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Sloan Awards Honor Nation's Top Online Programs

There are thousands of online offerings; learn the techniques employed by the top programs.

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The [University of Illinois—Springfield](#) and [Kennesaw State University](#) are among the winners of the 2010 Sloan Consortium Awards for Excellence in Online Teaching and Learning.

Sloan is an online education association with more than 200 institutional and 700 individual members. Awards were given to schools nominated from Sloan's pool of member institutions. Though for-profit schools enroll the lion's share of online students, award winners this year included private, public, and nonprofit schools. For instance, [Drexel University](#) and [Boston University](#)—two private schools with traditional campuses—tied for the award for excellence in institution-wide online education because the scope and quality of their online programs matched that of their on-campus offerings.

[Learn more about [online education](#).]

The University of Illinois—Springfield's Masters of Teacher Leadership Program was dubbed the most outstanding online program. During their two to three years in the program, students, most of whom are already employed as K-12 teachers or school administrators, receive financial aid tips from advisers and work with tenure-track professors—not adjuncts—who are eager to apply their teaching skills to the online realm according to the program's director, Scott Day.

Michael Chitty, middle school principal at Mansfield Christian School in Ohio and a Teacher Leadership Program student, says the course has taught him techniques that have enhanced his abilities as a school administrator. He says that he has been able to balance his life as a principal, father of five, and graduate student because the program accommodates his schedule. "It's an extremely efficient program—very user friendly," Chitty says. "The communication with the professors is outstanding."

Kennesaw State University, which won the award for excellence in faculty development for online teaching, has gone to great lengths to train traditional faculty in the ways of online instruction. In an effort to help the faculty better understand what it's like to be in the students' shoes, professors use online interfaces themselves as they learn relevant teaching techniques. So far, about 50 professors at the school have completed the 14 weeks of training it takes for them to craft their own online course. Teachers are also required to obtain online teaching certifications from Quality Matters, which involves a peer-to-peer review of online courses and professors.

[Some [Ivy League schools are embracing online education.](#)]

Richard Vengroff, the dean of the Kennesaw's college of humanities and social sciences, has taught online and claims that he and his colleagues have noticed the nature of online learning heightens the level of interaction with students. Rather than merely hearing from a few students put on the spot when he poses a question in class, he gets responses from all of them and they have more time to formulate richer, deeper written answers. He also maintains that Kennesaw tries to keep the quality of the online courses high by capping enrollment at 25 students per class as opposed to the several hundred who regularly attend lectures on campus. He insists that limiting class size hasn't helped Kennesaw's bottom line, but has ensured that the quality of classes remains high, while allowing Kennesaw to expand despite having no more room for students on campus. "People think we do the online classes because it's cheaper and we make big profits on it," Vengroff says. "That just isn't the case."

Sloan members view the awards a bright spot amid recent scrutiny on the industry—specifically on for-profit online schools—by Congress and regulators. "Sometimes in the press you see some of the negative things that are going on in online education—degree mills and accreditation mills," says Burks Oakley II, who oversaw the committee that handed out the awards. "This is really celebrating the very positive things that are going on in our community."

[Read about issues facing [for-profit online schools.](#)]

When evaluating the quality of an online program, Sloan committee members assessed

numerous metrics including the cost effectiveness and the level of student satisfaction. Those on the committee are all previous winners of individual Sloan honors. “They’ve all been involved in teaching online, creating an online program, running an online institution,” says Oakley. “They have real knowledge about what quality is. They’re senior enough to be able to look at something and tell if it’s real...if it’s good.”

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