Online Education in Public Affairs

Martha H. Ginn, Ph.D.
Augusta State University
mginn@aug.edu

Augustine Hammond, Ph.D.
Augusta State University
ahammon3@aug.edu

Abstract

This exploratory study provides an overview of the current landscape of online education in the fields of Master of Public Administration and Master of Public Policy (MPA/MPP) utilizing a dataset compiled from content analysis of MPA/MPP programs' websites and survey of 96 National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) affiliated institutions. Areas studied include the rationales for offering or not offering online education, concerns with technology, modes of online instruction, student services, faculty and staff demands and enrollment patterns. The primary goal stated for offering courses and degrees online is to reach more students. We found substantial diversity in teaching methods which suggests students and instructors alike are attracted to online education due to its flexibility. Surprisingly, we did not find any significant problems with technological concerns.

Introduction

Advances in, and diffusion of, technology have resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of postsecondary educational institutions offering online courses and programs (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Vernon, Vakalahi, Pierce, Pittman-Munke, & Adkins, 2009; Williams & Corkill, 2007). Several reasons have been given for the growth of online educational opportunities, including the desire to provide or expand educational access to underserved individuals, effective management of classroom space and financial resources, institutional changes, and the need to capture emerging market opportunities presented by working adults and transient students (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Austin, 2009). Graduate programs in public administration, public policy and public affairs (MPA/MPP) have been impacted by the proliferation of online courses and online degree program. Utilizing a dataset compiled from content analysis of MPA/MPP programs' websites and a survey of 96 National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) affiliated institutions, the report provides a thorough picture of the current landscape of online education in the fields of MPA/MPP including the extent, nature, barriers, and problems of online education among NASPAA accredited MPA/MPP programs.

The Challenges of Online Education

The appeal of online education notwithstanding, online education has not been without challenges and the excitement and expansion in online education has been accompanied by debate and concerns ranging from technological problems to institutional issues.

Technology. Communication has been observed to be quintessence to effective online teaching (Young, 2006) but technology can hinder effective communication in online environment (Austin, 2009; Santilli & Beck, 2005). There are wide-ranging concerns with the use of technology in online education including limitations on communication and interaction through technology (Austin, 2009; Williams, 2003), reliability of technology, technical support, and levels of technological competence by both students and instructors (Jones, 2008; Perreault et al., 2002; Santillia & Beck 2005; Vernon et al., 2009), and concerns with the digital divide and "the varying degree of connectivity among" students (Jones, 2008, p. 52). All these factors affect the smooth communication and instructional delivery in online environment and if effective instruction depends on communication, these issues, if they are widespread, are not trivial matters.

Instruction. The instruction-related issues and concerns include, but are not limited to, access to resources, students' communication with their instructors and peers, assessment and testing (Perreault et al., 2002), and time, cost, and training involved in course creation and delivery (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Barth, 2004; Jones, 2008; Williams, 2003). Effective online teaching is time consuming not only in the design and preparation of the course, but also in delivering the course (Barth, 2004; Santilli & Beck, 2005; Young, 2006). For instance, Barth has noted that aside from the

intensive preparation time required the first time an online course is offered, an online course takes almost twice as much time to deliver than a traditional class. Additionally, online instruction requires special competencies and skills training beyond the normal training of faculty (Santilli & Beck, 2005). Aside from the complex nature of online teaching, it can also be cost-intensive with respect to money, time, manpower, and support of the technology (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Jones, 2008). However, it is believed that with large courses and many sections, the cost involved in online education can be minimized (Carr, 2001 as cited in Jones, 2008).

Recruitment and Retention. The role of program size in cost minimization makes recruitment and retention a challenge to online education. Not surprisingly, respondents in Jones (2008) study indicated "effort to maximize return on investment could have a negative impact on instructional quality, course deliver flexibility, or student/instructor attitudes toward the selected online mechanism" (p. 51). While it seems obvious that schools and programs seeking to maximize the benefit of online investment must make recruitment and retention a priority, studies suggest that online education is not for everyone (students and faculty alike) and that tends to limit the market potential for recruitment and retention (Barth, 2004; Bocchi, Eastman, & Swift, 2004; Dupin-Bryant, 2004; Fortune et al., 2006). Echoing the view that online education is not for everyone, Bocchi et al. noted that attracting motivated online learners goes beyond programs features and fits with students' growth plans; it involves the profiling and selection of both students and faculty best adept for online learning, and equipping them to better work as teams in the virtual environment.

