

WHITE PAPER:

THE CHANGING PATTERNS OF DELIVERY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND COLLAPSE OF REGIONAL EDUCATION FROM A HAWAI'I-BASED PERSPECTIVE

Traditional elitist higher ed

Higher education in the United States has always had a complex history given that on one hand it reflected the British heritage of education as a form of elitism. But on the other hand the pervasive Calvinist influence of education as a means of salvation, with its corollary of education-teaching as the main focus of missionizing meant that higher education was anti-elitist and instead a reflection of religious morality (as it reflected self-discipline). This dialectic is still illustrated in the contrasting image of the university as a intellectual hub of discovery, learning and self-improvement on one hand and the frat party, sport team boosterism and Spring Break parties on the other.

The shift to the inclusive model of higher education is probably best typified by the World War II veteran's benefit package to make the university accessible to almost all. This pattern led to dramatic growth in the higher education system in the U.S., initial in the number of campuses, but also in the stunning expansion of enrollment in university systems. At this point higher education moves into a critical position as point of access to careers because of a university degree. The lack of a university degree becomes symptomatic of lack of direction and discipline (again the Calvinist morality) rather than inability to access the university. By the 1970's this becomes part of the move to equalize minorities within the U.S., through legislating access to universities and therefore career and economic equality.

1980-90's expansion—community college→college→ university

By the 1970's all levels of the higher education system had expanded, and a formal structured system of community colleges (vocational, first-stage liberal arts) → four-year colleges resulting in Bachelor's Degrees (both applied-vocational and liberal arts) that were for many the terminal degree they sought. At the top were the universities, who offered both four-year undergraduate degrees (in competition with the colleges) and advanced degrees (both applied and liberal arts). Advanced degrees were limited to specialists in the specific discipline.

A major change occurs in the 1980's likely in part to shrinking enrollments combined with educational expansion. This was the move to expand the vocational choice at universities (which also spilled down the educational hierarchy). At the same time the preparatory status of community colleges as staging to 4-year college degree is replaced by identifying them as narrowly as vocational-technical training centers. All the emphasis on completing a four-year degree (or more) requires attendance at a four-year college or university. At the same time many four-year colleges began expansion both in offerings and identity and reinvent themselves as universities. The college-university monopolization of the total undergraduate experience becomes the critical revenue stream—built in large part on the implication of higher quality education that delivered at a community college (for the same course material).

This expansion of the Academic Enterprise was not limited to course offerings and majors. It included such areas as the development of a very complex bureaucracy, major expansions of the tenure-track

academic ‘business’ and of accrediting agencies. All of this infrastructure was generated in response to the expansion of the upper tiers of the academic enterprise. Once this infrastructure was in place the need to justify its continued existence as enrollments begin to shrink [as much due to the enormous expansion of colleges and universities as to declining numbers] by the 1990s led most colleges and universities to expand their 4-year vocational degree programs and at the same time devalue the marketability of 2-year programs. This can be seen in areas such as nursing, education and business. This was reinforced by drives for higher levels of training for professional certification. This also justified the expansion of smaller regional colleges into universities at the time that larger central universities morphed into research universities. This expansion was driven in part on perception and marketing of regionality—that specific institutions either offered programs to local populations or offered a unique form of a program (“the only school offering ,,...”).

The entire system is based on a persistent growth model: the number of students and the level of education-training students need will persistently continue to grow over time. The validation of the system is based on social attitudes that professional certification and competency are also subject to persistent growth [frequently through the logic of increased specialization]. An individual may not see the value of the collegiate process, but realizes that educational program is necessary to follow that career path. However this contradicts a strongly-held American value of self-improvement, based on hard work rather than academic preparation (which can also be seen as elitist). The “self-made millionaire”, especially in areas such as high tech, is often held up as example of the lack of relevance of the increasingly inflated educational-validation system.

