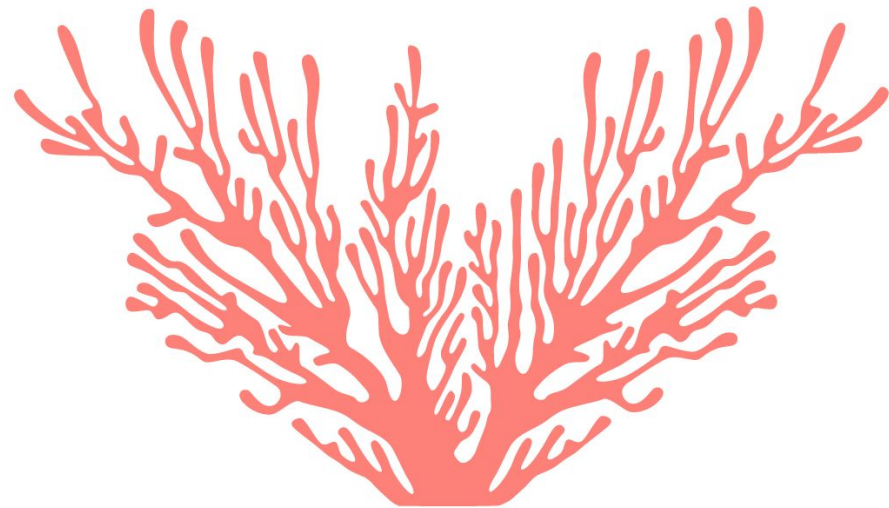


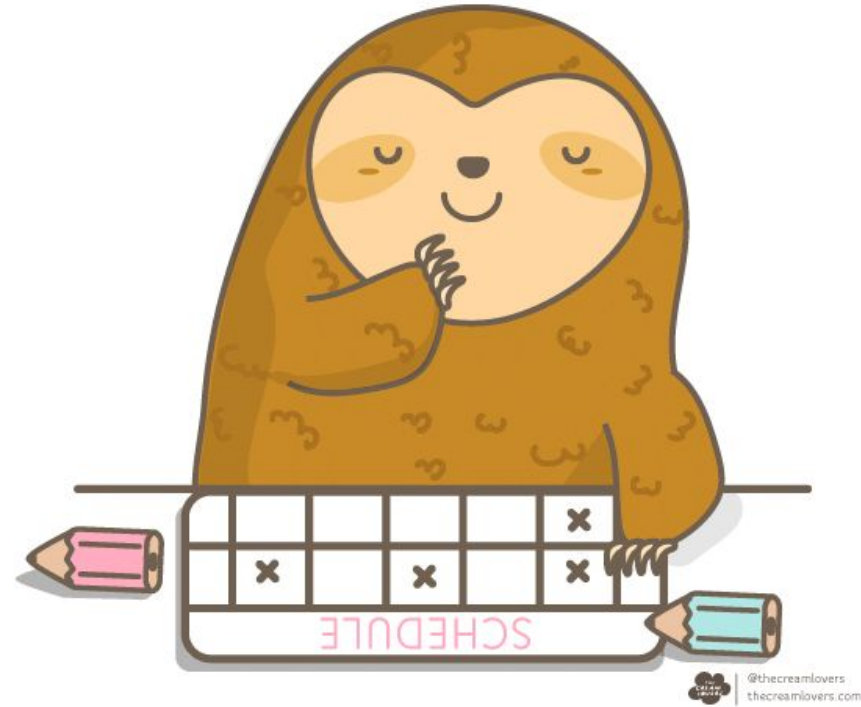
Does Structure Matter? Findings of the CORAL Study

Into the Evolving Nature of Organizational
Structures of Online Units at Colleges &
Universities



Agenda

- Session Activity Overview
 - Key Question Collector
 - Quick Write
 - Scavenger Hunt
- Study Overview
- Key Findings by Dimension
- Overall Implications



Animated image of a sloth with a schedule

Who are we???



- Collegiate Online Research Leaders ([CORAL](#))
- CORAL is comprised of educational administrators from a diverse set of higher educational institutions across the United States who were participants in the Online Learning Consortium's (OLC) 2018 Institute for Emerging Leaders in Online Education (IELOL) program. CORAL collaborative members are engaged in several research studies.
- This study was planned with advisement from the lead researchers of the CHLOE reports.

Say HELLO team!

