

Lealan M. Zaccone

OMDE606: Section 9040- The Management of Distance Education 1: Cost Analysis

March 31, 2003

Module 3: Assignment 2- Question # 2- Consider the Case of Possible Advantages of a DMU

Word Count (excluding reference citations, reference list, and headings):782

Supporting The Dual Mode University: An Analysis of Mixed-Mode Provision

By Lealan M. Zaccone

The spirit and meaning of education cannot be enhanced by the easy method of giving the same dose to every individual. If learning is to be revived, quickened so as to become once more an adventure, we shall have need of new definitions, new concepts, new motives, new methods; we shall need to experiment with the qualitative aspects of education. (Lindeman, 1926, p.4)

Introduction:

Today, learning is considered a lifelong process and is seemingly recognized as a critical component to succeed in a knowledge-based society. Increasingly, many educational institutions are targeting non-traditional markets while simultaneously, educators and trainers are reexamining the entire learning process-when, how, and where learning occurs. As traditional (campus-based) institutions currently adhere to technological changes, and (single-mode) distance learning universities offer flexible delivery methods that reach new learner populations, many researchers suggest that a blended learning approach (traditional methods combined with distance teaching methods) provides the proper mix of technology, flexibility, cost, curriculum, and access. This paper summarizes the advantages of this approach, explains the benefits of the dual-mode university, and evaluates mixed-mode provision in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

Analysis

The Dual-Mode University:

The changing needs of the workforce and the characteristics of learners in post-secondary education are among the most important reasons for the delivery of mix-mode learning systems. According to Rumble (1997) a dual-mode university (DMU) is a form of an on-campus resource-based learning center where distance teaching practices are used to alternatively serve (external or distance) students off campus (p. 31). The DMU offers a wider choice of teaching strategies to "meet the needs of the part-time learner, through the adaptability of individual needs, learning patterns and settings, and media combinations" (Collins & Moonen, 2001, p.9). They provide broader curriculum choices, bring down the costs of teaching, and allow new technologies to enrich existing classrooms (Rumble, 1997). These institutions can reach out to new target

groups, such as lifelong learners, people in the workforce, and the physically disabled (Bates, 2000, p. 28).

Benefits of Mixed Mode Provision:

The benefits of the DMU is that a mixed-mode provision opens up delivery systems, break down traditional barriers, and help reach new markets such as part-time students, second chance learners, returning adults, and/or individual's balancing multiple responsibilities (i.e. job, family, and community). Learning methods are mediated through various technologies, such as CD-ROMS, audiocassettes, video conferencing, and/or computer-based instruction, and "usually with some additional media support such as telephone tutoring, are delivered to students at home; or satellite campuses by an increasingly wide range of 'broadcast' technologies" (Bates, 1995, p.24). Mixing delivery technologies with traditional face-to-face teaching increases support, flexibility and access.

Economic Advantage:

The cost-effectiveness of a DMU system depends on several factors, including the comparative costs of traditional and distance teaching systems, cost structure of each delivery medium, and the potential for increased enrollment over larger geographic areas. "Basically, distance education systems incur high fixed costs which are then spread over a large number of students to result in a relatively low average fixed cost per student" (Rumble, 1997, p. 35). Therefore, the most important distinction between conventional and distance education, in terms of efficiency, is between the ratio of fixed to variable costs. The cost structure of a distance education college generally involves higher levels of fixed costs (i.e. learning materials, medium, and maintenance), but once these costs are met, they are not affected by volume of activity. It is the variable costs (i.e. replication and distribution) that subsequently change with the number of students and bring down unit costs. This is fundamentally different from the cost structure of conventional education where variable costs (i.e. teacher salaries) are higher and capital costs are lower.

Therefore, the economic advantage of a DMU is to offer a wider choice of cheaper courses through distance teaching methods such as audio, video, CD-Rom's or Internet technologies. These technologies provide an opportunity to develop new approaches to teaching and learning and the research (see Rumble, 1997, 152-9) supports that "technologies can improve the quality of education and enable new target groups to be reached, at less cost than by using conventional methods" (Bates, 1995, p.17). A dual approach "allows costs to be allocated to the different on- and off-campus courses (products) in different ways- enabling the price charged to students to be modified at will" (Rumble, 1998, p. 98). Furthermore, it is a "total mix of support and, in particular the integration of learning materials, books and personal contact, that is important and which makes many of the (DMU) programmes effective" (Rumble, 1992, p. 35).

Future trends:

According to Rumble (1998) both types of institutions (traditional and distance) recognize the importance of meeting the growing need of new learning market and in the future “the most effective response may be to develop partnerships” (p. 102). Mugridge (1997) agrees that collaboration efforts complement the strengths of an institution while minimizing weaknesses. Each institution “concentrates on doing better what one is already doing well but with the support of the other” (p. 58). Bates (2000) adds that the “two most important reasons for partnerships are: 1.) to share costs or spread the same cost over greater number of students, and 2.) fight off perceived competition for students from other sources (p. 163). Rumble (1997) concludes that “there are many ways forward, for those institutions creative enough to come up with a winning strategy, and the result of collaboration, from a recognition of the varying strengths of both types, will be a more integrated and effective university system” (p. 43). Otherwise known as the Dual-Mode University.

Conclusion:

As technology increasingly influences the way we live, work and learn, colleges and universities are simultaneously developing new ways to distribute educational services. The preceding analysis confirms that the winning strategy is in a blended learning approach. It concludes that the dual mode university: 1.) uses low-cost technologies to get campus-originated courses out to off campus students, 2.) has the capacity to reach new target groups 3.) offers a wider range of curriculum programmes and, 4.) makes use of various technologies through distance teaching methods. The various research supports that the dual-mode university is both effective and efficient.

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