Chapter 23

Comparing "Pracademic" Teaching Techniques and Career Outcomes in Online and Traditional Criminal Justice Educational Environments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The authors utilize qualitative and quantitative techniques to show how practitioner-oriented approaches to teaching criminal justice coursework in the on-line setting can be just as effective, or even more so, than traditional methods. In addition, new data are provided that give this analysis a quasi-longitudinal approach to observing cohort participants as they progress throughout their future career and educational aspirations. Teaching techniques and additional means of appraising effectiveness in criminal justice education are discussed. Recommendations, resulting from these findings are provided.

INTRODUCTION

At this point, it should be clear to scholars and practitioners alike that online education is not just a fad or a phase. Rather, online education is now a permanent fixture within the realm of higher education and also in the field of professional training for practitioners. In prior research by Hanser (2005), it was noted that the phenomenon of online instruction was a revolution in higher education. While that may have been true, at that time and while comparisons between online and classroom education may have been an area of intense inquiry, this is now a topic that has been very well researched and is, generally speaking, not any longer new, per se.

Indeed, online education has proliferated throughout the United States and now has even begun to spread into the multinational setting. If one doubts this, consider that the United Nations itself has adopted online education as a medium for a variety of peacekeeping and global intervention training courses. Consider, for instance, the course offered through the United Nations Institute of Training and Research (UNITAR), where courses on cross-cultural negotiation, currency risk management, multilateral trade negotiations, and other similar topics are taught totally online. Indeed, this organization has an entire peacekeeping program curriculum, mostly online, that is offered to persons who wish to eventually work in this type of field with the United Nations or other organizations that have objectives similarly aligned with such functions (UNITAR, 2011).

Further, there is ample support that this type of educational delivery is quite effective in a number of circumstances. Consider a meta-analysis conducted just 4 years ago by the United States Department of Education (2009) had some profound results and conclusions. In this study, it was concluded that "The meta-analysis found that, on average, learners in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction" (p. ix). We cannot think of anymore a supportive research statement that supports the efficacy of online education. Not only did this government funded study make such bold and unequivocal claims, it was a meta analysis, which means that these results are not merely restricted to a particular region, type of institution, or population. Further, this study had a very high level of scientific rigor with a strict methodological approach that would likely pass muster with the most skeptical of critics. Simply stated, this study was grounded in valid and reliable approaches that have produced clear results that affirm the beneficial role that online education and training has provided to society.

In many cases, skeptics of online education have noted that this type of delivery is too easily subject to the sharing of knowledge (and even answers) within the collaborative teaching forum that is common to online programs. From the concept of rigor it is understandable why some might question collaborative versions of learning. While programs have struggled to adequately address this issue, there

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