

OLC Innovate 2019 Conference - Emerging Ideas Session Handout

The University Mission: Can It Be Reimagined For Online Learning?

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Introduction:

Today's busy college students are looking for flexible degree programs that fit their hectic lifestyles. Consequently, institutions that have long been in the business of serving distance learners are experiencing a significant increase in the number of adult students seeking online degree programs and signing up to take distance education courses. Likewise, to meet the demand and keep up with competing institutions, the traditional "brick-and-mortar" colleges and universities are rapidly expanding their curriculum to accommodate a new era of distance education – and the online learner.

What's the Problem?

Most mission statements, and in particular those of traditional higher education institutions, provide little direction for online education, nor do they reflect the goals for student learning in an ever-increasing virtual, technology-driven, digital age.

After a review of the research, and using the mission statements from their own universities, the presenters contemplated questions about how well colleges and universities are aligning their online courses and programs with the university mission. Both presenters agree that:

"...Educational programs should reflect the institutional mission and enjoy the full and informed support of the faculty, the board of trustees and the president,... (and) the mission statement is the necessary condition for many different individuals to pull together through a myriad of activities to achieve central shared purposes. (Therefore,) one would expect an educational institution to have a mission statement that expresses a sense of its educational vision...(and) that educational vision should be deeply rooted in the institution's identity and practices." Source: Learning Goals in Mission Statements: Implications for Educational Leadership (Gaff and Meacham, Winter 2006, Vol. 92, No. 1)

Among the questions the presenters contemplated were these: What do mission statements say about the vision and expectations that our colleges and universities hold for online education? What do they say about the goals that are held for student learning in a contemporary, highly technical society? Specifically, is fulfilling the University Mission im(possible) online?

Emerging Ideas

An institution's mission statement should guide policy and practice. It should identify and define the institution's vision for its constituents and the general public. The mission statement should be the foundation for all curriculum goals and activity, including online education. The presenters offer five ideas for evaluating your college or university's mission statement to determine how well it aligns with the institutions vision and goals for online education.

- 1) Review your mission statement to see if it is a living document that acknowledges the impact of technology on education (looking for clauses that are broad enough to incorporate the goals of online

education).

- 2) Determine whether your institution's mission has a vision for technology or a goal statement for online learning?
- 3) Is quality online learning, course design, delivery and content reflected in any manner in the mission or vision statements?
- 4) If you have an online learning strategy and technology statement does it ensure support for the online learner?
- 5) Does the university have rules of engagement for students, faculty and staff as it relates to technology and online learning?

In summary, the presenters aim is to prompt administrators and faculty at institutions of higher education, to act on the impact technology has had on the curriculum and course delivery by "reimagining" and revising their mission statements to reflect important goals for student learning in online and blended environments.

References

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