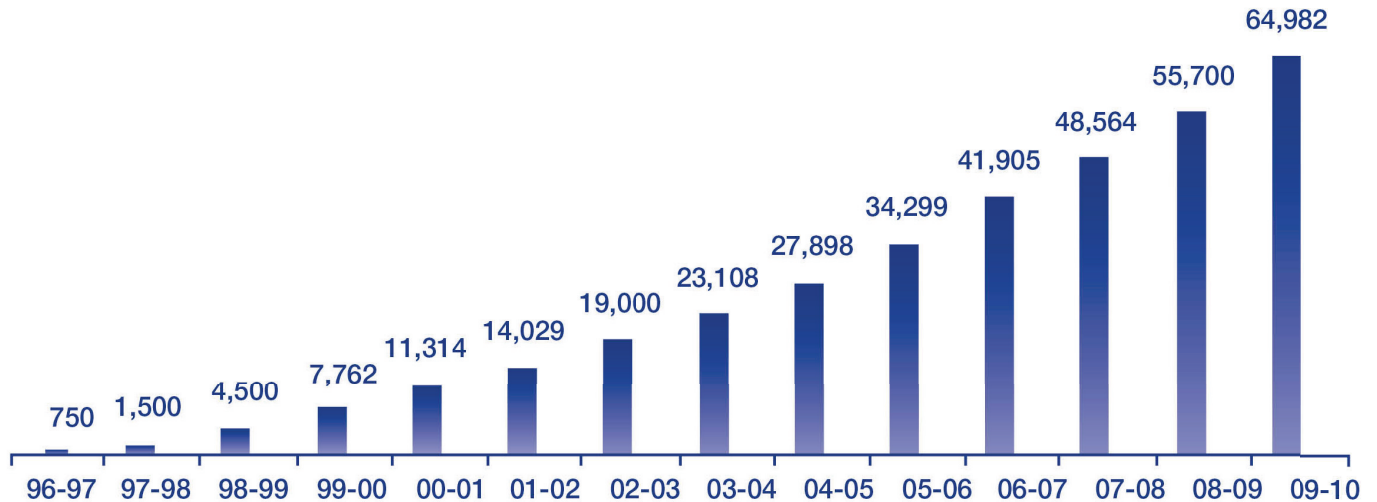


## OntarioLearn.com Enrolment Trends



*Through a consortium called OntarioLearn.com, 22 Ontario colleges now offer over 1,300 online courses. This graph shows the steady and dramatic growth of enrolment since its beginning in 1996-9.*

# OntarioLearn

With 1,300 courses, 64,982 student registrations, and growth at 16.7%, the future looks bright.

By Alan Brady  
Executive Director, OntarioLearn

OntarioLearn.com ranks as one of the largest providers of online course development and delivery in North America. Yet, as we have come to realize, it is likely one of the best kept secrets.

Started in 1995, OntarioLearn.com is a consortium that now consists of 22 Ontario community colleges servicing the rapidly growing market for online education with a unique and cost effective curriculum-sharing delivery model. We are governed by an Executive Committee, a Board of Directors with a representative from each member college and several Regional Committees. Our staff include an Executive Director, Quality Assurance/Quality Control Specialist, Administrator and Administrative Assistant. True to the nature of the online world, these individuals work “at a distance” as a “bricks and mortar” office does not exist.

## Enrolment

OntarioLearn.com has seen consistent growth and enrolment since 1995. At March 2010, total enrolment for the 2009/10 fiscal year was 64,982. While enrolment varies by college, this nonetheless represents a 16.7% increase over the previous fiscal year.

It is our belief that population growth through immigration, a larger number of high school graduates applying for limited on-campus spaces in post-secondary institutions, a preference for the flexibility that online learning offers and high unemployment numbers are just some of the factors contributing to the rise in interest in online education we have witnessed firsthand over the years.

