

What Do Students Think?

A Study of Maine Community College System Online Education

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Online Education in Community Colleges

According to the National eLearning Survey of Community Colleges 2017:

- **62%** of community colleges report that retention rates are lower in their online courses than in their face-to-face courses (Lokken, 2018)

In Maine:

- **33%** of the enrolled higher education student body take at least 1 online course
- **16%** take all classes online

In the Maine Community College System (MCCS):

- **100%** of students earning Associate's Degrees must complete 12 credit hours in the humanities and social sciences
- **55%** of online courses in the MCCS are in the humanities and social sciences

MCCS 2019 Strategic Plan Student Success Targets:

- **57%** increase in student success rate for Fall 2018 cohort
- **59%** increase in student success rate for Fall 2019 cohort

Research Question

Is there a discrepancy between what online learners perceive and report about their learning experiences versus what teachers and facilitators think online learners want and need?

Sample

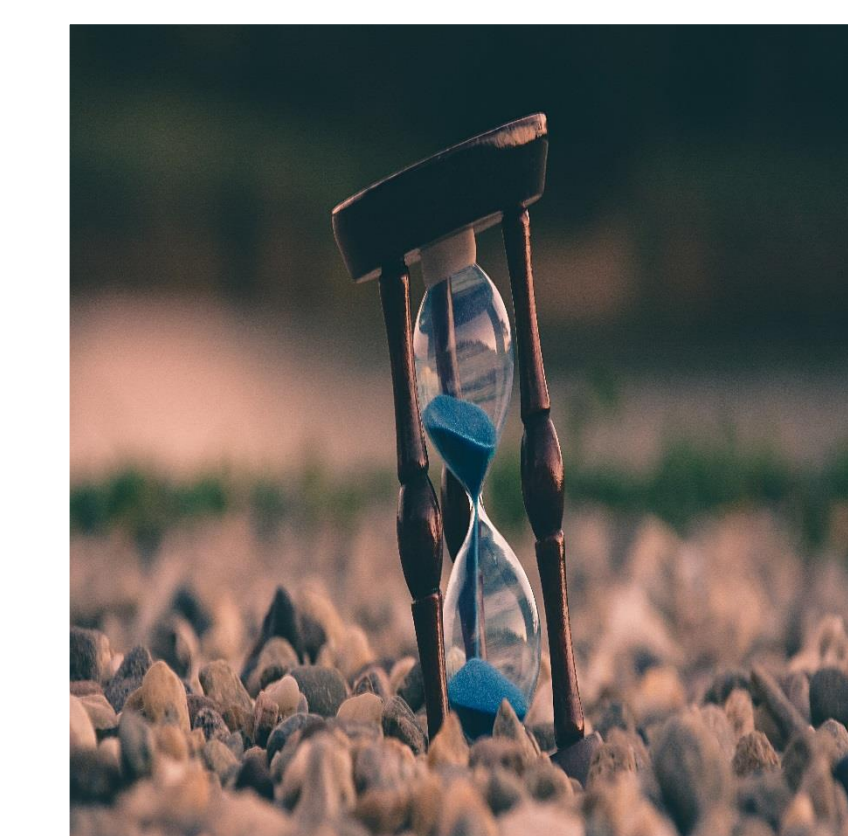
- Quantitative phase composed of 250 community college students enrolled in online classes at Northern Maine Community College (NMCC), Eastern Maine Community College (EMCC), and Kennebec Valley Community College (KVCC) during Summer 2018 session and Fall 2018 semester
- Qualitative phase composed of five semi-structured face-to-face interviews with students enrolled in online classes at NMCC, EMCC, and KVCC during Spring 2019 semester

Key Findings



Students are often unclear about what to expect regarding many aspects of an online course, including technical requirements, workload, structure, and interaction with faculty and peers

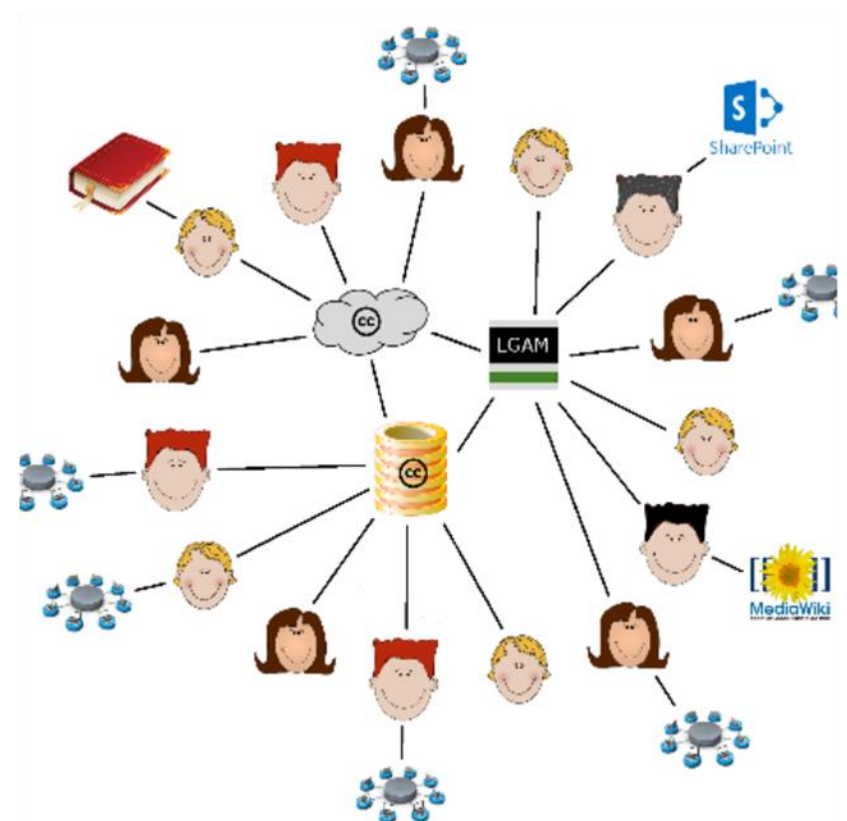
Students expressed that faculty engagement – response time to emails, creation of course materials, and presence in the Learning Management System – is a “make or break” factor in the success of an online course



