Chapter XII

Developing and Delivering Online Courses

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Abstract

Distance education, which started out with closed circuit TV technology, has evolved into completely online courses. Not surprisingly, online education has emerged as a major form of e-business. This chapter offers helpful suggestions for those who are planning to develop and deliver online courses, either as part of an existing degree program or as a new totally online degree program. Wherever needed, an online MBA program is used as an example. The chapter considers such things as mission, curriculum planning, curriculum control, marketing, scheduling, course development, expectations from students and faculty, and strengths and weaknesses of online education.

Introduction

Traditional classroom (or face-to-face, or F2F) instruction requires the students and instructor to be at the same place at the same time. In other words, the instructor and the students are place bound and time bound. Early forms of distance education[1] removed the need for them to be place bound. The earliest form of distance education started with the closed-circuit TV technology, where the audio and video signals of an instructor's lecture were transmitted to a distant location so that students at that location could also "attend the class." A clear advantage of this technology was that it eliminated or greatly reduced commuting needs for students and instructors. Later, the signals were compressed and carried via closed circuit or broadcasted using a satellite so that the signals could be delivered to several remote locations efficiently. Consequently, compressed video became a popular technology for distance education.

The advent of Internet changed the technology radically so that asynchronous communication could be utilized. Reading materials and activities of a course could be stored at a Web site for secure access from anywhere at any time. Students and instructors could "come to the class" individually at a time convenient to them and carry out all classroom activities. This turned out to be a great convenience to them, because not only are they not place bound but now they are also not time bound. As a result, demand for online education grew rapidly. Today, a Google search of the phrase "online education" produces more than a billion hits. Worldwidelearn.com, DirectoryofSchools.com, USNews.com and GetEducated.com are good Web sites to get a list of available online degree programs. For a survey of literature on distance education, including online education, see Bryant et al. (Bryant, Kahle, & Schafer, 2005).

MBA has been a popular degree program since the 1960s, and it still enjoys a high demand. It is no wonder that online MBA programs are increasing in popularity, because the advantages of being not place bound and not time bound are especially attractive to business employees. Private and public schools have raced to claim their share of the online market. Crawford (2005) reports an estimate of 125,000 online MBA students in the year 2005. A list of well-recognized MBA programs can be found at the Web site, BusinessWeek.com, and online MBA programs at GetEducated.com. Since many online programs are constantly being added and deleted, most lists are not up-to-date.

Online training of employees has also been increasing rapidly. Corporations have found it more cost effective to train their employees using online programs. Such programs eliminate the need for employees to travel, saving a sizeable amount of money for the company. For details on the advantages of online training of employees, see Blake et al. (Blake, Gibson, & Blackwell, 2005).

Consonance with the Mission

A university interested in starting an online degree program should first examine if such an action is in line with its mission. The university may have an obligation to its on-site

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