

**Connections SEM Conference
Creating Responsive Programs
Thursday June 5th**

I. Approaches to Creating Responsive Programming

These approaches might be considered as a progression, moving from minimal change and intervention in existing programs, to large scale innovation and reform of administrative structures:

Adapting different marketing strategies for existing programs / curriculum including changing the language;

Reducing or eliminating artificial barriers (i.e. a credit, versus course-based, system);

Adjusting entry standards that may not be reliable indicators of student success;

Supporting student transitions with thoughtfully designed bridging programs;

Delivering 'traditional' course curriculum at times outside the usual 9-5 parameters (e.g. Weekend College);

Accelerating or compressing curriculum delivery / curriculum immersion or, conversely, extending time frames for course completion;

Adding the right learner supports at the right intervals (guidance, counselling, advising, financial counselling, peer tutoring);

Integrating different teaching and learning strategies to promote student engagement (trans-disciplinary curriculum, the studio atelier model, block courses, small group learning, service learning, co-curricular activity);

Developing innovative program concepts of relevance that capture the imagination and engage student learners;

Addressing the needs of learners at all stages of their careers, from entry to retirement, through different types of program model and delivery;

Promoting new organizational structures and consortia - creating, promoting and affirming different student pathways and student mobility.

II. Working Principles for the Design of Responsive Programming

These might include, but not be limited to:

Using a 'strengths-based' approach, not a 'deficit' model (what students lack, or have missed, or failed) of program design and marketing (e.g. non-direct entry students are sometimes stereotyped as 'at risk', 'low literacy', 'remedial' and 'academically under-prepared', as well as being viewed as 'hard to reach' 'non

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traditional', and disadvantaged in various ways (e.g. 'commuter' students', 'under-represented', 'special populations').

Assessing existing 'non-conforming' programs for variances in delivery and the audiences they attract (e.g. applied degrees, hybrid delivery, fast-track options). The differences may not be visible as a strength, or marketed to the audience that would find them most appealing.

Starting where the learner 'is at' and making no assumptions about student needs and issues.

Focusing on helping students in learning 'how to be', [i.e. developing effective practices of the profession] not 'learning about' or 'around' a subject.¹

Using technology to create more responsiveness and flexibility in programs.

Creating learning opportunities that extend beyond graduation and / or regional boundaries.

Aligning the program / college culture with the different level of maturity of the changing student body.

Assessing existing educational structures for their capacity to fulfill new and emerging student needs (moving from the norms of what faculty and administration now know, towards what learners need to learn and how best they can engage in, and access, that learning).

Challenging accepted norms and standards of classroom, timetabling, course and program delivery and when and where learning takes place.

Challenging faculty and supporting their transition to different modes of delivery and student engagement.

Exploring new approaches to partnership, collaboration and regional alliances.

Designing curricula with the assumption that the exception is the rule. Evidence suggests that a significant number of students no longer align with the so called 'traditional' student profile².

¹ Seely Brown, John. 'New Learning Environments for the 21st Century.' **Presentation at the Forum for the Future of Higher Education, Aspen Symposium.** 2005.

² In 2002, S.P. Choy identified seven characteristics of the 'nontraditional' US student that included non-direct entry; attending p/t for part of the academic year; working f/t while enrolled; financial independence; supporting dependents other than a spouse; single parent status; absence of a high school diploma. Based on studies between 1999 and 2000 at least three quarters of all US under-graduates shared at least one of these characteristics ('Non-traditional Students: Findings from **The Condition of Education 2002**'. Washington D.C.: US Dept of Education. National Center for Education Statistics.)

