Contents

Introduction 3
Highlights 4
Advice 5
E-Learning Maturity 6
Deployment: E-Learning Services and Technologies 11
Conclusions and Recommendations 14
Acknowledgments 15
Appendix 16

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Introduction

Technology is key to the future of higher education. Digital capabilities describe the application of technology to the core functions of an enterprise. EDUCAUSE uses maturity and deployment indices to track digital capabilities within higher education. Maturity indices measure the capability to deliver IT services and applications in a given area. They examine not just technical facets of progress but also dimensions such as culture, process, expertise, investment, and governance. They enable institutions to determine where they are and where they aspire to be. Deployment indices measure stages of deployment for specific technologies and services, which are aggregated to track progress by area. The maturity and deployment indices are based on contributions to the EDUCAUSE Core Data Service, an annual survey and benchmarking service open to all higher education institutions. This report on e-learning as a digital capability is part of a series that describes EDUCAUSE maturity and deployment indices and their current status in higher education.

Half of all undergraduate students (49%) have taken a course in the past year that was offered completely online, and 81% of undergraduates said that at least some of their courses were blended (partially online and partially face-to-face). Courses with web-based components are the new normal for teaching and learning. A successful e-learning program entails more than simply deploying technologies and services—it requires institutional commitment and engagement, new policies, and more. Developing e-learning capabilities and investing in e-learning technologies can help a higher education institution prepare faculty to thrive in a next-generation digital learning environment and gain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining students.

Our definition of e-learning is learning that involves a web-based component, enabling collaboration and access to content that extends beyond the classroom. This report provides a status of college and university maturity and deployment in e-learning.
Highlights

Maturity

- Two-thirds of colleges and universities have composite e-learning scores near the midpoint of the five-level maturity scale, indicating standardized capability and documented procedures and/or responsibilities.

- The e-learning maturity index consists of five dimensions: analytics; engagement; governance, security, and accessibility; operational effectiveness; and priority.

- Operational effectiveness is the most advanced dimension: At three-quarters of institutions, e-learning systems and services are highly reliable, receive mission-critical support, and will be able to accommodate new methods of e-learning delivery and a growing number of e-learning courses in the coming years.

- The analytics dimension has the lowest average maturity: Fewer than one in four institutions have instituted analytics to evaluate the efficacy of e-learning courses or to track progress in e-learning against strategic goals.

- Faculty typically have access to training, and they play a large role in determining the technologies used in their courses. Few institutions reward faculty (e.g., extra salary, lighter course load, specialized recognition) for designing and delivering online courses.

Deployment

- The e-learning deployment index consists of 14 technologies and services.

- A full-function online learning delivery system and student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are the most widespread.

- Least commonly deployed are virtual computer lab delivery, multimedia production for online learning, a digital asset management system for learning, and remote exam proctoring.

- Institutions with higher levels of maturity are likely to have deployed more of the e-learning technologies and services.
Advice

- Look beyond the IT organization for opportunities to advance e-learning. For the most part, IT organizations are delivering e-learning technologies effectively. Challenges with non-IT capabilities such as governance, leadership, and community engagement are more likely to be impeding progress in e-learning initiatives than problems with IT’s operational effectiveness.

- To gain traction with e-learning, examine institutional governance practices and find ways to motivate, train, and support faculty e-learning practices. Governance and training are both foundational for e-learning, and many institutions have gaps in those areas.

- To strengthen existing e-learning initiatives, optimize analytics for evaluating e-learning efficacy and initiative progress.

