

Distance Education Growth Opinions January 2018

In January of 2018, WCET asked its members the following question on its discussion email list. Below are the responses in rough categories. Many of the responses cover more than one aspect of the growth of distance education. You might have categorized them differently. The responses are unedited.

2. Please comment. Please provide any opinions that you have about the growth in students who are studying completely at a distance.



Quality in lectures / Student value quality of the online experience

The cost of face to face education and the huge debt students carry force them to make choices including distance education. Students don't feel they get good value for their money when they sit in lectures where they are an anonymous person with hundreds and sometimes thousands of other students. Brick and mortar will have to be better to keep enrollments.

We advocate distance learning in that it enhances access, provides a flexible pathway for students, and leads to increased completion/graduation rates. It is critically important that we ensure that the same academic rigor exists for distance learning and face to face. It is also important to provide adequate student support services to ensure student success. This can get missed by the students that are not on campus. We are experiencing a significant uptick in the number of students taking all (100%) of their courses online. Many of our non-academic facilities are supported by student fees and were built assuming enrollment growth. Students that take 100% of their courses online are exempt from many of these fees, which is negatively impacting the revenues streams that support these facilities, assuming that these distance learning students are coming at the expense of face to face. Additionally, we charge a "differential" for online courses. But do online courses really cost more to deliver? Conversely, many in the general public (including legislators) believe that the delivery of distance education costs less. These are all challenges and questions that we are trying to better understand and address.

The growth is a natural reflection of the what's happening in the real world where brick 'n' mortar enterprises are being bypassed by online counterparts. The trend began as a disruption, serving nontraditional college students, but it's gradually consuming traditional students as well who appreciate the convenience of anytime-anywhere learning. Colleges are still a step behind, with online promotion and support efforts relying primarily on F2F and synchronous in-service workshops to bring faculty up to speed. The obvious result is increased blended strategies among instructors, but these "improvements" reach traditional students only and ignore the nontraditionals and traditionals who are swinging over to completely online offerings. College administrators and their appointed online-instruction service-providing staff still don't understand the critical difference between blended and completely online and rely on in-service platforms (F2F workshops, synchronous webinars, etc.) that inadvertently model and

promote blended instead of online practices. Their rationale is that this is what traditional teachers will respond to. The problem is that they're playing to teachers' fears and prolonging in-person and synchronous methods that go against the grain of the exponential growth in preference for online asynchronous (anywhere-anytime) services. Instead of dipping their toes in the online waters, colleges need to jump in and learn how to swim.

In our experience over the last 20 years, online is growing and now a more acceptable and recognized option. In the beginning we needed to explain more to applicants about online courses and justify their quality. Now students in our graduate program come directly to an online program with experience taking online courses and state their preference is online.

Online bolsters face-to-face

Just by looking at enrollment numbers, it seems possible that online enrollment bolsters face-to-face enrollment at the university I work for.

Shift to online / cannibalizing

There is definitely an enrollment shift from face to face to online enrollments for our on campus traditional student. In the present adult market, online enrollments are new students who wouldn't choose a face to face option at our university given locale.

Students are voting for online with their feet. While I do think that online growth is cannibalizing on the ground enrollments to some degree, institutions that do not have an online strategy face a real risk of losing students to other institutions that do have online options.

The students who had been served by regional campuses and evening/weekend programs are no longer studying on a campus but have migrated to online programs, reducing the number of students traditionally counted in f2f without increasing student numbers overall. I do believe that we will see growth in hybrid programs as institutions find ways to meet students' demands for cohort and f2f interaction as well as flexibility and access. This will continue to concentrate enrollments around physical locations. How do these statistics relate to the trends in students who study f2f out-of-state; are those trending down as well? Institutions can not afford not to offer online programs in order to compete in the current market for students but it comes at a cost and the need for reallocation of resources.

We are in a zero-sum game. Online learning's former driver was reaching new students; it is now a strategy to maintain enrollment. Students are choosing convenience out of necessity, given the demographics associated with 2018 college students, which is increasingly adult learners. If it were not for distance education, US higher ed would be suffering even large enrollment declines.

