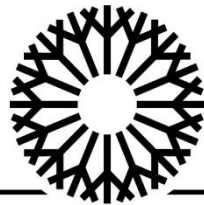


# Challenges and Solutions For Students Enrolled in Online Courses At Oklahoma City Community College

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*STUDENT FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS*



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OKLAHOMA CITY  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## METHODOLOGY

At the request of the Online Implementation Team, select students who had enrolled and attended an online section offered during Fall 2007, Spring 2008 or Fall 2008 were invited to participate in one of four on-campus focus groups. Students were selected using the following process.

- 1) The total number of online enrollments from previous semesters (Fall 2007 and Spring 2008) and from the present semester (Fall 2008) made it unfeasible to invite all online students due to limited resources and time.
- 2) A quick review of the number of online enrollments within academic divisions showed a wide variance between divisions. It was determined that in order to create a representative sample the number of students invited to participate from each division would be weighted toward the divisions with the highest online enrollments. Following is the breakdown that was used.
  - Arts and Humanities – 300 students ( $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2007/Spring 2008;  $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2008)
  - Business – 100 students ( $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2007/Spring 2008;  $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2008)
  - Health Professions – 100 students ( $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2007/Spring 2008;  $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2008)
  - Information Technology – 100 students ( $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2007/Spring 2008;  $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2008)
  - Science & Math – 200 students ( $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2007/Spring 2008;  $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2008)
  - Social Sciences – 200 students ( $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2007/Spring 2008;  $\frac{1}{2}$  from Fall 2008)
- 3) Invitations were mailed out to 1,000 students with the incentives of receiving a \$20 gas card for attending and an opportunity to put their name in a drawing for a Touch Ipod. Instructions were given to call or email their desire to participate and to designate their preference of which focus group to attend with an alternative preference if that focus group was filled.
- 4) Jane Hinojosa coordinated the responses and notified the students of their respective focus group date, time and location.
- 5) The four focus groups were conducted by one or more of the following facilitators: Tamara Carter, Liz Largent, Janet Perry, and Joyce Morgan-Dees.

6) Following are the dates, times, locations, and number of students who ultimately participated in each focus group.

Focus Group 1	October 27, 2008	12:00pm	CU3	10 participants
Focus Group 2	November 4, 2008	12:30pm	CU3	10 participants
Focus Group 3	November 6, 2008	6:00pm	CU3	9 participants
Focus Group 4	November 6, 2008	6:00pm	123	9 participants

## TERMS DEFINED

This report has been divided into nine categories that encompass various barriers or challenges that students in the focus groups identified. Under each category, there is a table with five columns. Below are the definitions for the terms used as the headers for these five columns.

- 1) Challenge – these were areas that students felt presented a challenge or even a barrier to being successful in an online course.
- 2) % Students Impacted – percent of students that were believed to be impacted by the identified challenge. In many cases, it is a range as students had different perspectives as to the percent affected.
- 3) Knowledge/Action Strategies – specific information the student found helpful in overcoming the challenge and would want a friend or family member to know before enrolling in an online course.
- 4) Changes – without regard to resources, students brainstormed on what action OCCC could take to either remove the challenge entirely or to help the student be successful in overcoming it.
- 5) Effective Support – what currently works at OCCC that helps a student overcome the identified challenge.
- 6) # of Groups – the number of focus groups in which students identified the specific challenge.

## COMMUNICATION

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Lack of establishing relationship with professor	100%	<p>Don't take an online course</p> <p>Make arrangements to meet professor in person</p>	<p>Initial class meeting is conducted as a teleconference</p> <p>Use Webcam for interaction</p> <p>Biography and picture of all instructors is provided</p> <p>First assignment requires biography for students to connect</p>		3
Lack of instructor interaction	75-100%	<p>Read the syllabus and make sure you have all contact information</p> <p>Identify office hours</p> <p>Email instructor</p> <p>If no response in 24 hrs call instructor</p> <p>Hunt instructor down</p> <p>Get Full-time instructor, not adjunct</p> <p>Contact other students to see if they have same issue</p>	<p>Syllabus is updated each semester with mandatory office hours posted on website</p> <p>Instructor provides evening and weekend office hours Clear communication on start date</p> <p>Indicator instructor has opened email</p> <p>Mandatory for instructors to return contact within 24 hours Video conferencing, WebEx</p>	<p>Auto grading on tests and quizzes provide quick feedback in some courses Some instructors are keeping set office hours</p> <p>Some instructors are providing timely feedback, using message boards to communicate,</p>	4

