

Online and Hybrid Education Glossary

Asynchronous Cohort System: Students may enroll at any time and proceed through a course at their own rate. This is also called “continuous enrollment.”

Asynchronous Communication: Non-synchronous, two-way communication in which there is a delay between when a message is sent and when it is actually received. In distance learning, asynchronous communication most often takes the form of e-mail (e.g. a professor e-mails a student with feedback on an assignment), voicemail (e.g. a student leave a message for the professor on his/her office phone), and discussion boards (e.g. the student posts a reply to a classmate’s question in a threaded class discussion).

Asynchronous Learning: Any learning event where interaction is delayed over time. This allows learners to participate according to their schedule, and be geographically separate from the instructor. Could be in the form of a correspondence course or e-learning. Interaction can use various technologies like threaded discussion.

Audio Conferencing: Voice communication delivered through standard telephone lines or Internet-based software sometimes used in distance learning.

Badge: Digital credential designed to recognize the completion of a single course or assessment or articulate singular skills and abilities developed through coursework.

Blended Learning: A curriculum that combines multiple types of media. Typically, blended learning refers to a combination of classroom-based learning with self-paced online learning.

Blog: Short for “web log.” A blog is an updatable website that is chronologically arranged, and updated at the user’s discretion. What makes a blog different than a regular website is the fact that it can be syndicated so that others can subscribe and have the content delivered to a certain place automatically. Weblogs started out as journals and chronologically arranged websites. However, it is common now for blogs to include audio, video, graphics, and text. It is common for blogs to be available as RSS or Atom feeds.

Boot camp: A credential made up of short, intensive courses typically based in coding, data analytics, or computer science. Boot camps are for students who need to complete a full program’s worth of study in just a few weeks.

Broadband: As opposed to the connection speeds and capacity that one can obtain over a phone line with a modem, a broadband connection can accommodate the rapid transfer of large amounts or packets of information. Generally, Internet connections provided by cable or DSL are broadband. Most distance learning courses will recommend that you have a broadband connection.

Bulletin Board System (BBS): A system maintained by a host computer for posting information, carrying on discussions, uploading and downloading files, chatting, and other online services. BBSs are generally created for a specific group of users and are usually topic-specific.

Certificate: Credential earned after a student takes a series of courses that show mastery of a specific topic or discipline. Certificates can be for-credit or non-credit and at the undergraduate or graduate level.

Chat: When two or more users communicate in real-time by typing messages which are sent instantly within the chat room or instant messaging program. In distance learning, a chat may be used for a class discussion, or so that students may ask the instructor questions or receive feedback from an instructor as a group.

Cohort: A group of peers in one course or program. Cohort-based courses in online education emphasize interaction between classmates as an important part of the learning process.

Competency-Based Education (CBE): Academic credit awarded based on mastery of clearly defined competencies, rather than on “seat time.” In traditional education, time is fixed and mastery is variable. In CBE, mastery is fixed, and time is variable. Technology affords each student a distinct pathway through content based on what they know/don’t know and where they need most support—“personalization at scale.”

Computer-Based Training (CBT): Training or instruction where a computer program provides motivation and feedback in place on a live instructor. CBT can be delivered via CD-ROM, LAN or Internet. Creation is done by teams of people including instructional designers, and often has high development costs.

Course Management System (CMS): The software, usually web-based, used by colleges and universities, as well as corporations and government, that facilitates distance learning by centralizing the development, management, and distribution of instructional-related information and materials. A CMS provides faculty with a set of tools that allows the easy creation of course content - syllabi, course modules, lecture notes, assignments, tests and quizzes, etc. - and is the framework in which they teach and manage the class. To an online student, a CMS is simply the vehicle by which you, the instructor, and your fellow learners interact using asynchronous discussion boards and live chat tools, access course information and materials, submit assignments, check grades, etc. See also: Learning Management System.

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Courseware: Educational software that delivers course material and instruction via computer.

Discussion thread: The term "thread" in computing refers to a series of related postings (sharing comments) in an online discussion. Your instructor may provide students with a private discussion forum to communicate with one another. You can organize this forum by creating new discussion threads specific to conversation topics. See also Electronic Discussion Board

Distance Education: Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously.

