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Innovation in Austere Times: Louisiana's CALL Program

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Beginning in 2007, a multi-university consortium in Louisiana offered online baccalaureate degrees in a range of social science majors through a new venture, the Center for Adult Learning in Louisiana, also known as the CALL program. Degrees in Criminal Justice, Sociology, and Family and Child Studies were among the initial offerings. The CALL program allowed adult learners to pursue their degrees online without putting their lives on hold, that is, learners did not have to quit full-time jobs or relocate families to return to college full time. Students could continue to work full time and maintain a part-time school schedule that was minimally disruptive to work and family routines as well as community obligations (Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003a; Kasworm, 2003). If circumstances permitted, CALL students could arrange to matriculate in two eight-week sessions within a regular semester and some three-week terms as well as six-week summer sessions. Students earned credits each session during the semester while only having to concentrate on one or two classes concurrently. The asynchronous online format provided students access to class information and assignments at a time and place of the student's choice.

Background and History of the CALL Program

According to estimates, approximately 73 percent of college students are now nontraditional students – attending school part time, working full time and having delayed entry or reentry into college for a variety of personal reasons (Weeber, 2016a; Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003c; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2008). Post-secondary education is needed by such students to develop their careers and to acquire knowledge and skills required by a constantly changing global society. This trend is not restricted to North America; it is a worldwide phenomenon (Lloyd, 2014; Stallings, 2002; Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003a, 2003c; Wlodkowski, 2003).

Programs catering to nontraditional students date from the early 1970s. The University of Massachusetts was a pioneer in such efforts when it began *University Without Walls* in 1971. *UWW* was an academic major whose purpose was to help nontraditional students earn a degree from a respected university. Students designed their program of study and took classes that were compatible with complicated family and work schedules. Also, students could earn credits for learning garnered through work and life experience (Colvin, 2006). Yale University, Columbia University, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, Bryn Mawr College, Wellesley College, Tufts University, Fordham University and Boston University developed similar programs to assist nontraditional students with their transitions to postsecondary education (Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, 1972; Lloyd, 2014; Weeber, 2016a).

Educators made pedagogical adjustments to support nontraditional learners when it became apparent that the diverse experiences, talents and accumulated knowledge of adult students were valuable resources for a teaching or training environment. In the eyes of these educators, it seemed reasonable that adults who committed to a time-shortened schedule, and who brought a rich background of work experiences to the table could thrive in accelerated learning programs if conditions were right (Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003b). Changes in teaching styles toward more active learning strategies were necessary, however. For example, teaching became more learner-centered. Instructors began with what exactly they wanted students to know instead of having students strain to absorb all the knowledge presented by the professor during long lecture periods. Then, teachers adapted to adult learners by using diverse methods and techniques which engaged the student and made the learning process enjoyable. Though methods varied, a problem or task centered pedagogy was considered superior to a subject matter approach. Students and professors also worked together to co-create knowledge. Work in teams was a useful strategy because it replicated the experiences of nontraditional students in the workplace. Additionally, teachers were striving to reduce the time and place restrictions for the nontraditional student that would limit that person's access to course materials and assignments; asynchronous online options quickly broke down such barriers (Weeber, 2016a).

Data suggested that there were a growing number of adults desiring to go back to college, but only under the right circumstances (Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003b). There was pent up demand for a college education that catered to working adults that would allow them to stay employed while working on a degree; the need was acute in Louisiana, where 70 percent of post-secondary students headed off to college but graduation rates were very low (Pope, 2010). The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems estimated that 609,789 adults in Louisiana started college but never finished, and another 944,968 graduated from high school but never attempted to earn a post-secondary credential (CALL, 2009). Consequently, Louisiana's percentage of adults with post-secondary degrees ranked an embarrassing 48th out of the 50 states (University of Louisiana System, 2016). This fact was of particular concern because over half of the jobs in the United States economy required postsecondary education above a high school diploma (Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl, 2013). For this reason, the Louisiana Adult Learning Task Force which preceded the development of the CALL program identified the need for significant improvements in adult educational attainment as one of the state's greatest workforce development challenges (Mingle, Chaloux, and Birkes, 2005).

