

Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

The Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative (OHE-LC) executes two Collaborative Research projects each year. Collaborative Research projects are foundational member-wide research studies with topics identified and prioritized by the entire membership. They focus on major trends and issues of long-term strategic importance using data sets or case studies drawn from across the membership and are used by members to identify national trends impacting all online education providers.

Examples of Recently Completed and Upcoming Collaborative Research Initiatives

REPORT TITLE	METHODOLOGY	TARGET REPORT RELEASE DATE
<i>Online Higher Education: Retention Benchmarks and Practices</i>	Member Benchmarking Data; Secondary Research	Completed
<i>Online Higher Education Market Update 2008</i>	Member Benchmarking Data; Secondary Research	Completed
<i>Competing in Online Higher Education 2008</i>	Member Benchmarking Data; Analysis of Member Web Sites; Secondary Research	Completed
<i>Benchmarking Online Operations</i>	Benchmarking Data for Member and Non-Member Institutions; Secondary Research	Summer 2009
<i>Survey of Online Program Alumni</i>	Survey of Member Alumni; Secondary Research	Fall 2009
<i>Sizing the Employer Market for Online Higher Education</i>	To Be Determined	Winter 2009/2010

Online Higher Education: Retention Benchmarks and Practices

Online higher education in the United States is thriving and online delivery is now increasingly mainstream across higher education institutions of many types. In this young market, not surprisingly the emphasis has been on marketing and recruitment. To cement the value proposition of online higher education, however, student retention and completion must be given more attention. This study seeks to advance member understanding of online student retention and completion benchmarks and practices and includes an overview of existing statistical data on online student retention and completion as well as the results of a member survey featuring data and perceptions for each member's largest online higher education program.

Online Higher Education Market Update 2008

This study provides OHE-LC members with updated estimates and forecasts of the size and shape of the U.S. online higher education market and builds upon past studies conducted in 2005 and 2006, allowing for longitudinal comparisons. Among the issues examined in the study are the current estimated size of the online higher education market and projected growth, adult student trends, and key dynamics of future market development.

Competing in Online Higher Education 2008

This study provides OHE-LC members with an in-depth and updated review of positioning and differentiation trends in the U.S. online higher education market and builds on the previous OHE-LC Collaborative Research Report, *Competing in Online Higher Education: Positioning and Differentiation Strategies*. The new study examines the full range of positioning points for online delivery by taking into account the growing diversity of higher education institutions offering online programming and helps OHE-LC members define and evolve their own positioning and differentiation strategies.

Benchmarking Online Operations

This study aims to address a major knowledge gap facing OHE-LC members – namely, how to assess investment, infrastructure, and practices associated with online operations. Online operations might include aspects of marketing, admissions, program development, staffing, services, back office, outsourcing, and technology. This study will create a cross-institutional data set focused on online operations, allowing OHE-LC members to compare themselves to industry norms and trends, as well as by institutional type and nature/maturity of online activity. In addition to OHE-LC members, the aim is to include a significant number of non-members in the study.

Survey of Online Program Alumni

To cement the online higher education value proposition, the short and longer-term impact of online study on the graduate must be evaluated. Given the strong career orientation of many

“The money we spent on Eduventures was exceptionally well spent as the quality of the insight was high and the price was very cost-effective. Eduventures is a great resource and partner.”

Ramsey Fowler
Dean of New College
St. Edward's University

online programs and students, career impact is particularly important. This study will survey alumni of OHE-LC member's online programs, seeking before-and-after job and salary information, as well as alumni views on the value of their online education. The study will also explore openness to alumni activities and, where appropriate, fundraising efforts.

Sizing the Employer Market for Online Higher Education

This project aims to size and better understand the employer market for online higher education. To date, online higher education has been first and foremost a consumer market. Many OHE-LC members are interested in the potential of the employer market, where corporations and other organizations turn to online active schools to deliver a variety of professional development, whether for-credit or non-credit, degree or non-degree, generic or customized. At present, this market is little understood, and both higher education institutions in general, and online higher education in particular, are viewed as under-represented.

