TOP traits

ONLINE EDUCATION IN 2015

Part Three: Six Cases of Innovation

ONLINE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION
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Part Three: Six Cases of Innovation

SUMMARY

The most mature form of online education is adult-serving degree and certificate programming in which at least 80% of all instruction occurs at a distance. This market remains a viable growth opportunity for colleges and universities committed to serving adult learners. This report series presents Eduventures' most recent analysis of this market. In part three, we discuss three primary areas of need to improve the quality and impact of online learning. We then highlight six innovators successfully addressing these objectives through efforts such as open learning, competency-based education (CBE), adaptive learning, and strategic partnerships.

ADDRESSING THE "PRODUCT PROBLEM" IN ONLINE EDUCATION

The momentum behind online education's explosive growth to date has been largely fueled by the value of flexibility and convenience for working adults and other non-traditional student populations. The problem with this approach is that most online programs, outside of a handful of exceptions, have tended to replicate rather than rethink the format and structure of conventional learning. In other words, online learning has mostly delivered the same old product with little attention to product innovation.

In 2015, after five years of sluggish growth in this market, unprecedented levels of public scrutiny, and parallel innovations within and outside of higher education, now is the time for online program leaders to take on the product problem once and for all. To do this, Eduventures suggests tackling:

▶ **The experience of learning online.** Institutions need to focus on pedagogic excellence through and through. This will require incorporating the principles and practices of andragogy, personalized learning, remediation, retention efforts rooted in high-impact instruction, coaching, and data analytics. It will also require a general focus on student satisfaction and success.

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▶ **The cost of learning online.** Institutions need to focus on reducing the overall cost and debt burden on students, including both tuition costs and those incurred by a lengthy time to completion. They must also reduce their own production costs, which, when done right, can help to lower tuition.

▶ **The outcomes of learning online**. Institutions need to focus on improving learning and labor-market outcomes. This will be achieved through outcomes-based course and program design, as well as by going beyond simple collection and reporting tactics to make continuous efforts to improve outcomes.

Figure 1. Addressing the "product problem"
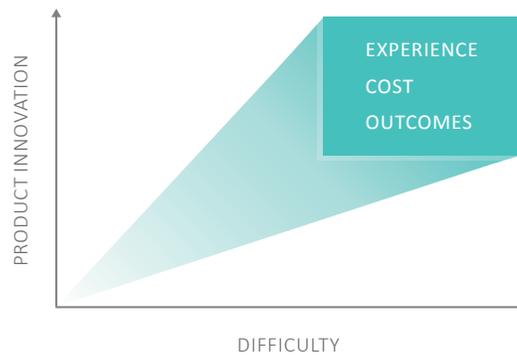
Below, Eduventures highlights six examples of innovators successfully addressing these objectives through efforts such as through open online learning, CBE, adaptive learning, and strategic partnerships.

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EDMONDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Lynwood, WA

Edmonds Community College (Edmonds CC) is a public community college. It currently enrolls over 20,000 students per year, with over 3,800 learning wholly or mostly online. Like many community colleges, Edmonds CC has long struggled with how to launch innovative initiatives with limited resources. Its solution has been to partner with Western Governors University (WGU). A dominant player in online education, WGU has embraced a unique partnership model with a number of community colleges nationwide that are focused on delivering low-cost pathways to attainment in high-growth, high-demand discipline areas.

INITIATIVE

In 2012, Edmonds CC was awarded a $3 million Department of Labor grant to advance CBE through its PACE-IT program,. The program offers certificate-level programming in high-demand technology fields such as data management and web development. Students advancing through this program also have the option of completing a bachelor's degree through WGU. Working in sustained partnership with Edmonds CC, WGU offers advice on launching CBE degree programs and on market intelligence and shares knowledge among a cohort of like-minded partner institutions on the replication of best practices. Edmonds CC currently enrolls 185 students in this program and has seen an uptick in interest among prospects since choosing to partner with WGU.

APPROACH

Edmonds CC offers a self-paced, accelerated, and assessment-driven program format that is wholly competency-based and distinctly aligned to key areas of industry need. To ensure academic success, individual mentors support each student, offering weekly academic support services, coaching, and encouragement. Certificates can also be easily stacked and used to transfer into programs at WGU, which encourages persistence and program completion.