Louisiana's low college graduation rate meant that, in real life terms, students' plans for their degrees were derailed by a life event - marriage, entry into the workforce, death of a parent, taking on the custodial responsibility for children

or aging parents, or fighting wars (Mingle and Birkes, 2004). Former students had the desire to return to school but did not want to take the life-wrenching step of quitting work and returning to school full time. Nor did they want to come back to traditional lectures. They wanted diverse and engaging learning techniques that would teach them skills needed by 21st-century employers (Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003b).

The program that would become known as CALL grew out of a regional initiative, the Continuum for All Louisiana Learners, which began during the 2006-2007 academic year.¹ That year, charter CALL campuses Bossier Parish Community College (BPCC) and Northwestern State University (NSU) designed programs and services to attract and serve adult learning target markets in Northwest Louisiana using an adult learning model recommended by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). That same year, four new institutions joined the statewide initiative and developed more accelerated courses and degree programs: Louisiana State University-Eunice, McNeese State University (MSU), Southeastern Louisiana University, and the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

As a charter CALL institution, BPCC was committed to creating pathways to serve the adult learner. As the school succeeded in meeting the initial demand for adult learning on its campus, word spread quickly, and the CALL program at BPCC grew rapidly. At the start in 2007, the program consisted of one staff member, two program directors, and two associate degree programs. Two years later the popularity of CALL at BPCC leveraged the creation of the Division of Accelerated Learning which housed the CALL Program. It was staffed with a Dean, three full-time faculty, and support personnel. The program expanded to three Associate's Degree programs - the Associate of Applied Science degrees offered in Business Administration, Computer Information Systems with a concentration in Software Applications, and an Associate of General Studies.

CALL charter institution Northwestern State University initiated its program for adult learners in 2006. In the ensuing two and one-half years, the university had the largest CALL enrollment in the state, 351 adult students enrolled for the Fall 2009 semester; the retention rate stood at 76 percent. Realizing that adult learners required more personal interaction as they returned to school, NSU established the Office of Adult Learning to nurture CALL students. The goals of this office were as follows: to respond to inquiries from potential or enrolled CALL students within 24 hours; to foster a team approach between their office and other academic departments on campus, and to recruit students.

¹ The next six paragraphs of this paper are based on the CALL (2009) progress report, pp. 5-13. See this report at <https://www.slideshare.net/SeanTraigle/callbookletweb> for a detailed history of the CALL program at all of the participating institutions.

Understanding the varied experience and abilities of adult learners, NSU selected the Bachelor of General Studies degree program for CALL. With minors available in many concentrations, the degree appealed to myriad interests and accommodated varying backgrounds and learning styles. All CALL courses added on the campus were required to be consistent, user-friendly, interactive, and to meet the Quality Matters (QM) rubric. As of 2009, Northwestern had added 29 CALL courses, all meeting the QM criteria.

McNeese State University was one of the second wave institutions in Louisiana to join CALL, and it was distinguished by its ability to engage and retain students as they pursued their goal of college graduation. MSU offered its first online course during the Fall semester of 1999. Since then, the Office of Electronic Learning has been the principal advocate for expanding online programs. By the time of the 2009 CALL progress report, the University offered over 115 online courses with 30% of the faculty completing online course-development training. These initial steps paved the way for the university to expand both online and adult learning endeavors. According to Spring 2009 enrollment figures, McNeese State University's adult/non-traditional student population accounted for nearly one-third of the university's total student body population.

The CALL program at McNeese formally originated during the Fall 2008 semester. The MSU program experienced a 23% increase in enrollment from Fall 2008 to Spring 2009 semester and maintained an 83% retention rate, with continued growth expected. The CALL Program gave the university an opportunity to make investments to improve and expand online and adult services. McNeese expanded prior learning assessment opportunities for adult learners to include CLEP, Departmental exams, and portfolio assessment. Importantly, the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs fully embraced the CALL concept and formed an E-Learning Task Force. Creation of the task force was a strategy by the Provost/Vice President to explore and expand the university's adult and online learning initiatives. The E-Learning Task Force was charged to research, explore and discuss where the school stands within the realm of online and adult education in Louisiana and beyond.

