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GET READY FOR THE ONLINE INVASION

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What if they gave a traditional classroom lecture and nobody came? Although that's not about to happen any time soon, the growing popularity of free virtual courses transcending barriers of time and geography, coupled with online offerings from for-profit institutions, poses a plethora of challenges for college presidents.

As the next wave of students weaned on the Internet engulfs our campuses, enrollment managers and CEOs need to prepare now with strategies and answers *before* they begin to receive, in large numbers, requests such as these from 18-year-olds: *"I've completed 30 units of online coursework. Can I transfer them in for credit toward a bachelor's degree?"*

Many educators note that MOOC's (massive online open courses) such as MITx, a portfolio of free MIT virtual courses also offered online by Harvard, Stanford, Yale and other prestigious universities, have taken higher education by storm. Further, with the advent of sites such as Coursera, a California-based virtual learning community, this issue has taken on considerable urgency in the larger context of how traditional colleges and universities can best deliver courses to students who have been learning online since pre-kindergarten. The American Council on Education (ACE) has just announced, in

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its words, an initiative next year using faculty teams to assess the content and rigor of these courses to evaluate whether they should be recommended for college credit.

Barely a year old, MOOCs differ from older for-profit distance learning programs in several ways: they are often more rigorous, offering highly motivated students a fast track to completing their undergraduate educations and allowing them to move more quickly into graduate programs and into the marketplace. The fact that courses from elite institutions are tuition-free appeals to all students, but especially to veterans and other non-traditional learners, the fastest-growing demographic segment in higher education today.

With similar live courses costing several hundred dollars per unit, traditional campus-based programs obviously cannot compete on cost. A possible solution -- limiting the number of units which students can transfer in -- may simply drive them to other universities.

We urge presidents and chief enrollment officers to arm themselves and their respective institutions *now* for this new wave of virtual learners who increasingly will seek a \$200,000 degree for the price of a few on-campus courses. In addition to what and how many virtual courses will be accepted and from what institutions, *the time required to evaluate these courses will be of great concern to faculty.*

The questions to be asked, then, are:

What credits will we accept?

How many and from whom will we accept them?

Who will evaluate them for equivalency with our current courses and degree requirements?

As they ponder these emerging challenges, presidents and senior campus leadership, including faculty, will also want to consider the larger picture of how to best deliver courses to students who are "digital natives."

Rather than the traditional "lecture" approach, one president from a primarily residential campus in the Northeast with a distance component suggests encouraging faculty to use the MOOC approach to teaching, using digitalized multimedia, online offerings as class preparation. Valuable

classroom time is then used for discussion and analysis based on students' virtual participation beforehand. Similarly, Yale Provost and President-Elect Peter Salovey teaches a seminar called "Great Big Ideas" in which students watch the course's lectures online, leaving classroom time entirely free for interactive discussion. "MOOCs really (constitute) only one part of what online tools can provide, and it may in the end not be the most important part," Provost Salovey says.

Although there will always be the traditional undergraduate demographic that seeks and benefits from the residential experience, a growing number of students will seek the cost-effective, convenient and expeditious virtual community to enhance their educational experience.

Experienced, respected enrollment management professionals such as The Dysart Group, Inc., can suggest strategic tools and strategies to help college presidents and enrollment managers to anticipate and craft proactive responses combining the best of both virtual and traditional campus-based learning.

"We can project trends and suggest innovative solutions to adapt the traditional classroom model to contemporary online learners," President John W. Dysart notes.

Keeping a college education affordable and accessible to all students who can benefit from it has long been the principal challenge facing presidents and senior campus management. The new distance alternatives make this balance both more complex and more urgent.

Thoughtful answers need to come soon, because our 17-year-old students wanting to complete most of their undergraduate education free and online are not going to wait for us to advance favorable solutions. Instead, they are quite likely to reply, "Well, if you won't accept my online courses for credit toward a degree, I'm going to enroll at another institution that does."

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