

# Sloan-C View

Perspectives in Quality Online Education

A Publication of the Sloan Consortium

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**THE SLOAN CONSORTIUM**  
A Consortium of Institutions  
and Organizations Committed to  
Quality Online Education

## Coming to Terms: ALN

Online educators want to say exactly what is new about higher learning online today, yet a proliferation of terms complicates things. In Sloan-C listserv conversations about whether distance or distributed education is the proper name for it, some useful clarifications emerged.

*Distance* education "is about access" says **Victor Kobayashi** of the University of Hawaii. It recognizes that not all learners have access to face to face instruction on campus at regularly scheduled times during fixed terms. **Al Powell** of Colorado State University gives a succinct definition of distance education, which has a 200 year U.S. history: "Distance education takes place when the teacher and student are separated by time, distance, or both." Distance education enables people to proceed at their own paces, places, and schedules, frequently on their own, independent of classmates and teachers. Yet, *distance* conveys an unfortunate provider-centric connotation—do learners think of themselves as distant? To the contrary, many faculty and students report they experience a strong sense of community and what **Burks Oakley** of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign calls "mind-to-mind" presence in online interaction.

Another term, *distributed* learning, aims to bridge the distance between teaching and learning. Distributed learning emphasizes information technology for learning beyond the classroom:

Distributed learning supports a "pull" model of education in which a person engages in learning activities at his or her own pace and at a self-selected time. This is in contrast to the traditional "push" model of education in which the learners synchronize their needs and schedules to the delivery of the instructor. (The California State University Center for Distributed Learning: <http://www.cdl.edu/html/dist.html>)

Emanating from environments in which online programs were initially housed with campus CIOs rather than with traditional academic departments, *distributed* education is a term widely used in federal government, as the term *e-learning* is used in corporations for self-directed modular learning.

The terms *online* learning and *web-based* learning are generic; both emphasize that a component of instruction employs the internet. Including formal and informal learning, the terms may be used for hybrid or blended courses in which components of instruction are face to face and online. But none of these names really conveys the distinctive characteristics of ALN, asynchronous learning networks.

**George Otte** of City University of New York points out that the terms *distance* and *distributed* may disguise what's really needed: "a thorough rethinking of the status quo." A rethinking would include, says Tom Abeles of *On the Horizon*, an expansion of the faculty role to embrace all modes of learning and a reevaluation of academic culture:

What is it worth to a student to have an on-campus experience and what is it worth for a click space experience?

**Murray Turoff** envisions learning in the academy of the near future:

The sooner that distance learning technologies become commonly used to support face to face classes, the sooner we can leave it up to students whether they want to attend face to face classes or not. Maybe this will still take a decade to accomplish, but it will come, and then the concept of distance learning or distributed learning becomes obsolete and we have ALN or LN for all courses. No artificial separation between regular students and distance students would be the preferred and simplified administrative operation of a University.

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forward

# ... From the Editors

A letter from the editors of the *Sloan-C View*

This issue of the *View* features excerpts from a Sloan-C listserv conversation about whether online learning is more than the latest form of distance education. . . is it more than old wine in new bottles?

In May, at the Sloan-C ASTD workshop on Corporate and University Alliances, Frank Mayadas explained that the internet is a radical discontinuity for business and for learning. Plato recognized the invention of writing as such a radical discontinuity, just as Edison recognized that electricity would change the world. As silicon technology advances to a price point that provides widespread internet access, we will experience things never before possible (Starr Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff. *Network Nation: Human Communication via Computer*. MIT Press, 1978.) Today, an estimated 10% of all higher education occurs through ALN, and this percentage is growing exponentially as people realize the power of:

- Instant distribution
- Instant aggregation
- Interactive, multiparty, multidirectional, multimedia communication that is archivable and retrievable
- Ready revision, refinement, and updating of information
- Rapid feedback from many users on testing, process, products

For these radical innovations, the term "Asynchronous Learning Networks" (ALN) conveys the learning potential inherent in online interactive people networks.

