

ONLINE EDUCATION CAN WORK

ACCORDING TO SECULAR METRICS

- Over 20 years of annual survey data among U.S. schools indicates consistent findings:
 - Online education is a critical component to schools' strategic plans.
 - Online education can achieve the learning objectives “as good or better” when compared with face-to-face.
 - Course design strategy intended specifically for online education improves the quality dramatically.¹
 - Even in COVID, 95% of students recommend online or remote learning to others.²

¹I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Online Report Card: Tracking Online Education in the United States*, February 2016. Richard Garrett and Ron Legon, *CHLOE 3 Behind the Numbers: The Changing Landscape of Online Education, 2019*, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/research-docs-pdfs/CHLOE-3-Report-2019-Behind-the-Numbers.pdf>.

²Melissa A. Venable. Best Colleges. “Online Education Trends Report.” 2021. <https://res.cloudinary.com/highereducation/image/upload/v1614724944/BestColleges.com/edutrends/2021-Online-Trends-in-Education-Report-BestColleges.pdf>

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ACCORDING TO CHRISTIAN, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION METRICS

- Association of Theological Schools (North American accrediting agency) allowed exceptions to their residency requirements in 2012-2013.³
 - In the data they collected from interim reports, schools that required no residency (ie. Fully online) affirmed that online achieves the learning outcomes equal to face-to-face instruction.
 - Peer school studies, mixed-method studies, and focus groups further confirm and reaffirm the same conviction – online theological education works.

³Association of Theological Schools, “Redevelopment of ATS Commission Standards and Procedures,” Commission on Accrediting, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://www.ats.edu/accrediting/overview-accrediting/redevelopment-ats-commission-standards-and-procedures>.

ONLINE EDUCATION CAN WORK

ACCORDING TO EVANGELICAL, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS

- Those who hold to the authority of the Bible perhaps have different convictions. They do not ask, “*Does* it work?” but instead ask, “*Should* we do it?”
- Evangelical professors responded to a 2015 survey asking their perceptions of online education.⁴ The conclusions:
 - 75% responded that they believe online education is a benefit to theological education
 - 50% qualified that response with a concern for community and spiritual formation online.

⁴Kristen A. Ferguson, “Evangelical Faculty Perceptions of Online Learning in Graduate-Level Theological Education” (Order No. 10240930, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <https://gbtssbc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.gbtssbc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1849021866?accountid=11145>.

THE DEBATE: ONLINE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

SHOULD WE DO ONLINE EDUCATION?

'Everything is permissible for me,' but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me,' but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Cor 6:12

- Point 1: “Incarnational/Embodied” education is a necessity
 - Counter Point 1: The Bible presents both mediated and non-mediated presence as effective for learning and transformation. The mission seems to dictate when to use either option.
 - Non-Mediated commandments
 - “not neglecting to meet” (Heb 10:24-25); fellowship through breaking bread and prayer (Acts 2:42); Lord's supper (1 Cor 11:23ff)
 - Mediated learning for transformation for global church
 - “for this reason I have been hindered from coming to you...” Rom 15:18-22
 - The Word of God via mediated means – prophets, written means, etc.

THE DEBATE: ONLINE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

SHOULD WE DO ONLINE EDUCATION?

'Everything is permissible for me,' but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me,' but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Cor 6:12

- Point 2: Spiritual formation is necessary and happens in community. Community cannot happen online.
- Counter Point 2: Community can happen online, but not the same as in person. Spiritual formation can happen online when community elements are identified and replicated online. It must be designed intentionally into the class.
- *Koinonia* in John 1:3-4 "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, so that you may have *fellowship* with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ." Community can happen in person or mediated because of the common fellowship we have with Jesus.
- "...consistent communication, intimacy, honesty, commitment, diversity, and safety."⁵

⁵Samuel E. Ebersole and Robert Woods, "Virtual Community: Koinonia or Compromise? Theological Implications of Community in Cyberspace," *Christian Scholar's Review* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 191.

THE DEBATE: ONLINE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

SHOULD WE DO ONLINE EDUCATION?