The notion that online programs are not suited for everyone is also demonstrated in the area of effectiveness (Williams, 2006). Explaining the possible reason for difference in performance between students in an online program and in a traditional classroom, Williams argued that online students are mostly "older, highly motivated, and self-disciplined" and "most often voluntarily seek further education in hopes of career advancement" (p. 135). She added that online education provides "self-paced instruction in a convenient/comfortable location" for these students who are mostly working professionals (p. 135). In sum, recruiting and retaining students for an online program is different and may be more demanding than that for on-campus programs.

Students, faculty and institution. The success of any teaching-learning experience depends on the student-instructor interaction but students are considered the most important factor in online education requiring online instruction to be student centered (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). It has been argued that the student-centered nature of online education makes faculty acceptance and disciplined students critical to the quality of online education (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). There are several factors that make online education appealing to students and faculty alike but both students and faculty most often cite flexibility and convenience as factors that makes online education advantageous and appealing to them (Donavant, 2009; Perreault et al., 2002; Young, 2006). Also important to faculty acceptance and satisfaction with online education are issues ranging from self-gratification to intellectual challenges, interest in technology to belief in their ability to promote student outcomes (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009) and their perceived usefulness of technology (Gibson, Harris, & Colaric, 2008).

Additionally, these student and faculty related issues and concerns of online education are institutional-based, making institutional environment important. Not only do the roles and competencies essential for the successful implementation and management of online education vary according to institutional environment (Williams, 2003), but faculty satisfaction with online education is also influenced by institution-related factors (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). Bolliger and Wasilik found that faculty satisfaction was higher when the institution values and supports online teaching, recognizes the higher workload involved and provide release time, adequate compensation, and "equitable reward system for promotion and tenure" (pp. 106 -107).

The literature on online education is extensive and expanding with the increasing trend in online education. This brief assessment of the literature suggests that online education is a complex and cost-intensive process with several challenges; however but with proper development and delivery, it can be as effective as traditional on-campus education.

Methodology

In order to assess the current state of online education in MPA/MPP, we implemented two research strategies. First, we surveyed a NASPAA member schools about whether they provided online educational opportunities and if so, we asked questions about the type of courses/programs offered. Since survey methodology relied on voluntary response and undoubtedly underestimates the prevalence of online education in the field, we did extensive content analysis of websites for NASPAA affiliated schools to get a more accurate representation of the breadth of existing online educational opportunities.

The survey instrument used was developed in collaboration with NASPAA. Filter and contingency questions were utilized to explore programs in different stages of online education. From these filter questions, we grouped together schools offering online degree programs or certificates and analyzed these schools separately from schools offering only online courses. The survey included a series of questions for schools that offer either online courses or entire degree programs online. These questions explored areas such as motivations for offering online courses and programs, estimated enrollments, methods of delivery, and technological issues encountered.

The SurveyMonkey survey was sent via email to all 270 principal representatives of NASPAA affiliated institutions in January 2011. Several follow-up reminder emails were sent out to help increase the response rate. Of the 270 NASPAA affiliated institutions invited to participate, 96, representing a response rate of 35.8%, completed the survey. The sample appears to be representative of the general NASPAA membership programs in terms of type of institution. While 76% of NASPAA members are affiliated with public institutions, 81% (n=78) of our respondents were affiliated with public institutions. NASPAA membership consists of 23% private non-profit institutions, and our survey included 19% (16) private institutions. As a result, our sample included both small and large programs and reflected significant geographic diversity. Of the 51 schools listed on NASPAA's website as offering online courses or programs, 18 (35.3%) completed the survey. Through the survey, we identified 44 additional schools that offer online courses or programs. Therefore, our admittedly incomplete list of schools with online offerings includes 95 schools and 62 (65.2%) of those schools completed the survey.

NASPAA's website contains a list of schools that offer online courses. This is self-reported data and is most likely an incomplete listing of schools with online courses. Therefore, we utilized this list of 51 schools as a starting point for website analysis and then visited program websites for every NASPAA accredited school, also listed on NASPAA's website. From this list, we identified 33 additional schools with online courses and programs. We compared our list of these 84 schools to those responding to the NASPAA survey as having online courses and identified 43 more schools that were not included in our survey database. In all, we have identified a total of 127 MPA programs that offer some form of online education. We were able to successfully identify and collect information on program websites from 121 of the 127 schools.

