

Chapter 16

Care and Cultural Responsiveness of Online College Courses: Preliminary Criteria and Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

The chapter is a review and critique of the appropriateness of current approaches and a sample of current criteria used to evaluate the quality of online courses at the postsecondary level and care and cultural responsiveness. Based on the review, the authors suggest modifications of existing criteria and additional criteria appropriate to assessing and evaluating care and cultural responsiveness of online courses. The chapter concludes with suggestions for best practices for applying these preliminary criteria and suggestions for further research.

INTRODUCTION

The perspective of the authors is that the design, implementation, and evaluation of online courses in higher education should incorporate care and cultural responsiveness to meet the needs of diverse students enrolled in online programs and courses. The first objective of the chapter is to review and critique the appropriateness of a sample of current criteria used to evaluate the quality of online courses and care and cultural responsiveness. The second objective is, based on this review, to suggest modifications of existing criteria and additional criteria appropriate to assessing and evaluating care and cultural respon-

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siveness of online courses. The final objective is to suggest best practices for applying these criteria. The chapter begins with the background for the work, including the theoretical and conceptual framework and a review of pertinent literature on best practices. The next major section focuses on a review of initiatives, approaches, and rubrics for assessing quality, care, and cultural responsiveness. Solutions and recommendations are the focus of the third major section, followed by a discussion of implications for further research.

BACKGROUND

According to a report prepared for the National Center for Education Statistics, growing numbers of students from all racial and ethnic groups are graduating from high school and enrolling in higher education (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Bachelor's degree attainment for Hispanic students in 2013-2014 was more than twice the number from 10 years earlier; the number of degrees awarded to Black and Asian/Pacific Islander students grew by 46% and 43%, respectively, in the same 10-year period, compared to 19% for White students. However, disparities persist by race and ethnicity for educational performance and degree attainment (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). In 2014, the overall 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduates who enrolled as first-year students at a 4-year institution was 60%, compared to 71% for Asian students, 54% for Hispanic students, and 41% for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Students of color are more likely to face the intersectionality of gender. While the majority of all undergraduates were female, the gender disparity was lowest for Asian students (52%) and greatest for Black (62% female) and American Indian/Alaska Native students (60% female) (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

The growing diversity of postsecondary students means more students from diverse cultural backgrounds are enrolling in distance learning. In 2016, more than 31% of students took at least one distance learning course; almost 15% of students were enrolled exclusively in distance learning courses, and almost 17% were taking a combination of ground and distance courses (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). According to fall 2015 enrollment figures, more than a quarter of post-baccalaureate students were enrolled exclusively in distance education courses, which is more than twice the proportion of undergraduate students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In 2017, more than 1 million students were pursuing graduate-level degrees online (Seaman et al., 2018). Online programs, particularly at the graduate level, typically attract non-traditional students – adults who are pursuing a post-baccalaureate degree while working full-time and/or who have enrolled in a degree program after a meaningful break in educational pursuits, such as raising a family, launching a career, or serving in the military, while continuing to fulfill traditional adult responsibilities. The student body enrolled in online graduate programs are typically also much more racially and ethnically diverse than traditional programs, particularly at for-profit colleges and universities, where students of color comprise the majority (Baylor, 2016).

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundation

Faculty and students bring to the online classroom their own diverse social, ethnic, cultural, geographical, or other contexts. In the context of distance learning, faculty facilitate the learning process, much of which takes place in the online environment through networking and social interaction asynchronously.

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