- Conclusion: Online education *should* exist as the people of God accomplish his mission to take the gospel to the nations.
 - There is biblical precedence for legitimate mediated teaching and education that can foster spiritual growth demonstrated by God himself (through his Word as mediated teaching) and the apostles (the letters of Paul as an example).
 - The primary community of God's people continues to be the local church, but as the mission goes forward, mediated teaching supports the mission the church and enhances the community among local believers.
 - It all works together, not in competition. It's a strategy for the mission. So, let's do both for the mission.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK

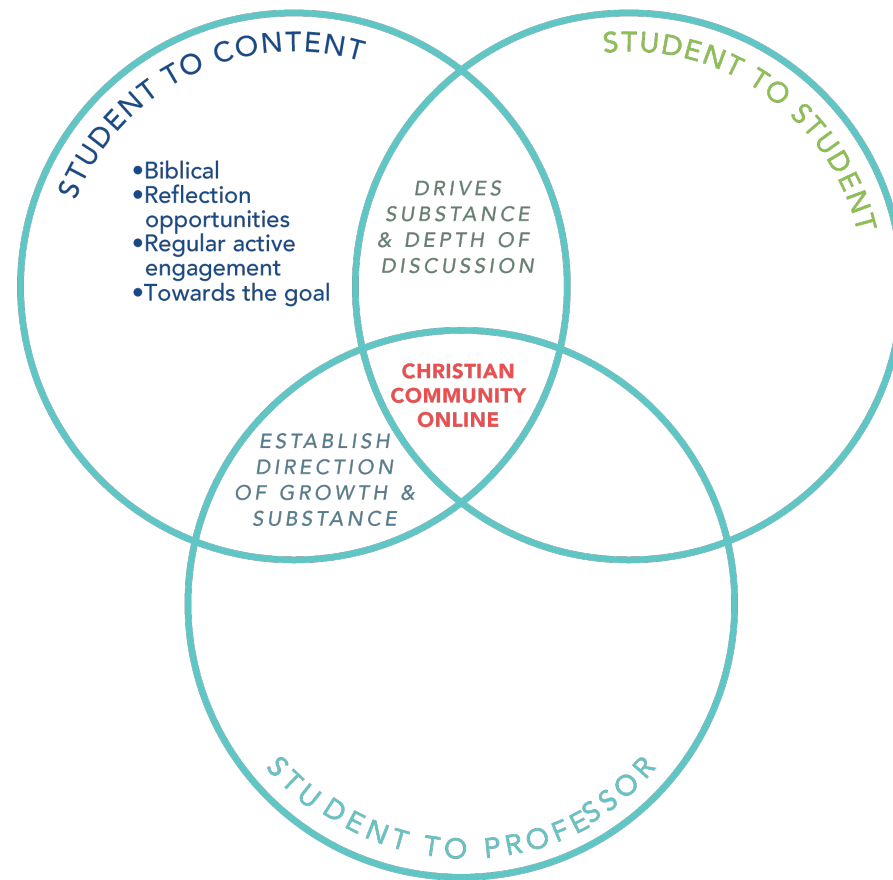
FOR ONLINE EDUCATION

- “Transactional Distance” is the primary threat to community in online education.⁶
 - Physical distance can cause increased variables in understanding, misunderstanding, and impact between students and the professor, which can then detract from the educational experience. Isolation and lack of interaction detracts from learning and transformation.
 - Therefore, we must intentionally plan for interaction in structured and meaningful ways.
 - “Community of Inquiry” model for community in learning that can be adapted by discipline.⁷

⁶M. G. Moore, “Theory of transactional distance” in Desmond Keegan, ed., *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

