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PLATINUM MEMBERS



Katrina: A Student's Perspective

By Haley Kornfield

FLVS Student Contributing Writer

The story of Hurricane Katrina is a story of many tragedies, and few triumphs. To be sure, respect and affection must be accorded to the National Guard soldiers who patrolled faithfully, the valiant journalists who covered the story thoroughly, and the many victims who held their families together, as they vowed to rebuild. However America should also be grateful for one unsung hero of Hurricane Katrina: the online educational system.

I recently interviewed two young students who didn't allow a hurricane (devastating as it was) to disrupt their education. They capitalized on online education to salvage the school year, and walked away learning about life,

cultures from different states, and independence.

Aaron Thomas is a senior from Boston, MA. He moved to Biloxi, Mississippi to stay with his mother for his senior year, and ended up facing the wrath of Hurricane Katrina. Thomas weathered the storm with some friends, and drove out of Biloxi toward Jackson, Mississippi afterward. Thomas experienced the flooding, and said he was frightened by the swirling winds, panic, and rising water. The roof of his home caved in when a tree fell on top of it. Even in Jackson, less severely hit than Biloxi, he had to go without electricity for three weeks.

He is attending conventional public school again but Thomas has also chosen to take an English III course through Mississippi's virtual school system, in cooperation with VSKOOL.

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UCCP Collaborates with Mexico

By Francisco Hernandez and Moises Torres

Contributing Writers

The University of California College Prep Online (UCCP) has gone abroad to create long-lasting partnerships with Mexican education agencies to address education challenges facing California and Mexico. In the summer of 2005, UCCP signed an agreement with Mexican education agencies to translate UCCP's courses to Spanish to make them available to students in Mexico and to English Language Learners in the state of Califor-

nia. This agreement stimulated a set of new online initiatives that will serve English Language Learners and migrant students. The initiatives aim to create opportunities for students to successfully complete a high school diploma and to prepare them to attend a college of choice despite language limitations or other issues such as high mobility in California. The four initiatives include:

1) **Equivalencies:** UCCP and Colegio de Bachilleres (High School Granting Education agency) aligned

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A Call to Action: Standards for Online Learning Content



By Liz Pape
Contributing Writer

Students in online courses have the opportunity to take courses that might not otherwise be available to them, to gain 21st century information and communications technology skills, and to learn in an online environment with students from around the world. The promise is great; however, as is often the case with new advances in technology, the standards to ensure we make the most of this promise are not yet in place.

In December 2000, the Web-based Education Commission called upon the public and private sectors to “work together to develop high-quality content and applications for online learning.” They further recommended that “the federal government work with all agencies and programs to adopt technical standards for the design of online courses, meta-tagging of digital content and universal design standards for access for those with disabilities.” The Web-based Education Commission recommended that “the education community develop standards for high-quality online courses, through the convening of state and regional education accreditors and organizations to build common standards and requirements for online learning programs, courses and certifications comparable to the standards required for onsite programs.” (“The Power of the Internet for Learning: Moving from Promise to Practice” Report of the Web-based Education Commission to the President and the Congress of the United States, p. 13, December 2000).

The Web-based Education


Commission’s call to action has more recently been followed by the National Education Technology Plan, which calls for seven action steps, including the support of e-learning and virtual schools. In addition to recommending that every student be provided access to e-learning opportunities, the plan also recommends the development of quality measures and accreditation standards for e-learning that mirror those required for course credit. (“Toward a New Golden Age in American Education: How the Internet, the Law, and Today’s Students are Revolutionizing Expectations”, National Education Technology Plan 2004, U.S. Department of Education, p. 41.)

Work is being done in both the area of online course/content standards, and the accreditation of virtual schools. The Southern Region Education Board has published its *Essential Principles of Quality: Guidelines for Web-based Courses for Middle and High Schools* and *Essential Principles of High Quality Online Teaching: Guidelines for Evaluating K-12 Online Teachers* (www.sreb.org/main/Publica-

[tions/catalog/CatalogDisplay.asp?SectionID=4](http://www.sreb.org/main/Publications/catalog/CatalogDisplay.asp?SectionID=4)). The *Guide to Online High School Courses*, available on the NEA website, was developed by the National Education Association, Virtual High School, American Association of School Administrators, CNA Corporation, IBM Corporation, National Association of State Boards of Education, National School Boards Association, and Verizon Corporation with support from NACOL (www.nea.org/technology/onlinecourseguide.html).

In a study of the accreditation process for virtual schools, seven groups were identified as having published accreditation standards that have been adopted by American virtual schools. The seven are: the National Private School Accreditation Alliance, the Accrediting Commission for Independent Study, the Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education Training Council, the North Central Association on Accreditation and School Improvement, the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges and Universities, the

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 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004
North American Council for Online Learning (202)626-6241 www.nacol.org

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Idaho Digital Learning Academy



By Donna Vakili, Ph.D.

Contributing Writer

In the state of Idaho, as is the case with a number of other states around the nation, virtual schools have become a hot and widely discussed topic. The challenge for virtual schools is to insure that quality and accountability exist to justify the hype, focus, and funding for online education. At the Idaho Digital Learning Academy, we strive to meet this challenge by carrying out the vision outlined by our legislation and implementing measures to address quality and accountability.

