

Partnerships

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INTRODUCTION

The rapidly changing environment in society is cause for higher education to reassess approaches to meeting educational needs. Many key factors are in a dynamic flux: these include growing numbers of students, more diverse populations of students, the need for more responsive educational content and modes of delivery, and the dynamic and unpredictable nature of the economy.

At the same time that new and pervasive demands face higher education, we are experiencing a shift away from high, predictable public support to increased reliance on tuition and outside funding sources. Partnering, now more than ever, is a critical component of success. Partnerships enable people and organizations to support each other by leveraging, combining, and capitalizing on their complementary strengths and capabilities, thereby achieving more than either partner working alone. However, successful partnering demands new ways of doing business and greater understanding of the factors contributing to successful partnerships.

Basic Definition of Partnerships

- **Partnership:** A relationship between two or more entities involving close cooperation where each entity has specific responsibilities.

As described in a set of documents from the United States Agency for International Development's New Partnership Initiative:

Partnerships require common goals, a good fit in the comparative advantages of the groups involved, a commitment to mutual learning, a high degree of trust, respect for local knowledge

and initiative, shared decision-making and commitment to capacity building. (Tools for Development, n.d.)

Table 1, from this USAID document, notes four dimensions of partnering.

Figure 1 contains a simple grid that further helps us to understand the various types of partnerships (Duin, Baer & Starke-Meyerring, 2001). A partnership is placed on the grid according to its primary identity (corporate or public) and audience (targeted or general).

The upper left quadrant of Figure 1 indicates that the partnership supports mainly corporate, targeted interests. A program might partner with corporate entities to address needs of specific learners. An example of a corporate targeted partnership is that between Pace University and the National Advisory Coalition for Telecommunications Education and Learning (NACTEL), formed to create and offer an associate degree in telecommunications (see www.nactel.org).

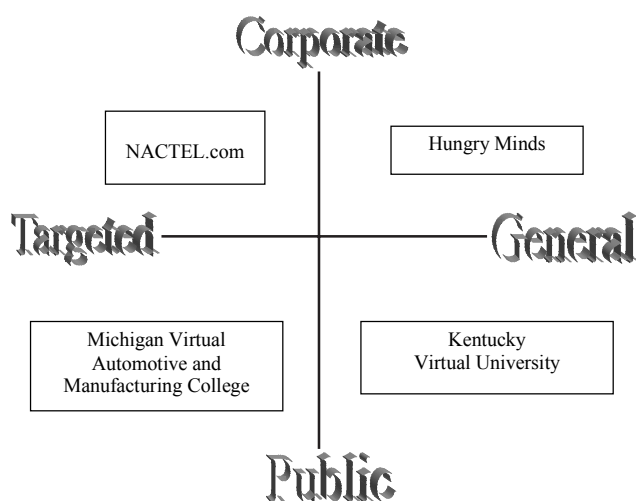
In contrast, a program or institution could partner with other public entities (higher education institutions, non-profit groups, etc.) to develop resources for a targeted group of learners. A public partnership (lower-left quadrant) could serve the needs of a specific industry and could work to ensure a timely response to the changing needs of that industry, but it would not be controlled by a specific corporation. An example of a public partnership targeted at a specific industry is the Michigan Virtual Automotive and Manufacturing College (www.mvac.org, now located at www.michman.com).

Public partnerships that address a general audience (lower-right quadrant) appear to be the most popular types of partnerships in higher education. Here an institution could partner to coordinate the delivery of their programs and extend general ac-

Table 1. Dimensions of partnering

	Low Partner Diversity	High Partner Diversity
Low Task Specificity	Vision: Agreement on general problems relevant to similar constituents. Organization: Associations or ideological networks that allow loose coordination among similar organizations.	Vision: Agreement on general problems relevant to diverse constituents. Organization: Broad social movements or geographically based networks that allow loose coordination among diverse organizations.
High Task Specificity	Vision: Agreement on specific problems and actions needed by similar constituents. Organization: Issue-based networks, alliances, or organizations that coordinate task and resource allocation among similar organizations.	Vision: Agreement on specific problems, actions needed by diverse constituents. Organization: Coalitions and partnerships that coordinate tasks and resource allocation among diverse organizations

Figure 1. Types of partnerships



cess. An example of this type of partnership in the larger higher education scene is Kentucky Virtual University. In contrast to Michigan Virtual Automotive and Manufacturing College, this entity's mission is more general: "To make post-secondary education more accessible, efficient and responsive to Kentucky's citizens and businesses" (Kentucky Virtual University, n.d., paragraph 1).

The final type of partnership on the grid is one that is controlled by corporate interests and designed to meet the needs of a general audience (upper-right

quadrant). Hungry Minds University is an example of a corporate entity that was geared toward a more general audience. Its mission was to be "the Web's most accessible and engaging gateway to knowledge," and its slogan, a "people's U.—a gathering of free minds" (a quote on original Web site), expressed a more general focus on learners. But, corporate partnerships that serve a general audience have become increasingly rare, and with the takeover of Hungry Minds by Wiley Publishers, Hungry Minds University was discontinued in November 2002. Most corporate entities now target specific types of professional groups, such as business, information technology, or health care. Nevertheless, in this quadrant, an institution might partner with corporate entities to meet the needs of general audiences, for example, to offer general modules on gardening, investing, or improving specific skills.

An Institution's Rationale for Partnering

In *Partnering in the Learning Marketplace* (2001), we introduced a framework to help partners better understand and define their goals and overall context for partnering. To define an institution's partnership rationale, begin by addressing the concepts and questions outlined in the following framework for partnering.

Of the criteria listed in this framework, five factors hold particular weight in terms of making for a successful partnership: commitment, collaboration, risk, control, and adaptation. These factors are

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