

**A Potential Vision:
How to not only survive, but thrive in the future!**

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CALVIN
MINDS IN THE MAKING

***Note: I've taken some liberties on the APA styling here...I hope you won't mind.**

A Potential Vision for Calvin College:
How to not only survive, but thrive in the future!

Do not underestimate the disruptive power of technology! The tidal waves of technological change are already upon institutions of higher education, and they demand action from those institutions who want to remain relevant...and open. As this paper will show, the status quo is no longer feasible and it is not a prudent course to follow given the trends occurring on both sides of the higher education “fence”. On one side of the fence are the changes occurring within the K-12 environment, and on the other side of the fence are the trends and changes occurring within the corporate world. To remain relevant, institutions of higher education must be aware of these trends and proactively respond to them.

Online learning plays a key role in today’s K-20 world of education as well as in the corporate world. Therefore, this paper will advocate for gradually – but as rapidly as the culture and the resources will allow for – implementing an online program at Calvin College. These additional offerings will help Calvin College remain relevant while returning a solid return on investment to Calvin’s students for years to come. As will be shown, there are numerous advantages to this new, powerful, and far-reaching course of action.

The disruptive power of technology

In his book *Sixteen Trends: Their Profound Impact on Our Future*, Marx (2006) allocates an entire chapter to various technologies and the ways these technologies are causing changes within the world of education. He states the following as the fourth trend: “Technology will increase the speed of communication and the pace of advancement or decline” (p. 87). One can see this phenomenon play out today as person A blogs about an idea, person B reads the blog entry 5 minutes after it was posted and instantly tweets about it...which is picked up by person C

who proceeds to put it on her website...wherein person D reads about this new idea, adds to it and puts an expanded version of this idea in his online-based discussion boards...and so it goes. Information spreads over the globe almost instantaneously. (Is there any other time in human history when a piece of video – such as Susan Boyle’s appearance on Britain’s Got Talent – would be seen *online* more than 47 million times within a day of release (Ostrow, 2009, 3rd paragraph)?) So information travels very quickly these days, and a modern prerequisite of being up-to-date with one’s knowledgebase is to have a solid, online (and offline) professional learning network.

The Michigan Virtual University 2008 Online Learning Report backs Marx (2006) assertion up when it states that:

These changes present opportunities to today’s students that previous generations would have thought incredible, such as the chance to learn Mandarin Chinese from home, or to take an advanced course in emerging nanotechnologies. At the same time, [the changes and opportunities resulting from online learning] threaten to leave behind students, economies and societies that are not keeping pace with today’s transformations.

To remain idle is not a choice if an institution of higher education wants to advance; the status quo must go.

If one doubts the disruptive power of technology, consider what has happened to the music distribution business since just October 23, 2001, when a small device called the iPod was introduced. The iPod and its accompanying software – iTunes – were from a niche computer maker called Apple. Windows users brushed it aside and so did the music executives...seeing as Apple had less than 5% of the desktop market at the time. "It's a nice feature for Macintosh

users," said P. J. McNealy, a senior analyst for Gartner G2, an e-commerce research group. "But to the rest of the Windows world, it doesn't make any difference" (Richtel, 3rd paragraph).

Fast forward to the end of 2008 when Apple enjoyed (and still enjoys) a "stranglehold over the market for digital music players, controlling a 70 per cent market share in 2008" and became the "largest retailer of music in the United States – digital or otherwise – and with the iPhone, has evolved into one of the most powerful technology companies on the planet and is now worth around \$115-billion" (Hartley, 2009, next to last paragraph).

Or consider Blockbuster, the world's largest movie rental chain. Blockbuster was at one time enjoying a very healthy bottom line, year-after-profitable year; but not anymore. Having discounted the power of the Internet, as well as minimizing the potential threat of iTunes and Netflix, Blockbuster on March 3, 2009 sought out legal counsel from Kirkland & Ellis, LLP in order to evaluate "restructuring options...including potential prearranged bankruptcy" (Boston Globe, March 4, 2009, 2nd paragraph). Many believe that bankruptcy is inevitable for Blockbuster. The point is, this once-thriving business has descended a long way from the heights that they used to reside at; the stock is trading at less than a dollar per share in early June 2009.

