Perpetual Enrollment Online Courses: Advantages, Administration, and Caveats

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Abstract

Although the advent of online learning has revolutionized the delivery of education, from the average student's perspective there have been few radical innovations in the general administration of pure online courses since their inception. With some exceptions the scheduling of online courses generally aligns with the university calendar, while professors adopt a delivery timetable parallel to the classroom. Although the technology continually improves, the experience of the students regarding the calendar remains the same. An alternative is to allow students to enroll in and complete a course at almost any point in time. These courses would operate continuously without a restricted start or end date. This paper poses the advantages and design considerations for perpetual enrollment online courses, as well as caveats. This proposal will be too radical for some institutions, but first-movers will have an advantage in attracting students from an untapped market.

The Notion of Perpetual Online Courses

The advent of online learning has radically transformed the delivery of higher education (Oliver, 1999; Owstow, 1997; Powell, 2003); however, except for innovations in technology, there has been little radical change in the delivery process since its inception. As early as 2001, authors began proposing wide ranges of course conduct, to include classes that ignore the traditional academic calendar (McAlister, Rivera, & Hallam, 2001). The idea of a perpetual online course is to allow students the opportunity to enroll in a course at almost any point in time (Fekula, 2010). Not only does this delivery format give students the maximum possible scheduling flexibility, it also proposes that professors can offer the highest quality course experience, while allowing institutions to access a population of students who might otherwise never enroll (Oliver, 1999). Students value the flexibility and convenience of online courses, as well as the availability of multiple entry points during the stages of their lives (Hovermill & Crites, 2008). Perpetual online courses will multiply these advantages.

In this perpetual delivery format students can enroll in a course at the time of their choosing, as opposed to the traditional start date. An additional advantage is that students can complete a course when they choose if they find that they must temporarily cease their coursework for any reason. Not only does this type of course accommodate students with scheduling restrictions, it is also advantageous to those who experience career events which limit their ability to participate in a course (Fekula, 2010). Schedule restrictions are often seen in the lives of nontraditional and graduate students in online education (Gaytan, 2007), but perpetual courses also have the potential to enhance the experience of undergraduate students in their pursuit of prerequisite courses. The capability to enroll in a course at any point in time enables students to better structure their future curriculum when prerequisites are required.

As an example, consider the student who enrolls in a perpetual online course in March, which is outside the normal term start date in January. This shows that the student enrolled at a point in time of their choosing. Next, assume that the student enrolled in a 16-week course and after completing week four the student gets a job assignment at work that includes a great deal of travel and significantly impacts his or her ability to keep up with the weekly coursework. A perpetual online course would allow this individual to cease work in the course after week four. Now assume that the student has completed his or her work assignment after a six-week absence from the course. At this point the student reenters the course and resumes working on the lessons in week five, since he

or she left the course after completing week four. Using this method it is possible for the student to stop and restart the course a number of times until they are able to complete it.

Perpetual online courses impact not only a student's consideration to take particular courses, but they impact the student's perception of their ability to complete an entire program with one institution. This type of flexible process has significant advantages for the institution's enrollment. Further, because students can decide the times during which they are best able to engage in and complete the course, they have the potential to achieve the highest quality learning experience.

Advantages of Perpetual Online Courses

The advantages of a perpetual online course are numerous (see Table 1). Students have the advantage of knowing that they can enroll in a program or course without the fear of losing the time, effort, or money invested when they encounter unforeseen circumstances. After beginning a particular course, a student can cease work when personal or professional circumstances preclude him or her from offering their best effort. This yields not only the advantage of scheduling flexibility, but the capacity to accomplish his or her coursework when circumstances will permit their very best performance.

