

How Do Universities Define “Online Learning”

Dr. Marc T. Austin
Dean and Associate Provost
Augusta University Online

March 10, 2022



AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY

ONLINE



Inside Higher Ed Interview

IHE How Do Universities Define 'Online Learning'?

A conversation with Augusta University's Marc Austin.

By Joshua Kim · Published September 13, 2022

What do universities mean when they talk about “online education”? This is a question that Marc T. Austin, associate provost and dean of Augusta University Online, wanted to figure out. So, he did some quick research. This Q&A with Marc is about what he found.

Q: What was the research question you wanted to answer, and what made you want to answer it? How did you go about doing this research?

A: As Augusta University embarked on an ambitious new effort to establish an internal online program management model to support a suite of graduate programs in health, cyber and education under the banner of Augusta University Online, we encountered a tremendous array of AU online courses and programs already well underway.

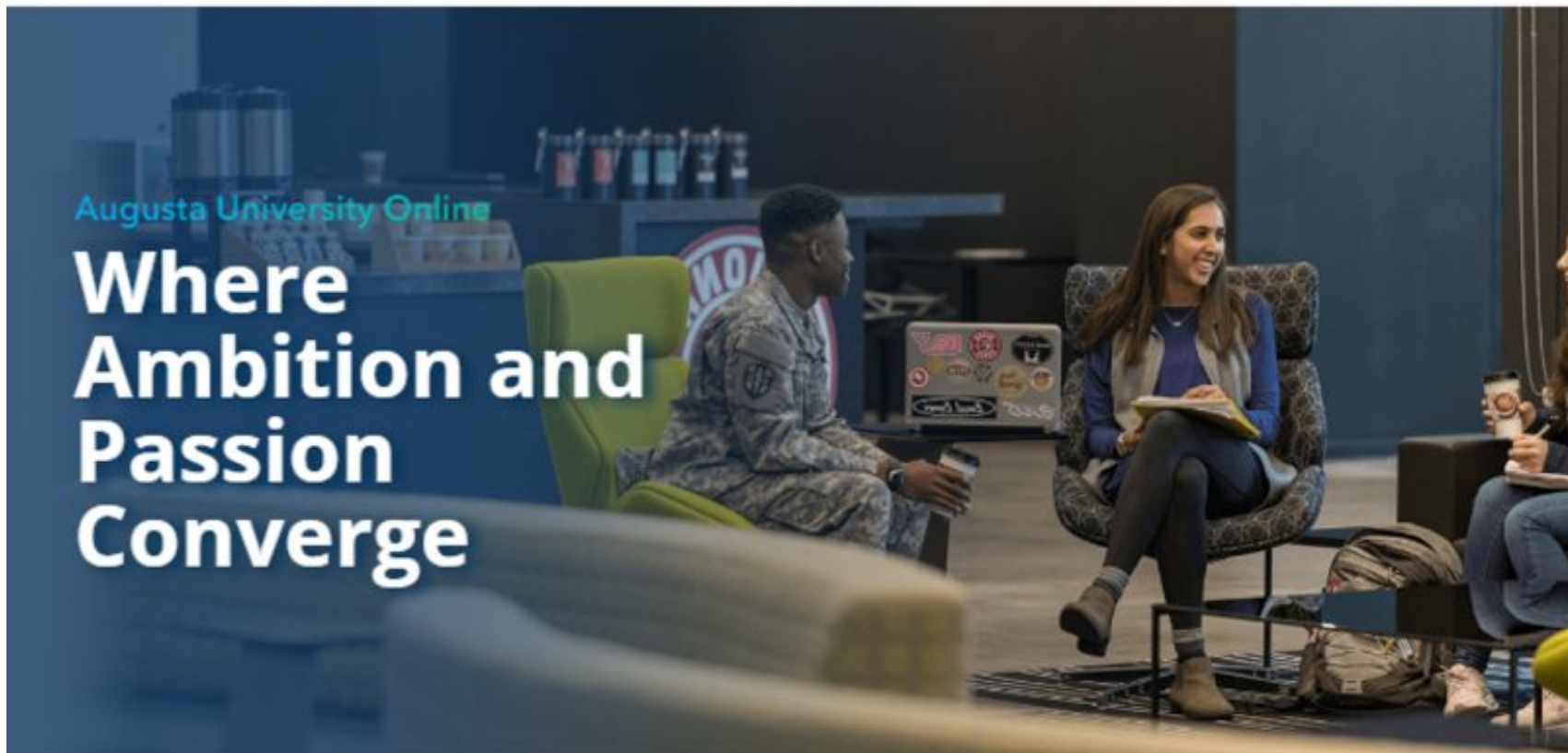


Augusta University Online Launches

March 1st - Nine Days And Counting!