Four online charter schools and the state-sponsored Idaho Digital Learning Academy currently operate in Idaho. The 2002 Idaho Legislature approved House Bill 534 "The Idaho Digital Learning Academy Act of 2002" which created the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) within the State Department of Education (Title 33 Chapter 55, Idaho Code). It was formed in response to a vision of school administrators and legislators who knew that online learning would grow and become an important future for Idaho schools. IDLA is a state sponsored, web-based school serving grades 7 thru 12 whose goal is to provide Idaho students with greater access to a diverse assortment of courses. IDLA served more than 1,800 enrollments in 2004-2005 and will serve over 3000 enrollments in 2005-2006 – a 67% increase.

Quality is an important focus at IDLA. According to our legislation, courses are developed based on state standards and best practices in online learning. Idaho certified faculty develop the courses in content area teams; the courses are reviewed by the Idaho State Department of Education curriculum specialists; and, fi-

nally, the courses are reviewed by IDLA administration and approved by the IDLA Board of Directors. Students complete end of course evaluations to provide ongoing feedback to revise and improve the course content and delivery. Currently 85 courses are offered including all the core courses, dual credit and advanced placement offerings, and electives such as Idaho Writers, Digital Photography, History of the Civil War, and Cisco Networking. Faculty are highly qualified, Idaho-certified instructors with more than 50 percent holding advanced degrees.

“Quality is an important focus at Idaho Digital Learning Academy. According to our legislation, courses are developed based on state standards and best practices in online learning.”

In addition to quality content, quality instruction is also an important consideration. When creating the Idaho Digital Learning Academy, the legislature recognized the unique professional development needs that online faculty require and stressed the importance of ongoing professional development. As a result, the legislature established a Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator position responsible for online and face-to-face professional development, screening of potential faculty members, curriculum development, and instructional design.

Dedicating a full time position insures that ongoing quality is an important focus at IDLA.

Accountability is also insured through a variety of measures. For example, all IDLA courses give final exams that require face-to-face proctors. When a state assessment is available, state end-of-course assessments are used. An old measure of accountability, “seat time,” is also clearly addressed in IDLA code and specifies that seat time is to be measured by competency and completion of course content, not time in class.

Accreditation through the State Department of Education and the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools is also required in the IDLA legislation. Accountability through governance and oversight is provided through a Board of Directors. The membership of the Board of Directors is specified in Idaho Code and consists of three superintendents, two principals, two citizens-at-large, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and a secretary to the Board of Directors. The membership of the IDLA Board of Directors not only insures accountability, but also creates a collaborative entity made up of local school district personnel and the State Department of Education – critical partners for success. Idaho Code also specifies the importance of the State Board of Education in the creation of rules and accountability, another important collaborative partner.

The 2005 Idaho Legislature appropriated \$900,000 for IDLA which was a 100% increase from the previous year. Currently in Idaho, high school reform is a focus of the legislature, the State Board of Education, and the

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Assessing Online Learning



By **Steve Baxendale**

Contributing Writer

A major area of debate in online learning is course quality. The quality of online learning courses ranges from excellent to poor. To assist in improving the quality of online learning, NACOL is exploring issues surrounding the development of standards, evaluating digital content and the characteristics of good online assessments. The focus of all of these efforts is to provide the optimal learning environment to meet the needs of all students.

In approaching online learning, the first question to ask is, "What should the student know and be able to do when they complete this course?" Once that question has been answered, assessments measure the student's current knowledge in the subject area. An online curriculum can be developed to add to that knowledge and assessments can be developed to measure the student learning occurring as a result of participation in the course.

Technology is having a major impact on the lives of students and is changing the way they approach learning. Gaming has become a key part of most students' lives and it is having a profound effect on the way students acquire and use information and solve problems. A look at the gaming industry can provide some insights in effectively engaging students and assessing their learning.

Gamers are comfortable operating in a virtual environment; one that has excellent graphics, animation, and video. These environments present a number of problems to be solved, rewards for solving these problems, opportunities for synchronous collabora-

tion with others, and continuous evaluation of performance. A great deal of learning takes place in the interaction between the gamer and the game. Success depends on quickly gathering, analyzing, and reacting to information.

John Beck and Mitchell Wade, in their book *Got Games: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever*, surveyed 2,500 gamers to identify the way they view life. In a gaming environment, gamers know there is always a solution and they aren't afraid to fail many times in their quest for success. Failure doesn't

In approaching online learning, the first question to ask is, "What should the student know and be able to do when they complete this course?"

discourage them and, as a result, they are more willing to take risks than previous generations. Gamers are continually analyzing and sharing information to successfully overcome the challenges

they face in the game. Gamers view life in the same way and tend to see schools as being out of touch with the digital world.

The business world has already begun to change their corporate training to meet the needs of gamers entering the workforce. As we attempt to provide engaging and interactive high-quality online learning, our focus should be on the ways this generation of students learns. Assessments should be reliable, valid, and ongoing; providing information to the student on his or her success in mastering the content. They should provide teachers with the data to monitor student progress and with the information needed to determine when to intervene to assist students in their learning. They may include group projects, online tests, standardized tests, performance based assessments, simulations, presentations, and portfolios.

It is an exciting time to be involved in online education. Join NACOL to work together as we attempt to realize the potential of online education to meet the needs of the next generation of learners and to define what it means to redesign schools in an online world.

