



Emerging Trends in Academe

A Case for Online Contracted Learning: Why and How to Create a Successful Virtual Corporate-University Leadership Development Program

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A long-held belief in corporate America is that colleges and universities prepare employees for entry-level positions, but it is the responsibility of the corporation to provide the skills and knowledge needed to contribute to the long-term strategic objectives of the organization. As such, a number of corporations have established their own internal “universities” to provide leadership development to senior and/or high potential employees. Examples include: Capital One University, Hamburger University (McDonalds Corporation), Caterpillar University, Disney University, and Commerce Bank University.

However, many corporations are now beginning to rethink this assumption and examine the cost/benefits of outsourcing certain “educational” requirements to higher education institutions, thereby enabling their HR departments to focus their resources on the “training” needs of the organization. This form of “contracted learning” will undoubtedly grow, as universities use emerging forms of technology (Internet, smart-phones, iPods, etc.) to bring together their renowned professors with corporate leaders, anytime and anywhere. Examples of online contracted learning include: Boeing Corporation with the University of Southern California, The Gallup Organization with Bellevue University, Verizon Corporation with Stevens Institute of Technology, and Lockheed Martin Corporation with Drexel University.

FACT:

Almost half of all companies surveyed by Chief Learning Officer Magazine in 2006 have no contracted relationship with a university

29 percent of corporate tuition reimbursements go to online or blended degree programs
ASTD Survey
March, 2005

The Lockheed Martin Corporation-Drexel University Leadership Development Program offers an instructive look into the rationale and methods used by both parties.

Lockheed Martin Corporation (LMC) employs over 135,000 individuals at locations all around the world. For nearly a decade high-potential employees have been selected annually to participate in LMC’s

Operations Leadership Development Program (OLDP), a two-year program involving four job rotations and participation in a Technical Development Curriculum (TDC) program. The OLDP is intended to develop a pipeline of individuals capable of becoming successful leaders in the future.

For many years, LMC staff have planned and administered the TDC, relying on a host of different external consultants and trainers to implement the OLDP curriculum standards. Consequently, OLDP courses have varied in length, location, cost, format, and quality. Additionally, the OLDP-TDC has required significant staff resources before, during, and after each OLDP cohort.

Their solution: deliver the OLDP-TDC completely online, thereby saving administrative time and money, while enhancing quality and accountability. After an evaluation process, Drexel University was selected to deliver the OLDP-TDC.

As a direct result of LMC's Leadership Development Program, LMC was named the second-best company at which to "launch a career" by *BusinessWeek* Magazine, in its 2006 rankings. The ranking was based on a survey of directors of undergraduate career services and over 37,000 graduating college seniors. These seniors are part of a new cohort often referred to as the "Millennial Generation". According to *BusinessWeek*, the "Millennials" (80 million strong) are now beginning to reshape the American workplace, and companies are scrambling to attract and retain the most talented among them. Of chief concern to Millennials is the extent to which a company will "develop them and provide a platform for other opportunities," cites *BusinessWeek*. As a result, twenty-one out of highest-ranked 25 companies provide "extensive training programs" to hone worker's skills and help them advance in their careers.

Leadership Development: Education vs. Training

How and to what extent a corporation makes a distinction between "training" and "education" will often determine the scope and degree of the long-term success of any leadership development program. Training, on the one-hand, is commonly viewed as a horizontal learning opportunity; namely, employees are provided equal exposure to a

FACT:

Corporations and government employers spend over \$13 billion-dollars each year on third-party education and training.

Eduventures, 2005,

"70% of companies in the study reported moderate to severe leadership shortage"

Executive Development Associate

July 6, 2005

standardized degree of content, and it is not always clear whether, or to what extent, the attendee has mastered the content or developed deliverable skills to the organization.

Education, on the other hand, is commonly viewed as a vertical learning opportunity, which seeks a more rigorous exposure to content and learning, and employs multiple evaluative strategies to uniformly assess mastery of content. It is, in a nutshell,

achievement-orientated. Deliverable skills are proven through rigorous evaluation and assessment.

As corporations seek to recruit, develop, and promote Millennials into leadership positions, it will be imperative for them to conduct a “gap analysis” of training and education needs of their new hires. Assessed “gaps” in company-specific knowledge and skills (i.e., HR policies and procedures, public speaking, time management) are best addressed by training seminars and workshops. However, “gaps” in higher level core competencies (i.e., principles of project management, advanced financial modeling) are best addressed through a graduate school-corporate partnership-one that is accountable, flexible, accredited, and, most importantly, virtual.

Advantages of a Virtual Corporate-University Contracted Learning Program

Accountability and Administrative Reduction

Currently, many corporations spend hundreds of hours planning, arranging, and verifying attendance at various educational events to support their leadership development program. A well planned Virtual Corporate University Contracted Learning Program can utilize the administrative resources and infrastructure of the university to significantly lessen the administrative/clerical responsibilities of the corporation. Moreover, once the scope and structure of the curriculum have been established, the university certifies the employee’s understanding and completion of the curriculum by issuing a letter grade on an official academic transcript. No more credit (and tuition reimbursement) for just showing-up.