II. Some Models of Interest

1. National Strategies to Support Responsive Programming

These initiatives are large scale training / education strategies for work based learning, but elements of them are scalable and transferable.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework Strategy / Vocational Education and Training Sector (VET)

Now in its ninth year, this ambitious, integrated, national training strategy was designed to address a skilled worker shortage across industry groups. It capitalized upon the potential of e-learning, re-skilled vocational instructors appropriately, and promoted student engagement. In its first phase, it developed infrastructure – resources, standards and repositories. The 2008-11 plan³ focuses on a future in which:

Learning is tailored to learners (engaging those who might not otherwise have engaged in education and training);
Learners are more in control (able to choose their own provider and pathways to their advantage as well as personalized learning);
Teachers are more effective ‘managers of learning’ (use of quality, up-to-date, and relevant learning resources that can be easily adapted; moving from a teaching paradigm to a facilitation and management of learning paradigm);
Businesses are committed for the right reason (enterprises invest in workforce development because they understand the returns, and flexible approaches mean learning can fit around business priorities);
There is a sustainable e-learning infrastructure (supports available through a national pool of resources).

The plan recognizes the differing needs of those living in rural, remote, regional and metropolitan Australia, giving employers and individuals’ greater choice and control over the time, place, content and delivery of training. There is an increased emphasis on PLAR, the portability of qualifications and accessible records. Initiatives include fast track apprenticeships, new training providers (Australian Technical Colleges), the increasing responsiveness and flexibility of providers, innovative partnerships and multi site delivery⁴.

The United Kingdom Dept for Innovation, Universities and Skills – Work Based Learning

The UK is promoting higher education courses that are co-developed and co-funded by universities and industry for work place delivery to employees. The model focuses on:

Reduction of barriers to education for f/t employees;

³ Flexible Learning Advisory Group. **2008-2011 Australian Flexible Learning Framework Strategy**. 10 August, 2007. www.flexiblelearning.net.au

⁴ **Skilling Australia – New directions for vocational education and training**. Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005

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Programs / courses (such as a work-based foundation degree) that meet the needs of both employees and employer (but which are not necessarily skills based);
Compressed offerings (a 2 year versus 3 year foundation degree)
Provision of work time to engage in learning sessions;
Delivery of learning at a time, place and pace to better suit employees;
Partnership between the education provider and the employing organization.

It includes regional consortia of universities and businesses, practice-led teaching and learning, and an emphasis on short courses, modular delivery and accreditation of 'bespoke' (custom) programmes for employees across all sectors. Incentives are being considered to encourage faculty to take workplace secondments.

In another initiative, the UK **Aimhigher Learner Progression Framework** (learner journey), is a 'progression model' based on partnerships, and consulting with learners; provides a set of principles and characteristics to guide partnerships and institutions in moving beyond one-off work place interventions to a sequence of experiences for learners within a sustained and planned programme "integrated with the activities of the wider learning community of schools and colleges".⁵

2. Changes in Academic Scheduling and Administration to Support Responsive Programming

These examples illustrate some of the ways in which academic structures and schedules can be reconfigured to better meet variance in learner needs.

Course Brokering - Western Governors University, USA

Unlike traditional universities, WGU does not award degrees based on a given number of credit hours, or required courses. Instead, students earn their degrees by demonstrating their skills and knowledge in required subject areas through a competency-based model based on a series of carefully designed assessments (tests, projects, portfolio). Students can accelerate the time required for degree completion if they can demonstrate their capacity to meet certain competencies. Each student is assigned a faculty mentor; an expert in the student's field of study; who works with them one-on-one to co-develop a personalized **Academic Action Plan** that identifies students' strengths and gaps. Students can build their program by choosing from more than 1,000 pre-approved 'high-quality' courses from dozens of US institutions.⁶

Flexible Credit – University of Syracuse

Each course, or a curriculum, is offered for variable credit depending on the student's needs or interests (e.g. a student with some prior experience may choose to take additional work for additional credit; a less prepared student may be required to take additional credit or non credit units). The model responds to:

⁵ **Widening Participation: a review.** Report to the Minister of State for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning. HEFCE, November 2006.