Still in doubt about the disruptive power of technology? Then consider the journalism industry, an industry that has been so turned upside down that there are websites such as NewspaperDeathWatch.com that track the demise (and hopeful return) of this industry. Things are getting worse, not better, according to the Newspaper Association of America that showed a loss of \$2.6 billion (-28.3%) in advertising revenue for the first quarter of 2009 (Newspaper Association of America, Advertising Expenditures, Quarterly tab, far upper right-column). This was an unprecedented event for this industry.

Many institutions within higher education are making the same mistake

Unfortunately, many institutions of higher education are making the same mistake as those within the music, movie rental, and journalism industries made – i.e., they are discounting the disruptive power of technology. In fact, within the world of higher education, the tidal waves are already hitting the beaches – think iTunesU, YouTube Edu, University of the People, Open Source Consortium, MIT OpenCourseWare, Academic Earth, Education-Portal.com, Open Yale Courses, OER, FindMeATeacher.com, AskOnline.net, italki, Live Mocha, Babble, FrenchPod, SpanishPod, L10, Transparent Language, and the list goes on and on and on.

The unnerving thing here at Calvin College is that there is not much concern regarding these developments. Given the current “perfect storm” that is occurring, a dialogue must be initiated very soon to discuss potential plans of action. Even if, and when, the economy returns to some type of health, the game will have changed. Higher education is in a game-changing environment; the status quo must go.

Changes on one side of the fence: K-12

Osunsami & Goldberg (2009) begin their ABCNews.com article, “School 2.0: Kids Go Online to Learn” stating, “Online education continues to gain in popularity, but this trend is not just taking hold among college students. Though some have reservations about the idea, much younger students are now discovering the convenience and low cost of virtual learning” (1st paragraph). In fact, online learning continues to grow and take hold throughout the United States within the K-12 environment. For evidence of such growth, consider Picciano’s & Seaman’s (2008) highlights from the *K–12 Online Learning: A 2008 follow-up of the survey of U.S. school district administrators* report:

1. Three quarters of the responding public school districts are offering online or blended courses:
 - 75% had one or more students enrolled in a fully-online or blended course.
 - 70% had one or more students enrolled in a fully-online course.
 - 41% had one or more students enrolled in a blended course
 - These percentages represent an increase of approximately 10% since 2005-2006.
2. 66% of school districts with students enrolled in online or blended courses anticipate their online enrollments will grow.
3. The overall number of K-12 students engaged in online courses in 2007-2008, is estimated at 1,030,000. This represents a 47% increase since 2005-2006.
4. Respondents report that online learning is meeting the specific needs of a range of students, from those who need extra help and credit recovery to those who want to take Advanced Placement and college-level courses.
5. For [small rural school districts], the availability of online learning is a lifeline and enables them to provide students with course choices and in some cases, the basic courses that should be part of every curriculum (see Highlights, 2nd paragraph).

Then there is K12 Inc, a corporation that serves 55,000+ students, 1,500 teachers, and contains 15,000+ hours of K12 instruction (Johnson & Saxberg, 2009, webinar). According to K12.com's website, over one million courses have been taken by students in 24 states, D.C., and 36 countries (1st paragraph).

In addition, consider just a subset of the virtual schools and organizations offering K-12 online learning-related services in the United States: Insight Schools Inc., Michigan Virtual

University, Connections Academy, iNACOL, Virtual High School, Kaplan Virtual Education, Florida Virtual School, Illinois Virtual High School, Oklahoma Virtual High School, Georgia Virtual School, North Carolina Virtual Public School, Kentucky Virtual Schools, Arizona / Pinnacle Virtual High School, National University Virtual High School, Excel High School (LA, MN, FL), Must High School, Maryland Virtual High School of Science and Mathematics, and Keystone National High School.

So there is enormous growth in the implementation of online learning within the K-12 world. However, all of this growth within the K-12 online learning environment should not come as a surprise. Many K-12ers – from pre-school days onward – have had access to computers, cell phones, PDA's, Internet-related resources, etc. They are immersed in technology from very early on and they are used to participating and contributing content to various web-related sites (such as YouTube, Facebook, MySpace).

