

TRIAL PERIODS & COMPLETION POLICIES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VIRTUAL SCHOOLS IN
THE UNITED STATES & CANADA

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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

State of Virtual Schools in Canada

- First virtual schools in 1993
- Some activity in all provinces and territories
 - ▣ Most have extensive programs
 - ▣ Only Prince Edward Island has very little activity
- Most have combination of district-based and provincial programs

Challenges of virtual schooling

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

Purpose of Study

1. Examine variation in trial period policies in US and Canada
 - Variability across types schools & geographic regions
2. Examine variation in how US and Canadian 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)
- Course completion definitions affect retention rates (Pape et al., 2005; Roblyer, 2006)

Methods

- Sampling Procedures
 - 159 US schools
 - 117 Canadian schools
- Email survey
- 4 contact attempts (2 emails, fax, phone)

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
 - Canadian

US Geographical Regions



Canadian Geographical Regions



Sample by Region: US

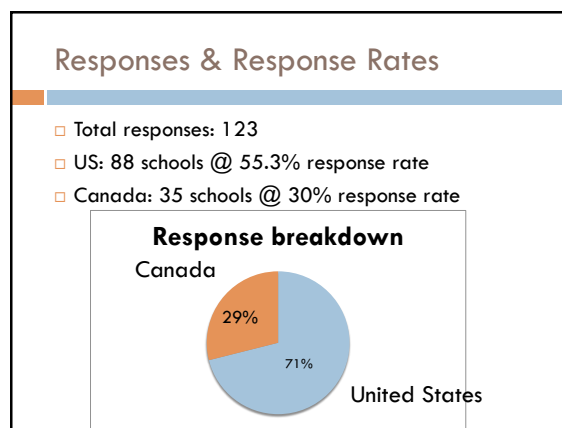
Region	US Sample	US % of Sample
Central States	41	25.5
Northeastern States	18	11.2
Southeastern States	33	20.5
Western States	67	41.6
Total	159	100

Sample by Region: Canada

Region	Canadian Sample	CA % of Sample
Atlantic	9	7.7
Central	30	25.6
Western	77	65.8
Across regions	1	.8
Total	117	100%

Sample by School Type

School type	US	US %	Canada	Canada %
Cyber Charter	34	21.1	0	0
For Profit	9	5.6	0	0
Multi-district	11	6.8	4	3.4
Private	21	13	3	2.5
Single – district	49	30.4	94	80.3
State – led	24	14.9	4	3.4
University – led	11	6.8	0	0
Other (Aboriginal, Unknown, etc)	0	0	12	10.4
Total	159	100%	117	100%



Responses by School Type

School type	US	US %	Canada	Canada %
Cyber Charter	16	18.2	0	0
For Profit	1	1.1	0	0
Multi-district	7	8.0	2	5.7
Private	13	14.8	2	5.7
Single-district	26	29.5	28	80
State – led	17	19.3	3	8.6
University – led	8	9.1	0	0
Other (Aboriginal, unknown)	0	0	0	0
Totals	88	100%	35	100%

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
Other (Aboriginal, unknown)	0	0	0

Representativeness by School Type

School type	Canadian Sample %	Canadian Response %	% Difference
Cyber Charter	0	0	0
For Profit	0	0	0
Multi-district	3.4	5.7	-2.3
Private	2.5	5.7	-3.2
Single-district	80.3	80	-.3
State – led	3.4	8.6	-5.2
University – led	0	0	0
Other (Aboriginal, unknown)	10.4	0	-10.4

Representativeness by Region

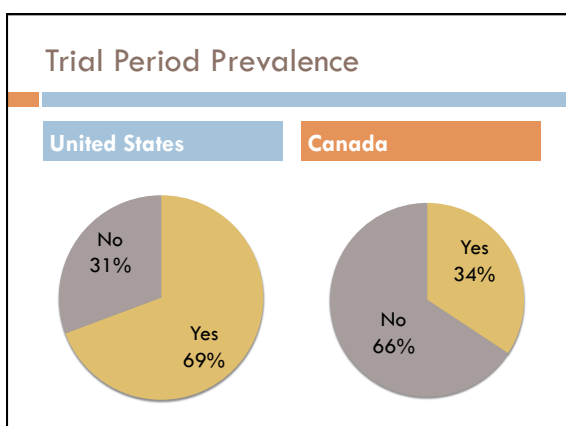
Region	US Sample %	US Response %	% Difference
Central States	25.5	26.1	-.6
Northeastern States	11.2	9.1	2.1
Southeastern States	20.5	22.7	-2.2
Western States	41.6	42	-.4

