

# Online Education Learner Engagement & Academic Success Strategies at Community Colleges

by George Lorenzo

the SOURCE on Community College Issues, Trends & Strategies

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**the SOURCE on**  
Community College  
issues, trends & strategies

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## **Introduction**

**M**anaging the growth of online education is a serious struggle for many community colleges. The adoption of sophisticated educational technologies applied to the development and implementation of fully online and blended teaching and learning courses and programs has become a game of “catch up,” says Sandy Shugart, president of Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida. “It is being adopted so quickly that we [community colleges in general] are having difficulty planning for and creating the support infrastructure that assures that the student has a really high quality experience.”

Wright Lassiter, chancellor of the Dallas County Community College District, concurs: “There is pressure for more support services for this growing cadre of students,” he says.

Gerardo de los Santos, president and CEO of the League for Innovation in the Community College, adds that accommodating an increased number of online enrollments requires a sophisticated technological infrastructure to effectively support both students and faculty. “There is a great opportunity, and it takes a good amount of resources to put the foundation in place,” he says. “There will continue to be pressure to effectively move students through the system.”

This report is a synthesis of community college issues, trends and strategies relative to institutional and student success in online education environments. It is based on some recent literature about community college online education along with interviews with community college educators who can be considered innovators in the online education sector.

### **Blueprint for a Virtual College**

To get a firmer idea on how to address the aforementioned pressures, Shoreline Community College in Shoreline, WA recently pub-

lished “Blueprint for a Virtual College.” This 92-page document is loaded with valid and authoritative examples of solid strategies from numerous institutions faced with an increased demand for online programs. These same institutions must also deal with the prospect of increasing the quality and amount of student support services needed to maintain a healthy online student body. In a section of the Blueprint titled “Student Preparation and Orientation,” for instance, the authors point to options for revising student orientations that are held online, including the adoption of instructional audio and video components. It’s noted how the use of multimedia, for example, can reduce the over abundance of text typically found in student orientations and ultimately get important instructional materials out more effectively, especially with students just out of high school.

Other student preparation elements require first-time online learners to take online readiness-for-college-level-work assessments in reading, writing, and math and/or other online courses that help prepare them for academic success. The Blueprint also refers to best practices for building robust student advising and early academic alert systems, as well mentoring programs.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Big Picture**

Another excellent resource relative to the growth and development of online education at community colleges can be found in the 24 pages of the Instructional Technology Council (ITC) 2010 Distance Education Survey Results. ITC has been conducting this annual survey since 2005. The 2010 results were aggregated from more than 320 community colleges.

Some of the salient results of the ITC 2010 survey include:

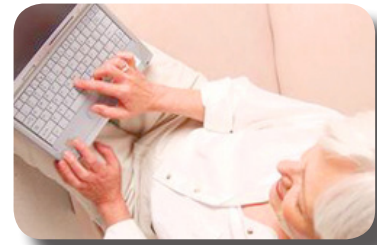
- Finding support staff is a challenge, especially experienced instructional designers.
- Addressing faculty workload issues and finding and training qualified faculty are two of the greatest challenges community colleges face.
- Sixty-eight percent of survey respondents reported that demand exceeds their online education offerings.
- There is a big need to better prepare students for online instruction through structured orientations and computer skills assessment.
- Student retention rates need to be improved.
- Assessment of online instruction needs improvement.
- Student assessment and interventions need to be improved.
- Technical support needs improvement.<sup>2</sup>

### **It's Really About Student Engagement**

The ITC report also noted that even with budget cuts and staff reductions, community colleges continue to increase their efforts to expand virtual services and support. In short, most community colleges have come to the logical conclusion that, beyond all of aforementioned issues and challenges, probably the most important issue to deal with is how to better engage online learners. If students are not engaged and retained, then the entire landscape looks bleak and all the talk about how online education can help with the so-called “completion agenda” becomes meaningless.

Fred Lokken, associate dean of TMCC WebCollege at Truckee Meadows Community College and coordinator of the ITC survey, explains that community colleges are dealing with “an

ever-increasing wave of digital natives who expect technology and demand it. We will need to respond by becoming more effective ourselves in its adaptation and appropriate use in both curriculum and delivery.”



