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COMMENTARY

Is Online Learning the Silver Bullet for Men of Color?

An Institutional-level Analysis of the California Community College System

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Community Colleges across the nation have taken the lead in offering online courses to hundreds of thousands of students. Online courses offer students freedom and flexibility to take courses at their own leisure. Faculty are better able to track their students' progress, and community colleges can offer more courses to more students without having to pay for added classroom infrastructure. Administrators may see this as a way to offer affordable courses to working students, students in remote areas, and students with families. Previous research has indicated that students who learn content online are just as likely to retain knowledge as students who have taken courses face to face. Thus, with the advent of online learning has also brought into question by what measures do we define success and what are the best modalities of instruction for students.

Our objective in this study was to determine whether or not there were differences in (1) students' academic success, defined as courses passed and (2) course retention, defined as courses completed, for community college men by racial/ethnic affiliation. The study used institutional data on men enrolled in California's community college system to provide greater insight into the effect of online learning on student success. Four modalities for learning were compared: traditional face-to-face, regular asynchronous (i.e., nonreal time), asynchronous with media (i.e., nonreal time with media) and synchronous styles (i.e., real-time virtual teaching).

Findings illustrated that Asian, Black, Latino, and White men were more likely to have higher success outcomes when engaged in face-to-face modalities. There were no clear patterns in which online modality was better than others with regards to success, except for Black men. For these men, asynchronous with multimedia was identified as the second most effective online modality pertaining to success.

This research has demonstrated the manifold benefits of face-to-face instruction. As such, face-to-face courses seemed to be the best type of modality for community college men. Administrators must contemplate expanded online outreach with rates of success. Considering that one fourth of community college students are in California and that 55 percent of California community college students are racial ethnic minorities; special attention must be taken when promoting online learning to Asian, Black, Latino, and White men in community colleges. Further research is needed to find modalities that can fulfill the same benefits as face-to-face learning. Research can be expanded on the variation in the presentation of online learning materials and the structure of interactions within online classrooms.

The full study is in Angelica M. G. Palacios & J. Luke Wood (2015): Is Online Learning The Silver Bullet for Men of Color? An Institutional-Level Analysis of the California Community College System, Community College Journal of Research and Practice.

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