

CASES OF INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The Pennsylvania State University
University of Texas TeleCampus
Rio Salado College
The City University of New York
Athabasca University
Empire State College

ABSTRACT

Six institutions provide snapshots of some of the major transformative effects of online education.

KEYWORD

Innovation, Metrics, Inter-institutional Programs, Change Adeptness, Hybrid Courses, Rates of Degree Completion and Progress, Pace of Change

I. PENN STATE WORLD CAMPUS

The Pennsylvania State University is a multi-campus land grant university with a long history of involvement in distance education and educational technology. The University includes, in addition to its University Park campus, 19 undergraduate campuses, an adult-centered graduate center, as well as campuses focused on medicine and law. It was one of three universities that founded distance education in the United States and has a long history of innovation with educational technology dating to early uses of instructional film.

In the mid-1990s, The Pennsylvania State University embarked on what would become a commitment to innovation with online learning, leading to a transformation in how the University uses technology to provide access to its curriculum and to ensure quality. Perhaps the most visible of these innovations is the World Campus, Penn State's online distance education program, which began in 1998 and which now offers 21 undergraduate and graduate degree and 33 certificate programs and noncredit programs, generating more than 20,000 course enrollments annually worldwide. While the World Campus was helping Penn State's academic units reach new students, other initiatives were focused on using online learning to improve undergraduate instruction on campus: the most significant of these has been the Courseware Initiative, led by Information Technology Services and Undergraduate Education, supporting the transformation of several high-enrolling courses, both improving instruction and addressing issues of cost-effectiveness.

As the World Campus grew, smaller undergraduate campuses saw the need to use online learning to attract and hold students in an increasingly competitive environment. A Course Sharing Task Force recommended creation of the E-Learning Cooperative, a mechanism by which World Campus courses and other online courses could be shared across campuses to further increase access. The Provost funded a Blended Learning Initiative to create new courses to meet the needs of the campuses; this is being led by the World Campus, in coordination with Information Technology Services and Undergraduate Education.

Within the last five years, several colleges have created their own instructional design centers to support the development of online courses for use on campus, for delivery by the World Campus, and for inter-campus delivery. The early leader in this trend was the Dutton e-Education Institute in the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, which develops undergraduate courses for use by undergraduate campuses, as well as full degree programs for World Campus delivery.

By 2005, it was clear that these activities were having a transforming effect on Penn State. The President and Provost called for the creation of “Penn State Online,” to bring the various resources for course development and delivery into greater coordination. These developments have further institutionalized the role of the World Campus and have begun to create a new leadership community for online learning at Penn State charged to shape this ongoing transformation.

II. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS TELECAMPUS

Institutional change can come crashing onto the scene with a fury, or it can be a slowly evolving self-revealing truth. In the case of the University of Texas TeleCampus (UTTC), the latter has certainly been the case. The TeleCampus operates at the System Administration level of the University of Texas System. Created in 1998 originally to provide services to distance education students at all of the 15 member institutions in the System, the TeleCampus quickly moved into offering collaborative online degree programs. The initial tasks were centered on changing policies and procedures, breaking down barriers, and creating communications channels where previously none existed. This was accomplished using the usual tools, (financial incentives, evangelism, coercion, and political arm-twisting), but the long term solution was to demonstrate value and quality.

From the outset, the TeleCampus made a conscious decision to “count things” and thus began to collect metrics on as many different aspects of the operation as possible. This gave UTTC an ability to answer specific questions when asked, but also to demonstrate consistent quality. The metrics included details such as enrollment numbers, growth rates, course completion rates, student and faculty survey responses, and of course a host of financial measures. Combined with “soft” data points in the form of student and faculty comments, these data allowed the TeleCampus to demonstrate value to policymakers and stakeholders who initially were dubious regarding the concept and practice of online education.

Having a small but dedicated marketing and communications group has proven valuable as well. Through their work, enrollments grew at a significant rate. In addition, they regularly nominate TeleCampus courses and programs for a variety of state and national awards—awards which provide external quality validation. All together, the ability to demonstrate quality and value has become a strong force in UTTC’s quest to affect institutional change.

The first few years of operation yielded success, but on a small scale. A small number of programs and modest enrollment allowed the TeleCampus to fine tune processes and build infrastructure for the anticipated growth to come. After the first few years, however, something interesting began to happen. The various campus administrations across the System began thinking of the TeleCampus as a strategic asset available to them, where previously they saw only an experiment.

The collaborative nature of the TeleCampus, working to build inter-institutional programs, had the unintended benefit of creating communications channels where none had existed before. Because policies and procedures to support online students needed to be crafted “from scratch,” silos of academic and administrative units began to talk. Remarkably, this happened not only between campuses, but even on

individual campuses themselves, where many of the units had little history of interaction.

