

Articles

Changes and Emerging Trends in the CE Function on University Campuses

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ABSTRACT

The paper describes emerging strategies employed by extension and continuing education units as they adapt to changes in the university and the larger community. The cost-recovery, entrepreneurial model of continuing education, relatively greater emphasis on continuing professional development programs, less emphasis on the traditional service function, the application of distance education techniques, and the marketing of programs globally are among the strategies that are changing the definition of extension and university continuing education.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce document décrit les stratégies en passe d'être reconnues et employées par les unités d'éducation périscolaire et permanentes quand elles s'adaptent aux changements ayant lieu dans l'université et dans la grande communauté. Parmi les stratégies changeant la définition de l'éducation périscolaire et l'éducation permanente universitaire sont le modèle d'entreprise de recouvrement de coûts des programmes de formation professionnelle continue, l'accentuation plus importante sur les programmes de formation professionnelle continue, une moindre importance apportée à la fonction de service, l'application des techniques de formation à distance et le marketing mondialisé des programmes.

INTRODUCTION

How has the extension, adult, and continuing education (hereafter, referred to as extension) function changed in today's universities? What factors have influenced these changes? What are some implications for strategic and program planning?

In the last few years alone, there have been several important changes in society (particularly in Western countries) that have directly or indirectly affected the nature of post-secondary institutions and their extension functions. Before examining these changes, let us first briefly reflect on some observations made about the past.

THE CHANGING FIELD OF EXTENSION, ADULT, AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Over a decade ago, Apps (1985) traced the developments in the field of extension, adult, and continuing education over the years, subsequently making the following list of its "aims" that have competed for prominence at some point or another.

1. **Personal development**—including the development of personal skills and liberal arts education.
2. **Remedial education**—correcting shortcomings of an adult's previous formal schooling as well as providing English as a Second Language and related immigrant education programs.
3. **Religious education**—much early adult education in England and the United States had religious aims.
4. **Cultural criticism and social action education**—education for social change was a prominent aim for continuing education particularly in the 1920s. Societal attention to this aim reappeared in the 1980s, primarily in the area of community development. In contrast, cultural criticism as an aim has received little attention since the 1920s.
5. **Education for career development**— an aim for continuing education for many years. This has become the most prominent aim, particularly if continuing professional education is included within it.

Although all of these aims are still relevant today, their relative importance varies from one time to another, from place to place, and from one institution to the next. Much depends on the critical issues in a given context. Educational planners emphasize the particular aims that are most relevant to the critical issues facing their organization. For example, Simerly (1991) identified 10 issues that continuing educators need to consider in preparing for the 21st century: increased organizational ambiguity; continuing education as big business; competition for scarce resources; complex global and political problems; competition for nontraditional students; human resource development; mainstreaming of continuing education programs; organizational cultures in the workplace; ethical behaviour; and managing diversity.

CHANGING VALUES AND BELIEFS

Many factors could explain the degree of importance attributed to each of the five CE aims identified by Apps, and why there have been shifts in their prominence over time. Among the factors influencing their priority are the changing values and beliefs of society, in general, and the educational institution, in particular, that offers and supports continuing education programs and services. These values and beliefs are dynamic and reflect tensions and conflicts among various points of views.

Tensions and conflicts have long played a part in university values. These are sometimes manifested in the multidimensional mandate and function of the university extension units (Penfield, 1975). Indeed, they may account for why some extension functions have shifted to centre stage whereas others have shifted to the fringe or faded out of the picture altogether.

To survive and grow, extension organizations, like all good learning organizations, must be resilient, adaptable, and progressive; one way they indicate these qualities is by making the necessary modifications in their goals. Anderson (1998) writes: "Most academics will agree the university is under increased pressure to change practice and policy—coupled with increased complexity." He lists the following changes, among others, that contribute to this pressure:

- decreasing public funding,
- increasing student numbers, diversity, and average age,
- emergence of the "student as consumer" ethos,

- pressure from business to focus teaching on job preparation and research on commercial applications,
- increases in early retirements and subsequent hiring,
- increasing demand for spending on information technologies accompanied with decreased spending on library books and journals.

