

Report: Half of High School Classes Could Be Online by 2019

by Dave Nagel

Low-cost delivery and tailored learning opportunities could drive up to half of all high school courses online by 2019, according to a report from researchers that's set to appear in the summer issue of [Education Next](#), published out of the [Hoover Institution](#), the public policy research center at Stanford University.

The researchers--Clayton M. Christensen, Robert and Jane Cizik Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, and Michael B. Horn, Executive Director of Education at the [Innosight Institute](#)--said that while only about 1 percent of courses in 2007 were online, this figure represents a 22-fold increase from 2000 and should grow to 10 percent within six years and to about 50 percent by 2019.

Two of the major reasons for this are that online course delivery is cheap compared with the "current public education model"-- \$200 to \$600 per course--and that online courses can offer things to students that traditional schools clearly can't. Viz:

- A broader curriculum;
- AP classes (**note:** as of 2003, a third of schools do not offer AP classes, and many that do offer the classes only offer "a fraction of the 34 courses for which AP exams are available");
- More "customized" learning opportunities;
- Remediation where none is available in the traditional school;
- Continuing education for dropouts; and
- Additional support for homeschooled students.

In these ways, the researchers pointed out, online schools are not competing with traditional schools, but complementing them or supplementing them. Christiansen and Horn referred to this approach as "disruptive innovation."

They explained: "A disruptive innovation extends its benefits to people who, for one reason or another, are unable to consume the original product [i.e., a traditional school]. Disruptive innovations tend to be simpler and more affordable than existing products. This allows them to take root in simple, undemanding applications within a new market or arena of competition. Disruptions rely on asymmetric motivation, in this case, taking on courses that the traditional system is relieved not to do and happy to hand off."

The researchers also found that the American public favors online education. According to a survey conducted by Education Next and the [Program on Education Policy and Governance](#) at Harvard, a majority favor spending public funds on online education for "advanced coursework or to help students in rural schools get access to a broader range of courses." Another 69 percent said they'd let their children take courses online for credit.

And momentum is building. At present, some 25 states in the United States now offer courses online for high school students. "In 2006-07, one-third of high school seniors in Utah took a class online through the state's Electronic High School last year; 52,000 students were served by the Florida Virtual School, and 4,600 students were enrolled in the Georgia Virtual School," according to the researchers.

The complete findings and commentary will be available online at the Education Next Web site [here](#).

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