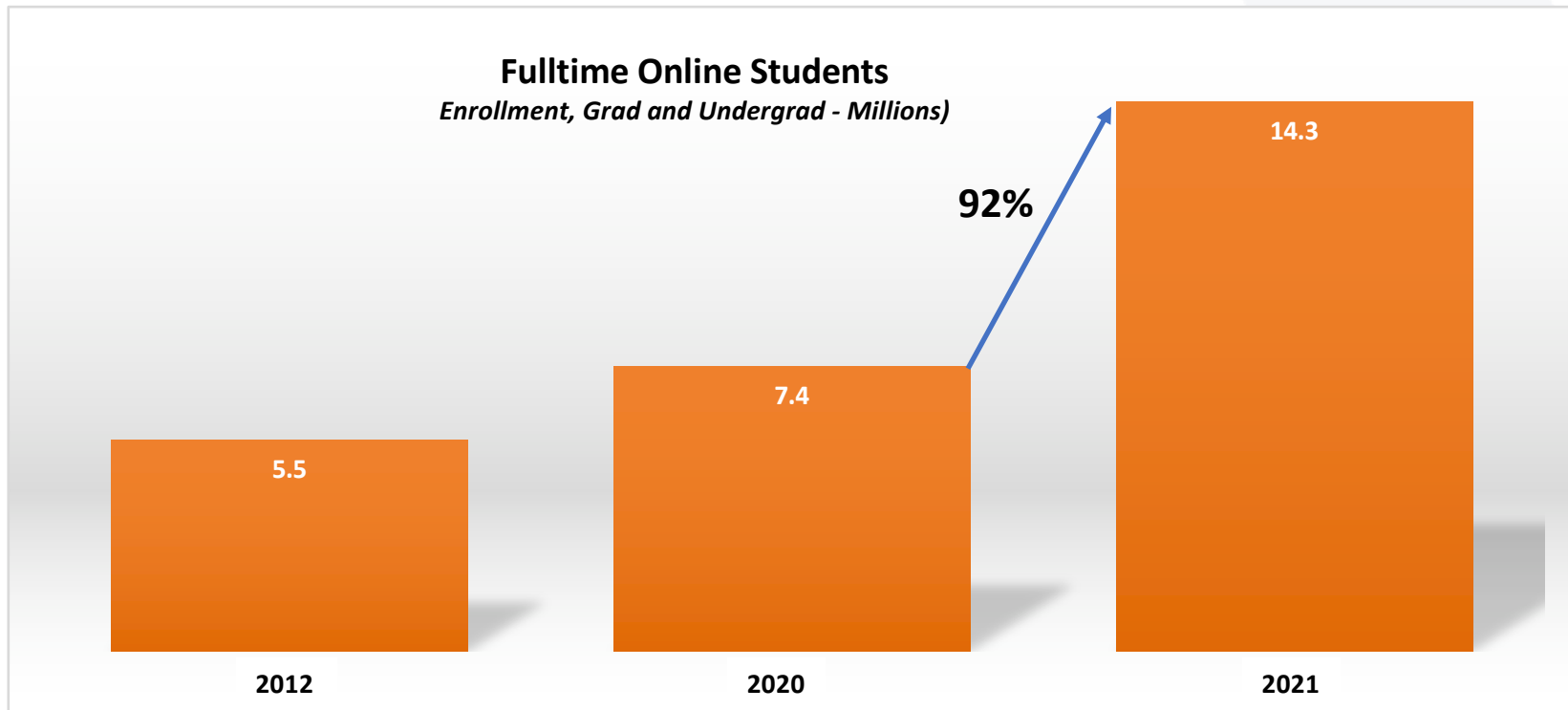
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<https://www.augusta.edu/online/>



“Online” Explosion During COVID



McKinsey
& Company



Where to Begin?

Distance
Synchronous
HyFlex
Asynchronous
Virtual-Exchange
Fixed-Time
Self-Paced-Learning
Open-Schedule
Video-Conferenced
Hybrid
Online?
Computer-Managed-Learning
Live-Virtual-Training
Blended-Learning
Blended/Hybrid
Multi-Modal
ActiveFlex
Bisynchronous
E-Learning
Remote



Why Defining “Online” Matters - Operations

Operational Needs

- Reporting - Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
- Accreditation
- Budgeting and Resourcing
- Facilities/Classroom Planning
- Information Sharing With Other Universities

Consequences of Unclear Definition

- Validating when is a program more than “50% or more” online?
- At what point does a *Substantive Change* occur?
- When is online “scale” achieved?
- E.g., HyFlex - what type of facilities/classroom is needed?
- Can’t compare institutions.
- Makes sharing practices more difficult.