Flexibility of Delivery

Under a well designed Virtual C-U Contracted Learning Program, an employee need not miss work and/or personal obligations to complete a leadership development program (see side box). Nine-to-five classroom instruction can be replaced with 100% online and asynchronous courses, permitting employees to access their coursework at anytime and anywhere....including after office hours. Little to no loss of time from work, which benefits both the company and the employee.

On-line vs On-Campus Learning? New Research- New Advice for Adult Learners

Researchers at Drexel University conducted the first comparison study between adult students earning their degree on-campus (Traditional) and adult students earning their degree through distance education (Online) to compare the level of intellectual rigor and the impact that both delivery methods had on family and work-life issues. Major findings from the study (available at: www.drexel.com) include:

- Traditional students were statistically **more likely** to report that pursuing their degree program had a “significant negative impact” on their time/activities with their spouse/ significant other, when compared to Online students.
- Traditional students were statistically **more likely** to indicate that pursuing their degree program had a “negative impact” on their work schedule.
- Online students were statistically **less likely** to report that pursuing their degree program had a “significant negative impact” on their stress level when compared to traditional program students
- **Both** groups of students **would not** change the timing of the start of their degree program relative to encountering significant life events, e.g., getting established in a career, having children, getting married, buying a home.

Accredited Curriculum

Under a well designed Virtual C-U Contracted Learning Program, an assortment of different and non-credit workshops, seminars, and continuing education courses can be replaced with online graduate-level courses, providing employees with a high quality and customized curriculum from an accredited university. Students enrolled in one of Drexel's Virtual C-U Contracted Learning Programs, for example, cite the fact that they are actually matriculated graduate students as an added benefit.

Transferable College Credit

Instead of awarding an internal corporate certification for completing an assortment of leadership development events, a successful Virtual C-U Contracted Learning Program awards graduate credit transferable into that college's graduate programs, e.g., credit towards an MBA degree.

Requirements for a Virtual Corporate-University Contracted Learning Program

1. Ensure a Match Between Curriculum and Corporate Goals

The curriculum must be flexible enough to meet the educational needs of the corporation, yet maintain the intellectual integrity and standards established by the university. Ideally, faculty-approved catalog courses should be used as a basis for the curriculum. In this way, the employee is assured the course credit is applicable to one or more degree programs at that university.

2. Ensure Technical Support Before and During the Contracted Period

Working adult students must have access to 24/7 technical support to resolve any technical issue related to the online course.

3. Ensure Quality of Faculty

A corporation has the right and responsibility to evaluate the quality of the faculty, including the range and areas of expertise, the depth of faculty member's contribution to the profession, the quality of teaching experience, and the status (full versus part-time) of the faculty members. In some instances, it may be appropriate for senior members of the corporation, who possess proper academic qualifications to serve as "adjunct instructors" within the partnership.

4. Ensure State-of-Art Learning Management System (LMS)

The success of any virtual/online programs depends on the LMS being up and running 99.5% or more of the time. In addition, the LMS must be easy to navigate and provides the instructor and students with a range of online "tools" that allow users to engage in conversation and dialog. Proof of the adequacy of the LMS should be expected by the corporation.

5. Ensure New Student Orientation

The institution should provide every new student/employee the opportunity to attend an online orientation, so as to become familiar with the LMS, to meet and learn the expectations of the faculty, and to be oriented to the academic support resources available to online students.

- 6. Ensure Access to University Resources (e-library, career counseling)**
Online students should have access to all academic support services available to campus students, including the writing and math center and career counseling services.

- 7. Ensure Accountability**
Both parties should meet quarterly to review the contract; to discuss and, if necessary, revise the curriculum; evaluate the registration procedures; evaluate formal and anecdotal student/employee comments and evaluations, and to begin planning for subsequent terms and courses.

- 8. Ensure Admissions Standards**
Both parties need to agree on minimal academic qualification for the program. Typically, a minimum undergraduate cumulative grade point average of 3.0 is needed for admissions to a graduate-level program. In addition, a highly technical leadership development program (science or engineering) may require certain prerequisite undergraduate courses in order to contribute to a graduate-level curriculum.

- 9. Ensure Flexibility in Scheduling**
The university must be willing to design and offer a program that includes multiple sections of each required course in each term. Employees should be able to start and complete their leadership development program in the same time period as their colleagues, regardless of when they are employed and enter the leadership development program.

Conclusion

Developing our nation's future corporate and community leaders is a task too big for any single organization. It requires an open and mutually respectful relationship between corporations and universities, in which each acknowledges its strengths and limitations. What is certain, however, is that talented entry-level employees (the Millennials) will increasingly demand that such partnerships exist and are available in a format that complements their tech-savvy nature and multi-tasking lifestyles.

Corporations and universities that fail to establish virtual leadership programs will be viewed by Millennials as dinosaurs. And we all know what happened to the dinosaurs.