

# Introduction

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Do you currently teach online? Have you thought about teaching online but for some reason haven't done it yet? Here at CU Online, we believe in the power of online learning. Whether you currently teach online or you are thinking about doing it in the future, we are here to help you sort through this process and we hope that this handbook might help you along the way. The boundaries between traditional face-to-face courses and completely online courses are beginning to blur. Therefore, as we move forward, we all must consider when, how, and why we integrate the tools that we do into our classrooms.

So where are we?

Online learning continues to shake up institutions of higher education (Daugherty & Funke, 1998; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Despite failing to meet initial expectations of growth (Shank, 2004), online learning continues to grow each year (Dawley, 2007). For instance, according to Sloan-C, an estimated 3.2 million students took at least one online course in the fall of 2005, up 800,000 from the previous year (Allen & Seaman, 2006). While the rate of growth of online learning has slowed in comparison to previous years, it still outpaces the growth of traditional face-to-face enrollments (Jaschik, 2009). The Instructional Technology Council reported an 11.3 percent increase in 2008 (Lokken, 2009). Similarly, Sloan-C, while surveying different institutions, reported a 12.9% increase in enrollments for 2008. Not surprisingly, at the University of Colorado Denver, we have seen similar results. In the spring of 2009, there were 6,540 enrollments in fully online courses, up 12.60% from the previous spring. While enrollments in hybrid courses were less with only 1,272 enrollments, they were surprisingly up 27.20% from the previous spring. This continued growth, coupled with bold new policies—like the state of Michigan requiring high school students to take online courses in order to graduate (Watson, 2006)—suggest that online learning is here to stay.

Despite this increased growth and acceptance, many are still skeptical about the value of online learning. For sometime this led proponents of online learning to feel the need to prove that online learning is “as good as” face-to-face learning. This gave rise to the comparison studies movement in which researchers conducted countless studies comparing whether student learning in online learning was as good as student learning in face-to-face settings. The majority of these studies resulted in what's been called the No-Significant Difference phenomenon. That is, researchers found no-significant difference in student learning between online and face-to-face. Over time, though these studies have come under increased scrutiny. Methodological issues aside, people began to question whether being as good as face-to-face learning is as good as it gets (McDonald, 2002). Instead, we need to begin focusing on what we do differently in each of these learning environments that help improve student learning (Wiley, 2002).

A recent study commissioned by the US Department of Education has stirred additional interest by finding that online students tend to achieve better learning outcomes than students in traditional face-to-face courses (and students in hybrid, online, and face-to-face courses do even better than online alone!)

So while online is not a cure-all or “magic bullet”, it does have the potential to revolutionize how we think about, and deliver education. The future is here. The question is only, “What should we do about it?”

At CU Online we answer this question by striving to support faculty in whatever way we can. We have a dedicated help line for faculty and students, we develop job aids and how-to videos, we offer individual assistance on an as needed basis, we offer regular workshops (that we have even begun to simulcast for those at a distance), and we put on annual events (e.g., Summer Web Camp, Winter Web Camp, and Spring Symposium). However, each year we try to think of “new” ways to support faculty. This year, we decided to create a yearbook to provide an outlet for faculty—much like Spring Symposium—to talk about the great things that they are doing in their classrooms. That is, we wanted to provide faculty an opportunity to engage in *the scholarship of teaching*.

The scholarship of teaching is a concept that is typically traced back to Boyer (1990). In *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, Boyer argues that the work of the professoriate actually includes four functions: scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. Boyer’s work served as a catalyst to get faculty seriously talking about the scholarship of teaching. One of the most accessible definitions of the scholarship of teaching was developed by faculty at Illinois State University who understand the term as “systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public” (McKinney, n.d.). Wetson and McAlpine (2001), however, like to conceptualize “the scholarship of teaching” as laying on a continuum with three phases: Phase one, growth in own teaching; phase two, dialogue with colleagues about teaching and learning; phase three, growth in scholarship of teaching (Wetson & McAlpine, 2001).

At CU Online, we specifically focus on the first two phases of the scholarship of teaching. That is, we strive to help faculty improve their teaching and talk with their colleagues about teaching and learning. Over time, though, we hope to be able to support faculty who want to explore the third phase of the scholarship of teaching and share the knowledge they have gained about their teaching with others in a peer-reviewed manner to a larger audience. There are those like Kreber (2002) who see this as the ultimate goal of the scholarship of teaching. This book is one-step in that direction because by publishing this in print as well as an ebook, we hope to be able to share with others what we are doing here at the University of Colorado Denver.

We are known at CU Online as a group with a strong focus on the use of technology and new media. However, as much as we love playing with new tools and finding ways that these new tools can help improve teaching and learning, we strongly believe, as those like Clark (1983, 1994) have pointed out, that it’s the pedagogy and not the technology that ultimately makes the difference in student learning. Therefore, this book is as much about pedagogy as it is about technology.

This handbook consists of four different sections. The first section is about trends and issues with online learning. The second section is about technology in action. The third section includes a brief summary of 25 different new emerging tools and applications. The last section includes different resources that you might use in your online classroom. Put together we hope to turn the CU Online Handbook into an annual publication, a guide to what is new, a celebration of what works and a toolkit for exploring new territory. Online education holds the promise to change the world. We’re excited about that future and looking forward to learning the hardest thing of all: How to teach differently.

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