Responses by Region

Region	Canada	Canada %
Atlantic Canada	3	8.6
Central Canada	11	31.4
Western Canada	20	57.1
Total	35	100%

Representativeness by Region

Region	Canadian Sample %	Canadian Response %	% Difference
Atlantic Canada	7.7	8.6	-.9
Central Canada	25.6	31.4	-5.8
Western Canada	65.8	57.1	8.7
Across Regions	.8	0	.8

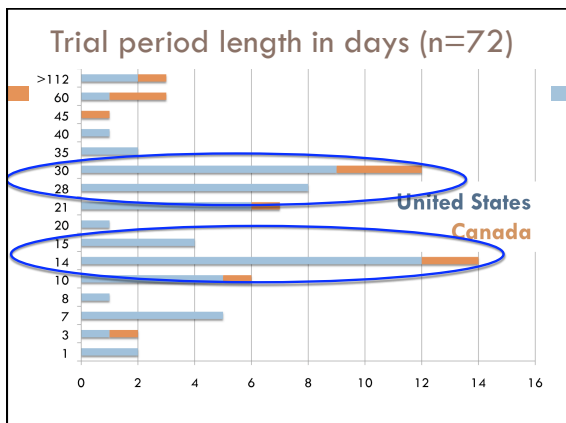


Trail Period Length

United States	Canada
Range: 1-185	Range: 3 - 112
Mean: 19.59*	Mean: 28.82*

Difference significant @ p=.05

*w/o extreme outliers



Trial period length variations by...

School type:

- US – sig. @ $p=.05$ $df(5)$ $f3.909$
 - Differences: Private school vs. state-led, cyber charters, and single-district
- Canada – No significant difference

Geographical region:

- US & Canada – No significant difference

Course Completion Definitions

- Grade irrelevant
- Grade relevant
- Other

Course Completion Definitions where... Grade is Irrelevant

Definitions	US	US %	Canada	Canada %
Remain in course 6 days beyond midterm	0	0	2	5.7
Remain in course	16	18.6	13	37.1
Complete all/majority of coursework	11	12.8	8	22.9
Totals	27	31.4%	23	65.7%

Course Completion Definitions where... Grade is Relevant

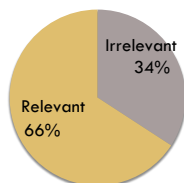
Definitions	US	US %	Canada	Canada %
Pass the course (60%)	38	44.2	12	34.3
Pass course & final	2	2.3	0	0
Pass w/ \geq D-/64%	1	1.2	0	0
Pass w/ \geq C-/70%	6	7	0	0
Pass w/ \geq B-/80%	4	4.7	0	0
Pass w/ \geq A-/90%	1	1.2	0	0
Totals	52	60.6%	12	34.3%

Course Completion Definitions where... Other

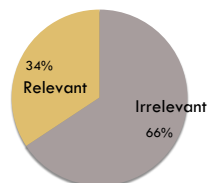
Definitions	US	US %	Canada	Canada %
Mastery not defined by grade	1	1.2	0	0
Individual schools define completion	4	4.7	0	0
Totals	5	5.9%	0	0

Completion Definitions where... Grade Relevant vs. Irrelevant

United States



Canada



Course completion variations by...

School type:

- US & Canada – No significant difference

Geographical region:

- US & Canada – No significant difference

Findings Summary

Trial Period Presence

- More prevalent in US

Trial Period Length

- Canada had longer trial periods than US
- Most common lengths were 2 and 4 weeks
- Regional differences: Not sig.
- School type: US sig. only- private schools

Findings Summary

Course completion definitions

- More stringent definition in US
 - US 66% grade relevant vs. Canada 34%
- US greater range in definitions than Canada

Implications: US and Canada

- What implications do you see this study has?
- Policy practices are inverse
- Future research explore why and what drives policy adoption

Implications: United States

- 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

Implications: Canada

- Small sample size = difficult to generalize
- Less variation so less of a problem
- US implications may apply
 - ▣ Internal/external reporting
 - ▣ Geography and school type not significant

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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