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ITC Survey Analysis

ITC Distance Education Survey Analysis

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Full-Scale Online Course Implementation at the University of Wilmer for Undergraduates

The University of Wilmer is looking at implementing a full-scale e-Learning course that will encompass both graduate and undergraduate students in the fall of 2015. The purpose of this report is to review and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed implementation. The following results were reached after a review of the Instructional Technology Council’s 2013 Distance Education Survey Results and the evaluation of existing e-Learning resources at the university currently on the graduate level. The final recommendation comes from the data review, and if fully supported by the university via timeframe and appropriate funding and training, and is to move forward with the full e-Learning program implementation.

Disadvantages

With any new program, online learning comes with both advantages and disadvantages. Many of the listed disadvantages lean to the side of the university and its implementation of the program moreso than on the actual learner using the program. In the year 2006, Montgomery College of Maryland released the following benefits of online learning:

1. Online courses require more time than on-campus classes.

2. Online courses make it easier to procrastinate.

3. Online courses require good time-management skills.

4. Online courses may create a sense of isolation.

5. Online courses allow you to be more independent.

6. Online courses require you to be an active learner.

7. Online courses don't have an instructor hounding you to stay on task.

8. Online courses give you more freedom.

9. Online courses require that you find your own path to learning.

10. Online courses require you to be responsible for your own learning.

(<http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/studevgt/onlinsts/disad.htm>)

Looking at all the information presented, the main problematic issue for online learning being implemented full scale for a university is the funding that accompanies the program. If the proper support is not there from the university itself, the program will wither away and fade into the background, not ever being implemented to its fullest. Time is another problem that is faced by both teacher and student in online learning. For the teachers, more preparation time, ahead of time, must be done in order to account for students who remain on task and/or ahead of the game in the course. On the learner side, more time must be allotted for studying and questions, since the teacher isn’t there each week for one to ask questions as they enter the mind. The other downside is awaiting response from the teacher and or classmates, as each work at their own pace and time due to the online nature of the course. Procrastination is the nature of the beast for university students everywhere. By having a class that is entirely online, the student has no immediate need to wake up early to catch class, have things ready by a certain day and time each week, and so on. Therefore, it is easier to be lazy and procrastinate when taking classes online. When procrastination is made this easy, due dates, tests, and finals sneak up on you and for some it is too late to save their grade in the class. This leads into another point, that if the student does not have good time management skills, success will be grim with online courses. E-learning classes demand that you make time for them to be completed in order for optimal learning to take place. If the student does not allot for time to complete course assignments, they will become so buried under all the course load work that they will not be able to recover their grade, as previously stated.

Isolation was noted as a disadvantage in online learning, as the student is typically completing the class in their own home, by themselves. This makes any feedback difficult, especially when questions arise and discussion is needed, because no one is there. Yes, you can communicate via online ways, but again it falls back to waiting for responses. The independent disadvantage is more for the teacher, in that they are less depended on which results in weak job security. Becoming an active learner can be a disadvantage in the sense that some shyer students have to break out of their mold. This can be a good thing, yet it can also invoke a crippling fear that many of the less active students have come to adapt to and some would rather fail at a task than change their ways. This isolation and forced activeness is due to the fact that with online learning, the teacher isn’t there to stand over you when assignments come due. The student is responsible for his/her own learning or lack thereof. The student must learn to stay on task without someone holding their hand the entire way. This new freedom can be a downfall to the online learning in that if you do not manage it wisely it can overtake you as a student. Overall the main disadvantage to online learning that falls off the university and onto the student is that due to high schools being done in the traditional fashion, many students who enter into a university and enroll in online classes are not mentally prepared for the type of work and working behavior that is required from students in these courses. More responsibility is placed upon the student than in any other class setting, and many students find quickly that they are not up to that challenge. The lack of face to face time and personal experience that is gained from traditional class settings is another downfall, along with poor support from the university (financially or training) that don’t allow for optimal success of the online program.

Advantages

E-Learning, or online learning, as a vast number of advantages. Many of these advantages bode in favor of the students, which in turn benefits the university. Montgomery College of Maryland (2006) released the following benefits of online learning:

1. Online courses are convenient.

2. Online courses offer flexibility.

3. Online courses bring education right to your home.

4. Online courses offer more individual attention.

5. Online courses help you meet interesting people.

6. Online courses give you real world skills.

7. Online courses promote life-long learning.

8. Online courses have financial benefits.

9. Online courses teach you to be self-disciplined.

10. Online courses connect you to the global village.

(<http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/studevgt/onlinsts/advant.htm>)

Looking at each advantage in short makes revelation of the following, and first we will look at convenience and flexibility. As a student, when taking an online course you have access to materials, assignments, classmates, and your teacher (via email or other options) 24/7. Anytime you find to sit down and do your work, it is there waiting for you. You are no longer hindered around a set class time you must be somewhere, regardless of life and its happenings. You know your due dates and are aware that it is up to you to log on, complete and submit assignments, and contact your teacher when help is desired. Many students in today’s world are working individuals, many with families that also take priority in their daily lives. The flexibility to log online whenever you want or can allows for family time to still take priority to working students. The idea of flexibility and convenience also reaches to the teachers at universities as well. Teachers enjoy the convenience and flexibility of teaching online courses because it also gives them the freedom to attend to other areas of their job during business hours, like more office time to meet with students about various topics of their education.