What should concern faculty members at CC is that there may soon be a noticeable change in what it takes to engage their students. In the “Educause Top Teaching and Learning Challenges for 2009”, Challenge #3 is: “Reaching and Engaging Today's Learners” (Educause, mid-way down the page). This may become harder and harder to do if the status quo continues to be pursued.

Will Calvin College's students in the near future come to expect that they can participate in their own learning and can contribute their own content for others to see? Will future students be so used to high-production-value movies, videos, games, and other types of entertainment that it will become a greater challenge to engage them? Probably so; and the bar already seems to be rising on what it takes to engage them. Calvin needs to be on the lookout for this potential trend. Again, the status quo may soon come up short here.

Changes on the other side of the fence: The corporate world

Within the corporate world, Bersin (2009) explains that learning within the corporation has evolved yet again to become “collaborative, social, and learner-driven” (p. 23). Looking through Bersin’s article, one can see the word “technology” sprinkled throughout the article and various technologies underlie much of what is occurring when an employee needs to go out and find a piece of information. That is, they expect to go online (see Takeaways section, p. 25). They get their training on-demand. They access Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter (p. 24).

Cross, Hart, Jarcho, & Quinn (2009) back this up when they continually discuss the topic of informal and networked learning on their TogetherLearn.com website:

Organizations are increasingly recognizing that training alone isn’t sufficient anymore, and they’re struggling with how to not just cope, but increase organizational relevance. Change is increasing, threatening old models. Organizations now need to be nimble; they need to not only hone the ability to execute, but they need to innovate as well. Organizations need to learn (problem-solve, design, create, etc.) more effectively and efficiently. The bottom line is that cost efficiencies come from supporting self-help for both employees and customers, and profits grow from optimal customer experiences and innovative new products and services. A strategic approach to coupling Informal learning as an adjunct to the formal training is increasingly recognized as the solution to improving performance. Employees at every level need to find the resources they need, and connect with the people who can help them answer questions and collaborate on new problems and opportunities.

Much of this information learning takes advantage of Web 2.0-based technologies and it moves things towards more of a self-service model – a model which CC also needs to pursue due to limited resources.

In addition, according to Dervarics (2009), “More than half of employers say college graduates are not well prepared for careers...as graduates lack specific capabilities to succeed at work. ‘Employers are already deeply dissatisfied,’ Schneider said. New hires often ‘are not promotable’ due to lack of communication and other skills” (as quoted in Dervarics, 2009, 5th paragraph). Preparing Calvin College’s students is one thing; but knowing what to prepare them for is another, as the average number of jobs that college-educated women hold from ages 18-38 is 11.1 and 10.0 for men (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004, 1st paragraph).

Given the above items, Calvin College needs to ask, “What should our strategic plans look like in order to best help our students ‘hit the ground running’ upon graduation? How can we best help students prepare to navigate these changing times? What is our responsibility to our students, parents, and the corporations that hire our students? Should we try to establish firmer relationships and partnerships with these corporations? If so, how do we best achieve these business relationships?”

The need for teams within higher education

Given the enormity of this task, the faculty members can no longer be expected to do it all by themselves. Instead, a team of people will be required. Eventually, team members (or at least “hats” that need to be worn) at Calvin College will need to include: subject matter experts, instructional designers, project managers, legal counsel, digital audio/video specialists, mobile learning consultants, writers, editors, programmers, database administrators, web and graphic

designers, interactivity designers, animators, security experts, and most likely, the students themselves.

In the medical world, there are tons of specialties. Why? Due to the vast amount of knowledge that one must have to be competent. The same situation has now become true within higher education – where even the most amazing, skilled faculty members will not be able to compete against a team of talented specialists.

The situation can be likened to one of the best basketball players of all time, Michael Jordan. As good as this multi-time NBA MVP was (often scoring 30, 40, 50+ points per game), he was not able to beat the Detroit Pistons in 1988 and 1989. It was not until Michael's teammates such as John Paxon, Scottie Pippen, and others really started contributing that the Chicago Bulls were able to beat the Detroit Pistons.