Why Defining “Online” Matters – The Faculty



Consequences of Unclear Definition for Faculty

Difficult to know:

- How best to adapt my teaching to engage the learner?
- Learn the right teaching tools at the right time
- How to transition between instructional modalities
- Most fundamentally.....
 - **Hard to know what they are teaching if the modality (and its parameters) is poorly defined?**



Why Defining “Online” Matters – The Student



Consequences of Unclear Definition for Students

- **Do I need to:**
 - Travel to campus?
 - Arrange my calendar to “dial in” at a certain time?
 - Buy technology/software?
 - Locate a distraction free environment?
- PLUS – The High Risk of Mis-communication!

“Cupcake on the Green?”

A screenshot of an event listing for "Cupcake Clash" by the University Activities Board. The event is scheduled for Tuesday, January 17, 2023, from 7 pm to 9 pm. There is a red "I'm Interested" button. To the right is a photo of a cupcake with multi-colored frosting. Below the event details, there is an "ABOUT THIS EVENT" section with the location "Talley Student Union, 4280" and "Talley Student Union, Raleigh, NC 27606". There are also links for "View map" and "Add to calendar".

Cupcake Clash
By University Activities Board

Tuesday, January 17, 2023 7 pm to 9 pm

[I'm Interested](#)

ABOUT THIS EVENT

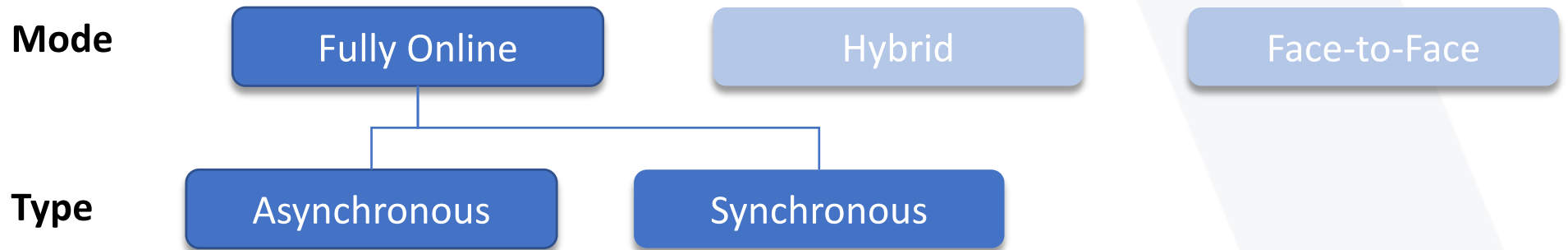
Talley Student Union, 4280 | [View map](#)

Talley Student Union, Raleigh, NC 27606

[Add to calendar](#)



A “Not Very” Scientific Study



*when communicating with students about **fully online programs** – how do you reference synchronous and asynchronous*



Asked 12 “online” colleagues – (via email, open text survey)

Representative Titles

- VP for School of Online Studies
- Director of Online Programs
- Online Partnership Director
- VP Online Strategy
- Online Learning Specialist
- VP for Learning Innovation
- Associate Professor



Three Types of Responses



Blended is Best

Asynchronous PLUS synchronous—is best.



Mix, with a Dash of Caution

A mixed synchronous/asynchronous can work but has risks.



Juice is Not Worth the Squeeze – *The (Asynchronous) Purists*

If the asynchronous course is high quality, synchronous is a lot of effort without better results.



Blended (Asynchronous *Plus* Synchronous) is Best!

Blended – students love options

- Live Lectures
- Recorded Versions
- Asynchronous Assignments

“We use Live Synchronous – and **recordings as supplements** to respond to student questions”

Blended is “here to stay” – we use live lectures/discussions with interaction, but attendance is optional with recordings available

but....The Best Students View the Recordings....



Blended (Asynchronous *Plus* Synchronous)

The Bottom Line



Blended is Best

A LOT of effort, but **when** it works, it is the best of both words!



Synchronous, with Caution!

Preferred Approach

Live Synchronous works really well with “**great**” faculty

- “students love it and want the live interaction”

BUT

Caveats/Cautions

Adjunct Issues

- Getting adjuncts to **commit to live sessions in advance** is hard
- Not all adjuncts draw the students



Synchronous, with Caution!

