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Investigating the Reasons Institutions of Higher Education in the USA and Canada Utilize Blended Learning

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Futurists believe that blended learning will continue to be a trend in higher education for many years. Blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning environments. Even though instructors are the pioneers of integration of technology in classrooms, ultimately the university officials have to make a decision about supporting blended learning initiatives on their campuses. The present study used an explanatory mixed method design to identify the main reasons universities in the US and Canada decided to offer blended courses and investigate possible relationships between region, institutional type and size with reasons for using blended learning. In the first quantitative phase, 310 university administrators completed a questionnaire to identify the main reasons their institution offered blended courses and in the second qualitative phase five academic administrators were interviewed to explain and elaborate on the findings. Evidence is provided to suggest that the size and location of the university has a relationship with the reason an institution decides to offer blended courses.

Introduction

It is not uncommon anymore to wake up in the morning and see titles such as "2012 is the year of the MOOC" or "College may never be the same" in the newspapers (Pappano, 2012). Administrators of higher education are getting used to reading articles like "Are you MOOC-ing yet?" or "The Campus Tsunami" (Snyder, 2012). Advancement in learning technologies is revolutionizing the world of higher education. Distance learning has long been a part of higher education, however, the introduction of initiatives such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and open courseware (OCW) has really challenged the traditional boundaries of brick and mortar universities.

Thirty years ago, you had to walk to the third floor of a building to see a university classroom with a professor, a group of students and a blackboard. Today you may have to turn on your TV from home or open your laptop sitting in your hotel room in Japan to attend a class in Texas. Thirty years ago, you needed a high SAT score and a very strong application to gain access to course material at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Today, an

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adjunct professor teaching chemistry in Kumasi, Ghana, can access course material for an organic chemistry class offered at MIT through the OCW website. Thirty years ago, mainly students enrolled in top universities could attend lectures by famous speakers and well-known business gurus. Today a 15-year-old boy living in Mongolia can attend a MOOC lecture led by the world's leading experts in Artificial Intelligence 8619 miles away, located on the campus of Stanford in the United States.

Online education has become very popular with many higher education institutions around the world. In the United States of America more than six million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2010 semester. A survey by Allen and Seaman (2012) found that the ten percent growth rate for online enrolments in 2011 far exceeded the two percent growth in the overall higher education student population in the US in the same year. In fact back in the fall 2002 semester, 1.6 million students were taking at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2003). This shows a 562.5 percent growth in less than ten years. The same study noted that even back in year 2002 more than eighty percent of the universities in the US were offering at least one online class.

What factors caused the popularity and growth of online education in American universities in the past decade? As universities rushed into online education, course materials were locked behind passwords or Virtual Private Networks. Many higher education administrators took the next step of offering online degrees aimed at anyone interested that had access to a computer and modem. Universities had long assumed that students wishing to receive college credit would be willing to pay the required tuition to unlock the course materials (Wiggins, 2001). As Fatham CEO Ann Kirschner stated, "If you want a course with serious interactive engagement with faculty, you'll pay for it" (Jarvis, 2003, p. 3). As the literature presents, viewing education as a good, has resulted in the increasing trend toward the privatization of knowledge (Litman, 2001).

Online programs in public universities, for-profit private universities, and even corporations have emerged in an attempt to gain a larger share in what seemed an infinitely expanding demand for "education to go" (Long, 2006). Unfortunately this trend restricted access to higher education, especially for individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds and those living in the developing world where financial resources are very limited and scarce. Online education helps universities increase their enrolments and revenue and in long-term may decrease institutional expenses (Anderson and Elloumi, 2004).

The Literature on Blended Learning

There are multiple definitions of blended learning in the literature. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) define it as the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. Some authors take a different approach and focus on the pedagogical aspect of blended learning when defining the term blended learning. For example, blended learning is defined as a pedagogical approach that combines the effectiveness of the classroom with the technologically enhanced active learning possibilities of the online environment (Dziuban, Hartman & Moskal, 2004). Many institutions look at blended learning as a hybrid of classroom and online instruction that includes some of the conveniences of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). From an administrative perspective blended learning is seen as a strategy that combines online and classroom learning activities and resources to reduce in-class seat time for students in a face-to-face environment (Lorenzetti, 2011). Overall, it is agreed that the

blended learning environment offers the best of both worlds, the advantages of the face-to-face environment and the endless capabilities of the online world.