The good news for Ontario learners is that OntarioLearn.com has kept pace with their needs. We offer choice without boundaries. Our business model enables students to register at one college in an online course developed and taught by another college. By pooling registrations this way, we make it more feasible to develop and offer courses in a cost-effective manner. OntarioLearn.com now offers over 1,300 courses. Our expanded course inventory means greater opportunity for many, including laid off workers who can retrain and get back into the workforce with new skills.

## Course Development

One of the cornerstone's of OntarioLearn.com's operation is the course development process. To maximize efficiencies, only one course covering one set of learning outcomes is allowed. This no-duplicate policy is maintained through a course claim process. Any college may enter a claim proposing a new course by providing the appropriate detail in a course outline. All other colleges have an opportunity to challenge this claim should they feel one of their existing courses already addresses the identical learning outcomes.

As of February 2010, there were 1,103 courses available to be offered each semester. Some courses in the course inventory are only offered at specific times during the year. During the final semester of 2009/10 more than 925 course subjects were available to partner colleges to include in their Winter 2010 offerings. When additional monthly intake offerings were considered, this number rose to 1,363 courses.

## Monthly Intake

Over the last few years, OntarioLearn.com's online students have demanded more flexible intake to start courses when they want to, without the restrictions of more traditional terms, e.g., registering only at the start of a new semester. This demand has been driven in part by the economic downturn which forced many out of the workforce and pressured them to quickly investigate their retraining options. OntarioLearn.com has responded to this demand and as of March 2010 there was an 8.2% increase in monthly-intake activity over the previous year.

## Program Areas

Many of the OntarioLearn.com partner colleges have designed certificate and diploma programs consisting of courses offered through the consortium. Each college determines the requirements for its program. Some of the certificates/diplomas are comprised entirely of courses available online through OntarioLearn.com, while others may also require courses offered outside the consortium.

The courses are offered in the following areas:

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|--|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Academic and Career Entrance Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accounting</li> <li>▪ Apprenticeship</li> <li>▪ Business</li> <li>▪ Business Writing</li> <li>▪ College Preparation</li> <li>▪ Communications &amp; Languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Computer Programming</li> <li>▪ Computer Software Applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Corrections</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creative Writing/Literature</li> <li>▪ Early Childhood Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Educational Assistant</li> <li>▪ General Education</li> <li>▪ General Interest</li> <li>▪ Health Sciences</li> <li>▪ Home Inspection</li> <li>▪ Hospitality/Travel &amp; Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human Resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Legal/Office Administration</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Library &amp; Information Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management</li> <li>▪ Marketing</li> <li>▪ Mathematics</li> <li>▪ Military Arts and Science <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ontario Management Development Program (OMDP)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Police Foundations</li> <li>▪ Sciences</li> <li>▪ Security</li> <li>▪ Social Sciences</li> <li>▪ Sports/Leisure &amp; Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teacher Training</li> <li>▪ Teacher Training for Online</li> <li>▪ Technology</li> <li>▪ Trades</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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## Success Rates

The success rate for online education through *OntarioLearn.com* has exceeded 70% for the last seven years. Using a 50% pass, the overall success rate during 2009 was 73.7%. The success rate increases to 84.2% when adjustments are made to factor in attrition. The retention rate for 2009 was 87.6%. It is worth noting that the average success rate for classroom instruction across the community colleges in Ontario is 65%.

## Quality Review

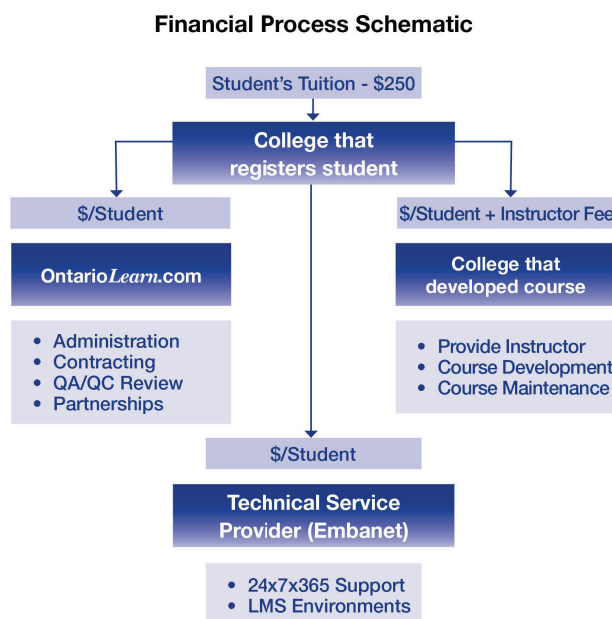
*OntarioLearn.com*'s quality standards are built on our members' collective commitment to providing our students with a positive learning environment that ensures their academic success and satisfaction.