- Understand and improve your institution’s e-learning strength by regularly assessing it: IT leaders can invite other institutional constituents, such as academic leadership and institutional technologists, to collaboratively complete the maturity and deployment assessments using the EDUCAUSE Benchmarking Service (educause.edu/benchmarking). The results can help institutional teams
  - identify their institution’s strengths and development needs relative to those of peers and to their own aspirations,
  - inform strategic planning for e-learning, and
  - provide metrics to track ongoing progress against the plan and relative to peers’.
E-Learning Maturity

In 2015, 538 U.S.-based institutions reported on their e-learning maturity in the EDUCAUSE Core Data Service (CDS) survey. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with 23 statements about e-learning capabilities that subject-matter experts had identified as being key institutional components for e-learning. For reporting purposes, institutional maturity is classified into the following five categories:

1. **Absent**: Capability components are largely not achieved. Little to no planning is under way.
2. **Initial**: Capability components exist either latently or slightly. Early planning and discussions may be under way.
3. **Developing**: High-priority capability components may be largely or fully achieved, while other components are still maturing. Active planning and strategic attention are under way.
4. **Established**: Capability components have been developed but may not yet be incorporated into institutional culture and practices. Efforts to improve sustainability or scalability are under way.
5. **Optimized**: Capability components have been developed with an eye toward sustainability, adaptability, and scalability. Components are fully integrated into institutional practices and culture (and may be influencing both).

Figure 1 summarizes the current status of e-learning maturity in higher education. The figure displays e-learning maturity scores for each of the five index dimensions, as well as a composite maturity score for overall e-learning maturity. The five levels of e-learning maturity are:

- **Analytics**: The use of learning analytics to evaluate e-learning courses and institutional analytics to monitor institutions’ strategic goals for e-learning progress.
- **Engagement**: Institutional community involvement—faculty, students, and staff—in e-learning, ensuring they are prepared to use e-learning technologies effectively.
- **Governance/security/accessibility**: The presence of appropriate policies and guidelines, effective decision making, and sufficient security; providing access to e-learning for students with disabilities.
- **Operational effectiveness:** The presence of adaptable, scalable, and reliable e-learning services and technologies whose management is centralized and considered mission critical.

- **Priority:** Institutional prioritization of e-learning investments, strategy, leadership, and incentives.

The appendix provides a draft rubric with detailed definitions of all levels of maturity across the five dimensions.

![Figure 1. Current status of e-learning maturity](image)

Operational effectiveness is the most advanced dimension and analytics the least. Responses are expectedly anchored near the midpoint of the five-point scale used to measure maturity. Differences of at least 0.1 between any two maturity scores of the dimensions are statistically significant.

Figure 2 displays the maturity scores for the individual capability components rolled up into each of the five e-learning maturity dimension scores in figure 1. Factor analysis was used to validate the placement of e-learning capability components into each of the maturity dimensions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Established</th>
<th>Optimized</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational effectiveness</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission-critical e-learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centralized e-learning services</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliable e-learning systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scalable e-learning</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptable e-learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Governance, security, and accessibility</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tech for secure e-learning</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<td>Policies for intellectual property</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide alternate tech</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student identity verification</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-learning governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies for effective decision making</td>
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<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
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<td>Faculty training</td>
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<td>Faculty determine technology</td>
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<td>4.1</td>
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<td>Evaluate new technologies</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<td>Rising faculty interest</td>
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<td>Staff training</td>
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<td>Student training</td>
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<td><strong>Priority</strong></td>
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<td>E-learning strategic priority</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-learning investment</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-learning management position</td>
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<td>3.6</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty rewarded for online courses</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analytics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytics to evaluate efficacy</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytics to ensure progress</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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</table>

**Figure 2. E-learning maturity index items and mean scores**
The e-learning maturity of individual institutions varies. Figure 3 shows the roughly bell-shaped distribution of maturity across institutions. Only one institution demonstrated the across-the-board strength to qualify as **optimized**, with all capability components in place, sustainable, adaptable, and scalable. The maturity of one in four institutions could be called **established**, with capability components in place but not fully sustainable, scalable, or incorporated into institutional culture and practices. The e-learning maturity of almost two-thirds of institutions is **developing**, meaning active planning and strategic attention are under way, high-priority components of capabilities may be in place, and early versions of some capability components may be even more fully developed. About 1 in 10 institutions have only achieved a maturity level of **initial**, with early planning and discussions under way and only partial or latent existing capability components. Only 1% of institutions, or five out of our sample of 538, rated their e-learning capability as **absent**, meaning that if they address e-learning at all, it is in an improvised, irregular way. (See the sidebar “Institutional Differences in Maturity” to learn about which types of institutions have higher and lower e-learning maturity scores.)

