

Major Results/Findings

How the survey was conducted

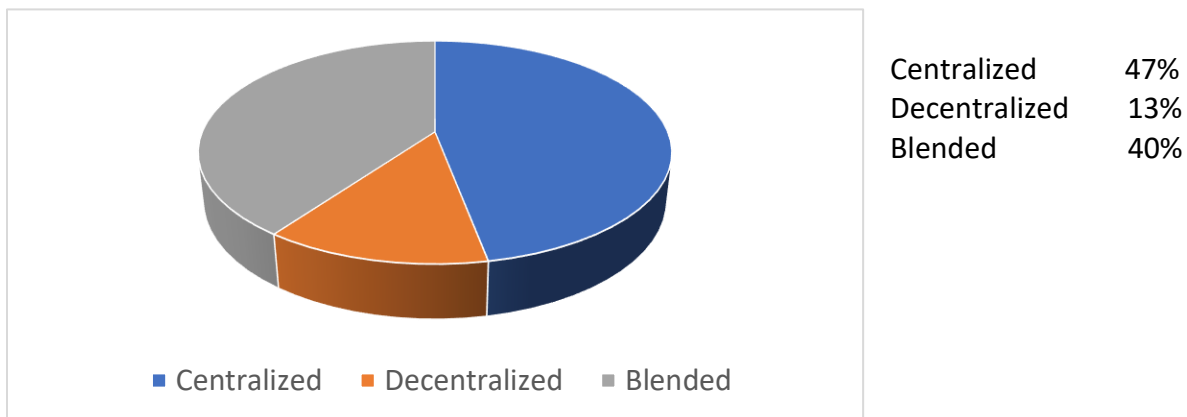
The Instructional Technology Council has conducted an annual national survey on the topic of distance learning at community colleges since 2004. For most of its existence, the survey asked a broad array of questions that embraced administration, faculty and student-related topics, issues and concerns. The final “original” format was used in 2023 to provide a post-COVID update on longitudinal topics of interest. Please note: previous ITC survey results including final reports and related Infographics are available from the Instructional Technology Council website: www.itcnetwork.org

The survey for 2024 represents the first effort to deconstruct the annual survey into three functional units: Administrative, Faculty and Students. This approach greatly reduces the number of questions asked which in turn expedites the time needed to complete the survey. It also allows the ITC to focus on each topic and take a “deeper dive” on each of the functional topics.

The ITC eLearning National Administrators Survey was conducted in November/December of 2023; it was distributed to member institutions of the Instructional Technology Council. As it was focused on administrative topics, each institution was asked to identify the appropriate staff member to complete the survey. Results were reviewed to ensure that each of the five membership regions of the ITC membership was appropriately represented and also that an appropriate sample of campuses in each region related to enrollment size (Carnegie Institution designations) participated.

Digging Into the Data: The Online Program

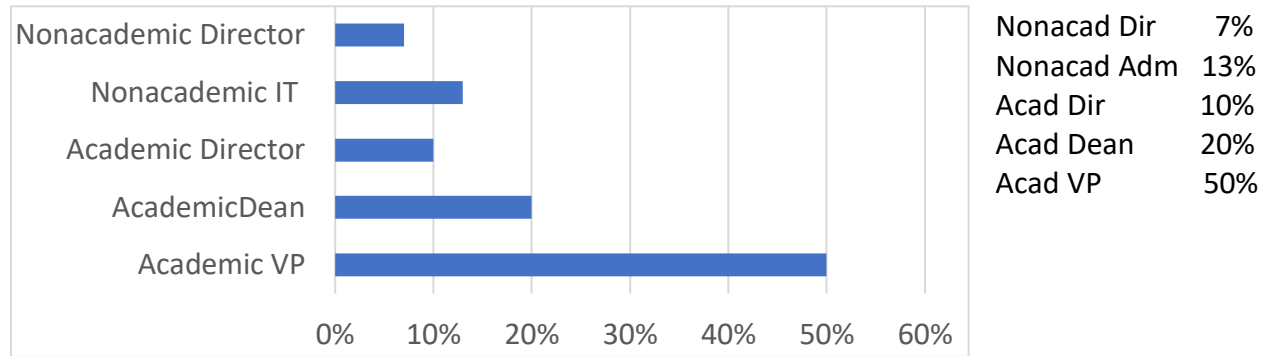
Administrative organization of the online learning program



Significance: Nationally, there have been several institutions that have “disbanded” their centralized administrative structure for the online learning program. The ITC survey confirms

that this approach remains the exception with only 13% of program responsibilities and functions being distributed throughout the organization. A centralized organizational approach remains the most popular at 47%, and 40% of programs maintain a centralized office but share responsibilities and tasks (Blended).