### **About Online Learners**

Becoming more effective, especially in the online education space, certainly has its challenges. Although some educators might argue differently, particularly at institutions offering bachelor's and master's programs online, engaging and retaining online learners has proven to be a greater challenge than engaging and retaining on-campus learners. Research comparing engagement rates [which are tied directly to learning outcomes and retention] of online and blended students conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin revealed that “online students were less engaged than blended students,” says Karla Fisher, former college relations coordinator at the Center and now vice president of academics for Butler Community College. Fisher surveyed and compared 906 students enrolled exclusively in fully online courses and 1,179 students enrolled in blended/hybrid courses at four community colleges and one statewide community college consortium during the Fall 2009 academic term. She discovered that “unfortunately, too many community college online students – especially those attending part-time – learn in relative isolation, disengaged from their peers and faculty members.” The challenge for community college administrators, faculty, and staff, Fisher adds, “is to find effective mechanisms for increasing engagement, and ultimately retention and success rates, among their online student populations.”

Since 2001, the Center – through the management and administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CC-SSE) survey instrument, called The Community College Student Report – has identified good educational practices for on-campus community college students that are directly related to retention and other desired student outcomes. The Center’s efforts have expanded in recent years to assess a range of online and blended student practices and behaviors that are also correlated highly with student learning and student retention.

Kay McClenney, director of the Center, says that while engagement is certainly an important factor that affects online student reten-

### **Demographics Have No Effect & Online Students Score High on Effort**

**E**arly research focused on online and blended students conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin shows that student demographics play less of a role in online student engagement than on-campus, says Karla Fisher, former college relations coordinator at the Center and now vice president of academics for Butler Community College. “Particularly age and gender appear to have no effect in the online environment, and race/ethnicity – strong predictors on-campus – also seem to have little effect,” she says. The research also reveals that, although measurably less engaged, many online students do score high on student effort. “This suggests that our respondents found that courses taught exclusively online require substantial individual effort,” Fisher adds. “In this study, online students spent more time preparing for class than their on-campus or blended peers.”

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— Kay McClenney, Director of the Center for  
Community College Student Engagement

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tion rates, another issue that comes into play is student readiness for online courses. “One of the reasons why some colleges have had terrible attrition is that they have, in the past, used online courses as a dumping ground for late registrants,” she says. “These students are the least likely to be prepared for the self discipline and computer skills that are needed to succeed in the online environment.”

### **Adding Fuel to the Fire**

The Community College Research Center (CCRC) investigated enrollment patterns and academic outcomes among students who were taking online, hybrid and face-to-face courses at Washington State Community and Technical Colleges during the fall of 2004 until the spring of 2009. CCRC’s research concluded that students are more likely to fail or withdraw from online course than from face-to-face courses. “In addition to a gap between online and face-to-face course completion rates, results suggested that students who took online coursework in early terms were slightly but significantly more likely to drop out of school in subsequent terms . . .” Moreover, these results were similar to another study conducted by CCRC on community colleges in Virginia, “indicating that student difficulties with online courses in community colleges are not confined to one state.”<sup>3</sup>

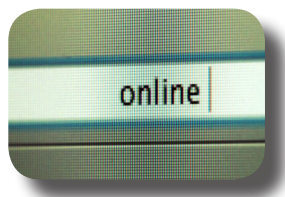
### Possible Solutions

The CCRC report lists many of Washington State Community and Technical Colleges' current student support practices and then suggests "potential directions toward stronger service integration" for getting online learners to be as equally successful as their face-to-face counterparts. These include:

- Requiring students to complete an assessment before enrolling in their first online course
- Requiring students to complete a course management system tutorial within the first few days of taking their first online course or be de-registered
- Provide 24/7 online support services, including reference librarian support, technical support and tutoring
- Provide incentives to faculty to participate in more professional development
- Focus efforts to engage faculty with topics related to student learning
- Invest in overall improvements through both monetary and non-monetary resources <sup>4</sup>

### Mandatory Online Orientation Proves Successful

An effective practice among many effective practices at community colleges that is along the lines of what the CCRC report suggests can be found at Richland Community College in Decatur, IL, where all first-time online students are required to take an online learning orientation course. This practice quickly resulted in a much better retention rate for Richland's online courses, from 71.8% in Fall 2008 to 79.5% in Fall 2009. Kona Jones, director of Online Learning at Richland Community College, and Online



Support Specialist Elizabeth Jackson, lead this effort by converting an optional orientation for new online learners into a sophisticated, self-paced online orientation.

