

Assignment 4:

Institution Evaluation: Best Practice

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The University of Phoenix Online Education.

The history and mission of the institution:

Founded in 1989, The University of Phoenix Online, <http://www.phoenix.edu> was one of the first accredited universities to provide a complete bachelor's, master's and/or doctorate degree in various fields of study via the Internet. As an accredited online university by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and The Higher Learning Commission, Phoenix Online is committed to building a learning-centered community that reaches the educational goals and needs of adult learners and working professionals. (Link, 2001). The mission of the University is to provide flexible and convenient, high quality degree programs and/or specialized training that are offered 100% online through Internet/Web technologies. There is a strong commitment to service for both educational excellence and student services, including administration, student support, registration and book buying. (Link, 2001). Their strategy is to provide all distant learners with the same quality of education, curriculum, faculty and resources offered in their traditional practices located at the 92 campuses and learning centers around the world. The strategic plan and framework of Phoenix Online is to respond to the changes in the workforce by providing the skills and knowledge that are in the highest demand.

The methods of development and delivery:

The goal of the University Online is to provide all students with the means to be more effective in their careers so they may reap the rewards that follow. The method of development is to occupy an online curriculum dedicated entirely to meeting the needs of continuing education and corporate training for mid-career professionals. This virtual learning community relies on computer communication that links faculty members and students from around the world into interactive learning groups. All faculty members hold extensive academic credentials and have work experience in a designated field of study. The virtual classroom is limited to 14 students for maximum interaction. Faculty members act as facilitators who share practical, "real world" experiences and build on the needs of students who are working professionals. Throughout the history of this University, 12,212 students have enrolled online, more than half of the students attended classes part-time, 20 percent are executives or owner of their own business, 30 percent are middle managers in business and industry and 44 percent are technical or licensed professionals. (Link, 2001). The University has awarded bachelors and masters degrees to more than 37,000 graduates, 25,000 degrees were awarded in 1990, 9,000 degrees were awarded in 1999, and the average age of the entering student is 35. (Link, 2001). Degrees can be earned in a two to three year period and classes are offered for 5-6 week concentrated curriculum sessions. Based upon quality assessments, a majority of the online graduates reported a high level of satisfaction in their education received and found the experience relevant to their career and academic goals. Each year, program curriculum, development, and delivery are evaluated and assessed to meet learners' current needs and demands.

Interaction prevalent in the institution:

The Online University is customized through a computer conferencing system that creates an electronic "virtual" academic community for each learner. Once enrolled in the program, students have access to the online campus and electronic classroom from their personal computer through the use of a modem. They can log on to the computer conferencing

system five out of seven days each week to participate in class discussion focused on the topic they are studying. Each student is able to engage in a dynamic interactive exchange with their instructor and classmates regardless of location or time of day. This online education permits working adults, whose schedules or locations may prevent them from attending a physical face to face classroom experience, receive all the benefits of group-based learning. (Corrigan, 1996). Students can communicate through Internet media, work off-line and then go on line to send and receive materials to and from class groups. All interaction (learner/learner, learner/content, learner/instructor) is done through asynchronous communication.

Best Practice: The Internet University: A Medium Delivery for Online Education

As the electronic revolution has altered the field of distance education throughout the years, a new phenomena known as the Internet University has evolved. In the industrial age, we went to school; in the information age, school came to us; now in the digital age, we can click into a school that exists solely in a virtual learning environment. Today, tools of electronic wizardry have made it possible for many well-known higher education institutions to plans and develop high-quality distance learning practices. The University of Phoenix Online has maximized its efforts in creating a virtual academic community. With the use of web technology and the Internet, this institution provides current and relevant degrees and training programs to thousands of individuals, career adults, and retirees who want to continue learning without dropping the rest of their life activities. When evaluating the framework of an effective distance learning program, potential components such as program design, learner autonomy, interactive element, and institutional quality assessment are all essential factors to consider in a best practice.

Best Practice:

The University of Phoenix has taken the Internet domain and built a very successful and widely recognized program serving many adult learners around the country. Combining the strengths of interactive group-based learning with the flexibility previously restricted to individual study, the programs at the University of Phoenix free a student to participate in a classroom liberated from the constraints of time and place. Many degrees and training certificates at the University of Phoenix are offered completely online for the convenience of working adults who find it difficult or even impossible to attend classes at fixed times and places. This flexible, condensed online curriculum delivery makes it possible for the busy adult learner to earn a degree via the Internet whenever and wherever they want while maintaining a career and personal life.

