THE SACRAMENTO BEE 🕏

Sunday, August 1, 2010

CARL 'TOBEY' OXHOLM III Another View

Online education will be a necessity

s the University of California system considers expanding academic options online, some, including The Bee, are raising serious questions about whether such an effort can work without harming quality ("Online education? Beware of Glitches;" Editorial, July 25). The questions should be asked, but the evidence is clear that quality doesn't need to suffer.

College students, whether learning online or in a traditional classroom, deserve a meaningful, engag-

ing, and quality educational experience. And the fact is, not all students learn best in the same way.

Across the country, approximately 3 million college students today are enrolled in fully online courses. Looking not that far down the road, over 1 million K-12 students (a 47 percent increase since 2005-2006) are taking one or more online courses.

These college students will not only expect but demand technologically delivered education. It's how they are learning and living.

But like traditional classroom courses, not all online courses are created equal. A "quality" online course utilizes a host of different teaching methods, cutting-edge technology, and online "tools" to facilitate engagement between the instructor and the students and among the students. And no, it's not inexpensive.

There is ample and increasing evidence to support the fact that a fully online course, if designed and delivered properly, generates real and measurable learning. In fact, a 2009 U.S. Department of Education review of online learning studies found "on average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction." Moreover, quality online courses also have a positive impact on traditional instruction. Researchers at Columbia University, for example, reported that online teaching improves practices in both virtual and face-to-face settings, and 75 percent of teachers said that teaching online had a positive impact on their face-to-face teaching.

Here at Drexel University's Sacramento Center for Graduate Studies, our faculty use traditional face-toface and online teaching methods, giving our students the best of both worlds. It's how they prefer to learn.

Providing access to top-tier online courses for those students whose location, work or family commitments make it difficult to come to campus is not only good teaching pedagogy, but good public policy, especially for a state needing to do more with less.

The "questions" of "whether" or "how" California brings quality online education to its citizenry should be beyond debate. It's no longer the future of quality higher education – it's the present.



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