# Creating Community Outside of Space, Time, and Place: Leveraging Learning Management Systems to Foster Virtual Connections

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Enrollment Trends

College enrollment in the United States has decreased for the eighth consecutive year according to data released in spring 2019 by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

"Current Term Enrollment Estimates, Spring 2019" National Student Clearinghouse Research Center
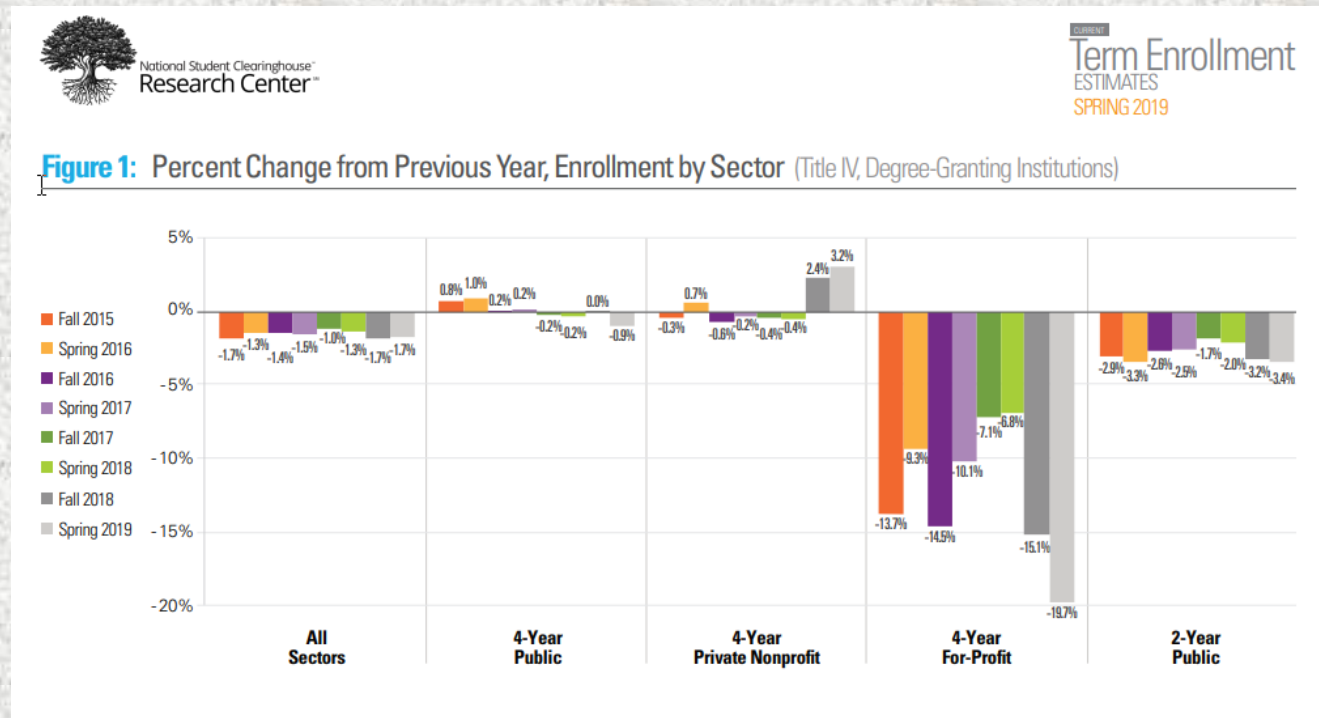
2-Year Colleges *vs*. 4-Year Colleges

Fall 2017

Community Colleges: -1.7%

4-yr Public Institutions: -0.2%

Spring 2018

Community Colleges: -2.0%

4-yr Public Institutions: -0.2%

Fall 2018

Community Colleges: -3.2%

4-yr Public Institutions: -0.0%

Spring 2019

Community Colleges: -3.4%

4-yr Public Institutions: -0.9%

Distance Education

Distance education, as defined by the Education Department's National Center for Education Statistics, "uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the student and instructor synchronously or asynchronously".

"The Condition of Education - Postsecondary Education - Postsecondary Students - Undergraduate Enrollment – Indicator", *National Center for Education Statistics*, May 2019.