At our college our F2F numbers are seriously down and our online courses have been growing at approx. 9% per year for the last 3 years. Same analogy is occurring in retail where brick/mortar stores are suffering while online shopping is exploding. We are sacrificing the in-person experience with the online because it is convenient, quick and meets the needs of the consumer's lifestyle and goals. I personally believe that the best learning happens in hybrid courses, but getting students to embrace being on a

campus versus at home for their schooling is likely a hard sell to many students. The for profit schools have contributed, in my opinion, to a learning model that promotes online as easier and faster methods to a degree, which has cheapened overall education.

Our institution serves the primarily post-traditional students and there is a lot of misinformation that leads them to DE courses as they think they will be more flexible, easier to manage, etc. Some of this is true or true in part, but the focus so many schools have put on this can put the face to face courses at a disadvantage and therefore disadvantage the students that need face to face type courses. On the positive side I have also seen more efforts toward developing blended or hybrid options which try to bridge the best of both worlds.

There is a need to be more targeted in our marketing of this modality. Who learns best in an online environment? Fully online learners are missing the relevant and critical development that occurs through out of class activities and experiences with other students, faculty, and staff.

Obvious it is coming at expense of face to face when total enrollments are slightly down. With regard to why online growth? a) more and quality online offerings b) convenience c) cost (don't have to incur additional living costs)

Some of the growth is moving students from taking on-campus classes to online classes. Also, the competition is fierce and many schools now offer online programs.

Distance meets student needs

Our face-to-face numbers have been dropping while our hybrid or online classes are rising. No one seems to want to sit in a classroom for that many hours a week.

Students, traditional and nontraditional aged, are looking for shorter, more convenient means to gain education and credentials

Unique programs are enticing students to complete entire programs online. Though the student who would have been considered traditional is now taking an online course at least once if not more each year he/she is enrolled in higher education. Online is serving a multitude of audiences.

Students are ready for the next generation of instruction. They are voting with their feet to take courses in a way that makes sense to them and to their individual lifestyles. Colleges who thrive will adjust to the changing needs and desires of these students.

Access / convenience

Students often need to be able to work while completing a degree at the same time. This often means that distance education is the best fit for this growing number of students.

Many find the ease n accessibility to instruction. Simultaneously the quality n rigor of instruction may not rise to the levels inherent in f2f instruction

Providing students with options in pursuing and earning degrees improves access to education. Many students would not be able to earn degrees if not for the flexibility that hybrid and online courses provide, because rising tuition costs have significantly out-paced wage increases. If we want an educated populace, we have to do all that we can to improve access to education. Modality of instruction is not just a technological issue, nor is it just a pedagogical issue. Perhaps most importantly, it is an equity issue.

The are post-traditional/adult and not able to pause life and come to residential campuses .

Some, if not a significant portion of the growth as a result of the convenience for students. Some of the growth in offerings comes because of the growth in third party providers making it convenient for institutions to offer.

With respect to new enrollments, it's about access: for many students, distance is the only option for pursuing an education. That said, we do see some students start F2F out of online education anxiety, and when they do get their feet wet online, they like its approach and convenience and move to it more steadily.

Many (if not most) of these students cannot make it to a traditional class because of time conflicts.

Relatively more of the distance ed growth is driven by students who would not come to campus, but in our case we see an impact on F2F too.

With a high proportion of adults employed and increasingly busy lives, students (other than those seeking the first-time, full-time experience right out of HS), need schedule and location flexibility.

It is real and we had better get accustom to it. Much growth is due to student demand for online and flexible options.

I think the flexibility offered by fully online programs means that additional students now have the opportunity to earn a degree. There may be some distance ed students who would have come to campus, but the majority would not.

As distance learning is becoming more reputable and common in universities that typically are bricks-and-mortar, more adult learners are seeing the opportunities to complete degrees or begin degrees while they continue working full-time. Universities are also growing the number of programs which is attracting more students.

There are many people in rural America and the world, as well as adults with jobs and families who now have an opportunity to obtain an advanced degree because learning has been brought to them through online education. In many cases, it's not likely these students would have considered attending brick and mortar institutions since location and scheduling are major factors in their decision to pursue an advanced degree.

Increase has a lot to do with scheduling for the students

Students studying exclusively or primarily online are often non-consumers of traditional post-secondary education. So they are net-new enrollments that would not have come otherwise.

We have done quite a bit of work with our data and feel confident that the growth in our online only student numbers represent new students who would not otherwise have been served by the university. There has been a shift to more campus students taking online courses but this most generally represents efforts by departments to offer additional sections of high demand courses and create greater flexibility in space utilization while containing capital investment costs.