The online program administrator reports to:



Significance: This question has been part of the annual ITC National survey since its launch in 2004. During the first years of the online movement, it was common to see the online program assigned to the library or to the IT Department. The shift to the academic side of the institution has been trending for the past fifteen years. For the 2024 survey, seventy percent identified a “higher level” (VPAA or Academic Dean) academic officer to report to. Comments submitted by survey respondents indicated the importance of this reporting line – both to have credibility with faculty as well as to have access to the institution’s leadership.

Current staff positions in the online program

Most Common Staff Positions		Least Common Staff Positions	
Administrator	87%	Videographer	23%
Instructional Designer	83%	Assistive Technician	23%
LMS Administrator	73%	Navigator/Retention Specialist	17%
Technical Support	67%		
Faculty Trainer	53%		
Office Support	53%		

Significance: Staff growth and complexity are critical to the evolution of any distance learning program. This year’s survey results confirm that programs have a growing number of positions that are deemed essential for its improved quality and overall success. The role of faculty trainer has declined based on results from earlier surveys; the primary reason is that this role has often shifted to a broader Professional Development role to support training for assisted, hybrid and Hi-flex modalities of instruction and support.

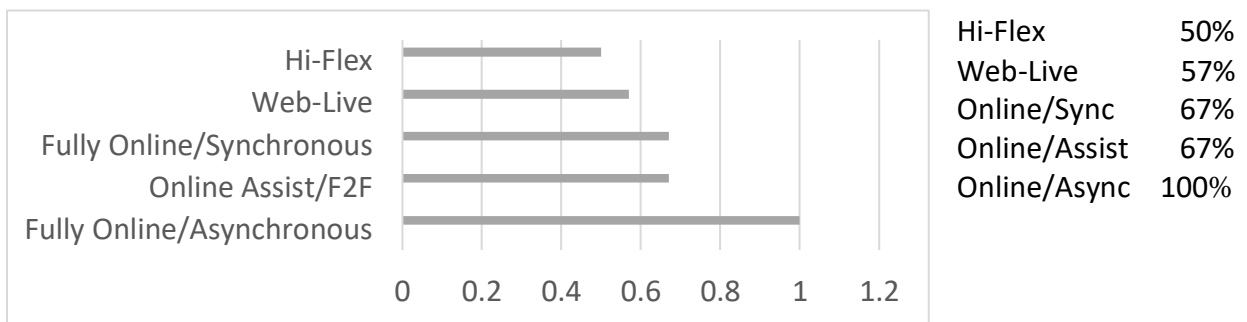
Size of Online Learning Staff Pre v. Post-COVID Pandemic

# of Staff	%
Increased	60%
Decreased	13%
Stayed the Same	27%

Significance: It is not surprising that most programs reported an increase in staff size post-COVID pandemic. After all, the institution’s online program became responsible for almost all instruction in March 2020. And more faculty (and students) are actually more interested in online instruction post-pandemic; the program is dealing with a greater volume of class sections and faculty. “Stayed the Same” is the disappointing data – for those working in these programs, the workload is overwhelming and the staff burnout is significant. Plateaued staffing also hampers efforts to improve overall online course quality and also fails to move the needle on improved student retention and success.