Distance Education Enrollment

While overall postsecondary enrollment dropped by almost 90,000 students from fall 2016 to fall 2017, the number of students who took at least some of their courses online grew by more than 350,000 students (5.7%).

By fall 2017:
- 33.1% of students took at least one online course
- 15.4% of students were enrolled exclusively online
- 17.6% of students mixed online & face to face classes

"New Data: Online Enrollments Grow, and Share of Overall Enrollment Grows Faster", *Inside Higher Ed*, 7 Nov. 2018.

SUNY Oswego
Bachelor's Completion Degrees

Syracuse Branch Campus (Blended Programs)
- Business Administration, BS
- Criminal Justice, BA
- Human Development, BA

Online Programs
- Business Administration, BS
- Broadcasting & Mass Communications, BA
- Criminal Justice, BA
- Public Relations, BA
- Wellness Management, BS

Bachelor's Completion Program Criteria

- Intended for students who have earned an A.A. or A.S. degree in chosen major or something related, although we do have students in the program who have earned approximately 60 credits in another major and eligible for a General Education Waiver.

- Same curriculum and requirements as main campus-based majors.

- Due to the varied needs of each student, all course offerings, are subject to availability as not every course is offered, each semester, at our Syracuse campus and/or online.

- Some courses might only be offered intermittently during the intersessions (winter and summer), so being able to take courses during the summer and/or winter is extremely important.

Undergraduate Enrollment

SUNY Oswego Online Undergraduate Course Enrollment

	No Online Classes	Some Online Classes	All Online Classes
2008	91.7%	6.2%	2.0%
2009	91.9%	6.1%	1.9%
2010	91.2%	6.9%	1.7%
2011	89.7%	8.4%	1.7%
2012	89.5%	8.5%	1.9%
2013	88.3%	9.9%	1.6%
2014	84.8%	13.6%	1.5%
2015	85.7%	12.4%	1.8%
2016	83.2%	14.5%	2.1%
2017	82.3%	15.5%	2.1%
2018	81.8%	15.2%	2.9%

Undergraduate Students: Fall — No Online, Online, all, Online, some
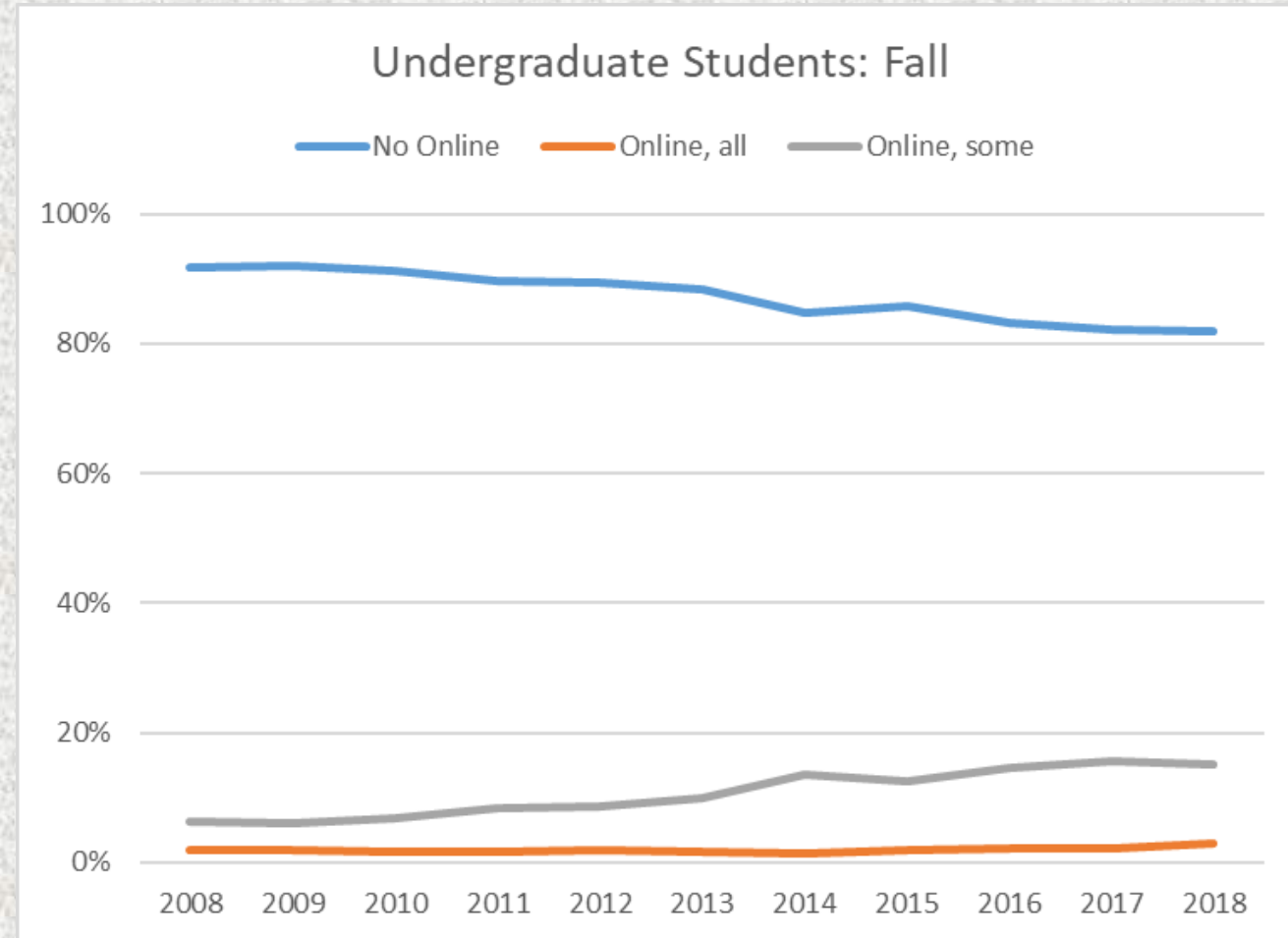
The Problem

