Policy Issues With Respect To On-line Learning

“No Significant Difference,” or Not?

State University System of Florida
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Foci of Policy -- Processes

- Finance
- Quality Assurance/Accountability
- Support of Innovation
- Institutional Vitality
Foci of Policy -- Goals

- High quality educational opportunities for citizens of Florida
- Accessible educational opportunities for citizens of Florida
- Workforce relevant educational opportunities for citizens of Florida
- Cost effective educational opportunities for citizens of Florida

- Serve the World
- Profit Center
Foci of Policy -- Processes

Finance

Quality Assurance/Accountability

Support of Innovation

Institutional Vitality
Foci of Policy -- Approaches

**Benign**
*(Whatever)*

**Directive**
*(Do it, my way)*

**Supportive**
*(Just do it)*
The essence of finance policy

Balancing public good and private benefit

Translation: Balance Appropriations, Tuition, and Financial Aid – ATFA
Finance Policy And On-Line Learning

The Supply Side – Institutional Support

1. Pay for Desired Activities -- *Directive*
   - Creates activities that generate resources (Special Programs, Student Support Services, Whatever “You tell them to do”)
   - Sacrifice nimbleness and institutional innovation
   - Reinforces incremental change, directed from outside the institution
2. Pay for Desired Outcomes -- **Supportive**

- Reduces costs per desired outcome
- Can’t count on results
- Beware of what you ask for
  - Improved completion – key to on-line success
  - Reduced equity – already an issue in on-line
Finance Policy and On-line Learning

The Demand Side – Tuition and Financial Aid

Three general strategies in play today
1) Shared Benefits/Shared Costs – **Benign**
2) Students Benefit/Students Pay—**Directive (I think)**
3) Forced cost effectiveness – **Supportive (I think)**
1. Shared benefit/shared cost – Public Good and Private Return on Investment (ROI)
   - Pretty much current funding structure -- treating on-line and technology mediated the same as standard classroom instruction
   - Most research suggests students are relatively insensitive to price (within reason)

   - Not a change strategy
   - But not necessarily bad
2. Student Is The Principal Beneficiary – Student Should Pay

- Charge what the market will bare

- Impact as significant on institution as on student
  - Not high price elasticity of demand for most students

- Need-based aid essential with this strategy
  - Price does matter to low-income students
3. Forced “Cost-effectiveness” -- Use Pricing of On-line learning to drive the cost curve down

- The New Rave – massification through MOOCs
- Competency based instruction and Prior Learning Assessment
- Providing “best in show” courses and programs
- Incentivizes students to chose a less expensive option
  - May work for adult students more than traditional
  - May work for courses rather than degrees
- Could Incentivize institutions to adopt more use of technology and partner more
The essence of accountability policy
- Are students and society receiving appropriate value
- Are institutions and the State accountable

Two current thrusts
- Student Learning
- Student Completion
**Student Learning Outcomes**

- Not an issue with traditional learning strategies
- A big issue with respect to on-line and technology mediated learning
  - Does it work?
    - On-line Learning -- “no significant difference”
    - Technology Mediated Learning – can be better
  - How do you incentivize it?
    - Clayton Christensen’s *Disruptive Innovation* Thesis
    - Change can’t happen in the center
    - Change doesn’t do better; but does good enough
Quality Assurance and Accountability Regarding On-line Learning

**Student Learning Outcomes -- Four approaches**

1. Disregard Quality, just like today -- **Benign**
2. Require institutionally developed quality assurance assessments, with public reporting – **More Supportive than Directive**
3. Require institutional adoption of externally developed assessments, with public reporting -- **More Directive than Supportive**
4. Require standard assessment of quality of all on-line learning -- **Directive**
Quality Assurance and Accountability Regarding On-line Learning

With respect to **Student Learning Outcomes**

1. **Disregard Quality, just like today**
   - Incentivizes the status quo
   - Eliminates the capacity to assure quality in a changing environment, and
   - Legitimizing or de-legitimizing new approaches in a fact-free environment