Having access to higher education in the comforts of one’s own home is a commodity many students wouldn’t trade for the world. You have the comfort of knowing that you are in your zone of learning, right from your couch if needed, but it also makes others in your home take note of your quest for higher learning and they should learn to respect that time you are online. As a student, many times in a large classroom the teacher speaks generically to the class rather than to your issue individually. With online learning, you can have private conversations (email, chat, Skype) with your instructor to help handle your issues before it is too late in the semester. With online learning, your classmates become more accessible to you as well. Many times, online classmates are from all over the world, which allows you to expand your horizons to people of other cultures, ability levels, and thought processes. This also ties into the concept that in such a booming technological age, learning to communicate and function with others via technology preps the student for the real working world that tends to thrive predominantly on technological resources.

With learning being online and at the fingertips of the learner and their home computer system, there is a greater chance of that learning extending past the semester. Having to do research and save items on the computer at their home means that that information is always saved and available to the learner, not just done in a lab for a quick grade. As a learner, you also learn how to research, which will be beneficial in life when trying to find answers to things out of your knowledge spectrum. The financial benefits for students with online learning are another big selling point for the university. Saving students money on gas, parking fees, and campus living alone is enough to guarantee a large interest pool in online learning. For working parents, this will also help with not having to pay for childcare since there are no designated class times, as well as not having to miss work for classes since you can “go to class” at your convenience.

The biggest flaw of college transition from high school is the new found freedom in the learning environment. The role of a teacher in the minds of youth changes from a person who is consistently on the case of the student to perform and get assignments complete into the role of not seeming to care if you turn them in or not because it is your money, your education, your future thus your responsibility as the student. Since the responsibility seems to shift from teacher to student, often times this causes the student to become more self-disciplined in their studies. Procrastination is the new enemy of the freedoms felt by college students, yet after a few pitfalls students being to discover the importance of self-regulated learning to get tasks accomplished with less stress than last minute working brings upon them. The point I feel is the most advantageous for online learning is the links that it brings the learner to other learners across the globe. Research, chats, interviews, and emails are just a few of the mediums used with online learning that allows the learner to link themselves to anyone, anywhere else in the world. The point is, with our world growing at such a fast technological pace, the ability is there for learners to learn new information or new skills whenever and wherever desired. The scope and reach of education broadens to far greater horizons that perhaps ever imagined through the use of online learning.

When reviewing the Distance Education Survey results released by the Instructional Technology Council in 2013, we see that the data shows that the offering of online courses is growing along with the retention rates of students, meaning the drop-out rate is decreasing. When looking at the Distance Education Survey data, the results also showed that this approach to online learning is not resulting in poor quality education. Over 96% of respondents indicated that their online courses comparable to or better than traditional classroom setting courses.

Training for Faculty

In order to implement a full scale program of online learning at the University of Wilmer, a training program will need to be developed for any and all faculty that will be participating in this form of education presentation. This training needs to be ongoing, to assist as needed anyone who is having issues with any part of the program implementation. With growing technology, even during a semester, training needs to be available to anyone who may have questions on the how, what, when, and where of the online program so that they can have answers when and if students ask the same things. Training in the program should not be optional, so that all have exposure to the training and tools to make the learning experience the best for the students enrolled.

Training for Students

Training should also be developed and offered to students to show the ins and outs of the new online program features to help ensure their learning be at its best. As a university, the goal is to attract and keep students in a program to graduation, so by providing training the university is placing care on the success of the students in this new area of learning. Survey results did indicate that some students within the university may not be ready for this type of learning, but the training should be made available and again ongoing throughout the semester for questions and concerns that arise.

Recommendations

Currently, the University of Wilmer has an online program in place that reaches strictly graduate students. In reviewing the data, it is apparent that this program is working on this level, and a demand for more undergraduate level courses is being placed upon the university by the student body. Anytime a new program is introduced, enrollment increases for the university, which is a benefit for everyone. The recommendation here is that the University of Wilmer work to increase their enrollment by implementing a full-scale online program that reaches both the graduate and undergraduate level of students. A team of faculty members from all areas colleges within the university should be appointed to make executive decisions for this program, including training for faculty and student body, budgets, and program structure. Financial support should be a top priority of the program and university before this program begins, so that appropriate follow through will be made on behalf of all involved.

Abiding by the laws of the Federal Government is a must for online learning to be creditable and successful. The laws that are in effect by the Federal Government are there to ensure that the person logging on to take the online course is in fact that student who is on track to complete the coursework for the degree at hand. (Lokken & Mullins, 2014). Most online learning programs require authentication before entering into the learning environment. According to Instructional Technology Council (2013) the Higher Education Act is coming up for renewal and many lawmakers are suggesting that universities and colleges using online learning programs buckle down on student enrollment regulations in order to confront student loan fraud. Some suggestions being made are for the universities and colleges to check with students’ previous states and institutions of enrollment, looking at students’ enrollment history, and monitoring attendance of students who are enrolled in online courses. These suggestions should be strongly considered by the University of Wilmer, also, to get ahead of the game and confront problematic situations before they have a chance to arise.

References

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