A study conducted by SUNY Oswego's Institutional Research & Assessment department comparing students' GPAs in their face-to-face ["traditional" classes] with GPAs in online [classes] shows that grades are lower in online courses.

SUNY Oswego Syracuse Campus Business Plan Updates and Progress Report, 2019, pgs. 5, 16, & 17.

What's Different?

Non-traditional learners
- Older than residential students
- First-Generation
- Location bound
- Employed
- Have children
- Break in education
- English Second Language

Students lack skills & experience for online learning
- Technology
- Time Management
- Organization
- Study Skills
- Clear understanding of requirements

Asynchronous Learning

Students report feeling
- Isolated
- Confused
- Passive
- Unengaged
- Self-taught

Photo by Navjot Kauer   Courtesy of Chandigarhedu

Lineberger, Jason. "Isolation: A Pitfall of Online Learning." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service/Digital Learning Coordinator, 29 Nov. 2016.

Intro to Online Learning

Berkley College, Arizona State University, Excelsior College, Western Governors University, Liberty University, and many others have developed online learning orientations for distance learners that mimic or foreshadows their courses.
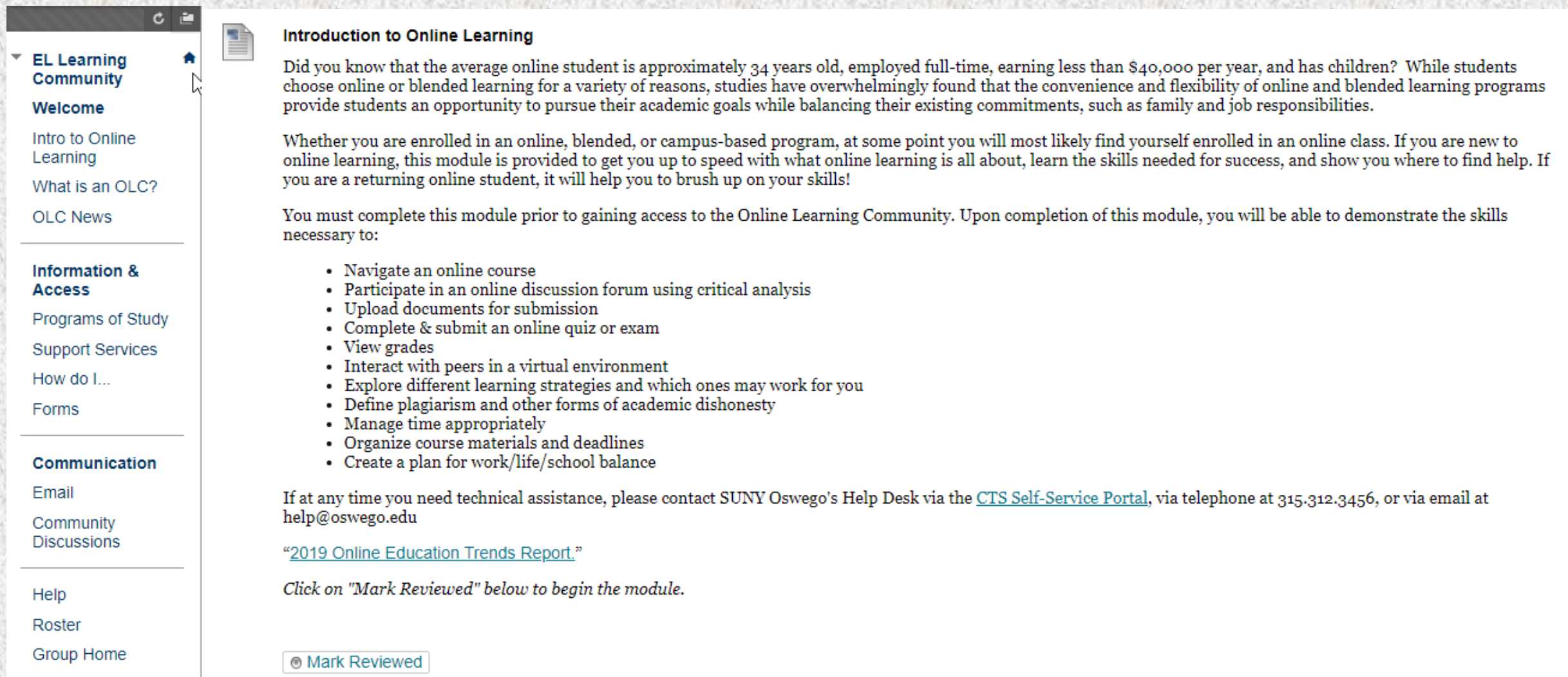
- Excelsior has found that student performance is "substantially higher and course withdrawal rates are significantly lower" among those who complete the orientation.

- Western Governors asserts that "students who take the orientation are far more likely to complete full-time credits within a term"; and

- Arizona State "has observed that students who complete [online learning] orientation end up with an average of 0.3 grade points higher than their peers who skip orientation. . . and also have a higher rate of persistence throughout the program".

Lieberman, Mark. "Orientation Programs Set Online Learners up for Success", *Inside Higher Ed,* 13 Sept. 2017

Intro to Online Learning

Upon completion of this module, students will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to:

- Navigate an online course
- Participate in an online discussion forum using critical analysis
- Upload documents for submission