Table 1

Advantages of Perpetual Online Courses

Student	Professor/Course	Institution
1. Accommodate career/personal events without fear of losing invested time and effort 2. Start a program/course immediately 3. Accomplish coursework when circumstances permit the best performance 4. Accomplish prerequisites to make progress more quickly	1. Use the richness and quality of the best inputs 2. Engage students who are able to accomplish the work when they are at their very best 3. Apply individual professor expertise to particular modules 4. Apply fractional contact hours to avoid excess teaching loads 5. Experience average or smoothed enrollment levels over time 6. Have more predictable enrollment levels 7. Receive compensation directly related to workload	1. Access untapped population of students with career or schedule restrictions 2. Offer immediate enrollment in courses and programs 3. Smooth enrollment across courses instead of semesters 4. Less concern about prerequisite course offering times

Next, students can begin a new program immediately after they have been admitted. This is in contrast to waiting weeks and perhaps months until the start of another term. The student can then decide how to best structure his or her program in a way that accommodates their personal and professional life, as opposed to restructuring their life to accommodate the program. Further, perpetual online courses enable the student to more readily attain prerequisite requirements that traditionally cause progress to slow, especially in cases where students must await a new term just to begin taking prerequisites.

In addition to the general benefits associated with online courses, the perpetual course accommodates not only a dynamic daily or weekly schedule, but the dynamic career schedules of various professionals. For example, this author has had students in the military, as well as the business world whose periodic work assignments precluded these students from maintaining continual enrollment in the program. A perpetual online course would give these professionals the knowledge and comfort that they can enroll, cease work, and restart a course to which they have previously committed as soon as their calendar allows.

There are at least two main reasons why this format has the potential to allow the student to achieve the best possible learning experience. First, although students would not necessarily be enrolling in a course populated with another fixed group of new students, the perpetual online course would incorporate the best elements of the classroom experience that the professor has maintained over time. The reason that this method works is because online course platforms promote asynchronous interaction. Not only is asynchronous learning advantageous, it is sometimes a preferred method (Palloff & Pratt, 2007) because students can logon at anytime and post assignments within a window of allotted time. This means that students have more time to think about their answers in regard to what is being discussed in a given lesson and this yields a much richer learning environment than even that of the traditional in-class discussion. The professor can further enhance this process by saving and using the best student responses over time and eliminating the weakest. This approach precludes students from enrolling in weak cohorts. After 12 years of online teaching experience, this author has seen numerous online classes in which many students were exposed to the substandard or average responses of weak students. Unlike in-class courses, everyone in an online class can be required to respond to discussion questions, so one must take the good with the bad. Conversely, the potential exists to have students exposed to the thinking of other students in a class, which yields an exceptionally good learning experience when the comments come from high performing students.

The second reason that the perpetual format has the potential to yield a better learning experience is because students will be able to decide when personal or career circumstances are having an adverse impact on their ability to perform in a course. This means that they can choose to be engaged in a course only when they are able to give it their best effort. This stands in stark contrast to traditional classroom courses, as well as online courses that are either hybrid, synchronous, or even asynchronous when required assignments must be submitted within predetermined windows or time periods.

Because a perpetual course never ceases, the potential exists to design courses with the involvement of multiple professors teaching particular modules. This is advantageous because it allows professors with particular expertise to teach the lessons to which they are best suited. This also yields the potential for institutions to apply fractional contact hours to professors in order to avoid excess teaching loads, while staffing additional course offerings. This computation can account for variations in enrollment levels by assessing average enrollment overtime. This is advantageous because over a period of months enrollment levels can be smoothed in ways in which the traditional semester enrollment cannot be averaged. This also has the potential to provide more predictable enrollment levels over time. For example, if a professor were teaching weeks five through eight of a 16-week perpetual online course, the maximum possible number of students who could complete weeks five through eight would be a known quantity based upon those already having completed week four. Although the potential exists for variation in each week's enrollment, this can be averaged over time and the professor's workload and compensation can be calculated on a per student basis. In contrast to traditional online courses that are subject to attrition and courses in which enrollment varies between semesters, perpetual online courses can apply average enrollment in a meaningful way.

