2016 Online Learning Landscape

5.8 Million Students Enrolled in an Online Class
Let’s face it, online learning is becoming mainstream. And why not? This learning modality provides ease of access, affordability, and inclusion for an evolving, growing higher education population. Increased digital learning opportunities, such as learning analytics, competency-based education, and adaptive learning are quickly being embraced by today’s students and allow for new learning methods to be adopted by institutions so that they can better serve students.

More Than 63% of Academic Leaders Deem Online Learning Critical
In fact, 78% of institutions employing online education say it’s absolutely critical to their long-term strategy. Online learning continues to be embraced by academic leaders and faculty who are focusing on pedagogical innovation, active learning approaches, as well as using adaptive learning tools and technologies. But the ultimate drivers are today’s students, representing a patchwork of ages, backgrounds, challenges, motivations, and income levels. It is an exciting time to be part of OLC, as collectively we forge an affordable, accessible, and innovative future for higher education.

SOURCE: Babson Survey Research Group, February 2016

84% of students feel technology helps teachers teach better...but 4-in-5 say universities and professors could do more with technology to make their education better.

McGraw Hill-Education , October 2015
A Letter from OLC’s Board President and CEO

The higher education landscape is changing at an accelerated pace, as is the adoption of online and digital learning. The student population is dramatically changing, too. This year we embrace an evolving contemporary learner. Not the traditional on-campus student but a growing adult learner population of over 14.9 million students, comprised of military, working mothers, caregivers, and an underserved student body over the age of 24 that have had to work a few years before they could afford their education. Many of these students are opting for online and blended programs that can be completed on their time, from wherever they are, as they juggle their personal, professional, and educational commitments. And, with that, many institutions are stepping up to respond to their needs.

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS EVERYWHERE

As the leading organization devoted to advancing quality online learning, OLC is pleased to offer our members professional development opportunities, best practice resources, research, publications, and just-in-time guidance on a wide variety of topics. For the past 25 years, through our conferences, quality learning opportunities, and ongoing support we’ve been an integral part of the swift, transformative growth of the higher education landscape, specifically as it pertains to online and blended learning, and innovative teaching and learning practices in these environments.

In 2016, we maintained long-standing partnerships, while forging new ones, with institutions and education providers to develop quality programs and help shape federal policy to ensure online learning success for all. In this report, we share some of these activities and look forward to continued acceleration and growth in the years to come.

SOURCE: NCES 2011
Our Vision
Setting the global standard in online learning.

Our Mission
Creating community and connections around quality online learning while driving innovation.

Our Goals
- Prepare higher education leadership to successfully navigate the complex and dynamic landscape of online learning.
- Be recognized as the leader in providing professional development to help member institutions and practitioners achieve higher levels of student learning and success outcomes.
- Become the go-to resource for delivering leading research and expert insight of online learning trends, innovations, and effective practices.
- Increase the visibility, voice, and value of OLC to our members, partners, sponsors, and those vested in online learning.
- Build the organizational capacity and structure to meet the current and future demands of OLC.
A COMMUNITY COMMITTED TO ONLINE LEARNING SUCCESS

As a member-sustained organization, OLC is committed to ensuring our members’ online learning success. Membership with OLC means being part of a global community of online learning enthusiasts and practitioners from over 14 countries. It means gaining direct access to subject matter experts, training by industry leaders, and receiving some of the best professional development and networking opportunities in the field.

MEMBERS SHARE THEIR STORIES
This year, when we reached out to OLC members and asked them to reveal why they joined OLC, they shared their excitement over our quality programs, appreciated our faculty development initiatives, and enthused about great networking and collaboration opportunities. We showcased their stories via downloadable case studies and videos that propelled our membership forward. Year after year, our community continues to grow: 117 institutions joined OLC in 2016 bringing our ranks to more than 750 Institutional Members, 12,000 Professional Members and tens of thousands of Community Members.

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY
In our continuing efforts to grow our community, we established a dedicated Community Engagement Division in 2016 designed to better understand the needs of our current members. We also launched several advisory groups to ensure our programs continue to evolve and meet the growing—and changing—needs of our membership.

With our vast geographic challenges, OLC membership provides a valuable way for our staff and faculty to engage in meaningful learning by connecting with colleagues globally.”

Pamela Wimbush, Director, Instructional Resource Center & Online Learning, Johns Hopkins University
Our Conferences provide premium opportunities to network, discover, and share views on online learning, emerging technologies, and best practices for blended learning, bringing together thousands of online learning professionals face-to-face and virtually. We’ve come a long way since we held our very first conference in Orlando over 24 years ago but we’re still focused on the same mission to advance quality online learning in higher education.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS
This year, in keeping with the accelerated pace at which online learning is evolving, our Annual Online Learning Consortium International Conference was renamed and rebranded as OLC Accelerate. Additionally, we launched a new annual event with MERLOT, OLC Innovate, which merged our Emerging Technologies and Blended Learning Conferences. We are proud to say both conferences exceeded expectations for attendees, sponsor, and exhibitor participation.