- Complete & submit an online quiz or exam
- View grades
- Interact with peers in a virtual environment
- Explore different learning strategies and which ones may work for them
- Define plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty
- Manage time appropriately
- Organize course materials and deadlines
- Create a plan for work/life/school balance

Blackboard Landing Page

Introduction to Online Learning

Did you know that the average online student is approximately 34 years old, employed full-time, earning less than $40,000 per year, and has children? While students choose online or blended learning for a variety of reasons, studies have overwhelmingly found that the convenience and flexibility of online and blended learning programs provide students an opportunity to pursue their academic goals while balancing their existing commitments, such as family and job responsibilities.

Whether you are enrolled in an online, blended, or campus-based program, at some point you will most likely find yourself enrolled in an online class. If you are new to online learning, this module is provided to get you up to speed with what online learning is all about, learn the skills needed for success, and show you where to find help. If you are a returning online student, it will help you to brush up on your skills!

You must complete this module prior to gaining access to the Online Learning Community. Upon completion of this module, you will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to:

- Navigate an online course
- Participate in an online discussion forum using critical analysis
- Upload documents for submission
- Complete & submit an online quiz or exam
- View grades
- Interact with peers in a virtual environment
- Explore different learning strategies and which ones may work for you
- Define plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty
- Manage time appropriately
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- Create a plan for work/life/school balance

If at any time you need technical assistance, please contact SUNY Oswego's Help Desk via the CTS Self-Service Portal, via telephone at 315.312.3456, or via email at help@oswego.edu

"2019 Online Education Trends Report."

