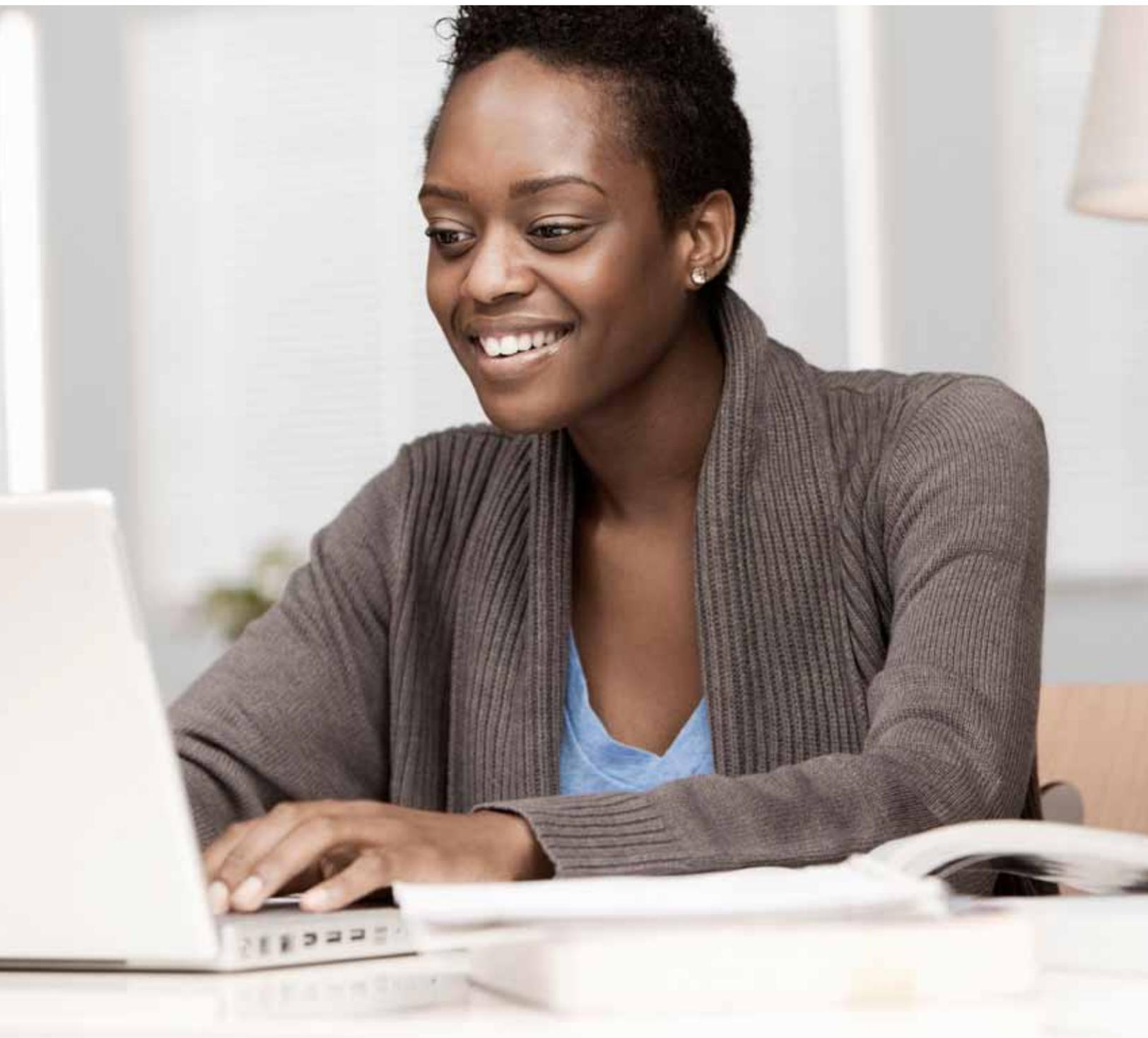


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The Online Learning Definitions Project

iNACOL
International Association for K-12 Online Learning





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Introduction

The mission of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success.

The Online Learning Definitions Project is designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of definitions related to online and blended learning in order to develop policy, practice, and an understanding of and within the field. The initiative began with a thorough literature review of existing definitions, followed by a research survey to iNACOL members and experts to ensure the efficacy of the definitions adopted.

These definitions should be implemented and monitored by each state, district or organization, as they reserve the right to apply the definitions according to the best interest of the population for which they serve.