Steve Baxendale is Director of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.

GOV. BUSH PROPOSES LAPTOP FOR EVERY FLORIDA TEACHER

Florida Gov. Bush is seeking \$239 million in the 2006-2007 budget to provide incentives to the state's existing education professionals and to attract an additional 31,800 highly-qualified teachers. The plan also seeks to improve teacher efficiency and effectiveness by giving each teacher a laptop and software tools.

Victims and Students of Katrina Opportunities for Online Learning

As we usher in a new year, we wanted to extend our gratitude for your ongoing support of the vSKOOL initiative and to encourage you to continue to support the coalition's efforts to provide education relief to the thousands of Gulf Coast K-12 students and teachers displaced by this year's devastating hurricanes.

vSKOOL is a consortium of online learning organizations, virtual schools, education associations, technology, media, and instructional software companies, for-profits, non-profits and foundations working together to provide online K-12 classes, tutoring, and other educational technology solutions to victims of Hurricane Katrina.

vSKOOL was launched September 7, 2005 by the North American Council for Online Learning and Cable in the Classroom, the cable industry's education foundation.

Specifically, vSKOOL is:

- Finding traditional and virtual school programs to offer course enrollments and tutoring to affected students;
- Locating highly-qualified teachers to volunteer to teach or tutor affected students in face-to-face and online settings;
- Soliciting and identifying corporate and foundation support (e.g., through scholarships) to help provide students access to valuable educational products and services;
- Organizing computer hardware, software, and infrastructure providers to provide computers and broadband internet connectivity to create learning centers to provide access to online courses and other educational technology products and services; and

- Coordinating with providers of other, related educational products and services to offer schools serving displaced students a variety of choices to tailor instruction to their unique needs and circumstances.

For general information and news about education-related hurricane relief and vSKOOL consortium activities, please visit www.vskool.org, visit the blog and join the listserv.

The vSKOOL Website: www.vskool.org

The vSKOOL Blog: www.vskool.org/www/vskoolblog.html

The vSKOOL Newsletter: www.feedblitz.com/f/?Sub=3231

So far . . . vSKOOL has assembled free or reduced-price resources from dozens of organizations and individuals of all types, including computer hardware, enrollments in online courses, access to online tutoring services, instructional and administrative software applications, digital content resources, professional development, and much more. For those providing online education services, we also maintain a list of qualified online instructors able and willing to help.

At vSKOOL.org, you will find our current listing of resource offerings, information about learning online and how to help kids cope with the disaster, and a frequently updated blog of news about the status of schools in the Gulf Coast region.

Please consider:

- Listing your organization's resource offerings on the vSKOOL site, if they are not

already there;

- Challenging other organization's to do so as well;
- Promoting your involvement with - or support of - vSKOOL on your website or publications; and,
- Employing other mechanisms to help build awareness of the valuable offerings that have been assembled.

Some exciting developments are in the works that you'll be hearing more about shortly. Let's make sure that as students and teachers begin to think about what their spring semester will look like, they look to vSKOOL.

Happy New Year!

*Don't Miss a
Single Issue!*

**If you have
changed jobs,
moved or are plan-
ning to move,
please send your
updated contact
information to**

info@nacol.org

Katrina (continued)

Continued from page 1

He has certainly faced academic challenges as a result of the hurricane, including uncertainty about a location for the AP test. At first, Thomas was discouraged from taking courses online because local administrators felt that he couldn't handle the courses with the other stressors (especially since he had never taken a course online before). He has proved them wrong though, and is now ahead of pace. Thomas enjoys the freedom that online learning provides in the form of choosing one's own pace, and communicating with teachers personally via phone and email. He feels that he is getting an optimal English education through online learning. An example of young American patriotism, Thomas serves with the National Guard. He feels that

communicating with teachers in Florida and his acclimation to technologically-based learning, has better prepared him for outstanding service in our multi-cultural, technologically advanced Armed Forces.

In a different city, with a different background, at a different age, student Abby Roskind, from New Orleans, also suffers from Katrina's devastation. She had just started the first week of her freshman year at the private school, Newman, when Hurricane Katrina struck. Ambitious, articulate, and bright, Roskind is hoping to receive athletic scholarships from Stanford and the University of Arkansas for track and field in pole vaulting. However, since leaving New Orleans she hasn't been able to practice pole vaulting

or establish herself at school. She is now living in Tampa and attending public school. This school seems to be emblematic of the best in public education. Roskind and her friends from New Orleans weren't used to the 7:00 AM start time of Florida public schools. In order to help them cope, the school made allowances for its Hurricane refugees to take their first and last periods online. The school has also allowed for the Hurricane victims to be in the same classes, as they acclimate themselves to Florida. Roskind is taking Biology Honors and English Honors online. She feels challenged, but is enjoying the online experience. She enjoys working at her own pace, and appreciates the overall sensitivity of online courses to her situation.

Aaron Thomas and Abby Roskind are two young victims of Hurricane Katrina who will come out of this situation in one piece thanks to online education. In the aftermath of a hurricane made famous for bringing national attention to ignorance and poverty, isn't education a most precious gift?