2. **Require institutionally developed quality assurance assessments, with public reporting**
   - Incentivizes faculty based quality assurance process, akin to requirements of accreditation
   - Sacrifices any capacity for comparability and raises issues of face validity
3. **Require institutional adoption of externally developed assessments, with public reporting**
   - Incentivizes faculty engagement in selection of quality assurance process, but enhances external validity and possible comparability of assessments

4. **Require standard assessment of quality of all on-line learning**
   - Incentivizes development of programs that withstand public scrutiny and elimination of programs and courses that don’t measure up
   - Provides for comparability assessment
   - Big downside, though
     - Sacrifices faculty engagement and buy-in,
     - Imagines a level of quality assessment that does not yet exist, and
     - Presumes one-size-fits-all
Quality Assurance and Accountability Regarding On-line Learning

Student Completion

A major concern with on-line learning

- Perception: Students Who Complete Do Just Fine, But Too Many Don’t Complete

- Evidence from University of Central Florida:
  - Blended are more likely to complete
  - Fully On-line are less likely to complete

The dilemma – We don’t really know

- But we think we do;
- So we develop policy on our “hunches”
Quality Assurance and Accountability Regarding On-line Learning

1. Data analytics for accountability -- collect data for reporting, comparing, and rewarding desired performance. **Directive**
   - Incentivizes improvement in course and program completion
   - Requires resources

2. Data analytics for improvement -- collect data to better serve students (the predictive analytics movement) **Supportive**
   - Incentivizes improvement in course and program completion
   - Engages faculty
   - Initially quite resource intensive
   - Data are hard for many to swallow
Focus of Policy – Supporting Innovation Through On-line Learning

Good Policy Enhances Innovation

So How Do We Do That?
Supporting Innovation Through On-line Learning--

1. The **Directive** Approach
   - Examples: Incentive Funding, Regulatory direction, Required actions
   - Incentivizes desired practices
   - Sacrifices innovation at the local level in favor of innovation at the policy-making level

2. The **Supportive** Approach
   - Incentives: Outcomes based funding, achievement awards/rewards
   - Incentivizes desired outcomes and rewards entrepreneurship and innovation
   - But, not as fun for policy-makers -- sacrifices direct engagement in promoting “best practices”
Ensuring Institutional Vitality through Online Learning

BE STUDENT CENTERED

But Don’t Undercut Your Institutions
1. Institution by Institution -- **Benign**

   - The Market Model: Incentivizes entrepreneurship and innovation within all faculty and allows the most active and effective to thrive.
     - Also allows for more nimble system over time
     - Protects viability of all institutions, as use of technology mediated instruction becomes more ubiquitous

But if so good in principle, why hasn’t it generated more innovation?

   - Florida has pockets of excellence in on-line education
   - And better than most in the aggregate
   - But many still not fully engaged
Ensuring Institutional Vitality through Online Learning

2. Institutional Collaboration – *Between Supportive and Directive*

- Incentivizes institutions to work together to garner support; thus achieving financial economies through reduced upstarts and quicker economies of scale
- Jeopardizes vitality of institutions that aren’t invited into or chose not to join collaborative efforts
- Makes abandoning low performing efforts more difficult, because of joint ownership
- Also, it’s hard work in a community where collaboration is an unnatural act
Ensuring Institutional Vitality through Online Learning

3. Lead Institution -- *Directive*
   - Rewards *mission differentiation*
   - Assures leadership on the agenda
   - Allows focusing of resources
   - Sacrifices the ability of all institutions to thrive in the emerging future of higher education
4. New Online Institution -- **Directive**

- Can create of a well-branded, clearly mission directed institution to deliver the service.
- Prevents existing institutions, with established gravitas, to move into or expand in this arena
  - Important given the ubiquitous nature of on-line in higher education today – could leave many behind
- Ignores the reality of blended learning, which appears to be the most cost-effective if focused on student completion
- Provides no incentive for faculty within the traditional settings to innovate with the use of technology
Policy Matters

Be Intentional

- Never lose sight of your original goals
- Use finance policy to drive desired outcomes *(don’t be benign)*
- Do not ignore issues around quality & accountability
- Intentionally promote innovation
- Do not undercut vitality of your existing infrastructure

*The how, however, is up to you*