

FAQ on eLearning Primer at CSU Stanislaus

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What precisely is eLearning?

At California State University, Stanislaus, the term “eLearning” is used to denote a fully on-line, asynchronous course – a “web course” – regardless of platform (Blackboard or eCollege). Any course with both a face-to-face meeting requirement and on-line material, is classified as a “hybrid” or “blended.”

Why is teaching a fully online course a good thing?

eLearning allows both student and instructor the flexibility to do their course work at a time of their choosing. This is particularly desirable for older students finishing a degree while holding down a full time job. Faculty are no longer tied to classroom several days a week and may grade assignments or respond to questions at a time convenient for them (after the kids are asleep...). This in turn helps ease the demand for the “brick & mortar” classroom space on campus. Geography and time are no longer a barrier to education.

Academically, fully on-line courses can provide methods of intra-communication not possible in a traditional lecture. Discussions and information sharing are more egalitarian with both faculty and students participating in on-going dialogs that can be used in a constructivist approach to learning. On-line courses have the further benefit of giving both students who A) do not have English as a first language, or B) have a disability, or C) are reticent to speak up in class, have a more equal chance to participate in reasoned class discussions that occur on-line. Research has shown that motivated, disciplined students do very well in an asynchronous learning environment. And indeed, there may be no difference in their grades.

Disabled students often prefer on-line courses as it allows them to work at home where they are generally better equipped with their particular assistive resources and free of time constraints and campus obstacles.

From the larger and more altruistic perspective, students from all over California and even other states can work towards a CSU degree that might be otherwise difficult to obtain. Expanding enrollment in eLearning courses at CSU Stanislaus ultimately benefits the campus and academic departments by increasing FTE and revenue. Attachment A shows the current on-line degree programs in the CSU. As will be seen from the gaps, there are many opportunities yet to be explored.

What are the challenges with eLearning teaching?

Perhaps the biggest challenge is taking course material that faculty are used to delivering face to face and converting it to a self-paced study program with interaction via threaded discussions and knowledge sharing by all participants. Frequent communication in eLearning is very important to keep the channels open and help ensure that students are not feeling isolated. Faculty writing skills will come to the fore as that will be the only

method of communicating with on-line students. Clearly setting down course requirements, behavior expectations, academic honesty, assignments detail, etc. is vital. Finally, even though an eLearning course does not tie an instructor to a room and a time, time management skills will be important to both stay on top of the course and maintain balance in their life.

Is our typical student a good match for an eLearning course?

Approximately 78% of the California State University, Stanislaus student population resides outside of the Turlock-Denair area. About 32% of the overall student population is age 25 or older – the average of undergraduate students is 23 and the average age of post-baccalaureate students is 34. Many students are adult re-entry and hold full-time jobs during the day – preferring to enroll in Distance Learning (televised) courses during the evening.¹

Is there financial assistance for creating an eLearning course?

eCollege – through June 2008, full time or tenure track faculty who agree to convert a face-to-face course to fully on-line, can receive a \$3,000 stipend as part of the eCollege pilot program. They must agree to teach the course five times.

Blackboard – while there is currently no campus financial support for creating fully on-line Blackboard courses, instructors may apply for FDC Mini-Grants, departmental funds, and other sources of funding.

Do the students pay extra for taking an eLearning course?

During the pilot program, students are charged \$150 per eCollege course (approved by SFAC, 3/07). If this sounds like a lot, consider that gas for the commute between Turlock and Modesto twice a week for a semester would easily go over that amount – not to mention parking passes, parking tickets, purchasing food while on campus, etc.

There is no additional charge for students taking a fully on-line Blackboard course.

What about other eLearning platforms?

Blackboard and eCollege are currently supported by OIT. A campus Task Force on eLearning is currently evaluating the respective merits and costs of three programs – eCollege, Blackboard, and Moodle. It is expected that the Task Force will make a recommendation at the end of Spring 2007 and a decision will be made in 2007/2008 as to which platform the campus will adopt. Whichever course management software is ultimately selected, existing on-line course material can be converted to the platform.

How many students can enroll in my eLearning course?