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Figure 3. Distribution of e-learning maturity across institutions
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Institutional Differences in Maturity

Institutional characteristics such as Carnegie Classification and institutional size are associated with small yet significant differences (p < 0.001) in composite e-learning maturity scores. The differences range from a low of 3.4 among bachelor’s institutions and institutions with fewer than 2,000 FTEs to a high of 3.8 for public master’s and doctoral institutions and institutions with 15,000 or more FTEs. More generally, e-learning maturity is higher in public than in private institutions, and the larger the institution, the higher e-learning maturity is.

The size trend holds for all the maturity dimensions except analytics, where the largest institutions (15,000 or more FTEs) report slightly lower maturity (2.9) than institutions with 4,000–14,999 FTEs (3.0). The public-private trend holds consistently for only two of the maturity dimensions: priority, and governance/security/accessibility.

For readers wishing to better understand e-learning maturity within their particular institutional demographic, EDUCAUSE has introduced a new service to enable institutions to compare their e-learning maturity with that of peers. The EDUCAUSE Benchmarking Service is available for e-learning and seven other areas.
Deployment: E-Learning Services and Technologies

EDUCAUSE’s e-learning maturity and deployment indices are complementary. While the maturity index measures an institution’s ability to deliver technologies and services, the deployment index measures which technologies and services are actually being delivered. The e-learning deployment index consists of 14 items that subject-matter experts identified as key institutional e-learning technologies and services. These are by no means the entirety of e-learning services and technologies institutions are delivering. Not included in this index are classroom technologies (such as clickers), technologies related to but not material to e-learning (such as mobile infrastructure), or many emerging e-learning technologies (see “E-Learning Technologies and Services That Might Appear in Future Years”).

In 2015, 538 U.S.-based institutions reported on their e-learning deployment practices (from no deployment to institution-wide deployment) in the EDUCAUSE Core Data Service (CDS) survey. For reporting purposes, the deployment of technologies and services is classified into the five categories (experimental to universal) displayed in figure 4, which also shows the percentage range of institutions that have deployed each technology institution-wide.

*Maturity measures the institution’s ability to deliver technologies and services. EDUCAUSE’s e-learning deployment index complements the maturity index by identifying which technologies and services are actually being delivered.*

![Figure 4. Current status of e-learning deployment](image-url)
### E-Learning Technologies and Services That Might Appear in Future Years

EDUCAUSE tracks 20 emerging e-learning technologies as part of its Strategic Technologies research:

- Accessing fully online courses from mobile devices
- Accessing online components of blended/hybrid courses from mobile devices
- Adaptive learning
- Badging
- Courseware
- Courseware for mobile devices
- Games and gamification
- Incorporation of mobile devices in teaching and learning
- Institutional support for speech recognition
- Learning analytics
- Makerspace technologies
- Makerspaces
- Next-generation LMS
- Open digital microcredentials
- Open educational resources
- Outsourced online assessments
- Predictive analytics for learning
- Small private online courses (SPOCs)
- Use of big data in learning analytics
- Virtual reality

These items are not included in the deployment index, because few institutions have yet deployed them—none is deployed institution-wide in more than 20% of colleges and universities. Many may join the deployment index in coming years. We review all e-learning technologies annually to decide which to include in the deployment index, which to include in the strategic technologies index, and which to retire.
Most items in the deployment index are available institution-wide at fewer than half of institutions. About 4 in 10 institutions have taken no steps to deploy 4 of the technologies: e-publishing platform for learning (44% have no plans to deploy), digital asset management system for learning (41%), remote exam proctoring (37%), and virtual computer lab delivery (37%). Over three-quarters of institutions are engaging in some way with the other 10 technologies, whether planning or initiating deployment, delivering in parts of the institution, or delivering institution-wide.