Digging Into The Data: Online Instruction

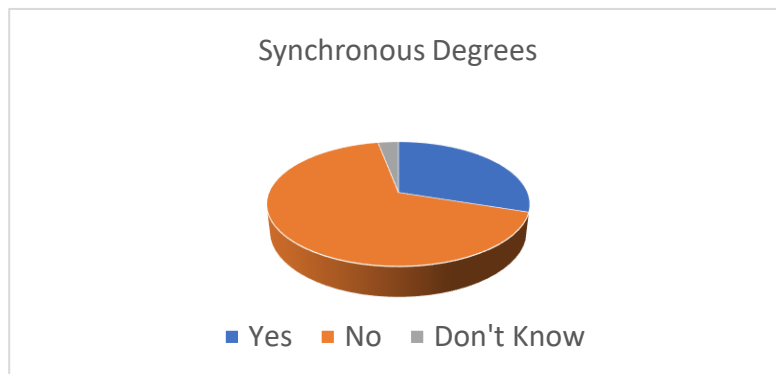
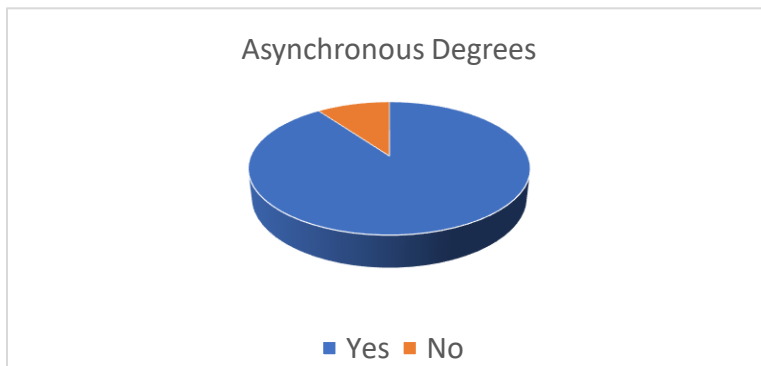
Types of online classes currently offered



Significance: For community colleges, fully online asynchronous classes are the overwhelming preferred modality of online instruction (100%). In addition, it is apparent that most campuses use several online modalities with assisted online sections in support of a traditional in-person class and fully online synchronous class options being the second most-popular modalities (both with 67% each). The synchronous option seems to be inconsistent with the needs of community college students and likely reflects the insistence of selected disciplines to utilize this approach. Math, the hard sciences, and CTE disciplines would be examples. Web-live sections have been fading quickly since the end of the pandemic. Whereas this modality is the bread and butter for universities, both faculty and students at community colleges have abandoned this modality in droves. And Hi-Flex currently is the least favorite of the modalities offered (50%).

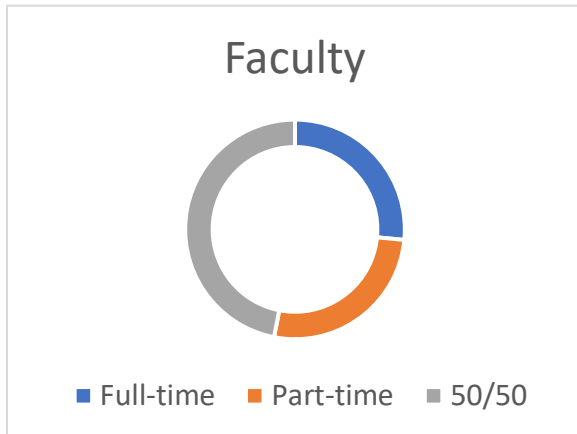
Community college faculty reject Hi-Flex for several reasons including: It takes both additional training and represents a much larger workload than any other option, most institutions fail to compensate for said-training and said-workload, and after all of the effort to teach in-person, web-live and asynchronous simultaneously, the vast majority of students choose the fully asynchronous option of the course since it offers the greatest flexibility. However, many institutions choose to count the enrollments as “in-person” rather than asynchronous. Faculty believe that the FTE should follow the student and the mode they use the most.

Offer one or more fully online degrees



Significance: For community college students, the fully online asynchronous degree is the only option that fits their work/life schedule. Universities prefer synchronous degree options, but do have a more captive student population.