Click on "Mark Reviewed" below to begin the module.

Mark Reviewed

Community

Survey findings from the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, Your First College Year (YFCY), and the College Student Survey (CSS) indicate that a students' sense of campus community is significantly related to the educational experience, has a noticeable effect on retention, and has an effect on various learning outcomes.

"Classroom community and student engagement are closely related to one another. Students who feel a sense of connectedness and psychological closeness rather than isolation are better prepared to become more actively involved with online learning. . . A welcoming teaching and learning community is central to online student knowledge acquisition, which in turn leads to meaningful learning experiences."

Springer, Robert. "Community: Influencing Learning Outcomes and Retention." *Director of Institutional Research at Elon University.*
Bean, John. Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 59:6, 708-711

Creating Community

- Create a safe space for risk taking, vulnerability, and the sharing of diverse ideas.

- Encourage students to reach out to classmates with similar life circumstances and/or career goals.

- Foster a supportive environment among peers in which positive relationships may be formed.

- Empower students to be self-sufficient regarding institutional policies & procedures.

Online Learning Community (OLC)

Using SUNY Oswego's Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard Learn, a community has been developed for students in our online and blended completion programs.

What is an OLC?

- RossHelen/Shutterstock.com (https://elearningindustry.com/tips-build-online-learning-community)

What is an online learning community? It is "a bonded group of learners who interact with each other in a virtual learning environment and share their perspectives and, during this period, construct knowledge". Others think of a community as a "feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals". Regardless of your definition, a community is a group of people who come together to provide support and assistance to one another (Schweir, 2001; Luppicini, 2003).

Chances are that you are juggling the challenges of working, raising a family, are location bound, and/or have some other extenuating circumstance which prevents you from attending traditional classes on our Lakeside campus. Whether you are an online student or a student based at our Syracuse campus, you probably don't fit the mold of a "traditional college student". Non-traditional learners share common backgrounds and experiences that influence the manner in which they access post-secondary education. Where people have a shared experience they gain a deeper sense of commitment.

The flexibility of online education is particularly valuable to adults with multiple responsibilities and busy lives. Without being required to attend classes at a fixed time (usually in the day) many adult learners are able to return to school and complete additional education that otherwise could not fit into their daily routines. Yet, associated with the convenience provided by an online platform, it is not unusual for online or branch campus students to experience a greater level of isolation or disengagement than they might if taking classes on the main campus. The needs of the learner must be addressed otherwise distance learning will not produce successful results.

Although you may not be traveling to our Lakeside campus, that doesn't mean you are alone! The goal of this learning community is to provide you with valuable resources, answer questions, and allow you the opportunity to connect with others like you! Additionally, as travel to one of our campuses during regular business hours may be a challenge for you, virtual meetings and office hours will be another option available for you to meet with your academic advisor.

While there are areas specific to each degree program, each of you has something valuable to contribute to the learning experience! Students new to programs can benefit from those who have already completed courses. Moreover, you can participate in group discussions to share suggestions, help another student, and provide encouragement and support for one another regardless of which program you are pursuing. Collaboration exposes people to new outlooks and ideas.

So, please take some time to explore the learning community, find some answers, share your experiences, and make new connections!

OLC Components

Welcome
- Intro to Online Learning (Adaptive Release – OLC access granted upon completion)
- OLC News/Announcements (Advising Info, Important Dates, Reminders, Etc.)

Information & Access
- Programs of Study (Info related to specific majors)
- Support Services (Accessibility Services, Tutoring, Library)
- How do I. . . (FAQs: policies, procedures, video tutorials, etc.)
- Forms

Communication
- Email
- Community Discussions (Major specific, general, & Book Swap discussions)

Each component area is considered fluid, as we work with students and institutional subject matter experts to further define and develop content that benefits our students the most.

Pilot Launch

- Fall 2019 – project goal
- Winter 2019 – soft launch
- Spring 2020 – revised goal

Data Collection & Review

Intro to Online Learning Module & Online Learning Community

- technological skills
- comfort level in virtual environment
- performance in online classes
- retention
- knowledge of relevant policies & procedures

Questions

Presentation

https://www.slideshare.net/melissasemione