum faculty responsibilities for teaching online courses."

On Student Support...

- "We do not have any student support. There is only a support desk for login issues. We have a webpage of reference and tutorial materials for students. The faculty member is considered student support, just like in a regular course."
- "We use an early alert system at week 2 for students who haven't yet started their courses and at week 6 for faculty to report students who need more help."
- "We check student attendance and faculty engagement in online course weekly."
- "Students are to have online skype or visual discussion with the faculty at some point in the program."
- "We have in place communication guidelines to ensure students are receiving answers to all questions in a timely manner."

On Organizational Issues...

- "We have a shared governance committee that works on policy/procedure and best practice development to be shared with the college for review and approval."
- "We have a college-wide eCourses committee led by faculty that develops a strategic plan, works in cooperation with our Center for Teaching and Learning to provide training for those faculty who want to teach online."
- "Divisions have set their own standards for assessment and quality We have offered a standardized format for LMS usage from the TTC but there is a strong spirit of independence among the faculty that prevails in this area."
- "We try to do this internally, with no advice. Our online delivery is not benchmarked or evaluated for effectiveness. Faculty think their content expertise is sufficient for online delivery."

WHAT PRACTICE IS CENTRAL TO SUCCESS IN ONLINE LEARNING?

> **Question: Please share what you consider to be a practice or set of practices that you believe are central to your success in online learning?**

This open-ended question sought to elicit the practices that practitioners found to be the most valuable in ensuring quality in blended, online, and distance courses. With some answers being very terse and others more descriptive, 157 people responded to this question. Even though the responses were open-ended, they are quantified below with excerpts of some notable responses provided.

When seen all together, the advice seems to be:

- Start with a quality rubric so that all are clear on the expectations.
- Develop faculty before they teach their first course on successful online teaching practices.
- Use a "team" approach in developing and offering the course.
- Develop courses with extensive student engagement.
- Encourage on-going faculty sharing of their experiences.
- Provide extensive student services to meet student needs and to relieve faculty of having to provide support beyond their academic role.

The Most Commonly Cited Practices Central To Their Success in Online Learning

- Thirty-seven cited that having some form of "best practices" or quality rubric was the key. Some adopt quality standards developed externally, while many report developing their own "best practices" by taking the best from multiple rubrics. While some have use a standard template for courses, a few respondents were adamant that faculty still have flexibility in designing their courses.
- Twenty-nine cited the need for faculty development before they teach their first online class. While the faculty experience varies from campus-to-campus, some institutions require faculty to receive "certification" as on online instructor. One respondent said: "Required training has definitely been the key to our success! We have a DE faculty training course that is the equivalent of a 3-unit college class."
- Twenty-one added that on-going faculty development is key. Workshops, refresher courses, individual, group, in-person, and online development experiences were cited. One institution said that it has more than 100 online tutorials for faculty.
- Twenty cited the "team" approach of collaborative course development. Faculty, instructional designers, and student support staff all work together to maximize the student experience. Institutions accomplish this by assigning "course managers," developing a community of practice

- with all team members, and encouraging a personalized relationship between all team members.
- Eighteen cited the need for courses that encourage student engagement. Whether it is faculty-to-student or student-to-student, respondents cited the success they observed in having the student actively involved in meaningful interactions with the faculty, other students, and the content. A few said that they provide guidelines for interaction and a few check the course to assure that interactions are occurring.
- Thirteen cited student support services in helping the student to navigate the course. Beyond basic services (help desk, technical support, online advising), one institution said that it tracks every student "issue" in customer relationship management software which allows them to use concrete data to address those issues in a systematic way.

Comments of Note

On Selecting/Recruiting Faculty

- "Quality instructors. We know that not every instructor or student works well in an online environment, so we have taken it slowly on the development and offering of courses to make sure we had a very good match."
- "We ask potential course developers to complete an application form prior to agreement to develop a course. The application asks the developer to indicate learning objectives, how the course fits within the department or program."
- "We have started approaching faculty and department chairs who offer online programs and suggest that a marketing strategy could be quality, and recommend they have their courses reviewed by the instructional designers (based on the QM standards."

On Faculty Development...

- "Applying the same course objectives and learning outcomes assessments to on-line courses as applied to traditional courses."
- "Provide a schedule that incorporates timelines and deliverables to have ample time and access to resources."

On Data...

- "Our assessment methodologies, and moreover the data collected has proved invaluable on many levels."
- "Measurement and documentation of success is key to identifying where improvement is needed and what works when changes are made."

On Student Support/Interaction...

- "Student services for online learners are essential to success. Providing students the support they need when they need it keeps them connected to the college and positively impacts persistence."
- "We answer all student issues in the DL office within 4 hours during the week. Constant student contact is vital both from this office and the faculty."
- "By front-loading our detection and support services, we help build student self confidence. Experience has shown that by the end of the second term, the low self confidence students start to rally, and the likelihood of successful completion."
- "Our success in online learning is dependent on the level of interaction the faculty and advisors have with our online students. We require and suggest the professors incorporate a variety of ways for the students to be involved in the course."

On Organizational Issues...

- "The <<Central Unit>> pays all expenses, including instructional, out of a base budget allocation. What has happened is that departments see this process as a way of increasing their enrolments without incurring instructional costs. Thus, we have no problems attracting online course content. However, the University needs to think strategically about the courses it offers online in the very near future as the instructional budget for online courses is getting out of hand."
- "Complete integration and mirroring of campus and online courses, programs and processes is both the strength and weakness of the online program."
- "I believe that developing a schedule of full reviews for online courses, including setting limits on how long a reviewed course can be taught before being reviewed again is crucial to maintaining quality courses."
- "It is a hodge podge."