Advantages of the Various Online Course Designs

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Abstract Online learning as a term includes many different approaches and technologies, but there's little that's been done thus far to identify the effectiveness of the various approaches, and offer guidance to those who have been told to "do something with online learning." There are advantages and drawbacks to the various online strategies. This panel will explore the relationship between learning outcomes and elearning course design.

Online learning is a very inclusive label, but used as if it were a single thing. It is not, and the range of approaches, whether based on technology or pedagogy are vast. There has been little done to help those considering online education to differentiate between the various online education approaches. Currently the arguments seem based more on vendor and vendor products, than on the learning outcomes expected by the content developer.

It's no surprise then that many online courses don't seem to meet the needs of the participants or the course developers themselves. What's needed is a discussion about the efficacy of the various elearning approaches, and how to match learning objectives to those approaches. In doing so, there is far more likelihood of developing an effective online learning experience for all concerned.

Online courses are frequently characterized as synchronous or asynchronous; but there are other dimensions. Instructor-led is frequently associated with linear-sequential structure while non-instructor led programs have greater potential for non-linear structures , but none of those characterizations provide any sense of which strategies hold the greatest potential for economically achieving a particular set of learning objectives. Conversely, what's the best online approach for developing knowledge on a topic that can be applied to a variety of diverse situations? It's time to being the discussion.

The three panelists -- Alese Smith, Zahrl Schoeny, and Raymond Rose -- come to this panel with over 15 years of experience in online education.

- Alese has been an online course developer with the Concord Consortium, and was one of the lead developers in creating the online teacher professional development course for the internationally recognized Virtual High School program. She has helped design a variety of online courses. She is co-author for Concord's new book*; Essential Elements: Prepare Design & Teach Your Online Course.* She is a strong believer in asynchronous courses.

- Zahrl is an advocate of blended online course delivery. He developed an online professional development program for school administrators in Virginia. He is in the process of developing a new online program that will prepare online course designers. Zahrl was part of the expert panel that developed the online course delivery standards for the Virtual High School.

- Ray has been the leader of Concord Consortium's online efforts over the past seven years. He currently directs Seeing Math a project that uses video case studies as a primary strategy for teacher professional development. Over the course of his work with Concord he has been involved in projects using a variety of online delivery techniques. He helped develop the NSCD Standards for Online Teacher Professional Development, and is on the board for a number of online education projects. He was recently recognized at the tenth annual Marketing Opportunities for Business and Entertainment Conference as one of the Influencers and Innovators of the Internet and Technology. He is a recognized proponent of online asynchronous education.