Clearly, this is a challenge for single-purpose organizations, but not as difficult for university extension organizations that typically have multiple goals and multiple constituents. Notwithstanding this reputation for adaptability, universities can be slow to change. According to one study, (Enrich, 1990), colleges and universities, when compared with other sectors in the “learning industry,” only ranked sixth on the list of organization types that provide formal and nonformal learning experiences to adult workers; first are corporations, followed by the military, then the federal government, labour unions, and for-profit vendors. This has been attributed to some universities’ conservatism in adopting changes in delivery methods (Greenberg, 1992).

CONVERGENCE OF TECHNOLOGIES

The convergence of technologies (telephone, satellite, computers, television, and film) and the expanded use of robots and expert systems have had a profound influence on people’s livelihood, employability, educational opportunities, and need for further training. Accompanying these trends is a growing concern over the gap between the haves and the have-nots, such as those who can afford and/or use the Internet and those who cannot; and those who can control the technologies and those who cannot.

These rapid developments in the computer and telecommunications industries are changing modern society in profound ways, and it is only just beginning (Negroponte, 1995). The rapid expansion of the Internet, among other developments, has created more opportunities for alternative learning and distance education technologies. The meanings of the terms outreach and extension have been transformed by new and emerging learning technologies.

These technological developments, which probably had their early roots in university scientific R&D labs, are now driving the innovations in program delivery.

CHANGING MEANING OF WORK

The concept of work itself is changing. Largely because of automation and computerization, some skills are becoming obsolete, jobs are disappearing, and work organizations are restructuring. This controversial trend is related to the information age and the growing importance of the knowledge industries (e.g., see Rifkin, 1995).

How work is organized directly influences career development and training opportunities and challenges.

SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES

Genetic engineering and other biotechnologies, space exploration, and medical research are making headlines, raising hopes and concerns and demonstrating the awesome implications of modern scientific discoveries. The transfer of technology from universities to hospitals, farms, and commercial laboratories, although not a new trend, illustrates the shifts in the dynamics of the relationship among research universities, government funding agencies, commercial firms, the media, and the public. Scholars, politicians, and the public debate legal, ethical, and public health issues, desperately attempting to get public policies caught up with changes brought about by scientific discoveries and technological innovations.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Though no longer the very public issue it was a decade ago, there continues to be much concern about the adverse effects of environmentally hostile industries and organizations, an issue that is second only to concern over threats to personal health, economic security, and political stability.

GLOBALIZATION OF THE ECONOMY

The rapid development of trading blocks has brought about unprecedented opportunities and challenges to both rich and poor countries. For example, the increased interdependence of economies has created employment conditions that reflect the movement of capital, jobs, and purchasing power across boundaries. Protectionism has given way to freer trade, making global marketing strategies more aggressive as the economic stakes become potentially more lucrative.

LEADERSHIP CREDIBILITY

In the present political and social environment, there is increased concern over the moral character of political leaders, leading to less tolerance of corruption and scandals. One prevalent opinion is that there are many good managers and administrators, but a shortage of good leaders.

The structure of contemporary work groups is also changing, becoming less hierarchical. Some progressive organizations are less dependent on traditional leaders for success than their more conservative counterparts.

CONFLICT

There is continued tension among racial, ethnic, and tribal groups despite efforts to promote multiculturalism, civil rights, gender equality, and the values of a civil society. Whether the political conservatives or liberals will dominate the political scene remains an open question as many voters grow impatient, their frustrations due in large measure to job insecurity, a lowered standard of living, and dimmed prospects for material prosperity, to say nothing of anxieties over abortion laws, homosexuality, gun control, invasion of privacy, and other salient topics.

POPULATION TRENDS

Despite progress in family planning, population and demographic trends point to increasing urban populations due to in-migration from rural areas. Increased urbanization in many of the population centers of the world has also created a phenomenon heretofore not experienced by humankind: the increasing number of mega-cities. Cultural diversity in urban centres, workplaces, and universities has had an impact on education, training, citizenship education, and language training.