All new online learners must now pass a two-to-three-hour online orientation prior to being officially enrolled in their first online course. The orientation is modular, with quizzes, interactive activities and self assessments that ultimately reveal how ready students may or may not be for online courses. "We also have videos, tips and tricks, a discussion forum and a drop box," Jones says. "And we have implemented a survey at the end of the orientation where students can anonymously give us feedback [that includes an open-ended question where students can offer opinions and advice]. We took all that feedback, along with our own experiences working with students and instructors, and rolled it into this mandatory orientation."

In addition to achieving better retention rates, Jones estimates that student trouble tickets at their help desk have been reduced by 50 percent as a direct result of the mandatory

### Beyond a Simple Orientation

According to Kay McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, "the reasonable thing to ask if you are going to do an online orientation is what are the other strategies that you are going to wrap around the orientation to make sure that you are making personal connections with these students who are otherwise anonymous and adrift. I would ask [in addition to an orientation] how you are creating connections and relationships with your online students. How do you make this an engaged learning community as opposed to a student staring at a screen?"

orientation. She adds that “faculty have been hugely supportive,” because it has dramatically reduced the time they were spending with student-readiness issues.

### **Academy of Excellence Helps Faculty Incorporate Best Practices for Student Success**

On the faculty side of online teaching and learning, Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) in Arnold, MD has created an “Academy of Excellence” that helps faculty incorporate best practices, strategies and general teaching philosophies into their online and blended courses. The Academy includes a peer-mentoring program where faculty who are teaching online or blended courses for the first time can pair up with an experienced online educator. In addition, these experienced faculty mentors also participate in online and hybrid course peer reviews that are based on Quality Matters (QM), a nationally recognized, faculty-centered, peer-review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components. “These peer reviews and the peer-mentoring program ensures that online courses are well designed and taught well,” says Dean of AACC’s Virtual Campus Jean Runyon, adding that “our students also have to be fully supported in order to really create a learning environment that is conducive for their success.”

### **Other Practices & Strategies With Student Success in Mind**

Overall, AACC has a variety of practices and strategies geared toward ensuring student success in online learning environments. “We’ve really used our learning management system and the technologies available to figure out how we can best support our learners,” Runyon says. “Through the purposeful selection of tools and technology, through faculty training, and through student support, we think we are really able to accomplish our goals.”

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Anne Arundel Community College Virtual Campus

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For example, by integrating its student information system (SIS) with its learning management system (LMS), AACC tracks which students have completed the online learning department’s online orientation and when students have logged into their actual online courses. Also, first-time online students get an automated reminder phone call one week prior to when their online course begins. By day three of their online course, those students who have not logged in receive another phone call.

AACC also has distance education librarians embedded in certain online courses to help students increase their information literacy skills. Special communities of learners are also created inside the LMS, such as an online community for veterans to interact with each other and community college staff. In addition, web conferencing tools have been integrated with its LMS so faculty can meet with their online learners to give live demonstrations, hold discussions or host guest lecturers. The Academic Advising department also uses web conferencing tools to conduct sessions with students.

### **Retention Software Helping GRCC**

Another good example of how a community college is implementing best practices and strategies geared toward helping their online students stay on board and succeed can be found at Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) in Michigan. Eric Kunnen, GRCC’s

director, Distance Learning & Instructional Technologies, explains how his department has been using retention-oriented software that “allows us to set up rules in the system that specifically targets online courses and lets us know if a student has not logged into a course in 48 hours, or 24 hours, or whatever threshold we decide to set,” he says. “Then we can communicate with those students who are not starting out well and notify an advisor, a counselor, a retention specialist, the instructor and/or the student. The flags are automatically set up based on the rules and thresholds we define.” Additionally, the system can be integrated with an instructor’s grade book. “We can show which students have missed their assignments or are not performing well based on a midterm grade [or other course-related flags].”