For the first course with eCollege, it is strongly recommended that 25 students be the upper limit on enrollment. This is to help you get accustomed to managing a fully on-line course. Once you've feeling more comfortable, enrollment should increase. There is no

¹ Data provided by Institutional Research, March 2007.

magic number for the upper limit – it depends upon you, your department, and how many students want to take the course. 15 enrolled students is the minimum for a course to be offered.

How do I go about designing & developing an eLearning course?

Here are some ideas and resources to help you. Building and teaching your first eLearning course will be a challenge, but it does get easier with practice.

Best Practices Guidelines: Our Off-Campus Mediated & Distance Learning Sub-Committee has developed general guidelines for a successful eLearning course (Attachment B). These will be useful in the preliminary stages of creating your course, but when it comes down to actually developing the material, you'll want some more specific information...

Design & Development: Bob Koehler (667-3898, bkoehler@csustan.edu) is our trainer for both eLearning platforms. He is also available to assist with pedagogical and practical aspects of building a fully on-line course.

Library Resources: John Brandt (664-6563, jbrandt@csustan.edu) is the Electronic Resources Librarian. He and the members of the Library Faculty are available to assist instructors integrate Library resources into their online courses. Librarians can create links to specific readings available through the library's online collections, help instructors identify appropriate research databases and configure links to provide off-campus access to these subscription resources for our students. Instruction librarians are available to work with faculty to develop a library instruction session and/or online research guides tailored to specific courses. Electronic journal articles and data-bases, scholarly & corporate web sites, and other resources are available to support your teaching objectives.

- 1) Setting up links to access specific articles available via one of the library's online resources (e.g. links to a specific journal article, or a specific e-book, if we have a subscription).
- 2) Identifying and linking to appropriate research databases, including appropriate information that will allow students off-campus to access these sources via the Library's subscription (requiring only the use of a student ID #).
- 3) Identifying a librarian to work with faculty to develop an instruction plan and/or online research guides tailored to their course.

Media Resources: OIT's Distance Learning department is happy to help with the grunt work of producing digital media resources for your eLearning course. These include, but are not limited to: shooting digital video (brief introductions, demonstrations, interviews, etc.), podcasting, analog audio to digital transfers, scanning images & text, creating PDFs, copyright assistance, and consultation on instructional design.

How do I know that someone is not cheating if I can't see them?

Of course, in any kind of class, there can never be an absolute guarantee that students are not cheating. There is just a different kind of cheating that is possible in an on-line course. Just as you had to think outside-the-box to construct an on-line course, you have to do the same for your on-line assessment of student learning.

The approach to preventing academic dishonesty in on-line courses is very similar to what would be done in a face-to-face class. A three-pronged approach is your best bet.

#1 Address the topic. In your syllabus, write a very plain statement about academic honesty, plagiarism, and scholarly integrity. Not only should you state the consequences, but point out that people get out of education what they put into it, and if they cheat, they won't have learned the material.

#2 Develop assignments/tests that demonstrate mastery. These can include, careful wording of multiple choice items, papers that are submitted once or twice in draft form before final grading, regular one-page opinion papers on reading assignments, regular quizzes to test comprehension, individual projects approved by you in advance, monitoring threaded discussions and activity within the sections of the on-line course to see who is falling behind or not participating. Check with other faculty teaching on-line courses and see what strategies they use, and change your tests before you teach the course again.

#3 Use the technology to prevent opportunistic cheating. It is a common misconception that cheating can be prevented only by technology, but this should really be your last bastion after applying the first two principles. The course software can let you develop a test bank of questions that will be randomized for each student, set a specific day, time, and time window for taking the test, and sometimes, lock up the browser to prevent a surreptitious Google search while the test is in progress. Use Turnitin.com plagiarism checker when students submit papers. Brian Duggan and Bob Koehler can assist with suggestions.

These three web articles that offer good advice on the topic –

“Strategies to Minimize Cheating Online” (Illinois Online Network)

<http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/assessment/cheating.asp>

Online Testing: Best Practices from the Field (North Carolina Community College System)

<http://www.ncei.org/blackboard/testingadvice.html>

“Cheating, Plagiarism (and other Questionable Practices), the Internet, and other Electronic Resources” (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Library)

<http://library.wisc.edu/libraries/WomensStudies/plag.htm>