The Center for Digital Education proudly announces the re-launch of Converge, as a printed quarterly publication. The magazine focuses on strategy and leadership for technology in K-12 education and is geared for the education policy decision makers. The magazine will provide details regarding the complex factors surrounding policy, funding, and successful deployment of technology to make a difference for our students.

**For more information, check out
www.convergemag.com**

***Haley Kornfield** is a reporter for News In a Click, an online student newspaper at Florida Virtual School.*

She is currently a junior at Miami Palmetto Sr. High and has been taking online courses such as AP Art History, AP Microeconomics, and Marine Science Honors, through FLVS since ninth grade. Haley delights in the online community, but is also an active member of her high school. She participates in the debate team, Fairchild Tropical Challenge Squad, Biology Club, and National Honor Society. Haley's plans for the future include attending Columbia University and pursuing a career in journalism. NACOL thanks Florida Virtual School for permission to share this story.

Working Together on Next Generation Education: A Vision for NACOL



By **Susan Patrick**

NACOL President and CEO

I am pleased to announce the Virtual Schools Symposium 2006 on November 4-7, 2006 is in Dallas, Texas. The theme of the symposium will be "Next Generation Education: Redesign Powered by Online Learning." Proposals for speaking for the VSS 2006, registration and other VSS information are available on the NACOL website.

Why focus on next generation education and redesign? Redesigning schools is a major focus right now and many of the solutions are available through online learning and other innovations. NACOL has a role in bringing together experts in virtual schools, the innovation experts and helping the leadership in traditional education envision new models powered by online learning.

NACOL stands ready to lead a national and international vision for creating new models of education – a new blueprint – to embrace systemic change toward student-centered learning. And for this generation of students, their world is online.

Our current educational system has the following results nationwide:

- 68% graduation rate from high school,
- 26% of students that start high school make it through two years of college.

Yet, today's information economy requires 80% of workers have college degrees.

The case is clear for systemic change, redesign and the need for a bold, new model of education that focuses on student-centered approaches and connects to kids

in their world.

How can NACOL help?

NACOL believes every child should be able to access the highest-quality educational opportunities available - regardless of geography, background or family income - and online learning is providing this, every day, for students around the world.

By collaborating with the most innovative educational leaders

"Why focus on next generation education and redesign? Redesigning schools is a major focus right now and many of the solutions are available through online learning and other innovations."

and pioneers in online learning, NACOL's membership of virtual schools, digital academies and online learning experts is uniquely positioned to build a blueprint of next generation education across North America. This is where true transformation is happening.

Together, we will cull our resources and define a vision which draws on the best of online learning, digital content, professional development, technology-enabled assessment and 21st century skills – all offered in a real world context with excellent teachers together to answer what school redesign and 21st century education is. Collectively, we need to build

a blueprint, provide a toolkit, provide training and educational opportunities, and continue to pioneer the path to educational excellence in the 21st century.

What's next? Next generation education emerges from the growth of virtual schools, wireless connectivity, flexible schedules, alternative programs, the demand for more rigor, technology, math, science, strong student support and relationships, ongoing mentoring and facilitative teaching, multimedia courses, virtual reality and digital curriculum measured by competency, and yes, student-centered learning. Say goodbye to the factory bell system.

In rural settings, students are taking classes never before offered through programs like the University of California's College Prep online program, Illinois Virtual School, Kentucky Virtual School, Michigan Virtual School and more than twenty other state-run virtual schools. About half of the states have state run online learning programs or policies in place, according to the Keeping Pace With K-12 Online Learning study. Online learning and virtual schools are expanding at a rate of 30% per year.

What Students Want

According to a recent survey, today's students want rigor, relationships and real world schools infused with technology and online learning opportunities that model what they see around them in the 21st century.

Perhaps one student said it best – a student walking toward his rural North Carolina school be-

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Vision (continued)

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gins to enter the brick building, then stops. He blankly stared at the door and then turned to walk away, almost bumping into the school administrator behind him.

"Why are you leaving?"

The student replied after a pause, "Because if I go inside, I have to power down."

Powering Up Our Schools

We must power up our schools into student-centered, modern learning environments.

They are the MySpace generation. Millennials. The Digital Generation. How do we open our doors to today's students, who live online, play online, communicate online, work collaboratively and effortlessly with instant messenger and Google researching school projects while making plans for Saturday night, bringing different perspectives from global resources and online journals while doing homework online and updating their blogs?

This isn't my generation or yours. For those of us who grew up with three channels on the television, we are faced with students who demand customization, instant access to information and personalized, any time, anywhere learning opportunities. They want to embrace new models of teaching and learning, and we can and should provide them. The expectations of these young, tech-savvy, ultra-communicators is just beginning and our nation's educators and leaders should take note.

Thank You for the Hurricane Relief Efforts: VSKOOL

I'd like to personally thank all of NACOL's members who responded to the Victims and Stu-

dents of Katrina Opportunities for Online Learning (VSKOOL) survey sent by NACOL. NACOL co-founded VSKOOL with Cable in the Classroom and now many organizations are contributing to its success. Thousands of class seats were donated by NACOL member institutions for hurricane victims to take online courses and your generosity of spirit and goodwill was deeply appreciated. I am proud to be part of this excellent team who quickly responded to those in need.

Don't forget to save the date: VSS 2006 on November 4-7, 2006 in Dallas!