Findings

Of the 96 schools that completed the survey, 34 (35.4%) indicated that all of their coursework is provided completely on campus without any online components, 17 (17.7%) offered hybrid or blended courses in the programs on campus with some content/classes meetings held on online, 22 (22.9%) had programs that offered both fully online and hybrid courses, and the remaining 23 schools (23.9%) had programs offering fully online courses. It is important to note that this survey question asked about current online course offerings, not whether the courses were offered exclusively online. Therefore, schools with fully online courses may also offer traditional on campus classes. We did, however, ask the follow up question of whether the entire degree or certificate could be attained online. A total of 19 schools offered programs that could be completed fully online, with 15 offering the entire MPA/MPP degree online and an additional 4 schools offering an MPA/MPP certificate online. Thus, of the schools participating in the survey, almost a fifth offer fully online programs and almost half offer courses completely online. On the other end of the spectrum, over a third of responding schools offer no online courses or courses with any online components. One should note that this figure may underestimate the schools without online programs because such schools may have elected to not even complete the survey in the first place since it was about online education.

Combining the information from the survey and the website analysis, we were able to compile a more complete listing of MPA programs offering educational opportunities online. Specifically, we identified 57 schools that offered complete degree programs or certificates entirely online. We also identified another 41 schools offering courses fully online but students cannot complete an entire degree program online. Many of these schools also offer hybrid courses in addition to the courses offered completely online. Finally, we identified 29 schools currently offering hybrid courses. Of the 57 schools offering complete degree programs or certificates, 11 of these programs are not NASPAA accredited. It is important to note that this is a lack of NASPAA accreditation for the program generally, not the online component. Currently, we do not have information on whether online programs are NASPAA accredited, rather only whether the program in general is accredited.

Rationales for going online. Online courses and programs are proliferating across academia and it appears that MPA/MPP programs are not immune from this phenomenon. The survey sought to identify the motivating factors in offering courses online. The results appear in Table 1. The first column displays the motivations for taking an entire program online, the second column displays the motivations for offering online coursework, and the final column includes the motivations behind schools that are currently considering offering online courses.

Table 1

Primary motivations for taking a program and/or certificate online, offering courses online, or considering offering courses online*

	Online degree programs or certificates Percentage of sample n=19	Online courses only Percentage of sample n=41	No onlin compone Percentage sample n=12
Increase enrollment/reach more students	79	66	67

Increase revenue	16	32	42
Compete with other similar schools	10	37	58
Physical space concerns on campus	16	10	8
Other (please specify)	42	51	33

* Percentage of sample for each response category, rounded to the nearest whole number

While the survey questions were worded slightly differently for each category of schools, there are clearly commonalities in motivations to offer online educational opportunities. The questions included check all that apply in order to accurately capture all potential motivations, therefore the cells display the percentage of schools in each sample that indicated the response category was a motivation for considering (or offering) online courses/programs.

The most popular motivation for entering the field of online education is to increase enrollments and reach more students. This same theme appears frequently in open-ended responses throughout the survey. Many schools suggest that an online format allows them to reach students that would otherwise be unable to take coursework due to geographic limitations, work/home constraints, and even physical impairments. To further support the idea that the decision to move to an online format is student driven, the primary reasons provided in the open-ended other (please specify) category were to reach more students and to accommodate students with varying needs. The second most popular theme in the other response field was the need for flexibility for both the students and the faculty. These observations are consistent with the literature on the factors driving the proliferation of online programs (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Austin, 2009).