**Jeff Seaman** reports on early, representative results from a Sloan-C survey of higher education, revealing that nearly 90% of schools offer blended or fully online courses. Indeed, **Mark Kassop** of Bergen Community College, Thomas Edison State College, eArmyU and the New Jersey Virtual Community College Consortium finds that learning online surpasses the traditional classroom in specific ways.

**John Sener** reports on effective practices that are eliminating barriers, enabling new populations of learners to access electronics and chemistry laboratories, and using the features of face to face and online learning in blended delivery models. As visits and postings to the Sloan-C effective practices site demonstrate, people are searching for and finding innovations. **John Bourne** and **Steve Schiffman** provide a primer on opportunity analysis and invite you to join a Sloan-C forum for entrepreneurial thinking.

The interdependent Sloan-C quality principles emulate the well-known features of continuous quality improvement (CQI), which uses feedback from customers, partners and employees to improve products and processes. As applied to higher education, the CQI quality goal is to scale programs to achieve capacity access through attention to learning effectiveness, affordability for learners and providers, and faculty and student satisfaction. Sloan-C members demonstrate these features of quality with empirical data as proof of effective practice.

You are welcome to join and to visit Sloan-C soon and often.

Best Regards,

... for the Sloan Consortium

Frank Mayadas,  
John Bourne and  
Janet Moore

The purpose of the Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C) is to help learning organizations continually improve quality, scale, and breadth according to their own distinctive missions, so that education will become a part of everyday life, accessible and affordable for anyone, anywhere, at any time, in a wide variety of disciplines. You are welcome to join Sloan-C: <http://www.sloan-c.org>

Welcome to new program listed in the [Sloan-C Catalog](#)

[FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY](#)  
[MSM in Risk Management/Insurance](#)

The Sloan-C catalog now lists over 500 online degree programs.

Over a thousand people read each issue of Sloan-C View on its first day of publication.

The Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks provided 368,000 viewings of articles in the past year.

The Department of Commerce lists education and training as the fifth largest export of the services sector of the U.S. economy.

<http://www.ita.doc.gov/td/sif/Charts102002/Page5.htm>

# Online Seminar in June

Starting June 5 and open for registration until June 19, the Sloan-C Third Thursday Seminar on Student Satisfaction will engage online educators with these topics:

**GETTING THE RIGHT FIT**— How do we promote effective ways to match prospective learners interested and capable of online learning with institutions who meet their needs? How do we get the right match with our programs?

**SCALABLE SERVICES**— What effective practices are emerging for promoting student satisfaction as an enterprise wide issue?

**PROMOTING COMMUNITY AND RETENTION**— Which new challenges and developments on the horizon are likely to change the current landscape of student satisfaction to online education? Are developments emerging to promote community and retention?

**BEYOND THE COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE**— What new ways of measuring the quality of student satisfaction are in use, and how useful are they?

**Dr. Meg Benke** of Empire State College, a national expert on student satisfaction, will moderate the seminar.

For a fee of \$79.95, participate in online discussions, and receive the preview student satisfaction studies, Volume 4 of the quality series upon publication, and a synthesis of commentary from peer practitioners, register at:  
<https://secured.sloanconsortium.org/sloancseminars/registration/index.htm>

## Coming to Terms: ALN

(Continued from page 1)

We are not there yet. "When ALN courses and programs become as common as on-campus courses and programs and when support services are provided to all students, near and far," says **Kobayashi**, then ALN will be understood as "the basic medium for instruction (even when distance is reduced to near zero meters), because ALN means uniquely asynchronous learning communities."