E-learning maturity and deployment are moderately correlated: Institutions with higher maturity have generally also deployed more e-learning technologies and services ($r = 0.56$).
Conclusions and Recommendations

Teaching and learning is the core mission of higher education, yet most institutions’ application of technology to education is limited to widespread deployment of a few mature technologies and partial or pilot deployment of others. The holdup is not typically the IT department’s operational effectiveness. At three-quarters of institutions, e-learning systems and services are highly reliable, receive mission-critical support, and will be able to accommodate new methods of e-learning delivery and a growing number of e-learning courses in the coming years. Faculty interest and engagement in e-learning are high at more than four in five institutions. It is institutional commitment that is still generally modest. Aligning institutional priorities with practices to motivate, train, and support faculty for designing and delivering online courses can help overcome what seem like tepid e-learning incentives for faculty.

Two additional factors appear to be holding many institutions back:

- Lack of analytics to evaluate the efficacy of e-learning courses and to ensure that progress in e-learning meets institutions’ strategic goals.
- Lack of an effective, established mechanism in place for e-learning governance (responsible for policy, quality, accreditation issues, etc.).

E-learning has the potential to improve teaching and learning by adding rich new pedagogical experiences. E-learning can also lower barriers to higher education by offering flexibility with respect to when, where, and how students learn and faculty teach. Institutions can strategically choose e-learning services and technologies to optimize their particular commitment to e-learning, whether it be cost reduction, enrollment increases, student success, or curriculum and pedagogical enrichment. The options exist. Student and faculty interest is high and rising. IT departments are ready, willing, and able. All it will take for many institutions is pulling just a few levers. Assess your institution’s maturity and see which ones to pull.
Acknowledgments

Much credit and many thanks are owed to Eden Dahlstrom, Gregory Dobbin, Leah Lang, Pam Arroway, and Kate Roesch, who all contributed substantial advice, effort, and expertise to this report. EDUCAUSE is a great place to work, thanks to colleagues like them!

Notes

1. Eden Dahlstrom, with D. Christopher Brooks, Susan Grajek, and Jamie Reeves, ECAR Study of Students and Information Technology, 2015, research report (Louisville, CO: ECAR, December 2015).
2. See E-Learning Maturity Index detail.
3. See E-Learning Deployment Index detail.
Appendix

Table 1 displays a provisional rubric of the five dimensions and their characteristics at each level of the scale. It is based on a retrospective review of the 23 items in the maturity index and responses to them, but it has not yet been validated by subject-matter experts.