In the context of perpetual online courses faculty can be given stable schedules relative to average enrollment numbers. In other words, there would always be students in the course. These perpetual courses can be viewed like the summer offerings at many institutions; however, the professors would know their enrollment levels in advance. With enrolled students being at various stages of completion and limits on the maximum enrollment in a course, it is possible to estimate the course enrollment numbers months in advance.

Another advantage to both the professor and the institution is that income can be guaranteed according to the actual number of students being served. This number would be a known quantity, as opposed to the variation seen in semester enrollments over time. This author's experience over numerous years with various programs shows that of the 18 to 25 students who enroll in a cohort and take the first class, the potential exists for only 10 to 12 students to complete the program due to attrition. Although this differs in programs that do not use cohorts, it still indicates that enrollments vary among courses and might be attributable to students who have no easy option to return to the program once they have withdrawn from a course.

The third set of advantages concerns the institution. Universities can access the untapped population of students who have experienced career or personal scheduling limitations that preclude them from enrolling in higher education programs. Students who might not otherwise enroll in a program will do so because they can enroll immediately after they have been admitted. Having taught in adult learning situations for 15 years and in distance education situations for over 12 years, this author has concluded that some types of students who are seeking a degree may believe that one school is as good as the next and that cost and convenience factors play a major role in their willingness to enroll (Gaytan, 2007; Oliver, 1999; Vik & Anderson-Cruz, 2009). A student enrolling in a

program that offers perpetual courses could begin immediately and not have to wait four weeks, six weeks, eight weeks or more for the next term to begin.

Institutions also have the advantage of being able to smooth out the enrollment across courses instead of semesters. With perpetual online courses, student enrollment would not ebb and flow with the start of new terms, but can be averaged across many more time periods and up to 52 weeks per year.

Perpetual courses can also play a major role in the issue of prerequisite scheduling. Students needing prerequisite courses can be served more quickly through perpetual online courses. They can get the prerequisites done according to their need and not according to the ability of the university to schedule particular courses. This is a scheduling advantage for the institution because the school need not be concerned about when and how it will offer certain prerequisites since they will be perpetually available.

Administration of Perpetual Online Courses

A variety of administrative concerns must be accounted for with the adoption of perpetual online courses (see Table 2). The conduct of perpetual online courses requires experienced online professors who are capable and willing to engage in the asynchronous offering of online courses. This delivery format can be challenging, but the truly seasoned online professor might see little difference between a perpetual online course and the usual asynchronous course. Perhaps the biggest difference for professors is that they must review and assess the work of students engaged at different points in the course and in various lessons during a given week in which the professor traditionally would be concerned about only one lesson. While this is impossible in the classroom, it is possible in the conduct of online courses since the preparation for online teaching is done prior to the course, as opposed to the lesson (Pachnowski & Jurczyk, 2003).

Table 2
Administration of Perpetual Online Courses

Professor Requirements/Issues	Institution Issues
1. Experienced online professors 2. Enrollment variation per lesson 3. Ongoing course updates and revisions 4. Possible multiple professors in module courses 5. Possible course supervisor/director 6. Continuous grade reporting 7. Pacing of students through the course	1. Enrollment time limits 2. Periodic or ongoing grade reporting 3. Unstable enrollment at points in time, but the potential to achieved average stable enrollment 4. Possible multiple sections of courses 5. Restructure compensation on per student basis 6. Account for fractional credit hours for professors teaching modules 7. Information system costs

Professors will also be required to engage in ongoing course updates and revisions for two reasons. First, they must ensure that the best discussion sessions are maintained in each lesson, while omitting past comments made by weaker students. Second, when course updates are required these must be done while students are still enrolled in the course; however, these types of updates would cause problems only when a student has begun a course and ceased work. In this case it is possible that a student began the course with a particular text or set of materials which might be superseded by a course revision. There are at least three solutions to this issue. The first is to inform students of the possibility and let them know that the materials can become outdated if they cease work; however, this would not be a positive way accommodate students. The second is to provide a separate platform for the revised course for only newly enrolled students. This requires the professor to monitor two platforms, but should be acceptable when professors are compensated on a per student basis. The old platform could then be retired once the last student completes the course. The third alternative is to limit ongoing revisions to the student-based discussion area, and restrict major course revisions to infrequent periods and new platforms. When professors are teaching only particular modules of a course, the process of updating and revising the course is a shared and thus offers a lighter workload.