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
		Go to tutor or lab		and awarding extra points for student feedback	
Lack of timely response to student communication	75%	If no response call instructor	<p>Make it mandatory instructor responds within 24 hrs</p> <p>Tutoring by instructors who are good at this for those who are not</p> <p>Provide access to instructors on weekends and nights</p> <p>Designate an on-call instructor</p>	Some instructors are doing this well	1,3
Lack of student to student communication (encourage use of discussion boards)	75%	<p>Email other students</p> <p>Who's online indicator (similar to IM)</p> <p>General discussion</p>	<p>A Chat button</p> <p>A general discussion area</p> <p>Home page indicator for discussion (new posts)</p> <p>Group activities</p>	<p>Being able to email classmates</p> <p>Read other student responses</p>	4

## COURSE

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Lack of consistency between online courses	80-100%	Research instructors  Speak with instructor & take it up the chain  Know subject content might make a difference  Be aware format may be different	Standardize the layout/format of all online sections  Allow each department to determine what is important and allow adjustments		2
Syllabus missing, too generic or lack of clear objectives	90%	Know there may more than one syllabus available  Student must take responsibility to find out  Just ask  Scan chapter Syllabus required for all classes  Standardize course requirements  Each instructor personalizes each section  Write objectives clearly and in depth	Syllabus required for all classes  Standardize course requirements  Each instructor personalizes each section  Write objectives clearly and in depth  Provide examples of what is expected  Time of testing and expectations clearly stated  Instructor information sheet	Syllabus is posted with clear objectives in a few classes  Some instructors are using the calendar to schedule assignments and tests	3

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
		<p>Provide examples of what is expected</p> <p>Time of testing and expectations clearly stated</p> <p>Instructor information sheet available for each instructor</p>	available for each instructor		
Lack of Power Points, lack of audio on Power Points, or Power Points are too static	80%		<p>Have Power Points and put audio with them</p> <p>Make sure relevant to class</p> <p>More of picture</p> <p>Make sure the to print handout format is properly set</p>	Like the Power Points that do exist	1
Due dates for assignments not clearly posted or too short of suspense	75%	<p>Email professor</p> <p>Check syllabus</p> <p>Try to look at assignments before due dates</p> <p>Check Angel daily for updates</p> <p>Get in the habit of checking the</p>	<p>Highlight due dates in announcements</p> <p>Have automatic reminder announcement</p> <p>Mandatory for all instructors to post all assignments on the calendar</p>	Some instructors are emphasizing due dates	2



Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
		calendar regularly	Allow completion ahead of time		
Course content is out of date, for traditional section, illegible on screen, or student is unable to view all course content	60%	Notify instructor  Ability to view all course content varies from class to class, ask instructor up front	Make a blog on web page for public notification  Instructor should be ready when class starts  Make mandatory all courses show all class content at start	Power points  Lesson layout  Discussion board	2
Lack of lectures	100%		Put lectures up  Web cam the class during on-campus class time  Webinars and/or podcasts		1
Instructor refers to material used in on-campus course, but not available online.	100%	Ask instructor, ask again, then go find them  Do assignments early so you will know if material is missing  Communicate with other students	Professor should give same info to online as traditional classes  Use streaming video  Set a time on campus to ask questions/discuss  Application of current events to papers	Some instructors do have time for online students to come in and talk	1