GETTING LOCAL
For the second consecutive year, we continue to connect learning professionals at local events across the country. Thanks to many of our Institutional Members who hosted our one-day OLC Collaborate events, we had three sessions tackling hard-hitting subjects that impact regional schools in unique ways. Topics have included textbook affordability, learning analytics, competency-based education, blended learning, and more. Appreciation goes out to California State University, University of Central Florida, Nevada State College as well as the University of Nevada – Las Vegas for helping us make those connections possible.

“OLC is the conference that combines intellectuals, leaders, and innovators into one productive opportunity!”
Patricia Gonzalez, Director of e-Learning, University of North Carolina at Wilmington
The biggest advantage of membership is OLC's professional development opportunities which enable our staff to continue to develop their expertise and to create better learning opportunities for our students.”

Dr. Pratima Dutta, Director of Distance Learning, CSUN Tseng College

ACCELERATING & AUGMENTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

While the OLC Institute for Professional Development features over 100 workshops each year, our focus continues to be on designing quality programs that meet the growing demands of higher education professionals at all levels. This year, we rolled out six new workshops to meet that need.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT & BEYOND
We are proud to note that more than 3,250 professionals attended the Institute this year. We’re also thrilled to share the fact that over 270 faculty members signed up for our Online Teaching Certificate program – one of our most popular programs which is now ten years old!

While many of our programs focus on the needs of faculty, we reached out to our members this year to discover their additional professional development requirements. That’s why in early 2016, we launched an OLC Mastery Series for Instructional Design. Due to the popularity of the Mastery series, as well the allure of our Certificate programs, we were certain that instructional designers would also benefit from an in-depth certificate program designed exclusively for them. It was exciting to watch enrollment exceed capacity before year’s end.

QUALITY PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
Also, we realized administrators needed support to improve their online higher education programs. To that end, we created a Mastery Series focusing on the OLC Quality Scorecard, a tool which helps online administrators evaluate and improve digital education programs by measuring programs against best practice indicators of quality.
At OLC, quality is always at the forefront of everything we do. That's why hundreds of institutions have turned to us to ensure their learning programs meet the highest quality standards, leveraging our OLC Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs.

**CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE**
The Scorecard has been used by our member institutions to demonstrate elements of quality—and identify areas of improvement—within a program. It also serves as a tool to accurately present overall levels of quality to higher education accrediting bodies.

**QUALITY GUIDELINES FOR ALL**
In 2016, we launched a robust suite of Quality Scorecards to provide institutions with the necessary criteria and benchmarking tools to ensure learning excellence for the entire institution. Now, faculty, instructional designers, as well as administrators can confirm that their course design, teaching and instructional practice, digital courseware, and blended learning programs meet the highest global standards for quality, are grounded in research, and incorporate expert, peer-led best practice guidance.

**INTRODUCING THE QUALITY SCORECARD SUITE**

"The OLC Quality Scorecard serves as a national baseline to show us how we benchmark against online learning best practices."

Mark Porcaro. Executive Director of Online Learning, Wichita State University
In 2016, we launched the OLC Research Center for Digital Learning and Leadership, fortified by OLC proprietary and partner research materials. Our focus is to increase visibility of OLC through exclusive research, publications, and research partnerships. We also created integrated learning opportunities through our blog, surveys, webinars, and case studies. Some research highlights included our continued partnership with the Babson Survey Research Group on the annual distance learning survey and collaborations with Cal Poly and the University of Virginia. Additionally, OLC was commissioned by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission and Presidents’ Forum to conduct a research study focused on alternative credentials, and the Texas Learning Consortium to define student engagement in blended environments.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF ONLINE LEARNING (OLJ)
Not only did our peer-reviewed journal, Online Learning, celebrate its 20th year in publication, we hit another milestone this year producing our largest number of issues to date. Topics included learning analytics, OLC conferences, and a collaboration with the American Education Research Association Online Learning SIG, as well as a special anniversary issue. As our publication has grown these 20 years, in 2016 we expanded our advisory board, as well. OLJ leadership participated in the EDEN RW9 Editors’ Panel and a new OLJ Panel at OLC Accelerate. We also held our first annual graduate research session at the conference, which will carry forward in 2017.

“OLC helps connect us to valuable resources, research, and peers who understand our desire to create, maintain, assess, and deliver high-quality online courses and programs.”