Table 1. E-learning maturity dimensions and levels rubric (draft version)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Established</th>
<th>Optimized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytics</td>
<td>Learning analytics is not used to evaluate the efficacy of e-learning courses or to ensure that progress in e-learning meets the institution's strategic goals.</td>
<td>Discussions are under way about using learning analytics to evaluate the efficacy of e-learning courses and/or to track progress in e-learning toward the institution's strategic goals.</td>
<td>Learning analytics is currently being planned and/or piloted to evaluate the efficacy of e-learning courses and/or to ensure that progress in e-learning meets the institution's strategic goals.</td>
<td>Learning analytics has been implemented to evaluate some aspects of the efficacy of some e-learning courses and/or to ensure that progress in e-learning meets the institution's strategic goals.</td>
<td>Learning analytics has been implemented with demonstrated effectiveness in evaluating the efficacy of e-learning courses. Learning analytics has been implemented to ensure that progress in e-learning meets the institution's strategic goals. The results are used to inform ongoing improvements in and expansions of e-learning initiatives.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Established</th>
<th>Optimized</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Students, faculty, and staff are expected to learn new e-learning technology and skills on their own. No evaluation of new technologies for possible use in e-learning courses is under way or under consideration. Faculty are not consulted in decisions about which technologies are available for use in courses. With rare exceptions, faculty have little or no interest in incorporating technology into teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Training for students and faculty to learn new e-learning technology and skills is available via web-based documentation. Staff are encouraged to learn new e-learning technology and skills on their own. Evaluation of new technologies for possible use in e-learning courses is undertaken only in the context of major initiatives and technologies. Decisions about technologies used in courses are made with little or token consultation with faculty. Faculty interest in incorporating technology into teaching is on the rise, although few currently do so.</td>
<td>The help desk provides best-effort support to help students and faculty learn new e-learning technology skills. Web-based training is available to enable staff to learn new e-learning technology and skills as needed. Evaluation of new technologies for possible use in e-learning courses is undertaken for major initiatives and technologies, and as time permits, for other uses. Faculty are consulted in determinations made about technologies used in courses. A number of faculty enthusiastically incorporate technology into teaching and learning. Interest among other faculty is on the rise.</td>
<td>Training for students and faculty to learn new e-learning technology and skills is available via scheduled, generic training sessions or self-help, web-based training. Staff receive training to learn new e-learning technology and skills for targeted, major new e-learning technologies and initiatives. Regular evaluation of new technologies for possible use in e-learning courses is encouraged and occurs in the context of ongoing service delivery. Faculty share decision-making authority about technologies used in courses with IT and other stakeholders. The majority of faculty enthusiastically incorporate technology into teaching and learning. Faculty enthusiastically incorporate technology into teaching and learning and are rewarded for innovative and productive uses.</td>
<td>Training for students and faculty to learn new e-learning technology and skills is available institution-wide via general web-based documentation and training sessions and via customized consultations and training. Staff have release time, a training budget, and performance goals to encourage them to learn new e-learning technology and skills. A budgeted and staffed program exists for regular evaluation of new technologies for possible use in e-learning courses. Faculty lead decision making about institutional and departmental e-learning technologies. Faculty enthusiastically incorporate technology into teaching and learning and are rewarded for innovative and productive uses.</td>
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### Governance/security/accessibility

The presence of appropriate policies and guidelines, effective decision making, and sufficient security; providing access to e-learning for students with disabilities.

<table>
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<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Initial</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resources and knowledge do not exist to effectively provide alternate technologies for students with disabilities to engage in e-learning. E-learning activities are informal and ad hoc, with no formal decision making or associated oversight of policies, quality, accreditation, etc. Relevant policies and guidelines to verify students’ identities do not exist or are inadequate. No thought is being given to assess or improve them. Technology to ensure the security of e-learning initiatives is neither in place nor under consideration.</td>
<td>Efforts are under way to assess needs or establish alternate technologies for students with disabilities to engage in e-learning. Discussions are under way to establish e-learning governance mechanisms and/or policies. Planning is under way to evaluate technology to ensure the security of e-learning initiatives.</td>
<td>Some resources and knowledge are in place to provide alternate technologies for students with disabilities to engage in e-learning. Governance mechanisms exist for specific aspects of e-learning or in specific areas of the institution. Efforts are under way to develop e-learning-related policies and guidelines. Technology is in place to ensure some aspects of the security of e-learning initiatives.</td>
<td>Resources and knowledge to effectively provide alternate technologies for students with disabilities to engage in e-learning are adequate for current needs. E-learning governance is overseen by a project or short-term group. E-learning-related policies and guidelines are sufficiently rigorous and audited for compliance on an ad hoc basis. Technology is in place to ensure the security of e-learning initiatives.</td>
<td>Resources and knowledge to effectively provide alternate technologies for students with disabilities to engage in e-learning are compliant with related regulations and have a roadmap to further enhance support. An established and ongoing governance body or bodies for e-learning exists. E-learning-related policies and guidelines are rigorously enforced and frequently or continuously monitored for compliance. Technology is in place to ensure the security of e-learning initiatives. E-learning security is integrated in an overall information security roadmap, which is updated on an ongoing basis.</td>
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### Operational Effectiveness