Blended learning is not a new concept. Ever since technology entered the classroom, blended learning became part of the world of higher education. More than a decade ago blended learning was identified as one of the top trends of higher education (Rooney, 2003). In 2002 it was estimated that 80-90% of all courses offered in universities will be taught using a blended format (Young, 2002). This prediction soon became a reality and even institutions known for having only online programs began offering blended classes.

What are the benefits of blended learning? The list of benefits is very long according to the literature. Early studies at the University of Tennessee and Stanford found that blended learning improves learning effectiveness by providing a better match between how a learner wants to learn and the learning program that is offered (Singh & Reed, 2001). It provides more access to higher education and extends the reach to potential students that cannot follow a traditional program based on their work schedule, family or distance barriers. One of the disadvantages of online education was the loss of the sense of community. Studies have found a significant correlation between this variable and attrition (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). Blended learning resolves this issue as students will experience face-to-face interaction and socialization.

Many institutions are pushing for blended learning as part of their strategic planning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2007; Rovai & Jordan, 2004; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Allen & Seaman, 2003). However, not all administrators and decision makers in higher education are favoring blended learning simply for its enhanced learning environment, flexibility or convenience. Blended learning can improve classroom utilization, help fill under-enrolled programs and even solve parking issues on campus. A review of the literature presents a gap in the various reasons universities decide to implement blended learning. The purpose of this study was to identify the main reasons universities in the US and Canada decided to offer blended courses and investigate possible relationships between region, institutional type and size with reasons for using blended learning.

Methods

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

(1) What was the main reason that administrators in four year universities in the US and Canada decided to offer blended courses at their institutions?
(2) To what extent did location, institutional type and size make a difference on the main reason four year universities in the US and Canada decided to offer blended courses?

This study utilized the explanatory mixed method design. An explanatory mixed method design, also known as the two-phase model, consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to explain and elaborate on the results of the first phase of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In the first phase, the researcher employed the correlational design and utilized a short questionnaire to collect data from the participants. In correlational design, the researcher uses the correlational statistical test to describe and measure the degree of relationship between two or more variables (Creswell, 2007). In the second phase, the basic interpretative method of inquiry was utilized through interviewing five participants.

In the first phase of the study, a web-based questionnaire utilizing the cross-sectional strategy was used to collect data at one point in time. Since no survey was found to collect the data needed to answer the research questions, the researcher had to create a short survey. The questionnaire included eight questions on the demographics of the university and the top two reasons the university decided to implement blended learning. The survey was first shown to a panel of experts and after modification a pilot study was conducted to check the survey for validity and reliability. The possible reasons administrators may decide to implement blended learning at their institution were collected from the literature and previous studies.

For the US participants, the four main regional divisions used by the United States Census Bureau (2010) were utilized:

- Region 1 – Northeast (Divisions 1 and 2): Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey
- Region 2 – Midwest (Divisions 3 and 4): Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa
- Region 3 – South (Divisions 15, 6, and 7): Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana
- Region 4 – West (Divisions 8 and 9): Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii

For the Canadian participants the three region model was utilized:

- Northern: Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
- Eastern: Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador
- Western: British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan

The institutional type question included three categories:

- Public university
- For-profit private university
- Non-profit private university

The basic Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2010) was used for the size of the universities:

- Small university: less than 3000 degree-seeking students
- Medium university: 3000-9999 degree-seeking students
- Large university: at least 10000 degree-seeking students

Based on the review of the literature, the following factors were listed as main reasons universities use blended learning:

- Improving learning effectiveness
- Increasing access
- Providing flexibility and convenience
- Reducing costs

An option was given to participants to choose other reasons and specify them. An invitation for participations in the web-based questionnaire was sent to 1200 administrators in four year universities in the USA and Canada. Administrators included department chairs, college deans, and vice presidents of four year universities. Two series of invitations were

electronically sent and at the end of the two-week data collection period, 310 surveys were completed yielding a 25.8% return rate. Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 19 to answer the research questions of this study.

In the second phase, five participants that held administrative roles in their institutions were selected. Purposeful sampling using the snowball strategy was used to select the participants. The interviews took place over telephone during normal business office hours. Each interview took approximately thirty minutes.

