

# ***GROWING BY DEGREES***

## ***Latest Report From the Sloan Consortium***

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“Is online education now a part of the mainstream of higher education?”

This question was the first and most fundamental one examined by the recent Sloan Consortium report on the state of online education in higher education. The answer the report gave was a clear “yes.” The report indicated that thousands of courses are being offered, and there is a large number of programs available online. The report, *Growing by Degrees*, is available online at <http://www.sloan-c.org/resources/index.asp>.

*Growing by Degrees* is the third annual report by the Sloan Consortium, and presents the latest data about the growth and spread of online education in higher education in the United States. The first report, *Sizing the Opportunity* (Allen & Seaman, 2003), indicated that online and/or distance education was growing rapidly and was perceived positively by faculty and administrators. The authors of this report defined online learning to be courses in which most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically, these courses have no face-to-face meetings.

A second report, *Entering the Mainstream* (Allen & Seaman, 2004), reported that online education was becoming a regular component of higher education. Many institutions of higher education were offering courses, a large number were offering programs, and online education was considered to be a normal activity of colleges and universities.

The most recent Sloan Consortium report confirms the impact of online education. According to this report, 40%-60% of schools with traditional courses also offer online courses and programs.

One indication that online courses are a regular activity of institutions of higher education is the role of core faculty in online instruction. There has been a long-held belief that online courses are taught by adjunct professors, rather than full-time staff. *Growing by Degrees* (Allen & Seaman, 2005) refutes this perception. It reports that about two thirds of online courses are taught by regular faculty, a percentage that is often higher than the percentage of regular courses taught by core faculty.

Another important indicator of the growth of online education is the importance of this instructional approach to the long-term strategy of the institution. In 2005, 56% of institutions indicated that online instruction was critical to their long-term plans, up from 49% in 2003. The only institutions that did not see online instruction as part of their long-term strategies were the smallest, nonprofit colleges.

Enrollments in online courses have increased to about 2.4 million from 2 million in 2003. Growth has been continuous, and has often exceeded the expectations of organizational planners.

The belief that online instruction takes more effort continues to be strong. Many leaders reported that they felt that it takes more effort to teach online, that it is harder for students, and that it is more difficult to evaluate the quality of online courses. In spite of the belief that online education is more difficult, this approach is perceived favorably by most who responded to the Sloan survey.

As an aside, the emerging literature about the effort required for online teaching and learning indicates that effective online education is not necessarily more time-consuming and difficult. It seems that there is a discrepancy between perceptions and fact. The keys to effective online education are proper course design and appropriate instructional strategies. The editors of the *Quarterly Review* would welcome papers dealing with these issues.

## REFERENCES

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