The study will investigate both evolving attitudes in different industries to online delivery in general, and scope for enhanced fit between employer needs and online higher education programming. The scope of the investigation will encompass employer needs in terms of content and services, the nature and structure of alliances between firms and schools, and employer policies relating to delivery mode, institutional type, tuition assistance and accreditation. Methodology is yet to be determined, but will likely be a combination of survey and interviews.

RESEARCH BRIEFS

Research briefs are developed by the OHE-LC research team to provide timely insight into emerging areas of interest for the entire membership. Research briefs are typically shorter research initiatives and are meant to provide an overview of data and trends related to a targeted topic of interest. Research briefs are developed in response to collective interest expressed by the membership.

UPCOMING AND COMPLETED RESEARCH BRIEFS FOR 2009

Update on Consumer Demand and Decision-Making for Online Higher Education

As online higher education continues to grow, consumer experience and decision-making is evolving; and in the midst of a major recession, up-to-date consumer data is critical. In addition to updates on consumer interest in online higher education by credential, field of study and demographics, this study will seek to illustrate how prospective online students make enrollment decisions, and how the current economic environment is shaping those decisions.

Online Technology and Instructional Design

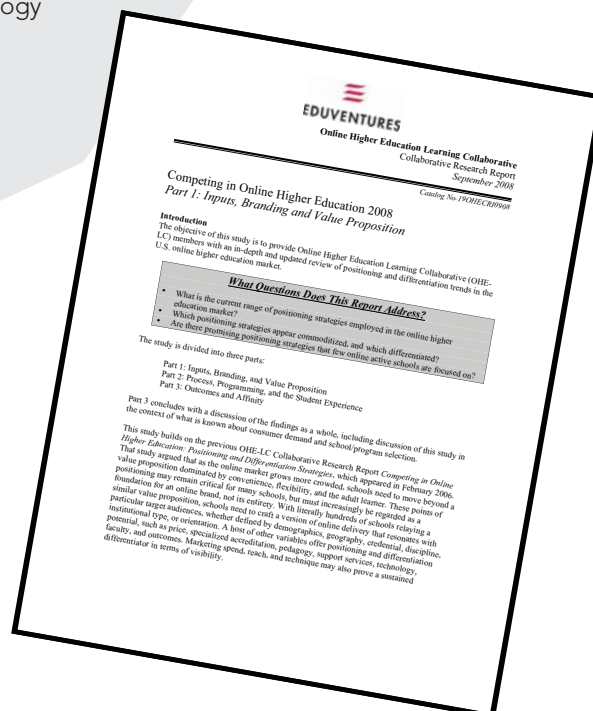
At present, many OHE-LC members are interested in the range of instructional design practice and use of technology in the online higher education market at large. Both pedagogy and technology suggest potential for online active schools to enhance the online student experience, burnish the online brand, and differentiate online programming in particular markets. This study will be a comparative analysis of sample online courses at a range of online active schools. The aim is to go beyond school positioning of the online student experience to assess the pedagogic and technology features of actual online higher education courses.

"The research (by the OHE-LC research team) allowed us to convince people both internally and externally that the program under consideration was a doable project and was instrumental in helping us gain the support we needed to launch the program."

Dr. Larry Gould
Provost
Fort Hays State University

Online Programming Trends

Of central importance for many OHE-LC members is an understanding of online programming trends. Which programs and specializations are in the ascendant, and which are in decline? In Fall 2008, to support online market sizing work, OHE-LC staff built a database of online programs across 100 schools, encompassing the most active schools in the market plus a wide range of other institutions. This Research Brief will update this database, noting new and retired online programs. This intelligence will offer OHE-LC members unique insight into the evolution of online programming across credentials, fields and specializations.



CUSTOM ANALYSIS

Custom Analysis is targeted, member-specific research studies with topics identified and prioritized by individual members. They focus on strategic or operational issues specific to that member involving analysis of their own data or best practices in use by other members and are used by members to address their immediate, campus-specific challenges. Custom Research Reports, Custom Inquiry, and Membership Q&A all fall under Custom Analysis.