A key item to note here then is that online-based learning materials present the best chance – at least as of today – to introduce educational materials that have been created by a team of specialists.

Further benefits of online learning

There are also other benefits to online learning-based education, some of which include: the flexibility in scheduling (which has become increasingly-important as more students have to work to get through school); greater opportunities to introduce new business models and create additional revenue streams; the ability to quickly and easily access and integrate electronic-based resources – worldwide and from numerous sources – which thus helps build the students' personalized learning networks; online learning provides greater control to the student; it offers the same content in 4-5 different ways and lets each student select the method that works best for them; it offers the capability to each student to fast-forward and/or to rewind through content at

their own pace; it provides interactivity and choice; and if it is done well, online learning can offer a very engaging learning experience.

Per *The Michigan Virtual University 2008 Online Learning Report*:

[Online learning] is being used to expand the range of courses available to students beyond what a single school can offer; provide highly-qualified teachers in subjects where qualified teachers are lacking; expand credit recovery options for students; and increase the teaching of technology skills by embedding technology literacy in academic content. Online education allows students to learn essential 21st century skills by stressing self-directed learning, collaborative communication, time management, and technical literacy in the context of problem solving and global awareness. Students are finding increased opportunity, flexibility, and convenience through online learning.

Teachers are discovering a new way to reach students, many of whom were not successful in traditional schools and courses. Administrators are exploring ways to offer a wider range of courses to students and professional development opportunities to teachers. (p. 1)

The above presents some of reasons that online learning is growing in popularity and usage. Brooks (2009) alludes to these and more when she outlines eight reasons that colleges “should proudly – and without apology – offer online courses” (7th paragraph):

1. We want our students to be actively engaged in learning.
2. We want to reach students with diverse learning styles.
3. We want our students to have a variety of experiences outside the classroom.
4. We want to teach our students how to do independent research.
5. We want to make college more accessible to students.

6. We want to make attending college more affordable.
7. We want to teach our students values and ethics.
8. We want our students' degrees to be valued by employers. (7th paragraph)

Face-to-face environments: Where is the innovation going to come from?

The face-to-face environment has not shown the level of innovation that has been achieved (in a relatively short amount of time) within the online learning world. So the question needs to be asked: “If Calvin remains a face-to-face-only institution, where is the innovation going to come from?” The perfect storm that has been addressed in this paper demands a response...it demands innovation; the status quo just will not cut it anymore. In contrast, the online world has plenty of room to hit its stride and is just beginning to innovate; it has just begun to “enter the race” so-to-speak. The face-to-face world has to figure out how to better bridge itself with the online world if it wants to remain competitive and relevant.

Concerns with the status quo

Several times throughout this paper, it has been mentioned that the status quo has to go. But what is being referred to when the term “status quo” is used? The status quo being referred to throughout this paper is that Calvin College:

- Keeps offering face-to-face courses only
- Does not consider Academic Earth, University of the People, Open Source/Open CourseWare, OEW, iTunes U, YouTube EDU, and for-profit universities to be a threat
- Continues to think that one person - i.e. the faculty member – can do it all and that they can compete with a team of specialists
- Does not think the Internet and other technologies will impact or disrupt their business - even though businesses involved with music, entertainment, journalism, retail, hotels,

books, trading/brokerage, etc. have been turned upside down by the disruptive impacts of technology

- Continues to be suspect of the value of technology – vs. thinking that various technologies can provide Calvin College with a strategic advantage...that they can provide Calvin with solid sources of innovation and differentiation for Calvin College's future (a future, by the way, where the information typically relayed for a higher education is becoming a commodity)
- Continues to not offer financial incentives for faculty to integrate technology into their classroom
- Does not communicate what steps are being taken to address these trends and changes on either side of the higher education fence; that is, within the K-12 as well as in the corporate environments.

If Calvin College decides to maintain the status quo, several things are at risk:

1. Costs will continue to increase; thus reducing the pool of potential applicants who can afford to attend Calvin (which thus leads to cost-cutting strategies vs. growing the revenue side of the equation)
2. Students' level of boredom, frustration, and disengagement will increase
3. Students' sense of the relevancy of the materials will decrease
4. The disruptive impact of technology will increase.

