TTUS Charge 4 responses

Texas Tech University System

Study the prevalence of online courses and degrees in higher education. Examine how institutions providing online courses and programs are accredited, particularly courses and programs originating from states other than Texas. Evaluate how students whose courses and degrees are primarily online perform in terms of persistence and degree completion versus students who take courses in traditional classroom settings. Study labor market outcomes for students with primarily online courses and degrees versus more traditional programs.

1. *What are the existing barriers to online learning for students and faculty? What have institutions done to alleviate and eliminate these barriers?*

   - The region served by Texas Tech University, Angelo State University, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, and the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center – El Paso has limited access to broadband internet, especially in rural west Texas, the Paso del Norte region in El Paso, and throughout the Concho Valley.
   - Due to the pandemic, many local libraries and institutional libraries closed, which further impacted student's ability to connect to the internet and complete online coursework.
   - Lower socioeconomic students may have low-cost internet access, limiting the overall bandwidth available to the residence. The number of individuals in a single-family dwelling resulted in even more significant strain on internet speeds and access to video in particular.
   - Clinical healthcare educational programs require hands-on experiences. Online learning impacts the ability to provide such experiences. Some TTUHSC educational programs have started using virtual simulation to supplement hands-on clinical experiences.
   - With online learning, faculty lose the ability to use some of the most effective teaching methods (e.g., service learning in groups, interprofessional education).
   - Higher education students who are also parents of school-age children were challenged to maintain connectivity with multiple devices active in a home during the daytime. Further, while providing homeschooling for their children, these higher education students were also challenged to find time for their academic requirements.
   - Faculty in different disciplines have varying experiences with teaching in online learning environments. This varied experience makes uniform decision and instruction standards challenging to implement because not all faculty are at the same level of understanding or acceptance of online or distance learning. To alleviate some of the barriers, TTU system institutions provided mobile hot spots to students who did not have high speed or reliable internet at home. The universities also increased wi-fi

access in parking lots and public areas on campus to connect wirelessly from their cars. Utilizing institutional funds, the TTUHSC provided financial assistance to students to purchase high-speed internet at home. TTU System schools have partnered together to share training materials for best practices in high quality online learning environments.

2. *What information and data are available regarding long-term student success for those taking courses primarily online, both general and specific to Texas institutions?*

   - Studies conducted at Angelo State University indicate that online-only degrees that have been in place for some time are as effective as face to face. That is particularly true of graduate programs. The majority of graduate students at ASU are in online-only

   - programs. The proliferation of online universities, in general, provide access for place-bound students and those seeking degree completion.
   - SACSCOC requires that student learning outcomes for courses are the same for all delivery (face-to-face, hybrid, and online instruction). All Texas institutions provide this evidence for each SACSCOC 5th year interim report period and Reaffirmation cycle.
   - Although the THECB no longer requires a comprehensive assessment of an institution's capacity to support student learning online, institutions must comply with the Principals of Good Practice for Online Learning (see http://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/sites/docid/cache/file/801171AA-D6F1-B416-71F569F8980FEA1D.pdf)
   - Programs have multiple success measures, including, but not limited to, pass rates, graduation rates, accreditation reviews, and outcome reports. Comparing data by the modality of programs has been done by TTU System institutions for many years.

3. *With institutions having shifted instruction to online-only in the Spring of 2020 because of the pandemic, what lessons have been learned?*
   - Emergency remote learning is not the same as a class designed to be online.
   - Students who do not have access to high-quality internet, are not comfortable with technology as a mediator of learning, or have lower levels of online self-regulation, are likely to struggle during the rapid transition to online learning. These students need to be identified early and receive targeted support.
   - Faculty who have not had teaching experience in online environments need dedicated instructional technology support as they transition their teaching materials and pedagogy to online environments.