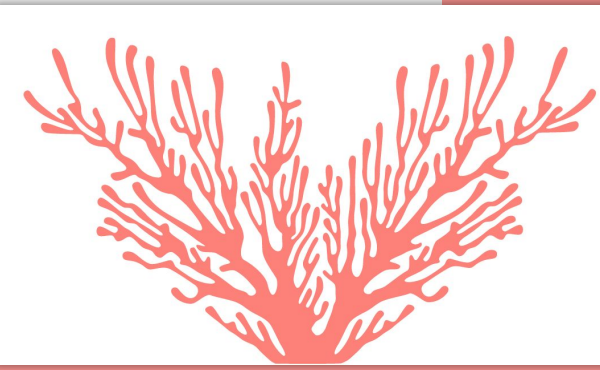
And, who are you??



Animated image of candy

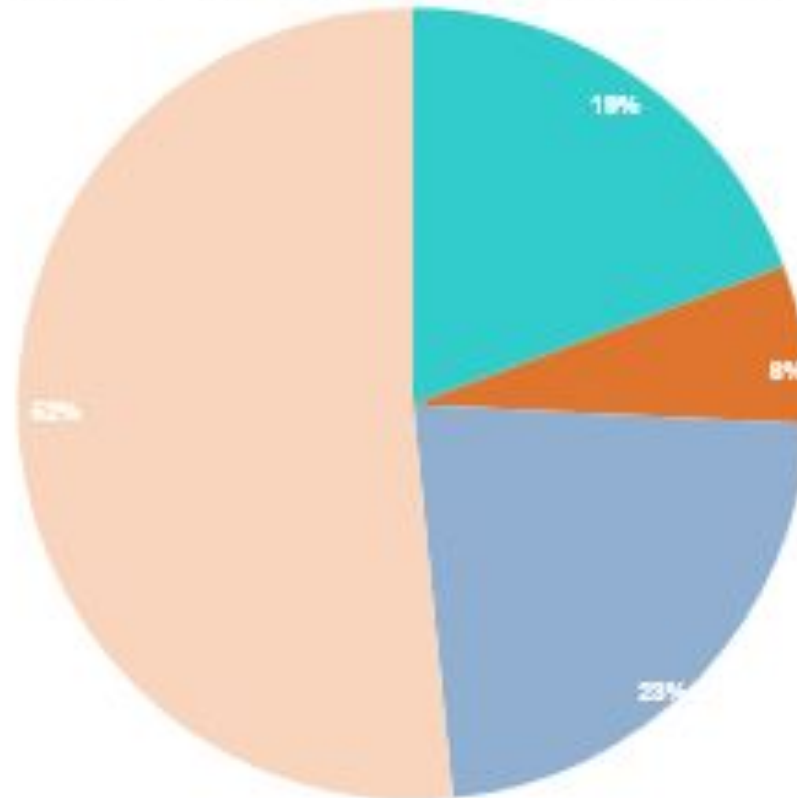
What we were up to...

- Qualitative inquiry
- Research Questions
 - What are the implications of the current structure of the online unit within the institution?
 - What are planned changes to the current structure?
- Thirty-one higher education institutions with online units/departments
- Utilized Organizational Design concepts to shape interview guide
- Series of three semi-structured interviews covering four dimensions of student's life cycle

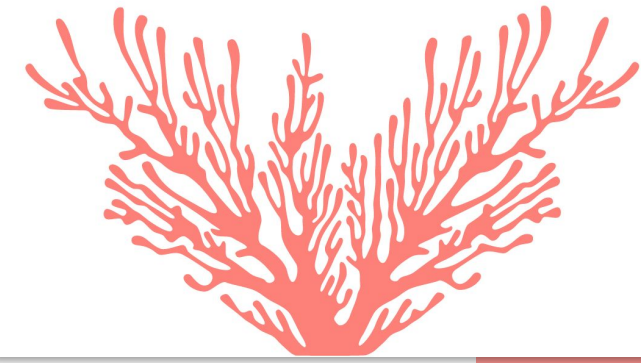


Who we talked to...

■ 2-Year Non-Profit ■ 4-Year For-Profit ■ 4-Year Private ■ 4-Year Public



Talked within the context of...



- **Work specialization**
 - The degree to which tasks in an organization are divided into separate jobs.
- **Chain of command**
 - Answers the question of “who reports to whom?” and signifies formal authority relationships.
- **Span of control**
 - Represents how many employees each manager in the organization has responsibility for.
- **Centralization**
 - Refers to where decisions are made in organizations.
- **Formalization**
 - The degree to which rules and procedures are used (not simply codified) to standardize behaviors and decisions in an organization.