I think that the key word in this questions is "completely" at a distance. As someone who is enrolled in an online doctorate, I have options and I am no longer locked into my area to go to school. I can get the exact degree that I am looking for, not "something comparable" and I am more worried about getting the education over getting the "college experience"

I believe that distance education is a viable option for many of our students at the community college level. Most of our students work and have families and DE saves them a lot of travel time (which may be used for studying). Distance education enables a student to pursue their educational goals and still meet the demands of work and family

DE courses provide access to education that traditional 10-2 F2F courses can not.

"Build it and they will come." To remain competitive, institutions need to be conscience of the expectations their consumers have, and this includes higher education. Options for mobile learning is clearly one of today's expectations.

it results in more students taking college classes in our rural state because they are geographically isolated.

I believe the growth we are seeing in distance education is related to the demand of our students. Online is more convenient for many demographics of students (especially adult learners).

They are given the option to complete courses and degree that they might not otherwise be able to complete because of work and family commitments. Offering distance education courses also help our face to face students complete their degrees and for some in a timely fashion. These programs do not cannibalize or compete one another, they assist students in completing their degrees.

We will continue to see more distance growth than face-to-face. Circumstances of the world we live in now may require people to get more instruction throughout their lives. They are not going to keep physically coming back to universities to update their skills or change careers.

NOTE on Q1: I don't see the growth of online at our institution as PRIMARILY being driven by revenue generation, but it is certainly a factor that drives the institutional support for online (often incurring antagonism from the face-to-face elements of our institution). The growth of online at our institution has absolutely increased access to higher ed among our student population. This is a population who

would not come to campus for further education, but who feel that further education (primarily at the graduate level) will benefit them professionally. With the current low unemployment rate, it remains to be seen whether this perception will remain persuasive enough to continue driving enrollment, or whether our model will need to change in perhaps fundamental ways.

Flexibility and options available for students are key.

In my conversations with nontraditional students, distance education provides opportunities to receive education that wouldn't otherwise be all that attainable. Distance education opportunities seem to be opening up a lot more educational options for nontraditional learners as well. Quite often I will meet people within my university's immediate jurisdiction who are attending distance programs from other universities. It would seem the expanded marketplace is giving students more opportunities in general to take classes, although they may not take classes at the institution that is closest to them.

More students see the online option as more convenient, especially in professions with different work schedules. The students now taking online are more comfortable with the technology compared to a few years ago when the adult students did not use computers regularly. Students can find a program that meets their particular needs even if one is not located close to them.

Adults whose schedules prevented them from attending courses at fixed times (primarily in the evening).

I believe that the growth in online education is primarily from adult students who make thoughtful and informed decisions and conclude an online program best fits their needs given all their real-world responsibilities.

The students who study online (either at my institution or people I know) would not go to campus to take classes. They are non-traditional students looking for an alternative to the traditional middle-of-the-day class offerings.

Amazing opportunity to provide quality educational experiences for students that previously we not able to attend. It is critical to include timely feedback, humanizing the instruction and learning and avoid asynchronous sterile experiences.

The world is changing. Students have competing priorities. Fewer students can delay entering the work force and have the support and free time to focus on school only. Distance education provides them a solution that allows them to pursue their higher education and better themselves while being able to support themselves in the real world. Get used to this. Fewer middle class parents have the funds to sponsor full time students thanks to the direction our government is headed in.

While there are some who think DE comes at the expense of traditional programs, a quick review of the IPEDS data on age ranges attending traditional vs online indicates older students opting for online.

While our online enrollments are mainly students who also enroll face-to-face, or have replaced face-to-face students as a program moved entirely online, we do enroll about 20% entirely new students.

However the biggest advantage may have been increased degree completion for those who leave the area before graduating.

It's really about convenience and options, I don't see DE as taking students away from our on-campus programs. Many of our DE students are unable to attend courses on campus so our programs open up opportunities for this population. IMO the decline we see in some F2F campus enrollments has more to do with employment opportunities than the impact of DE. Over the years we have seen drop-offs in campus enrollments as our economy improves and jobs become readily available.

These are students who are primarily not able to attend in person and would otherwise not be enrolled. Institutions are not focused on quality enough; students stick with DE because it's their ONLY option but they're not getting a fair shake in terms of quality because schools aren't focusing on the faculty incentives and course quality priorities; instead looking just at the numbers and assuming success in pedagogical quality. The numbers reflect desperation, not program quality.