Preferred Approach

- Synchronous creates smaller more intimate classes

BUT

Caveats/Cautions

Scheduling issues

- You have to schedule a lot more times for students
- This won't work for the 100% asynchronous student



Synchronous, With Caution

Preferred Approach

Real-time synchronous sessions are required at our university.

....AND recorded....

An instructor *may* allow a student who missed classes to view it, **but not as an open policy.**

Caveats/Cautions

BUT

Beware of the recordings:

- What happens when a recorded session “goes off on a tangent”?
- Often need editing? Captioning?
- FERPA/Privacy issues



Synchronous, With Caution

The Bottom Line



Add Synchronous, but with a Dash of Caution

Synchronous should be marketed as “**Live Online**” to be clear with both faculty and students how **calendars** can impact learning outcomes



Asynchronous (A Case Against Synchronous)

Faculty Disappointment

Adding Synchronous (optional)“We warned them!”:

- No one will attend optional synchronous (seriously!). Maybe a couple students show up.
- Students come in at various times, requiring faculty to repeat themselves.
- Can't add “new” content if its optional.
- Just finding the additional time to hold an optional lecture is tough.

The best of intentions....

Faculty may want to do both, but they tend to default to asynchronous



Asynchronous (A Case Against Synchronous)

Student Disappointment

Mandatory Synchronous works well when the instructor is great (like ANY course)

Optional Synchronous:

- Distractions when classmates enter late
- **Student Prefer Control** – They appreciate opportunities to interact but are most satisfied when in control of when they elect to participate in a synchronous session.

Enrollment Disappointment

REQUIRING online synchronous can hurt enrollment (especially graduate)



Asynchronous

The Bottom Line



Asynchronous Purists

100% online means - **fully asynchronous**

The Juice (for adding synchronous) is Not Worth the Squeeze



A Few Take Aways

- **Blended** - A LOT of effort (money, time, skills), but when it works, it works well!
- **Using Synchronous** - Should be marketed as “Live-Online” to avoid student/faculty confusion
- **Asynchronous** – 100% online means - **fully asynchronous**

It's really about communication!



Two Practices - Augusta University Online

Write it Down!

AU Coding Decision Matrix

Criteria
Physical location on Campus for successful completion
Length of Term
Marketing message to students
.....



- Fully online
- Hybrid (Live)
- Face to Face

100% (Asynchronous) Online ... with one exception

A “Personal” Reference – Requires blending either synchronous or a project



Limitations of the “Study”

- We need to engage **learners** – not just administrators
- We need to engage **employers** in the skills and experiences needed
- We need to engage **diverse communities** in how we define online

- We need to ask what online **should be (v. what it is)**

P.S. we have to do the same thing with the other modalities!

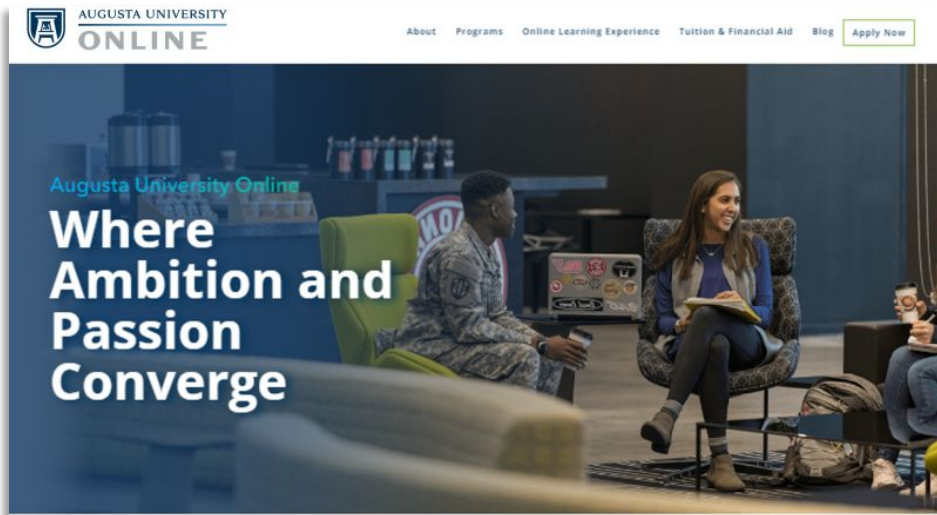
Fully Online

Hybrid

Face-to-Face



Considering the Future



Augusta University – 100% (Asynchronous) Online

- Will Students Get What They Expect?
- Will Faculty Be Engaged?
- Does the Definition Allow for Continuous Improvement and Innovation?

Online has a great opportunity to enhance learning

.....but let's be clear about exactly what we mean when we say - "online"



Questions?



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