Student Onboarding

**Academic
Functions**

**Student
Onboarding**

Includes:

- Marketing
- Enrollment & Admissions
- Financial Aid
- Evaluations
- Matriculation

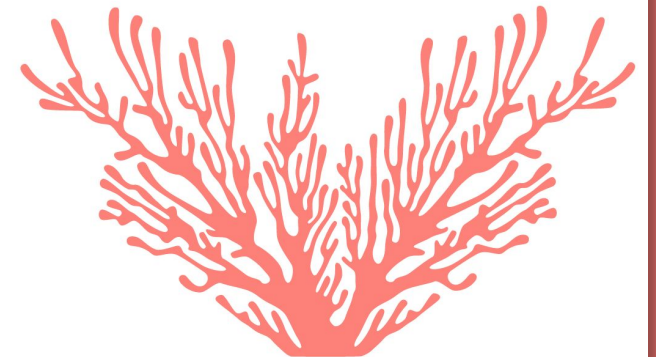
**Student Support
Services**

**Administrative
Functions**

Key Findings - Student Onboarding

- Predominantly all aspects of Student Onboarding were **centralized** at the university level such that there was little-to-no difference between how online students are attracted to, and on-boarded from campus-based ones.
- Online units are **key collaborators in Student Onboarding** and spend time ensuring that online student needs are honored (to the extent they can!).
- **Financial aid is by far the most centralized** function citing specialized knowledge as the precedent.
- Even so, **specialized Online Student Orientation** was fairly common where nearly 50% of respondents had designed an orientation specifically for online students.

Key Question: should all students be taking it now?



Academic Functions

**Academic
Functions**

**Student
Onboarding**

**Student Support
Services**

**Administrative
Functions**

Includes:

- Curriculum
- Programmatic Oversight
- Instructional Design
- Quality Assessment
- Faculty PD & Support

Key Findings - Academic Functions



- **Non-traditional** organizational designs are prevalent.
- **What the online unit manages varies** in Academic Functions, though it most often does not include management of online faculty.
- Online units and their leaders are all **thinking about the quality** of the education and **consistency in student experience**, though it is not always easy for them to enforce this.
- Of all the components, instructional design and faculty professional development exist in the online unit; though both remain largely optional in nature.
- *Key Question:* should this change or is it already changing?

What we heard...

I feel like we've not treated online learning as a unique field of expertise until the last three years or so

[we] can't be islands anymore

We don't want policies with a 'capital P' for everything...they [informal policies] need to be high level and form sort of a framework...let's build 'standards of practice' [instead]

We aren't the *wild-wild-west*, but we're definitely not formal...[we] excel at building *coalitions of the willing*

My role is focused on build[ing] coalitions and shared understandings...identifying the flowers that we want to keep and fertilizing the ones that need to get better and maybe trimming the ones that don't

...there are still faculty that you have to prove over and over again that online can work

...one of the challenges that I run into in my role is either a misunderstanding of online from our leadership around the institution, or a belief that it is, for some reason, easier.

Student Support Services

**Academic
Functions**

**Student
Onboarding**

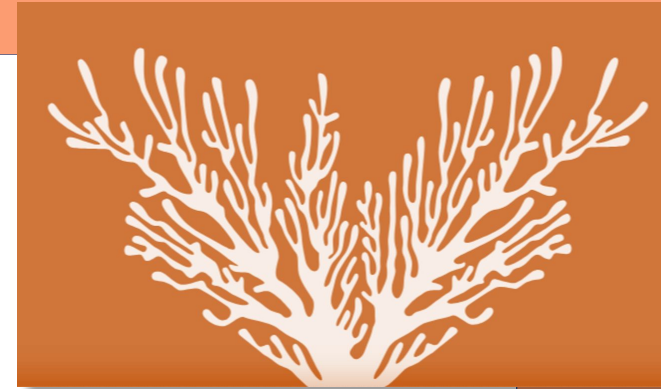
**Student Support
Services**

**Administrative
Functions**

Includes:

- Retention Services
- Student Engagement
- Student Well-being
- Learning Support

Key Findings - Student Support



- Predominantly all aspects of Student Support Services were **centralized** at the university level, except for Student Coaching/Advising.
 - N=10 had some type of resource dedicated to helping online student navigate the institution and their programming.
- **Collaborations** between the online staff and the support unit staff are the foundation for online student services success.
- **COVID-19 had a profound, positive effect** on online students' access to online support services*

Key Question: did this happen for you too?

...*In fact so much so, we have written an article solely on these results!

What we heard...

You have to have a seat at the table. We need to be in discussions with all the relevant units.

What's been kind of nice and rewarding is **the student life area has really kind of jumped into this [online]**, and I think that the COVID experience really accelerated it.

There's parts and pieces that take place in different parts of the university. So [regardless the type of student], the **office that provides a service is the same office that's going to provide it to an online student.**

The good thing about COVID is that some of those really located **services that hadn't made many forays into digital made a shift to more digital resources.** Before, they were more concerned about walk-ins.