The importance of raising the state's college graduation rate was a goal welcomed by leaders of most all political stripes and was a priority of Bobby Jindal, Louisiana's Republican governor, and 2016 presidential candidate. In June 2010, under Jindal's leadership, the Louisiana Legislature passed The Louisiana Granting Resources and Autonomy for Diplomas (LA GRAD) Act.² The law directed the Board of Regents overseeing higher education in Louisiana to enter into six-year performance agreements with participating institutions. Schools that signed off on the agreements pledged to meet performance objectives in exchange for increased

² House Bill No. 1171, Act. No. 741, Regular Session, Louisiana Legislature, 2010.

autonomy and flexibility in performing some of the details of their educational work. The Act was important because it essentially institutionalized the goals of CALL, rendering the program less vulnerable to budget cuts, a chronic problem under Jindal's watch.

Improving graduation rates was at the top of the list of performance objectives needing attention. The Board of Regents, as specified in the Act, expected each school to improve cohort graduation rates consistent with institutional peers. Lagging behind other schools in the state, or poor performance, was no longer allowed. A corollary to this goal was to increase the percentage of program completers at all levels; this was seen as a preliminary and necessary step in the process of producing more graduates. A third important goal was to increase use of technology for distance learning. Distance learning was perceived as a cost-effective way to put students back into college with minimal disruption to their lives. Universities needed to have sufficient infrastructure to reach this goal, so some investments in time and money were crucial. Expansion of the CALL Program was an element in achieving this particular goal. If colleges were successful in meeting the goals outlined in the Act, they were allowed some freedom to adjust tuition rates without legislative approval and given some other autonomies which would make campus life easier for the institution, for example, easing restrictions on travel, contracting procedures and inventory control.

The advent of Jindal's administration in 2008 also signaled the beginning of a period of austerity for Louisiana's state colleges. Wanting educators to "do more with less," and having pledged to Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform that Louisiana would have no new taxes, the state budget for higher education in Louisiana – left unprotected in Louisiana's Constitution - was reduced 55 percent during Jindal's tenure from 2008-2016. Colleges in the state decreased payrolls, eliminated or consolidated 387 degree programs, and the burden of paying for a college education was shifted dramatically from the state to individuals and families through a series of budget cuts and tuition hikes (University of Louisiana System, 2016). Faculty pay for Louisiana professors ranked last among Southern Regional Education Board schools (SREB, 2016). Morale was understandably poor, and hundreds of faculty left the state or planned to leave, in search of higher pay and benefits as well as more stable positions (Butkus, 2017; Gluckman, 2017). Deferred maintenance costs mushroomed to \$364 million, leading to ramshackle conditions on some Louisiana college campuses (ULS, 2016). In the 2009 progress report released to the public, CALL administrators pleaded with Jindal's administration to spare the program from budget cuts, a request with which the fiscally conservative Governor mostly complied (CALL, 2009).

Program Advantages

Despite this depletion of resources, the CALL Program grew faster than expected due to the benefits offered to prospective students. A key draw of the program was its student focus.³ Each campus provided some mechanism to nurture and engage students, and to guide them through their programs. At NSU, a small two person office was established to help students advance toward graduation as well as to reach the program goals for distance learning adopted by the university. McNeese, similarly, chose the two person office model which was supplemented by subject matter advisors in the student's academic department of interest. BPCC started small but soon grew into the Division of Accelerated Learning with a Dean and full-time faculty members. Thus, increased enrollments and the growth of programs appeared to suggest that students, at least initially, were connecting with the programs and benefitting from them. Furthermore, recruiters found that the idea of a minimal disruption to one's life was also an important factor drawing students. In real life terms, it was impractical for many working adults to quit their employment entirely and return to school at a campus location to resurrect their college career. Thus, prospective students were encouraged to enroll at whichever Louisiana CALL university best met their academic needs, regardless of the school's physical location or the home base of the student. Many students directly enrolled at the school of their choice – wherever it might be physically located - and remained enrolled online there if they enjoyed the program and acquired knowledge and skills from it. In an exclusive arrangement for criminal justice majors, McNeese State University and Louisiana State University at Eunice initiated a 2+2 program where students started degree work at Eunice and then transferred to McNeese State to graduate from the program.