My favorite resources and links:

North American Council for Online Learning www.nacol.org
National Education Technology Plan www.nationaletechplan.org
Pew Internet & American Life Project www.pewinternet.org
Prisoners of Time www.ed.gov/pubs/PrisonersOfTime/index.html
Partnership for 21st Century Skills www.21stcenturyskills.org
Generation Yes www.genyes.org

NetDay www.netday.org
iEarn www.iEarn.org
Exploring E-Learning Reforms For Michigan: The New Education (R)evolution www.coe.wayne.edu/e-learningreport.pdf
Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning www.ncrel.org/tech/pace
A Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning www.ncrel.org/tech/synthesis/index.html



Susan Patrick is President and CEO of NACOL.

IS YOUR INNER CREATIVE GENIUS CALLING?

NACOL invites students, faculty and creative members to submit original photos or other artwork for the 2006 Virtual School Symposium cover art contest. The theme of 2006 Virtual Schools Symposium to be held on November 4-7 in Dallas, Texas is "Next Generation Education: Redesign Powered by Online Learning".

Artwork selected would depict images of "next generation" concepts, next generation student-centered learning, individualized or personalized learning, growth, redesign, forward-thinking, innovative themes or styles.

The winner of the contest will be selected as cover art and poster art for the 2006 Virtual Schools Symposium and receive recognition at VSS.

Summarizing NCREL's *Synthesis of New Research On K-12 Online Learning*



By **Robert L. Blomeyer**

Learning Point Associates

Online learning is an emerging but rapidly growing phenomenon in K-12 education. Although practitioners believe that online education is effective in reaching and serving a wide range of students, little empirical research has been performed to determine its effectiveness in elementary and secondary settings. Questions remain about the educational needs best addressed through online learning as well as its impact on school improvement and learner outcomes.

Programs of research informed by early lessons learned are needed to inform the future development of online learning. This *Synthesis of New Research on K-12 Online Learning* summarizes the latest in a series of research efforts sponsored by North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) to answer questions about online learning and promote the growth of effective programs and practices.

Methodology

In October 2004, NCREL developed and distributed a request for proposal (RFP) calling for new, quantitative research on online learning. Rigorous research methodology was indicated as an important priority for all proposals. The required research methodology was defined as quantitative data collection supporting an understanding of the efficacy of online learning in the K-12 context.

Thirty-three proposals were received, and eight proposals were chosen for funding. The syn-

thesis is based on final research reports submitted to NCREL by the research teams. Copies of those reports are available on request from the research teams.

Section 1 of the synthesis provides an overview of the field of online learning to establish the context within which the eight research studies were defined and conducted. Section 2 presents brief summaries of each of the eight studies, with an analysis of common themes, challenges, and issues in online learning. Section 3 presents specific implications for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners based on the eight studies.

Synthesis of New Research Findings

In Sections 1 and 2 of the synthesis, six common themes prevail:

- Student Academic Performance
- Characteristics of Successful Online Students
- Qualities of Effective Online Courses
- Professional Development for Effective Online Teaching and Learning
- Challenges of Online Learning
- Online Learning, School Change, and Educational Reform

Section 3 applies the categories as a basis for findings and recommendations relevant to K-12 educational policy and practice. An abbreviated summary of the six categorical sets of findings and recommendations follows:

Findings and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Recommendations Relating to Student Academic Performance

Academic performance in online high school courses and/or online high schools generally appears to demonstrate academic performance that is at least equivalent to participation in traditional or "face-to-face" courses (Cavanaugh, Gillian, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004). Findings on academic achievement in the eight synthesized studies are generally inconclusive for reasons discussed as "barriers" to effective research. Practitioners seeking guidance in developing and operating online learning programs should consider the following:

- Professional development implemented with the intent of preparing "highly qualified" online teachers appears to have a positive effect on online student performance.
- Online instructional strategies designed to optimize student-student and student-teacher interaction show limited evidence of having a positive impact on students' performance. More rigorous, experimental research needs to be undertaken examining online interaction, with much clearer definitions of cause and effect, before clear and useful findings are possible.

Recommendations Relating to Characteristics of Successful Online Students

The studies reviewed in this synthesis begin to identify and define a constellation of features and student characteristics that show great promise for improving

New Research (Continued)

Continued from page 9

students' potential for academic success and optimal performance in online courses.

- At least one valid and reliable predictive assessment is currently available. The Educational Success Prediction Instrument (ESPRI) assessment (Roblyer & Marshall, 2002–2003) has apparent potential for predicting whether new online students will be academically successful. Using predictive assessments to optimize the potential for success with new or first-time students appears to be a promising, research-based best practice.
- Additional preparation of and/or counseling for first-time online students—for the expressed purpose of supporting the success of students who have identifiable characteristics or assessment scores indicating a low probability of online academic success—also appears to be a promising practice.

Recommendations Relating to Qualities of Effective Online Courses

Online high school courses and virtual schools apparently suffer from the perception on the part of educational leaders, educators, and community members that they are in some way inferior to traditional instructional models and methods.

- Accountability data documenting the effectiveness of online courses and online schools, with attention paid to standardized measures of achievement that support comparisons of performance to national, state, and regional norms should be collected and made available for public review by all schools with online pro-

grams.