Interestingly, the motivation of competition with other schools was not very prevalent for those with online programs but was cited as an influential motivation those offering or considering offering online courses.This may be due to the fact that those schools with online programs or certificates are typically more established in providing online courses and have most likely already established a client base through the establishment of one or more degree specializations. This deduction is informed by the observation by Allen and Seaman (2007) that future growth in online education will come predominantly from institutions already offering online opportunities "as they add new programs or grow existing ones" (p.2). These institutions have potentially distinguished themselves from other schools by offering a somewhat unique product in the form of a specialized degree concentration online. The creation of a niche market may insulate schools from the competitive pressure less established schools experience. In support of this theory, the two schools with online programs that indicated that competition was a motivation indicated that they did not offer any degree specializations. In general, these findings suggest that those not offering online components are feeling the pressure and perhaps sense that they are losing students to other schools with online programs. Furthermore, increasing revenue appears to be a motivating factor for those without online programs but appears to have been less important for those with already established programs. Again, the few schools motivated by increasing revenue with degree programs or certificates were not currently offering degree specializations.

Increasing revenue with an online program could originate from increased enrollment or increased fees and/or tuition for online courses. On the topic of enrollment, given that the most common motivation for offering online courses and programs was to reach more students, it is useful to evaluate whether schools feel they successfully met that goal. Table 2 includes an exploration of the patterns in enrollment since the school began offering online courses (or programs).

Table 2
Patterns seen with regard to enrollment since began offering online courses or programs*

	Online Courses Only Percentage of sample n=39	**Online degree programs certificates** Percentage of sample n=19
Dramatic increase in enrollment	5	26
Modest increase in enrollment	51	63
No increase in enrollment	44	11
Modest decrease in enrollment	0	0
Dramatic decrease in enrollment	0	0

* Percentage of sample for each response category, rounded to the nearest whole number

It appears that offering online courses is helping to reach more students because the modal category for both online courses and online programs is a modest increase in enrollment. Additionally, 26% of the online programs saw a dramatic increase in enrollment while only 5% of online courses did. This would suggest that in order to achieve dramatic increases in enrollment, the schools may need to consider taking their entire program online. The table also clearly shows that no schools experienced a decline in enrollment when offering classes online.

Exactly how many students are enrolled in online MPA/MPP degree or certificate programs? Only 13 of the 19 schools in our survey that offer online programs provided an estimated enrollment in their online degree or certificate programs for Fall 2010. The range of enrollment figures was 10 to 140 with an average of 56 students. These numbers suggest that there is a demand for said programs. Given that these programs do not require students be geographically proximate to the institution, schools considering offering an online program may want to consider catering to a niche market by providing a degree specialty not already readily available in the current marketplace. We asked the question "what percentage of your students enrolled in your online program and/or certificate reside outside of your state." While the majority (11 out of 19) indicated that 20% or less lived out of state, two schools indicated that 80% or more did live out of state. The other five schools fell in between these two extremes. Ultimately, this demonstrates that online programs are competing regionally or nationally for students.

We gathered information from program websites to address the issue of potentially generating additional revenue streams from online course fees or higher tuition rates for online courses. Unfortunately, not all schools listed their tuition and fee policies with regard to online education, so our estimates are plagued by missing data values. We found 15 schools that clearly charged an additional fee for online coursework. The minimum fee charged was $25 and the maximum was $925. The mean for online fees was $175 with a standard deviation of $270 which suggests wide disparity in the fees assessed for online education.

We found 40 schools that provided in-state tuition costs per credit hour for both regular classes and online classes. The average cost per in state credit hour for a regular class was $545, with a standard deviation of $368, whereas the average cost per in-state credit hour for an online class was $572, with a standard deviation of $388. While the data suggest schools are charging a premium for online coursework, a matched pairs difference of means test indicated the mean difference $25.68 was not statistically significant with a t score of 1.193 and a two tailed significance probability value of 0.240. We also found 17 schools that provided out of state tuition costs per credit hour for both regular classes and online classes. The average cost per out of state credit hour for a regular class was $840, with a standard deviation of $557, whereas the average cost per out of state credit hour for an online class was $806, with a standard deviation of $592. While the data actually suggest that schools are charging students less for online coursework done out of state than regular out of state tuition, a matched pairs difference of means test indicated the mean difference $34.70 was not statistically significant with a t score of -1.041 and a two tailed significance probability value of 0.313.

Technology. A primary concern in online instruction involves technology. The survey explored the prevalence of technology problems in both online courses and online programs. The responses to this question appear in Table 3. While previous scholars (Jones, 2008; Perreault et al., 2002; Vernon et al., 2009) raised concerns including reliability of technology, technological competence by students and instructors, and technical support, overall, the responses here suggest that technological resources and technological problems are not as prevalent as one might assume for schools offering online instruction in MPA/MPP programs.