### **Adding to the Mix**

GRCC also utilizes synchronous technologies for communications between faculty and students, such as instant messaging and video conferencing. More instructors are using such tools for online office hours, Kunnen explains. “It allows for a variety of synchronous communications [during times that are more convenient, in particular, for adjunct faculty members and busy working adults who don’t spend a lot of time on campus] so they can chat, launch an audio session, or even a white board session, which works especially well for math courses,” he adds.

### **More EdTech Tools**

“We’re seeing an infinite amount of emerging instructional technology tools out there for all faculty members to use, and we are finding that the tool boxes have never been richer,” says Linda Wareck an instructional technologist at Oakland Community College (OCC). OCC is the largest of Michigan’s 28 community colleges, comprised of five campuses located in Southeast, Michigan, in Oakland County. Wareck is a veteran instructional technologist who has presented frequently over the past 10

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Oakland Community College

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years, at local, regional and national levels, specializing on topics related to online faculty development using collaborative tools and teaching strategies.

### **Synchronous Web Conferencing Tools Bring Positive Experiences**

Wareck explains that as a member of a technology management committee at OCC, she’ll bring case studies to the table that feature



how “collaborative tools” have been utilized successfully to engage both online faculty members and students in positive ways. In addition to seeing the use of social networking tools [eg. Facebook and Twitter], blogs and wikis in online, blended and as compliments to face-to-face courses growing in popularity and effectiveness, Wareck notes that the use of web conferencing tools for hosting synchronous course events has brought about some extremely positive teaching and learning experiences. In particular, she points to an OCC political science class in which the instructor used a collaborative tool for web conferencing to host a prominent guest speaker for a synchronous course event – Kimberly Hunter, press secretary for Senator Jim Webb from Virginia. Thirty-five students were able to see, hear and interact with Hunter, a Washington insider, for 30 minutes. “The students had tremendously positive feedback about the whole experience,” Wareck says. “They got a chance

to meet with somebody they would have never had the opportunity to interact with before. They felt that this was more of an experience they would have had in the real world or maybe in a university environment.”

### **It's a Web 2.0 World**

At Hillsborough Community College (HCC), Celeste Fenton, director of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Technology Faculty Development Department, and Brenda Ward Watkins, HCC instructional designer, are also seeing the use of collaborative tools growing and being more readily accepted by faculty who are passionate, open-minded and ready to learn about using Web 2.0 technologies in their online, blended or traditional courses. HCC's district offices are located in Tampa, FL. It has five primary campus locations, two satellite locations, an active distance learning program (MyHCC), and a comprehensive corporate training center.



Fenton and Watkins are also co-authors of “Fluency in Distance Learning,” published in 2010 by Information Age Publishing, Inc. In addition to offering an overall “practical, hands-on, workshop-style approach to creating an effective distance learning course,” as noted on the book's back cover, Fenton and Watkins included a chapter on how to create dynamic content with multimedia in online teaching.

Referring to the development of online courses, Watkins says that “it really is no longer acceptable to just put up a PowerPoint presentation and have students read various book chapters and answer the questions at the back of the book.” She adds that “anything you can do in a face-to-face course, you can do online.”

To help push that kind of effort with faculty, Watkins and Fenton developed a four-day

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Hillsborough Community College

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Summer Institute on Web 2.0 technologies in 2010, with a focus on blogs, wikis, social networking, and synchronous technologies. “When we advertised the Summer Institute, it filled up within 24 hours, and we had a waiting list that could have filled another Institute,” Watkins says. “And, the 2011 Institute filled in less than 90-minutes.”

In addition, Fenton explains that due to the consistent growth in the number of online and blended courses being offered at HCC – “because students are demanding it” – faculty members “are now a lot more motivated and a lot more interested in developing dynamic online courses that include Web 2.0 technologies.” She adds that the number of licenses for web conferencing software, for instance, has recently increased at HCC campuses and that both screen-capture and screen-casting video software are increasingly being utilized by HCC faculty and instructional designers.

### **Engagement Needs to Happen Early and Often**

Perhaps what all these solutions have in common is best summed up by McClenney, who points to the results of the CCSSE since 2001. “What we have established through our research is that intensive student engagement is key to student success and needs to happen early and often in community college students,” she says. “This is true in the online environment, and it just has to be done in different ways.”