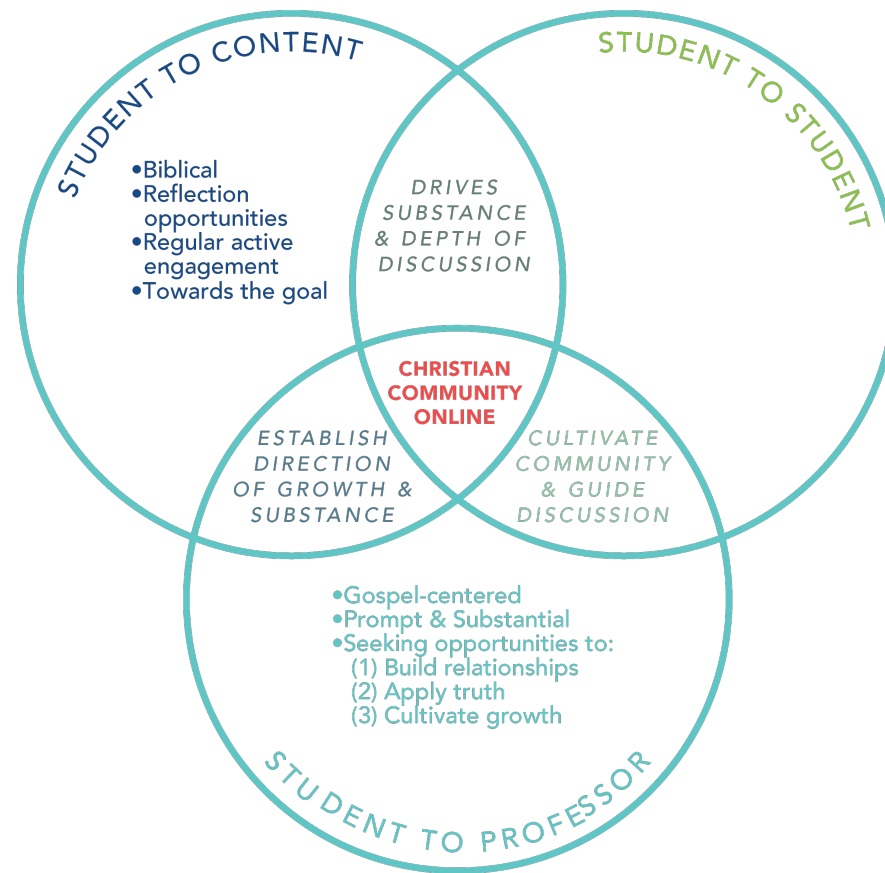
⁷D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer, “Critical Inquiry in a Text-based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education,” *The Internet and Higher Education* 2(2-3), (2000), 87–105. Numerous resources, diagrams, tables, and implementation models for the CoI can be found on the CoI website: <https://coi.athabasca.ca/>