Dana R. Willett, Director, Office of Distance and Extended Learning, Texas State University
OLC serves as a catalyst for online and digital learning leadership to connect, learn, and excel. Since its inception in 2006, the Institute for Emerging Leadership in Online Learning (IELOL) has advanced the leadership skills of 325 higher education professionals. IELOL is a unique blended-learning leadership development program jointly sponsored by Pennsylvania State University and the Online Learning Consortium.

DEVELOPING EMERGING LEADERS

Now in its ninth year, IELOL serves the development needs of emerging leaders responsible for a variety of online learning initiatives. Participants connect and network with colleagues from around the world, with graduates joining a growing network of leaders in higher education. In 2016, the program produced a record number of emerging leaders: 52 IELOL graduates.

TAKING THE LEAD TOGETHER

With a direct focus on building a network of senior online learning leaders, OLC held its inaugural convening of the Leadership Network at the OLC Accelerate conference. During the one-day leadership summit, nearly 100 participants addressed some of the biggest online learning challenges we collectively face in higher education. Feedback was extremely positive, and many noted that they valued the combination of speakers, working with peers in small groups, and advanced networking opportunities. The day ended in a highly interactive panel-discussion in which they shared key insights, trends and leadership direction unearthed during the full-day event. This online learning senior leadership convening will now become a staple event at all of our conferences in 2017.

IELOL is one of the best professional development experiences I’ve had in the 20-plus years I’ve been in higher education. Rock solid content and amazing faculty!”

Brian Udermann, Director of Online Education, University of Wisconsin-La Cross
RECOGNIZING & REWARDING INNOVATION

For more than 15 years, OLC has recognized individuals for outstanding work in the field of online education through its annual awards. In 2016, we recognized 16 Effective Practice Awards for members who have shared innovative techniques, strategies, and practices in online education (see next page for complete list.)

A PROFESSIONAL DISTINCTION
In 2010, we began recognizing select OLC members as OLC Fellows. This is a professional distinction recognizing extraordinary contributions or leadership in online learning conferred upon by the OLC Board of Directors.

Honored in 2016 was Robbie Melton, Ph.D., Associate Vice Chancellor of eLearning, Mobilization and Emerging Technologies for the Tennessee Board of Regents and Jennifer Richardson, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Learning Design and Technology, Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction at Purdue University.

DIGITAL LEARNING INNOVATION
Thanks to a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we held our first awards program to support the use of digital courseware.

The Digital Learning Innovation Awards (DLIA aim to advance the adoption of digital courseware by recognizing institutions who have improved student success, especially among minority, first generation, and other underrepresented student groups.

Of the more than 110 institutions and faculty-led teams who completed their submissions, three institutions and five faculty-led teams were identified as having exceptional implementations that identify student outcome improvements, and that could inform and scale to other institutions (see sidebar.) The awards were presented to honorees by former U.S. Under Secretary of Education Martha J. Kanter, Ed.D., during the OLC Accelerate conference, in Orlando.

$100,000 Institutional Awards

$10,000 Faculty-led Team Awards

We have to make a promise to educate this generation of students, and the next, and the next. You are the innovators. You are the technology leaders. You know how it works today and you're ready for how it's going to change tomorrow.”

Martha J. Kanter, Civic Nation & Distinguished Visiting Professor and Senior Fellow at NYU, Former Under Secretary of Education
“Applied Learning Experiences in an Online Accelerated Degree Completion Nursing Program: The Leadership and Management Practicum” by Beth Oyarzun and Elizabeth Gazza, University of North Carolina Wilmington

“Building Hyper-Bonded Communities in a Virtual Environment and Its Relation to Student Persistence” by Chelsea Barnett, M. Ed., Project Manager, Institutional Research, and Kurt Gunnell, Ph.D., Director, Institutional Research, Western Governors University

“Enhancing Cognitive Presence in Online Case Discussions with Question Based on Practical Inquiry Model” by Ayesha Sadaf, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Larisa Olesova, George Mason University

“Fostering Sustained, Authentic Learning Among Tomorrow’s Obstetric and Gynecological Sonographers in a Fully Online Postgraduate Course” by Nayana Parange, University of South Australia

“Improving Student Learning of College Biochemistry Using Simulations” by Maurizio Costabile, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, School of Pharmacy and Medical Science, University of South Australia

“Log In to Learn—And Change the World” by Lee Ann Dickerson, Faculty, and Margot McGowen, Student Success Coach, Jefferson Community & Technical College

“Multiple Programming Language Introduction Programming Course” by Michael Brown, Tommy Bennett, and Lewis Williams, UMUC