- Institutions need to be prepared with adequate technology and instructional support staff to support students and faculty in online environments.
- Pandemic conditions influence required clinical placements, and health care facilities and clinics may need to reduce their time supervising students during these periods. Thus, multiple acute and non-acute care clinical placements must be identified in advance if possible.
- Conscious effort on the part of faculty and students is required to create active student engagement and building a sense of course community in an online environment.
- Support staff needs training in handling the business operations of the school while working remotely.
- All student support services need to be available remotely all the time so that if an institution has to move to remote instruction, students have access to things like mental health care and tutoring services immediately without having to wait for the institution to develop online services.

4. *What are the challenges related to technology, quality, accessibility, or other considerations? The Committee is seeking the perspectives of college/university administration, faculty, and students.*
   - Reliable internet service is critical for a successful online program. This is not available to many faculty and students.
   - Even when students have excellent broadband access, there will still be occasional issues that are disruptive. The variety of hardware and software configurations can mean problems arise on a student by student basis. Mandating a specific hardware/software configuration is likely to lead to pushback, especially from low-

   - income students who may not have the resources to purchase new technology. The immediate requirement for all students to have webcams, microphones, etc., to participate in class was an unexpected financial strain for several.
   - A significant challenge for healthcare educational programs is to ensure clinical opportunities and experiences for online students.
   - Adequate and comprehensive online learning materials needed to be acquired quickly.
   - Synchronous classroom meeting solutions need to be available.
   - Just in time, faculty training on online pedagogy and educational technology is required.
   - Adequate instructional technology staff is needed (as distinguished from Informational Technology staff).
   - Comprehensive online access to Library and co-curricular student support services is essential. These cannot be created quickly.

- There are significant costs associated with making content accessible. Still, all content must be accessible for all learners, including making videos closed captioning, providing documents and content compatible with screen readers, alt-tagging images, and providing alternative formats of instructional materials.

5. *Post-pandemic, will the recent shift to online courses lead to expanded online demand and capacity?*

- In general, there will be an increase in the demand and capacity of online education nationwide and especially in Texas.
- Faculty and Institutional Researchers will need to assess the best learning environments and pedagogies for the subject matter and then deliver them in the highest quality and safest way possible, given changing conditions.
- After the temporary provisions for online modality are rescinded, some institutions may leverage the learning curve from the shift to online and expand degree programs. The THECB, some disciplinary accreditors, and SACSCOC will require specific steps to transition such programs into permanent online delivery.
- Most laboratory or hands-on activities, and clinical rotations cannot be replaced with online instruction or simulation.

- Given the exposure to online education resulting from COVID-19, more students will recognize that an excellent online program, like those provided at TTU System institutions, will meet their needs.

6. *How can the Legislature address gaps inequity in accessing reliable, affordable Internet access?*

- Work with Telecommunications companies to incentivize them to build out universal broadband access across all of Texas, mainly focusing on rural areas where high-quality internet delivery will need to be subsidized.
- Consider providing community colleges and/or libraries with funding to ensure that every Texas community has a location where high quality internet can be accessed.

7. *What sort of differences in quality are we seeing for online nursing programs without a clinical component versus those that do have one or are done in person?*

- The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) requires that all accredited BSN programs include "planned clinical practice

experiences…" regardless of delivery modality. Simulation experiences are not counted as "planned clinical practice experiences." https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/CCNE/PDF/Standards-Final-2018.pdf (See page 16-17)

- In addition to continue face-to-face clinical rotations, TTU System institutions The increased access to "virtual simulation" programs. Early evidence indicates virtual simulation software has been seamlessly and successfully integrated into the current online curriculum. This software and live standardized patient clinical scenarios supplemented nursing student education when some programs experienced a reduction in clinical time at the end of the Spring 2020 term.

8. *What sort of privacy exists for students utilizing some of the more popular online curriculum packages?*

- All systems used by TTU System schools are behind firewalls and multiple levels of authentication and encryption. The vetting process for new technologies includes that they comply with FERPA, HIPPA, and institutional security and privacy standards.
- All TTU system schools comply with SACSCOC standards that require institutions to be sure that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit.

9. *Has recently adopted legislation on Open Educational Resources been able to make an impact on the quality of online education yet?*

- Recent legislation has encouraged TTU System schools to develop and maintain OER collections/libraries. Each institution has started its OER repository; all system schools will also utilize the central OER repository currently being developed by the THECB.

