Pearson

Driving true online teaching and learning excellence

Five critical dimensions for university leaders to consider

Online learning is now a priority—but what's your best route to success?

Online course delivery and education technology are necessary tools every institution has embraced to stay connected to their students. But remote learning isn't the same as robust online learning, and institutions are now grappling with that divide. This operational imperative to bridge the gap for learners reveals key challenges: financial, academic, and reputational. To set institutions, faculty, and students up for success, leaders must be strategic about how they transform virtual courses into robust learning experiences—and the resources they draw upon to do so.

Yesterday's online learning

In the Fall of 2016, **32%** of all students attended at least one distance learning course and nearly half of those distance learners attended **only 5%** of institutions.[1]

Today's reality

The overwhelming majority of America's **1.5 million faculty members** moved their courses online in the Spring of 2020 and **70% of them had never taught** a virtual course before.[2]

More than 25 million students transitioned to remote learning or have been otherwise impacted by COVID-19.[3]

Students are demanding more

Nearly every institution in the US quickly transitioned to providing online courses, and no two did it the same way. No matter what route you took to transition online, you've likely discovered your prospects and students are sophisticated consumers with high expectations. In the age of Amazon, Netflix, Apple, Google, and Facebook, students expect online experiences to be consumerized, personalized, responsive, immediate, efficient, and relevant from start to finish. They know that online learning means more than lectures delivered via video conferencing, and they often need more support and flexibility, not less, to stay engaged and motivated in online courses.

Institutions must invest more—and be more agile

To deliver what today's students need, institutions must provide complex, connected services and integrated support covering the full journey, so nobody falls by the wayside. Recent events have taught us the importance of anticipating change, responding quickly, and executing effectively. Rigorous academics must be complemented by outstanding online experiences and a strong culture of performance and accountability.

Scalability is now crucial to success

As decision-makers know, institutions of higher education face similar dynamics as other fields: a growing bifurcation between those that thrive and others that are struggling. Institutions succeeding online are doing so on a large scale and were well positioned to respond to recent events. While institutions that were forced to transition online quickly learned that what works for one course or program may not sustainably scale to meet every need.

Many institutions have respected internal teams capable of managing course development and retention for a small number of online courses or a single program. But when they were asked to manage hundreds or even thousands of offerings, the student experience was understandably compromised, adding to increasing retention and enrollment concerns.

Scalability creates qualitative as well as quantitative challenges. You may suddenly need a tech center, a library disability office, or some other specialized function you didn't have before. Can you create it internally? How long will it take?

Strategy makes all the difference

Institutions must begin and end with strategy. Leaders must have greater clarity about what they aim to achieve, how they will achieve it, and how quickly they can make it happen. They must be equally clear about how online learning links to short-term response plans, broader institutional objectives, and future emergency preparedness; how it impacts issues such as accreditation; and how it can be leveraged to enhance instruction and access to student support resources.

A pivotal decision: What are your next steps?

As institutions plan for the future, they face a fundamental choice. Should they build and manage online learning capacity largely on their own, perhaps filling one or two gaps with needed third-party services? Or should they seek a long-term partner capable of providing strategic counsel and comprehensive services, as well as making upfront investments in their programs?

This white paper will help you ask five timely questions to choose your best resources with confidence.

1. How do we develop compelling online courses and curricula?

Exceptional faculty and academic quality remain central to serving students wherever they are. But translating faculty expertise online isn't easy. It requires different techniques and often a change in mindset.

Online students want to engage whenever it's convenient, in a stimulating community of learners, with maximum control over how they learn. Older online teaching strategies—even if somewhat more interactive than a "lecture with PowerPoint™"—often bore them. Institutions must master newer tools, practices, and skill sets.

You may employ instructional designers and are likely familiar with their traditional roles. However, developing modern online courses requires you to integrate traditional instructional design with strong expertise in user experience engineering and several other disciplines:

Role(s)	Tasks
User interface/user experience/ learning design specialists	Architect, design, and optimize the entire learning experience, not just within courses, but across the entire student lifecycle
	Standardize interaction design across courses so students are immediately comfortable when they start a new course
	Carefully design linkages and entry points so all of a program's courses build on each other, and students can efficiently move towards graduating with the competencies they need
Technology specialists	Ensure that Learning Management Systems (LMSes) and other tools are working properly and used to maximum pedagogical advantage
Graphic designers, videographers, writers, and other creative professionals	Create educationally compelling content that appeals to today's students
	Create deliverables that also improve on-campus iterations of your courses
Web developers, web programmers, and web architects	Make sure courses work smoothly and responsively on any browser or device your students want to use
Quality assurance teams	Make sure everything works well, in the many environments in which it will be used
Project managers	Ensure that the right solutions are built, and delivered on schedule and on budget
Program leaders and managers	Work with faculty and others to measure course/program performance qualitatively and quantitatively, learn the right lessons, and adjust or intervene to improve student success, retention, and completion

> *"Pearson is willing to listen and work with us to meet our needs...my faculty are pleased with how Pearson's instructional designers have been able to work with them to translate some of these difficult tasks into an online environment."*
>
> — Dr. Goutham Menon
> Director of Social Work
> University of Nevada, Reno

Beyond all this, course development teams and their institutions face two more crucial issues: *innovation and accessibility.*

Innovation

The most successful institutions plan strategically for how they will manage innovation and new requirements in their online courses and programs.

