

**U.S. VIRTUAL SCHOOL TRIAL PERIOD AND COURSE COMPLETION POLICY STUDY**

ABIGAIL GONZALES, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY & UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

DR. MICHAEL K. BARBOUR, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

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## Agenda

- Describe study
- Share findings
- Discuss collectively implications & future directions

## State of Virtual Schools in U.S.

- Explosive growth
- Student population primarily supplementary
- Variety of types of virtual schools
  - ▣ Statewide, virtual charter, Multi-district/consortia, single-district, private, for profit, & university
- Geographic location
  - ▣ High concentration Western & Southeastern states
  - ▣ Northeastern states slow adopters

## Challenges of virtual schooling

- Attrition is a significant problem (Carr, 2000; Lary, 2002; Rice, 2005)
- Multiple factors contribute to differences
- Non-learning related factors – Policy adoption
  - ▣ When we start counting students
  - ▣ How we count them

## Purpose of Study

1. Examine variation in trial period policies in US
  - Variability across types schools & geographic regions
2. Examine variation in how US virtual schools define course completions
  - Variability across types schools & geographic regions

## Significance of Study

- Is there a need to standardize?
- Cannot standardize metric without knowing current landscape
- Are policies adopted context specific?

### Review of Literature

- Researchers call for standardizing performance measures (Smith et al., 2005; Pape et al., 2006; Watson et al., 2006)
- Limited research examining two policies
- Pape et al., (2006) compared 3 v. schools
  - 2 trial periods: 3 and 5 weeks
  - 2 defined completion as 60%, 1 used “qualitative tag”
- Evidence trial periods can sift out weaker students (Ballas & Belyk, 2000; Cavanaugh, Gillan, Bosnick, Hess, & Scott, 2005; McLeod, Hughes, Brown, Choi, & Maeda, 2005)
  - When to count
- Course completion definitions affect retention rates (Pape et al., 2005; Roblyer, 2006)
  - How to count

### Methods

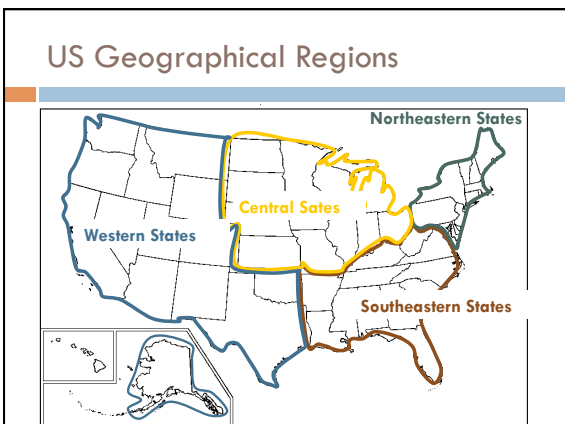
- Sampling Procedures
  - 159 US schools
  - Schools listed in
    - NACOL's Online Learning Clearinghouse List '07
    - State-led schools in Keeping Pace w/ K12 Online Learning (Watson, 2007)
- Survey Study
  - 3-question email survey w/ introduction, purpose
    - Presence of trial period
    - Length of trial period in days
    - Definition of successful course completion

### Survey email

- 4 contact attempts (2 emails, fax, phone)
- Addressed to school principal, director, or registrar
- Addressed by name when possible

### Methods

- Virtual school: state approved / regionally accredited school offering credit through DL methods including the internet (Clark, 2001)
- School type taxonomy from Cavanaugh, Barbour, and Clark 2008
- Regional Divisions
  - US Watson & Ryan 2007



### Sample by Region

Region	US Sample	US % of Sample
Central States	41	25.5
Northeastern States	18	11.2
Southeastern States	33	20.5
Western States	67	41.6
Total	159	100

### Sample by School Type

School type	US	US %
<b>Cyber Charter</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>21.1</b>
For Profit	9	5.6
Multi-district	11	6.8
Private	21	13
<b>Single – district</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>30.4</b>
<b>State – led</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14.9</b>
University – led	11	6.8
Other (Aboriginal, Unknown, etc)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100%</b>

- ### Responses & Response Rates
- 88 schools of 159 contacted
  - 55.3% response rate

### Responses by School Type

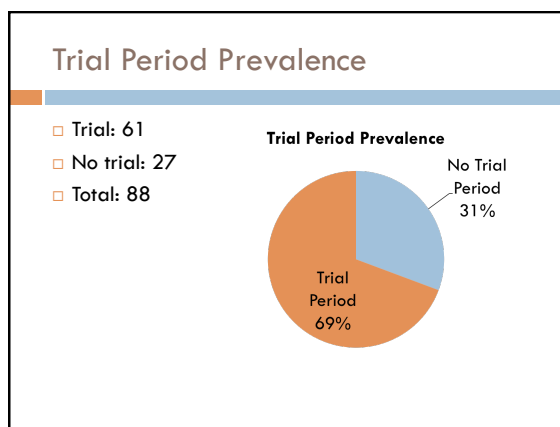
School type	US	US %
<b>Cyber Charter</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18.2</b>
For Profit	1	1.1
Multi-district	7	8.0
Private	13	14.8
<b>Single-district</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29.5</b>
<b>State – led</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19.3</b>
University – led	8	9.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Representativeness by School Type

