Chapter 10

Developing, Implementing, and Experiencing an Online Sociology Degree Completion Program at a Large California Public University

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this chapter, the authors investigate the creation and operation of a Sociology Online Degree Completion Program at a large California public university. The program emerged over several years, and the authors discuss the rationale for its formation, emergence, and implementation. The authors concentrate their analysis primarily on the work of the Sociology Department's Online Education Committee, whose activities were instrumental in creating the program. They then examine the student populations served by the program and their experiences. The authors compare

the demographics of the students in the Online Degree Completion program with the demographics of transfer students in general, and they highlight pertinent similarities and differences. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the program's future, including challenges facing the program and how the program relates to the continued movement towards online classes in higher education. The authors thus offer a multidimensional and narrative account of the emergence of this program.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The university is a large—and growing—public university in the California region, and one of the largest in the system of which it is a part. It serves an increasingly diverse student population. Its online course offerings are expanding considerably. The department of sociology is one of the largest in the College of Sciences. It is a department that has undergone a transformation in the past decade with faculty retirements and new hires. In this context, the Sociology Degree Program was started.

To obtain a multidimensional view and narrative of the program's origins, members of the Sociology Online Education Committee, as well as administrators involved in the program, participated in two focus groups; one was not sufficient because of scheduling conflicts. The focus groups participants included the following individuals. The names below have been changed to protect the individuals' identities.

- **Felipe:** Hired by Dean Edwin of Extended Education to help develop the program.
- **Jerry:** Sociology faculty, member of the Sociology Online Education Committee.
- **Keith:** Sociology faculty, and a former chair of department.
- **Lily:** Sociology faculty, Coordinator, Sociology Online Degree Completion Program.
- **Leonard:** Sociology faculty, a former chair of department, member of the Sociology Online Education Committee and past instructor in the program.
- **Mary:** Director, Self-Support Degree Programs in Extended Education.
- **Ruth:** Sociology faculty, a former vice chair, member of the Sociology Online Education Committee and past instructor in the program.
- **Teri:** Sociology faculty, member of the Sociology Online Education Committee and past instructor in the program.

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