Distributed Learning: Distributed learning is a type of distance learning that makes use of information technology. Distributed learning includes most types of distance learning but not correspondence via the mail.

e-Learning: Any learning that utilizes a network (Local Area Network, Wide Area Network or Internet) for delivery, interaction, or facilitation. This would include distributed learning, distance learning (other than pure correspondence), Computer-Based Training delivered over a network, and Web-Based Training. Can be synchronous, asynchronous, instructor-led, computer-based or a combination.

Electronic Discussion Board: A blackboard is a collaborative, virtual space where multiple parties contribute ideas towards the solution of a problem by posting information, solution ideas and suggestions. Each addition to the blackboard brainstorm is intended to increase collective understanding until a problem has been solved.

Face-to-Face: Also shortened to "F2F." A term used to describe a "traditional" classroom environment where the instructor and students are not separated by geographic distance or time.

Facilitator: An online course instructor. Online instructors do not retain their traditional "teacher-centered" roles from the brick-and-mortar, face-to-face paradigm. Instead, they become the medium through which discovery learning is facilitated in a student-centered environment. The facilitator may also be referred to as the "course moderator." In Interactive Videoconferencing (IVC) the far-end helping staff person, whether teacher or para-educator, is called the "facilitator."

Gamification: An instructional approach that relies on elements of game design to keep students motivated and engaged during learning.

Hybrid Education: A blend of online and on-campus education.

Instant Messenger: Also shortened to "IM." Software that lists a user's buddy list (who may consist of friends, family, co-workers, classmates, etc.) who are also online and enables users to exchange text-based messages. Some instant messenger programs also include voice chat, file transfer, and other applications. IM may be used in distance learning to facilitate communication between two students or between a learner and his or her instructor.

Interactive Videoconferencing: Courses in which content delivery and interaction are primarily through live television hook-ups (see Synchronous Learning) connecting a teacher to groups of students on-site and in distant locations.

Learning Management System (LMS): A program that manages the administration of training. Typically includes functionality for course catalogs, launching courses, registering students, tracking student progress and assessments. See also course management system.

Listserv: An e-mail system where users "subscribe" to join in on group messages. A message sent to the listserv is sent to every subscriber's mail box. A listserv is similar to an e-mail "bulletin board." It is common for college courses to have a listserv so that instructors and students can communicate easily with group messages.

Local Area Network (LAN): Local Area Network (LAN) refers to a network connecting a group of computers in relative proximity to each other. A LAN allows users to communicate and share information with each other, as well as providing access to shared devices such as file servers, printers, and modems.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC): These courses, commonly known as MOOCs, are entirely online and open to anyone with an internet connection. MOOCs differ from typical online courses in two ways: They can draw hundreds or thousands of students; and students can usually audit them for free, though those who pay can receive a certificate of completion, among other additional features.

MicroBachelors: Program currently in development by edX that will operate similarly to the already existing MicroMasters programs by breaking the bachelor's degree into modules.

Microcredentials: Comprehensive term referencing the diverse types of short-format credentials that students can earn to develop and demonstrate skills and competencies in various disciplines.

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MicroMasters: Accelerated, online graduate-level programs offered through partnerships between edX and universities. MicroMasters act as a standalone credential similar to a certificate, but also transfer credit into master's programs at participating universities.

Modular master's: A master's programs made up of combined modules within single subject areas or across the institution. Modular master's allow graduates to better specialize and articulate knowledge areas.

Multimedia: The ability to combine audio, visual, and possibly other types of hardware into a presentation. For example, a "multimedia" classroom will typically have projection hardware and switching controls that make it easy for teachers to switch back and forth between computer projections, videotape projections, audio CDs, 35mm slides, videodiscs, CD-I players, etc.

Nanodegree: Credential, often technology-focused, offered through Udacity recognizing students' completion of project-based courses. Nanodegrees appeal to students who must quickly develop new skills, and whose employers place a greater value on demonstrated ability than a recognizable credential.

Netiquette: Informal rules of conduct for how to behave on the Internet. For example, in a distance learning course, it is poor netiquette is to use ALL CAPITAL LETTERS in a messages, as this is the equivalent of shouting.

Non-Traditional Student: Also called "adult student", "adult learner", "re-entry student", or "returning student." According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a non-traditional student has one or more of the following characteristics: delays enrollment (does not entering postsecondary education right after high school); attends part time; works full time (35 hours a week or more); is financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid; has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others); is a single parent; or does not have a high school diploma (has completed high school with a GED or other nontraditional diploma or has not finished high school).

