

## 2011 Outlook for Online Learning and Distance Education

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<http://www.contactnorth.ca/en/data/files/download/Jan2011/2011%20Outlook.pdf>

Some key facts, highlights of the executive summary.

### Major Developments in 2010

- Enrollment in fully online (distance) courses in the USA expanded by 21%, compared with 2% expansion of campus-based enrollments;
- In the USA, much of the expansion into online learning is being driven by the for-profit sector
- The for-profit sector in the USA is finding a large market that is not being served as well by the state system, in particular lifelong learners, learners with relatively low or any high school qualifications, new immigrants, and marginalized communities.

### Systemic Barriers to Online and Distance Education

- **Faculty resistance**
  - The main systemic barrier to online learning and distance education remains faculty resistance, which shows no sign of decreasing. The Campus Computing Survey for 2010 showed that approximately 75% of all respondents said that faculty resistance to online learning was a factor that impeded the institution in moving to online learning. In fact, this is a slight increase over the figures for 2009.
- **Lack of training** in teaching
  - One of the key reasons for faculty resistance to online and distance education is their lack of knowledge or understanding of pedagogy and theories of teaching and learning.
- **Unambitious institutional goals** for technology-based teaching, focused more on enhancing the classroom model than finding new designs that allow for more flexible access and that use the affordances of new technology to develop skills needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
  - The intelligent use of technology should enable higher education institutions to:*
    - Accommodate more students;
    - Improve learning outcomes;
    - Provide more flexible access; and
    - At less cost.
- **Failure to develop appropriate methods for costing online learning**
  - 44% [of the 163 institutions in the survey] reported that online courses make a profit, 9% break even and 45% didn't know whether they made a profit or a loss.*
- **Lack of a system wide approach** to online learning and distance education, manifested by:
  - Restrictions on credit transfer, resulting in barriers to student mobility and difficulties in forming effective consortia;
  - Over-restrictive admission requirements for non-traditional learners; and
  - Lack of undergraduate degrees wholly available online and at a distance.

### Opportunities for 2011

- **Course redesign**
  - Learning management systems still have major advantages, in that they provide an *institutionally* secure environment, enable the management of learning, and integrate with administrative systems. Thus designers are looking for ways to integrate web 2.0 tools with learning management systems (Mott, 2010).
- **The future is mobile: 'the notion of class time as separate from non-class time will vanish.'**  
**Among other items...**
  - **Mobile learning** requires a radical shift in thinking from the concept of classroom teaching.
- **Open educational resources are a development that still falls far short of its promise. But they are increasing...**

- **Multimedia materials, such as short video clips, animations, and simulations will increasingly be developed as part of online course materials**
- **Learning analytics will provide instructors and course directors with tools that will enable decisions to be made based on data analyzed**

The main challenges to the use of learning analytics is making sure that data are collected and stored in ways that are useful for the kind of questions asked by end users (for instance, coding courses by the type of delivery, such as blended, hybrid and fully online), training end users such as faculty in the use of such tools, and ensuring that all concerns about privacy and data security are adequately addressed.

### **Conclusions**

Although the growth of fully distant online learning will continue over the next few years, the rate of growth of fully online courses is likely to decline as market saturation is reached, and as more flexible campus-based programs are developed that meet the needs of part-time students and lifelong learners.