Indeed, the creation of asynchronous learning communities motivated ALN from the beginning. **Frank Mayadas**, Sloan-C President, provides a brief history to help understand the holistic approach that distinguishes ALN:

In 1993, shortly after we started the Sloan program, we held a small meeting of people who had received grants, and a few people who were likely to get grants. We had maybe 20 people in the conference room at the Omni Hotel here in Manhattan—from Drexel, the University of Illinois, the University of Southern California—Berkeley Extension, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Cornell, Brown, and others. One question I raised with this group was: "What should we call this stuff we are trying to do?" I wanted to avoid "distance education" because at that time, most of it was correspondence, television and audio conferencing. **Roxanne Hiltz** and **Murray Tuross** of New Jersey Institute of Technology had used the term "learning networks" already in publications, and we added "asynchronous" and called it ALN. The ALN term puts emphasis on everything that appeared to be important then, and which appears to be important now: Asynchronicity, Learning, and Networks (emphasizing networks of computers and networks of people learning together). Subsequently as the commercial internet exploded on the scene, computer networks became the internet, but the people networks idea survived. The ALN term still means something to me: asynchronous, instructor-led, cohort-style, emphasis on people-to-people interaction, relatively inexpensive course cost, and lower emphasis on expensive media.

# Opportunity Assessment:

## A Tonic for Jump-starting Sloan-C Creativity

Stephen Schiffman, John Bourne and Janet Moore

Sloan-C members have many ideas about how to make courses better, deliver better student services, create infrastructure for online courses and degrees, serve new populations of learners, make students happier while they learn more online in better teaching environments, drive down costs of online learning, and a host of innovative ideas. As an organization, how do we make sense of the continuous stream of ideas Sloan-C generates and take advantage of these ideas? One technique is called Opportunity Assessment (OA). OA is a well-developed part of entrepreneurship, taught at most colleges of business in the US. This opinion piece advances the concept that Sloan-C can use entrepreneurial theories to advance e-learning more vigorously and effectively in the upcoming years.

**"An opportunity is not just an idea, but an idea that has been filtered and shaped through a business situational lens."**

Professor Steven Spinelli, director of the Arthur M. Blank Center for Entrepreneurship at Babson College, tells his students not to come to him with business ideas. He says to come to him with business opportunities. There is a difference. Spinelli, one of the founders of Jiffy Lube, teaches that an opportunity is not just an idea, but an idea that has been filtered and shaped through a business situational **lens**. Sloan-C wants to think about how to turn ideas about online learning into opportunities.

So what does the opportunity lens look like? How would one begin to filter an idea? A basic technique taught at Babson, a top-ranked program in entrepreneurship, is the "3M" method. The three M's are: market demand, market structure, and margin analysis.

First consider **market demand**. What is the trend and capacity of the market into which your idea will fit? Are you trying to sell into a growing or shrinking market for your product or service? A course on how to create online courses may be a great idea, but has the market for such a course collapsed, as more and more faculty use online course tools such as Blackboard or WebCT? Is the "window of opportunity" still open?

Next, consider **market structure**. Is it realistic that you will be able to reach your customers? Who controls access? Are there a few major players or is the market fragmented with many players? Related to market structure is the concept of "unfair advantage". What specific attributes or abilities do you have that others don't have that will enable you to compete in the market? For example, do you have a hold on geography or a client list? Do you have unique expertise, a license or a patent? Or might you have an online course taught by a luminary in the field at your institution?

Finally, **margin analysis** is a fiscal plan for developing and delivering your product at a profit. More precisely, you must sell at a price that lets you recoup your initial investment as well as cover all ongoing costs. The difference in price and cost is called the **margin**, and this margin will determine how much you must be able to sell just to break even.

What relevance do the 3Ms, and opportunity assessment in general, have for online education? In "Higher Ed, Inc.: The Rise of the For-Profit University" Richard S. Ruch maintains that most colleges and universities now see themselves as market-driven institutions, even though there is significant difference in the way for-profit and not-for-profit institutions account for their finances. Not-for-profits, according to Ruch, talk about "excess revenues" instead of profits; but either way, all organizations rely on revenue in excess of cost to sustain growth. Furthermore, Ruch points out that the market is a "powerful source of information about real social and economic need," a fact accepted and used by business people.