The modal category for all but infrastructural development in online programs is not a problem. Percentage wise, online programs do have more "slight problem" responses than online courses only, but that is most likely a function of frequency of use. The largest concern, although admittedly slight, is infrastructural development, followed by system upgrades. These concerns are most likely artifacts of recent budgetary restrictions in higher education that are probably forestalling both infrastructure development and system upgrades in order to meet more pressing budgetary needs.

Table 3

Percentage of schools indicating problems with information technology resources in online courses or program/certificate:*

	Not a problem	Slight problem	Major Problem
Online Courses Only:			
IT support for students	57	43	0
IT support for faculty	62	38	0
Infrastructural development	61	31	8
System upgrade	64	31	5
Maintenance	64	36	0
Online Programs/Certificates:			
IT support for students	58	42	0
IT support for faculty	58	37	5
Infrastructural development	42	47	11
System upgrade	53	42	5
Maintenance	58	42	0

Another relevant point is that the data only provides insight on these problems from the MPA/MPP director's standpoint. The problems with IT support for students may be much more widespread for students than faculty realize. Regardless, technology does not appear to be a significant barrier in online instruction within the discipline.

With regard to technology and instruction, there appears to be relative uniformity in the course management systems utilized at the schools that participated in the survey. Over 75% of schools offering online courses or online programs indicated that they utilized Blackboard or a Blackboard owned product (WebCt) for their course management platform. Five schools indicated they used university specific platforms and 2 schools utilized E-College. We did include an "other" category and the most commonly named product was Desire to Learn, followed by Moodle. Regardless of the other products available, Blackboard seems to be the overwhelming favored product in online platforms for our sample. Utilizing instructional platforms such as Blackboard should keep start up costs lower for schools offering online instruction.

Instruction. There are multiple instruction formats one can pursue in providing a course online. In our survey, we gauged the frequency of the use of various methods of instruction currently available. For both schools offering online courses and schools offering online programs, we asked them to indicate how often they used the differing methods of delivery. Table 4 presents the frequency of use for each method organized by whether the school had online courses only or entire programs online. The distribution of responses clearly show the wide range of instructional methods utilized in virtual classrooms. The lack of a clear predominant method of instruction reinforces the idea that many schools are adopting online formats at least partially due to the flexibility it provides for the instructor. As mentioned previously, students and faculty alike cite flexibility and convenience as factors that make online education advantageous and appealing to them (Donavant, 2009; Perreault et al., 2002; Young, 2006).

Table 4

How often methods of delivery are used for online classes*

Response Options	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	Always
Online Courses Only: n=37					
Simultaneous broadcast with interactive features	48	38	11	3	0
Taped lecture broadcast	51	32	11	5	0
Narrated PowerPoint lectures	35	24	24	11	5
Written lectures posted or emailed	17	14	34	20	14
Online Programs/Certificates: n=19					
Simultaneous broadcast with interactive features	20	55	10	5	10
Taped lecture broadcast	18	41	23	18	0
Narrated PowerPoint lectures	0	30	40	20	10
Written lectures posted or emailed	10	31	10	21	26

*Percentage of sample for each response category, rounded to the nearest whole number

Clearly, there is no one size fits all for instructional methods, but it does appear that simultaneous broadcast and taped lectures are the least popular and narrated PowerPoint lectures and written lectures are the preferred method. The preference for these self-paced methods does suggest, as evidenced in previous literature, that online education is not for everyone and that independent students with self-motivation are more likely to succeed in this environment than others (Barth, 2004; Bocchi, Eastman, & Swift, 2004; Dupin-Bryant, 2004; Fortune et al., 2006). The preference for narrated PowerPoint lectures and written lectures feed into Austin's (2009) perceived limitation of technology to MPA/MPP education. The use of narrated PowerPoint lectures and written lectures do not "support real-time or synchronous interaction" (p. 164) and by extension the kind of educational practices necessary for the development of the requisite skills for current students and public administrators.