- Parties supporting the development and implementation of online learning should contribute to the development and validation of professional standards and guidelines supporting the implementation of highly effective online courses delivering standards-based content.

Recommendations Relating to Professional Development for Effective Online Teaching and Learning

All eight studies identify the situated and effective preparation of “highly qualified” online teachers as a crucial element in the implementation of effective online learning programs.

- State education agencies in all 50 states should work toward establishing performance-based qualifications for online teachers and require that all teachers assigned to online high school courses have appropriate subject-area teaching certification.
- State education agencies should work toward developing and enforcing performance-based professional requirements for all online teachers.

Recommendations Relating to Challenges of Online Learning

Some of the features and strategies identified in this synthesis may be interpreted as barriers to further diffusion and sustainability of online learning in K–12 educational systems. In particular, there are indications that the strenuous demands of virtual teaching and learning may make participation in online learning

programs a relatively undesirable option for some teachers and school administrators.

- K–12 educators (teachers and leaders or administrators) participating in online learning projects must be emotionally prepared to accept and adapt to ongoing changes, including technological changes in hardware systems and changes in curriculum requiring periodic modifications to online courses.
- The loss of visual contact with students seemingly robs online teachers of queuing systems that may be important to some dimensions of interpersonal communication. In particular, efforts should be made to provide additional support systems for online teachers that can help alleviate teachers' perceptions that students' attitudes and emotional states are less accessible to them in online learning environments.

Recommendations Relating to Online Learning, School Change, and Educational Reform

The institutionalization of e-learning or online learning in America's schools is *not* about establishing online learning as a delivery system competing with the traditional K–12 schools. It also is *not* about disseminating new or innovative instructional technologies. Rather, it *is* essentially about educational improvement, school reform, and improving academic performance in American's high schools.

- The goals for online learning projects and programs should be intentionally stated in terms of systemic education reform and school improvement.
- The outcomes defined as tar-

New Research (Continued)

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gets for online learning programs also should be oriented toward school reform and educational improvement.

- Data management systems should be implemented for online learning programs that will fully support comparisons of student academic performance between online and traditional settings. If the national online learning community is going to aim high, it needs the assessment capacity to show that it is hitting the mark.

Recommendations for Additional Research

We believe that the future of research examining online learning lies in the systematic examination of students' academic performance in contexts that invite measuring the impact of all those instructional and environmental variables differentiating between

the wide varieties of online learning environments in use today. The following question must be asked:

Does Method X (experimental group) show evidence of supporting student performance that is better than or equal to Method Y (control group)?

The answer to this apparently simple question may not be as simple as it appears. To fully answer the question, we must first determine what the basic underlying similarities and differences are between Method X and Method Y and then accommodate for those differences so that our findings will reflect the real character of the interventions and not just our prior assumptions about all fruit being apples.

The real challenge for online learning researchers is to determine the significant characteristics common in all learning environ-

ments so that we are sure that we are not comparing *apples* to *oranges*. Then, we should continue to address the basic question common to all design-based research: *Does this instructional intervention work better than things did before?*

If we continue to ask that same question and account for the real similarities and differences between related interventions, we eventually will discover ways to optimize learning in all sorts of instructional contexts and learning environments, both traditional and online.

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2006 Virtual School Symposium

Next Generation Education: Redesign Powered by Online Learning Dallas, Texas November 4-7, 2006

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Sunday, November 5	Pre-Conference
Monday, November 6	Day 1 of Conference
Tuesday, November 7	Day 2 of Conference

Student's Corner

Inspiring Math through Online Learning



By Steven Nelson
Contributing Writer

My name is Steven Nelson and I am a senior at Montville High School in Oakdale, Connecticut. I am a three sport varsity athlete (x-country, wrestling and track). I was a member of the academic all state team last year for wrestling. I am a member of both the National Foreign Lan-

guage and National Honor Societies at my school. I am also an Eagle Scout.

I am currently taking a course called Number Theory [Patterns, Puzzles and Cryptography] through the Virtual High School (VHS) program. This is my first time taking an online course so I was really unsure what to expect. I think that taking this class has helped me broaden my horizons because, as of my senior year, I ran

out of options in terms of math classes at my high school so I went looking elsewhere. I was surprised by the variety of courses offered through the VHS program.

The experience so far has been amazing. It has taught me a lot about organization and self discipline. In the class I am surprising myself every day by simply learning new techniques or methods to approach different problems that I never knew existed. I would definitely recommend others take a VHS course but only if they are highly motivated because unlike a traditional class there is no teacher standing over your shoulder reminding you to get to work.

Next year I plan to head off to college and hope to major in electrical engineering at the college of my choice. I am applying to the United States Coast Guard Academy, Villanova University, Lafayette College, Bucknell University and UConn, just to name a few.



NACOL thanks Liz Pape, CEO, Virtual High School for sharing this student's story. Reprinted by permission of Virtual High School (www.goVHS.org)

Grant Opportunity from the U.S. Department of Education for Charters

The Charter Schools Program seeks to expand the number of high-quality charter schools by providing financial assistance for planning, program design, initial implementation, and proper evaluation. The competition is open to states with a charter law and charter schools within states that elect not to participate or do not have an application approved. The deadline for applications is March 10. www.ed.gov/GrantApps lists all competitions that are currently underway and provides links to electronic application packages, forms, and other critical information.