Because it can be challenging for a professor to monitor a course extending as long as 16 weeks, multiple professors could be used to teach modules throughout the course. In this case the professor would only be

responsible for continuously monitoring a fraction of the weeks in a given course. Although the professor must assess and observe a number of different lessons on a weekly basis, as those lessons are repeated the task will be less difficult for the professor. In courses with multiple professors, enrollment levels can be increased, while in courses with only one professor enrollment levels must be kept lower. In this case, if enrollment demands are high, then multiple sections of the course can be offered. Since the enrollment can vary per lesson, it might be challenging for some instructors to conduct a perpetual course, but is it still possible if enrollment levels are averaged over time.

In cases where courses are taught in modules by different professors, a course supervisor or director is needed to oversee the administration of the courses to include updates, revisions, and the reporting of student grades upon completion. Another alternative for final grading is to have the professor who conducts the last lesson do the grade reporting. Since this would occur on a continual basis the professor doing it will be more proficient at this task.

In order to control the flow of students through a particular course, the pacing can be structured to ensure that a student completes a lesson and receive grades, as applicable, prior to beginning the next lesson. This process is important to ensure that students understand the point in time at which they can exit or enter a course. It also controls the points in time when professors are required to assess students and provide feedback.

Perpetual online courses must still be subject to a maximum enrollment time for each student. In the case of institutions offering 16-week courses, a time limit of one year to complete a course might be appropriate. In cases where courses are shorter, such as eight weeks, institutions might adopt a rule of six months to fully complete a perpetual online course. Since this process also involves ongoing or periodic reporting of final course grades, institutions can consider creating separate information systems to handle perpetual online courses. But in the short term institutions could simply employ the process used when a grade of incomplete is reported in a course. When a student does not complete the course after the traditional deadline, he or she would automatically be assigned an incomplete, which would remain until they have achieved a grade or the time limit has expired.

Although perpetual online courses would likely result in seemingly unstable enrollment numbers when compared to traditional semesters, they also have the potential to offer an average enrollment number over time. Each course will have a particular maximum enrollment level after which another section of the course can be added. Unlike semester systems where the averaging of course enrollments might be meaningless from the standpoint of the professor's workload, the average workload in a perpetual online course will reflect the professor's compensation on a per student basis. Thus, instructor compensation must be restructured on a per student basis (Moscato, 2001). In some cases this might be more attractive to professors than current compensation structures. In addition, because of accreditation concerns, institutions can more accurately align student and professor contact credit hours according to the actual number of students enrolled in a perpetual online course.

Another advantage can be professor utilization. For example, if the contact hours associated with a particular course are divided by the number of instructors in the course, then instructors who normally have a full course load might be able to teach perpetual courses by having only fractions of contact hours added to their load. In turn, this might not impact or violate accreditation standards since the fractional course load could be defended as not significantly increasing student contact hours.

Finally, in the event that the institution believes it must have a separate information system to track students in perpetual online courses, then administrators must account for the cost of updating the current system or acquiring a new system.

Other Considerations

Some courses will not be suitable for perpetual online offerings. In particular, if the pedagogy relies upon students engaging in group activities, then the perpetual format as proposed here is not appropriate. In the case of capstone courses that occur at the end of the program, the perpetual format might also pose problems. However, by the end of the program, the scheduling and timing of one last course might not be as much of an issue for students when most of the program was able to accommodate their schedule.

Institutions might also differentiate the appropriateness of perpetual formats for undergraduate and graduate course offerings. For example, undergraduate courses might initially be limited to prerequisite courses that many people need in order to make progress in a particular program. In contrast, with graduate courses being fewer in

number, a given program might be able to provide all of its courses in the perpetual format. These limitations of the number of perpetual online courses offered might also reflect the numbers of professors able and willing to conduct perpetual online courses.