To understand and analyze the qualitative data more in-depth, the three-part analysis of data as described by Yin (2010) was utilized. Microsoft Excel was used for the first level of compilation of data. The focus in the second level of compilation was to find out general themes and break down the data to reflect what the participants were saying. Yin (2010) in his work described Level 1 coding as a process of reusing the initial words of the participant. For this level, some of the words the participant had stated were reused. For level 2 coding, the researcher grouped similar ideas together putting them into the same categories. Finally the data was reassembled by re-reading the codes listed under levels 1 and 2 until new themes began to emerge. Measures were taken to ensure credibility and trustworthiness through consistency and peer debriefing. Consistency was used in conducting the interviews, collecting and analyzing data.

Results

Quantitative analysis

Fifty one percent of the participants were female administrators in higher education. More than forty six percent of the participants were administrators in private non-profit institutions and the majority of participants were working in medium size universities. Table 1 illustrates some of the demographics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants in phase I

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	159	51.3%
Male	151	48.7%
Institutional type		
Public	123	39.7%
For-profit private	42	13.5%
Non-profit private	145	46.8%
Institutional size		
Small	44	14.2%
Medium	156	50.3%
Large	110	35.5%
Total for each variable	310	100%

Only thirteen participants were from Canada. The majority of participants were located in the West and South regions of the US. There were no participants from the Northern region of Canada. Table 2 illustrates the locations of the participants.

Table 2. Location of participants in phase I

Region	Frequency	Percentage
USA	297	95.8%
Northeast USA	68	21.9%
Midwest USA	32	10.3%
South USA	124	40.0%
West USA	73	23.5%
Canada	13	4.2%
Eastern Canada	7	2.3%
Western Canada	6	1.9%
Western Canada	3	1.0%
Total	310	100%

Fifty three percent of the participating institutions offered at least one online course. Around sixty eight percent, 210 universities, offered blended classes. All of the universities that offered at least one online class also offered blended courses. However, fourteen percent of the universities offered blended courses but did not offer any online classes. It is important to note that all the for-profit universities offered online courses. For the following analysis, only the 210 universities that offered blended courses were used

So why do universities decide to offer blended courses? Increasing access was the number one reason administrators in four year universities in the USA and Canada offered blended courses. The second reason indicated by the participants was to improve learning effectiveness. Nine participants selected other reasons not listed. Their answers were combined into factors: to increase student engagement and to have a competitive advantage. Figure 1 illustrates the main reasons universities decided to offer blended courses.

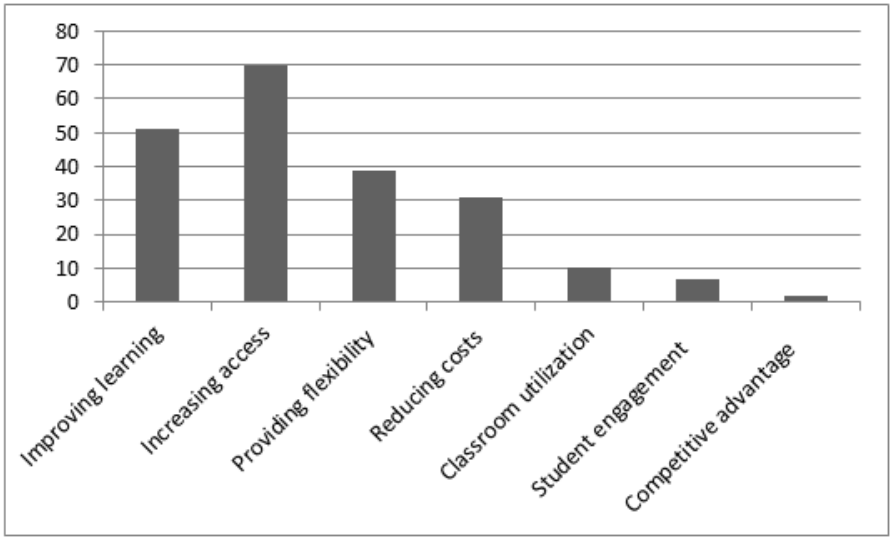


Figure 1. Reasons for offering blended courses

For both the non-profit and for-profit private universities, increasing access was the main reason to offer blended courses. On the other hand, the main reason public universities offered blended courses was to provide more flexibility and convenience. However, the results of the inferential non-parametric test found no significant differences (p=0.54), therefore the type of the institution did not make a statistically significant difference on the reasons universities offer blended courses. Table 3 illustrates a break-down of reasons for different institution

types.