AGING BABY BOOMERS

In many countries, the baby boomers are entering middle age and the changes in their lifestyle are dictating the marketing strategies of many industries, especially those in the service sector—which includes health care, recreation, and hospitality—as well as those involved in food production and housing. Early retirement has created, in some cases,

opportunities for second careers and the need for retraining. Self-directed learning approaches that employ the emerging learning technologies are gaining favour over the traditional classroom-based approaches.

A CHANGING UNIVERSITY

The trends described above are reflected, to a greater or lesser extent, in changes in our educational institutions, and vice versa. Not surprisingly, the role of the university in society—a major topic in the academic literature as well as in the popular press—has been transforming.

Let's take the service role of the university in society, as a case in point. Archer (1995) compares two interpretations of the term "service university": first, as the co-optation of academics by industry to serve the commercial sector's economic aims, a trend that is criticized by some (e.g., Newson & Buchbinder, 1988); second, as a community-driven service university exemplified in the first half of the century by the University of Wisconsin Extension, the University of Alberta, and the St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish. Archer holds that a return to the latter model of a service university will do much to overcome the public's negative sentiment currently aimed at universities and its elitist professoriate. [For further discussion and analysis of this enormous topic, refer to Neilson & Gaffield (1986); Pannu, Shugurensky, & Plumb (1994); Smith (1991); and Watson (1985), to mention a few, who have written about the state of our universities and what can be done to transform them into more relevant institutions.]

LEADERSHIP

How universities modify their functions has been influenced by what the institutions' leaders perceive as the most critical challenges affecting their mission. For example, in the United States, the six challenges for higher education identified by Gilley (1991) include: greater minority participation; college and university finance; replacement of retiring faculty; affordability and financial aid for students; stronger ethics in academe; and ability to help America in world competition.

Gilley (1991) also predicted that the growth of urban centres will force institutions to become "distributed universities," disseminating educational services via technology and innovative academic structures. Many Canadian universities have also adopted distance education strategies but

not necessarily for the same reasons.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In February 1994, in its effort to increase the accountability of publicly supported institutions, the Alberta government released its list of performance indicators for universities. Client satisfaction, one of the indicators, included a rating of the students' success in landing jobs in the field in which they studied. This implies, among other things, that government support will be given to programs that satisfy clients, that is, that enable them to find meaningful jobs.

What are the implications of this trend for liberal education programs? Some (e.g., Emberley & Newell, 1994) are very concerned that this will have catastrophic consequences for universities. Another implication is that the faculty's traditional autonomy will be threatened.

RESTRUCTURING, RESOURCE REALLOCATION, AND OUTSOURCING

Reduced budgets, declining enrolments, increased competition, increased costs, and increased pressure to implement cost-reduction tactics have contributed to an unprecedented trend among many organizations, including universities, to restructure.

The dominant restructuring strategy has been to downsize by attrition or lay-offs. Other common restructuring strategies are the decentralization of certain functions and the amalgamation of others. Units that no longer serve the central or core business of the university, for example, are being absorbed by others, if not virtually eliminated. Scarce resources within the university are being redirected away from some activities (e.g., some athletic cost centres) and into others that are believed to be of greater value.

Outsourcing—the practice of purchasing services from non-university vendors—has affected parking and food services, among others. These strategies are aimed at lowering costs by reducing the payroll and benefits allotted to permanent, full-time employees and replacing them with outside vendors and lower-paid part-time workers. This also applies to tenure-track positions, a sacred cow that some would like to sacrifice.

Downsizing an aging academic staff continues as institutions find it

more difficult to support the higher salaries of senior staff. Some reduction in the ranks of the senior professoriate has been taking place as the baby boomers enter the retirement phase of their career. Faculty replacement schemes are in place, featuring early retirement offers and heavy recruitment of younger, junior faculty. The practice of replacing senior faculty with lower-paid, part-time adjunct faculty (a common practice in extension) and graduate students comes under criticism from time to time; some are underpaid and overworked, while others cannot communicate effectively.