Many students cannot afford to give up their jobs in order to attend college. Therefore, distance learning provides opportunities students would not otherwise have. At our institution it is difficult for some of our students to get to campus as they can't afford a car. Distance learning provides the only avenue for them to obtain a degree.

The identity of "non-traditional" students is becoming blurred - we see a majority of students are adults, not fresh from high school. Many are working adults, with families, who need an alternative to the day-time only class schedules. Distance education provides that alternative and fills the needs for many students. This encourages a migration from F2F to at least some fully online enrollments. Students are also more technically aware, sometimes more than faculty, and are asking for more web-based materials. This is encouraging the expansion of hybrid options (replacing seat time), as well as "web enhanced" (no seat time replacement, but materials are available electronically). This provides an additional bonus of allowing scheduling to be more flexible for limited grounded resources.

DE has provided new options for traditional students as well as non traditional ones. To some extent it has taken the place of face to face options while at the same time grown the overall student market since it has broadened access.

evolving technology has contributed to the ability to provide high quality, highly engaging online courses. This has increase access to education for many who would not be able to do this otherwise. An educated consumer and the pervasiveness of technology that connects (social media and other tools) has contributed to the growth.

Distance courses offer students more options and flexibility. Distance courses are the only/best option for working students, students with physical disabilities, single parents, and students who don't live near a college campus.

In the Great Plains states, marketing must be outside the area to maintain or increase enrollment. There are unserved adults who desire a degree or other credential, but the people are not where the

educational opportunities are located. The offering of hybrid and online classes has not increased greatly in this area, largely due to opposition to online in any form by faculty. Approximately 1/4 headcount and 1/5 credit hours are from F2F students taking an online course for its flexibility (jobs, family responsibilities, speeding up degree completion, intercollegiate athletics, and so forth).

I believe it is largely due to unstable work schedules and the difficulties of commuting rather than an educational preference.

Students want options. Life circumstances that limit mobility or access and travel costs and challenges make distance learning attractive.

As I stated in the question above, I believe part of it is serving a population that is not served by the residential experience. These are students who are professionals, or are otherwise employed during the time typically used by residential campuses to deliver instruction (i.e. business hours). I like to refer to such students as temporally displaced. They're not geographically displaced, which is the first thing we think of when we use terms like "distance students," "distance education," etc., but have commitments during business hours that preclude them from being able to participate in the residential experience. The reality is that--at least for our institution--the majority of these students are within 100 miles of the residential campus. Last fall, this was 58%, with 38% being fewer than 50 miles from campus). Before "distance" education, they would have either commuted or just not have participated at all.

Due to the fact the economy is good people have jobs so don't have the flexibility to come to in person classes.

A couple of factors: students are much more comfortable with digital approaches to all forms of information and communication; thus more prefer a digital (i.e. distance) approach. Also, more are working while going to school and DE facilitates blending working with learning more effectively than face2face.

the growth in 100% online is a result, I suspect, of increased attention to adult learners who are more likely to gravitate to 100% online programs

Research shows that when students have a choice to take classes online OR on-campus, they progress at higher rates to the next year. As our student higher ed population becomes more diverse, more students do not have the privilege to be on campus all the time. They are juggling work and family commitments. Taking at least one class online each term allows them access achieving their college goals. As more public institutions develop more fully online programs, the number of fully online students will continue to increase (and migrate from the expensive for-profits, which we know are losing students).

As technology becomes more embedded in our everyday life, it makes sense that those interested in any form of education are going to want access to it anytime/anywhere.

With unemployment rates at a low, more students are working full-time jobs while going to college. Therefore, online classes provide the flexibility they need to successfully complete their degree.

There appears to be growth in the number of adult students who would rather work in an online environment that fits with their lifestyle.

The option set for students online is greater than face to face. As more students move online for full or partial programs, their ability to choose providers grows. This is one more step in the gradual price competition for higher education.

They just have more options that meet their needs. Before they only had option A (come to class, which they may or may not do). Now, they have option A, B (online), C (hybrid), etc. So, on one hand, the overall has plateaued and the growth is distance ed is just fluctuation in a non-monopolized market that has more diverse options now. And the real question is - what would overall enrollments be without distance learning options? It's hard to predict, but my hunch is that overall enrollment would even less (greater % of loss) without the distance options.