This methods of delivery question also provided an open ended "other, please specify" option that many schools utilized to provide further information regarding their instructional methods. Several other methods of instruction were discussed in the open-ended responses with the most common being the use of discussion boards or online discussions to reinforce material. Multiple responses emphasized the importance of interactive assignments with the instructor and other classmates. Schools also indicated that online assignments, either turned in within the platform or emailed to the professor were critical to the instructional methods. Finally, two schools indicated that they utilized some variant of a

real classroom setting that required weekly check-ins for students to assess progress. The common theme in these open-ended responses was the necessity of persistent student and instructor interaction. As emphasized by Bollinger and Wasilik (2009), schools appear to embrace the idea that continued interaction and assessment by dedicated faculty members leads to more successful online courses.

Student services. It is clear that effective online instruction is dependent on effectively communicating with and engaging the students. Instructors must go to extensive lengths within the virtual classroom to make sure the students feel connected. Furthermore, schools must provide a variety of administrative student services for these students as they navigate through their educational pursuits, sometimes at an extended distance from campus. Schools that offer entire degree programs or certificates online are increasingly offering these types of student services online as well. Of the 19 programs with online degrees or certificates, 13 provide academic advising online. Five of the 19 schools provide financial advising online. Academic support, such as tutoring, is offered by 5 out of the 19 schools. Six of the schools provide career placement and career support services online.

Faculty and staff. Given all of the added services that need to be provided with an online program, one would assume that the administrative burden created would necessitate the hiring of additional administrative staff. However, only 2 of the schools with online programs indicated that they employed administrative staff dedicated exclusively to their online programs. In addition, only 5 schools indicated that they had to hire additional faculty or staff to accommodate their online program. Furthermore, these additional positions included 1 to 4 full-time positions and one school indicated they had to hire an additional 10 part time instructors. The lack of additional staffing is somewhat surprising given the acknowledgement or the recognition, both in the literature and in the survey results, that effective online teaching is time consuming for the instructor. We expected the increased workload associated with online teaching would lead to additional faculty and staff hires. The relative absence of increased personnel may be a function more of current economic times than a true lack of need to hire additional instructors.The other possibility is that offering online courses has not created the increased enrollment schools may have anticipated and justifying additional hires to upper administration might be difficult.

We also asked each school to provide the number of tenured or tenure track faculty and part-time or adjunct faculty/practitioners. While one might assume that online programs would require more faculty; we found the opposite. Specifically, we found that schools with online courses only had an average of 9.6 tenured or tenure track faculty and 7.6 adjuncts, whereas online degree programs had an average of 7.1 tenured or tenure track and 6.5 adjuncts. However, when we did a difference of means tests for both tenured/tenure track and part time faculty by type of online offering (online courses only vs. online degree programs), the difference was not significant. Specifically the difference of means in tenure track faculty was 2.495 with a t score of 0.962 and a two tailed significance probability value of 0.340, whereas the difference of means in adjuncts was 1.009 with a t score of 0.245 and a two tailed significance probability value of 0.807. Obviously, the number of faculty members would be dependent on total enrollment in the program and while we found that schools with online degree programs did have slightly higher enrollments than those with online courses only, the differences were not significant. Specifically, schools with online programs averaged 89 full-time students and 107 part-time students, whereas schools with online courses only average 71 full-time students and 94 part-time students in their programs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from this study must be interpreted with caution due to some limitations. First, the findings from this study are based on graduate program in the fields of MPA/MPP and might not be applicable to other programs and/or academic levels. It is also based on self-reported data and, as with all self-reported data, validity and reliability might be of concern.These concerns notwithstanding, the findings have provided some important insight into online education in the fields of MPA/MPP.

This study represents an exploration of the current landscape of online education in public affairs. Within this field, the most popular motivation offered for entering online education was to increase enrollments and reach more students. The self-reported data suggests that the majority of schools with online offerings had modest increases in enrollment and some with online programs saw dramatic increases in enrollment. Therefore, the primary objective, to reach more students, appears to be being at least partially met. However, if increasing enrollments is the ultimate goal, results suggest that offering entire programs, rather than merely a few courses, online leads to more substantial increases. Furthermore, if a school wants to move in the direction of online education, it would be wise to consider the degree concentration route. Unlike the traditional classroom format, in the online arena, you are competing for degree candidates nationally. In order to thrive in this environment, you must offer not only a superior product, but a rather unique product as well. Whether these increased enrollments are translating to higher revenues is not as clear. While some schools charge additional technology fees for online classes, we did not find a statistically significant difference between tuition dollars paid by online versus traditional students.

