Online vs. Brick and Mortar Learning: Competition or Complementary

Margaret A. Goralski, Quinnipiac University
Louis K. Falk, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

ABSTRACT

Online learning began as a subset of distance learning. It was initially, and is still perceived by some students, families, and educators, to be inferior. However, digital communication and technological advances have allowed a more interrelated educational experience to develop between learners and teachers. There is no need to be in the same place at the same time, hence, new online learning models are emerging to compete with or compliment brick and mortar education. Online learning is beginning to challenge the future of traditional brick and mortar models of education. It allows both the learner and the professor to combine their educational commitments with family, work, and other obligations. On the other hand, brick and mortar campuses allow students to monitor communication more efficiently and enhance student opportunities to form worldwide networks through sororities, fraternities, et al. As demand for more convenience and practical benefits of education increase, universities must make strategic decisions regarding online vs. brick and mortar learning. Will online learning continue to become more competitive, replacing traditional brick and mortar delivery systems, or will universities be able to construct a new model of complementarity – each fulfilling a particular purpose? This paper will delve briefly into the history and evolution of online learning, explore the internal competition between online and brick and mortar delivery, and make recommendations for the difficult strategic decisions that must be made by governmental agencies, university administrators, and future faculty, families, and students worldwide.

Keywords: Online learning, Brick and mortar Campuses, Competition, Complementary, Strategic decisions