10. *Do small and rural community colleges have the financial capability to switch to online and in-person, classes, degrees, etc.?*

- Not applicable to TTU System

11. *How does the impact of COVID-19 affect the small and rural community college's ability to offer online classes and make other changes to adapt to the pandemic?*

- Not applicable to TTU System

Texas Tech University

Study the prevalence of online courses and degrees in higher education. Examine how institutions providing online courses and programs are accredited, particularly courses and programs originating from states other than Texas. Evaluate how students whose courses and degrees are primarily online perform in terms of persistence and degree completion versus students who take courses in traditional classroom settings. Study labor market outcomes for students with primarily online courses and degrees versus more traditional programs.

See TTUS response for system components in addition to the following.

1. **What are the existing barriers to online learning for students and faculty? What have institutions done to alleviate and eliminate these barriers?**

   For students, the largest barrier is stable internet access and the required technology. Texas Tech has increased the wireless capabilities in the parking lots in Lubbock and at the regional sites.

   For faculty, the largest barrier to teaching online is the lack of understanding of the different options for online delivery and the lack of online pedagogical training. Texas Tech has provided definitions and discussed with faculty the different options for teaching online. The instructional designers help to train the faculty about online pedagogy.

1. **What information and data is available regarding long-term student success for those taking courses primarily online -- both in general and specific to Texas institutions?**

   The number of students that successfully complete the online degree programs, specifically the graduate programs, is a measure of student success.

2. **With institutions having shifted instruction to online-only in the Spring of 2020 because of the pandemic, what lessons have been learned?**

   Additional training of faculty in the technology and best practices associated with teaching online was needed.

3. **What are the challenges related to technology, quality, accessibility or other considerations? The Committee is seeking the perspectives of college/university administration, faculty and students.**

   The main challenge associated with technology is the expense to both the university and the students. Texas Tech uses the Online Course Review Rubric (SUNY OSCOR) as a measure of quality of course design and accessibility of online courses. The students have expressed the need for more interaction with the instructor and other students in the course. Quality design will assist in meeting this need.

4. **Post-pandemic, will the recent shift to online courses lead to expanded online demand and capacity?**

   Post-pandemic there will likely be more online options for students.

5. **How can the Legislature address gaps in equity in accessing reliable, affordable Internet access?**

   Work with providers to ensure they cover rural and remote areas of the state, as well as locations in urban areas with little affordable access.

6. **What sort of differences in quality are we seeing for online nursing programs without a clinical component versus those that do have one or are done in person?**

   N/A

7. **What sort of privacy exists for students utilizing some of the more popular online curriculum packages?**

   Texas Tech works with vendors that only meet the State and university's requirements for security and accessibility.

8. **Has recently adopted legislation on Open Educational Resources been able to make an impact on the quality of online education yet?**

   There has been minimal progress in lower division classes. The OER resources are not available for most of the upper division classes.

9. **Do small and rural community colleges have the financial capability to switch to online, as well as in-person, classes, degrees, etc.?**

   N/A

11. **How does the impact of COVID-19 affect the small and rural community college's ability to offer online classes and make other changes to adapt to the pandemic?**

   N/A

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso

See TTUS response for system components in addition to the following.

The response below are for TTUHSC El Paso only.

Study the prevalence of online courses and degrees in higher education. Examine how institutions providing online courses and programs are accredited, particularly courses and programs originating from states other than Texas. Evaluate how students whose courses and degrees are primarily online perform in terms of persistence and degree completion versus students who take courses in traditional classroom settings. Study labor market outcomes for students with primarily online courses and degrees versus more traditional programs.

12. What are the existing barriers to online learning for students and faculty? What have institutions done to alleviate and eliminate these barriers?