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Definitions

Accreditation – Often a peer reviewed process to determine quality of an educational program by evaluating schools using a set of educational standards. In the United States, there are national accrediting bodies and regional accrediting bodies that are established as a peer review process for validating quality. There are governmental and non-governmental accrediting bodies. It is important to note there are reputable as well as dubious accrediting bodies, and the reputable accrediting bodies are approved by the United States Department of Education.

Asynchronous learning – Communication exchanges which occur in elapsed time between two or more people. Examples are email, online discussion forums, message boards, blogs, podcasts, etc.

At-risk student – Any student who is performing poorly academically, or who may face learning impediments not limited to socioeconomic status, behavioral and learning disabilities, and home, family, and community stresses; may also specifically refer to students in danger of not passing a course or graduating.

Attendance – Number of students actively participating in a course, school, or scheduled session

AUP (Acceptable Use Policy) – A policy that outlines the responsibilities of students, teachers, staff, and others as they use the computers, software applications, and Internet when using the school or district computers or Internet connections. AUPs also outline the consequences for failure to adhere to this policy.

Blended course – A course that combines two modes of instruction, online and face-to-face.

Blended learning – Blended learning is any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; often used synonymously with Hybrid Learning. (Horn and Staker, 2011)

Blog – As a noun, a website or a section of website used for expressing ideas and opinions of users in multiple modalities, often maintained by one leader. As a verb, maintaining or adding content to an ongoing asynchronous discussion housed at a target website.

BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education Services) – An intermediate education agency (IES) that provides New York and Colorado school districts with educational services; other states may have similar but alternatively named programs (e.g., CESA – Wisconsin; RESA – North Carolina).

Brick and mortar schools – Refers to traditional school or traditional school building, as contrasted with an online school.

Charter school – Public schools that operate under many of the same regulations and some additional unique regulations that do not apply to traditional public schools. Each school is established with a “charter” which is essentially a performance contract detailing the school’s mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment, and ways to measure success. Charter schools are accountable to their sponsor (typically state and local education agencies) to produce positive academic results and adhere to the charter contract. (Treetops School International, 2011)

Chatroom – A website or part of a website or an online service that offers communities a synchronous venue for discussing specific topics.

Competency-based learning – 1) Students advance upon mastery. 2) Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students. 3) Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students. 4) Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs. 5) Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) – The use of educational software to enhance the mastering of educational concepts or standards without the involvement of a teacher.

Content repository – A venue for saving and sharing content. A digital content repository is an online venue for saving and sharing digital content.

Course completion – The percentage of students completing a course(s) within a certain time frame. The term is used in two ways: 1) The percentage of courses that are successfully completed by a student; or 2) the percentage of students who have successfully completed a single course. When determining successful completion using either definition, a program needs to include three components: 1) which students are included in the calculation (i.e., students enrolled after the drop period ends, students enrolled at the end of the term, etc.) and the length of the drop period; 2) the length of the course itself, including whether it is fixed or flexible; and 3) the academic requirements associated with completion (i.e., whether students need to pass an exam, or pass the course itself, to be considered as having completed it).

Course enrollment – The number of students formally in a course. Course enrollment data are influenced by registration periods, duration of course (semester, year-long, or flexible schedules for competency-based credits), drop/add periods and “count” dates that determine accuracy of number of students enrolled per course, completion and/or attrition rates.

Course Management System (CMS) – The technology platform through which online courses are offered. A CMS includes software for the creation and editing of course content, communication tools, assessment tools, and other features designed to enhance access and ease of use.” (Watson & Kalmon, 2005, p. 120) See *“Learning Management System”*.

Course registration – The process of officially enrolling in a course; See *“Course enrollment”*.

Credit recovery – Refers to a student passing, and receiving credit for, a course that he/she previously attempted but did not succeed in earning academic credit towards graduation. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2010)

Cyberbullying – Involves harassing, embarrassing, or threatening a young person via the Internet, email and mobile device. Technically, cyber-bullying takes place between two or more young people. When adults are involved, it is typically referred to as cyber-harassment or cyber-stalking.

Cyber education – Largely obsolete term losing favor in online community; synonymous with Online Learning.

Cyber school – A formally constituted organization (public, private, state, charter, etc.) that offers full-time education delivered primarily over the Internet; Term used synonymously with the terms “Virtual school”, “eSchool,” and “Online School” in some state policy. See “*online school*”.