The Internet Phase I

As the internet become more generally accessible, universities began to realize potential markets that could be accessed with this technology. In the first phase, this consisted largely of “local” students (within the immediate region) who were unable to attend traditional ground-based courses. For this reason at most universities online education initially was developed within the evening/accelerated/non-traditional unit of the university. Online courses were designed to mimic the traditional “ground” class. This can be seen in such online systems as “E-College” (now owned by Pearson Publishing). As digital realities were just beginning to take form and were very poorly understood, learning delivery was designed as a digitized form of the then-current educational theories around learning. Revenue was tied to control of materials and enrollment within a “learning system” such as E-College. Attempts were made to add new elements such as the move of courses into Second Life (a virtual world) to mimic the traditional classroom. But the conjunction of several factors have led to:

The Internet Phase II

1) the growth of digital publishing, as reflected in the success both of Amazon.com and also digital readers (such the Kindle and other tablets); 2) the growth of smartphones linked to complex social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, QQ...); 3) the demand for portable computing—the tablet. A presentation by the Google Atmosphere Map Division staff gives some good statistics to emphasis the rate and level of change: in the last quarter of 2012 (Q4) 274 million smartphones were purchased; 25 million smartphones were purchased at Christmas; in 2012 over 700 million smartphones were purchased; in 2013 over 1 billion smartphones were purchased; in 2013 Google was averaging 1.3 million android activations per day [view at youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=rsJ39RaFytQ#t=6].

Central to the intersection of the three factors is the realization of the “durability” and “portability” of electronic media, the “pdf” document being a good example. A print text can be scanned, converted into a digital image, “ocr’ed” into an accessible document and turned into a searchable, printable pdf document. This document can be sent as an attachment to anyone, posted on a website accessible to anyone, and read by anyone. They can also comment on the document to anyone else. And all of this could be done in the space a few minutes, from anywhere on the planet with an internet connection. Theoretically a million copies could be generated within a few minutes. The monopoly of the physical text and the ability to control access (copyright) was gone.

The changing rhetoric about “e-books” since the late 1990’s is a good illustration of the speed of this change: Amazon was incorporated in 1996, its first public stock option was in 1997 and in 1999 Jeff Bezos (owner) named Most Important Person of the Year by Time Magazine. Borders Books was founded in 1971, grew rapidly in the late 1980-1990s and by 2010 had over 500 stores in the U.S. alone. In September 2011 all their stores closed as the company collapsed in receivership. Its major competitor was Barnes & Noble, who became a national chain in the same period (1980-90’s). By 2007 B&N operated over 800 bookstores in the U.S. alone. By 2011 it was in the second phase of major reorganization, closing a majority of its stores, dropping two subsidiary chains (B. Dalton and Crown Books) and focusing on its e-book system (Nook) and e-offerings.

The realization that free dissemination of materials was widespread initially was seen as a threat by the academic and publishing industries, as a major loss of intellectual control and revenue. By 2013 (and significantly earlier in Europe) a number of journals and other published materials were moving to a free-to-access model with journals and articles available on the Internet. In part triggered by parallel demands to increase access to higher education, make university education more accountable (and assessable) and to shift learning back to a more certification or competency measure form of education led to the development on “free” online courses.

Current Free Online Course Paradigm

The current model is a realization that the materials of a course are publically available in scattered form, either through student work, digital material given to classes or materials generated within the university system. This is especially true for courses that are taught ‘online’. By organizing and structuring the material into free online courses, the university keeps intellectual control of the material and goals. While the course content is generally available, intellectual discussion, analysis and most importantly measures of competency are still handled by the course academic/teacher.

See the following as illustrations of this section: <http://oyc.yale.edu/>; <https://www.edx.org/>; <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/>; <http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>; <http://oli.cmu.edu/>; <http://webcast.berkeley.edu/>; Stanford on iTunes; <http://ocw.tufts.edu/>; <http://www.ocwconsortium.org/>; <http://www.montereyinstitute.org/nroc/>.

Major universities involved in open courseware listed above: Yale, Harvard (leader of edx Consortium), Carnegie-Mellon, MIT OCW Consortium, Open University UK, U.C. Berkeley, Stanford, Tufts and John Hopkins

This has the advantage that for public knowledge and assessment, the course material can be viewed (and critiqued) by all. The student has a great deal of information as to the requirements placed on them to know the course content. In many ways this moves back to the old form of elitist higher education, with a student and the tutor/reader. The student consumes, they dialog, and eventually the student displays competency and is vetted by the tutor/reader. The 20th century “class”, highly structured, highly scheduled, material consumed on a schedule, is replaced (?) by a modified version of higher education pre-1880. A student can view various course alternatives (say courses on Japanese Society) from various institutions, look over the materials, find the best fit (or the most prestigious), consume the material, register for the class and pass by illustrating intellectual command of the material (competency). The location of the university is largely irrelevant. The perceived value/reputation of the university grows.