The CALL Program, at a more abstract, philosophical level, was about the viability of the university in rapidly changing times. Could higher education institutions continue to be relevant to the real world and a viable option for students seeking a 21st -century education? Critics, noting the massive debts that student borrowers faced after college, suggested that university degrees were not worth the effort. A diploma was no longer a decent investment of time and money toward the goal of graduation and after that, the promise of a better job (Carey, 2015; Arum and Roksa, 2011; Powers, 2017). Professors and advisers were not working hard enough to retain students; freshman dropout rates at some Louisiana schools approached or exceeded 50 percent. The CALL program hoped to neutralize at least

³This is based on anecdotal evidence from students, faculty and those staff tasked with recruiting students to the CALL program. It comes from four sources: 1) student advisee-faculty mentor meetings; 2) comments made to other students by way of the student introductions at the beginning of online courses; 3) comments from staff whose job it was to recruit students and help steer them to graduation; and (4) the 2009 CALL progress report.

a portion of such criticisms. Among the advantages of the program was that the accelerated format enabled students to graduate sooner and carry less debt; advisers, if all went well, would be able to give the personal attention necessary to shepherd students through programs (Wlodkowski, 2003).

The program targeted adult learners. Program administrators sought mature people who were self-disciplined, could follow directions and be motivated to learn. Occasionally, some students lacked the updated computer resources necessary to succeed in the program. However, most students who were fully prepared technologically for online education were able to meet faculty expectations. According to planning documents on file at McNeese State, 100 percent of recent online students earned a grade of B or higher in a capstone research assignment in Sociology that was a graduation requirement for both online and face-to-face students (Turner and Weeber, 2016). Such results were not limited to one Louisiana school. At the Loyola University of New Orleans, researchers who examined accelerated criminal justice courses with an enhanced online component or virtual classroom reported no statistically significant differences in grade distributions or student satisfaction between the eight-week accelerated course and the more traditional sixteen-week course (Weeber, 2016b; Hicks, 2014). These Louisiana results, while admittedly limited, were also reflective of some nationally observed trends. Research projects comparing the learning of younger (traditional) students enrolled in sixteen-week courses with the learning of adult students enrolled in five-week versions of the same courses suggest that accelerated courses provided levels of learning indistinguishable from or greater than those demonstrated by the younger students in conventional courses (Wlodkowski and Westover, 1999; Wlodkowski, Iturralde-Albert, and Mauldin, 2000).

The experience of Baton Rouge resident Granville Anderson, 43 years old, was fairly typical of students who embraced CALL. He was working full time with a mortgage company taking college classes off and on, and “married with two kids and a dog” when the economy spiraled, and he found himself unemployed. “I basically fell flat on my face and ended up in the hospital from all the stress,” said Anderson (Blum, 2011). Not long after that, he saw a billboard for the Louisiana CALL program and decided to give it a try. He had matriculated earlier in life at LSU and Southern University, neither of which had yet connected with the CALL program. So he entered Northwestern State University which did have a contract with CALL. Anderson graduated in December 2011 with a Bachelor’s Degree in General Studies and found work in the banking industry, all the while never having to leave Baton Rouge. He met his professors and classmates for the first time at his graduation which he attended in Natchitoches, Louisiana (Blum, 2011).

For Waylan Rhodes, the Police Chief of Little Elm, Texas, quitting his job to go back to school was not an option. “The CALL Program provides me the opportunity to continue my education with flexibility. As an adult with a full-time

job and three children, it would be nearly impossible to attend college in a traditional classroom setting with required classroom times” (CALL, 2009: 11). Chief Rhodes matriculated at McNeese State from 2008-2010, and today he is the Police Chief in Silsbee, Texas.

2009 CALL graduate Deborah Poore was hesitant at first to return to school. Even with the convenient, online format, she had some doubts. Upon graduating, however, she reflected: “Going back to school is the best thing I’ve done just for myself in years! It rejuvenated my love of learning and helped me accomplish a lifelong goal. While it is challenging, it is well worth the investment of time and money.” Ms. Poore benefited greatly from the personal attention she received from Northwestern State University. CALL staff at the school coached Poore through setting up online classes and guided her through the process of getting credit for work experience. Also, she expressed her thanks to the teachers that were interested in seeing her succeed (CALL, 2009: 9). Ms. Poore earned a Bachelor of General Studies degree from Northwestern State and is now a Business Banker at Capital One in Haughton, Louisiana.

