Introduction

In response to the need for critical dialogue and examination of online education, the CCCS Working Group: Christian Higher Education Online (CHEO) promoted an interdisciplinary dialogue about online education, Christian higher education, and the intersection of the two. The dialogue was informed by: scholarly literature; popular periodicals; online media; perspectives, experiences and interviews of current online instructors; and first-hand experiences with online learning. The following sections will report the recurring themes that emerged from our discussions and share some suggestions for the Calvin community as it moves forward with online education.

Rationale

Initially, the group probed the rationale for examining Christian higher education online. First, the urgency for exploration was evident in the discussion and debate about the growing presence of online education not only in the media but here on Calvin’s campus as well. The MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) mania evident in popular media was inescapable in the past year and provoked discussions across campus including multiple Calvin Matters listserv postings about online education at Calvin. Second, data on Calvin student transfer credits revealed that enrollment in online courses from other institutions continues to rise. This trend is reflective of national data that suggests enrollment in online education will continue to increase at all higher education institutions. Third, we noted that Calvin is already a part of the online education trend, embarking on at least three ventures that include online education: 1) the undergraduate online pilot,1 2) the current use of online courses in Calvin’s graduate teacher education program,2 and 3) Calvin Theological Seminary’s online degree program.3 Fourth, growing stereotypes and assumptions about the varying models of online education need to be analyzed and challenged. Online education models vary greatly in terms of pedagogy, student interaction, delivery, structure, and more; therefore we cannot continue to maintain a narrow, restricted view of online education. On the other hand, before we proceed too far in adopting online programs, we as a body of believers committed to intentional Christian higher education must critically

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1 http://www.calvin.edu/academic/online/
2 http://www.calvin.edu/academic/graduate_studies/
3 http://calvinseminary.edu/academics/distance-learning/
examine and, informed by Christian scholarship, purposefully shape the ways in which we adopt online education.

Theme One: Definitions
The group found it important to examine the complexity of the definition of online education, and the narrow public perceptions about online education. Online education has become a nebulous term, used to encapsulate varying online structures and pedagogies ranging from MOOCs to synchronous virtual high school courses. In higher education, we must resist the current discourse that amalgamates all online endeavors into a single construct and instead promote a discourse that specifically names and distinguishes online education endeavors. Until we do so, we perpetuate inaccurate and erroneous assumptions about the possibilities and pitfalls of all models of online education. As the group examined various online education applications, we recognized the variety of factors that must be acknowledged. For example, online courses may vary based on the primary goals (content delivery, collaborative learning, faith formation, etc.), the proximity of the students and instructors, the synchronous or asynchronous nature of delivery, the technology utilized, and the number of students in the course, to name a few. The variations in online courses were evident as guest speakers shared their experiences teaching online with our working group. No course could be defined using a singular and narrow definition of online education.

As a result, we believe Calvin administrators, faculty, and staff must begin to clarify the definitions surrounding online education as we discuss various online programs and future initiatives. Definitional clarifications will aid scholarly pedagogical consideration of specific online education endeavors. Given the scope of this final report, we will not propose finalized definitions, but for further exploration encourage a close examination of the resources provided in the bibliography as well as the list of scenarios we engaged in our definitional journey.

Theme Two: Purpose and Goals
The second overarching theme that emerged centered around purpose and goals. The group’s readings of Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) and Goodfellow (2007) set the stage for asking deep questions about the goals of online education. Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt’s (2006) examination of distance education situated online education within its historical context and highlighted the importance of articulating goals. Goodfellow’s (2007) account of the British Open University raised questions about how to actualize goals. These readings triggered questions such as, “what is the goal of offering online teaching and learning opportunities?”, but also backed into the more specific questions, “what is the goal of Christian higher education?” and “what might be the goals of online education at Calvin College?” Readings, videos, and guest speakers throughout the year continued to propel this discussion. Some of the most prevalent goals we discussed centered around the themes of democratization, market share, and student formation. An institution may privilege specific primary goals, but multiple underlying subgoals and factors may either support or impede progress toward the primary goals. In the following paragraphs, we provide examples of specific goals in online education and offer considerations for Calvin College.