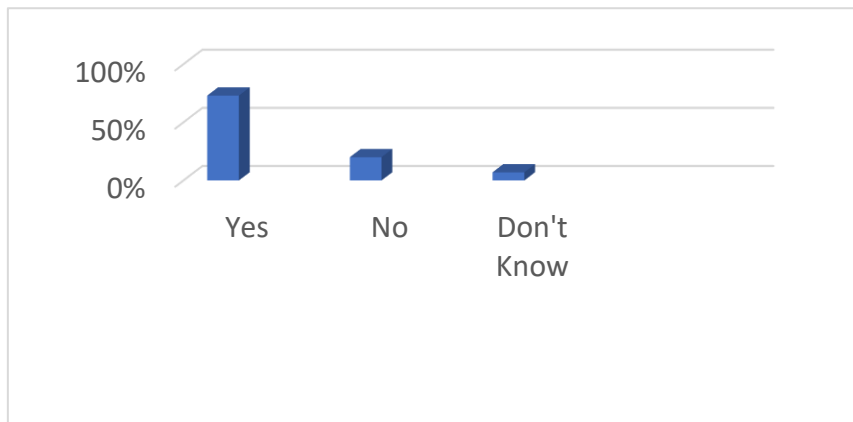
Most online classes are taught by:



Full-time Faculty	26%
Part-time Faculty	26%
50/50	48%

Significance: In spite of the decline in student enrollments and subsequent budget reductions, most institutions still maintain a balance between full- and part-time faculty teaching online classes. Full-time faculty increasingly are showing interest in teaching online which has then increased need to find part-time faculty able to teach in-person classes during the day.

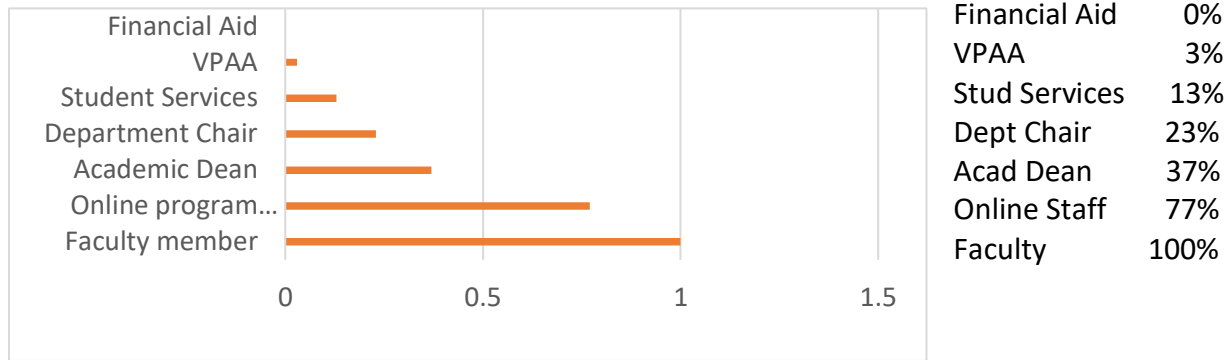
Did your campus administration attempt to resume in-person enrollments to pre-pandemic levels?



Yes	73%
No	20%
Don't Know	7%

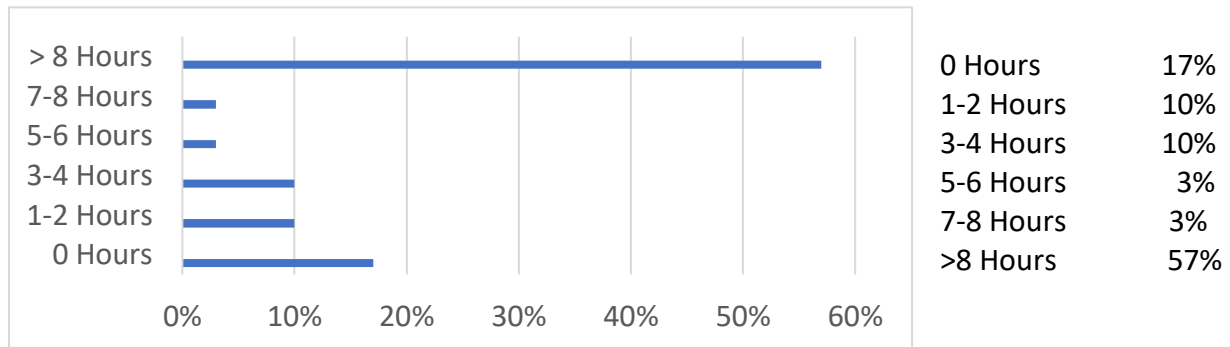
Significance: Seventy-three percent of respondents confirmed that campus administration tried to return their campus to "normal" pre-pandemic enrollment levels. This is understandable since campus funding and culture are based on the traditional classroom. But in the process, many campuses tried to suppress the large online enrollments which is counter-intuitive to what students – and faculty – were indicating they preferred post-pandemic.