## A Brief Look Inside Rio Salado College

**Rio** Salado College (RSC) is one of the most innovative and successful community colleges in the nation that offers fully online courses and programs. This distinction comes from its history: RSC became one of the first higher education institutions to go fully online in 1996. Plus, as far back as 1996, RSC started an unprecedented “term block” registration system, with 26 start dates. Today, RSC has 48 start dates with new online courses beginning every Monday. RSC currently has more than 43,000 online learners and still growing, making it the largest community college online institution in the U.S.

The SOURCE talked to Vernon Smith, vice president, Academic Affairs, to get a handle on what’s new and what’s been working all along at RSC in the online education arena. Below is a condensed version of what Smith shared with us.

**The SOURCE:** What kind of steps has RSC taken to improve online learner retention rates?

**Smith:** Our retention rates are on average in the upper 70s and 80s percentile. We have a robust predictive-analytic modeling system called Rio PACE (Progress and Course Engagement). It is integrated with our learning system, and it takes out data from our SIS (Student Information System), including students’ academic records, class behaviors, login behaviors, site engagement and whether or not they are keeping up with assignments and how they are doing in comparison to their peers. We take all that data and do a massive data crunch against all the historical data we have on previous students who have been in that same course. From that we are able to predict whether or not a student will drop out, and, by the eighth day of class, whether or not they will achieve a C grade or better. We can track a student’s progress and build a score into the instructor’s course roster and then drive student interventions from there. The instructor is able to contact a student right away, and we have found that direct contact from the instructor has the greatest impact. We also have an instructional help desk, a technology help desk, a tutoring service, and an ask-a-librarian service – all provided 24/7. Our instructional help desk is staffed with experienced online learning instructors who are able to answer students’ questions about course content and/or direct them to our tutoring services. The technology help desk often helps students with simply getting logged in. We have a 24/7 librarian chat service through a partnership with Maricopa Community Colleges, and we have a robust library with lots of resources. We track the instructional and technology help-desk systems so we can discover patterns that help us make improvements that ultimately affect retention.

**The SOURCE:** Can you tell us about Rio’s system for designing fully online courses?

**Smith:** We use a one-course, many-sections model. Faculty and instructional designers build a master course that meets all the minimal competences and includes high quality assessments. We then deploy that master course across sections. Faculty can enrich the course themselves, but the course already has high quality built into it. This allows faculty to use their highest skills for working with students instead of spending too much time building lessons that we have already built for them. Faculty are encouraged to tell us if there is something inside the master course that needs to be fixed, but we really want faculty to focus on helping students make it through their courses. By the way, we have 1,300 faculty and only 22 are full-time.

**The SOURCE:** Which leads to our next question: What can you tell us about faculty who teach online courses at RSC? What kind of credentials do they have? What kind of training do they go through?

**Smith:** Online faculty members meet the same qualifications as on-campus faculty. We have a real privilege of being able to recruit and retain faculty. Eighty percent of our adjunct faculty members have been with us for five years. Others are new because of growth. We evaluate faculty over a period of time to see if they are actually good online instructors. It is based on their responsiveness and monitored through our RioLearn system (learning management system) in which we have a series of alerts that let us know if the instructor has not responded to a student's completed assignments or if a student has not been graded. It is a quality assurance that keeps the student in mind first. As far as faculty training, we have a series of online training courses called AFD (adjunct faculty development) that start out with AFD 101, which teaches them how to use RioLearn and includes training modules that cover online adult learning principles. It is a non-credit course that they take on their own time, but we encourage them to get it done early on. We also have monitoring and shadowing of new faculty. Each department chair has their way of doing it. Some are more hands on than others, especially during the first semester that they teach. Overall, there is always a lot of monitoring going on.

**The SOURCE:** It's no secret that the RSC model for developing and offering online courses and programs is highly scalable. What would you say are the key elements of RCS's success in relation to scalability?

**Smith:** The one-course, many-sections model is a big part of our ability to scale up quickly. But beyond that we have an internal mechanism called "The Development Team." It's the heart of our system and it's cross functional, comprised of decision makers from all parts of the college. We meet on a weekly basis to make decisions at the systems-level and to understand the implications of our decisions. So, for example, when we went to every-Monday start dates, we asked what that would mean for financial aid, for student-enrollment services, for tutoring, for advertising and marketing, etc. It has taken us since 1978 (when RSC was established by the Maricopa County Community College District) to develop this kind of approach. We also learn from our best practices, and we have a strong culture that we call "Relentless Improvement."