Anderson, Rhodes, and Poore had to meet admission requirements before their matriculations. The CALL admission requirements, applied statewide at participating schools, were as follows. The student must be admitted into the university of choice as a degree-seeking student. An online application for a particular school was available on the CALL website. Second, the student must have accumulated at least 45 hours of transferable college-level credit from a regionally accredited institution; this was a requirement for the criminal justice degree only. Once enrolled, CALL students were able to take advantage of privileges granted to regularly enrolled students such as financial aid, acceptance of transfer hours earned at other colleges, and advanced placement through passing AP exams. There were opportunities to enroll as a regular student in addition to the enrollment in the CALL program. Further, CALL students were eligible for Prior Learning Assessment which allowed them to get credit for knowledge accumulated in the workplace. Students submitted portfolios to faculty who assessed the breadth and depth of knowledge acquired on the job and made decisions about the worthiness of the student’s request for academic credit (see Colvin, 2006).

Enrollment and Graduation Statistics

Table 1 highlights a summary of enrollment data from the CALL program during the first two years of its existence. As the program grew from its initial campuses, BPC and NSU, the number of inquiries increased 33.7 percent; applications rose by 29.3 percent. The total number of students enrolled grew by one-third. This modest growth reflected the effect of adding four schools in the second year, as well as a media campaign designed to attract some of the thousands of working

Table 1. Enrollment Data for All CALL Institutions, 2007-2009*

Year	Inquiries	Applications	Students Enrolled
Year 1 (2 institutions)	2,413	754	492
Year 2 (6 institutions)	3,227	975	656
% Improvement from Year 1 to Year 2	+33.7	+29.3	+33.3

*Adapted from CALL (2009) progress report.

Table 2. Enrollment and Graduation Data from the CALL Program at McNeese State University, 2008-2011, for Students Enrolled in Sociology, Criminal Justice, Family and Child Studies, and Management*

	SOCL B.A.	CJUS M.S., B.S	FCST B.A.	MGMT B.S.	Totals
Applications	27	33	50	3	113
Admissions	10	21	29	3	63
New Enrollments (Fall, 2011)	5	13	15	2	35
Total Enrollments	9	83	115	2	209

	SOCL	CJUS	FCST	MGMT	Totals
Total Registrations	40	376	561	9	986
Graduates Fall 2011	0	13	5	0	18
Total Graduates to Date	0	44	13	0	57

*Data courtesy of Dr. Helen Ware, Director of Electronic Learning, McNeese State University, Spring, 2012.

adults in Louisiana known to have a desire to return to school. Louisiana added 150 new graduates in the first two years of the program; 105 were new Bachelor's Degree graduates, and 45 were new Associate's Degree graduates (CALL, 2009).

Table 2 reveals the early activity in the CALL program at McNeese State University as of the Fall, 2011 semester, as measured by preliminary enrollment and graduation numbers. At this point, the statewide program was in the middle of its fifth academic year (McNeese's fourth year), and the data provided a snapshot of some of the prospects and challenges facing such a program in its developmental stage. Family and Child Studies, a social science field tied to the availability of jobs, was the most active major in the program with 115 students enrolled and 561 class registrations. The Criminal Justice department ranked second in each of these categories, but had more graduates, perhaps due to the feeder program at LSU-Eunice and the enrollment of other transfer students, who had to meet a minimum number of transfer hours, 45, to be admitted to the program. Sociology and Management had no graduates; Management, as a major, was just beginning its participation in CALL. Criminal Justice distinguished itself by having the most graduates, 13, for the Fall, 2011 semester. The most significant number in the table is in the lower right-hand corner, the total number of graduates, 57, over the three and a half years of the CALL program. At this point in McNeese's CALL participation, students were graduating at a rate of about 16 per year. Progress was admittedly slow, and administrators began to understand that a certain amount of time was needed for success stories to be written.