Table 3. Reasons for offering blended courses based on institution type

Factors	Public	For-Profit	Non-Profit	Total
Improving learning effectiveness	12	9	30	51
Increasing access	12	11	47	70
Providing flexibility/convenience	17	10	12	39
Reducing costs	0	10	21	31
Classroom utilization	0	1	9	10
Increasing student engagement	6	0	1	7
Competitive advantage	1	1	0	2
Total	48	42	120	210

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted comparing the reasons universities offer blended courses with varying levels of institutional size. A significant result was found ($p < .001$), indicating that the groups differed from each other. Follow-up comparisons indicated that the main reason small universities offer blended courses was to reduce overall costs. It is important to note that none of the large size universities offered blended courses for this reason. Improving learning effectiveness, increasing access and providing flexibility and convenience were the top reasons for offering blended courses in medium and large size universities. None of the small size universities selected improving learning effectiveness as the main reason in offering blended courses. Table 4 illustrates a break-down of reasons for different institution types.

Table 4. Reasons for offering blended courses based on institution size

Factors	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Improving learning effectiveness	0	41	10	51
Increasing access	12	37	21	70
Providing flexibility/convenience	0	26	13	39
Reducing costs	21	10	0	31
Classroom utilization	0	1	9	10
Increasing student engagement	0	1	6	7
Competitive advantage	1	0	1	2
Total	34	116	60	210

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted comparing the reasons universities offer blended courses with varying levels of geographic regions. A significant result was fund ($p < .001$), indicating that the groups differed from each other. Follow-up comparisons indicated that the main reason universities in South and Midwestern USA use blended learning to increase access. Improving learning effectiveness is the top reason for using blended learning in universities in the Northeast and in Canada. Table 5 illustrates a break-down of reasons for different geographic regions.

Table 5. Reasons for offering blended courses based on geographic region

Region/ Country	NE USA	MidW USA	South USA	West USA	East Canada	West Canada	Total
Learning effectiveness	17	0	19	12	2	1	51
Increasing access	1	12	44	13	0	0	70
Provide flexibility	10	6	7	15	1	0	39
Reduce costs	11	10	0	10	0	0	31
Classroom utilization	8	2	0	0	0	0	10
Increase student engagement	1	0	3	3	0	0	7
Competitive advantage	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total	48	30	74	54	3	1	210

Qualitative analysis

The second phase of the study involved collecting qualitative data to explain and elaborate on the results of the first phase of the study. Table 6 illustrates the demographic profile of the participants in the second phase.

Table 6. Demographics of participants in phase II

Factors	Gender	Location	Institution Type	Institution Size
Dr. A	Female	NE	Public	Large
Dr. B	Male	E Canada	Public	Large
Dr. C	Male	W	For-Profit	Small
Dr. D	Male	S	Non-Profit	Medium
Dr. E	Female	MidWest	Non-Profit	Medium

In order to analyze the data and elaborate on the findings from the phase quantitative phase, the qualitative data is described from two broad levels. The first level was to elaborate on the top three reasons universities offered blended courses. The second level of analysis was then to divide the data into the main goals and objectives of using blended learning in the institution of the five participants.

First level of analysis

During the first phase of the study, the participants selected the top three reasons their universities decided to use blended learning. The different reasons were described as improving learning effectiveness, increasing access and providing flexibility and convenience.

Improving learning effectiveness

As illustrated in Table 7, Dr. C and Dr. D believed that blended learning improves learning effectiveness. However, Dr. B and Dr. E thought that this can only happen if the planning and implementation if done properly and the nature of the course is a good fit for blended learning. Dr. A did not believe that blended courses can improve learning effectiveness.

Table 7. Thoughts on blended learning and improving learning effectiveness

Participant	Thoughts
Dr. A	There is no empirical evidence that blended learning improves learning effectiveness
Dr. B	Compared to online classes, blended classes improve learning effectiveness; however, face-to-face classes are more effective than both of them
Dr. C	Blended learning provides the best of both learning environments and if done properly will improve learning effectiveness
Dr. D	Blended courses improve learning effectiveness through increasing student engagement
Dr. E	Based on the nature of the course, some blended courses can be as effective as traditional Course

Increasing access

As illustrated in Table 8, Drs. C, D and E believed that blended learning increases access to higher education especially in rural areas. Dr. B compared blended courses to online courses again and Dr. E. Dr. A did not believe that blended courses can increase access to higher education.

Table 8. Thoughts on blended learning and increasing access

Participant	Thoughts
Dr. A	Since blende courses require students to come to campus sometimes, it does not increase access
Dr. B	Online classes are a better option to increase access than blende courses
Dr. C	One of the advantages of blended learning is to increase access to those who don't live close to universities
Dr. D	Blended course can increase students' access to higher education
Dr. E	In rural areas blended courses have the potential to increase access

Providing flexibility and convenience

As illustrated in Table 9, all participants believed that blended learning provides flexibility and convenience. It is important to note that even Dr. A that disagreed with the previous two factors shared this common belief.