⁶ www.fastwe.com/fastweb/colleges/view_western_governors_university_127642

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Varying levels of student skill at course entry;
Student capacity and need to move at a different pace through course work;
Supporting access to additional credits (breadth and depth) for advanced students;
Using technology and independent study to make more effective use of student and faculty time.

Courses may be subdivided into units, each with a distinct grade and credit. The model has been used successfully at the University of Syracuse for over 25 years⁷

'Fast Track' Options

Fast Track, accelerated, intensive, compressed, condensed and immersion are all terms that suggest the program, or course delivery, is accomplished in a shorter time frame than normal requiring some adjustment for both faculty and students.

Research at Austin Community College suggests that the accelerated format is appropriate for some courses, some faculty and some students. Regardless of when they are offered (summer, intersession, weekend or regular semester) time intensive courses produce comparable or enhanced academic achievement⁸ (Gaubatz, 2003), although there are lingering questions about academic rigour.

Accelerated programs are also said to be 'more effective' with 'non-traditional' learners. The US **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)** is currently conducting a study of accelerated learning programs with particular reference to low income and underrepresented youth⁹.

3. Changing Teaching and Learning Strategies for Responsive Programming

Different teaching and learning strategies can be adopted at the course level that not only serve to engage and challenge learners with different needs and expectations, but which better prepare them for workplace transition.

The Atelier (studio-based) Model

In a studio-based learning environment all work-in-progress is 'made public' and students learn from each other's progress and challenges. Rather than accelerating delivery, it's the model that facilitates ease of transition to the work place. A key feature is the public 'crit' in which the 'master' / external expert practitioners comment on students' work. With a focus on expectations of professional performance, students begin to develop the 'social and intellectual

⁷ Diamond, Robert and Peter deBlois. 'Case Study: Flexible Credit and Continuous Registration. Meeting the needs for new instructional formats.' **The National Academic for Academic Leadership**. 2007. www.thenationalacademcy.org/readings/flexible.html

⁸ Gaubatz, Noreen. 'Course scheduling formats and their impact on student learning.' **The National Teaching and Learning Forum**, 12/1 2003. www.ntlf.com/html/lib/suppmat/1201course.htm

⁹ **Accelerated Learning Options: Moving the Needle on Access and Success A Study of State and Institutional Policies and Practices** http://www.wiche.edu/Policy/Accelerated_Learning/reports.asp

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practices' that enable them 'as an ensemble' to become a 'reflective practicum'. In fact, students are 'enculturated' into professional practice¹⁰. This traditionally arts oriented model has also been adapted successfully at MIT to teach science based curriculum (**Technology Enabled Active Learning - TEAL**)

A number of US Colleges participating in the **Developmental Studies Redesign Initiative (National Center for Academic Transformation)**, have focussed on course re-design and use of technology to promote student learning and retention, often in large enrolment, traditionally lecture based, 'developmental' or foundation courses with low student success rates. In many instances these courses were not responsive to student needs to begin with, but even minimal re-design has produced startling changes in student success and retention. Design features include team based development of quality, often modularised, web-based resource materials, a focus on individualised learning and support, changes in scheduling, (e.g. a 15 week course now delivered in 5 week modules), self paced course completion, (versus lecture), mandatory student advising, and the extensive redesign of teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Block Delivery

There is some variance in definition and usage of the term 'block' delivery. It has been described in the high school context as organization of courses into larger blocks of time that promote flexibility and diversity of learning activities'. In other instances it reflects a significant shift in course design. Not all block courses are accelerated. Some of the most interesting models are developed in order to support trans-disciplinary or interdisciplinary learning, a focus on a central theme from various view points, and the associated field work, extended field trips, and applied learning that would enrich such courses. Most require inter-disciplinary faculty teams.

¹⁰ Seely Brown, John. 'New learning Environments for the 21st Century.' **Presentation at the Forum for the Future of Higher Education, Aspen Symposium.** 2005.