## INSTRUCTOR ISSUES

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Professors not posting grades in a timely manner/default grade set to zero	75-95%	<p>Don't panic</p> <p>Email the professor; if that doesn't work, go up the chain (Dean)</p> <p>Don't wait on the grade, keep on working</p> <p>Hit the refresh button often</p>	<p>Give the instructor a time limit to post grades</p> <p>Instructor should be available on weekends</p> <p>Give the instructor an assistant to post grades</p> <p>Post instructions to hit refresh button often</p> <p>Set default as "un-graded" instead of a score of zero</p> <p>Don't put a deadline date by grade</p>		2
Lack of understanding students other responsibilities	50%	<p>Plan time better</p> <p>Take an evaluation of your responsibilities before you start</p>	Mutual understanding between instructor and student		1
Instructors spend more time with traditional students than online students (unable to keep online course up-to-date)	50%	<p>Email instructor</p> <p>Don't be afraid to speak up</p> <p>Make appointment on campus with</p>	<p>Instructor teaches only online courses</p> <p>Assistant maintains website for</p>	Some instructors use Email effectively	1

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
		instructor	course		
Instructors not taking online courses as seriously as traditional courses	50%	Expect it	Don't teach if you don't take it seriously  Screen instructors  Do not make anyone teach online if they don't want to		1

### MORE DIFFICULT THAN EXPECTED

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Students think online classes are easier	100%	Need to be self-disciplined Devote a lot of time Realize that you must read a lot before completing assignments	Advisors should inform students before enrolling Require orientation Incorporate online information into Success in College & Life class		2
Online course takes more time than traditional course	100%	If you don't have time to devote take traditional course Use on campus labs	Advisors should tell students exactly what is happening in online courses		1
Extensive reading	50%	Be prepared Space it out	Make student aware of reading requirements before enrollment Perhaps view syllabus prior to enrolling in class		1
More homework given	50%	Expect it Do it Be prepared to write Look at other's postings	Make sure more homework is necessary		1

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
		Personal versus world opinion			

## SCHEDULE OFFERINGS

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Lack of online courses, especially intersession courses	75-80%	Look ahead to see if there are any you can take	Offer more online courses overall, especially during intersession	Currently offer some intersession classes online	1
Lack of labs specific to online courses	25%		Offer labs that are only for and are specific to online course		1

## STUDENT PREPARATION

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Lack of time management	90-95%	Treat like a regular class and schedule specific time each week  Keep personal calendar of all deadlines  Do assignments early  Don't get behind  Always have a plan B  Don't overload  Do not have false expectations on time  Try different strategies	Class on time management offered online or on weekend at no cost  Statement before enrollment telling how much time is needed  Instructors should be aware of students' limitations	Planned time framed courses	2
Procrastination, lack of self discipline or motivation	70-80%	Strong caution- it takes discipline  Know up front the time course requires  Don't wait until last minute  Use calendar	Screen students to ascertain if they have time management skills to take online classes  On campus/online seminars on procrastination (advertise)  Email as part of advertisement	Calendar	3

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
		Give yourself a mock deadline Block out time for specific assignments Schedule a pretend class time	Colored alerts when nearing deadline Checklist to mark off completion of items Provide more traditional courses at student preferred times		
Don't know what to study and/or not knowing what the focus is	75%	Ask instructor for study guide or practice test Reread the syllabus Scan chapter Ask instructor to prioritize	Provide study guide Provide practice tests Give more specific instructions Give contact phone number Design courses so that focus is easily identified Classroom videos Web streaming	Calendar Use of home page Log in other page Main home page combines classes	3