### **The Mobile Student: Increased Smartphone Usage Catalyst for New Communica- tions Technology Adoption**

New technologies to support mobile learning and student notification systems are other areas that are growing in adoption and usage at community colleges because, simply put, more students are using smartphones than ever before. According to PEW Internet, 94% of community college students have cell phones, with 65% of that group using their cell phones to access the Internet or send and receive emails.<sup>5</sup>



Terry Patterson, director of distance learning at South Arkansas Community College (South-Ark) explains how this relatively small institution with a little more than 1,500 students has been implementing a sophisticated mobile communication system in order to stay current in the area of mobile technology adoption and services.

In particular, SouthArk has adopted a tool that allows faculty to send customized messages within its LMS environment to students in text/SMS, email and text-to-speech (TSS). Faculty choose from a list of enrolled students

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— Terry Patterson, Director of Distance Learning,  
South Arkansas Community College

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who have selected their preferred notification delivery modes. The tool was implemented inside a fully online Introduction to Computers course and a traditional English Composition course. “We got very productive feedback,” says Patterson. “The instructors could push the tool out to their students [through a button inside their LMS] and make sure they were utilizing it. The instructors felt like they were able to contact students more effectively and really get them connected. They were able to engage students and keep them informed.”

Patterson adds that SouthArk is now “getting prepared to roll this out fully across our system so that we’ll be engaging students in these forms [primarily in text/SMS] all across our campus. Not many institutions are using text messaging yet. We feel that it’s important to be able to do this now.”

### **SOCCCD Proactively Implementing New Ways to Stay Connected With and Inform Students**

South Orange County Community College District (SOCCCD) is also working with an early implementation of new mobile technologies to better engage and stay connected with both their online and traditional student body. SOCCCD is comprised of three campuses in Southern California and serves more than 40,000 students each semester.

Jim Gaston, associate IT director, and Robert Bramucci, vice chancellor of Technology and

Learning Services for the district, have been working on the implementation of mobile applications that can enable meaningful communications with SOCCCD students on their smartphones.

Gaston’s and Bramucci’s work entails integrating mobile applications with SOCCCD’s student information system, which happens to be home-grown. In the first phase, for instance, mobile applications will give SOCCCD students the ability to access a campus map [with an integrated GPS], news, campus-wide event notifications and class schedules. “It has some really nice features out of the box,” says Gaston, “but what we are really interested in doing is building on that and using the platform as a springboard for us to deliver some of our customized services,” including the ability to add and drop classes from a personalized list. In addition, through a recommendation engine called “Sherpa,” the intention is “to be an online guide to help students make good decisions about courses, services and just general information that they might find helpful,” Gaston explains.

For example, the drop-add application will not only notify students, on their smartphones, that a course they wish to enroll in has been filled or closed, but it will also automatically search for other sections that may have an empty seat [in an online course, for example]; or, if absolutely nothing is available, the application will make a recommendation to take something else that might fit within a student’s pre-defined interests, or a student’s academic record and his or her day/time schedule.

### **Reformatting of Screens for Faster Viewing and Just-in-Time Information**

“At the heart of this is really a simple idea, and that is personalization,” says Bramucci. “It takes information and reformats it specifically for mobile devices so that it is much faster – you do not have to scroll around too

*“If we can take all these services and deliver them through a mobile device, then we will be able to get to the student exactly when they need that information. They could be standing in line at the admissions office and something will pop up [on their smartphone] that they are interested in.”*

— Jim Gaston, Associate IT Director,  
South Orange Community College District

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much. It’s formatted so that you can check class announcements and go into a discussion board and leave a quick message without having to do a lot of the scrolling around that typically comes with the standard mobile browser.”

“If we can take all these services and deliver them through a mobile device, then we will be able to get to the student exactly when they

need that information,” Gaston adds. “They could be standing in line at the admissions office and something will pop up [on their smartphone] that they are interested in. That’s when we really start getting excited about this ability to deliver all kinds of services from multiple modalities.”