A general moratorium on new buildings exists. The building boom in many campuses is all but over, even though many universities are physically bursting at the seams as more students are packed into fewer classes but not necessarily into larger rooms. Fewer old buildings are being upgraded at a time when the physical plant is deteriorating. Indeed, the competition for campus teaching space is so severe in some universities that renting off-campus classrooms has been the only way to cope.

Globalization and internationalization of academic programs are on the ascendancy. The move is towards greater internationalization of programs, either by exporting them beyond the traditional geographical boundaries or by encouraging students from abroad to seek admission (and pay relatively higher tuition fees). It is now commonplace for universities to have partnerships with foreign universities, to offer joint degree programs, or even to establish a branch office or campus in another country. English Language programs have been a growth industry, although there are signs of a decline attributed to the currency crisis in Asia.

Partnerships and alliances are becoming the norm. Cooperation, collaboration, and partnerships are still the operative terms for institutions that accept the premise that no single organization, no matter how vertically integrated, can go it alone in an increasingly competitive and global environment. The dominant type of partnership that is emerging is one between the university and corporations; for example, Nosek, and Yaverbaum (1991) describe a case involving information system education. Some of these alliances are controversial and will have strong proponents and critics for some time to come, particularly where partners might have a conflict of interest. On the other hand, alliances that facilitate active participation by qualified practitioners in university programs, on-the-job training (as in co-op programs) for students, and eventual employment of graduates are valued highly, particularly in the professional fields.

The heightened interest in the application of new learning and teaching technologies has resulted in a sharp increase in experimentation and the subsequent use of distance education, computer-mediated learning, and other alternative delivery technologies. These technologies are often seen as useful in extending the marketing reach of university programs, giving unprecedented meaning to the terms outreach and extension. Many outreach programs depend on recent advances in telecommunications and computer technologies; on-line courses, teleconferences, discussions on the Internet, and virtual classrooms are increasing in number as more academics become aware of these options and skillful in taking advantage of their features. The Academic Technologies for Learning at the University of Alberta and the Virtual College and the Center for Digital Multimedia of New York University's School of Continuing Education are recent examples of this development.

TRENDS AND EMERGING FUNCTIONS OF TODAY'S UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Over the past few years, there have been a number of trends specific to university extension units that are worth noting.

1. Prominence of Continuing Professional Education and Other Career Development.

In one university, planning teams were asked to build scenarios in response to the question "Which activities, programs, and courses should the continuing education unit emphasize in the next five years?". The teams saw career development services as a "key to integrating continuing education activity" and used it as an organizing concept (Edelson, 1992, p. 103).

This is an example of a highly visible trend that began as early as the mid-1960s in which the emphasis has been on professional and career-development programming. The unemployment situation, competition for students, commodification of knowledge, and demand for professional training programs, particularly by emerging professions, have all contributed to the more central role continuing education units have played in providing citizens with learning experiences and credentials that enhance their employability.

The Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta recently approved

the establishment of its Continuing Professional Development Institute (CPDI), a research and development unit that was set up to conduct academic and applied research on continuing professional education, as well as to assist program delivery units, professional associations, and corporations in their marketing research, program design, curriculum development, and program delivery. CPDI is also seen as a means of more closely integrating the Faculty of Extension with other faculties, especially those that are escalating their cost-recovery outreach programs but have little or no experience in managing entrepreneurial programs.

What is different today is the heightened degree to which these continuing professional development programs are expected to generate surplus revenue for the university. There is also far more competition from an increasing number of providers of similar educational services.

This is further evidence of the movement away from the service university of the first half of the century towards a more professionally oriented and commercial function. Serious governance and academic quality issues inevitably arise as competition escalates and academic products are rushed to market. Not unlike the volatile computer software industry, quality is often sacrificed in favour of speed because of the strong belief that to be first is to have a competitive advantage.