Students in perpetual online courses must realize that they will not normally have the potential to engage in synchronous interaction with other online students. However, they will still be required to reply to comments made by students, while recognizing that they will not necessarily receive a response from other than the professor (Liu, 2008). Given this author's online teaching experience, this should not pose a problem because students generally do not reply to comments on their answers unless it is part of the required assignment. One of the shortcomings of traditional online courses is perhaps the assumption that this kind of interaction occurs without being mandated by the professor.

A final consideration concerns the things which work well in the asynchronous environment. Quizzes and other objective assessments that are automatically scored lend themselves well to perpetual online courses. Maintaining these types of instruments could also be a shared task amongst courses involving multiple professors or modules.

Caveats

The notion of perpetual online courses is an attractive one; however, administrators must evaluate this option in light of significant challenges. There are many caveats, if not dangers associated with the idea of open-ended courses in higher education. At least the following four major concerns must be addressed when considering the implementation of perpetual online courses: (a) student self-directedness and enrollment levels, (b) faculty compensation and workload, (c) student information systems and registrar functions, and (d) financial aid.

Student Self-directedness and Enrollment Levels

The allure of an on-demand course can be a double-edged sword for students. While the course offers the ultimate in flexibility it also poses the danger that less disciplined students will drop out of a perpetual online course simply because they believe that they can return whenever they choose. Since online courses require a particular sense of self-imposed discipline not necessarily required in the traditional classroom (Alan & Seaman, 2006; Barnard, Paton & Rose, 2007; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001), students enrolled in a perpetual online course face the potential for double jeopardy. Because the course is online, a less self-directed student is already in jeopardy of not completing the course. When accompanied by the potential to cease work without penalty, these students face a second hazard. In turn, students who cease coursework have a greater potential to withdraw from the entire program. Students needing the structure of a lock-step program and the pressure of due dates as a means of encouragement to stay with the curriculum should avoid perpetual online courses.

Another issue is that enrollment is subject to supply and demand. This is a shortcoming when few students are enrolled at certain points during a course due to low demand, which is disadvantageous to the institution. At other times, demand could be high resulting in a lower supply of open seats. In either case, a mechanism is required to smooth out enrollments, which could mean restricting student enrollments to particular dates. In turn, this diminishes the attractiveness of perpetual online courses for students who want to enroll at any time. Although additional sections or instructors can be added, it is unlikely that this could be done in a responsive way to meet the immediate needs of students on a weekly basis. On the demand side, a per student compensation scheme can cause variation in instructor compensation as demand fluctuates. Average enrollment levels might be calculated, but as discussed in the following section, this proves challenging.

Faculty Compensation and Workload

Investigators have addressed faculty compensation and workload issues in online courses for a number of years initially identifying no clear patterns (Schifter, 2000) with little resolution over time (Schifter, 2004). One explanation is that online courses still seem to be perceived as a peripheral activity at some universities (Kolowich, 2009). A general trend is that faculty members seek increased compensation and a reduced workload for online course development and teaching (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). A past survey indicates that differential compensation for online professors exists, but can depend upon factors such as the rank of the faculty member and the type of course (Hickman, 2003, as cited in Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). Although this is an acknowledgment of the need for differential compensation contingent upon the type of course, this also has implications for the willingness of institutions to offer such packages. Since online faculty turnover and attrition

is costly (Betts & Sikorski, 2008), extensive training with increased compensation might be the reason why institutions avoid such compensation differences. The complexity of a perpetual online course may compound the compensation problem.