Discussion board – See “*Threaded Discussion*”.

Digital citizenship – Norms of behavior with regard to technology use, including the practice of netiquette, ethical and legal online behavior.

Digital Learning – Online or blended learning. See “*Online Learning*” and “*Blended Learning*”.

Digital literacy – Digital literacy is the ability to locate, organize, understand, evaluate, analyze and create information using technology. (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2009)

Distance education – General term for any type of educational activity in which the participants are at a distance from each other--in other words, are separated in space. They may or may not be separated in time (asynchronous vs. synchronous).

Distance education course – Any course offered at a distance. See “*Distance education*”.

Distributed learning – Any learning that allows instructor, students, and content to be located in different locations so that instruction and learning occur independent of time and place; often used synonymously with the term “Distance learning”.

Drop-out rate – The number of students who do not complete a course as a percentage of the number who enrolled.

E-course – Any course offered over the Internet.

Electronic learning (e-learning) – See “*Online Learning*”.

E-School – A formally constituted organization (public, private, state, charter, etc.) that offers full-time education delivered primarily over the Internet; term often used synonymously with the terms “Virtual school” “Online school”, and “Cyber school” in some state policy. See “*Online school*”.

E-Teacher (or e-Instructor) – See “*Online Teacher*”.

Engagement – Active participation in a course to promote retention and understanding for deeper learning.

Enrollment – See “*Course enrollment*”.

Face-to-face – When two or more people meet in person.

Filter (Browsers) – Software that restricts access to designated websites.

For-profit company – A company that is incorporated under the law for the profit of its owners.

Full-time equivalent – The number of students at a given institution if every student were full time, based on the local definition of full time. (Northwest Educational Technology Consortium, 2005)

Full-time online instructor – Any course instructor who carries a full load, as defined locally, by contract or policy.

Full-time online program – Full-time online schools, also called cyberschools, work with students who are enrolled primarily (often only) in the online school. Cyberschools typically are responsible for their students' scores on state assessments required by No Child Left Behind, which is the primary way in which student outcomes, and school performance, are measured. In some states most full-time online schools are charter schools. (Watson, et. al, 2010)

Full-time online student – A student who takes all his/her courses over the Internet.

Highly Qualified Teacher – The current Federal definition of a “highly qualified teacher” is one who is fully certified and/or licensed by the state; holds at least a Bachelor’s degree from a four-year institution; and demonstrates competence in each core academic subject area in which he or she teaches. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)

Home schools/Home schooling – The formal instruction of children in their homes instead of in a school. (Unger, 1996) The differences between home schooling and full-time virtual schooling include: 1) Virtual schools’ students may be at home, but the students are enrolled in a public school that follows the state mandated academic standards (home school students choose whichever standards they wish); 2) Virtual school students must take all federal and state mandated tests, as they are public school students with accountability requirements (home school students need not take any state or federal tests); 3) Virtual school students have a highly qualified teacher licensed teaching them online and interact with the teacher on instruction and assessments via Internet technology (home school students do not have to have licensed teachers providing instruction, or follow any mandated by state or federal highly qualified teacher requirements).

Home-grown content – Content developed by a teacher, school, or district for use in instruction, as compared to content developed by outside companies or other vendors.

Hybrid learning – See “Blended learning”.

Independent study – An alternative to classroom instruction which provides the student with a choice of ways to learn content under the guidance of a teacher. (California Department of Education, 2000)

Instructional designer – Someone who uses the principles of learning, pedagogy, and content frameworks to create teaching materials and experiences for online courses.

Instructional media – The materials that teachers use to teach and students use to learn (for example, printed text, digitized text, software, speech, images).

Internet – A vast computer network connecting users worldwide via TCP/IP protocol.

Intranet – A private network using the Internet within an enterprise for authorized users.

Learning Management System (LMS) – The technology platform through which students’ access online courses. A LMS generally includes software for creating and editing course content, communication tools, assessment tools, and other features for managing the course. (Northwest Educational Technology Consortium, 2005) See *“Course Management System”*.

Learning object – An electronic media resource (or digital file; or collection of files) targeting a lesson objective, standard, or a lesson concept, that can be used and reused for instructional purposes.

Learning object repository – A space for storing digital learning resources. (e-learning Ontario, 2007)

Licensed content – Content with restricted usage and only available with permission, generally for a fee.

Mobility Rate – A measure of student movement in and out of a school or district during one academic year.