Existing Barriers for Students and Institutional Responses

- In the Paso del Norte region, we have inconsistent broadband access due to the scale of our service area and mountainous terrain, as well as low income status of many of our students and communities that we serve.
- The closure of the TTUHSC El Paso Libraries and regional public libraries further impaired access to computers and internet, which disparately impacted our large population of Pell-eligible undergraduate nursing students.
- In addition, many homes in the Paso del Norte have lower cost, lower bandwidth internet service and the number of individuals in a single family dwelling resulted in even greater strain on internet speeds and access to video, in particular.
- Given transition to remote education for K-12, TTUHSC El Paso students who are also parents of school-age children were challenged to maintain connectivity with multiple devices active in a home during the daytime. Further, while providing home schooling for their children, these TTUHSC El Paso students were challenged to also find time for their own academic requirements.
- To support students, each discipline tailored approaches to meet unique student needs, including: weekly or more frequent meetings via WebEx and Zoom for synchronous class sessions; faculty making regular contacts to individual students via phone or email; transition to online testing for those disciplines that didn't already utilize these tools; individualized student placement advocacy for Nursing clinical placements; transition to simulation and online materials to a limited degree for clinical requirements; weekly communication via Tech Engage to students regarding co-curricular resources (e.g. Student Counseling Services, Student Health Services, Financial Aid, Food Pantry, etc.).

Existing Barriers for Faculty and Institutional Responses

- Faculty in different disciplines had varying experience with teaching in online learning environments. Nursing has two fully online degree programs and a third technology assisted degree program. However, the Graduate School of

Biomedical Sciences has a significant focus on research within laboratory environments. The Medical School utilizes a combination of online instructional materials in addition to face-to-face labs and clinical experiences.

- To support TTUHSC El Paso faculty, we rapidly escalated support from institutional and academic unit IT, the Office of Faculty Development, Learning Management System (Canvas) staff, and the institution-wide eLearning Committee.
- In addition, just-in-time instructional materials and solutions were purchased and later reimbursed with CARES Act Institutional Portion funds. We continue to pilot and evaluate improved solutions for synchronous classroom meetings, instructional materials, and institutional policies and procedures handbooks and catalogs.
- Further, we have partnered with Texas Tech University eLearning to share training materials for best practices in and high quality online learning environments.
- The following journal article has been published and describes the rapid transition of the Office of Faculty Development in order to support faculty during transition to online learning:
  Mulla, Z., Paton (Osland Paton), V., Rodriguez, M., Vazquez, E., & Kupesic, S., (2020, June). Novel coronavirus, novel faculty development programs: Rapid transition to eLearning during the pandemic. *Journal of Perinatal Medicine,* 48(5): 446–449.
  https://doi.org/10.1515/jpm-2020-0197

13. *What information and data is available regarding long-term student success for those taking courses primarily online -- both in general and specific to Texas institutions?*

SACSCOC requires that the student learning outcomes for courses are the same for all methods of delivery (face-to-face, hybrid, online). All Texas institutions provide this evidence for each Interim report period (5 years) and Reaffirmation cycle. SACSCOC Peer Evaluators review the evidence and identify any areas that are not in compliance with SACSCOC Principles.

Section 8. 1. The institution identifies, evaluates, and publishes goals and outcomes for student achievement appropriate to the institution's mission, the nature of the students it serves, and the kinds of programs offered. The institution uses multiple measures to document student success. (Student achievement) [CR]
https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/2018PrinciplesOfAcreditation.pdf
(page 20)

In addition, there is extensive research from each institution that is submitted to the THECB when a change of modality is proposed for a degree program. In

addition, the THECB has required comprehensive assessment of an institution's capacity to support student learning in all environments – face-to-face, hybrid and online.

14. *With institutions having shifted instruction to online-only in the Spring of 2020 because of the pandemic, what lessons have been learned?*

- Students who have lower access to high quality internet, are not comfortable with technology as a mediator of learning or have lower levels of online self-regulation are likely to struggle during rapid transition to online learning. These students need to be identified and receive targeted support.
- Faculty who have not had experience with teaching in online environments need dedicated instructional technology support as they transition their teaching materials and pedagogy to online environments.
- Institutions need to be prepared with adequate technology and instructional support staff to support students and faculty in online environments.
- Required clinical placements are influenced by pandemic conditions and health care facilities and clinics may need to reduce their time in supervising students during these periods. Thus, multiple acute and non-acute care clinical placements must be identified in advance if possible.