Table 9. Thoughts on blended learning and providing flexibility and convenience

Participant	Thoughts
Dr. A	One of the few advantages of blended learning is providing the convenience for students
Dr. B	Blended courses provide more flexibility for the instructor and the students
Dr. C	Offering flexibility is one of the main benefits of blended courses
Dr. D	Blended courses create a flexible learning environment for all stakeholders
Dr. E	Providing convenience is a great benefit of blended courses

Second level of analysis

In this level of analysis, participants were asked the main goals and objectives their institutions had when they decided to offer blended courses on their campuses. The researcher was able to deduce from the data the following objectives for deciding to use blended learning in the institutions of the participants.

Providing more options to students

Three of the participants described providing more choices to students as the main goal of their universities in offering blended courses. Dr. A stated that the decision to offer blended courses was a reaction to the demands of the students. Dr. B mentioned that his institution was offering online programs for many years and they were looking for offering more options to students who do not wish to enroll in online classes. Dr. E stated that her institution strategically decided to offer blended courses to provide more alternatives for the new generation of students. All three participants gave very rich descriptions of why providing more options for students was a major goal of using blended learning in their institutions. Table 10 provides more statements from the participants.

Table 10. First objective of offering blended courses: providing options

Participant	Statements
Dr. A	It is becoming an expectation from our students to offer courses that utilize technology such as blended courses. The young generation wants more than just the traditional lecture. We were needing to provide more options to meet this demand.
Dr. B	After our university experienced the downfalls and shortcomings of our online programs, we wanted to create additional choices for our students that were looking for technology enriched classes. Blended programs is the middle ground that seems to satisfy the needs of a large number of our students.
Dr. E	The new generations of students including the digital natives are looking for more choices that offer flexibility. Blended learning is a good alternative for such learners.

Enhancing the learning experience

Three of the participants described enhancing the learning experiences of their students as the main goal of their universities in offering blended courses. Dr. E shared both objectives and mentioned that blended courses became popular on her campus after a series of successful experiences of mostly junior faculty that later shared their experiences with others. Dr. C who was a pioneer in using technology in the classroom in his school stated that he favors the blended learning environment and is among faculty and administrators who push for more blended courses on campus. Dr. D described that after discussion among faculty and administrators about the impact of blended courses on student learning and looking at the future trends in higher education, blended learning was placed in the strategic plan of his institution. Table 11 provides more statements from the participants.

Table 11. First objective of offering blended courses: enhancing learning

Participant	Statement
Dr. C	Blended learning develops both individual and collaborative learning skills. Often in blended courses the discussion continues outside the classroom and with the advancements of technology students have access to more resources for learning and collaboration.
Dr. D	The multiple learning modalities offered in blended courses enhances the learning environment and enables differentiated learning. Students can work at a customized level and pace and have access to learning technologies that increases communication and collaboration.
Dr. E	Our faculty believed that blended learning has the benefit of improving student learning. Some faculty that had taught using this technology shared their experiences with others and student evaluations were also supportive of this claim. Increasing the digital fluency is another significant contribution to student learning

Discussion

The term blended learning is being used with increased frequency in higher education and other related fields. Blended learning is still a vague concept in higher education. Many faculty members are currently using blended learning in their courses without knowing it. Graham, Allen, and Ure (2003, p.4) present the three most commonly mentioned definitions in the literature:

- Blended learning is defined as combining instructional modalities (Bersin & Associates, 2003; Orey, 2002a, 2002b; Singh & Reed, 2001; Thomson, 2002)
- Blended learning is defined as combining instructional methods (Driscoll, 2002; House, 2002; Rossett, 2002)
- Blended learning is defined as combining online and face-to-face instruction (Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003; Sands, 2002; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002)

However, institutions often create their own unique definitions of blended learning. For many universities blended learning or blended courses refers to courses where the instruction happens in a hybrid format. Because of this variation, the researcher was obligated to define a blended course as a hybrid course where some sessions are online and some sessions happen in the traditional classroom. This definition was clearly communicated with all participants in both phases of the study.