Multi-district virtual high school – An online program administered by, and serving, multiple districts, often organized in a formal consortium. (Not to be confused with a district program that serves students from many schools.) (Watson & Kalmon, 2005, p.121)

Non-profit organization – An entity legally incorporated under federal tax rules that require earned revenue to be used in the operation of the organization.

Online course – Any course offered over the Internet.

Online course provider – An organization that provides courses that are offered over the Internet.

Online degree program – A program that offers degrees using courses delivered over the Internet.

Online learning – Education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet. (Watson & Kalmon, 2005) The term does not include printed-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component. (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development Policy and Program Studies Service, 2010) Used interchangeably with Virtual learning, Cyber learning, e-learning.

Online learning program – An online learning program is an organized offering of courses delivered primarily over the Internet.

Online learning resources – Any digital material used for supporting student learning that is delivered in multiple delivery models.

Online professional development – Professional development delivered over the Internet.

Online school – A formally constituted organization (public, private, state, charter, etc.) that offers full-time education delivered primarily over the Internet.



Online teacher (or instructor) – The person who holds the appropriate teaching certification and is responsible for instruction in an online course.

Online teaching endorsement – Supplemental state licensing that approves a teacher to teach online.

Online teaching reciprocity – The ability of a teacher who is considered qualified to teach online in one state also to teach in another state without additional requirements or assessments.

Online tutor – Someone who supports student learning in specific content areas over the Internet.

Online facilitator – This term is used in two ways. 1) For part-time online programs is the person working face-to-face with the online student to monitor student progress and attendance, providing training, assist in motivating the student, etc. The person may or may not be a certified teacher but works in conjunction with the certified online teacher. 2) Used interchangeably with online teacher or online educator.

Pace/pacing – The speed or time allotted with which a teacher or student moves through a course.

Part-time online program – An online program that allows students to take less than a full load of online courses, as defined by local or state legal entities. Sometimes refers to a “supplemental online program”.

Part-time online student – A student who does not take a full load of online courses.

Part-time online teacher (instructor) – Teacher or instructor who has a partial online course load.

Quality standards – A set of benchmarks or indicators for courses, teaching, professional development, programs, etc., developed by a governing body, association, or accrediting organization.

Seat-time – The amount of instructional time to earn a credit (Carnegie Unit) and in online learning is indicated by amount of time engaged in coursework.

Self-paced – Online courses in which students work at their own pace within an overall timeframe.

State virtual schools – Virtual schools created by legislation or by a state-level agency, and/or administered by a state education agency, and/or funded by a state appropriation or grant for the purpose of providing online learning opportunities across the state. (They may also receive federal or private foundation grants, and often charge course fees to help cover their costs.) (Watson, et. al, 2010)

Student mentor – An adult who maintains a one-to-one relationship with a student over time and provides consistent instructional support and guidance towards academic achievement.

Student-teacher ratio – The number of students in comparison to the number of teachers provided for each online course.

Synchronous learning – Online learning in which the participants interact at the same time and in the same space.

Tag (or meta-tag) – A coding statement for learning objects within a curriculum that describes the contents (using keywords, descriptive terms) enabling searches.

Teacher of record – In many online courses this is the same as the online teacher. However in some states, when the online teacher is not an employee of the student's school, educational code requires the teacher of record to be from the student's school. In this case, it is the person who holds the appropriate teaching certification and is responsible for certifying the final grade for the course.

Technology facilitator – This person provides training and support for technology and administrative applications.

Threaded Discussion – A forum that includes a running commentary of messages used by a group to facilitate asynchronous online discussions.

Universal accessibility – A requirement by law, ADA Section 508, that learning materials, including interfaces, images, sounds, multimedia elements, and all other forms of information, must be made available for use by anyone, regardless of disability. (Foothill Global Access, 2008)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) – A framework for the design of online learning objects and environments ensuring accessibility for all users.

Video conferencing – Interactive communication technologies which allow two or more locations to interact via two-way video and audio transmissions simultaneously.

Virtual class – A group of students assigned to the same online course.

Virtual education – See *"online learning"*.

Virtual school – See *"Online School"*.

Web-based education – See *"online learning"*.

Webinar – A seminar which is conducted over the World Wide Web. It is a type of web conferencing. A webinar is "live" in the sense that information is conveyed according to an agenda, with a starting and ending time. (Joy, 2004, p. 15)

Wiki – A restricted or open website developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to create, add and edit content.

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