### **Pushing the Envelope of Innovation**

Smartphones and mobile technologies are adding another level of flexibility that students are demanding, says the League’s de los Santos. “We are becoming more sophisticated about how to use these mobile technologies. We are learning and trying to determine the learning outcomes of using different forms of technology. It [smartphone technologies] works well for some students, and it works well for some faculty. It does not work well for everybody.” He adds that community colleges, in general, “are pushing the envelope of innovation. We need to be about flexibility and inserting the changes we need for students.”

### **End Notes:**

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## Interviewees

**Many thanks go out to all of the educators listed below who took out the time to be interviewed about online education.**

Robert Bramucci, Vice Chancellor of Technology and Learning Services,  
South Orange County Community College District

Gerardo de los Santos, President and CEO of the League for Innovation in Community College  
Celeste Fenton, Director of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Technology Faculty Development  
Department, Hillsborough Community College

Karla Fisher, Vice President of Academics, Butler Community College

Jim Gaston, Associate IT Director, South Orange County Community College District

Elizabeth Jackson, Online Support Specialist, Richland Community College

Kona Jones, Director of Online Learning, Richland Community College

Eric Kunner, Director, Distance Learning and Instructional Technologies,  
Grand Rapids Community College

Wright Lassiter, Chancellor of the Dallas Community College District

Fred Lokken, Associate Dean of TMCC WebCollege at Truckee Meadows Community College

Kay McClenney, Director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement

Terry Patterson, Director of Distance Learning, South Arkansas Community College

Jean Runyon, Dean of Virtual Campus, Anne Arundel Community College

Sandy Shugart, President, Valencia Community College

Vernon Smith, Vice President, Academic Affairs, Rio Salado College

Linda Wareck, Instructional Technologist, Oakland Community College

Brenda Ward Watkins, Instructional Designer, Hillsborough Community College

## About The SOURCE on Community College Issues, Trends & Strategies

The SOURCE was launched on March 13, 2011 and is published by Lorenzo Associates, Inc. The mission of The SOURCE is to provide free, timely, accurate and highly informative resources to community college faculty, staff, administrators and students. In addition to publishing reports like this one (our fourth to date) inside The SOURCE Library, The SOURCE achieves its mission by aggregating and publishing an enormous number of links to outside news, feature articles, reports and organizations related to the community college sector. The SOURCE also publishes a free electronic newsletter that is distributed to subscribers every two weeks.

Please visit The SOURCE website at [www.edpath.com/thefsource.html](http://www.edpath.com/thefsource.html).

To subscribe to The SOURCE eNewsletter, published every two weeks, please visit <http://bit.ly/jvldQd>.

## BEST OF EdPATH

To use an old cliché, the more things change, the more they stay the same. This can be applied to the field of online higher education. In January of 2002, when the first official issue of Educational Pathways (EdPath) – a newsletter with in-depth feature articles about online higher education – was published, many of the same issues and challenges faced by educators today were making headlines back then: lack of faculty participation; administrators not accepting or supporting the further development of an online education system that works; struggles with instructional design and pedagogical concerns; a lack of funds; inability to create sophisticated marketing and promotional campaigns; struggles with building effective student support services; the list goes on.

Although the vast majority of these EdPath articles from the past were concerned with 4-year undergraduate programs and graduate-level online programs, the information is still very much applicable to any level of online education today. In that spirit, a list of some of the most-read EdPath articles published over the years, with abstracts and links, is provided below. As the writer of these articles, I'm biased, but I also believe that these articles are worth looking over because they carry a lot of sound and helpful information from educators who have been working in the field of online education over a major portion of their academic careers.

*For free access to all articles published in EdPath, from 2002 through 2010, please visit [www.edpath.com/stories.htm](http://www.edpath.com/stories.htm)*

**02/2002: Elements of an Online MBA Program.** Covers some of the key elements that Regis University developed over time to make its fully online MBA program successful.  
[www.edpath.com/2002/0202/020204.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2002/0202/020204.htm)

**04/2002: UCEA Members Talk Extensively About Distance Education.** This entire issue featured questions and answers with online educators who were members of the University Continuing Education Association, now the University Professional and Continuing Education Association. It's interesting to see how many of the same issues brought up back in April of 2002 still exist today.  
[www.edpath.com/2002/0402/April02.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2002/0402/April02.htm)

