

The Game Changers in Online Learning Series

The Kentucky Community
and Technical College System

Online. Modular.

Competency-Based.

Transferable. Affordable

Eight key features of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) which, taken together, are game changing:

- 24/7/365 admission, registration and course starts
- Choice of delivery mode – in class, online by term and online on-demand
- Choice of credit length – from .25 through increments based on competency to 3 credit hours per course
- Competency-based modular online structure
- Systematic quality assurance of programs and courses
- Certification of faculty for online instruction
- 24/7 help desk support
- Kentucky-wide transferability

The [Kentucky Community and Technical College System](#) (KCTCS) was created in 1996, and now has 16 colleges offering facilities on 68 campuses. The KCTCS offers certificates and diplomas as well as two-year associate degrees in over 600 credit program offerings. The most popular area of study is the baccalaureate transfer program, which allows a student to earn an associate degree at a KCTCS college and transfer to a Kentucky university. By state law, all courses must be transferable within the post-secondary education system, including General Education Courses. The KCTCS is funded by the state, based on a block grant linked to agreed objectives and an approved business plan rather than a model based on enrollment. Income is also derived from student fees.

Mission statement

'In everything we do, our mission is to improve the quality of life and employability of the citizens of Kentucky by serving as the primary provider of college and workforce readiness, transfer education, and workforce education and training.'

Students

In the fall of 2011, there were 108,302 students enrolled at the KCTCS, representing over 50% of the students enrolled in post-secondary education in Kentucky. Registration has grown almost 110% since 1998. The number of credentials awarded has also grown dramatically, from 9,510 in 2001-02 to 27,813 in 2010-11. Among the credentials awarded in 2010-11 were 7,899 associate degrees, 2,385 diplomas, and 17,529 certificates.

More than 60% of students were studying part-time and more than 55% were female. Those under 18 years of age numbered 14,187, while 44,915 students were between the ages of 18 and 24. The largest group of the student body (48,690 students) was aged 25 and older. Students from Kentucky pay \$140 per credit hour. Students from contiguous states pay \$280, and from elsewhere \$490 per credit hour. Courses are generally three credit hours.

The options for learning

The KCTCS offers students the opportunity to take individual courses in a face-to-face classroom at any of the 68 locations of their 16 colleges, as well as through online programming. Numerous programs and courses are available online, as the student chooses a home campus and can then access all the online materials from any college in the system.

In 2009, the President of the KCTCS allocated \$3 million to implement online learning as a response to flat and/or declining enrollment across the system; a need to improve completion rates; a sense of market saturation for the in-class model; and a market analysis that indicated a demand for short, focused, and easily available courses related to the workplace. To respond to this need, the online offerings were developed in two formats:

- **Online Learn by Term:** Semester-long courses are available online, with some requiring on-site exams or lab sessions. Some courses are also becoming available in condensed formats – allowing completion in eight rather than 15 weeks.
- **Online Learn on Demand:** Every course in this model is broken into three or more modules. Students may sign up for the whole (master) course or enroll module-by-module, earning partial credits for each successful completion.

The KCTCS is rapidly developing online courses based on Requests for Proposals open to all 16 colleges in the system. The colleges bid to develop specific courses and the successful applicant gets instructional design and technological support. On completion, all courses/modules are subject to intensive quality control.

Online Learn On Demand

Online courses are divided into modules based on competencies and each module is composed of a pre-test, learning resources, facilitated instruction, and a post-test. On successful completion of the post-test, the student is awarded whatever fractional credit is assigned to that module. This may be .25, .5, .75, or one credit unit. Students are expected to complete each module within three to five weeks after their start date, but extensions are available at no cost.

The students can stop after earning partial credit, having learned the skill or information they sought, or may continue through all the modules comprising the master course to earn the full three credits.

The KCTCS model offers true “Learn On Demand” as students can start their learning at the time of their choosing as well as deciding on taking a full, 15 week, three credit online course or starting with one of the modules that are part of the course.

Their transcripts show their completion of the master course and their route to completion.

The competency-based approach for the online modules, featuring pre-tests, allows student to focus their learning in areas of greatest need. They can determine what they already know and accelerate their progress through each module.

Students who score high grades on the pre-test are encouraged to attempt the post-test and, if successful, are awarded the credit. This design greatly facilitates the integration of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).