No matter what position you take on calling students customers with regard to their attainment of learning objectives, at the macro level of shaping an idea into a viable opportunity, considering students as market customers lets you invoke the machinery of entrepreneurial thinking.

So the next time you or a colleague comes up with an idea for a new course, seminar series, curriculum, or programs (products, all!) ask these questions: Why would anyone buy it? Why would they buy it from you? Would enough buy it so that you can offer it in a sustainable way?

Is your idea a real opportunity?

What can Sloan-C do next to develop opportunities for online learning? Please let us know by contacting [john.bourne@sloan-c.org](mailto:john.bourne@sloan-c.org) if you would be interested in joining a Sloan-C online forum for discussing opportunities in online learning.

...the [Sloan-C Team](#)

# The Sloan Survey of Online Learning

Jeff Seaman, Ph.D.

**The Sloan Consortium is just completing a comprehensive national study of online learning in Higher Education. Working from a representative sample of all United States institutions of higher education, this study has collected data on attitudes and practices from over 990 institutions.**

**The Sloan Consortium would like to thank all the institutions that took the time to respond to our study. The information you have provided will allow us to publish comprehensive and up-to-date study of the nature and extent of online learning.**

## First Results

While analysis process has just begun, we can provide you with some summary tables of what we are discovering.

## Online versus Blended

The study used the Sloan definitions of online and blended courses, where at least 80 percent of the course content had to be delivered online to be considered an "online" course, and between 30 and 80 percent delivered online to be considered a "blended or hybrid" course. Overall, well over half of the entire sample provides both at least one online and one blended course (56.4%). An additional 16.0% offer online courses, but no blended courses, while 8.9% offer blended but no online. Overall, only 18.7% of all the institutions did not offer either type of instruction.

Online Degree Program Offered				
	Public	Private, nonprofit	Private, for-profit	Total
Yes	48.8%	21.6%	19.0%	33.7%
No	51.2%	78.4%	81.0%	66.3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

**Public institutions are much more likely to provide online courses than are private schools.**

Types of Courses Offered				
	Public	Private, nonprofit	Private, for-profit	Total
Both Online and Blended	81.3%	38.3%	22.5%	56.4%
Online Only	12.5%	17.7%	24.1%	16.0%
Blended Only	3.8%	15.8%	4.1%	8.9%
Neither	2.4%	28.2%	49.4%	18.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

When we examine these numbers by the control of the institution (public or private), we see that the public institutions are way out in front—with twice the proportion offering both online and blended instruction than the private institutions. Only 2.4 percent of all public institutions did not offer either type of course, compared to a quarter of all private, non-profit schools. About half of the for-profit schools do not offer either type of courses. Unlike the public institutions, where virtually all offer both online and blended courses, the private schools are much more likely to offer only one type of instruction or the other.

Overall, over half of all three types of schools offer online courses, either alone or in combination with blended offerings. However, the individual percentages range from a low of 47 percent for for-profit schools to over 93 percent for public institutions.

## Online Degrees

The strong public/private differences we saw for courses offerings are mirrored in the results of the distribution of those who offer an entire degree program online (using the Sloan definition of having at 80% of the degree program content delivered online). Public institutions are over twice as likely to offer such a degree program than either type of private institution. The for-profit schools are more similar to the nonprofit schools in this aspect on online learning that there were for the provisions of courses.

## Next steps

The Sloan Consortium will continue to report on the results of this study of the next several months. Planned reports include an estimate of the total number of students learning online and an investigation of the attitudes towards online learning.

## Data

The data for this study come from the Sloan Survey of Online Learning, conducted March-June 2003. A representative national sample of 990 schools (32.6 percent response rate) provided usable survey responses.

# Ten Ways Online Education Matches, or Surpasses, Face-to-Face Learning

**Mark Kassop**

From the perspective of a long-time (30+ years) classroom instructor, a sociology professor, a day-to-day user of the course management system, and a person who thrives on interaction with students, Mark Kassop identifies 10 ways online education excels:

1. Student-centered learning: Students are empowered to learn on their own and even to teach one another, working together toward learning goals more effectively.