Online course design is evolving rapidly. Busy internal teams may not have time to stay on top of it all, no matter how forward-thinking they are. An online learning partner that creates thousands of new courses each year may help you quickly implement innovations your students will benefit from, and avoid those that are overhyped or unsustainable.
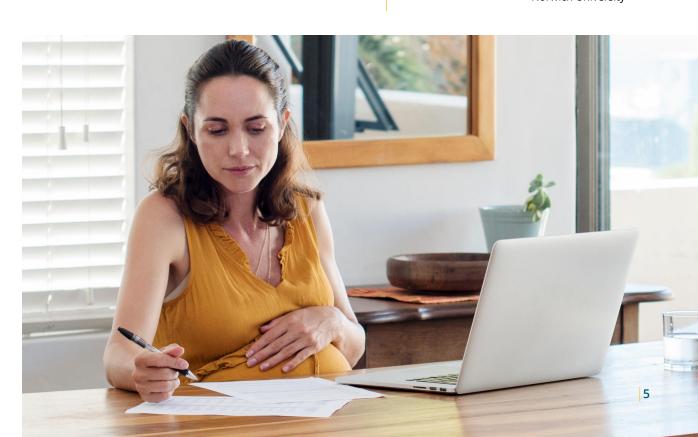
But these aren't the only modifications you'll need to manage. For example, who will help you quickly update your courses to reflect changing accreditation requirements? If you must reinvent or reinvigorate a program, who'll lead design thinking workshops to clarify goals and plans?

Accessibility

Accessibility is absolutely vital when online courses are the only option available for students. Courses should be designed for compliance with accessibility requirements, requiring careful closed captioning and other modern features. Accessibility is best designed in from the outset, and can't easily be bolted on. If a course is designed well upfront, fewer students may request costly accommodations.

"We've heard from our students and alumni—military and civilian—that our online programs made it easier to earn a degree. They graduate and get good jobs with good salaries."

— Bill Clements, VP and Dean
College of Graduate and Continuing Studies
Norwich University

2. How do we help our faculty succeed?

Your faculty are experts in their disciplines, with strong networks in their fields and a deep commitment to students. But they may not be experts in learning design, and some just had an abrupt introduction to teaching online.

You'll need to support faculty all the way to success. Collaborating on course development and training requires a deep understanding of their needs and respect for their expertise.

Course development support

While the institution and faculty should always retain the rights to their intellectual property, the best online courses are co-created with learning experts who know how to communicate the faculty member's message most powerfully. These experts can help instructors:

- optimally structure and deliver their existing content so it's maximally effective online

- communicate complex concepts in new ways, via interactives, animations, videos, and more

- identify opportunities to embed greater real-world relevance throughout coursework

Training

Faculty training should be comprehensive, ongoing, and measured. Institutions need mechanisms for recognizing an instructor's need and quickly delivering the right assistance. Training should encompass:

- all tools instructors will be expected to use fluently, including LMS and community tools

- just-in-time training based on real-time metrics that identify gaps (e.g., through student feedback, you might discover that a faculty member needs more training on facilitating online teleconferences)

- course management tips and shortcuts to help faculty free up time for teaching or research

"Our faculty were incredibly relieved to know that we were working with professionals who understood not only the graphic and media design, but also how to organize an online course to best suit the needs of an online student and achieve the goals of the faculty."

— Neil Teixeira
Director of Distance Learning
USC Annenberg

3. What kind of support services do online students need throughout their educational journeys?

As Arizona State University Online Executive Vice Provost and Dean Philip Regier explains, "When it comes to online learning, there is a direct correlation between quality services and student success. The more support students receive, the better their learning outcomes and overall experience will be." Online students require support throughout their journeys, from first contact to graduation and beyond.