The top three challenges students said they experienced in online classes:

- Struggled to handle studying plus work/family responsibilities
- Faced personal problems
- Lacked motivation

55% of students expected to participate independently, without interacting with peers; however, interviews revealed that forming a sense of community is important to students in online classes



References

- Fetzner, M. (2013). What do unsuccessful online students want us to know? *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 17(1), 13-27. Retrieved from ERIC database. (Accession No. EJ1011376)
- Lokken, F. (2018, February). *ITC annual national eLearning report 2017 survey results*. Retrieved from Instructional Technology Council website: https://associationdatabase.com/aws/ITCN/asset_manager/getfile/178344?ver=348
- Maine Community College System. (2018, November). *2019 MCCS strategic plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.mccs.me.edu/wp-content/uploads/MCCS-Strategic-Plan.pdf>



Conducted Pilot Study

- Spring 2018: Replicated Fetzner's (2013) study "What Do Unsuccessful Online Students Want Us to Know?" at EMCC



Recruited Online Faculty Volunteers

- 7 EMCC Faculty
- 6 NMCC Faculty
- 4 KVCC Faculty



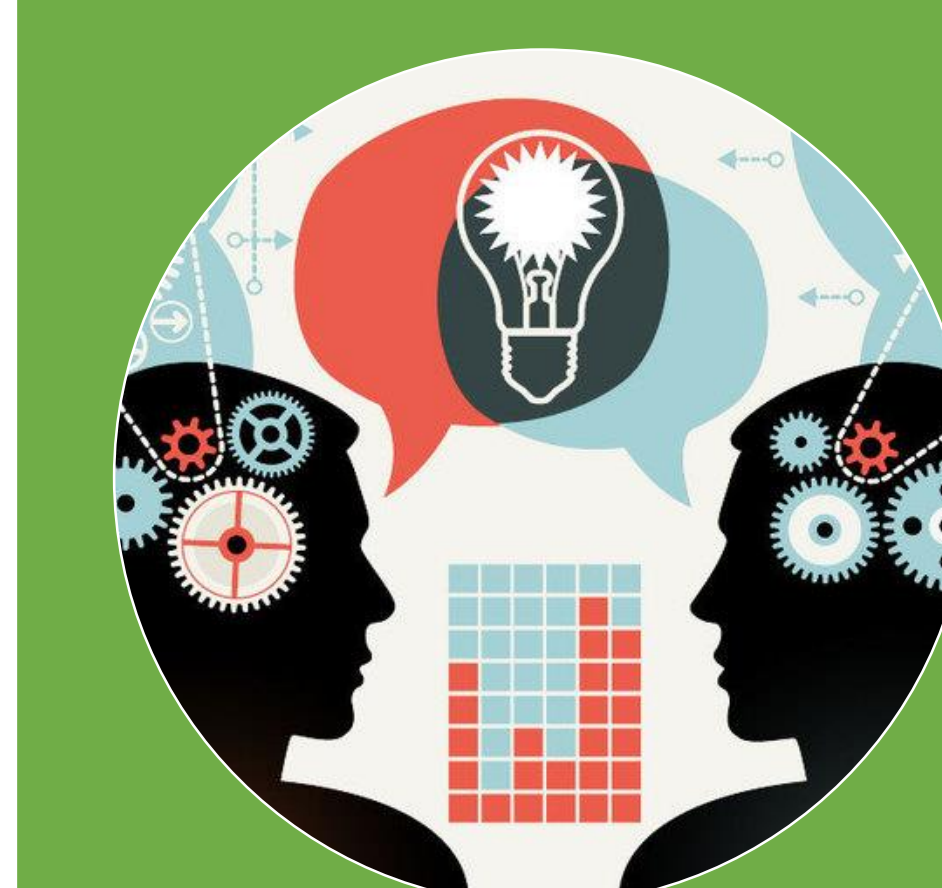
Administered Surveys

- Faculty embedded a Beginning of Semester survey link and End of Semester survey link in online classes



Conducted Interviews

- Conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with students from NMCC, EMCC, and KVCC to deepen understanding of survey data



Distributed Findings to Participating Faculty and Colleges

Methodology