Table 3. Graduation Data for the CALL Program at McNeese State University, 2008-2016

Program	Number of Graduates
Criminal Justice (M.S., B.S.)	139
Sociology (B.A.)	131
Management (B.S.)	53
Educational Leadership (M.A.)	1
General Studies (B.G.S., A.G.S.)	9
Psychology (M.A., B.S.)	4
Business Administration (Certificate)	1
Total	338
Average Graduations Per Year	42

Table 3 shows the graduation data for all eight years of the CALL Program at McNeese State University. Criminal Justice, which had gotten off to a fast start as data in Table 2 indicated, was the most productive program with 139 graduates. Sociology, which had no graduates at all as of Fall, 2011, was now in second place with 131 graduates. In 2012, Family and Child Studies merged with Sociology and became a concentration within the Sociology degree. So Sociology as a discipline at McNeese benefitted greatly from this merger, and many of its graduates were, in fact, ones who had carried a Family and Child Studies concentration. Management, one of the four original CALL majors, came in third with 53 graduates. Educational Leadership, General Studies, Psychology, and Business Administration (Certificate Program) all began later in McNeese's CALL history but did contribute some graduates by 2016. The average number of graduations per year, 42, was well over double the rate reported at the end of the 2011 calendar year.

Discussion and Conclusion

Louisiana's CALL Program persisted, surviving the substantial budget ax wielded by Bobby Jindal, who left office in January 2016. Because of that, Granville Anderson, Waylan Rhodes, Deborah Poore, and hundreds more like them were enabled to move ahead with their educations and their lives. Elevating graduation rates turned out to be a nonpartisan goal in a politically divisive state. The program filled a niche for new revenue at a time when budget woes struck both the Louisiana state budget and the national economy, and colleges were reaching out to new markets and new constituencies in search of a fresh supply of students.

However, as Louisiana college administrators would find out, online education was not the economic lever that they had hoped for, that is, it would not alone bail the state out of its higher education budget woes. Accumulated anecdotal evidence from Presidents, Provosts, and other administrators suggested that the growth curve for online education, as measured in numbers of students, had begun to flatten out around 2011 and that this was a national trend (Online Learning Consortium, 2012, 2016). After an initial surge, enrollments in Louisiana were meeting a plateau as classes met mixed reviews from students and faculty. Students were often left feeling that they did not get as much out of online classes as they did from traditional face to face classes. Among faculty, there was some resistance to embracing online pedagogy as a legitimate way to teach students, and these potential instructors refused to teach in the program, thus shortening the pool of faculty who could teach in CALL. Again, this trend appeared to be national as a 2011 survey found that only 30.2 percent of chief academic officers believed that their faculty accepted the value and legitimacy of online education (Online Learning Consortium, 2012). The faculty that did choose to teach online in Louisiana, meanwhile, were at times hard pressed to keep up with the demand for classes, according to anecdotal evidence. Distance Education administrators in the state considered contracting, and some did contract, with outside agencies to meet some of the student demand for online courses (McNeese State University, 2011).

More positively, after the initial interest in CALL and a nationwide trend toward student interest in studying online, several departments in universities throughout Louisiana began to offer online courses or hybrid variants, and some programs offered their degree programs entirely online. Because of this growth, in 2014, information previously located on the CALL website merged into a larger and more comprehensive database named LouisianaOnline.org, which lists all of the online or hybrid degree programs offered at Louisiana colleges. As of August 2017, there were 129 such programs at two-year and technical colleges in the state while there were 280 online or hybrid programs at Louisiana's four-year colleges (Louisiana Online, 2017).

Critics of higher education contend that online education, despite making college more accessible, enabled an influx of nontraditionals into the college student market that advanced the “massification” of collegiate education. That is, it has contributed to a watered down pedagogy that is far below the model goals and expectations of elite Anglo-American colleges (Weeber, 2006). Traditionalists doubted that meaningful information could be delivered in a shortened format and that online programs stressed convenience over substance and rigor. Online programs have been tagged with derogatory names such as “McEducation” and “Drive-Thru U” (Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003a, c). Further, some academic journals published articles highlighting the problems encountered by online educators (e.g., Parsons-Pollard, Lacks and Grant, 2008), especially student dissatisfaction with online education. Nonetheless, the improvements in education put into place to accommodate nontraditional students – such as CALL - had the practical effect of making college more affordable, manageable and accessible to all classes of people (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1984; Maehl, 2000; Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003b). Associate’s Degree programs, considered to be a quick, convenient route to skills needed for workforce development in a global economy, are today almost universally offered online at community colleges. The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported that 56 percent of all undergraduate degrees earned online in 2012-2013 were Associate’s Degrees (Weeber, 2016c).

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