Developing an institutional online education strategy: lessons from the edge

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Access to knowledge

Global mobility

Technology

Competition

Industry integration
Universities: Adapt or die

Streamlined status quo

Niche dominator

Transformer
Free uni courses go global

Platforms offering learning online are drawing thousands – and offer potential to reshape higher education, writes Nick Anderson.

B"rian Caffo teaches a public health course at Johns Hopkins University that he calls a "mathematical biostatistics boot camp". It typically draws a few dozen graduate students – never more than 70. This (northern) autumn, Caffo was swarmed. He had 15,000 students.

They included Patrycja Jablonska in Poland, Mohammad Hijazi in Lebanon and many others far away who ordinarily would not have a chance to study at the elite Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore. They logged on to a website called Coursera and signed up. They paid nothing for it.

These students, a sliver of the more than 1.7 million who have registered with Coursera since April, reflect a surge of interest this year in free online learning that could reshape higher education. The phenomenon puts big issues on the agenda. Coursera does not make money from its massive open online courses (MOOCs) but is part of the " Funding for free online learning is a growing field of interest, with a variety of players involved. Coursera, Udacity and edX are three major players, each with a different business model.

The big three
What the main players are offering

Coursera

Profile
For-profit with Stanford roots, 33 university partners including US Ivy League Institutions and the University of Melbourne.

Courses
190 in 18 subjects including computer science, math, business, humanities, social science, medicine, engineering, education.

Assessment
Software grades quizzes and homework; students grade written responses.

Academic integrity
Click a box agreeing to an honour code.

Social interaction
Online forums and study groups, meet-ups organised by students in about 1400 cities.

Pacing
Most courses have start and end dates.

What you get
Some instructors offer signed certificates of completion, but not from the university. Beginning next semester, Antioch University students can get credit at the Los Angeles campus for approved courses.

Udacity

Profile
For-profit with Stanford roots but no university affiliation.

Courses
18, in computer science, mathematics, physics, business.

Assessment
Software grades tests, problem sets, programs assignments.

Academic integrity
Proctored final exams at Pearson testing centres, for $89.

Social interaction
Online forums and study groups meet-ups organised by students in about 450 cities.

Pacing
Courses taken at own speed.

What you get
Certificates based on academic performance: completion, distinction, high distinction, highest distinction. Colorado State's Global Campus accepts transfer credit for a course in creating a search engine. In a free job-matching program, resumes are sent to partner companies, including Google, Bank of America, Twitter, Facebook and ThailPay based on their job openings and students' results.

edX

Profile
Non-profit run out of MIT and Harvard, with Berkley and the University of Texas system.

Courses
5, in chemistry, computer science, electronics, public health, plants for 20 to 30 next year.

Assessment
Software grades tests and homework.

Academic integrity
Some final exams are proctored at Pearson testing centres for varying costs.

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The debate over free online learning is just beginning. But it is likely to have a profound impact on higher education, from the way courses are taught to the way universities are funded. It is also likely to have a lasting impact on the way we think about education.
Key Questions

• MOOCs - trend or a fad?
• role of open educational resources?
• online or blended learning?
• attracting students to campus?
• role of campus master planning?
• business models for online learning?
• external partnerships?
• future of academic work?
• supporting academic staff?
• relationship between pedagogy, space and technology?
# 1 – Shared Understanding

- Fully Online
- Blended learning
- MOOCs
- Mixed Mode
- Online
- Lecture recording
- own time
- virtual classroom
- on campus
- support
- internal
- business model
- open resources
- flipped classroom
- real time
- learning management system
- personal learning environment
- active teaching
- flexibility
- student engagement
# 2 – Critical Elements

- Student Satisfaction/Experience
- Quality
- Growth/Profitability
- Staff Capability
- Digital Infrastructure
- Marketing/Brand
- Facilities Master Planning
# 3 – Engagement

- Uncovering Current Practice
- Surprises
- Innovative activity
- Different viewpoints
- Long term/short term activity
- Holistic view
- 1000 flowers blooming
- Course based versus programmatic approaches
# 4 – Assessing Capability

- Staff Capability
- Digital Infrastructure
- Facilities Master Planning
- Marketing/Brand
# 5 – A Call to Action

- Senior leadership understanding and commitment
- Coalition of the willing
  - learning and teaching, IT
    - at both a central and faculty level
  - supported by other key actors (marketing, facilities)
- Professional development
- Policy and governance frameworks
Technology Has Limits
Questions

1. Does your University have an online education strategy?

2. If you do is it separate to your overall teaching and learning strategy?

3. Do you need an online education strategy to enable online education activity?

4. Are there other things to consider?