EDUVENTURES' TAKE

In a nearly flat online market for associate degrees, Edmonds CC demonstrates that innovation can come from partnerships with leading players to address distinct areas of industry need. Along with WGU's other partner institutions, Edmonds CC is a model of how to innovate with the assistance of grants, which can be plentiful for institutions willing to align their program strategies with broader national priorities such as degree attainment.

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NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
New York, NY

New York University (NYU) is a four-year private university located in New York City with several international branch campuses. It currently enrolls over 53,000 students, with over 1,500 learning wholly or mostly online through its NYU-ePoly program, which is offered through the Polytechnic School of Engineering. As an elite institution, NYU has always struggled to make online learning a natural extension of its brand. Its solution has been to partner with leading corporations and a technology provider to evaluate new markets while advancing research on how people learn most effectively through online delivery.

INITIATIVE

NYU-ePoly offers eight online master's degree programs in niche disciplines, such as bioinformatics and industrial engineering, as well as certificates and certifications in similar fields. NYU has expanded its reach into online through extensive partnerships, both with employers (e.g., **IBM** and **BNY Mellon**) and technology partners, which is the focus of its most recent partnership with **McGraw-Hill Education** (MHE).

APPROACH

Working with MHE, NYU (through ePoly and the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development) has launched efforts to incorporate open digital content in select programs through the use of adaptive learning technology. In this format, students will use open digital content, producing "compound learning objects" that can be tagged, analyzed for effectiveness, duplicated across courses, and mapped back to objectives to support learning mastery. This process promises to strengthen the quality of ePoly's programs and serve as a research testbed for joint experimentation with MHE (and a third partner, **Microsoft**). This will in turn support the advancement of online learning technologies writ large and of the production of technology standards through MHE's partnership with IMS Global Learning Consortium, which can support much needed efforts to strengthen system interoperability.

EDUVENTURES' TAKE

NYU has taken an ambitious step forward with its focus on adaptive learning. With extensive partner support, NYU will emerge as a national example of how to experiment with novel approaches to online learning without sacrificing brand recognition or quality.

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NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Flagstaff, AZ

Northern Arizona University (NAU) is a four-year regional public institution. It currently enrolls over 26,000 students, with 430 learning wholly or mostly online through its Personalized Learning program. In the shadows of a number of large online players, NAU has struggled to carve out its niche in the online market in terms of market share, brand recognition, and funding to offer innovative programs. Its solution has been to pursue CBE, which has become a major market differentiator for NAU.

INITIATIVE

With the support of a $1 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, NAU offers three bachelor's-level CBE programs in computer information technology, small business administration, and liberal arts. All programs are offered through an all-you-can-learn, low-cost, subscription-based tuition model with a focus on student success through a very deliberate CBE model.

APPROACH

NAU approaches CBE through andragogy- and project-based learning. In lieu of faculty-led teaching and courses, this model encourages self-directed learning and the application of knowledge and skills in a professional context. NAU encourages collaboration among faculty, students, student mentors, and employers from inquiry to program completion. It uses a multi-instructor approach to student mentoring and support, in which one faculty member oversees overall curricular and program design, another provides subject-matter expertise, and a third focuses on advising and coaching students within a particular module. To facilitate this experience, NAU also uses personalization features available through open education resources and assessment features that are part of its partnership with **Pearson**.

EDUVENTURES' TAKE

NAU has managed to leapfrog into an already crowded and competitive regional market like few other institutions of its kind. Its personalized, self-paced approach provides a blueprint for other regional public institutions seeking to differentiate their brand through personalized learning.

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Valdosta, GA

Valdosta State University (VSU) is a four-year regional public institution. It is one of three regional institutions in the University System of Georgia (USG). VSU currently enrolls nearly 12,000 students, with over 1,700 learning wholly or mostly online. Having seen modest success to date with online learning, VSU has sought to explore viable program innovations to expand its market share and elevate its position within its own state university system and beyond. Its solution has been to offer CBE in a distinct area of regional need: teacher training.

INITIATIVE

To support its entry into CBE, VSU successfully pursued numerous grants to fund exploration and infrastructure support, including support from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), the Georgia Department of Education, and an Open Educational Resources grant from USG to expand into open online learning. These funds have been awarded to support VSU's efforts to establish its own CBE model and to drive an incubator approach to a full-scale, system-wide rollout of CBE programming. VSU was also selected as the pilot institution within the USG system to experiment formally with CBE.