2. Writing intensity: Online courses are usually far more writing-intensive than traditional classes have ever been. In an online course, general discussions, requests for elaboration or assistance, answers to directed questions, group projects, most assignments, and many tests and quizzes are in writing.

3. Highly interactive discussions: In online discussion, every student in the class is expected to respond, respond intelligently, and respond several times. Asynchronous discussions frequently last for a week and include 100 or more student postings.

4. Geared to lifelong learning: The online environment fosters self-motivated education, giving precedence to the autonomy of the learner. Students direct their own use of Internet links, search engines, discussion boards, chat, e-mail, and other media.

5. Enriched course materials: For example, well-constructed, creative online courses can take anthropology students to cultures all over the world, archaeology students to active digs, art students to the finest museum collections, and business students to corporations large and small. World-class resources can be accessed, viewed, and studied 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

6. On-demand interaction and support services: Help is only a click away in an online course. Online courses can include many types of interactive learning aids such as flash cards, immediate feedback tests, and PowerPoint presentations, contact with the instructor and classmates, e-mail, chat rooms, discussion boards and a whole host of campus services, including registration, academic advising, financial aid information and forms, services for students with disabilities, 24/7 libraries, and online tutoring.

7. Immediate feedback: Online students generally have greater access to instructors. Online tests and quizzes with automatic grading can provide immediate feedback and references to text and class notes with explanations.

8. Flexibility: Online learning includes ample opportunities for students to pursue coursework at any time that fits into their busy lives.

9. An intimate community of learners: Instructors note the surprisingly close relationships that they have developed with their online students.

10. Faculty development and rejuvenation: The thinking, planning, research, learning, and effort of constructing and teaching an online course rejuvenate many faculty members.

The important point is that online education can be done well, and the demand for it is such that we all have to work to make it better. It is here to stay for all of the right reasons.

Note: The full article was originally published in *The Technology Source* (<http://ts.mivu.org/>): Mark Kassop "Ten Ways Online Education Matches, or Surpasses, Face-to-Face Learning." *The Technology Source*, May/June 2003. It is available online at <http://ts.mivu.org/default.asp?show=article&id=1059>. The article is reprinted in part here with permission of the author and the publisher.

## New and Noteworthy in Effective Practices . . . on Access

### **FlexNet: Improving Access by Maximizing Utilization of Physical Facilities**

Hybrid course delivery models improve access by reducing the number of required campus visits. University of Phoenix 's FlexNet goes one step further by using a common model (1/3 classroom, 2/3 online) to maximize utilization of its classroom facilities. This improves access by increasing the number of available courses and thus number of students served.

### **Anytime Anywhere Chemistry Experience**

Chemistry courses at UNCW and UCD utilize commonly available materials for conducting home-based laboratories that are meaningful learning experiences. Professors report that online students learn at least as much as their on-campus counterparts. Home-based laboratory experiences can overcome the problem of "how do you do the labs?" in online lab-science courses.

### **Chemistry Laboratories for Science Majors in Distance Learning Courses**

Some distance chemistry courses for science majors have a long and established track record of providing access and effective learning experiences. Since 1995, Northern Virginia Community College's distance chemistry courses have used a mixture of home-based, computer-based, field trip, and in-person laboratories to provide improved access and effective learning experiences.

### **Virtual Electronics Laboratories**

Students in the early years of undergraduate science and engineering programs are often frustrated by the lack of "hands-on" experiences which help them internalize difficult concepts. Professor John Bean's virtual microelectronics laboratory at the University of Virginia uses visual representations of microelectronics devices and processes based on leading edge developments in 3D Web-based modeling, providing a gateway into microelectronics for first-year university and community college students.

To see details about these practices and to contribute your own effective, replicable and innovative practices, visit <http://www.sloan-c.org/effective>

Submitted by [John Sener, Sloan-C Effective Practice Editor, Access](#)

The Effective Practices site gets over 4,000 visitors per month.