Who has access to a faculty member's online classes/content?



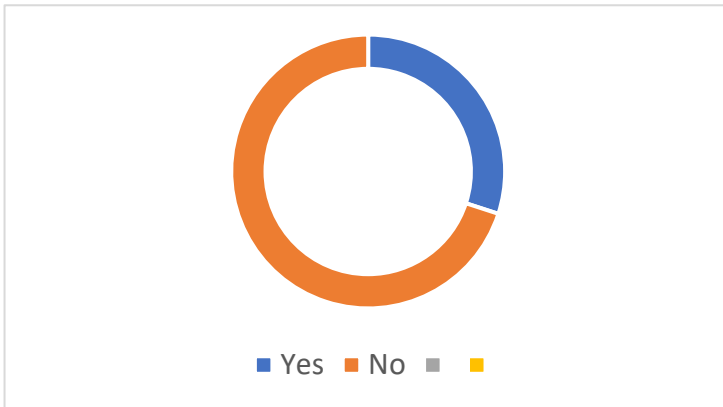
Significance: This issue is controversial at some campuses/not so controversial at other campuses. For many faculty, the assumption is that all modalities are treated the same. Based on common practice, normally an administrator will notify the faculty of the need to attend their class. So even though online classes are far easier to access than in-person classes, the administrator should still notify the faculty and provide a reason for accessing the online class (examples: course observation, student complaint). Unfortunately, many administrators believe they can access the online class without prior notification - - and therein is the crux of the issue. The data confirms that most campuses have NOT given administrators access to faculty online content.

How many hours of LMS training/how to teach online do you require for faculty?



Significance: Fifty-seven percent of respondents affirm that they require “more than 8 hours of training” to be able to teach an online class. This is consistent with responses in previous ITC surveys. Overall, eighty-three percent require some type of training which represents a good practice/standard for an online learning program. Faculty training equates to a better managed class, often a better designed class, and a more complex approach to teaching – and engaging – online students. What is concerning about this year’s results is that seventeen percent of respondents indicated they do not require ANY training to teach an online class. Teaching an online class is not an organic experience. To be effective, teaching needs to be adapted and enriched to ensure students are engaged and ultimately successful.

Do you require regular/recurring training for faculty teaching online classes?

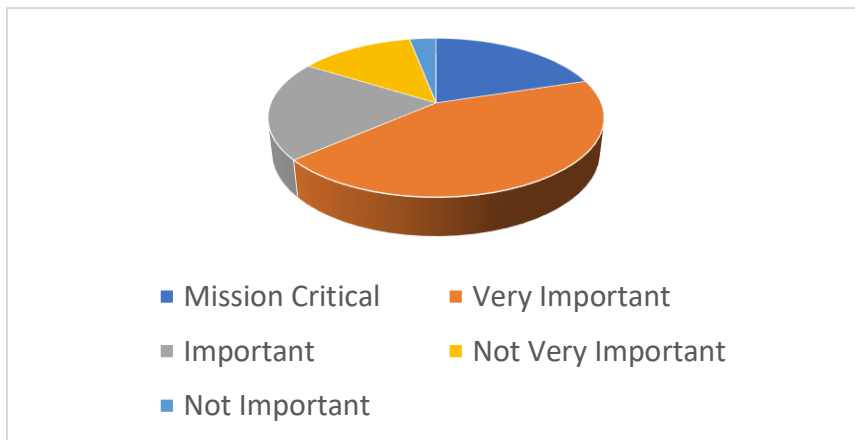


Yes 30%
No 70%

Significance: Eighty-three percent of online learning programs require some type of training to be able to teach online BUT seventy percent report that they do not require recurring training. Since new teaching methods and strategies emerge with frequency, and the LMS regularly adds – and removes – certain features and functions of the teaching platform, it is critical to require refresher training for all faculty. The lack of a strong requirement for recurring training is concerning.

