

Some “Must-Read” Reports About the State of Online Education

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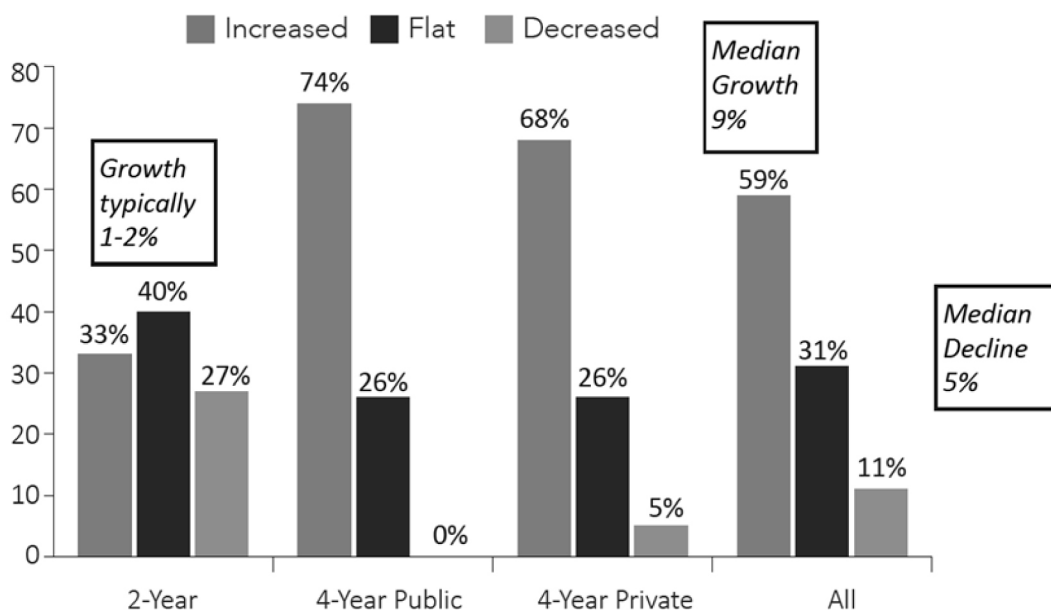
There are several reports published annually about online education in higher and K–12 education that I read every year, and that list is growing. I read these not only to keep up with the field, but also to learn about innovations and trends that I should be researching and/or incorporating into my courses. My

“must read” list now also includes the *Changing Landscape of Online Education* by Legon and Garrett (2017), underwritten by Quality Matters and Eduventures. The authors of this report conducted a survey of “chief online officers at community colleges, four-year public, and 4-year private, nonprofit colleges and universities” (p. 5). This survey, to be administered annually, provides baseline data from chief online officers, the individuals within these institutions who manage online education. As online education changes, it will be important to learn about decisions and trends from their perspectives.

The findings of the CHLOE report provide a snapshot of online education from the chief online officer’s point of view. It is a unique perspective in that individuals in such positions are viewed as key decision-makers of online education in community colleges and universities. As Legon and Garrett (2017) noted, “At many institutions, management of online-related activities and responsibilities ... [are] consolidated under the leadership of a single institutional officer” (p. 5). Therefore, surveying this group annually can potentially provide an important view of the community college and 4-year university online education landscape, as well as help substantiate



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Source: Legon and Garrett (2017, p. 13).

Figure 1. Fully online student headcount growth from spring 2015 to 2016.

findings from other reports examining online education from different stakeholders. For example, of 104 usable surveys, Figure 1 shows student headcounts from spring 2015 to 2016 increased, particularly in 4-year public and private universities.

These findings are consistent with findings from other reports, such as the more recent report sponsored by the Online Learning Consortium by Seaman, Allen, and Seaman (2018), where the authors also discovered “The number of distance education students grew by 5.6% from fall 2015 to fall 2016 to reach 6,359,121 who are taking at least one distance course, representing 31.6% of all students” (p. 3).

Other reports that help keep me informed about online education and technology innovation include, but are not limited to the:

- International Association for K–12 Online Learning’s, or iNACOL (see <https://www.inacol.org/resources/>

[resource-search/?resource_types=20](https://www.inacol.org/resources/resource-search/?resource_types=20)): iNACOL publishes several reports each year. Of the reports iNACOL publishes, I make it a point to read those in the *Keeping Pace* series. These reports examine K–12 online and often also blended education. The focus of the report varies year-to-year; even so, it is a highly recommended addition to your list of must-reads even if you do not teach or work in K–12 education. Seeing what is coming up in the pipeline can certainly influence those of us in higher education!

- Online Learning Consortium annual surveys of academic leaders of online learning, previously known as the Sloan Surveys (see <https://secure.onlinelearningconsortium.org/publications/surveys>): now in its 10th year, these reports provide definitions of distance education and data about online student enrollments in institutions of higher education.

- NMC *Horizon Reports* (see <https://www.nmc.org/nmc-horizon/>): These were well-known reports examining key technology trends in higher education, K–12 education, libraries, and museums; however, the organization filed for bankruptcy last year (Lederman, 2017) so the future of these reports continuing is uncertain.

Other groups publish reports, as well, that are worth reading; see for example:

- Accenture's *Technology Vision 2017*: <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insight-disruptive-technology-trends-2017>
- Deloitte's *Tech Trends 2018*: <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/tech-trends.html>
- Gartner's *Top 10 Strategic Technology Trends for 2018*: <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/gartner-top-10-strategic-technology-trends-for-2018/>

Keeping informed in an ever-changing field is important. These are just a few of the many reports that I recommend reading for those involved in online higher education.

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