Various compensation schemes have been proposed as follow: compensation on a per student basis versus a course basis, compensation based on full-time load or overload status, course release times, the tenure-track status of faculty, graduate assistant support for online courses, and exclusive online faculty status (Moscato, 2001). As previously suggested, due to fluctuating enrollment the perpetual online course might be best served with a per student compensation model. Moscato (2001) posed three separate models: one supporting the institution's goals, one that considered the faculty member perspective, and a third proposing an overload, variable-rate compensation scheme. Each model includes fixed and variable costs, as well as breakeven points based upon student enrollment. Although Moscato quantifies compensation this way, he also concludes that this issue must be addressed on an institution-by-institution basis due to the significant differences among various institutions.

The problem addressed by Moscato (2001) exposes the difficulty of determining compensation levels in perpetual courses where multiple instructors are involved in teaching course modules. However, one possible model for compensation in this case is a fixed sum plus a variable amount based upon enrollment. The difficulty is in determining average enrollment levels over time. The compensation for the entire course must be divided by the number of professors teaching the course, which could readily yield the fixed amount of compensation. The challenge is to capture average enrollment levels over time. Ideally, each module would be the same length of time, in which case enrollment levels could be determined by the enrollment in the first module since tuition payments would be committed by that time. The other issue is that students who cease work in a course and then return in subsequent weeks will be out of sync with the professor's compensation. There is no way to directly align student enrollment in a given lesson with instructor compensation because we cannot predict when students will cease and resume work; however, the compensating factor could be that the professor realizes the payment even when the student does not complete a particular week of the course. Instructors must be amenable to the idea that they might provide a teaching service at a future date for compensation that has already been received. This should not seem too unreasonable to most people, since the idea of payment in advance for service not yet rendered is advantageous. Enrollment variance is a complicating factor in the process, but professors should also realize that the perpetual course provides a fixed paycheck on a monthly basis, in contrast to terms in which enrollment levels are uncertain. Additionally, these problems will need to be addressed as they unfold during the implementation process.

Student Information Systems and Registrar Functions

The administration of student information systems, as well as the functioning of the Registrar’s Office will be impacted by the implementation of perpetual online courses. Since these systems are traditionally structured according to academic years, semesters, terms, and sessions, some accommodations, if not significant changes must be made. Administrators will also need to account for billing, faculty scheduling, compensation, and student transcript administration. One approach to this problem is to incur the cost of changing the system to accommodate perpetual enrollment according to the recommendations of the systems analysts.

The other approach to this problem is to consider how existing administrative approaches have addressed nontraditional schedules. This author's experience in a few institutions conducting adult learning and distance education programs shows that students routinely take courses at times that are outside the traditional semester or term system. In particular, both public and private, and small and large universities exhibit room for flexibility. For example, the University of South Carolina Aiken, Central Michigan University, Bellevue University, and Brenau University conduct courses in which the administrative reporting requirements for student records and instructor compensation are not restricted by a fixed system. Variations include courses operating with the following meeting schedules: three-weekend, four-weekend, six-week, eight week, and Maymester. In each of these cases, grade reporting and instructor compensation are done outside of traditional semester system norms. Both instructors and students understand that they will not receive payments or grade reports until the point in time when the information system allows it. Although this occurs routinely during summer sessions, in the case of courses held every other weekend for three weekends, the system operates year-round and is flexible enough to allow instructor grade inputs throughout the year. The conclusion is that costly, hard infrastructure system changes might not be required when effective policies are found amenable to the stakeholders in the process. In either case, administrators will need to address these significant issues. The foregoing discussion indicates that at least the potential exists for faculty to accept various schemes and for institutions to offer them.

Financial Aid

Perhaps most difficult challenge of all in the conduct of perpetual courses is the issue of financial aid. Fifty percent of people who consider attending college cite financial reasons for not doing so; therefore, course structures must be appropriate for allowing financial aid to promote maximum enrollments (Johnner, 2006). Another research finding is that locus of control and financial aid are two significant factors explaining up to 74% of retention in online programs (Morris & Wu, 2005). So, it is clear that financial aid issues must be addressed.