**02/2003: At the Online Library.** The prototypical 21st century higher education library is a complex business. Technology is driving enormous change in the way students learn and faculty teach. Libraries must keep up with the inflow of new technologically savvy students who insist on doing all their research online over a quick Internet connection with easy-to-navigate interfaces.  
[www.edpath.com/2003/0203/020301.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2003/0203/020301.htm)

**04/2003: Story of a For Profit.** An entire issue devoted to Capella University.  
[www.edpath.com/2003/0403/April03.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2003/0403/April03.htm)

**05/2003: ePortfolios: Who's Doing What?** An entire issue devoted to electronic portfolios. At the time, this was one of the most read issues of Educational Pathways.  
[www.edpath.com/2003/0503/May03.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2003/0503/May03.htm)

**03/2004: Portrait of a Modern Metropolitan University: How UCF is Developing Institutional Strategies through the Growth and Management of Fully Online Programs and Blended Courses.** All about the University of Central Florida . . .  
[www.edpath.com/2004/0304/030401.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2004/0304/030401.htm)

**04/2005: The Digital Optimist.** A relatively brief review of what was going on at the time in the world of online higher education that sounded more pessimistic than optimistic.

[www.edpath.com/2005/0405/040504.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2005/0405/040504.htm)

**04/2005: Sloan-C Seeks Opportunities for Corporations and Higher Education to form Meaningful Online Teaching and Learning Partnerships.** Yes, educators and trainers can accelerate the evolution of quality online learning experiences by encouraging more collaborative projects between corporate and academic learning professionals?

[www.edpath.com/2005/0405/040503.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2005/0405/040503.htm)

**10, 11 & 12/2005: The Adoption of Innovation: Online Learning Business Plans, Strategies, Change Management and Leadership.** A three-part series all about the business of online education published in the October, November and December issues of Educational Pathways.

[www.edpath.com/2005/1005/Oct05.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2005/1005/Oct05.htm), [www.edpath.com/2005/1105/Nov05.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2005/1105/Nov05.htm),  
[www.edpath.com/2005/1205/120501.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2005/1205/120501.htm)

**02/2006: The Growth and Development of Online Nursing Programs at Excelsior College, University of Phoenix and Walden University.** In a general sense, how three schools of nursing built and expanded their online degree offerings.

[www.edpath.com/2006/0206/020601.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2006/0206/020601.htm)

**07 & 08/2006: How to Facilitate Effective Online Interaction.** Excerpted and synthesized from Alexandra Pickett, "A Series of Unfortunate Online Events and How to Avoid Them."

[www.edpath.com/2006/0706/070605.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2006/0706/070605.htm)

**09/2006: Using Free and/or Inexpensive Tools to Create Engaging and Interactive Online Courses.** Some of the links may be broken in this piece, but it is loaded with some great suggestions from Professor of Accounting at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), Richard Lillie.

[www.edpath.com/2006/0906/090601.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2006/0906/090601.htm)

**12/2006: Notes from the Chronicle of Higher Education Technology Forum: Strategies for Campus Leadership.** An interesting synthesis of four presentations from the Forum that can be considered relevant to online teaching and learning in higher education.

[www.edpath.com/2006/1206/Dec06.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2006/1206/Dec06.htm)

**07 & 08/2007: Western Governors University: How Competency-Based Education Has Come of Age.** An entire issue all about Western Governors University.

[www.edpath.com/2007/0707/July-August07.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2007/0707/July-August07.htm)

**10/2007: A Research Review About Online Learning: Are Students Satisfied? Why Do Some Succeed and Others Fail? What Contributes to Higher Retention Rates and Positive Learning Outcomes?** The long headline says it all.

[www.edpath.com/2007/1007/100701.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2007/1007/100701.htm)

**Spring/Summer 2008 : More on Electronic Portfolios, with vendor case studies.**

[www.edpath.com/2008/0308/SS08.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2008/0308/SS08.htm)

**Summer/Fall 2008: Special Report: Information Technology Governance in Higher Education.** Not so much directly about online education, but definitely related – for IT folks . . .

[www.edpath.com/2008/0408/040801.htm](http://www.edpath.com/2008/0408/040801.htm)