2. Extension as Process Expert in Outreach and Distance Education.

Extension units are generally recognized as process experts in the area of outreach and distance education. They are well positioned to be catalysts and facilitators in universities, as they move to broaden the faculties' repertoire in delivering programs and to encourage their learners to be more self-directed and diversified in their quest for higher education.

There are new opportunities for revitalizing the extension mandate as universities push to extend educational services and resources beyond the physical boundaries of the campus.

3. Extension, as a Business, is a Model Revenue Generator.

Continuing education has been a big business for some time. University extension units not yet successfully operating on a commercial model are probably endangered or in a threatened category.

That extension units are expected not only to be self-supporting but also to generate surplus revenue for the institution is not a new trend. However, the intensity of the expectation has increased in recent times, especially in government-funded institutions. The university's organizational culture

has changed. Pragmatism, entrepreneurial values, business jargon (e.g., business plan, quality assurance), and management concepts (e.g., strategic planning, systems thinking) have become widespread among extension practitioners. This new culture is now spreading beyond the administrative subculture out into the academic subculture of the university, where there is a somewhat different set of values at work (e.g., see Newton, 1992; Tierney, 1990).

It is a safe guess that, over the recent past, more entrepreneur-programmers have been hired and promoted to positions of leadership than have mainstream academics with no management or business experience. As with many professional organizations, it is no longer a sufficient condition to be a scholar and content specialist; an extension practitioner must also have management skills and an openness to profit making. This is especially true for large-volume providers that offer continuing professional education, English as a Second Language, and information technology-related programs, which are regarded by many central university administrators as important profit centres.

4. Extension as a Service Centre for the University.

Some extension units are asked to provide a range of administrative services to the parent university organization in addition to providing academic services to its own clients. They administer conference centres, special sessions, in-service training of university staff, and public relations, among others. Some of these functions are transferred to the extension unit as a cost-cutting measure rather than on the basis of the extension unit's academic capabilities. Although many of these functions can be operated on a fee-for-service basis, not all of them are viable profit centres.

Critics have argued that this trend undermines the academic role of the extension unit. Supporters, on the other hand, believe that extension must do its best to be of value to the parent organization if it expects to survive restructuring decisions. "Don't be part of the problem, be a part of the solution."

5. Graduate Degree Programs.

The majority of extension services involve general interest and non degree credit programming. However, some continuing education units have been granted the authority to offer their own graduate degree program (e.g., the University of Calgary).

Some of these degree programs recruit students from all parts of the world and a number of them are offered on-line, with some face-to-face

sessions (e.g., Athabasca University). A recent survey shows that most Canadian university extension units offer certificate and diploma programs (Archer, Lamble, & Einsiedel, 1997).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

Many of these controversial issues are magnets for politically motivated decisions that may not always reflect the bigger picture and the longer view. For example, a Rand Corporation study of several large American universities showed that one problem of the governance structure is that policy makers are focusing on cutting cost without sufficient regard to defining missions, reallocating resources, and making choices among the present activities in which higher educational institutions are engaged (Benjamin et al., 1993).

Universities in many parts of the globe continue their search for a new and meaningful role in our changing world, a search that will change some aspects of their extension function (e.g., see Tight, 1994). It is encouraging to observe that, in this search, more university planners are not only employing strategic management principles and techniques (e.g., see Simerly, 1991; Stockman, & Lewis, 1990), but also viewing their organization in holistic and integrated terms. An optimistic interpretation of this trend is that incrementalism and crisis management are giving way to strategic thinking.

More academic leaders, despite the unrelenting pressure to attend to the urgent problems of the day, are taking a longer view (e.g., see Beckett, 1987) and are asking important questions about the relevance of higher education institutions to the larger issues facing our planet, nations, and communities (e.g., see Apps, 1985; Edelson, 1991, 1992; Knox, 1993). Hopefully, we are learning to steer better, and not just to row harder. If nothing else, we may be getting better at asking the right questions.

Perhaps the answers organizations find in the future will validate choices they are making today. Adaptable organizations that survive and flourish in turbulent environments generally do.

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