A fundamental shift in the thinking of many of the campus' senior administrative officers became apparent by the 4th year of TeleCampus operation. We were brought to the table to discuss what role online might have in helping to address the pressing strategic issues facing higher education: improving graduation rates, increasing building utilization rates, broadening access.

To be sure, there are still some who question the validity of online delivery. Many, however, have moved from doubters to believers. They have become the agents of change within the system.

III. RIO SALADO COLLEGE

“Sustaining any profound change process requires a fundamental shift in thinking and action. We need to think of sustaining change more biologically and less mechanistically. This requires patience as well as urgency.”

Peter Senge, from *The Dance of Change*

With a college mission to “transform the educational experience through choice, access, and flexibility; customized, high quality learning design; and personalized service and organizational responsiveness,” Rio Salado College’s leadership views intuitional change as a crucial force behind the college’s vibrancy and its success. Over the last ten years as the college sought to rapidly institute major changes in its curriculum, educational delivery systems, and approaches to student services, it became apparent that the college concomitantly needed to evolve and nurture a culture which would sustain profound changes as well as embrace the concept of change. In other words, the college wanted its employees to be more naturally “change adept.”

Today at Rio Salado College being “change adept” means that at all levels of the institution, employees understand:

- Change is an important aspect of the college;
- They have the opportunity to participate in the planning of changes that involve them;
- How to help themselves and other move through the natural stages of concern associated with change;
- They have a responsibility to support college change initiatives.

The concept of being “change adept” is introduced formally and nurtured informally through the following:

1. “The Rio Way”

Mandatory for all Rio employees, this is a three-day college culture immersion workshop. This workshop, offered several times each year, includes (along with other topics associated with Rio’s culture) training in:

- Total Quality Management- to provide employees with the needed skills to participate in planning efforts;
- Change adeptness—which includes the stages of change and exercises for dealing with change; and
- Skills of a learning organization.

Participants in each workshop represent a cross-section of Rio's employees, and Rio's own employees conduct the workshop sessions.

2. The College Culture Page

The college culture page containing the Rio Salado College vision, mission, and core values is strategically placed throughout the college to remind employees about the importance of these concepts. Although change adeptness is not a college core value, it is a foundational underpinning of these values and is reinforced by the culture page.

3. Employee Rewards and Recognition Program

This program helps to nurture the concept of being "change adept" on a more personal level. In this program Rio employees nominate fellow employees whose efforts or actions exemplify Rio's core values. All of those nominated receive college core value icons and a wall plaque on which to display them. Their nominations are posted in the weekly electronic President's Bulletin.

Thus, over a period of several years the concept of change adeptness has become an explicit characteristic of the Rio culture and definitely assists with the preservation of profound changes.

IV. THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK: ONLINE INSTRUCTION AS ~~DISTANCE~~ LOCAL EDUCATION

Institutional change is most often reactive. Occasionally, it is proactive. And then there are those times when it's hard to tell. The recent development of a special online degree for degree completers at The City University of New York (CUNY) is a case in point.

CUNY had been working with online instruction since 2000, when a union-imposed moratorium on distance learning was lifted. Supported by funding from the Sloan Foundation, hundreds of faculty were trained to offer online courses to thousands of students. Not a campus or even a discipline was untouched; online courses were offered at every kind and level of instruction. As the faculty development project reached deeper into the mainstream, hybrid courses (half online, half on-campus) became an increasingly prevalent alternative to fully online instruction.

Still, the reasons to put instruction online were largely up to the instructor. The University as a whole had all the students it could handle, literally on its doorstep. But soon changes—including substantial faculty hiring—prompted another look at what might be done with online instruction.

Research on a national scale also provided impetus for reconsideration. Blended learning or hybrid instruction, often going on under the administrative radar, seemed to be growing rapidly, partly because institutions that had been doing fully online instruction found how much they were (or might be) serving local populations. The annual Sloan surveys documented the extent of online instruction, including the fact that it was offered by well over 90% of public institutions of higher education. If you wanted online instruction, you could get it locally.

Student interest was out there, not least of all locally, but what would be the institutional driver for change? And what were the risks? What, for instance, would prevent online instruction from simply

drawing students out of classrooms and playing to convenience rather than need?

A clue lay in an emerging crisis in higher education: the problem with rates of degree completion and progress. National statistics showed that it took nearly 7 years, on average, to finish a 4-year degree. And a growing number of students failed ever to complete the degree. According to ACT's ongoing study of retention and completion, BA/BS completion rates at 4-year public colleges have been falling from a high of 52.8% in 1986 to a 20-year low of 39.5% in 2005.

CUNY turned to its own institutional research, which showed that, over the last six years, 64,000 students left in good academic standing (with a GPA of 2.0 and a minimum of 30 earned credits)—and without going to any other institution of higher learning. Focus groups revealed academic difficulty was not the issue, nor were problems with CUNY specifically. What then? To do a global paraphrase of the students queried, “Life happened”—the need to work full-time, to provide child care, and so on. And so, for so many, the door to a college degree was shut.