CUSTOM RESEARCH REPORTS

Custom Research Reports utilize several possible methodologies such as benchmarking, analysis of members' in-house data and identification of best practices. All past Custom Research investigations are made available to the entire membership, allowing members to benefit from research conducted on behalf of other member institutions. The Learning Collaborative currently has more than **120 Custom Research Reports** available to members in its research library.

Sample Custom Research Reports by OHE-LC Research Theme

Identifying New Programs and Markets

- *Spanish-Speaking Online Learners: An Untapped Market?*
- *Motivations of Registrants for a Continuing Medical Education Online Program*
- *Online Delivery Internationally by U.S. Schools: An Assessment of Current Activity*

Improving Marketing and Recruitment

- *A Comparative Analysis of Unconverted and Converted Leads at One OHE-LC Member Institution*
- *Cost-per-Lead and Cost-per-Start Trends*
- *Prospects Weigh in on the Relative Importance of Various On-Site Elements of Online Programs, as Well as on Values-Based Market Messaging*

Refining Teaching, Learning and Outcomes

- *Pedagogical Elements, Approaches, and Strategies Among Non-Credit Certificate Providers*
- *Orientations for Online Students: Current and Best Practices*
- *What Factors Drive Successful Online Students to Drop Out Before Program Completion?*

Streamlining Operations

- *Statewide Postsecondary Online Learning Networks: Models of Shared Student Enrollment and Programmatic Collaboration*
- *Postsecondary Faculty and Administrators' Preferences for Online Program Development*
- *Scaling Online Business, Engineering, and Nursing Programs While Complying with Specialized Accreditation Standards*

CUSTOM INQUIRY

Custom Inquiries include queries of existing data, high-level overviews of areas of existing knowledge, or secondary research investigations. Custom Inquiries are proprietary to the commissioning member, and are therefore not shared with other members.

Sample Topics of Past Custom Inquiries:

- *Assessment of Market Conditions for a Masters Level Program in Business Management*
- *Overview of Social Networking Trends in Higher Education*
- *Gender Differences in Survey Results featured in 2007 OHE-LC Collaborative Research Report "Understanding the National Online Higher Education Market"*
- *Nation and State Enrollment Trends for Master's Programming in Public Administration*

MEMBERSHIP Q&A

OHE-LC members have the opportunity to pose short, fact-based questions to the membership at large through Membership Q&A, thereby leveraging the collective experience of member institutions to guide decision-making. Inquiries generally focus on operational issues with results summarized in short reports, with results subsequently archived and made available to the program membership at large.

The Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative has over 60 completed Membership Q&A reports in its research library.

Examples of Past Membership Q&A:

- *Call Center Operations and Structure*
- *Lead Generation and Lead-to-Enrollments Conversion for Online Master's Programs*
- *In-House Textbook Publishing*
- *Online Faculty Employment Status*
- *Professional Development Opportunities for Online Faculty*
- *Online Course Evaluations for Online Programming*
- *Pricing Model Efficacy*
- *Click Through Rates for Banner Ads and Paid Search Ads*

MEMBER ROUNDTABLES

Member Roundtables are web teleconferences that convene the membership to discuss research findings, best practices, and implementation strategies. They allow members to speak directly with the OHE-LC research team, relevant experts and other member institutions in order to leverage the collective wisdom of the membership on specific topics. All Member Roundtables are recorded so member institutions can access them afterwards if they are unable to attend in person.

Examples of Past Member Roundtable Topics

- *What Are U.S. Schools Doing Online Internationally?*
- *Update on Online Higher Education in the Current Economy: Where Do We Stand?*
- *Online Business Programming Trends and Issues*
- *Online Higher Education in a Weak Economy: Thriving or Surviving?*
- *Managing Online Growth*
- *Blogging in Online Higher Education: The What, Why, Where & How*
- *The Military Market for Online Higher Education*

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