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<th>Dimension</th>
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<td></td>
<td>E-learning technology delivery systems have frequent incidents and sporadic support and are not considered mission critical in terms of IT support provided.</td>
<td>Reliability of and support for e-learning technology delivery systems vary. Some e-learning services, programs, and technologies can accommodate new methods of e-learning delivery.</td>
<td>The most important e-learning technology delivery systems are highly reliable and receive mission-critical IT support during critical academic periods. Some e-learning technology services (e.g., course delivery, lecture capture, CMS, support) are managed through a centralized system and will be able to accommodate new methods of e-learning delivery and a growing number of e-learning courses in the coming years.</td>
<td>E-learning technology delivery systems are highly reliable and receive mission-critical support 24/7/365. Business continuity plans are in place in the event of loss of availability. Almost all e-learning technology services (e.g., course delivery, lecture capture, CMS, support) are managed through a centralized system. E-learning services, programs, and technologies are updated regularly to anticipate and accommodate new methods of e-learning delivery and a growing number of e-learning courses.</td>
<td>E-learning technology delivery systems are highly reliable and receive mission-critical support. Many e-learning technology services (e.g., course delivery, lecture capture, CMS, support) are managed through a centralized system.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Existing e-learning services, programs, and technologies are outdated and inadequate to meet current needs. No plans are in place to assess needs or make improvements.</td>
<td>Existing e-learning services, programs, and technologies meet current needs only.</td>
<td>E-learning services, programs, and technologies meet current needs. Planning is under way to ensure capacity for a growing number of e-learning courses in the coming years.</td>
<td>Many e-learning services, programs, and technologies are updated regularly to anticipate and accommodate new methods of e-learning delivery and a growing number of e-learning courses.</td>
<td>E-learning is treated as an investment in the institution's future and students' success, rather than as an added cost. Design and delivery of online courses is factored into decisions about faculty promotion and tenure.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>E-learning is not a formal part of any senior executive's portfolio, nor is it among the institution's stated priorities. Discussions about e-learning are focused on costs rather than return on investment. Faculty are implicitly or explicitly discouraged from designing and delivering online courses.</td>
<td>E-learning initiatives are limited to specific departments, schools, or groups of students. Institutional e-learning initiatives may be under consideration or in the early planning stages but are not yet funded or announced. Faculty are neither discouraged nor rewarded for designing and delivering online courses.</td>
<td>The institution has identified e-learning as a priority but has not yet identified goals or leadership. Faculty efforts to design and deliver online courses are appreciated but not explicitly rewarded.</td>
<td>E-learning has a dedicated leader, but the position is not at an executive or cabinet level. The institution has stated e-learning goals and funding and has identified key stakeholders and leadership. Faculty are rewarded for designing and delivering online courses.</td>
<td>E-learning is a highly visible and clear priority for the institution, with a dedicated leader who reports directly to the president and/or serves on the cabinet.</td>
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</table>

### Priority

| Dimension          | E-learning is not a formal part of any senior executive's portfolio, nor is it among the institution's stated priorities. Discussions about e-learning are focused on costs rather than return on investment. Faculty are implicitly or explicitly discouraged from designing and delivering online courses. | E-learning initiatives are limited to specific departments, schools, or groups of students. | The institution has identified e-learning as a priority but has not yet identified goals or leadership. Faculty efforts to design and deliver online courses are appreciated but not explicitly rewarded. | E-learning has a dedicated leader, but the position is not at an executive or cabinet level. The institution has stated e-learning goals and funding and has identified key stakeholders and leadership. Faculty are rewarded for designing and delivering online courses. | E-learning is a highly visible and clear priority for the institution, with a dedicated leader who reports directly to the president and/or serves on the cabinet. |
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