Effective online student support requires institutions to collaborate deeply and creatively in new ways. This sometimes requires significant cultural and organizational change. For example:
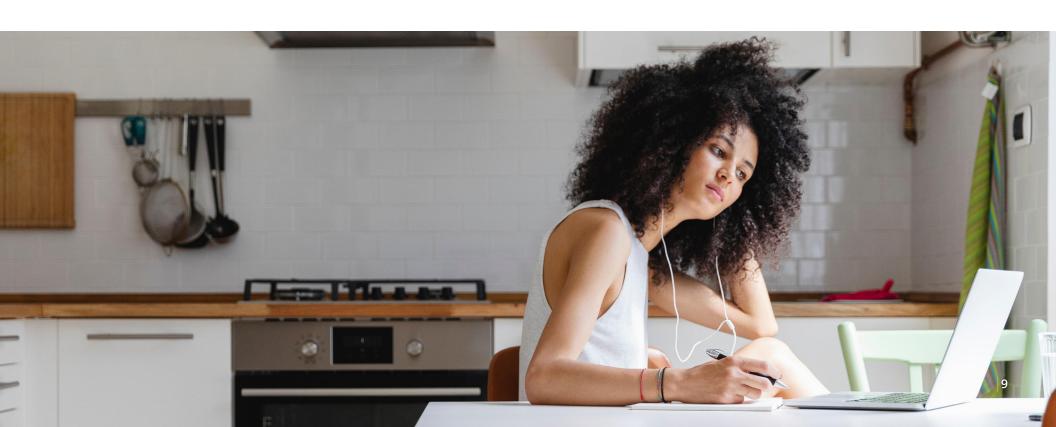
- When student support services discover that students are encountering serious life challenges (from financial to physical or mental health), how do they communicate this information to faculty or other relevant support teams?

- How could faculty adjust their curricula or course structure to include more flexible options for struggling students?

- When faculty know they will soon be covering difficult key concepts, how could they coordinate with tutoring support to better meet anticipated student needs?

"Maryville prides itself on partnering with industry leaders to enhance student access and success. Together, we will better educate thousands of students who want and deserve a high-quality college education."

— Mark Lombardi
President
Maryville University

Students and programs are more successful when faculty and student support professionals work together closely. Retention specialists are typically the "glue" that integrates the institution's capabilities to promote student success. Retention specialists can track individuals' progress, reach out proactively when there's an academic or non-academic problem, and coach online students to remain engaged and move towards their goals. They often collaborate with these professionals:

Role(s)	Tasks
Financial aid	Ensure that students get fast and reliable answers about financial aid, and know about non-institutional resources that may be available to them.
Online tutoring	Provide tutoring on the right topic 24x7, when the student needs and wants it.
Help desk	Provide 24x7 help desk services to help students overcome technical obstacles to study.
Career services	Provide comprehensive career services, from practicum and internship placements to 24x7 resume, interviewing, and portfolio support. Offer organized pathways to help students build career capabilities.

4. Do my resources have a track record of relevant success?

Whatever resources you're using, objectively assess their track record. Many of the same questions apply to both internal and external resources:

1. Have they delivered on their promises?

2. Can they build the types of programs you want? Have they done it successfully before?

3. Can they demonstrate the new and advanced skills you'll need to deliver robust online learning at scale, or are they stretched to their limit?

4. Are they agile and collaborative, or siloed and resistant to collaboration?

5. Will they act as agents of change, helping you accelerate transformation, anticipating and serving changing student needs, job markets, and realities? Or are they tied to routine and unlikely to suggest improvements?

6. Are their long-term interests aligned with yours?

5. What marketing and advertising expertise do we need to sustain enrollments?

Like the rest of us, students didn't have a choice about taking their education online this Spring. But moving forward, they'll be weighing their options between returning to school or not, staying with your institution or not, and starting college or taking a gap year.

In a market place where you're not only competing with other institutions but also the uncertainty of higher education in general, capturing student attention demands greater skills and sophistication, and stronger collaboration in support of a clear strategy. Consider these issues:

National branding and promotion—Sustaining your enrollments requires more than local or regional brand equity. You'll need to advertise more, and more effectively, to reach your current students and prospects. It begins with greater clarity about who they are and what they care about. This requires creative professionals and marketers who deeply understand today's educational landscape.

New channels—Most students are primarily on social and mobile, and with the advent of social distancing people social media usage has increased as much as 40% with 18–34 year olds.[4] You need the expertise to reach them wherever they are and where they're headed next.

Google search and advertising—Staying in the first page of search results and building profitable online ad campaigns requires expertise, creativity, and agility. Teams need to constantly monitor costs and adapt to changing algorithms.

Flourishing online programs and graduates

Pearson helps institutions grow their impact and meet today's challenges by enrolling learners online, and helping them transition into thriving graduates. We offer the most comprehensive portfolio of online learning services to foster both academic and financial strength. We deliver our services through diverse business models customized to complement an institution's strengths, match its risk tolerance, and sustain its mission in the face of change.

For more information, visit **pearson.com/opm**

Sources

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3. COVID-19: Higher Education Resource Center, Entangled Solutions. May 4, 2020.
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Pearson services for online success

- Funding
- Research & insights
- Student acquisition
- Curriculum design
- Learning design

- Student support
- Faculty support
- Help desk
- Sources

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