It may not be Calvin College's choice: Michigan's legislature may require online learning

These challenges must be addressed. But it should be noted that the decision for Calvin College – as well as for any other college or university in this state – may not be up to us to

make. Rather, that decision may be made for us by the legislature for the State of Michigan. For example, *The Michigan Virtual University 2008 Online Learning Report* states that:

In 2006 the Michigan legislature passed the country's first statewide online learning requirement for all graduating high school seniors. The law, and the innovative courses and programs developed by [the Michigan Virtual University], have made Michigan a model for educators and policy makers across the country (p. 1).

In 2008, Alabama added a distance learning requirement for graduation, requiring students to successfully complete one online/technology-enhanced course; in 2008, Florida enacted a new state law requiring school districts to create fulltime virtual schools for K-8 (SETDA, p. 2). So the choice may not even be up to us to make. From a PR standpoint, it would look much better if we were proactive in making this move vs. having it required of them.

The issues and challenges of implementing an online program

With all of this said, it should not be assumed that implementing an online program is easy. In fact, it takes a great deal of work and it takes years to build up an effective online program. Shelton and Saltsman (2005) assert that there is a myth in academic institutions: "That myth promotes the notion that online distance learning programs are easy to set up, require little to no planning, and cost almost no money to operate" (p. vii). Shelton and Saltsman (2005) go on to mention the common student services that need to be offered to online students:

- Academic Advising
- Academic Support
- Admissions
- Bookstore
- Bursar

- Career Counseling and Job Placement
- Financial Aid
- Library
- Registrar
- Student Community
- Testing (p. 89)

Along these same lines, in 2002, the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET) published their “Guidelines for Creating Student Services Online”. *Figure 1* is from WCET’s report and it nicely outlines all of the areas that need to be addressed in order to launch and run a successful online program:

