Higher Education Online Learning for Career Preparation

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, a global pandemic caused a major disruption in educational programs around the world. While it almost seemed incomprehensible at the time, the past two years have provided educators an opportunity to evaluate current practices and, in many ways, force educators, students, and families to rely on online education opportunities. There has been a pedagogical shift in thinking about how students learn, as well as how families and communities can support learning. Stakeholders need to understand the current developments in online education, particularly in higher education, and what needs to happen to continue to build upon the growth we have made thus far.[1]

Background Research

- Online learning emerged as a safe and viable option for education continuity as the COVID-19 pandemic turned personal and professional worlds upside down.
- Even before the pandemic, the global eLearning market was already seeing a massive annual global growth. It is expected to reach $336.98 billion by 2026, at a compound annual growth rate of 9.1% from 2018 to 2026.[2] The growth estimates are likely to see an update sooner rather than later owing to the pandemic.
- In the U.S. alone, education technology investment has already exceeded $13 billion.[3] As online learning occurs over the internet, it naturally utilizes technology—and as education technology itself keeps on evolving, eLearning is also bound to be revolutionized.
- The number of students taking online courses grew to 5.8 million nationally, continuing a growth trend that has been consistent for 13 years. 28% of higher education students are enrolled in least one online course.[4]
- A survey showed that 52% of graduate students in the U.S. found their online college-level education to provide a better learning experience than their college-level classroom education.[5]
- One forecast suggests that the pandemic's aftermath will cause a six-month to five-year disruption as well as a 15% to 25% decline in enrollment.[6] According to a joint report by the Boston Consulting Group and Arizona State University[7], the overall post-secondary student enrollment has been seeing a yearly decline of 1% to 2%, while the number of students taking online courses grows 5% annually.

Based on this background research, there is a continued interest in online coursework opportunities both by students and educational institutions. It is the responsibility of educators and communities to support both secondary and postsecondary students in furthering their knowledge and skills by providing them with a mode of learning in which the teachers and instructors function as guides, thus allowing students to be active collaborators as opposed to passive learners[8].

Veronica Sanders, EEDW Program Administrator: vsanders@nmrec1.org
325 N. Bergin Ln., Bloomfield, NM 87413
PR# S411B210027

"Online learning is not the next big thing,
it is the now big thing." - Donna J. Abernathy

Applying the Research to Virtual Learning for High School Students

Setting the IT ECHS as an online opportunity addresses the challenges school districts face with staff shortages for small clusters of students in small rural schools. With schools and students geographically dispersed, districts were previously forced to consolidate and limit offerings in ECHS. The advantage of having university faculty deliver instruction online addresses teacher shortages and ensures IT instructors possess qualifications for a rigorous, high-quality IT online program[9].

EEDW supports students, teachers, and communities by

1. Targeting an ECHS pathway to build students' digital skills, a required entry for *every job* in today's workforce;
2. Developing the pathway as an online course, available to an unlimited number of students, particularly in rural areas where districts do not have the resources or enrollment to support an onsite IT program; and
3. Expanding the role of business partnerships in ECHSs through a virtual format by bringing online business partners from every industry across the state to support and mentor students.

The result is students will not only build digital and IT skills but also develop personal mentor/mentee relationships with prospective employers to open doors to a fully representational workforce. As literature points out, students that are able to experience these types of opportunities while pursuing degrees and certificates are more successful and marketable when it comes to entering the workforce.

Conclusion

With higher education affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges and lessons learned can be turned into opportunities to leverage online learning. Educators, communities, and industry partners have the potential to help students find success following graduation.

Endnote

[1] Bouchrika, I. (2020, June 30). 50 Online Education Statistics: 2021-2022 Data on Higher Learning and Corporate Training. Retrieved from Research.com: https://research.com/education/online-education-statistics

[2] Global E-Learning Market Analysis. (2019). Retrieved from Syngene Research: https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/4769385/global-e-learning-market-analysis-2019

[3] How School Districts Can Save (Billion) On Edtech. (2017). Retrieved from Technology for Education Consortium: https://marketbrief.edweek.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/How_School_Districts_Can_Save_Billions_on_Edtech.pdf

[4] Duffin, E. (2019). Opinions of online college students on quality of online education U.S. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/956123/opinions-online-college-students-qualit

[5] Ibid.

[6] Dennis, M. (2019). Higher education opportunities after COVID-19. Retrieved from https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200507152524762

[7] Making Digital Learning Work. https://edplus.asu.edu/sites/default/files/BCG-Making-Digital-Learning-Work-Apr-2018%20.pdf, Boston Consulting Group & Arizona State University. (2018).

[8] Stern, J. (. (n.d.). Introduction to Online Teaching and Learning. http://www.wlac.edu/online/documents/otl.pdf.

[9] Zinth, J. (2018). STEM dual enrollment: Model policy components. ERIC. ED 590462.