Online Learning: Instruction delivered over the Internet (as opposed to a local or wide area network).

Portal: The Website surrounding the online courses that provides information for the online program, course listings and/or schedules, and may allow registration and other student services.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA): Institutions assess and award credit for learning gained outside traditional classroom experiences, typically prior to student enrollment.

Specialization: A series of related courses (often 5-10) offered through Coursera, designed to help students master a specific topic. Students earn a Specialization Certificate upon completion to demonstrate their learning to employers.

Stackable credentials: Online credentials, such as certificates, that students can earn and then combine to build up to a larger credential or goal – such as a full degree. For example, students may earn three for-credit graduate business certificates online – allowing for immediate career advancement – which together may meet some or all of the course requirements of an online MBA.

Standalone concentration: focus areas or concentrations within degree programs that can be packaged and completed without earning the corresponding degree.

Streaming Media: The ability to access video or audio via the Web without downloading an entire file. The video is continuously sent to the user in small chunks and is not stored in a file on their hard disk.

Synchronous Communication: Live, real-time communication. Examples include a conversation at the grocery store, phoning your children to say hello when you're traveling on business, instant messaging or chatting in an AOL chat room.

Synchronous Learning: Any learning event where interaction happens simultaneously in real-time. This requires that learners attend class at its scheduled time. Could be held in a traditional classroom, or delivered via distributed or e-Learning technologies.

Telecourses: Classes for which the primary mode of content delivery is via pre-produced video lessons (or other asynchronous media), and the primary mode of interaction is print materials, or real-time meetings between the teacher and the students.

Threaded Discussion: A common feature of distance learning that allows students to interact with their classmates and instructor. A threaded discussion is a series of messages on a particular topic posted in a discussion forum. A threaded discussion is asynchronous, not fixed in time or space, so students can log on at any time from any Internet-enabled computer to seek clarification for issues they encounter in their coursework, to discuss topics raised in class, or to initiate new discussions on related topics. A good online discussion has the same effect of group or in-class discussion, in which students build on one another's perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of the materials.

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Verified certificate: credential offered through Coursera and edX that ensures the authenticity and value of a MOOC. Verified certificates cost \$30 to \$150 and indicate successful completion of the MOOC.

Video Conferencing: Real-time visual and audio communication using a computer, video camera or web camera, and a network, such as the Internet. Examples of video conferencing include an instructor delivering a live lecture from one central point to many different students, all geographically separated, or a meeting between two students collaborating on a group project.

Virtual Library: A virtual library is a collection of information in digital formats (as opposed to print or other media) and is accessible via computers. This digital information can often be accessed remotely using a network such as the Internet. A virtual library is also called a digital Library or an electronic library.

Virtual: Simulated or conceptual, not physical in nature. In distance learning, the term “virtual classroom” refers to the online environment in which students and instructors interact.

Web-Based Training (WBT): Training which is delivered over a network (LAN, WAN or Internet). Can be either Instructor-led or computer based. Very similar to e-Learning, but usually implies that the learning is in the professional or corporate level.

Webinar: A webinar is a seminar or workshop in which the facilitator and participants view the same screen at the same time. Usually the webinar has an audio component that the facilitator controls and functionality that allows participants to chat by entering text, answering polls, raising their hands and asking questions.

Whiteboard: The electronic equivalent of a blackboard and chalk on a computer screen that allows multiple, remote users to add text, create drawings or diagrams in a shared electronic workspace that is visible to all participants. Whiteboards are a common feature of distance learning course management software systems because it can be used for online instruction the same way a blackboard is used in a traditional classroom.

Wide Area Network (WAN): Wide Area Network (WAN) is a computer network that covers a broad area, creating informational and communication links between computers that are not necessarily in close proximity to each other. A WAN is often used to connect Local Area Networks (LAN) or other types of networks together, or to connect a LAN to the Internet. Some consider the Internet itself to be the largest example of a WAN.

Wiki: A wiki is a website that allows anyone visiting to contribute (add, edit, or remove) content. Wikipedia, for example, is a virtual encyclopedia built by users providing information in their areas of expertise. Some classes, both online and classroom based, use a wiki to share and communicate information and work.