Student response

Currently some 3,000 students are registered in Learn On Demand courses, averaging about 1,000 each term. Enrolments in Learn On Demand are growing. Completion rates also show a positive trend: with 88% of online Learn On Demand students completing, compared to 78% of students in online Learn By Term courses, and 86% of students for in-class Learn By Term courses.

A number of initiatives are in place to expand student numbers:

- Intensive marketing across the state, especially to the employed;
- Targeted focus on six specific college sites who have “stepped up” to be champions for Learn on Demand;
- The addition of success coaches to the range of supports available to learners; and
- A growing range of quality assured programs, taught by online certified faculty. Profitability will occur when annual enrollments exceed 5,000 learners.

For every course, students know that it has been extensively quality assured and peer reviewed in colleges and universities across Kentucky; their instructor has been quality assured in the subject and, if they took an online version, certified to teach online; and that the KCTCS is a fully accredited system.

Faculty development and support

In fall 2011, the KCTCS Online started a new program called KOILS – KCTCS Online Innovation Learning Series to support faculty in increasing their expertise in the use of educational technologies and in the pedagogy of effective online teaching and learning. Faculty and staff volunteer to participate in discussions covering teaching and learning, student engagement and interactivity, course design and quality standards, and educational technologies.

Faculty are also provided with tutorials and training on tools and teaching techniques, access to resources and best practices, and a rigorous quality assurance procedure for all Learn On Demand course developers. In addition, there are frequent seminars, webinars and other professional development opportunities provided in house by the KCTCS on-line learning teams. BlackBoard has also provided an extensive library of tutorials and getting started guides for the BlackBoard Learn learning management system.

All courses are facilitated by instructors who are certified by KCTCS to teach online. KCTCS being a non-union environment facilitates changes in practice and expectations for faculty. Approved faculty have their normal base salary but are additionally compensated for On Demand facilitation at an average adjunct instructor rate per enrollee based on \$15.47 per student for a module which is 0.5 credits and \$30.93 for each student for one credit.

Systems support

The KCTCS uses People Soft as its administrative platform and Blackboard as its delivery platform. It is also increasingly using Soft Chalk as a means to secure high quality course modules quickly, which are then delivered through Blackboard. The KCTCS has a strong, effective and efficient relationship with Pearson as a primary content provider. Adjustments to People Soft were undertaken by the KCTCS People Soft team who ensure that the system is able to cope with 24/7/365 application, admission, registration, enrollment and payment in a way that ensures access to financial aid for students who qualify.

Shift in perspective

At the heart of these developments is a shift from having the student fit in with the requirements of the KCTCS to the provision of a student-focused service. The “mantra” of the change is, “Enabling the student to be the centre of our service.” Students are able to match the offerings of the KCTCS to their learning agendas and lifestyles rather than having to adapt their learning agenda to the needs of the system.

What follows is a summary of these developments in the form of a table that looks at three questions:

What is a student at the KCTCS able to do?

Why is this good for students?

and

How does the KCTCS make it happen?

A KCTCS student is able to...	Why this is good for students	How the KCTCS makes this happen
<p>Access 24/7/365 Admission A student can apply, be admitted, and enroll in a program/course at any time.</p>	<p>Students can make decisions at any time to engage in learning and can also choose the most appropriate form of learning for their circumstances, learning style and opportunities. They can also better manage their financial obligations.</p>	<p>All 16 colleges have the same (PeopleSoft and Blackboard) systems and these have been re-engineered to permit "instant" enrolment for Learn On Demand courses and modules and enrolment in the next eight-week or 15-week term, with automated log-in for Blackboard for each student.</p>
<p>Choose a Delivery Mode The student can choose from one of four basic delivery modes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class by term – 15 weeks of in-class teaching for a three credit course. 2. Learn by Term – 15 weeks of learning online for a three credit course. 3. Condensed Learn by Term – a full three credit class in eight weeks. 4. Learn On Demand – a choice of an online master course or any of the partial credit modules included in a master course. 	<p>This choice enables students to match the delivery mode to their current circumstances, learning style, competencies, and finances.</p>	<p>Learn On Demand courses have been redeveloped based on competencies, with a three-credit master course broken down into modules carrying fractional credit.</p>