## TECHNOLOGY

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Slow/no response from tech support	95%	<p>Make sure your computer and software is upgraded</p> <p>Contact tech support when have problems</p> <p>Call online learning for suggestions</p>	<p>Have tech support numbers on main page</p> <p>Real time 24-hour tech support</p> <p>Require tech support to respond within 24 hours</p> <p>Define terminology</p>	Tech support works when able to contact	2
Problems with technology	95%	<p>Don't procrastinate</p> <p>Contact instructor</p> <p>Have a good computer</p> <p>Have required plug-ins</p> <p>Go to campus lab</p> <p>May have spam issues if you don't use OCCC email</p>	<p>Fix it</p> <p>Instructor should see exactly what student is seeing online</p> <p>Online link to talk with live person</p> <p>Confirm aware of issue</p> <p>Available more often</p> <p>Live chat board</p> <p>Ability to save during a test</p> <p>Have a break accessible in test</p> <p>Would like to rearrange the home</p>	<p>Angel is forgiving if you do it wrong</p> <p>Intermediate saving of tests</p> <p>Instructors can post on Angel homepage</p>	2

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
			page		
Links not working effectively	75%	Email professor	Instructor checks all links each semester before posting  Give alternate links		1
Auto grade feature does not work accurately or unable to review previously graded material	75%	Ask to see exam  Contact instructor if you think it isn't right	Provide graded exam to student	Hit refresher	1
Required videos/Power Points unable to download	75%	Make sure computer has enough memory  Email professor immediately	Embed videos in site  Provide laptop that is compatible with Angel or provide discount for rental laptop  Provide links for software updates and/or plug-ins	Go to computer lab  Use the computers in the Library  Sometimes software is provided	1
Error message – file too large to upload (Angel)	75%	Know that you can compress or zip some files  Clear cache file	Be able to submit multiple file types  Change Angel		1

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Hard to access log on	25%	<p>Ensure computer is up to date</p> <p>Contact online learning department or come to the computer lab</p> <p>Try to log on several times and know your log in</p> <p>Log on through Internet Explorer</p>	<p>State in letter the process to use if you can't log on</p> <p>Tutorial online that assists you in logging on</p> <p>List system requirements prior to enrollment</p>	Computer lab is good to help students	1
Difficult to switch between one or more courses in Angel	25%	Know to log out of Angel and then log back in	Fix it		1
Technology issues with Angel Incompatibility of programs (student prefer WebCT over Angel)	10-15%	<p>Try again later</p> <p>Call instructor</p> <p>Call tech staff</p>	<p>Limit change</p> <p>Utilize better platform</p> <p>Resolve test compatibility issues</p>		1
Lack of personal computer for downloads	10%	Use a flash drive at Public library/OCCC, Kinko's, friends	<p>Provide flash drives</p> <p>Provide laptops</p> <p>Provide rental laptops</p>		1

## TESTING

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Not enough time to test	75%	Ignore the clock Still need to be aware of time Set timer Pace yourself	More time to test/Should be able to have more time if needed  Instructors need to be aware of time restraints  Pause button or scheduled break	Some instructors are giving enough time	1
No retesting	50%	Be better prepared for test	Allow retesting under certain circumstances  Other options for testing than Test Center  Provide proctors at travel locations  Class comparison of grades available online		1
Clock countdown is distracting	50%	Ignore the clock	Make clock an option		1
Lack of clear instruction to test	25%		Make readable and understandable  Allow students to give feedback on tests		1

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
			<p>Know at the beginning the # of questions the test will be</p> <p>Can move independently through test</p> <p>Ability to see entire test when you start it</p> <p>Tech problems causing shut down during tests</p>		
Lack of clear objectives for tests	10-15%	<p>Read syllabus</p> <p>Call instructor</p>	Instructor required to make objectives clear through standard format	Some instructors are providing clear objectives	1

## TRAINING

Challenge	% Student Impacted	Knowledge/Action Strategies	Changes	Effective Support	# of Groups
Lack of instructor knowledge of how to use Angel	75%	Varies from instructor to instructor  Take tutorial	Require instructors to have adequate training and show proficiency in Angel  Provide orientation before each semester	Some instructors are knowledgeable	4
Student unfamiliar with online environment	75%	Talk with other students who have taken online course  Tutorial available before student enrolls in an online class	Require tutorial before register  When student registers have a walk through tour online  Provide orientation before each semester  Develop a scavenger hunt	Welcome letter  Scavenger hunt  Packet with an intro to program	2