

Elements of Quality Online Education

Engaging Communities: Wisdom from the Sloan Consortium

Edited by *Janet C. Moore*



The Sloan Consortium

A Consortium of Institutions and Organizations
Committed to Quality Online Education

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Elements of Quality Online Education: Engaging Communities: Wisdom from the Sloan Consortium

Each year, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation invites practitioners to summer research workshops resulting in the publication of annual volumes in the Sloan Consortium quality series and in online workshops that use the annual volumes as a starting point for building knowledge with a wider audience. In 2003 and 2004, summer research workshop participants were also invited to do something new—to provide brief perspectives that are useful to other practitioners. The nineteen wisdom papers in this collection represent views: on the ways assessment guides improvement; on the potential of blended environments; and on transformations that will give new meaning to the Sloan-C quality pillars of learning effectiveness, cost effectiveness, access, and faculty and student satisfaction.



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Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.



Sloan-C has its administrative home at the Sloan Center for OnLine Education (SCOLE) at Olin and Babson Colleges. SCOLE has been established as a center that spans the two campuses of Olin College and Babson College. SCOLE's purpose is to support the activities of the Sloan Consortium, a consortium of higher-education providers sharing the common bonds of understanding, supporting and delivering education via asynchronous learning networks (ALNs). With the mission of providing learning to anyone anywhere, SCOLE seeks to provide new levels of learning capability to people seeking higher and continuing education. For more information about Sloan-C, visit www.sloan-c.org.

For more information about Olin and Babson Colleges, visit www.olin.edu and www.babson.edu.



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INTRODUCTION

Janet C. Moore

Chief Learning Officer

The changes in new models should be so novel and attractive as to create dissatisfaction with past models. *Alfred P. Sloan, 1922*

Each year, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation invites practitioners to a workshop to confer and share their practical research on specific challenges of importance to quality online education. These summer research workshops result in the publication of annual volumes in the Sloan Consortium quality series and in online workshops that use the annual volumes as a starting point for disseminating information and building knowledge with a wider audience. The 2004 Summer Research Workshop produced volume 6 in the Sloan-C series on quality education: *Elements of Quality Online Education: Engaging Communities*, and in online research workshops that engage practitioners from many schools, organizations, and nations in exploring new models for excellence in online education.

In 2004, in addition to writing major papers to be included in volume 6, summer research workshop participants were also invited to share their wisdom in brief perspectives that might useful to other practitioners.

The papers in this volume portray organizations that are the negotiating simultaneous demands of tradition, the status quo, and the transformation of higher education. These nineteen wisdom papers include views: on the ways assessment guides improvement; on the potential of blended environments; and on transformations that will give new meaning to the Sloan-C quality pillars of learning effectiveness, cost effectiveness, access, and faculty and student satisfaction.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment for continuous improvement in the quality, breadth, and scale of asynchronous learning networks (ALN) is the basis for transformations that reaches beyond online course and programs to affect entire organizations and reach beyond institutions to engage more practitioners.

- In “Transformative Assessment of Online Education at the University of Massachusetts Lowell” Jacqueline Moloney and Steven Tello illustrate the effects of transformative assessment and point out that assessment should foster shared trust, shared motivation, shared language, and shared guidelines.
- In “Evaluation of Online Programs: Developing Approaches in the Penn State World Campus” Melody Thompson and Peter Rubba advise educators to ask what higher education wants to become, and then to use assessment to provide “information that cannot only facilitate, but also catalyze, further development.”
- In “Embedded Assessment in Pace University’s NACTEL Program: Better, More Timely Information,” David Sachs points out that “formative assessment methodologies as innovative as the current educational technologies,” and that using technology for continuous assessment enables faculty and support personnel to make improvements all the time, not just after the course is over.
- In “Teaching Presence and Establishment of Community in Online Learning Environments,” Peter Shea, Alexandra Pickett and Karen Swan continue the State University of New York Learning Network’s investigation of the importance of teaching presence and propose that it is “the most promising mechanism for developing online-learning community.”
- In “Reciprocity Analysis of Online Learning Networks” Reuven Aviv, Zippy Erlich and Gilad Ravid seek to understand the implications of reciprocity in online groups because “interactions, or resource exchanges, are the driving activities of online learning networks,” and even though participants expect reciprocity, it does not always happen.
- In “Collaborative Assessment in Asynchronous Learning Networks: Research in Progress,” Jia Shen, Starr Roxanne Hiltz,

and Michael Bieber describe “learner-centered assessment”, proposing “to shift the attention in assessment from instructors and teaching to students and learning.”

