

60-Second SoTL

Episode 55 – Online Students and the First-Year Experience

(Piano Music)

0:03

Jessie L. Moore:

Welcome to 60-Second SoTL! This week's episode is part of a short series by students in Elon University's Masters of Higher Education program. The students are exploring first-year experiences as meaningful or high-impact learning experiences. Listen for the other podcast episodes in their series wherever you subscribe to 60-Second SoTL.

(Piano Music)

0:26

Stephanie Matte:

What is an online first year experience and how are institutions supporting students in their online first year experience? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Stephanie Matte.

0:38

In "The Online First-Year Experience: Defining and Illustrating a New Reality" scholars Ryan Korstange, Jeff Hall, Jamie Holcomb, and Jasmeial Jackson compared 3 different online institutions and the components that make up their first-year experience. While the institutions were not explicitly stated within the study, the footnotes provided the names of the universities and by descriptions of type and size the anonymized institutions were able to be identified.

1:02

We know that online education has become an increasing reality for so many, especially as we move through and beyond the COVID 19 pandemic. Often, online learners are balancing work, family, and many other competing priorities for their time.

1:15

In this study, 3 different institution types were examined. Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) is a private non-profit university with a small campus population and serves more than 125,000 online learners; Middle Tennessee State University is a regional comprehensive public university and serves 12,000 online learners; and Ashford University is a private for-profit online only university with a total enrollment of 40,000 learners.

1:41

All 3 institutions offered orientation either self-paced with continued access to the content throughout the first term or a 2-week instructor led 0 credit course. Across all 3 institutions the content included in

the orientation was technical information regarding the online learning platform and how to access resources. Additionally, Ashford University's orientation also included study tips and time management tools.

2:04

Alongside the orientation programming, the authors evaluated the first-year seminar course requirement of the same 3 institutions. Across all 3 institutions the first-year seminar was an academic seminar and SNHU and Ashford University included some extended orientation content. These courses spanned 5-15 weeks in length and were taught by both full-time and adjunct faculty. The content of these courses was standardized at SNHU and Ashford University while Middle Tennessee State University allowed the faculty to create the curriculum based on interest. The last major difference between these seminars was the student population required to take the course. SNHU required all students with less than 12 credits to take the course. Middle Tennessee State University required students who tested below the institutionally determined college readiness level in 2 or more academic areas to complete the course, and Ashford University required all incoming undergraduate students to complete the course.

2:57

Throughout this case study, we understood how online institutions support students as they transition to online learning. We know that all students regardless of learning modality have a first-year experience whether institutions provide programming or not. Through this case study, we now understand the foundational elements to developing intentional programming that helps online students make sense of their experience and adjust to the reality of online higher education. To learn more about this study, see the full citation in our show notes.

3:21

(Piano Music)

Jessie Moore:

Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

(Piano Music)