Introductory Remarks: College 2.0: The New Face of College Education

Welcome

Good evening, and welcome to Suffolk University. We are pleased to be involved in this important conversation about the rapidly changing higher education environment.

I want to thank our partners at WGBH, including President and CEO Jon Abbott and WGBH Radio General Manager Phil Redo (pronounced REE-DOE), who are with us this evening. WGBH’s Innovation Hub and host Kara Miller have chosen a fascinating subject and assembled some of today’s leading educational thinkers and innovators to analyze how the intersection of technology, university economics and expectations about outcomes might play out in academia in the coming years.

Technology and higher education

Technology is driving changes in the way that instruction is delivered, with concerns about the high cost of education serving as an incentive to harness technology for cost savings.

“Any technology tends to create a new human environment.” That’s what Marshal McLuhan wrote in his 1962 classic, The Gutenberg Galaxy, and we have seen the truth of his claim over and over again in the intervening decades.

I wonder whether the introduction of Gutenberg’s printing press spawned fear and protest just as the prospect -- or rather, the reality -- of online learning is doing today.

Did monks fear the change in their circumstances once they were no longer required to spend their days copying out manuscripts?

We're certainly seeing faculties across the country balk at the idea of integrating into their teaching online lectures and courses developed at other institutions. Some fear for their jobs and worry that consolidating the delivery of subject matter will lead to a paucity of ideas and voices.

Meanwhile, others claim that students will be able to access the best possible instruction as the world’s foremost intellectuals record and distribute their knowledge through MOOCs. I believe we will find a middle ground between these extremes.

There’s no turning back the clock on technology, so our task is to turn technology to our students’ advantage. MOOCs are gaining a great deal of attention for their power to bring insights and perspectives typically available only to students in college and university classrooms to hundreds of thousands of people around the globe. But MOOCs are a small subset of the technological revolution in education.
Even in traditional face-to-face classroom instruction, technology may be used to enhance the learning process. Flipped classroom instruction involves face-to-face learning and activities such as video or podcast presentations outside the classroom. Hybrid courses combine in-person class time with online content and activities. Research has shown that hybrid courses can be quite effective.

So what are the advantages that technology can bring, in addition to bringing knowledge to many more people?

Well, students can learn more effectively when they get extra help with challenging material by watching and re-watching online instruction segments. One of our professors pursued this idea about ten years ago when he began offering online mini-lectures as an enhancement to his calculus-based Physics class.

Technological enhancements and online educational options offer access and convenience. Time management is no small matter for students who are working to pay tuition and other bills or for those who have family or community obligations.

Meanwhile, technology has the potential to provide relief from the “cost disease” -- that seemingly inevitable escalation of costs that noted Princeton economists William Baumol and William Bowen, first wrote about decades ago.

But as compelling as these potentials are, many questions remain about how the further integration of technology and higher education will work.

- Must Open Online Courses always be “massive,” or can they be tailored to a particular school or region?
- How will institutions engage their faculties to embrace the concept of increased productivity that accompanies the introduction of new technologies?
- Will elitism be an issue, with access to the traditional academic environment once again limited to the wealthy few?

These and other key questions are what bring us together tonight. Suffolk University is pleased to host this conversation of “College 2.0: The New Face of College Education,” made possible by Innovation Hub and WGBH. So now let me turn things over to Kara Miller, host and co-producer of “Innovation Hub,” who will lead this evening’s conversation.

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