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# Crynoldebau / abstracts

Engaging the Digital Student with an (almost) Exemplary Practice

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The increasing number of student enrolments onto distance learning programs speaks volumes to the importance of this method of instructional delivery. However, despite increased student enrolment, student withdrawal rates associated with distance learning are also higher when compared to traditional face-to-face tuition by as much as 10 – 20%. One theory to explain this is that adult learners may only register for a course in order to obtain specific knowledge, whilst ignoring accreditation, and will, therefore drop the course once that knowledge has been acquired. In order to improve student retention levels in distance education programs, distance learning providers need to assist students in making the adjustment to learning at a distance by engaging and enhancing student satisfaction for the duration of the module. One method that might achieve this is to comply with “a good practice” as set out by the Exemplary Course Award. A good practice promotes the use of technology for knowledge dissemination, accommodates students with disabilities and respects the diverse talents and ways of learning for individual students, amongst other principles. This project aimed to systematically explore if an exemplary Blackboard practice can enhance student satisfaction with the wider goal of increasing student retention with online distance learning education. Our results suggest that an exemplary practice can indeed increase student satisfaction with online learning and that all themes covered by the ECA assessment are equally important. Furthermore, the self-evaluation employed by the ECA does present a valuable tool for all pedagogues to assess their current Blackboard practice.