4 https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BzBN8ld1MvlzZzNhMiIscWhG WKU/edit?usp=sharing
Online education initiatives such as the Open University (Goodfellow, 2007), for example, founded on principles of democratization, primarily seek to open access to higher education for students commonly marginalized from those opportunities. In a similar light, we are excited about the possibilities for Calvin to embrace online education for purposes of democratization and social justice. Calvin has rich, well-developed course offerings that could be made accessible to a broader student body, using the MOOC model. Yet, in our discussions we recognized that community and cultural responsibility are essential components of a Calvin education. Calvin’s Expanded Mission Statement and From Every Nation Statement (2004) emphasize that Calvin seeks to build intentional learning communities as part of its educational model and also strives to develop faculty, staff, and students who are responsive to and learn from cultural beliefs, knowledge, customs, and practices that are both similar to and different from their own. Given these considerations, we believe a just and sustainable possibility for reaching goals of democratization and social justice might best be achieved in partnerships with Christian higher education institutions nationally or internationally. Joint partnerships provide greater capacity for richness, breadth and depth while providing on-the-ground support that enhances the capacity for community building and culturally responsive education. We must ask not only what we can offer, but what we can receive and learn from such Christian partnerships.

Some higher education institutions, like University of Phoenix, privilege market share and profit as their primary goals. They seek to commodify education to make it affordable yet still profitable. They standardize courses, instruction, and assessment, focusing on scaling up in order to reach a larger portion of the higher education market. Other higher education institutions are adopting online courses and programs within their larger programs in response to student demand and in hopes of attracting greater market share (Blumenstyk, 2012). Even though Calvin College may not adopt market share as its primary goal, our history has taught us that we must still be attuned to the market forces. Given that multiple institutions have targeted skill-based courses as well-suited for online standardization, Calvin might want to look more carefully at such courses as candidates for online delivery. Alternatively, courses requiring more responsive interaction between faculty and students may not be a target for other institutions because they are time intensive, require lower enrollments, and fail to offer fiscal paybacks, but Calvin may want to explore these as an opportunity to meet alternative goals like reaching a particular market (e.g., international graduate students or dual-enrollment high school students). Calvin will need to pay attention to how market forces are driving the definitions and suppositions of higher education and then carefully delineate goals and vision for education.

For Christian institutions, formation is a significant goal. Online education offers novel opportunities for supporting student formation. For example, Lowe (2012) at Erskine Theological Seminary recognizes that communities extend beyond the cohort of individuals within a course or institution, and draws upon the communities of families, friends, and colleagues that already exist for students beyond the classroom walls. By drawing upon these communities, students engage in deeper and more meaningful learning experiences that foster spiritual formation. Instead of viewing online education as isolating, we can instead examine novel possibilities for expanding social communities “in which the Spirit operates to accomplish transformation into the fullness of Christ” (Lowe, 2012, p. 58). Given the nature of Calvin’s present residential college experience, many of our group discussions centered around the context of formation with concern about whether online environments

5 Expanded Mission Statement URL: http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/mission/;
From Every Nation Statement URL: http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/multicultural/fen/
supported formation the way that face-to-face environments do. However, ultimately we recognized that online environments can provide rich, intentional communities where formation occurs. We challenge Calvin to explore innovative ways to think about student formation within an online context.

**Theme Three: Lessons Learned**

**Inequities Persist in Online Environments**

Important lessons emerged from our readings and discussions around online education. First, inequities persist and may in fact be exacerbated in online environments. Multiple readings, videos, and discussions throughout the working group drew attention to the fact that culture, race, ability, and economic status do not simply disappear in online or distance education. Western modes of discourses and ideologies have largely shaped participation structures, modes of dialogue, and social norms on the Internet to the extent that many student groups are marginalized including: students from non-Western cultures, minority students from Western cultures, students from lower socioeconomic groups, and students with disabilities (McCormick, 2007). Even institutions with explicit goals of equal access and increased participation of marginalized student communities have struggled to retain students of color and low socio-economic status (Goodfellow, 2007). Providing access in terms of technologies (computer, Internet access, etc.) does not necessarily equate to successful participation in online education. Therefore, any online initiatives at Calvin must specifically consider and implement culturally-responsive pedagogies and intentionally designed culturally-responsive support systems for marginalized students. We suggest that Calvin assess retention and ask not only who excels in online courses, but who drops out and why. We also suggest Calvin carefully consider what culture is being exported in delivering online courses for a broader audience.

**Current Online Programs Offer Valuable Insights**

We can gain valuable insight into online endeavors by examining the online programs already underway at Calvin. Discussions throughout the year with our faculty in online undergraduate courses, Graduate Education courses, and the online M.Div. Program at Calvin Seminary revealed a wealth of information about the realities, pitfalls, and opportunities of online education here at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary. Furthermore, the working group discussions brought light to the fact that several face-to-face undergraduate courses at Calvin also employ online components for a variety of pedagogical purposes. The faculty members that teach these hybrid courses, combining computer-mediated, online pedagogies with face-to-face delivery, also have valuable insights to share about online education. We recommend Calvin draw upon the knowledge and experience of those already involved in online and hybrid educational offerings as online education development continues.

