



An Organizational Approach for Sustaining E-Learning in a Large Urban University

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Abstract

Partly motivated by recent fiscal and economic realities, many universities acknowledge that for long-term sustainability, they must discover how to better exploit e-learning media and channels to reach, engage and retain new and mature learners, including working professionals. But online learning is not simply a digital “add-on” to education. Rather, e-learning is a fairly complex language and communication phenomenon that mirrors how learners are already acculturated and interconnected through their social and professional networks. The future of modern universities is highly dependent on recognizing and embracing these realities to ensure their long-term survival.

For a number of years, large urban universities have been enriching their traditional instructional models with e-learning pedagogy and technology. E-learning has been progressively adopted to provide flexible and convenient access for students wanting to attend their accredited post-secondary institution. Online learning, characterized by distinct benefits and challenges, has also been shown to achieve learning outcomes that are competitive with those of traditional models of learning. Some institutions have begun to blend traditional learning and e-learning models to produce innovative and potentially superior learning outcomes.

This paper discusses several motivational, integrative, and fiscal factors that inform e-learning sustainability in the context of a large urban university. Distinguishing attributes of e-learning are explored relative to traditional learning including pedagogy, design, technology, development, and delivery. Also explored are issues of engagement among instructors and learners, faculty buy-in and incentives, hidden and unaccounted for costs, rationalization of costs and fees, e-learning profitability versus quality, and issues of student recruitment and retention. An organizational structure is proposed that stimulates e-learning opportunities and buy-in at the grassroots, builds and sustains specialized and scarce e-learning competencies and resources in a central e-learning unit, and solicits, endorses, and supports new e-learning projects aligned with institutional priorities.