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE EDUCATION

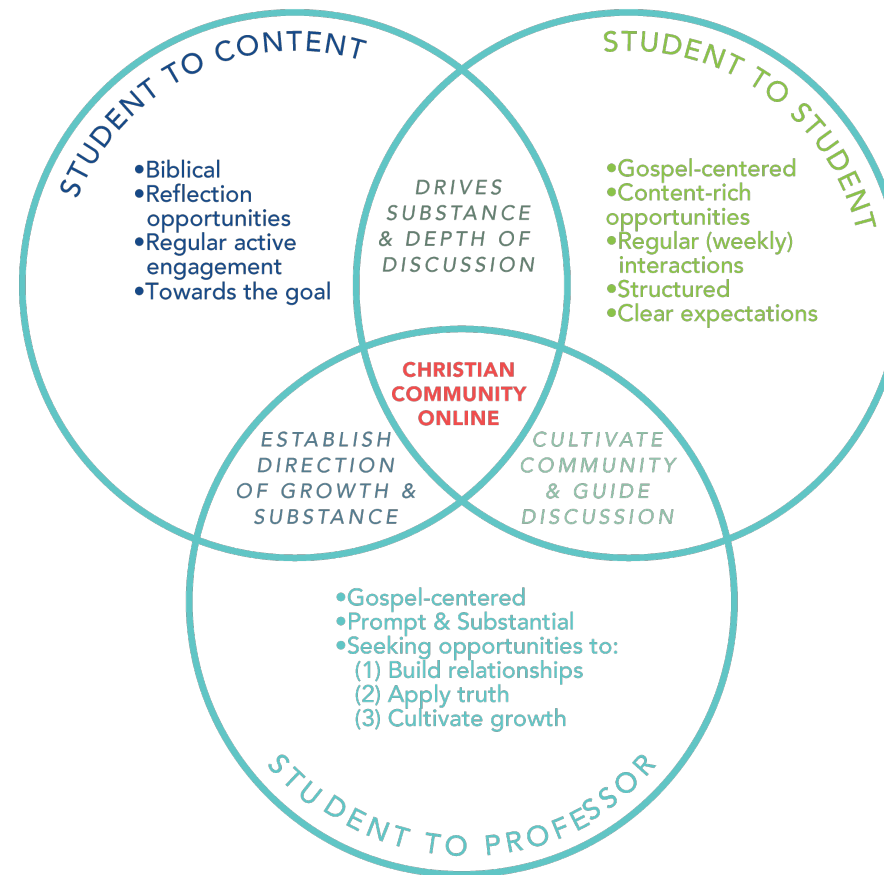


CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK

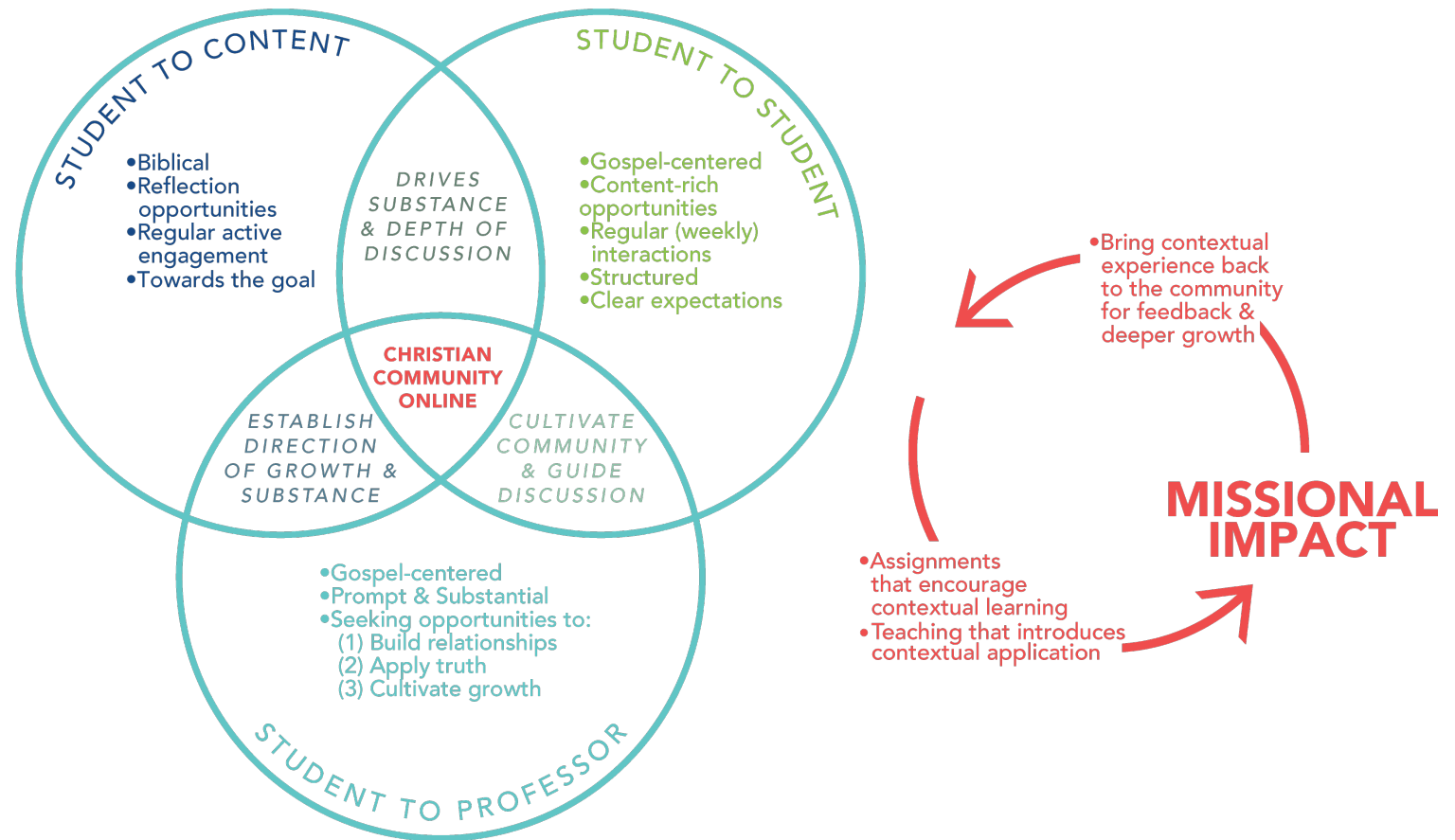
FOR ONLINE EDUCATION



CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE EDUCATION



CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE EDUCATION



LEADING AN ONLINE PROGRAM

CREATING COMMUNITY FOR ONLINE EDUCATORS

- Finally, if you are leading an online program, consider implementing the above strategy for your professors.
 - Create meaningful content to aide them in their online instruction
 - Create intentional opportunities where you interact with your professors regarding their online course
 - Create frequent and open dialogue among professors where they can share what works and what doesn't
 - Create opportunities for them to test their skill in their own courses and get feedback from your academic community

Bibliography

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