This has enormous implications for the educational infrastructure in the U.S. (as elsewhere). The physical structure of the university, the regional nature of its identity and reason for existence, the massive investment in bureaucratic infrastructure, and of course related industries from publishing through accreditation systems—all would lose a major part of their justification for existence. The perceived social value of the institution becomes a huge factor in selective traffic. Branding moves from athletics and logo wear into the course (and program) offering. Southern Oregon University, Boise State University or University of Hawaii Manoa—any university teaching 19th Century Victorian English Literature is now competing with Yale, Harvard, U.C. Berkeley, Princeton for students. As an informed consumer, the individual student can evaluate and select the version of that course and “consume” it.

In this model, the non-branded universities will only survive based on unique courses (and potentially programs). Attractive branded schools can then also either charge more or expand offerings to cover demand—the same issue seen in brand-driven retail markets. The most significant measure of assessment becomes foot traffic (i.e., registered students), and the major function of accrediting agencies becomes quality control (did the course consumed match the public materials).

Contemporary Technical Model: The current model of open course formats consists of two components: 1) the public material; 2) the more traditional interactive material that makes up the competency measures. This can be seen from the following (from Harvard’s edX site):

“HES students will use the edX materials as part of their learning, but will have additional videos, section meetings, assignments and instructor feedback. HES students receive and must fulfill requirements contained in a separate HES course syllabus.” (from <https://www.edx.org/course/harvardx/harvardx-sw12x-china-920> downloaded 2.5.14).

Behavioral Science Program Strategies

A specific view of the near future drives the redesign of the program. A key piece is based on the Google Inc. view of the future, a corporation whose business plan is to “Organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible”, to “democratize information”. They note that while traditionally “the enterprise led innovation that went to the consumer, now it is consumer led innovation that drives the enterprise”. “The pace of innovation at the consumer level will always outpace that of the enterprise. Google Enterprise’s slogan is “Work the Way You Live”. [see at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=rsJ39RaFytQ#t=6]. This premise drives our program redesign as follows:

- 1) Remodel courses so that they coherently reflect the social policy direction of the major. Note that this is a career goal (social policy), NOT a job goal. It is also a major change from the traditional multiple-degree track (Bachelors-Masters-PhD). It gives the student freedom to make a number of choices: work in related area after degree completion; or go on for advanced certification either in applied or traditional programs.
- 2) Move to a free course online presence as soon as possible. This both expands our identity to a large audience, provides publicity for the courses-major, and also by virtue of ‘hits’ will be a measure of the validity of the course-program design and theme.
- 3) Design the major requirements to reflect the changing access to discipline-specific courses. This involves ‘freeing up’ many of the major requirements so that course substitutions become an integral, advertised part of the program. If a student wants a stronger Hawaiian-Pacific emphasis than we can offer, then substitutions of specific courses from UH Manoa or U. Oregon would be accepted. This increased flexibility goes back to the argument that Google and Amazon make, that the consumer is the driver of structure, not the organization. The function of the organization becomes to certify and structure a sociological-anthropological world view, in large part through the senior thesis part of the major program. This will include courses offered in academic systems such as the U.K. and New Zealand where there is a very formal structure of national-level discipline and course “accreditation”. [example: A course in sociology on Gender Identity and Media from U Auckland or Bristol U (UK) would be accepted as within major.]
- 4) In the longer view, course and discipline-level national accreditation will become of increasing importance and the need for institution-level accreditation will decrease. As students can take discipline-specific courses from a wide variety of courses, the emphasis shifts from “where” the course is offered to “what” the course contains, [content over location]. Course ‘certification’ should be handled by national discipline-specific societies rather than regional accreditation organizations. The alternative is the system present in the UK and New Zealand with governmental oversight, but courses and programs certified by in-discipline professional teams.