Taking Standards Seriously at SREB To Improve Quality and Contain Cost

The Educational Technology Cooperative, composed of K-12 and higher education agencies in the Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) 16 states, is working together closely to improve learning through the use of technology. Leaders in these agencies understand current and future issues including the adoption of standards to allow for more sharing and exchange.

At a recent Cooperative meeting in Atlanta concerning online learning, Dr. Robert Wisher, Director of the ADL Initiative in Washington, DC, presented information about repositories and registries – critical components of the multi-state SREB SCORE (Sharable Content Object Repositories for Education) initiative. SCORE registry work is based upon work the Department of Defense has done with learning object repositories known as CORDRA. Dr. Wisher said “It pleases me greatly to see the educational community take immediate advantage of the ADL tools and methods being implemented within DoD. Our common ground is building envi-

ronments for effective learning while containing costs.”

A key SCORE document is the SREB Technical Guidelines on Digital Learning Content www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/SCORE/05T05-Digital Learn Content-WEB.pdf

“Companies were judged in part by their level of use of standards to guide the development and implementation of their products.”

in which SCORM serves as an important consideration in development and acquisition of learning content. These guidelines were developed over several years as SREB worked closely with the Academic ADL Co-Lab to identify

key issues and topics essential for effective use of digital learning content in teaching and learning.

SREB also partnered with other regional compacts and the Academic ADL Co-Lab through a national education group called the ATAlliance to obtain quality products and services for schools and colleges. A key focus this year has been on eLearning Management Solution companies – companies that provide platforms for online courses. Learning Repositories were also evaluated. Standards were a key element identified in the request for proposal and the subsequent evaluation. Companies were judged in part by their level of use of standards to guide the development and implementation of their products. While SCORM is a long standing standard in higher education distance education, it is important to include and introduce K-12 educators to these already existing digital content standards, too.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). Link: www.SREB.org

Idaho Continued

Continued from page 3

Governor's Office. IDLA is seen as a solution to assist in high school reform and additional funding has been requested by the State Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the Governor's Office. A focus on quality and accountability over the last three years of operation has insured that IDLA is seen as a quality provider of online courses and as a solution to highly qualified faculty, increased rigor, and

time and distance barriers.

In summary, continued funding and focus on the benefits of virtual schools can be insured by addressing the importance of quality and accountability as delineated in the U.S. Department of Education's National Education Technology Plan. One way to insure quality and accountability is to clearly define appropriate legislation and frameworks by which virtual schools operate. We believe

at IDLA that quality and accountability are necessary prerequisites for state funding as well as the future perception of virtual education. Our legislation has provided a solid blueprint to insure that quality and accountability are priorities at the Idaho Digital Learning Academy.

Donna Vakili is Director of Idaho Digital Learning Academy.

Nearly 40% of Adults Think High Schools Should Require an Online Course to Graduate

Thirty-six percent of the nation's school districts now offer distance education courses, according to a 2005 U. S. Department of Education report. Of those, 47% reported using the internet to deliver these courses. Given the veritable explosion in online learning opportunities at the K-12 level and its prevalence at the collegiate and university level, Gallup polled a national sample of American adults in June 2005 and asked them this question:

"It has become common for education courses after high school to be taken online. In your opinion, should public high schools in your community require every student to take at least one course online while in high school?"

The stunning response: nearly 40% of adults agree that an online course should be required. Mind you, these are adults who probably did not have the opportunity to take online coursework in high school and may or may not be us-

ers of the Internet themselves. A decade ago, this would have been a ridiculous question to ask. How quickly our expectations have changed as the Internet is infused into every day living and is indelibly changing civic life, work, play, and - yes - education, too.

Call to Action (Continued)

Continued from page 2

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. In Spring 2003, the study's investigators reviewed 67 websites of virtual schools to obtain information about the schools' accreditation status. Of the 67 investigated, 47 did not indicate accreditation by an agency outside of the state board of education or accreditation by the local school attended by the students. ("Distance Learning Success Factors in the RPR Cycle and Virtual School Accreditation Standards", Cathy Cavanaugh, University of North Florida).

We, the leaders of K-12 online education, are charged with developing standards for high-quality online learning content. It is our task to build upon the work that already exists. Through NACOL, we must work together to determine appropriate online course/content standards, and disseminate and promote those standards to school administrators develop-

ing or leasing online courses. By collaborating to maintain quality standards, we will help advance e-learning opportunities for students, in support of the National Education Technology Plan. We must encourage an accreditation process for virtual schools based upon a common set of accreditation standards. With the establishment of a common set of course/content standards and accreditation standards, we provide valuable information for consumers - information to help them determine the extent to which online courses and virtual schools meet quality standards. This information is necessary for informed decision-making, for improvement of courses and virtual schools, and for the advancement of educational opportunities for our students.