<p>Choose a Course Credit Length Students can choose to enroll in a three credit course either in class or online. They can also choose to enroll in separate modules with .25, .5, .75 or one credit units which lead to the three credit master course.</p>	<p>Students can pace their learning and their financial commitments by choosing modules of varying credit length. They can also manage their time effectively – choosing a credit unit that matches their availability.</p>	<p>Learn On Demand course modules offer varying lengths for varying credit. Students are expected to complete a module in three to five weeks but extensions are available.</p>
<p>Take Competency Tests Every competency-based module has pre- and post-tests, so students can obtain credits quickly and more efficiently.</p>	<p>The pre-test pinpoints areas of strength and weakness so students can focus on what they need to improve. The post-test of competency can be taken by students to earn credits for prior learning.</p>	<p>The modular structure with the pre-tests highlights student areas of need, and the post-test allows for assessment of prior learning and/or successful module completion.</p>
<p>Access Wide Course Choice A student has hundreds of courses available through in-class and online delivery.</p>	<p>Both Learn By Term and Learn On Demand cover a large cross-section of college programs.</p>	<p>The KCTCS is developing more quality assured courses developed by the 16 colleges.</p>
<p>Receive Academic Support Students have immediate access to learning facilitators and can arrange for specialist support if they are in difficulty. All courses have instructors who are certified for online instruction.</p>	<p>When the student has a challenge or concern, their issues can be dealt with quickly and effectively.</p>	<p>The aim of the KCTCS is to enable successful completion. Whether students are in class or online, they have access to academic coaching, guidance and mentoring through professors and facilitators.</p>

<p>Access Online Support Services A student can get help in real time with technical and other problems.</p>	<p>Most technical issues can be dealt with quickly– important for students who have three weeks to complete their module.</p>	<p>The KCTCS help-desk is available online 24 hours a day, with live contact from 7 AM to 10PM. The virtual library and bookstore are also available online during regular hours.</p>
<p>Be Assured of Quality Students know that all courses and modules offered by the KCTCS have been quality assured and their instructors have been certified.</p>	<p>Students have confidence in the quality of their education.</p>	<p>Online modules and courses are subject to comprehensive and thorough quality assurance, both at the development phase and during delivery. All staff members who offer instruction online must be qualified to do so through the certification program offered by the KCTCS.</p>
<p>Be Part of a System All colleges in the Kentucky system share a common platform for learning and administration, common courses, and an approach to learning that puts the learner at the heart of all that they do. Students moving within Kentucky are assured that their previous learning is recognized.</p>	<p>Students can move seamlessly from college to college without having to learn new systems, new tools, or new technology.</p>	<p>System-wide approaches to student learning involves systematic short, medium, and long-term planning; focused leadership; collaborative approaches to service and learning delivery - all with the student needs at the centre.</p>

The Five Key Enabling Factors

In exploring with the senior leadership and key operational staff of KCTCS why these developments have occurred, we identified these factors:

1. **The KCTCS is a relatively young system.** There were 29 colleges in Kentucky prior to the establishment of KCTCS in 1996; the system has gone through a rationalization (there are now 16 colleges) and has a strong centralized administration.
2. **Courageous and focused leadership.** The KCTCS has had just one President /CEO since 1996 (Dr. Michael B. McCall) and he is determined to make the KCTCS a leader in online learning. He has enabled and empowered a team of insightful leaders to “make it happen” and they are highly engaged in this work.
3. **Common systems infrastructure.** All of the colleges use People Soft and Blackboard and the adaption and development of these systems are centrally managed and locally operated.
4. **Block grants.** The KCTCS is not funded per student by enrollment. It is allocated a block grant against a performance agreement and manages its resources accordingly. The Commission on Higher Education in Kentucky oversees all aspects of post-secondary education, but essentially leaves operational matters to the leadership of each institution
5. **Common Curriculum.** Because the 16 colleges in the KCTCS are a system rather than a collection of individual institutions, there is a common curriculum across the system, facilitating sharing, transferring, and resource allocation.

These five enablers have provided the base from which Learn On Demand and online learning in general can grow quickly in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

These materials are based on the October 2012 visit at the Kentucky Community and Technical College System in Lexington, Kentucky which included extensive briefings, demonstrations and interviews with the senior leadership and key operational staff:

- Dr. Michael B. McCall, President
- Dr. Jay K. Box, Chancellor
- Dr. Sandra L. Cook, System Director
- Joe Carrus, Enterprise Resource Planning Technical Lead for Technology Solutions
- Chun Cummings, Enterprise Resource Planning Technical Lead for Technology Solutions
- Lora Woods, Financial Reporting Database Assistant for Technology Solutions