Digging Into The Data/Uncategorized Data

How important will Artificial Intelligence (AI) be in providing instructional and student services support for online learning in the next 5 years?

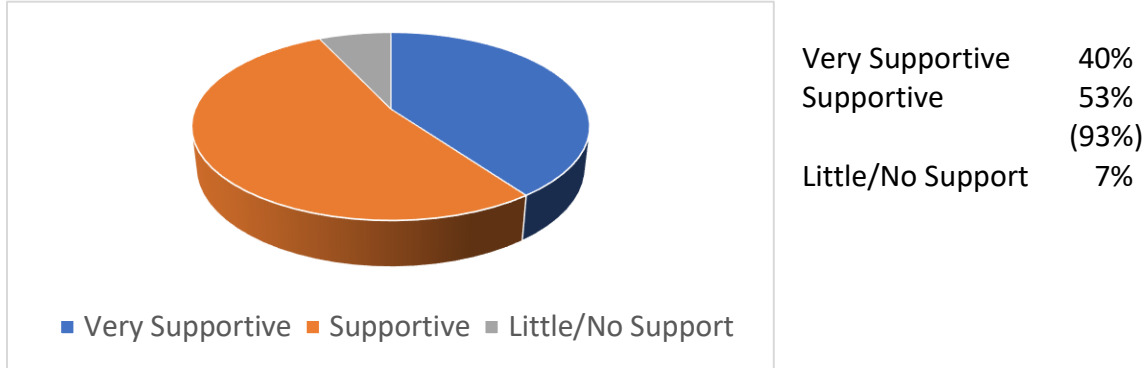


Mission Critical 20%
Very Important 43%
Important 20%
(83)
Not Very Important 13%
Not Important 3%

Significance: Eighty-three percent of respondents agree that Artificial Intelligence will be important/very important/mission critical in providing instructional and student support for online learning in the next 5 years. AI will have a profound impact on online learning in a variety of ways: improved student services available 24/7, teaching assistant bots tailored for each course/course content to serve as virtual tutors, appropriate assistance for students

when drafting major writing assignments (spellcheck, grammar, prompts for critical thinking, etc.).

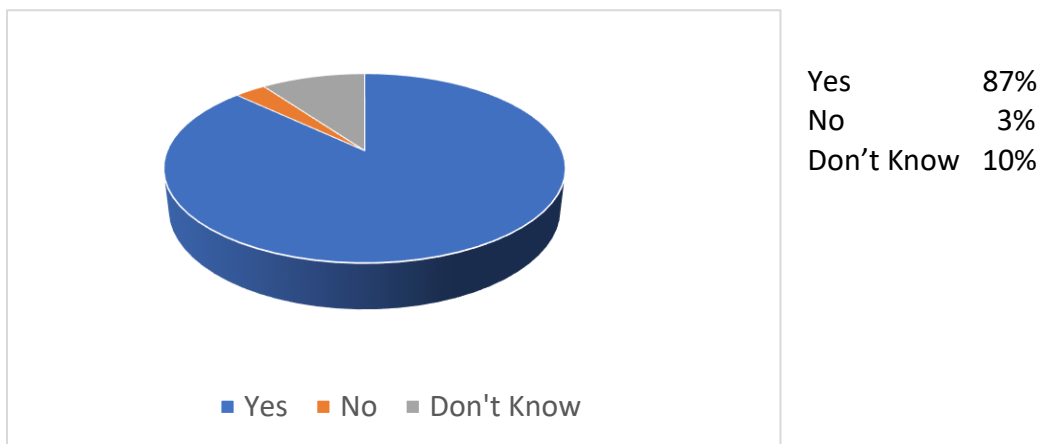
How supportive is your Leadership Team of the online learning program?