Resources

Guide to Online High School Courses, published by National Education Association, [www.](http://www.nea.org/technology/onlinecourseguide.html)

www.NationalEdTechPlan.org

National Education Technology Plan, www.NationalEdTechPlan.org

Learning for the 21st Century Report, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, www.21stcenturyskills.org

MILE (Milestones for Improving Learning and Education) Guide for 21st Century Skills, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, www.21stcenturyskills.org

Essential Principles of Quality: Guidelines for Web-based Courses for Middle and High School, Southern Region Education Board, www.sreb.org/programs/edtech/pubs/EssentialPrincipals/EssentialPrinciples.pdf

The Virtual High School: Teaching Generation V, Andrew Zucker and Robert Kozma, Teachers College Press

Liz Pape is CEO of *Virtual High School*

Michigan Considers Requiring High-School Students To Take at Least One Online Course

The new requirement would appear to be the first of its kind in the nation. Mike Flanagan, the Michigan state superintendent of public instruction, said he proposed the online-course requirement, along with other general requirements, to make sure students were prepared for college and for jobs, which are becoming more technology-focused.

The Michigan Department of Education is considering a set of 'more rigorous' high school

graduation requirements proposed by State Superintendent Flanagan. One of the three major requirements includes "completion of an online credit or non-credit course or learning experience."

The proposal originated in an e-learning report released in 2005 by former state superintendent of public instruction, Tom Watkins, titled, "E-learning Reforms for Michigan: the New Education (R)evolution". The recommenda-

tions were compiled after meetings with hundreds of school superintendents and administrators, technical leaders, teachers, business leaders and students. The E-learning report is available on NACOL's website.

Links:

"E-learning Reforms for Michigan: the New Education (R)evolution" www.coe.wayne.edu/e-learningreport.pdf

UCCP(Continued)

Continued from page 1

the Mexican curriculum online to the California content standards with the objective of giving students high school credit for courses completed in Mexican high schools. Mexico will be offering a certificate of equivalency that students can present in California high schools to receive credit for the courses taken. California High schools will receive a copy of the curriculum alignments of the Mexican curriculum that will indicate which courses are equivalent to the California's high school courses. The Imperial County Office of Education will pilot this initiative in the Fall of 2006 with all school districts in their region.

2) Courses in Spanish: UCCP will be offering courses in Spanish in the Fall of 2006 aimed for English Language Learners. These students will have the opportunity to take intensive English acquisition courses while they take college prep courses online in Spanish so they don't fall behind in their path to college.

3) Bi-national high school online: UCCP, Secretaria de

Educacion Publica (Mexico's Secretariat of Education), Colegio de Bachilleres, Corporacion Universitaria para el Desarrollo del Internet 2, Televisión Educativa, Universidad De Guadalajara Virtual are examin-

"UCCP will continue to work with its Mexican partners to implement these initiatives and offer education online solutions to address English Language Learners and migrant student needs in the state of California."

ing the possibility of creating a bi-national high school online between Mexico and California.

4) Research: UCCP, the University of California, Davis, and institutions of higher education in Mexico will be working on creat-

ing a series of research studies based on the collaborative initiatives between UCCP and Mexico. The areas of research will include English Language Learners, implementation of equivalencies, college prep course online in Spanish, and the various areas of online learning across borders.

Although these initiatives are in their first year, UCCP will continue to work with its Mexican partners to implement these initiatives and offer education online solutions to address English Language Learners and migrant student needs in the state of California.

Dr. Francisco J. Hernandez serves as Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs of the University of California at Santa Cruz and he is the Executive Director of the UC College Prep Online (UCCP). Dr. Moises Torres is the Director of the UC College Prep Online, an online college preparatory project at UC Santa Cruz and teaches in the UC Santa Cruz School of Education.

Online education “clicks” with Millennials

As reported by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in recent reports and the National Education Technology Plan, schools and districts offering online learning and other forms of distance education are growing at explosive rates. One-third of all public school districts reported they offered some form of distance learning. Districts plan to continue to expand online offerings in the future.

As a growing number of schools promote high school reform and redesign, students seeking a quality education are given more choices through online learning. More institutions are offering more courses, and many more students are enrolling. Here are the most recent numbers available:

- There were an estimated 40,000-50,000 enrollments in K-12 online learning in 1999-2000 (Tom Clark, WestEd)
- There were 328,000 enrollments in all distance education courses in K-12 in 2002-2003 (NCES, March 2005)
- An estimated 36% of public

school districts offered distance education courses in 2002-2003 (NCES, March 2005).

- There were an estimated 500,000 enrollments in online learning in 2005-2006 (Eduventures)
- 72% of public school districts with distance education planned to expand offerings in the future (NCES, March 2005).
- There were 3 million enrollments in college-level, credit-granting distance education courses in 2000 (NCES, 2003).

Today's Students: The Millennials are ultra-communicators and use technology to communicate, create and learn:

- 67% of preschoolers use computers.
- 80% of elementary students use computers.
- 50% of all teens are creators of content on the Internet (original, remix, reuse).
- 96% of students say that doing well in school is important to their lives.
- 94% of students plan to continue their education after high

school.

- 90% of children between 5 and 17 use computers.
- 94% of teens use the Internet for school-related research.
- Teens spend more time online using the Internet than watching television.
- The largest new group of Internet users from 2000-2002 were children from the ages of 2-5

Links:

Pew Internet & American Life Project: www.pewinternet.org

NCES: Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School Students in 2002-2003 (published March 2005):

www.nacol.org/documents/2005010.pdf

National Education Technology Plan, "Toward A New Golden Age of American Education: How the Internet, the Law and Today's Students Are Revolutionizing Expectations": www.nationaledeplan.org



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