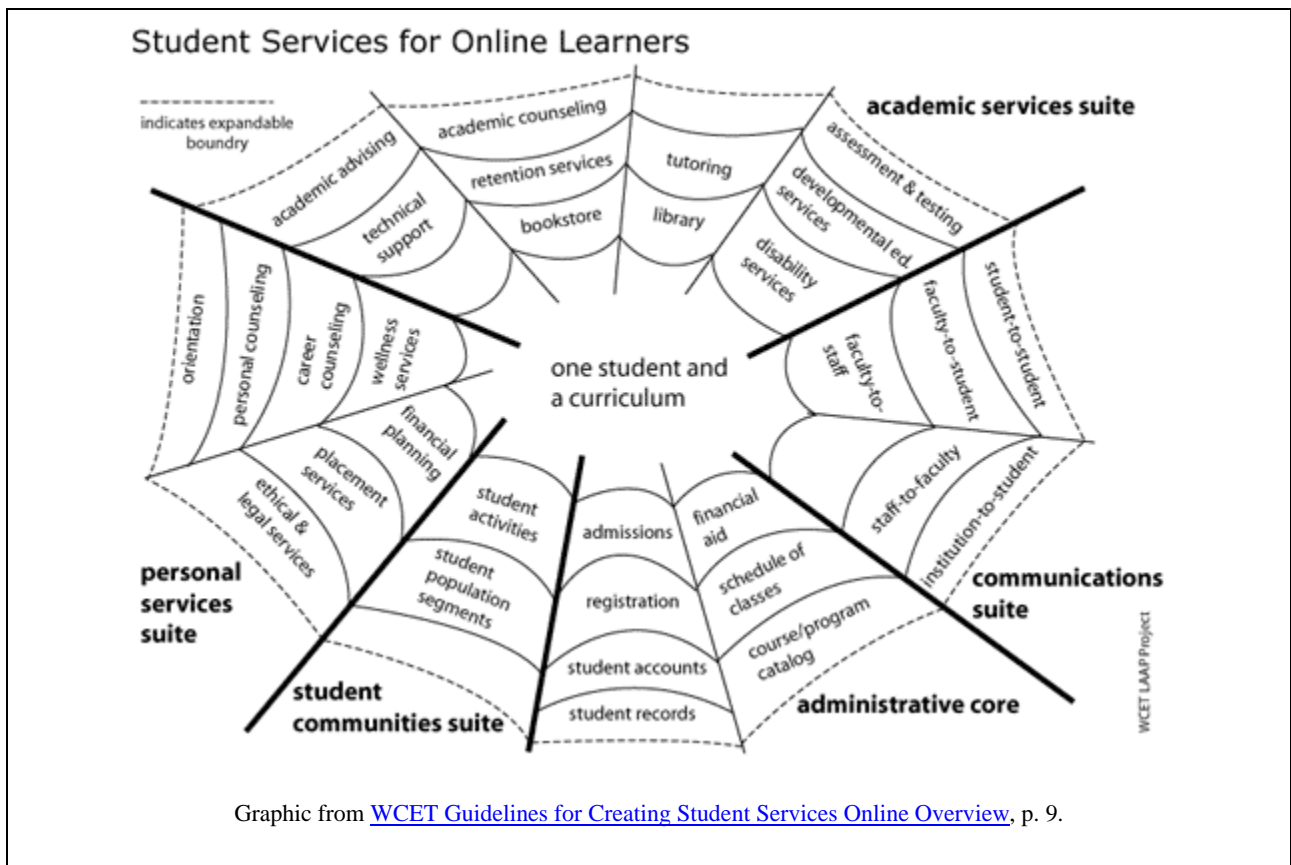


Figure 1

So the move towards establishing an online program represents a great deal of work, coordination, and resources. But the key question before Calvin College is, “If an institution of higher education wants to remain in business during the 21st century, has developing an online program become a cost of doing business?” Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, S. (2008) stress that online education’s place is becoming increasingly-solidified in the long-term plans of the institution: “In 2005, 56% of the institutions indicated that online instruction was critical to their long-term plans, up from 49% in 2003” (p. 5). Note the direction here – up, not down.

Some of the questions Calvin College would need to answer if we decided to implement an online program

1. In the eyes of the following groups here at Calvin College, what would be the benefits and advantages of offering online, web-based courses?
 - Faculty members
 - Members of Calvin College's Administration Team
 - Staff members
 - Students

2. In the eyes of the following groups here at Calvin, what would be the concerns, disadvantages, or challenges of online, web-based learning?
 - Faculty members
 - Members of Calvin College's Administration Team
 - Staff members
 - Students

3. Target audience
 - Who is Calvin's target audience and what are their backgrounds?
 - What prerequisite knowledge might they have?
 - What do their outside lives, schedules, workloads look like?
 - What equipment do they have (including connectivity to the Internet)?
 - Would they be interested in pursuing courses online? If not, how does Calvin persuade them of their need to have some exposure to this way of learning?

4. Technology

- Does Calvin College want to continue to host Blackboard or should we have Blackboard hosted by a 3rd party vendor? (Remember, Calvin may need 24x7 support if our courses are taken by students from around the world.)
 - What would be the affects to Calvin College's networking infrastructure?
 - What does Calvin College want as:
 - Our *minimum* system requirements?
 - Our *recommended* systems, hardware, software?
 - Given these system requirements, are we – and our students – ready?
 - Are there other technologies that we want to implement at this time?
 - Who will monitor the systems to not only keep them running smoothly, but also to upgrade them and to decide when they should be upgraded?
 - Are there any new security-related concerns here?
5. Will the offering of online courses affect how faculty members are selected? If so, how?
6. Do we want to develop our faculty members' expertise in teaching online? If so, how? (And/or) does Calvin want to move more towards using a team-based approach?
7. Do we want to establish a mentoring program for faculty members who teach online?
8. Do we want to establish (internal-usage-only) virtual open houses to showcase innovative, well-done, online-based courses for other faculty members to see and get ideas from?

9. What would the organizational chart/structure look like in order to support, lead, administer, and operate the new program? Would there be a separate group or would the current groups integrate these new policies and procedures into their current practices? In other words, who would provide the following student services?