**Rethinking Pedagogy**

Pedagogical shifts have become part of the ongoing discussion of online education. Online environments demand different pedagogical decisions than face-to-face environments. This theme played out throughout the year as we read about online instructional practices and we invited guests to speak of their experiences. For instance, Davidson (2012), a professor at Duke, reported how revamping her course for participatory,
collaborative learning required her to rethink her pedagogy and her goals for student learning. Andrew Vanden Heuvel, a physics instructor for Calvin’s online pilot, shared unique new opportunities for reconceptualizing pedagogy through online course design, implementation and assessment. Chad Engbers, a Calvin English professor teaching literature in the online pilot, reported that the process of designing and teaching a course online forced him to think about his pedagogy in his face-to-face classes as well. Al Boerema, professor in Calvin’s Graduate Education Program, shared the reality of using online video chat software to bring educational leaders from across the world into class discussions. All of the speakers shared promises of pedagogy in online environments, but also discussed constraints and concerns about some of the existing online pedagogical practices. In the end, the ultimate excitement about online education centered on the opportunity to once again begin an intentional discussion about pedagogy in higher education classrooms, whether in online or face-to-face environments. We suggest Calvin College take the opportunity to encourage intentional, thoughtful discussions and decisions around pedagogy in order to promote a better teaching faculty and richer, deeper learning for students in terms of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. We also recommend that Calvin provide resource support for faculty and instructors providing online instruction, including substantive time allotments and seminar participation, in recognition of the rethinking and adjusting required for online environments. Good online pedagogy cannot be developed on the cheap; it requires substantive investments in time, resources, and institutional support.

**Structuring Up**

The working groups discussions revealed that the information to be gained from Calvin’s current online endeavors has been largely isolated within institutional silos (departments, programs, etc.) and has not been shared widely despite the cross-disciplinary nature of many of the online programs and courses. We highly recommend tapping into the current online endeavors to share practices, questions, and propositions for future online endeavors across disciplines, departments, programs, and the college as a whole. Furthermore, we recommend that Calvin examine the place of online course and programs within the current institutional structure and move toward establishing a department or center of online instruction that functions with faculty oversight and governance. We also recommend Calvin examine the wide variability in processes and resources for course development, assessment, and support. The processes and procedures are vague at best across the current online initiatives. As we move forward with our current online offerings and any potential future online initiatives, we suggest clarifying processes and procedures for developing new online courses, transitioning current face-to-face courses to online formats, and supporting online courses.

**Resisting the MOOC Frenzy**

It’s easy to get drawn into the frenzy around Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and online course offerings. We are just seeing the first broad iteration of MOOCs and must recognize that many will probably not continue to be provided tuition free. A handful of online consortiums are already beginning to charge tuition as students seek to gain credits from the online offerings. Although MOOC courses boast large and diverse student enrollments, only a small percentage of course participants actually complete courses (Mangan, 2012). There remain significant questions about MOOCs related to pedagogy, access, student support, assessment, and identity-verification to name a few. In
the past year MOOCs have become synonymous with online education, when in fact there are multiple ways of providing online education opportunities. What we should be asking is what Calvin has to offer to a broader national and international audience and what we can gain from such opportunities. Only then should we consider the type of online delivery that will support those goals, whether a MOOC or some other online offering. We suggest asking, for example, how such courses might strengthen relationships between national and international Christian communities and institutions as well as support the work of the Church internationally.

Contributing to the Conversation
Given the extent of online education in the higher education landscape, there is very little substantive conversation about online education in Christian higher education. Reviews of literature reveal more practical literature addressing “how,” than conceptual literature addressing “why” and “to what end” based in a Kingdom vision. There is also a lack of dialogue about how the digital technologies that enable online education are changing the ways of thinking, being, and doing in the 21st century. We cannot simply appropriate the current cultural practices of online education without deep reflection and discernment about how the technology is changing us or how to harness the technology to reform, rather than just reproduce, society. We claim every square inch for the Kingdom of God, whether in this world or the “virtual world” so we must be critically asking about and articulating the opportunities and risks of online education in light of a Kingdom vision. The issues that are not being discussed need to be brought to the fore. We recommend that Calvin become part of, if not a leader, in the conversation around Christian online higher education.