Significance: 93% of respondents indicated that their Leadership Team was Very Supportive/Supportive. That is remarkable and perhaps reflects the impact of the pandemic in communicating how important the institution’s online learning program is. This, coupled with the fact that 63% of online learning programs also reported a net increase of staff. Again, this was triggered by the necessity to pivot enrollments to fully online learning. It does confirm that the Leadership Team is definitely aware of the institution’s online learning program; but is this level of awareness and support permanent?

Dual Credit Offerings

Is your online program offering/planning to offer online college courses to high school students (dual credit)



Significance: Community colleges have been struggling with declining enrollment since 2012. Although enrollments are showing some improvement post-pandemic, the core traditional student demographic is also in decline (Knocking on the College Door 10th Edition –

Online Learning Program: Greatest Challenges (Administrator)

Online Learning Program: Greatest challenges RANKED (2024)

1. IT Support
2. Accessibility/ADA compliance
3. Adequate administrative authority
4. Adequate assessment
5. Monitoring emerging trends/practices for online learning
6. Appropriate operating/equipment budget
7. Adequate office space
8. Adequate staffing
9. Faculty acceptance
10. Student acceptance
11. Adequate/appropriate student services
12. Organizational acceptance/credibility
13. Equity/DEI compliance

Significance: Program technical support (IT), compliance with Federal requirements (ADA) and adequate administrative authority topped this year's rankings of greatest challenges. That these particular three challenges rose to the top indicates that online programs – and their administrators – are still dealing with the effects of the COVID pandemic. And it will take time to address these challenges; campus leadership needs to address all three by: increasing staffing for the IT Department (including expertise in online learning tech support needs), making Federal compliance a priority – and providing the funding and staffing support to attain full compliance, and by reviewing the current administrative placement of the online learning program – and elevating the distance learning administrator (title) to be present in the more senior level meetings where key priority, funding and staffing decisions are made.

5 Major Trends

The ITC has twenty years of survey data regarding online learning at community colleges. The 2024 results are longitudinally consistent with previous years of research data.

Online enrollment at community colleges trending up

The ITC findings are consistent with other national data regarding enrollment trends. As reported in the article “Online enrollments spike at community colleges”, Inside Higher Ed, November 20, 2023:

Robust online education now “needs to be part of the repertoire of every comprehensive community college, because that’s where the demand is,” Keshvala said. “Students have decided to do things differently than pre-pandemic once they were forced to be in an online environment.”

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/institutions/community-colleges/2023/11/20/online-enrollments-spike-community-colleges>

Community colleges offering fully online asynchronous degrees

Fully online asynchronous degrees are now a standard with 90% of respondents indicating they offer one or more asynchronous degrees. Degrees that are now fully online and fully virtual.

Dual-credit online college course offerings are on the grow as well

Eighty-seven percent of respondents confirmed that they are offering/plan to offer online dual-credit classes.

83% of respondents describe Artificial Intelligence as Important/Very Important/Mission Critical for online learning in the next five years.

AI will have an increasing role with online learning and will become a major solution for student services support, enhanced student engagement, and helping to develop essential 21st Century AI soft skills.

Asynchronous online classes are THE dominant method of virtual instruction at community colleges

100% of respondents confirmed they use this modality of delivery. It is the perfect solution for community college students – no need to be on campus and 24/7 access.

5 Observations

Online classes remain the driver for community college enrollment growth.

This has been true since before the Great Recession; traditional in-person enrollments have been on a steady decline during the same period. As evidenced by the National Clearinghouse, online enrollments have gained new momentum post-pandemic. Students and faculty that may have avoided online learning pre-pandemic are now aware of its inherent advantages.