- Academic Advising
- Academic Support
- Admissions
- Bookstore
- Bursar
- Career Counseling and Job Placement
- Financial Aid
- Library
- Registrar
- Student Community
- Testing

10. Should we establish any incentive and/or reward systems?

11. What new policies and procedures do we need?

12. In regards to the content that Calvin College were to offer:

- Where does Calvin want to get the content? Do we want to film/record our faculty members who want their courses to be offered throughout the world?
- Do we want to supplement those recordings with interactive materials from publishers?

- Do we want to use any open source learning objects or learning objects from various repositories out there?
- Do we want to implement a combination of these resources?
- Who owns the content? This includes copyrighted-related items and issues.
- How do we want to implement quality control?
 - We need to build engaging, interactive courses that take advantage of what the online-based world has to offer while accurately relaying the appropriate subject matter.
 - We need to continually keep the online courses up-to-date.

13. How do we develop/incorporate a culture of innovation within its online program?

14. How do we want to evaluate our online offerings? Faculty? Student progress?

Services? Courses?

15. Given the answers to the above items, what resources will Calvin College need to accomplish those items? For example, how much funding will Calvin need to:

- Create and/or purchase the content?
- Support/promote faculty?
- Keep the content up-to-date and accurate?

16. Costing/pricing:

- How much will Calvin College charge?
- Can we charge different amounts depending upon the access a student has to a faculty member?
- Can we charge different amounts depending upon whether the student is an alum, graduate student, or an undergraduate student?

- Are there ways to significantly decrease the cost of getting an education at Calvin College?
- Can we charge something for those students who receive credit from Calvin College but make a “materials-only” section available to folks throughout the world for a greatly reduced cost or for free?

If you discard the ideas proposed within this paper – which is a totally acceptable option – then how would you answer the following questions?

1. Do you believe new developments such as iTunes U, YouTube Edu, Academic Earth, open education, etc. are a threat to our business?
 - If yes, what are your plans to respond to these developments?
 - If not, what is your reasoning?
2. If the educational information that Calvin provides becomes a commodity – via the Internet and open source education – what are your thoughts regarding how we should address this potentially-dangerous situation?
3. Do you see 1:1 computing, personalized learning environments, mobile learning, lifelong learning, and some of the other trends and items on the radar – as mentioned herein – as being relevant?
 - If so, what are your plans to incorporate them into their offerings?
 - If not, what is your reasoning?
4. What are the main pipelines into Calvin College? Are those pipe-lines increasing or decreasing in size?
5. If you do not believe online learning offers more opportunities for innovation and new avenues for revenue, what are your plans for innovating in our current face-to-face environment? What are your plans for increasing revenue?
6. Given that budgets at Calvin are shrinking, how long can we cut costs before we have to radically change what we have to offer? Where does this strategy ultimately take us?

7. Do you see any correlation between the journalism industry and the higher education industry (or some of the other industries mentioned herein)?
- If so, do you believe Calvin (and the rest of higher education) can escape their fate? Why or why not?
 - If not, what is your reasoning?
8. To what extent should Calvin be preparing our students to “hit the ground running” upon graduation? If your answer is little to none-at-all, are there any issues that you might see with the increasing price tag of education? What return on investment would you expect as a parent? As a student?

Concluding thoughts

Finally, Calvin College must ask, what happens if the online-learning world pulls away from the face-to-face world in terms of achieving better academic results? What happens if learning objectives are reached far better and faster in an online-learning based environment? What then? What happens if it takes 4 years in the face-to-face environment to complete a college education, but only 3 years in the online world to meet the same requirements? Why would a student come to a face-to-face-only institution, pay a great deal of money, only to not be as competitive in the marketplace upon graduation?

Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, S. (2008) point to the results of the Sloan Consortium's 1000 returned surveys from chief academic officers around the United States: "The majority of [these officers] believed that the learning outcomes in online courses will equal or exceed that of face-to-face courses within 3 years" (p. 15).

So Calvin needs to carefully consider these changes and trends, while constantly taking pulse checks on them. We need to constantly seek to respond to these changes and trends with proactively-laid out plans to address them – with the goal of not being broad-sided by any such trend.

This paper will end where it began – with a final reminder: **Do not underestimate the disruptive power of technology! The tidal waves of technological change are already upon institutions of higher education, and they demand action from those institutions who want to remain relevant...and open.**

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