School type	US Sample %	US Response %	% Difference
Cyber Charter	21.1	18.2	2.9
For Profit	5.6	1.1	4.5
Multi-district	6.8	8.0	-1.2
Private	13	14.8	-1.8
Single-district	30	29.5	.5
State – led	14.9	19.3	-4.4
University – led	6.8	9.1	-2.3

### Representativeness by Region

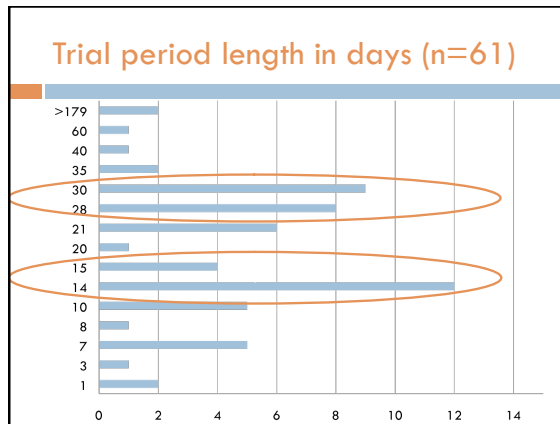
Region	US Sample %	US Response %	% Difference
Central States	25.5	26.1	-.6
Northeastern States	11.2	9.1	2.1
Southeastern States	20.5	22.7	-2.2
Western States	41.6	42	-.4



### Trail Period Length in Days

- Range: 1-185
- Mean: 19.59\*
- Instances where **event** marked end of trial period

\*w/o extreme outliers



### Trial period length variations by...

School type:

- Sig. @  $p=.05$   $df(5)$   $f3.909$ 
  - ▣ Differences: Private school vs. state-led, cyber charters, and single-district
  - ▣ Private schools had shorter trial periods compared to other schools

Geographical region:

- No significant difference

### Course Completion Definitions

- Grade irrelevant
- Grade relevant
- Other

### Course Completion Definitions where... Grade is Irrelevant

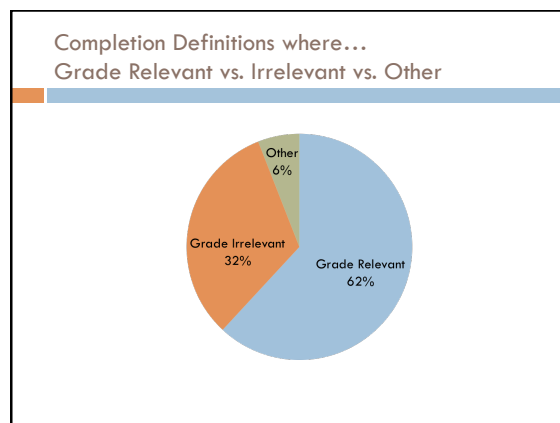
Definitions	US	US %
Remain in course	16	18.6
Complete all/majority of coursework	11	12.8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31.4%</b>

### Course Completion Definitions where... Grade is Relevant

Definitions	US	US %
Pass the course (60%)	38	44.2
Pass course & final	2	2.3
Pass w/ $\geq$ D-/64%	1	1.2
Pass w/ $\geq$ C-/70%	6	7
Pass w/ $\geq$ B-/80%	4	4.7
Pass w/ $\geq$ A-/90%	1	1.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>60.6%</b>

Course Completion Definitions where...  
Other

Definitions	US	US %
Mastery not defined by grade	1	1.2
Individual schools define completion	4	4.7
Totals	5	5.9%



Course completion variations by...

School type:

- No significant difference

Geographical region:

- No significant difference

Findings Summary

**Trial Period Presence**

- Prevalent practice ~70%

**Trial Period Length**

- Average length ~ 20 days
- Most common lengths: 2 and 4 weeks
- Regional differences: Not sig.
- School type: Sig. - private schools

Findings Summary

**Course completion definitions**

- Wide variation between and within groups
  - ▣ Remain in course

**Future Research**

- Student characteristics, experience, and reason for dropping out during trial period duration
- Comparison study with Canadian trial period and course completion policies

Implications

- Need common metrics for calculating attrition
  - ▣ Best if same as bricks-and-mortar schools
- Gather data for internal and external reporting
  - ▣ Internal = Institutional metrics
  - ▣ External = Standardized metrics
- Determining metric easier since geography and school type factor little

## Participant Discussion

- How do you determine or set your trial period policies and completion definitions?
  - What influences you?
- Should a common metric be established?
  - Who would determine the standardized metric?
  - What would be the optimal trial period/ course completion policy?
- What other metrics / policies need standardization?
- Questions?

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