“Pining for the past” is a major barrier for community colleges (and universities)

73% of respondents indicated that campus leadership attempted to reinstate in-person classes to pre-pandemic levels. Nationally, the phrase “return to normal” was commonplace in describing these efforts. There are two factors driving this: current community college leadership was a product of traditional instruction. It is familiar and easier to understand than online learning. The other element is that our “culture of funding and priorities” is stuck in the 20th Century. Presidential success is measured in expanding the physical footprint of the campus (edifice complex). And funding formulas focus on the physical campus (buildings, parking, landscaping) – there has not been any adjustment/no incentives or rewards to growing the online program. The national dialog has made a critical point however, there is no returning to normal. Actually the old normal is fiscally unsustainable and inherently inefficient and expensive. The future will look a lot more like Western Governors University (WGU), and the physical campus will become an albatross of deferred maintenance and spiraling operational costs.

There is hope: Leadership is starting to “get it”

Survey results confirmed several interesting developments. 93% of respondents indicated that their college leadership was Very Supportive/Supportive. That would not have been true ten years ago, so emerging new leadership is more future-focused. That bodes well for community colleges finding ways to embrace and energize online learning programs. 60% of respondents confirmed that distance learning staff grew at their institutions during the pandemic – and they have retained the increased staffing. More needs to be done, but the campus culture is evolving and beginning to embrace the 21st Century realities of higher education.

The distance learning program needs to reside on the Academic side of the college

80% of respondents confirmed that the online learning program reports to an academic administrator (director/dean/VPAA). The focus of the online learning program is on instruction, the faculty, and the students. It is NOT about the technology, it is about instruction. Consequently, most institutions realize this and have the program reporting to the

academic side of the college. The alternative (nonacademic reporting line) diminishes the program and creates a disconnect especially with faculty. Some will point to their success in embracing a nonacademic reporting line, but academic link is more organic – and clearly the national trend!

The emerging focus on dual-credit classes – a good idea?

Our question regarding dual-credit classes was edifying – community colleges have long-focused on the traditional student (ages 18-24). The entire structure and culture of the typical college is geared towards this particular student type. Yes, there is also a sizable nontraditional (ages 25-55) bloc of students at our colleges, but marketing, student services, and class scheduling caters to the traditional student. Dual-credit classes are the most recent addition to this culture. There is a major problem with this; major longitudinal studies indicate that the traditional student either already is, or will be, declining ([Knocking at the College Door 10th Edition – WICHE – \[www.wiche.edu\]\(http://www.wiche.edu\)](#)). And with the technologies transformations that will be impacting the Future of Work, it is critical that community colleges alter the traditional culture to now embrace the active adult learner for two reasons: retooling our workforce in the age of technological transformation of the economy and lifestyle requires every community college to step up. It is also essential to our survival in higher education

Acknowledgements

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About the Survey Author: Fred Lokken is a Professor of Political Science and chair of the Business, History, Political Science and Legal Studies Department at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada. He served for 20 years as a Distance Learning administrator/Dean of WebCollege. He has been a member of the Instructional Technology Council Board of Directors (past-chair) for more than twenty years.

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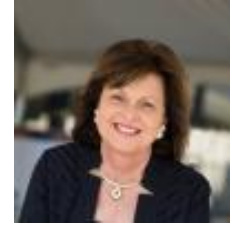
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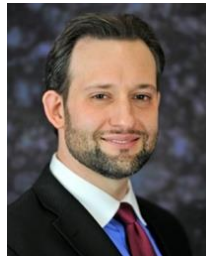
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About the Instructional Technology Council

In 1977, a committee of the board of directors of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (now the [American Association of Community Colleges, AACC](#)) created the "Task Force on the Uses of Mass Media for Learning." In 1993, the renamed Instructional Technology Council, ITC, became its own separate non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. ITC is an affiliated council of the AACC and represents nearly 200 institutions that offer distance education courses to their students in the United States, Canada and around the world.

Mission: *To convene and develop innovators who propel community colleges forward in the use of technology to help more students achieve their goals.*

Vision: *To be the premiere instructional technology membership organization where community college practitioners can readily discover inspiration and support for innovation.*

ITC members include single institutions and multi-campus districts; regional and statewide systems of community, technical and two-year colleges; for-profit organizations; four-year institutions; and, non-profit organizations that are interested or involved in instructional telecommunications.

Instructional Technology Council
19 Mantua Road
Mount Royal, NJ 08061
director@itcnetwork.org

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