## Book Reviews

For complete reviews, please visit: <http://www.sloan-c.org/resources/reviews/index.asp>

### **Higher Ed., Inc.: The Rise of the For-Profit University**

Richard S. Ruch

### **Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution: Transforming Cultures and Communities in the Age of Instant Access**

Howard Rheingold

## Introducing a faculty development opportunity. . .

### Online Case Writing Workshop

Offered by the Case Method Institute  
Sponsored by the [European Case Clearing House](#) and supported by the [Sloan Consortium](#)

#### **What is it and who is it for?**

This online collaborative workshop is devoted to helping authors from virtually any discipline write and publish high quality case teaching materials. We believe that people learn both by offering and receiving constructive criticism from peers. This cost-effective forum joins case writers from widely divergent geographic areas who share similar interests.

#### **Benefits:**

- **Peer Review** - Work directly with peers to improve your case study.
- **Support Materials** - Access case development support materials.
- **Expert Help** - Learn from an expert workshop facilitator.
- **Time** - Have three months to complete revisions.
- **Case Library** - Use cases produced in the workshop with the authors' permission.

#### **Learn More...**

Please explore the workshop at <http://www.casewriting.org>.

If you have any questions, contact David Wylie, workshop facilitator, at [casewriting@babson.edu](mailto:casewriting@babson.edu) or at 781-239-6181.

#### **Cost: \$295**

**Discount for first 50 participants: \$195**

**Registration is now open and the workshop will be ready for action by June 13.**



**THE SLOAN CONSORTIUM**  
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If you know of, or are hosting, an event that should be listed on the Sloan-C View Calendar, please send the details of the event and url to [publisher@sloan-c.org](mailto:publisher@sloan-c.org).

**21st ICDE World Conference on Open Learning & Distance Education: Lifelong Learning in the Networked World**

Date: February 18-21, 2004  
Location: Hong Kong  
URL: <http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/hk2003/>

The Conference aims to document achievements and investigate the challenges facing those seeking to provide open and distance education for persons of all ages in a world that is becoming increasingly networked.

**The Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning (ABSEL)**

Date: March 24-26, 2004  
Location: Las Vegas, NV  
URL: <http://www.towson.edu/absel/>

Call for papers and proposals—submissions are due October 18, 2003.

**19th Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning**

Date: August 13-15, 2003  
Location: Madison, Wisconsin  
URL: <http://www.uwex.edu/disted/conference/>

This year's conference will feature distance educators who are working smarter to build successful strategies, methods, and techniques.

**The University of Calgary's Best Practices in e-Learning Conference**

Date: August 13-14, 2003  
Location: online  
URL: <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/conference/>

Totally online so you can participate without the cost and inconvenience of traveling.

**ALT, The Association for Learning Technology**

Date: September 8-10, 2003  
Location: University of Sheffield, UK  
URL: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/alt/>

ALT celebrates its 10th anniversary conference "Communities of Practice" hosted by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield.

**Online Learning Conference & Expo**

Date: September 22-24, 2003  
Location: Los Angeles, CA  
URL: <http://www.onlinelearningconference.com/>

The largest gathering of decision-makers charged with developing and implementing e-learning.

**9th Annual Sloan-C/ALN Conference**

Date: November 14-16, 2003  
Location: Orlando, Florida  
URL: <http://www.aln.ucf.edu>, [www.sloan-c.org](http://www.sloan-c.org)

Mark your calendars for this year's conference: The Power of Online Learning: Implications for Teaching and Learning.

**International Conference on Computers in Education (ICCE)**

Date: December 2-5, 2003  
Location: Hong Kong  
URL: <http://www.icce03.org>

Proposals for papers deadline extended to May 2, 2003.

The theme of the Conference is **The "Second Wave" of ICT in Education: from Facilitating Teaching and Learning to Engendering Education Reform**. The theme adopted places the issues of a "pedagogical practice paradigm shift" at the centre of the debate.