I believe that cost and convenience are still primary drivers for online enrollments. Technology changes with time, student needs are less volatile. Having the time and money to matriculate drives the decisions re: whether or not/when/how to enroll.

DE classes provide much more flexibility for students, who are often balancing work and family responsibilities. The DE mantra of "Anytime, Anywhere, Anyplace" resonates deeply among these students.

I think it has to do with the fact that students are balancing a lot more these days -- jobs, families, etc. I also think that more older students are going back to school to improve their skills and they have a lot more obligations than the "traditional" student.

Distance education enrollment is highly cost driven. Distance courses tend to be more flexible, more cost conscious, and reduce many of the externalities of taking a course on campus (e.g. food, parking, wasted time between classes or commuting). Overall, I feel students are seeing distance education as providing a higher return for their tuition dollars. New classroom, same course, same diploma, none of the added nickel and dime expenses.

Convenient, flexible, ease of attending/studying, and less expensive are the key reasons in the growth of online education.

This is part of the advent of student-centeredness. It is offering the learning opportunities in the most accessible and flexible format for students.

I feel as though distance education is tapping into new students who might not have attended a traditional school with on ground programs. Also, the student population is shifting towards less time being spent in school so certificate programs, badging, credentialing, boot camps, etc.

It is evident in our summer enrollments. F2F is very low in the summer while online is always on a waitlist. The flexibility allows students to do what they want, when they want.

I'm not sure the issue lends itself to simple either/or questions. I do believe that there will be some impact on brick and mortar enrollments, but I primarily believe that DE options provide opportunities for students that likely would not otherwise be able to attend face to face. I do see an emphasis on schools trying to increase revenue, market share and enrollments, but have seen some schools with a very mission focused approach aimed at helping "non-traditional" students as a primary focus over revenue production. I think it's tough to over-generalize as there are so many different types of schools and so many variables at play.

The growth in adult learners is fueling the growth in distance education. There is a decline in the numbers of "traditional" 18-22 year students, which represent the population which attends face-to-face classes in the greatest numbers. Adult learners want the flexibility to attend classes at their convenience (work/family obligations) as opposed to commuting to a campus for a designated face-to-face class.

At the community college level, the growth of online seems to mostly be related to the lack of availability of campus courses at a time or location that works for students. 55% of our fully online students work full time, 22% more work part-time. Online classes are not cannibalizing campus enrollments; campus instruction is failing to address the needs of these students and many are forced to take online classes to progress in a timely fashion. Online (and to some extent hybrid) classes are better able to fit in to the demanding schedules of community college students.

It may be that more (adult) students are employed and therefore need the increased flexibility that online provides over face-to-face. The increase in online numbers has prompted some face-to-face faculty to explore using technology as a way of meeting traditional students in the middle.

Students are becoming more comfortable with technology. It is also the flexibility; students see the significance in where and when they have access to their classes.

I think the flexibility of studying at a distance is increasingly appealing to students.

We are seeing that a large percentage in online growth is from local students who take online course for the more flexible schedule and convenience.

I agree with Clayton Christensen that building the brick and mortar schools do not make sense in the future. The nature of the students is changing and the needed time to spend in a set environment is not as easy as it was 20 years ago. More working adults are finding the need to return to add or finish their education. There will be a change in the future for courses that require hands on experiment of practice to reduce the time spent at a one

The growth of completely online programming can be tied to the increase number of non-traditional, adult learners to higher education. This modality provides them the flexibility needed for an acceptable work life balance.location facility.

Convenience! The growth and shift are all about focusing on the student and their needs and availability. For existing four and two year public universities and I think the effort to put more classes and degrees online was about grabbing new students that were not being served. And I think it has

helped with that. But, we are also seeing a lot of on-site students want the same schedule convenience and opportunities being afforded to distance students.

While there is an increase in traditionally aged students studying completely at a distance most of the audience is adult students. The flexibility offered by distance delivery and the availability of so many areas of study is attracting students who otherwise would not attend college. I do wonder what effect distance programs are having on adult-focused off-campus evening programs.

A growing number of students don't want to come to campus and luckily, more Institutions are recognizing this fact and providing more opportunities for students to earn 100% of their ed pathway through online learning. I think we are not going to see a large grow of students outside of an institution's normal delivery area unless the institution is willing to spend large amounts of money on marketing to generate national and international interest. Also programs will need to align with workforce development needs and be cost-effective for students to draw a national and international crowd.