In terms of initiatives, we have to reach out for it...it's not something where it's a general directive that they are to support us...it's left a little bit too informal...**it's personal relationship building.**

We've chosen to stick with ensuring that our main campus, the **services that we have are fully accessible to all of our students.** And I think pre v. post COVID, we are **even more internally aware of that need.**

Administrative Functions

**Academic
Functions**

**Student
Onboarding**

**Student Support
Services**

**Administrative
Functions**

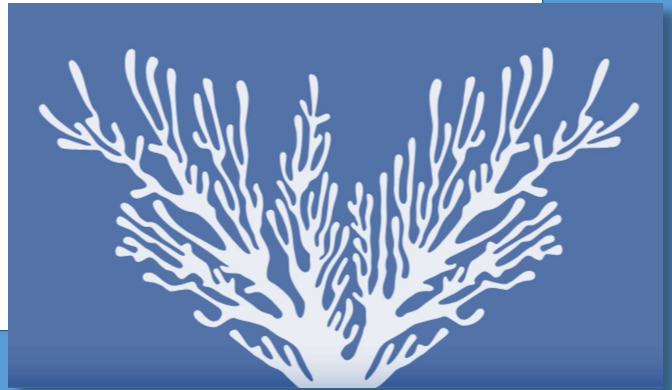
Includes:

- OPM
- Institutional Research
- Information Technology
- Finance
- Facilities

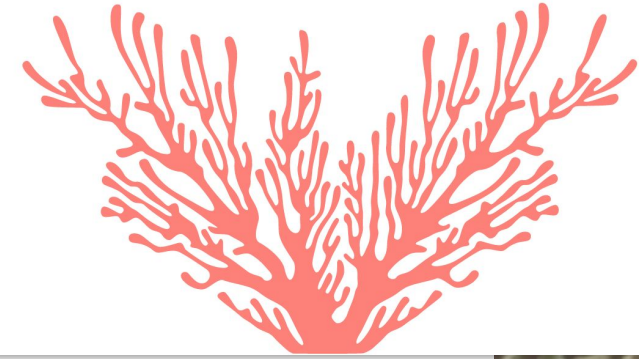
Key Findings - Administrative Functions

- Despite hearing about the prevalence of **OPMs** handling marketing and enrollment, that was a very **small subset of the sample** where most institutions preferred to handle these functions in-house (n=4).
- Significant variability in how the financial operations are structured and administered for online units (area of future study).
- Largely, administrative functions are **centralized** at the university level, though the Learning Management System (LMS) was sometimes housed in the online unit and NC-SARA reports are managed by some online units.

Key Question: why do we think this is?



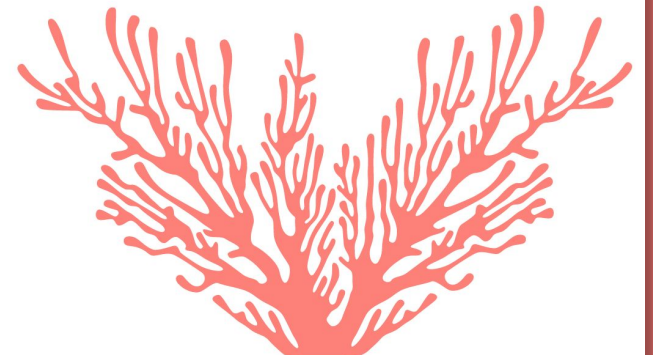
KEY TAKEAWAYS...



- The organizational structures of online units **do not follow traditional organizational design** frameworks.
- Online units and their leaders lead from where they are, through “**coalitions of the willing**”, alliances, and the use of social capital, not often through formal authority structures.
- Online is growing at most institutions and is a strategic initiative, though **education, advocacy, and alliance-building is still critical**.
- Online leaders make sense of centralization of some dimensions at the university level in terms of **efficiency, leveraging specialized knowledge, and big-picture perspective**.
- Online leaders and their units became vital players in the COVID-1

Quick Write Time!

- Quick what now?
- Reflection Questions:
 - What did you know coming into this presentation that shifted for you?
 - What resonated with you the most in the findings?
 - What did you want to learn the most about from here?



THANK YOU!

- **CHLOE** researchers (a joint research group representing Quality Matters and Eduventures) helped us solidify our purpose and direction.
- Online Learning Consortium (**OLC**) helped us spread awareness and recruit participants.
- National Louis University (**NLU**) awarded us a Seed Grant to fund the project.
- And, the support of each of our institutions to lend our time to this work!

See you soon!

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