

Editorial: The Hybridization of Higher Education: Cross-National Perspectives

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THE HYBRIDIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Peter Cookson

EDITORIAL

The worldwide landscape of higher distance education is undergoing a major transformation. As open and distance learning is moving from the margins to the mainstream, single mode distance education provider institutions designed from the start to offer distance education programs are attaining new levels of legitimacy. At the same time, conventional campus-based higher education institutions are adopting information and communication technologies (ICT) both to enhance their on-campus instruction and to create new distance education courses and programs. Driven by such factors as declining traditional student numbers, reduced government allocations, proliferation of ICT applications for delivery of education programs, incursions into their traditional service areas by burgeoning institutional competitors, and the prospect of significant savings and revenues, campus-based institutions in many countries are thus becoming *dual mode* (both face-to-face and distance education mode) institutions.

This issue of *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* focuses on this worldwide phenomenon of “hybridization of higher education.” The refereed section features recent higher education experiences in 13 countries. Eight case studies describe the impact of hybridization on higher education in Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Israel, Norway, Taiwan, and the UK. Another six case studies describe the experience of specific universities in Australia (University of South Australia), Colombia (Universidad Pontifical Javeriana), Spain (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya), Ukraine (Open International University for Human Development), and the USA (Brigham Young University and the University of Texas).

All eight national case studies and four of the six institutional case studies provide descriptive analysis of issues that arise when conventional universities create and/or expand open and distance learning programs. Although the Open International University for Human Development and the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya are unique in that they were designed at inception as unimodal distance education universities, they have been included in this issue because they illustrate contextual and organizational issues similar to those encountered by campus-based institutions engaged in the hybridization process.

As they prepared to write their national or institutional case studies, authors were invited to adhere, as much as seemed appropriate, to an outline based on systems thinking. The idea behind this common structure was to set the stage for subsequent fruitful secondary comparative analysis. Thus, this theme issue is intended to provide useful insights not only to our current 3,000-plus distance educator subscribers in more than 70 countries, but also to higher education administrators whose universities are redefining themselves as dual mode institutions so as to serve students whose space and/or time constraints prevent their participation in traditional campus-based programming.

The 14 articles in this issue illustrate how difficult and complex the process of hybridization can be. The national case studies suggest answers to the following questions:

1. How does the nature of the various stakeholders' demands for higher education influence hybridization of higher education?
2. What impact do central and state government policies and imperatives have on the expansion of distance education programming in campus-based universities?
3. How do the legacies of primary, secondary, tertiary, and distance education affect expansion of distance education programming in campus-based universities?
4. How much latitude do individual institutions have to create and expand distance education initiatives?
5. How do institutions differ in the ways in which the various (course, student, regulatory, logistical, and technological) subsystems operate?
6. To what extent has the growth of distance education been stimulated by pressures emanating from government policy, information and communication technologies, characteristics of the population, and other societal and cultural aspects?
7. To what extent has the hybridization of higher education been an impetus for inter-institutional cooperation and collaboration?
8. How well do distance education programs fare vis-à-vis more established campus-based programs?

9. What are the discernible long-term trends related to distance education organization and delivery within dual mode institutions?
10. What are the most pressing issues encountered by institutions undergoing hybridization?

The institutional case studies suggest answers to the following questions:

1. What are the distinctive features of distance education in the various institutions?
2. How do the mission and history of institutions shape the hybridization process?
3. To what extent have distance education and campus-based instructional programs mutually influenced each other?
4. What are the institutional influences on hybridization of campus-based institutions?
5. What national and international influences affect the hybridization of campus-based institutions?
6. How has the emergence of distance education operations within each institution been influenced by higher education policy and practice?
7. What have been the critical incidents for each institution that have led up to attainment of dual mode status?
8. What have been the major issues marking the institutions' progress to dual mode status?
9. What lessons do the institutional case studies offer for other campus-teaching universities aspiring to attain dual mode status?
10. How have governments assisted or hindered the process of hybridization?
11. How has the administrative and organizational structure of the institution shaped the hybridization process?

12. Regarding the way the university organizes and administers its distance education provision vis-à-vis non-distance education functions – what impact does it have on the hybridization process?
13. What is the impact of technology on the hybridization process?
14. What institutional interventions appear to have spurred and/or deterred the hybridization process?
15. How have distance education programs affected campus-based programs and vice-versa?
16. What has been the role of “leading personalities” in the hybridization process?

Careful reading of these case studies will reveal both similarities and differences arising from the experiences of campus-teaching institutions around the world. An awareness of the various sets of experiences can enable both higher education and distance education administrators to increase the range of their options in determining strategies to build and expand distance education programs within their respective institutions.

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