It's about Funding

My institution believes it will save it from all the state funding cuts, but it has not invested the appropriate amount of money in technology to grow at the rate it had hoped to. Distance ed is not cheap to offer.

Our focus is both on funding, plus access for new students.

I believe that institutions find additional revenue in some cases for De students when special fees are allowed for same. In addition, DE courses can scale much easier in some models. Student re driven to the long known convenience of the delivery method. Further, some state strategic plans fully endorse growth in DE as a percentage of total enrollment.

Mainly targeting international students for the increased tuition money since the political environment does not encourage international students to come to the US anymore.

From the student perspective it's all about access and fully DE programs offer the flexibility they want and the market needs. From the institution's perspective it's about revenue and offering programs that will expand their "pie".

At my school, I know there is talk of using DL to grow funding. However, I also believe that students WANT the convenience factor of DL courses. Sometimes, that is at the expense of F2F courses, and sometimes, it brings in new students who otherwise couldn't attend traditional F2F courses.

I think that gaining additional funding by serving new students go hand in hand. As long as there is a dedicated course fee you can't separate them.

I am very in support of distance education and believe it has tremendous potential and reaches students who need it. At the same time, I'm concerned that Universities tend to view it as only the "cash cow"

and it becomes a business rather than education. At the same time, that business approach has allowed a lot of new and interesting things. So, like all phenomenon, it's never just one thing.

We are now doing more to market fully online programs. We also are creating more fully online opportunities for completing under grad and grad programs. I think some of the early bad perceptions that were out there about online quality have been offset by quality improvement efforts at schools. Also more students have actually taken an online course and see that it's feasible. (Side note: now that all courses are available in more programs, we are seeing more on-campus students taking more online courses and taking an increasing average number of credit hours online, indicating a greater reliance on online to complete their degrees.)

I think there are more distance students because there are more seats open for them, and these are being aggressively marketed, often with the help of OPM companies. The marketing is being done by universities looking for "cash cows." This is an opinion that is backed by what I am hearing from my peers.

I believe more institutions are adding hybrid and distance only educational options primarily as a way to generate revenue. Also, in terms of the students, I'd be interested in knowing the age demographic of distance and hybrid students; some students do not want to take off from work to pursue higher education full-time. Students might also be taking advantage of employer sponsored educational benefits

Addressing Lack of On-campus space

As our face-to-face population grows, providing more online course delivery and hybrid courses are the only way to cope with the lack of additional classroom space. Most of our online students also come to face-to-face classes on campus.

Student Services is Key

To prioritize spending in light of shrinking budgets, many institutions will need to assess whether they can afford to maintain equitable access to quality student services and support for both fully online students and on-campus/hybrid students. Service to fully online students requires different hours of operation, access modes and procedures than service to on-campus or hybrid students. Providing consistent quality support to both groups, requires investment in both operational configurations. If an institution does not have the funds to support both configurations, it need to invest in the configuration that best supports its target population based on mission and strategic plan.

Both are True

This is not an either/or. Offering flexible options for students leads to better retention, persistence and time to degree

In our case, I believe that our distance offerings have cannibalized our face-to-face offerings to a small extent, but I believe strongly that the students opting for the distance option are doing so because they

were making great sacrifices to be face-to-face, including struggling with childcare and putting their career growth on hold.

'at the expense of' might better be phrased as 'to accommodate the needs of' face to face students. These students will be increasingly more attracted to flexible options that include both the on-site experience and the anytime/anywhere convenience of online learning.

I think it's natural to believe that an increased population in distance students would come at some cost to on-campus enrollment, unless the distance programs are unique to that delivery method and have no on-campus equivalent (which is probably rare). However, the trade-off is a broader reach, and better service to rural areas where choices are very limited. Our hope is that we can balance moderate growth in distance enrollment with a flat or slowly-growing on-campus population. So far that has been difficult to realize.

We are gaining net new non-resident adult students. I think it is also helping us retain on-campus traditional students.

I checked both "...focused on funding..." & "...focused on new students..." because our university seems to be equally focused on both - we desperately need more funding, AND our mission is to serve rural areas of the state. We seem to be making reasonable progress in both areas. At the same time, our enrollment on the main campus continues to grow, but at a slower rate than at a distance.