- In “Factors in Cost Effectiveness of Online learning,” Olin Campbell provides ways to improve cost effectiveness “by decreasing cost while maintaining effectiveness, by improving effectiveness while maintaining cost, or by both increasing effectiveness and decreasing cost.”

BLENDED ENVIRONMENTS

A 2004 Sloan-C survey found that blended environments are popular for many reasons, chief among them the perception that such environments offer the best of both worlds combining ALN and face-to-face benefits. Much is to be learned about blended environments, and these papers describe findings and challenges.

- In “2004 Sloan-C Workshop on Blended Learning in Higher Education,” a report from a Sloan-funded workshop at the University of Illinois Chicago, Mary Niemiec, Burks Oakley II, Raymond Schroeder, Chuck Dziuban, Joel Hartman, Anthony Picciano and George Otte provide views from multiple institutions, faculty and students—and describe the research agenda.
- In “RIT Introduces Blended Learning Successfully, JoeAnn Humbert and Karen Vignare focus in on the reasons blended courses at RIT are beneficial to the school, to faculty and to student success and completion rates.
- In “Blended Learning: Driving Forward Without a Definition,” Stephen Laster makes a case for the benefits and limitations of defining “blended,” and recommends that “we establish an environment that is open to experimentation and measurement while remaining flexible.”

TRANSFORMATIONS

As we discover the power of ALN for transformative effects and share innovations, organizations are learning that the impact of internet

connectivity and reach is only beginning to be realized.

- In “The Virtual Breakthrough Series Collaborative at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement,” Penny Carver and Barbara Boushon describe online collaboratives that enable medical personnel to improve performance by implementing best practices and sharing results.
- In “Opportunity Knocks, Emails and Phones,” Meg Benke points out that ALN has opened new opportunities to help all learners—online and face to face—succeed in learning when support services are proactive and on-demand.
- In “The Planning and Development of RioLearn, Rio Salado College’s New Online Learning System,” Carol Scarafiotti describes a process and a partnership composed of Microsoft and members representing all of Rio Salado’s stakeholders that worked together to build its new learning system. Scarafiotti emphasizes that identifying working assumptions is important. Especially useful is Rio’s motto: “Do no harm to students.”
- In “Toward a Universal Learning Environment: A Vignette from the Future,” David Porush calls upon imagination to envision universal access to “successful pedagogy online that is active, constructivist, andragogic, and agentic.”
- In “Virtual Reality Worlds: Not Just Chat on Steroids?” David Cillay describes virtual worlds as a doorway to universal access in which players assume roles, make learning choices, and may radically change the learning environment through lively interaction. This is a future that may be closer than we think.
- In “Is There a Tipping Point in Online Education?” Claudine SchWeber demonstrates that small changes eventually have massive impact, as online education reaches critical mass and shifts the orientation of organization towards ALN.
- In “Asynchronous Learning Networks and Organizational Change,” Janet Poley acknowledges that “differences in structure, mission and philosophy, culture, and national context may negatively influence interest in change and ALN innovation;” consequently, “institutions of higher learning need to seriously address the important challenges and organizational changes required to remain ethical and relevant.”

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- In “Online Learning as a Social Innovation: Lessons from the Past,” Murray Turoff unpacks the implications of important changes in terms of substitution theory and histories of disruptive change. Turoff calls for professional societies to take the lead in helping students discern quality among myriad options.
- Finally, in “The Sloan Consortium: Filling the National Policy Vacuum in Online Learning,” Bruce Chaloux issues a challenge to the Sloan Consortium with an agenda for “educating national leadership, regardless of party affiliation, about online learning.”

Engaging communities of researchers, educators, administrators, and corporate groups, Sloan-C seeks to advance the field of online education as new models become part of the mainstream of higher education, so that quality education will become “an ordinary part of everyday life [1].”

Sloan-C is a consortium of accredited colleges and universities and organizations dedicated to improving the quality, scale and breadth of their online programs 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>

1. **Gomory, R. E.** “Internet Learning: Is It Real and What Does It Mean for Universities? The Sheffield Lecture, Yale University, January 11, 2000.” *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks (JALN)* 5 (1): June 2001.
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Sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, 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.



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