Distance Education: At the Crossroads of Mission, Enrollment, Accreditation, and Compliance

Bridget Brady
Registrar & Director of Enrollment Services, Fielding Graduate University

Monique L. Snowden, Ph.D.
Associate Provost for Academic & Enrollment Service, Fielding Graduate University
Distance Education:
A Chronology of Different Delivery Methods

- **Correspondence (c. 1728)**
  - Oldest form of distance education
  - Asynchronous

- **Extended (c. 1892)**
  - Uses satellite locations to deliver content, synchronous
  - Expands to use television or other broadcasting (c. 1964), asynchronous

- **“Online” (c. 1980)**
  - Classrooms in a virtual space
  - Can be asynchronous or synchronous (or both) depending on the technology
  - Other terms: E-learning, M-learning (“Electronic” and “Mobile” respectively)
  - This is what the general public thinks of as distance education

- **Hybrid/blended/distributed (c. 1974)**
  - Any of the methods above combined with physical on-site presence

... where the learner and the source of information are separated by time or distance or both.
Key Questions to Ponder

1. What is your institution’s **mission**, and how is that mission affected by the current state of the economy and competition in higher education?

2. What are the first- and second-order goals and affects of distance education in **enrollment** planning?

3. What should you know about impacts and dependencies of institutional and programmatic **accreditation** on academic & enrollment services?

4. What **compliance** matters do academic & enrollment services professionals need to know and manage?
Mission & Money

Even before the economic collapse, colleges have been going through intense debates about how they should be financed and what missions they should hold onto— and which they should revamp.

Traditional schools have not been oblivious to the educational implications of our changing economy, but the growing competition from the for-profit schools is becoming increasingly influential in an industry, higher education, that is increasingly dominated by competitive pressures on their very survival. What the for-profits have also made clear is that some traditional programs are profitable and others are not — a fact that was never in doubt but that the for-profits have delineated more sharply.

No Margin, No Mission: The double (and triple) bottom line matters!

How do we balance between keeping up with the competition, attracting students with new services and amenities, and fulfilling our institutional missions?

We’re a mission-driven organization, and in a mission-driven organization, no margin no mission. It’s very simple. You have to figure out how to generate a margin so you can deliver the mission. Education, research, and service are all activities that intrinsically lose money.

~ President Emeritus William Brody, Johns Hopkins
The **Ancient Agora**, or marketplace, is located to the northwest of the **Acropolis**. It was the political and administrative center of ancient Athens as well as the place where social, commercial and religious activities concentrated. In the background is the hill of the **Acropolis**, the “high city” that dominates Athens. The Acropolis was sacred to Athena, the goddess of wisdom and patroness of Athens.
The cherished academic view that higher education started out on the acropolis and was desecrated by descent into the agora led by ungodly commercial interests and scheming public officials and venal academic leaders is just not true.

If anything, higher education started in the agora, the market, at the bottom of the hill and ascended to the acropolis at the top of the hill. ... Mostly it has lived in tension, at one and the same time at the bottom of the hill, at the top of the hill, and on the many pathways in between.

Distance Education & Enrollment: Challenges & Opportunities for Registrars

• Transactional issues (i.e., teaching and learning) predominate over structural constraints (i.e., geographical distance).

• Tracking attendance/student engagement

• Defining the credit hour

• Involvement with assessing learning outcomes

• Gaining/maintaining trust as a valid/normative learning method with:
  – The public
  – Other institutions
  – Accreditors
Accreditation

According to the U.S. Department of Education:

The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets **acceptable levels of quality**. Accrediting agencies, which are private educational associations of regional or national scope, develop **evaluation criteria** and conduct **peer evaluations** to assess whether or not those criteria are met. Institutions and/or programs that request an agency's evaluation and that meet an agency's criteria are then "accredited" by that agency.
Values and beliefs of U.S. accreditation

Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for academic quality; colleges and universities are the leaders and the key sources of authority in academic matters.

Institutional mission is central to judgments of academic quality.

Institutional autonomy is essential to sustaining and enhancing academic quality.

Academic freedom flourishes in an environment of academic leadership of institutions.

The higher education enterprise and our society thrive on decentralization and diversity of institutional purpose and mission.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
Mission Matters

Mission & Purposes – 10 New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)

Mission & Integrity – 5 North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA)

Mission and Goals – 14 Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges (MSA)

Institutional Mission – 10 Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS)

Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives – 4 Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations – 5 Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NWCCU)
Credit Hour Definitions
What is an “hour” of learning at a distance? How do you measure what students learned versus seat time?

State Authorizations
How to manage this when potentially you have a student in every state in the union?

Gainful Employment program reporting
How to secure the data needed to produce the necessary reports when your student audience is not a captive audience?

Misrepresentation
Have you presented your distance education programs accurately?
Distance Education & Compliance/Regulations: Challenges & Opportunities for Registrars (cont’d)

Satisfactory academic progress
- Qualitative and quantitative measures – does your policy have both?
- Pace measure – newer regulation – are you monitoring pace?

International students
When model is blended (requiring some physical presence), how do you support international students and remain complaint?

Student privacy issues
FERPA; longitudinal data systems

Veterans
- MoU with the Department of Defense
- Tuition benefits differ based on whether student is engaged in distance credits; understanding these differences can be difficult.
Thank you for your attendance and kind attention!

Questions & Comments

Bridget L. Brady  
Registrar & Director of Enrollment Services, Fielding Graduate University  
blbrady@fielding.edu

Monique L. Snowden  
Associate Provost for Academic & Enrollment Service, Fielding Graduate University  
msnowden@fielding.edu