I would say that it's not as cut and dried as "coming at the expense of FTF". Most of our students take a mix of online and FTF courses. They turn to online when they cannot get classes they need on ground due to conflicts with scheduling (due in part to their own schedules) or filled classes on-ground. Sometimes, when it's because we don't offer classes at optimum times for students, then those classes on-ground may suffer. What's happening more and more is that enrollment managers are trying to adjust class scheduling to take into consideration times that work for working students. So they are really paying attention to the trends that might take away from FTF.

Our university is experiencing growth in BOTH on-campus first-year student enrollment AND online/distance education enrollment (primarily for degree completion programs). I believe that we are serving different demographic groups and enrolling new students in online/distance education programs who would not typically come to campus to pursue their degree. We do see the growth of blended/hybrid combinations: 1) low-residency in-person with online, and 2) asynchronous online with synchronous distance education (video-conferencing).

Although some face-to-face enrollments are impacted by online enrollments, this is a small percentage. I checked that box because I do see a small correlation, but in general, these are new students who would not be taking courses otherwise.

I did not select either of the first two options above because each is partially true, partially false. Indeed, we are seeing a growth in exclusive DE students that does not affect our F2F enrollments, but we are also seeing an even larger growth in our resident students taking DE courses because of convenience,

scheduling conflicts, and/or full classes. While this decreases the F2F enrollments, it does not decrease the overall headcount of our resident students.

A Little Bit of Everything

This is a tough question because perspectives vary based upon individual's personal experiences. Research and data tells us that the background of students studying at a distance is commonly comprised of those who are a bit older, who have families, who are interested in changing their careers, returning to school for additional training, or who have decided to finally complete a terminal degree. Those are the students who most strongly advocate for opportunities such as online/distance education programs and in which the existence of those programs are most beneficial to them. On the other hand you have those students who do not and would not fair well in an online nor hybrid scenario. They really do seek the immediate, in-person, human social characteristics and interactions that an on-ground/brick and mortar program offers that is often difficult to replicate in an online scenario. With that said, from an academic institution's perspective, the recruitment and growth of their student population is a crucial and important goal for the institution's continued growth and success of all programs offered and most definitely leads to the increase of additional funding.

The discipline students are studying really make a difference. Some students who would have previously taken face to face courses now have online options which they are choosing. This is especially true of student over the age of ~25. Other disciplines that require heavy hands on labs or other experiential learning opportunities are not as heavily impacted by distance education, but course may be more blended, flipped, or hybrid approaches.

RSC has always had most of its enrollment as on line. But We still do have face-to-face enrollment.

We do see some negative effect on our face-to-face anecdotally (students preferring online) but our f-to-f enrollment is up. With some exceptions we do seem to be serving students who could not normally come to campus. Our online tract is relatively new so we don't have enough information yet to make a firm determination on these questions.

Ultimately, I think we are trying to herd cats here. Also, there's too much nuance covered up in those aggregate numbers. Any attempts to convey this information should be contextualized with statements about how the Web is generally adding new modalities and new opportunities for learning, but tracking those changes is complicated. There is a story to be told about distance/hybrid education, but it can't be told by one or two tables/charts.

Seems to be a trend.

It'd be interesting to compare people's motivations for enrolling in distance programs vs. f2f ones and to then also look at completion rates, since my impression is that people sign up for distance classes because they think they'll be easier/more convenient than f2f ones but that distance students are less likely to actually finish their classes/earn a degree.

Current employment and long-term employment outcomes should e monitored.

It may be because of the "digital" generation(s) and their technological savvy and/or the busy work life that many students have.

Don't overlook the growing acceptance by employers of this modality in job preparation. As online courses are viewed as more legitimate, it makes sense that more students are willing to invest in them.

(Regarding 1 above, I am not sure I understand what is meant by the third and fourth choices.)

Regarding the growth in DE, has there not also been a growth (or shifting proportion) of non-traditional students/students over the age of 25? In my opinion/experience, that is a significant factor. Other factors include improved technology, including the preference of millennials for online learning (I know more parents whose children are in online high schools), and decreased cost associated with online learning (versus in-residence).