15. *What are the challenges related to technology, quality, accessibility or other considerations? The Committee is seeking the perspectives of college/university administration, faculty and students.*

- Adequate and comprehensive online learning materials needed to be acquired quickly.
- Synchronous classroom meeting solutions need to be available.
- All materials are closed caption or alt-tagged.
- Just in time faculty training on online pedagogy and academic technology is required.
- Adequate instructional technology staff are needed (as distinguished from Informational Technology staff).
- Comprehensive online access to Library and co-curricular student support services is essential. These cannot be created quickly.

16. *Post-pandemic, will the recent shift to online courses lead to expanded online demand and capacity?*

- Faculty and Institutional Researchers will need to assess the best learning environments and pedagogies for the subject matter and then deliver them in the highest quality and safest way possible given changing conditions.

17. *How can the Legislature address gaps in equity in accessing reliable, affordable Internet access?*

- Work with Telecommunications companies to incentivize them to build out universal broadband access across all of Texas, particularly focusing on rural areas where high quality internet delivery will need to be subsidized.

18. *What sort of differences in quality are we seeing for online nursing programs without a clinical component versus those that do have one or are done in person?*

- <u>Clinical experiences for nursing have continued during the pandemic</u>. Our accreditor, CCNE, requires "planned clinical practice experiences" and this requirement has not been waived even though Gov. Abbott issued a temporary waiver allowed more than 50% simulated clinical learning experiences.

- The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) requires that all accredited BSN programs include "planned clinical practice experiences…" regardless of delivery modality. Simulation experiences are not counted as "planned clinical practice experiences". https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/CCNE/PDF/Standards-Final-2018.pdf (See page 16-17)

  III-H. The curriculum includes planned clinical practice experiences that:

  • enable students to integrate new knowledge and demonstrate attainment of program outcomes;

  • foster interprofessional collaborative practice; and

  • are evaluated by faculty.

- On March 21, 2020, Governor Abbott approved a temporary waiver of the 50% limit on simulated clinical learning experiences so that students in their final year of the nursing program could meet their clinical learning objectives.
- <u>22 Tex. Admin. Code §214.10(e)(3)</u> and <u>§215.10(e)(3)</u> relating to Clinical Learning Experiences for Vocational Nursing and Professional Nursing Education Programs:
  Prior to this waiver, these rules limited clinical learning experiences for vocational nursing and professional/registered nursing students to 50% simulation activities in each clinical course. **The granted waiver now allows students in their final year of a nursing education program to meet clinical**

learning objectives by exceeding the 50% limit on simulated clinical learning experiences.

This temporary waiver may help senior nursing students enrolled in a program that has ceased direct care clinical learning experiences to graduate as planned and become a part of the nursing workforce during this unprecedented disaster when employers need "all hands on deck".

19. *What sort of privacy exists for students utilizing some of the more popular online curriculum packages?*

- TTUHSC El Paso provides student learning resources that are behind authentication. The vetting processes for purchasing these solutions requires that they are compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). Students information is not released to vendors per the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

- SACSCOC incorporates the US Department of Education regulations in its Standards:

  Section 10.6. An institution that offers distance or correspondence education:

  (a) ensures that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit.

  (b) has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs.

  (c) ensures that students are notified, in writing at the time of registration or enrollment, of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity.

  https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/2018PrinciplesOfAcreditation.pdf (page 24)

20. *Has recently adopted legislation on Open Educational Resources been able to make an impact on the quality of online education yet?*

- TTUHSC El Paso has begun to maintain an OER collection and it is expected that this resource will grow over time.

21. Do small and rural community colleges have the financial capability to switch to online, as well as in-person, classes, degrees, etc.?

- Not applicable to TTUHSC El Paso

22. How does the impact of COVID-19 affect the small and rural community college's ability to offer online classes and make other changes to adapt to the pandemic?

- Not applicable to TTUHSC El Paso