No one can deny the impact of technological advancements to the world of education. Additionally, the new generation of students comes equipped with a vast background in technology and many are digital natives. It seems very logical that universities adjust to this change and current trend in higher education. The question is why and when? Some universities embraced the learning technologies and became pioneers and some are still resisting to make progressive change. Some university administrators have to first be convinced and then slowly changes are made through the levels of bureaucracy in the institution. Such organizational changes usually follow a top down process and are really slow due to resistance to change at different levels.

Improving learning effectiveness was found to be the number one reason to offer blended learning in medium size universities. Based on the basic Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2010), most public and private universities in the United

States fall into the medium size category. This finding was significant as one of the main desired outcomes of using blended learning is to enhance the learning experience. The findings from the second phase of the study also supported this. Participants indicated that by having the ability to continue the learning experience outside the classroom, creating individual and collaborative learning skills, and differentiated learning, blended learning makes great contributions to the learning experience of students. A national study by the U.S. Department of Education found that students in online learning environments performed slightly better than those learning the same material through traditional face-to-face instruction (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia & Jones, 2010). Another study published by the University of Central Florida found that blended courses consistently rank higher than other modalities in student course evaluations and "have the highest levels of student success and the lowest withdrawals of any modality—including face-to-face." (Cavanagh, 2011)

It is important to note that one of the participants in the second phase of the study was not supportive that blended learning enhances the learning experience and wanted to see empirical evidence that supports this claim. It is expected that administrators with negative perspectives to blended learning will resist the move toward offering blended courses in universities. However, this study showed that most administrators do not share this negative perspective. In an article published in The Chronicle of Higher Education the president of Pennsylvania State University was quoted as saying that the convergence between online and residential instruction was "the single-greatest unrecognized trend in higher education today" (Young, 2002, p. A33).

According to the findings of this study, increasing access was one of the top reasons administrators decided to offer blended courses in their universities. Private universities especially located in regions with vast rural areas such as the Southern and Midwestern US selected increasing access as their number one reason for offering blended courses. Blended learning increases the access to education in institutions of higher education (Picciano, 2006). Increasing access to higher education can be measured in several ways. For most public and private universities increased enrollments are evidence of greater access for the students. That explains why many universities include blended and online learning in their strategic planning. Allen & Seaman (2004) conducted a national survey and found that 52.6% of chief academic officers in universities viewed online learning as critical to their institution's overall long-term strategy.

Blended courses replace a portion of the face-to-face instruction with web-based learning technologies and this allows for the flexibility of utilizing online resources to reduce the on campus time (Dziuban, Moskal, & Hartman, 2004). Providing flexibility and convenience was found as another important factor for universities to offer blended courses, especially for Public institutions. This finding was also supported in the second phase were providing options to students was found as a major theme for using blended learning. Dr. A who had negative views toward blended courses stated that it is becoming an expectation from our students to offer courses that utilize technology. Offering blended courses was a reaction to the demand for providing more options to their students. Especially after experiencing the shortcomings of purely online classes, blended courses were offered in Dr. B's institution to satisfy the needs of a large number of students. Dr. E mentioned that the new generation is looking for more choices that offer flexibility. At a time of rising transportation costs, students who take blended courses can cut down on commuting time and costs by saving money on gas, parking, and tolls.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Some experts in the field believe that the new metaphor for higher education is "The ability to use knowledge effectively is power." Blended learning offers both the social, collaborative and increased engagement of traditional face-to-face classes and the immediate availability of information and knowledge and powerful online tools to university students in a way that has never been experienced before. This study identified the main reasons administrators and decision makers in institutions of higher education decide to offer blended courses. However, with the rapid emergence of new technologies and increasing number of blended courses in universities, there is a need for more research and studies in this field.

Future qualitative studies are recommended to identify the reasons why some chief academic officers resist blended learning. Further quantitative and mixed methods studies are recommended to identify the barriers to offer blended courses in institutions of higher education. Finally, future case study research is recommended to analyze the success stories and stories of failure in implementing blended learning in universities. There is a clear gap in the literature on studies that discuss criteria for selecting courses that are best fitted for online or blended learning, support for development and delivery of blended courses, and ownership of materials.

The new generation has never ending access to information and is more engaged in social networking tools. In addition to everything that has been discussed, the employers in the 21st century are looking for graduates with enhanced communication skills, increased digital fluency, expanded networking and strengthened professionalism. With the help of online resources and web-based technologies, blended learning has the potential to address these vital needs more than any other modality. The new generation is eager to explore new ways of collaborating, discovering, performing and ultimately learning. Is your institution prepared?

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