Conclusion
In conclusion, work needs to continue on thoughtful, deep discussions around Christian higher education online. The scholarly literature, popular media, online moguls and entrepreneurs offer unique insights into online education, but there is little that addresses the potentials and pitfalls of online education and Christian higher education institutions. Over the past year our group has sought to open the discussion to begin an intentional examination of online education here at Calvin. We recognize the substantive amount of work that must be done towards this end and have outlined several areas for further consideration. We hope the discussion deepens as more voices join in seeking to work in this area of God’s Kingdom more faithfully. We see great promise in how thinking about online Christian higher education is forcing us to once again consider the primary questions of the purpose and place of Christian higher education.

Annotated Bibliography
Davidson examines shifting her personal pedagogy to transform learning for the new digital age. She developed a pilot course that privileged participatory, collaborative
learning, where student interest and research guided the course and technology supported learning. Ultimately, Davidson reflects on this transformation of her classroom and her teaching with implications for the future.


Hunter argues for “faithful presence,” a paradigm of what it means to be Christian in the world. Faithful presence seeks to honor the Creator through loving obedience to God and love of neighbor, not through seeking to change the world. Hunter envisions faithful presence as the word of God becoming flesh within believers. Paradoxically, in living out faithful presence as individuals and through creative, constructive societal structures, the world is changed to align with the Kingdom of God.


Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt trace the history of distance education in terms of democratization, liberal education, and educational quality with the goal of exposing the issues involved in distance education that similarly require attention in the examination of online learning possibilities. They then outline three current visions for online education: the presentational view; the performance-tutoring view, and the epistemic-engagement view.


Brave New Classrooms presents a critical examination of e-learning and higher education. The authors examine both positive and negative discourses surrounding e-learning within current economic, institutional, and political contexts. They describe the rise of a resistance discourse about e-learning, identify specific points of resistance, and suggest pedagogical implications. The reporting of research findings on the Open University offer important insights into who is accessing and benefiting from online education.


Maddix, Estep, & Lowe present a limited overview of theoretical and theological foundations of online education followed by a more substantial examination of practical guidelines for supporting online educations. They explore pedagogical best
practices and suggestions for developing and assessing online programs and courses.

This issue highlights several examples of how technology is changing teaching and scholarship in higher education. Mangan shares through statistics and stories who is taking advantage of free online courses. DeMillo aggressively argues that more technology is not the answer for higher education, citing the business experiences of Borders Books and Montgomery Wards, but predicts different uses of technology for learning will ensure the future for some higher education stakeholders.

Blumenstyk, G. (2012). One business school is itself a case study on the economics of online education.
Mangan, K. (2012). MOOC mania (Also titled Brave New World)
Stimpson, C. (2012). On becoming a Phoenix
Graham, G. (2012) How the embrace of MOOC’s could hurt middle America
This issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education features multiple authors giving an overview of the state of higher education online instruction. Mangan outlines the history and proliferation of massive open online courses (MOOCs) and their varied formats and sponsors, as well as issues involved in teaching and learning in large classes. Stimpson shares her experience taking a University of Phoenix online five-week creative writing course. Graham sounds a warning about MOOCs and how their proliferation might eliminate face-to-face possibilities, with their mentoring and responsiveness, for all but the elite.

Ripley illustrates with individual stories and university stories and statistics how newer technologies for online courses are changing who is taking courses and why they are taking them. She paints a picture of higher education as priced out of the range of many, with free or low-cost online options offering an affordable option. Online and face-to-face physics courses are contrasted, focusing on pedagogies that address learning needs.

The co-founder of Wikipedia, Sanger analyzes three current ideas about the Internet and education: memorization, collaborative learning, and group co-constructed knowledge. He cautions that given the current trends in the use of the Internet, we
may be eliminating “liberally educated, creative thinkers” and that we must call into question current trends in education.


**Media and Online Resources**


In this video, Khan details the establishment of the online education platform Khan Academy. He examines how a simple mission to support his cousins through online video tutorials turned into a worldwide non-profit online education powerhouse with over 4,000 online educational video tutorials. Khan then examines the implications for pedagogy in the classroom.


Mitra examines the very real problem that teachers and classrooms do not exist where they are needed most. He shares the results of his research including his "hole-in-the-wall" experiments where computers were placed in neighborhoods of children who would never otherwise receive an education. The children then self-initiated exploration with the computers and Internet that led to dramatic learning outcomes. Mitra uses the research to examine ways we might revolutionize education throughout the world.


The Pew Research Center presents extensive data about American students that are coming of age in the digital age, collectively coined the millennials. The research examines millennial behaviors, values, and opinions and compares them to members of the GenX, the Boomers, and the Silent generation. The Pew Research website provides reports, data analysis tools, research questions, and more.