

STATE OF E-LEARNING IN CANADA

This fact sheet provides highlights from CCL's 2009 report, *State of E-Learning in Canada*. To read the full report, visit www.ccl-cca.ca.

Why should Canadians care about e-learning?

E-learning can substantially increase our access to knowledge and information and, as studies suggest, improve access to education, formal and informal learning, and employment opportunities.

How is e-learning offered in Canada?

In Canada, e-learning is provided in a number of different settings and forms. It can take place in schools, the workplace and the community, and can play a key role in both formal and informal learning. For example:

Elementary and high schools

- In 2003–2004, more than one million computers were available to 5.3 million students in elementary and secondary schools across Canada—approximately one computer for every five students (better than the average ratio among OECD countries of 1:13).¹
- In 2003–2004, more than one-third (36%) of secondary schools across Canada had students participating in electronic or online courses.²
- Virtual high schools are becoming more widespread, allowing students to take online courses daily from their own communities. This is of particular importance for students who reside in more remote areas, and who may need to travel large distances or face relocation to attend secondary school.

Post-secondary institutions

- E-learning has increased access to education for people with disabilities, those who live in remote rural areas, and full-time employees who wish to fit courses around their work schedules.

What is e-learning?

Most simply put, *e-learning* is the application of computer technologies to education—whether used face-to-face in school or workplace settings, blended with traditional learning, to deliver a course fully online, or for self-directed informal learning.

- Learners experience enhanced learning through internet access, student portals, digital libraries, and wireless networks that support laptops, handheld and other portable devices.
- Instructors use course management systems to post syllabi, assignments and lecture notes, and to continue discussions with students between class sessions. Using tools like electronic portfolios (a tool that follows their learning progress), students can receive considerably more feedback and learn how to self-assess their learning and skills accurately.³

Work settings

- Many workplace organizations have adopted a blended approach—a combination of online and in-class instruction.⁴
- Virtual classrooms, which provide for live instruction without the travel, are also growing in popularity.⁵
- E-learning can provide employees with a wide range of skills—from technical to administrative and management skills. In particular, e-learning is appropriate for literacy and essential skills training.

How does e-learning help Canadians learn?

E-learning provides Canadians the flexibility to learn at their own pace at any stage in the lifespan—thereby fostering positive attitudes about the value of lifelong learning.

- **Self-directed:** Learners can choose content and tools appropriate to their differing interests, needs, and skill levels.
- **Reduces physical and geographical barriers:** More educational options to learners with disabilities, and those living in remote areas.
- **Timely:** Learning can be delivered and learned when desired or necessary.

Where does Canada currently stand with regard to e-learning?

The proportion of courses delivered online in Canada is one of the highest among countries studied; however, research suggests that Canadian post-secondary institutions have been slower than those in many other countries to incorporate significant online components into their programs.⁶

Likewise, e-learning has not become a standard feature of employee training. Various surveys show that by 2005, the percentage of workplace training delivered online ranged from 15% to 20%.⁷

Did you know?

Many Canadians go online to pursue learning opportunities:

In 2007, one-half (50%) of all home users (16 and older) went online for the purposes of education, training or school work.⁹

How can we improve the overall e-learning experience in Canada?

Many individuals and organizations have a role to play in improving e-learning in Canada:⁸

- **Students and instructors** can provide feedback to improve future experiences, and communicate the learning opportunities that e-learning creates.
- **Institutions** can provide the technical infrastructure and support needed to enable comprehensive solutions.
- **Content and technology providers** can work with educators to develop high-quality, practical solutions that consider learning principles and adhere to common technological standards to facilitate collective use.
- **Accreditation bodies** can create and enforce clear guidelines for e-learning courses.
- **Employers** must understand the validity of e-learning, and work with other stakeholders to ensure graduates' skills meet job market needs.

In 2001, the Advisory Committee on Online Learning published *The E-learning E-evolution in Colleges and Universities*, in which it detailed key recommendations for Canada's e-learning future. A list of these recommendations can be found in *State of E-Learning in Canada*.

¹ Johanne Plante and David Beattie, *Connectivity and ICT Integration in Canadian Elementary and Secondary Schools: First Results from the Information and Communications Technologies in Schools Survey, 2003-2004* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, June 2004), Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE20040017.

² Plante and Beattie, *Connectivity and ICT Integration in Canadian Elementary and Secondary Schools*.

³ P. Abrami and H. Barrett, "Directions for research and development on electronic portfolios," *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology* 31, no. 3 (2005): 1–15. Cited in Chapter 1 in Saul Carliner and Patti Shank, eds., *The E-Learning Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Online Learning* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer/John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

⁴ Allison Rossett, Felicia Douglass and Rebecca V. Frazee, "Strategies for building blended learning," *Learning Circuits*: June 2003. Cited in Chapter 1 in Carliner and Shank, eds., *The E-Learning Handbook*.

⁵ Jennifer Hoffman, *The Synchronous Trainer's Survival Guide* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2003). Cited in Chapter 1 in Carliner and Shank, *The E-Learning Handbook*.

⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *E-Learning in Tertiary Education: Where do we Stand?* (Paris: 2005).

⁷ Carliner and Shank, eds., *The E-Learning Handbook*.

⁸ Nicole Wagner, Khaled Hassanein and Milena Head, "Who is responsible for e-learning success in higher education? A stakeholders' analysis," *Educational Technology & Society* 11, no. 3 (2008): 26–36.

⁹ Statistics Canada. "Canadian internet use survey: 2007." *The Daily* (June 12, 2008). www.statcan.gc.ca/dai-quo/index-eng.htm.