“Online Learning in an Engineering Course” by John M. Long, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, School of Engineering, Deakin University

“Pathway to Quality Online Education at University of Houston – Clear Lake” by Shanta Goswami Varma and Henry Newkirk, University of Houston – Clear Lake

“Project-Based, Competency-Based Curriculum Design at College for America at Southern New Hampshire University” by Heidi Wilkes, DLP, Senior Director, Curriculum and Assessment Development, and Kaitlin LeMoine, Assistant Director, Curriculum and Assessment Development, College for America at Southern New Hampshire University

“Retrofitting and Proactivity for Accessibility in Online Courses” by Erin Blauvelt, M.Ed., Multimedia Instructional Designer, and Kimberly Barss, M.S., Instructional Designer, Center for Online Education, Learning & Academic Services, Excelsior College

“Student Success Toolbox for Flexible Learners: Supporting Transitions from Thinking about Study to the First Weeks” by Mark Brown, James Brunton, Ann, Cleary, Eamon Costello, Loraine Delaney, Seamus Fox, Jennifer, Lisa O’Regan, and Jamie Ward, Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Dundalk Institute of Technology, and Institute of Technology Sligo

“The Technology Test Kitchen” by Frank Tomsic, Phylise Banner, Clark Shah-Nelson, Angela Gunder, Ann Musgrove, Jessica Knott, Robbie Melton, Bethany Bovard, and Dave Goodrich

“The Walden Junto Model: Supporting Faculty Communities of Practice” by Laurie Bedford, Ph.D., Faculty Specialist, Faculty Initiatives and Center Support, and Laurel Walsh, MFA, Ed.D., Executive Director, Center for Faculty Excellence, Walden University

“Virtual Assistance Labs and Just-in-Time-Online Proactive Feedback: Reducing Statistics Anxiety in Graduate Students” by Carla Thompson, Ed.D., Professor, Research and Advanced Studies, University of West Florida

“Walden University Writing Center Interactive Modules: Student Writing Support Any Time, Anywhere” by Beth Nastachowski, MA, Manager of Multimedia Writing Instruction, Writing Center Contributing Faculty, Academic Skills Center, Walden University
PARTNERING FOR ONLINE LEARNING SUCCESS

OLC could not excel in the field of online learning without the relationships we’ve developed over the years. While too numerous to highlight them all, these partnerships are instrumental to our success in 2016 and beyond.

WITH A FOCUS ON QUALITY

Working closely with SUNY, we’ve expanded our Institute offerings with a new Instructional Designer Certificate and have included their course level OSCQR rubric as part of the Quality Scorecard Suite. Also, in collaboration with Tyton Partners, we released the Courseware in Context (CWIC Framework) designed to help postsecondary decision-makers make informed selections of digital courseware products.

DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR ALL

In partnership with Drexel University, we’ve established community access to its “Virtually Inspired” website, featuring high-quality videos showcasing how educators are using the latest technologies to invent the future of connected learning.

In support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Postsecondary Success Initiative, which focuses on increasing the success of underrepresented students in Higher Ed, we’ve partnered and collaborated with a number of organizations including EdSurge, the New Media Consortium, Tyton Partners, Intentional Futures, Mindwires, SRI, and APLU.

Through our partnership, even more professionals and institutions will have access to high quality professional development opportunities focused on the latest trends and established best practices in higher education.”

Kim Scalzo, Executive Director,
Open SUNY at State University of New York
We must invest in adult learners to meet our country’s need for skilled workers. This coalition will help advance the adult learner agenda and we are proud to be a part of it.”

Pamela Tate, President and CEO, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning

REPRESENTING ONLINE LEARNING AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

AT OLC, we realize policy must change to meet today’s learner. That’s why we aligned with three other like-minded associations to serve as a cohesive voice advocating for adult students and the institutions that serve them.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Together with support from Lumina Foundation, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), the Presidents’ Forum, and University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) we formed the National Adult Learner Coalition.

The Coalition’s mission is to advance the adult learner agenda to expand post-secondary education and credentialing opportunities that will strengthen our communities, regions, and national economy. Together, the founding members represent more than 1,000 higher education institutions throughout the United States that have long been leaders and innovators in expanding opportunities for today’s contemporary learners.

A SHARED VOICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY

The Coalition will promote policies that align post-secondary education and America’s workforce development goals to produce better outcomes and access for the new majority. We believe our coalition fills a void in the higher education policy establishment which, until now, lacked a unified voice representing the adult learner and the institutions and programs that serve them.
The Online Learning Consortium is the leading professional organization devoted to advancing quality online learning providing professional development, best practice publications, and guidance to educators, online learning professionals, and organizations around the world.

For more information, visit www.onlinelearning-c.org