Program Design:

According to Moore and Kearsley, any institution that provides distance education for web-based learning must organize and manage the work of both technology and academics in order to generate ideas and strategies into course delivery. The course content must be structured in a format suitable for distance learning with a method of evaluation. (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Each program offered at the University of Phoenix is carefully reviewed and updated to provide the essential skills and expertise that are in high demand of the working professional. Upon approval of each distance education course, the faculty member makes efficient and effective use of the technology available to achieve the learning identified in the course content. Guidelines are set for each program developed, and these guidelines serve as benchmarks for curriculum approval. They are continuously reviewed under course revisions to match the changing needs of adult learners and meet the University's mission statement to ensure the delivery of a high quality education. Each educator provides an effective combination of theory and practical experience. In each module of instruction, there are problem scenarios or case studies to enhance "real world" learning opportunities for student/ peer interaction through collaborative

group projects. All classes offered at the University are limited to 14 students for a more specialized approach and each course incorporate materials for research and information purposes and hyperlink to websites to deepen the learning experience and stimulate discussion. (Link, 2001).

Interactive Element:

In addition to course delivery and content, Holmberg tells us that good distance learning programs are not just created by combining innovative technologies to deliver subject matter, but yielding to interaction which enhance the learning experience. (Holmberg, 1995). When designing a successful online learning environment, not only do educators need to take appropriate action to identify the learning needs and characteristics of the targeted student; the institution must provide designated course-related support for each learner. Two-way communication is an essential process of this design. Phoenix Online provides an innovative asynchronous format that works like email in a software program. Unlike other programs that are partially delivered via mail, videotape, or even some required on campus attendance, the online delivery through the University of Phoenix utilizes the Internet and web technology for interaction. This is done by asynchronous techniques such as emails, list serves, bulletin boards, discussion forums, and one-on-one question/answer response. According to Peters, an interactive multi-media method used in distance education practices helps mirror traditional face to face interaction and creates a sense of community among learners. (Peters, 1998). Phoenix Online uses various forms of media to increase learner/content, learner/instructor and learner/learner interaction. This is enhanced through the two-way communication process of asynchronous computer mediated conferencing. The University uses the networked learning environment to integrate voice, video, and data connections between their students, instructors, and Internet resources. This collaborative networked environment takes a learner-centered approach, which accommodates the connection of learners to a wide variety of multimedia resources. (Peters, 1998). Upon registration at the University of Phoenix, students and fellow classmates are provided access to a special group mailbox. This group mailbox serves as the electronic classroom. One of the first things a learner does is exchange professional and personal information with fellow classmates. The faculty member then provides instruction, issues assignments, and stimulates and facilitates class discussions, all mediated in the virtual classroom. Each student receives a well-organized course guide in which they find a convenient outline of each week's learning activity. The class meeting and discussion is spread out over a full seven days, and the weekends are free for the student to complete readings and papers. Before each week of class begins, the instructor typically submits a lecture and review of each assignment. Then, throughout the week, the instructor is there to facilitate the class discussion by providing expertise, guidance, and answer questions. At the conclusion of the assignment, the learner is asked to provide a summary of the concepts covered and based on their contributions to the class, the instructor provides feedback on how he/she is doing and responds to any issues or concerns a student may have. (Link, 2001).

Learner Autonomy:

Phoenix Online supports an online learning environment that shifts from the linear outline of faculty centered teaching to student centered teaching, utilizing strategies that promote discovery-based learning and critical thinking. The faculty's role at the University of Phoenix is that of resource facilitator and/or online communicator. They use web-based communications technologies to support and sustain interaction in a knowledge-based learning environment. Peters explains how a digital learning environment can present an educational model for autonomous and self-controlled learning. (Peters, 1998). Phoenix Online uses the context of a digital learning network that places students at the center of their educational experience. Each learner at the University has the opportunity to use the virtual classroom to increase interactivity and individualization. This environment optimizes his/her learning experience through methods of searching

and processing and helps each learner focus on personal interests, preferences and skills. Not only does the online classroom provide a flexible and adaptable autonomous opportunity for each student, the multimedia space is designed for an innovative learning architecture that aids in converting information into knowledge. (Peters, 1998). Phoenix Online, through a networked learning environment, provides the opportunity for each student to be connected to an array of multimedia resources where technology supports collaborative learning, heterogeneous grouping, problem solving and higher order thinking skills. According to Peters, when this style of teaching is transposed into multimedia spaces strategically, students no longer just absorb, process and reproduce information offered to them, but further track down, evaluate and arrange information into receptive knowledge (Peters, 1998).