While the impact on financial aid might not be as significant for graduate students in perpetual online courses, undergraduate students subject to full-time enrollment stipulations will be unable to take full advantage of perpetual courses. Although a student can still enroll in a perpetual course at the beginning of a term, he or she could not cease work without impacting their financial aid if the student is enrolled in the minimum number of hours required. One option for students in these situations is to enroll in the required 12 credit hours and leave open the potential to add an additional three-hour perpetual online course. This could be advantageous to the learner in cases when he or she is unsure of the workload at the beginning of a semester. In these cases, students can add a course if and when they feel they can handle the additional hours. So, in some sense the financial aid restrictions offer a different perspective on this issue that might not have been considered before; that view being that students initially enrolling in only 12 credit hours might increase to 15 hours when it seems appropriate.

One of the reasons that the financial aid issue poses the most difficult challenge is that policies are out of the control of the institutions since they are governed by outside agencies and ultimately legislators. In 2006 Congress lifted the 50% rule for online versus brick-and-mortar courses (EDUCAUSE, 2006) so that students in a program offering more than 50% of their courses online could be eligible for financial aid. Although policy change is a difficult direction to pursue, the softening of the policy in 2006 at least points to the possibility of policy change. Thus, institutions could lobby for changes to the calculation of full-time enrollment status in relation to the type of courses being taken by students. Given the 2006 decision, this proposal might not be unreasonable.

Financial aid issues must be addressed through policymakers, so in the short run institutions cannot accommodate perpetual online undergraduate courses when there are financial aid implications. Eventually, agencies and legislators might be convinced that it is better to allow room for open-ended enrollments for students using financial aid, than it is to have students complete a semester at a point in time only to have performed poorly or have failed. This presumes that the advantage of perpetual courses is allowing students to engage in the course when they are most capable.

Limitations

It is beyond the scope of this article to empirically assess student, faculty, and administrator support for the implementation of perpetual online courses. As with any new academic program, the constituents must be surveyed in order to determine their willingness and capability to engage. Because of the flexibility of such courses, it is likely that students will agree that these courses are a good idea; however, student interest levels could be gauged by surveys. Differential levels of interest can also be determined among graduate or undergraduate students relative to the likelihood of enrollment in perpetual online courses. This differentiation might also align with traditional versus nontraditional students in the sense that working adults are more likely to support this course format. Adults achieving effective self-directed behavior would make good use of this opportunity.

The next challenge is to garner faculty support. In this case it is likely that, similar to the inception of online courses, some faculty would support the idea, while others will be reluctant. Again, a survey of faculty similar to prior surveys done regarding online barriers and incentives to participation (McGuire, 2005) should be accomplished. The most significant challenge will be the administrative support systems, including the capital and personnel investment, as well as the effort required to generate policy change and support. Information systems personnel can be surveyed to determine if existing systems are easily modified to accommodate perpetual enrollments, as well as whether existing learning platforms can easily accommodate the routine loading and unloading of students as they enroll and complete the same course. The difficulty of tracking students over time will pose challenges for the Registrar's Office. Registrars must be surveyed to determine their willingness, as well as capability to support these types of enrollments. Financial aid office personnel must also be surveyed to determine which types of students will qualify for participation in perpetual online courses without violating financial aid rules.

Conclusion

It is likely that some professors and administrators will react negatively to the idea of perpetual online courses. People will always produce reasons not to implement new ideas, but those promoting innovation and change must argue that such objections come from an unwillingness to change old ways or adapt existing systems. Just as the delivery of courses have changed with the advent of online systems, so, too, must the processes by which these courses are delivered; the world of education is moving on (Irlbeck, 2002; Schott, Chernish, Dooley, & Lindner, 2003). Although there are many technical, administrative and policy aspects to be resolved, there is no technological reason that students and professors cannot engage in the conduct of perpetual online courses. Seasoned online professors are likely to support this option. Just as students seek the flexibility associated with online courses, so, too, will some professors seek that which is new and different. This proposal will be too radical for some institutions, but first-movers will have an advantage in attracting students from an untapped market.

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