1. For professional, working adults, many are lacking the same thing faculty and administration in our institutions lack - time. It seems a cliché to state that the 21st century has ushered in an ambitious complexity in our personal and professional lives, due greatly - and ironically - to our embracing of technology, but it is true and higher education is certainly not immune to these lifestyle shifts. Ironically still, we expect and turn to tech, through e-learning, to relieve those time pressures, though the jury is still out as to whether it relieves or adds a new layer. 2. The current generation, I believe we can say with some certainty, has been bred on tech. What were once considered nuances are now considered natural; therefore, what was once a leap to distance education, to them, is only a small step. Discomfort is minimal and this generation gravitates toward comfort. 3. The value of education has slipped; more precisely, the perception of the value of education has slipped, reducing it in our standings of personal priorities. Therefore, rather than altering one's life to focus completely on education as priority one, education can integrate neatly and less painfully into and among other life priorities. Oddly enough, even with perceptions down, the need for expanded education has never been higher. 4. Higher education as a means of transforming the individual socially, intellectually, and deeply is strong still, but there is an increasing fraction of society seeking credentials for advancements, sans the virtues we have come to associate with traditional higher education environments. This may account for the significant uptick in blended and pure distance education models, coupled with the growth of those institutions that adhere to, regardless of their core values, "The customer is always right."

In my opinion, the stigma against entirely online degrees is lessened because many large, reputable, and public institutions have increased entirely online options.

Can we disaggregate the IPEDS data by age? I believe the students studying completely at a distance are likely older (working, etc. also).

There are so many factors that it is hard to generalize about reasons for growth - economy, job market, institutional emphasis, more students comfortable with an online environment, lack of consistent definitions, undergrad vs. grad or non-degree, etc. etc.

What I would like is a breakdown (I admit I did not read the full report) to these numbers in regards to traditional versus non-traditional as well. As we know, DE is highly flexible but there may also be a growth because, in the absence of controls such as proctoring, students are more easily able to cheat

because they are not in the classroom. We should be careful to not consider these numbers in a vacuum but in a larger context. At my institution of 1500+ sections online each semester, only a tiny fraction use any kind of proctoring so the assessments for those that don't use the proctoring likely have a greater number of cheaters. At my institution, DE continues to grow steadily even though all DE courses cost more than their on-campus counter parts. While the flexibility of DE is obviously of great benefit, I wonder how many take DE classes where there may be a perception (and in many cases a reality) that cheating is easier. Our student newspaper interviewed a student several semesters back that they would not take a DE class that used proctoring because it made it harder to cheat.

-New generation of students used to technology -Redundant, boring, ineffective face-to-face courses. - Convenience and sometimes only option to attend college. - Shifting student demographics, adults have jobs and families and no luxury to commute to campus locations. -Less exposure (therefore less risk) to racism, homophobia, language barriers, and having to disclose, age, physical and learning disabilities in front of peers and instructors. -Chunking of time according to need, more time to respond to questions, gaming the system, conform of studying at home, no particular desire or time to engage with peers in and out of the classroom.

Hard to paint in broad strokes--I really think it varies based on type of institution....

It is very complex, including declining numbers of high school graduates who would have traditionally taken a college prep program, more students with financial need, older students starting or continuing their education in more convenient and cost-effective fashion, etc.

Changing demographic of average higher ed learner Flexibility Improvements in students' ability to navigate technology

The curriculum development has improved year-by-year for online, but the real variance is in that both business and higher education are adopting it as legitimate education, which was not the case ten years ago. It is fading with the retirement of the current, traditional higher education faculty members.

In some cases at our institution, faculty have chosen to teach a course online instead of face-to-face because their online courses fill, but the face-to-face don't or because they have been asked to teach online and can't do both modalities. I also see more courses integrating online materials, whether they are officially listed as blended/hybrid.

Growth will continue

It will continue to grow

We have seen a steady increase in online and hybrid enrollments. This is due to more course offerings in online programs.

I think the growth in students studying online will continue. It provides an accessible format for some learners to be able to obtain or finish a degree. However, studying in this format is not for everyone. Unfortunately, most students think it will be easy and that they can handle it. Despite large efforts by institutions, retention rates stay lower than in face to face formats and some students continue to add

to their debt by trying again, but still lack the motivation and engagement. My institution continues to work hard to create processes and classes that keep students engaged and making progress towards completion. All institutions need to help students find the best format or mode of delivery for their success.

I believe students are taking more online courses to increase their total course load in a given term.

Growth will stop

The marketplace is tightening up. Growth rates are slipping. Most places are over spending on marketing costs and under-performing in growth. Have we seen the peak in the demand?