Course quality is measured using two assessment tools. The first is a comprehensive student feedback questionnaire that measures the overall effectiveness of course content, instruction and students' general perceptions of quality. *OntarioLearn.com* also administers a Course Standards Checklist designed to measure overall course design and student usability. The checklist is used to evaluate all new courses and reassesses those courses that fall below the expected student satisfaction levels.

*OntarioLearn.com* member colleges are accountable for the overall quality of the course content, copyright and instructor recruitment, training and evaluation. *OntarioLearn.com*'s Quality Assurance/Quality Control Specialist is responsible for conducting course reviews and providing the college under review, with a summary of the checklist results, and a findings report that summarizes what was observed and provides a recommended course of action. Colleges are expected to act on the changes and/or provide a rationale for the existing design decision by the end of the semester after which the review was conducted. If the changes are not made in a timely fashion, the college risks having the course removed from the *OntarioLearn.com* inventory.

## Financial Process

Under our model, the host college is defined as the college that designs, develops and delivers the course, and provides the students' final grades. The registering college is the one that promotes the courses, registers the student, collects tuition fees and grants the certificate or diploma associated with the program involved. The chart below shows how our financial model operates.



## **Embanet support**

OntarioLearn.com has engaged Embanet to supply data hosting and help desk support services to the consortium. Located in Markham, Ontario, Embanet operates a world-class data centre with a state-of-the-art network infrastructure to ensure that the appropriate bandwidth is available to support our growing needs. The data centre includes alternative power generators, disaster planning procedures and an offsite data centre where operations can be relocated, in the case of a local emergency.

Embanet installs and supports five Learning Management Systems (LMS); Angel, Blackboard 7.3, Blackboard CE8, FirstClass and Moodle. Embanet also provides version migration services using these products, and operates a help desk that answers calls from both faculty and students 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. During busy months, the help desk staff can handle upwards of 5,000 inquiries.

In addition to supporting our operational needs, the staff at Embanet have significant experience with online course design and delivery. They have proven to be excellent partners when it comes to special projects that require rapid design and development of new initiatives.

## **Challenges**

Technology continues to advance and colleges are challenged to integrate new technologies like “social media tools” and “mobile applications” into their courses. This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that the colleges that make up the OntarioLearn consortium vary considerably in size. Larger colleges have instructional designers to help the subject matter experts develop courses and others have only the subject matter expert. The key to our future and the educational experience of our students will be ensuring that our faculty has the resources, training and skills necessary to apply technological advances to our courses.

## **Future Initiatives**

The three-year strategic plan, approved by OntarioLearn.com’s Board of Directors in November 2009, identifies the following key initiatives:

- Evaluate current faculty training resources with the aim of creating online courses that can showcase best practices and the application of tools like Adobe’s Buzzwords and Connect, designed for online word processing and web conferencing respectively.
- Provide resources for faculty and students to prepare for the online learning environment.
- Conduct research aimed at determining the profile of our future students and the type of programs that will attract them.
- Create new specifications for any system changes and make recommendations for changes with budget information to the Board including, but not limited to, redevelopment of the OntarioLearn.com grades system and ongoing ePortal enhancements.
- Assist the government in the development of the Ontario Online Institute.

These initiatives will be vigorously pursued as OntarioLearn.com strives to maintain its position as a leader in Online Education.