Quality Assessment:

After each course is taken online, students receive an evaluation assessment to reflect upon their learning experience. Based upon feedback from 1999, most students agreed that the style of teaching was satisfying. (Link, 2001). As independent learners they appreciated the flexibility of an online curriculum and claimed it was a valuable experience with a non-linear focus on individual work. (Link, 2001). Each student felt in control of their own learning path and based their knowledge on personal interests and career goals. Furthermore, the University of Phoenix Online tracks these quality assessments to evaluate their digital learning environment and create new opportunities for pedagogical planning. They utilize the results to better assist them in identifying the needs and characteristics of the learners they intend to serve in the future.

Summary:

Without exception, the strategic plan of the University of Phoenix Online has proven to be an effective institution in developing successful non-linear, student-centered programs and for providing an excellent performance-based educational structure. Perhaps Professor Holmberg explains it best; “a good distance learning program involves a wide range of professional input, expertise, and support through an empathic instructional mission of the institution “ (Holmberg, 1995, p. 32). Phoenix online is a fully functioning distance education system that blends the consistent and coordinated efforts of its administrators, faculty, facilitators and support personnel. The distance education practice at the University of Phoenix Online brilliantly reflects how the computer can provide unlimited opportunities for autonomous learning, mediated communication, interactivity, and strong support services from the leading institution. This University has laid the groundwork for the transformation of organizational structure and mission into a virtual learning environment. It is indeed an example of a fine distance education practice and displays a “perfect” model of how the availability and integration of information resources, students, faculty, and administration can be connected to everyone, from everywhere, at anytime. This Internet University is very well deserving of its recognition and reputation for “distinguishing a blend of proven academic practices and innovative instructional delivery systems that have helped to build the largest online private business school in the country-the second-largest private university of its kind- with a growing network of campuses and learning centers throughout the United States.” (Link, 2001).

References:

- Corrigan, D. (1996). The Internet University: College Courses by Computer. United States: Cape Software Press.
- Holmberg, B. (1995). Theory and practice of distance education (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Moore, Michael G & Kearsley, G. (1996). Distance Education: A Systems View. Wadsworth:Belmont, CA.
- Peters, O. (1998). Learning and teaching in distance education. London: Kogan Page.
- COADEC & MDLA Joint Conference (2001) Maryland: Henry Link

Mark Up and Grade an Assignment

Enter Grade:

A+ (You can use either numbers or letters to specify grades.)

Student's Text:

Task elements	Comments
Explicit listing of the essential elements of evaluative framework	The University of Phoenix is chosen as 'best practice' example. The reasons for this include 'learner autonomy' and 'quality assessment'.
History and mission	Historical information is included; reference to mission statement is included.
Methods of development and delivery of course content	Modes of delivery are described in some detail.
Interaction with students	Forms of interactions are described in some detail.
References	References in are included and fully meet APA style requirements. The author makes excellent use of the required readings to argue the case of her best practice example.
Summative assessment	The author's own evaluative stance is well expressed. The essay is very clearly structured. It describes the institution in detail. It is excellently written. A+

Assignment 4: Institution Evaluation: Best Practice Lealan M Zaccane OMDE 601 Section 9040 May 7, 2001 Thomas, Please note- although I have thoroughly reviewed the large number of DE practices provided in my group collaborative document and those researched by other group participants as well, I did not choose one of these DE institutions as an example of my "best practice." Last week, I attended a distance education conference in Maryland (sponsored by COADEC & MDLA) and the University of Phoenix Online was represented there. It is one of the leading online practices of its kind and its mission is one that is modeled by many other DE institutions, including UMUC. I was impressed by the delivery services and strategic plan of the institution and decided it was best for me to apply the knowledge that I have learned in this class to this leading practice. It has been a valuable and significant experience of applied learning and I really do feel it is one of the best practices of its kind. I've made reference to this conference- I hope it is properly cited. Regards, Lealan