APPROACH

VSU's current focus is on graduate-level STEM teacher certification endorsements in both math and science, though plans are currently underway to expand at the degree level. In addition to using prior learning assessments, VSU will also focus on self-paced learning, open educational resources, and competency-based assessments in these programs. A high-quality online student experience will also be central to its focus, and rich digital content will be integrated into its existing enterprise platform, Brightspace by **D2L**. This student experience can also be readily duplicated across VSU's programs and other programs within the USG system.

EDUVENTURES' TAKE

VSU is an up-and-comer in CBE. If successful, its efforts could provide a blueprint for state systems looking to incubate a CBE model at a smaller scale before replicating it across multiple campuses.

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OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
Corvallis, OR

Oregon State University (OSU) is a four-year public, land-grant research institution. It currently enrolls nearly 30,000 students, with 7,600 learning wholly or mostly online. As part of its land-grant mission, OSU has long offered extension, continuing education, and credit courses both face-to-face and online. Today, these efforts have expanded into a comprehensive portfolio of online courses and degree programs, as well as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and free and open digital content. As a large and successful player in online learning for many years, in recent years OSU has had to address how and whether to engage with the broader landscape of likeminded institutions. Its solution has been to join a new and ambitious consortium focused on building strategic alliances and partnerships across institutions through innovative teaching and learning tools, methods, and technologies.

INITIATIVE

Recently, OSU became a founding member of Unizin, a fledgling consortium of select public universities focused on advancing online learning and developing open education resources. As Unizin grows, it will provide joint access to digital content across member institutions through the development of a new learning ecosystem that will have the learning management system, **Canvas**, at its core.

APPROACH

Through its Unizin membership, OSU is planning to incorporate open content into its existing courses. This content will be mapped to objectives and outcomes and measured for its effectiveness through a robust analytics platform, which will enable a data-rich approach to instruction and program improvement. It will also enable OSU to begin experimenting with adaptive instruction and CBE and may serve as a method to initiate cost reduction measures for both students and the institution.

EDUVENTURES' TAKE

OSU is proving that partnerships with consortia like Unizin are a critical best practice for enhancing mission while increasing access to learning innovations. This strategy will provide a viable means of advancing its already large and successful program toward more innovative online learning formats.

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TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Lubbock, TX

Texas Tech University (Texas Tech) is a four-year public university. It currently enrolls nearly 30,000 students, with 444 learning wholly or mostly online at the doctoral level through its Worldwide eLearning Program. Its efforts have focused on offering doctoral education online, which is still a relatively small market and dominated by large, wholly online institutions. Texas Tech has had to forge a program vision and strategy that is aligned with its core institutional values. This requires reaching new markets to expand its offerings without compromising its commitment to faculty involvement in shaping programs and mentoring students throughout their experience. Its solution has been a wholly faculty-led online initiative.

INITIATIVE

Texas Tech offers four wholly online doctoral degree programs, including an Ed.D. in higher education administration and a Ph.D. in systems and engineering management. Programs are designed primarily for career changers who seek advanced credentials from a research university but are unable to relocate to Lubbock.

APPROACH

Texas Tech has designed its online doctoral programs around the input and buy-in of its faculty. They have participated in throughout the process, from ideation, strategy, and planning to production, designing the student experience, and deciding which technologies to use and why. Texas Tech does not use adjuncts; its full-time faculty deliver all instruction online and offer students unlimited one-on-one mentoring. All programs also make extensive use of project-based learning, often through cohorts, which enables students to apply learning to real-life scenarios in their current workplaces. This is also achieved with faculty input by leveraging faculty connections to professionals in various industry contexts when possible.

EDUVENTURES' TAKE

Texas Tech proves that no degree level is off-limits for online learning and that a large public institution can expand its programs to reach students, even at the doctoral level. By maintaining strong faculty involvement, it offers a model for how to deliver advanced-level credentials in a high-touch, personalized format.

ABOUT
EDUVENTURES

Eduventures is the leading research and advisory firm focused exclusively on analyzing the forces transforming higher education. Building on twenty years of success in working with education leaders, Eduventures provides forward-looking, actionable research based on proprietary market data and advisory services that support both strategic and operational decision-making. Our recommendations and personalized support enable clients to understand the top traits of leaders in critical disciplines and to evaluate the opportunities presented by new technologies.

More about Eduventures can be found at www.eduventures.com.