Realizing that online education could eliminate the scheduling difficulties that have defeated so many students, CUNY has an online baccalaureate program for degree completers ready for a Fall '06 roll-out. It speaks directly to the matter of access, the heart of CUNY's mission, and it allows the leveraging of all the work that followed the lifting of the ban on distance education—online instruction is now for a local population for whom time, not distance, is the issue.

V. ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

The term ‘institutional planner’ is not a common occupational category in post-secondary institutions. At the same time ‘institutional planning’ is a required occupational activity for many, if not all, people holding positions in these institutions. Planning is a necessary response to changing social conditions, and change has become a constant imposition for several decades in the post-secondary enterprise. The needs of our emerging information and technology-based global economy, new complexities of postmodern life, the accelerating pace of change and increasing demands for competent, high-skill performance in the workplace are dependent on an appropriate educational response.

How, then, is such a response crafted at post-secondary institutions? “It is the job of planners to construct a process for change” [1]. A large, publicly funded degree-granting institution underwent major transformation in its curriculum delivery, using a strategic planning process that encompassed all aspects of campus life. Under conditions of such transformation, the following required tenets were identified:

- Broaden perspectives of those involved to help them understand current and evolving needs of key stakeholders and determine how best to address those needs.
- Synthesize individual perspectives into an institutional perspective to create a statement of future direction, values and priorities.
- Focus on what is fundamentally important, creating opportunities to eliminate unnecessary work and providing a focus for managing change.
- Strengthen connections among all campus community members by improving communications, establishing common goals, increasing cooperation and coordination, prioritizing and sequencing workloads and enhancing bottom-up participation.
- Equalize the knowledge base amongst participants and eliminate conjecture based on incomplete information and intuition by establishing a fact base.
- Anticipate and tease out ‘issues’, which are at the root of most organizational conflict and lack of

clarity.

- Link change activities to existing operating plans, which serves to foster consistency, conformity and continuity of action and effort.

For Athabasca, success was evidenced by the production of a quality product that was embraced across the campus. New models of online delivery must be appropriately accommodated across disciplines and fields of study, but can have an individualized campus look and feel, based on an integration of campus values, priorities and desired direction, providing a sense of ownership, familiarity and predictability.

VI. EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE: HOW FAST TO CONVERT?

Many institutions face the dilemma of changing delivery methods while continuing to serve existing student populations with legacy systems. All levels of leadership in an organization have a role to play in making decisions on how fast a change can be implemented and maintenance of multiple models.

Empire State College was founded by Ernest Boyer within the SUNY system in the 1970's to serve adult learners. Two predominant program delivery models emerged over the first twenty-five years. In most of the College, faculty worked with adult learners in individualized learning contracts through regional learning centers throughout New York State. In the Center for Distance Learning, faculty developed structured learning materials through print packages and electronic mail. Distance learning faculty worked with students, still in a highly individualized manner at a distance. The Center for Distance Learning was an early starter in online education in 1996 and had developed fifty fully online courses. Students began combining individualized study with group-based online learning.

Because of resource limitations, the Center for Distance Learning was considering ways in which the print individualized study approach could be preserved and continue to grow the online program to serve learners in groups. Faculty and staff were highlighting the important aspects of both learning methods. The Dean and planning committee had laid out a plan to convert the remaining 150 courses over five years. The plan was supported by the educational technology staff. During a resource planning session, the President asked if and why the Center's faculty believed the online learning courses were the most effective option for the particular adult learners that were currently served or could be served. After hearing the answer, he asked why the Center wanted to retain the print independent study methodology for five years. Wouldn't the costs of maintaining the legacy system and the new online systems cancel the opportunities for new development and the synergies of working more intensely? The President and the leadership discussed the resources and at the end of the conversation asked, "What would it take to convert the entire curriculum in one and a half years?"

This leading question showed confidence in the power of transformation. When Empire State College decided to forge ahead and support the conversion in this short period, there were many in the faculty who believed we were going to lose significant numbers of students who would not like the move to entirely online. In fact, the program continued to grow at the rate of 15% each year. While the year and a half required large amounts of dedicated work, it also allowed faculty and staff to focus on the mechanics of the conversion. The synergies that were created by having all of the department chairs, instructional designers and technical support engaged for a short and focused time allowed for higher levels of engagement in course design and in the improvements of management and technical systems.

A leadership case study can be made for knowing when to have confidence in the quality of your model and intended directions at all levels and when to push for a focused and intense conversion, rather than a

calculated model with slowly executed steps. This effort has now allowed technical resources to be directed to creating greater blended opportunities within New York State and the independent study models.

VII. REFERENCE

1. **Cleveland-Innes, M., C. Emes, and J. Ellard.** On being a social change agent in a reluctant collegial environment. *Planning in Higher Education* 29: 25–33, 2001.