Recent Large Scale Research on Online Learning Effectiveness: Online & Hybrid Course Success across the Virginia Community College System

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Sloan-C Online Learning Conference
Orlando FL, November 4, 2010
Underprepared Community College Students

• CCRC focus: improve CC student success
• Developmental students a particular concern:
  – About 60% incoming CC students referred to at least one developmental course (math, English, reading); many referred to multiple courses
  – < 25% of these students receive degree/cert within 8 years (compared to 40% non-dev ed)
  – In part because so few complete developmental sequence & move on to college-level courses in the first place
Online/hybrid courses and developmental CC students

• Most well-designed studies of online/hybrid coursework conducted with well-prepared university students

• CC faculty tend to express concern about putting developmental courses online

• A few well-controlled single-CC studies of online courses show much lower course completion rates; most of these focused on developmental students.

• Yet there are anecdotal/case-study reports of very successful online/hybrid developmental courses (e.g., NCAT)
Two Datasets

- 23 Virginia community colleges
- Fall 2004 cohort followed to summer 2008
  - Approx. 24,000 students and 300,000 courses
  - “Online” flag (courses >95% online)
  - 12% course enrollments online; 43% students took at least one online course
- Fall 2008 cohort followed to spring 2009
  - Approx. 28,000 students and 200,000 courses
  - “Online” flag and “hybrid” (50%-95% online) flag
  - 9% course enrollments online; 3% hybrid
  - 27% students took an online and 17% a hybrid course
Completion Rates, 2004 Cohort

- Ever-online students, college-ready vs. dev ed in English
- Raw completion rates across all courses (D or better)
- 5-pt gap in completion for dev ed status small in comparison to 13-pt gap in completion for online
- Pattern remained after controlling for a wide array of factors

Moreover:
- students who took dev ed online less likely to enroll in / succeed in subsequent gatekeeper course
Course Completion, 04 & 08 Cohorts

- Among students who took at least one online/hybrid
- Raw completion rates (D or better) across all their courses
- Patterns remained consistent after inclusion of controls
- Hybrid rates lower than f2f, but not significantly so
Strategies that could improve online completion at CCs

- Restrict enrollment (not optimal)
- Teach online learning skills
- Build in stronger non-instructional supports
- More intentional instructional design
  - Stronger research base to aid design
  - More resources & support for faculty designers
  - Peer-review-driven continuous quality improvement processes
For more information:

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CCRC is funded in part by: Alfred P. Sloan foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, The Ford Foundation, National Science Foundation (NSF), Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education