Contrary to the literature, we did not find any significant problems with technological concerns in online course delivery. It is possible that as schools increase their infrastructure and incorporate online learning platforms campus wide, these problems are evaporating naturally. However, a more systematic study of student's perceptions of

technological issues would be necessary before concluding this problem has been largely overcome.

The lack of a clear preference in format for delivery of online courses suggests that flexibility is a major factor making online education appealing to faculty and students. The dominant method of instruction, that of self-guided narrated PowerPoint presentations suggest online education in MPA/MPP programs is probably most effective for students who are more independent and self-disciplined.

The concerns about faculty and staff workloads in online education are ubiquitous with the schools surveyed and will require more extensive planning to address. The logical solution would be to hire more faculty and staff to offset the increased workload generated by online courses. However, this route was rarely taken within the sample studied here, perhaps due to budgetary constraints. Open-ended responses in the survey suggested university administrators were not providing the support necessary in the online education environment. This is a worrying situation and might compromise the quality online education, especially when effective online education has been observed to be very demanding in terms of money, time, manpower, and support of the technology.

In sum, online education is now an integral part of public affairs education and its trajectory continues in the upward direction within the field. Bearing in mind that the primary goal stated for offering courses and degrees online is to reach more students; schools need to be strategic and deliberate in offering courses or degrees online including identifying students and faculty more suitable for the online environment.

References

Allen, I. E. & Seaman, J. (2007). *Online nation: Five years of growth in online learning.* Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium. Retrieved from http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/pdf/online_nation.pdf

Allen, I. E. & Seaman, J. (2010). *Class Difference$: Online education in the United States, 2010.* Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium. Retrieved from http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/pdf/class_differences.pdf

Austin, E. K. (2009). Limits to technology-based distance education in MPA curricula. *The Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 15(2), 161 – 176.

Barth, T.J. (2004). Teaching PA online: reflections of a skeptic. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 439-455.

Bates, A. W. (1997). *Restructuring the university for technological change.* Retrieved from http://cclp.mior.ca/Reference%20Shelf/PDF_OISE/Bates_Restructuring%20University.pdf

Bocchi, J., Eastman, J. K. & Swift, C. O. (2004). Retaining the online learner: Profile of students in an online MBA program and implications for teaching them. *Journal of Education for Business*, 245 – 253

Bolliger, D. U. & Wasilik, O. (2009). Factors influencing faculty satisfaction with online teaching and learning in higher education. *Distance Education*, 30(1), 103–116

Donavant, B. W. (2009). The new, modern practice of adult education: Online instruction in a continuing professional education setting. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(3), 227 – 245

Dupin-Bryant, P. A. (2004). Pre-entry variables related to retention in online distance education. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 18(4), 199 – 206

Fortune, M. F., Shifflett, B., & Sibley, R. E. (2006). A comparison of online (high tech) and traditional (high touch) learning in business communication courses in Silicon Valley. *Journal of Education for Business*, 210 – 214

Gibson, S. G., Harris, M. L., & Colaric, S. M. (2008). Technology acceptance in an academic context: Faculty acceptance of online education. *Journal of Education for Business*, 355 – 359

Jones, J. G. (2008). Issues and concerns of directors of postsecondary distance learning programs regarding online methods and technologies. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 22, 46–56

Perreault, H., Waldman, L., Alexander, M., & Zhao, J. (2002). Overcoming barriers to successful delivery of distance-learning courses. *Journal of Education for Business*, 313 – 318

Santilli, S., & Beck, V. (2005). Graduate faculty perceptions of online teaching. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 6(2), 155 – 160

Vernon, R., Vakalahi, H., Pierce, D., Pittman-Munke, P., & Adkins, L. F. (2009). Distance education programs in social work: Current and emerging trends. *Journal of Social Work Education,* 45(2), 263 – 276

William, B. & Corkill, P. (2007, March). Mastering online education. *National School Boards Association*, 40 – 42

Williams, P. E. (2003). Roles and competencies for distance education programs in higher education institutions. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 17(1), 45 – 57

Williams, S. L. (2006). The effectiveness of distance education in allied health science programs: A meta-analysis of outcomes. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 20(3), 127–141

Young, S. (2006). Student views of effective online teaching in higher education. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 20(2), 65–77

Back to the Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration Contents