

Distance Education Case Study #2

Most Salient Elements of the Situation

University 5 has experienced 10 years of success with its distance education summer residency programs. The university is on the cusps of making major decisions that will have a direct effect on enrollment, faculty income and the future of the residency program. Within the past 5 years, the mandatory residency session within the master's degree program was deemed optional. Despite the residency option, students favor the residency program with considerable enrollment. Faculty supports the residency as a valued aspect of the distance education program and welcomes the added income. However, there is division among education leaders concerning the legitimacy of residency within a distance education program.

Explanation of why intervention is warranted

An adhoc committee was appointed by the dean to study and make recommendations regarding the residency sessions. The committee was charged to determine the vision for the distance education program and whether the residency will be continued. If a vision is not determined dissonance, inconsistency and confusion will have a detrimental effect on the university, and may cause the entire distance education program to lose creditability. There are conflicting views among the director, dean, department chair, and faculty. Kotter argues, "Major change is often said to be impossible unless the head of the organization is an active supporter" (Kotter, 2006, p. 6). In order for the proper decision to be made, stakeholders must come together to gain an understanding of the pedagogy of distance education, engage in effective communication, and decide future of the summer residency sessions.

Diagnosis of the Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths:

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March 17, 2013

University 5 has several strengths that will certainly catapult it into a successful future. One of the most significant strength is the students' willingness to voluntarily attend the residency, as an optional activity. Despite the cost of residency and the inconvenience of travel, the students value the opportunity to have the campus experience. Additionally, the 10 year success of the two graduate level programs confirms the residency's viability. With the increase of enrollment and geographically dispersed student population, the university has a profound opportunity to enhance the capacity of its educational system. Finally, the demonstrated support of the faculty and the added income is a bona fide incentive.

Weaknesses:

A major weakness is leaderships' diverse perspective of the proper level of interaction within distance education. There is conflict with the leadership of the university regarding the validity of face-to-face interaction within a distance education environment. The director believes the summer residency is inappropriate and should be eliminated. The dean favors the residency specifying that it adds legitimacy to the program. Below are a couple of theories from the research community addressing various perspectives.

Residency in distance education is inappropriate:

1. According to Holmberg, "distance education is characterized by teaching and learning being brought about by media: in principle students and their teachers do not meet face to face" (Holmberg, 2005, p. 9). When residency is incorporated into distance education, students lose autonomy whereas they cannot decide for themselves when and where they learn.
2. Research comparing distance education to traditional face-to-face instruction indicates that teaching and studying at a distance can be as effective as traditional

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face-to-face, when the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks, there is student-to-student interaction, and when there is timely teacher-to-student feedback (Moore & Thompson, 1990; Verduin & Clark, 1991). Educational leader should consider research and take a stance on the pedagogy of the university's distance education programs.

Residency adds legitimacy to the program:

3. Moore & Kearsley, consider that "it is equally reasonable for students to occasionally meet together and perhaps even meet with the teacher, but the normal place of learning is separate from the teacher's location..." (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p.3). A residency program in distance education would not serve to add legitimacy; it is another mode of communication/interaction. However, it must be understood that technology is the principal means of communication in distance education.

Strategic Plan

The adhoc committee will develop a strategy for cooperation, initiatives and sacrifice.

Below are the key components:

Establishing a Sense of Urgency:

The dean's decision to convene an adhoc committee is a substantial technique of establishing urgency. The President, Vice President, Provost and other university officials have publicly sanctioned the establishment of this committee; and deemed it the start of a thorough and deliberate process that will enhance the future of the university.

Creating the Guiding Coalition:

The dean recognizes that a powerful coalition is necessary to lead and manage a change project. The adhoc committee will be chaired by Frank Peterson, who has served as associate

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Vice President of Enrollment Services since 1992. The members selected for the committee (faculty/staff senate, alumni, faculty and students) are believed to produce a cohesive blend of trust, shared objectives and quality outcomes. The committee is expected to engage all constituencies of U5, internal and external; and study the demographic and societal trends that impact U5.

Developing a Vision and Strategy:

Vision

The master's degree and the certificate of advanced graduate study are beneficial to the university. It is the recommendation of the committee that both programs offer an optional one-week intensive summer residency on campus, worth 3 credits. Students opting out of the residency can earn 3 credits from an additional online course.

Plan of Action:

The committee found that the residency activities are a compelling benefit to the distance education program. It offers a unique experience that students find meaningful to their educational experience. Patterns of distance education are influenced by education, technology and social trends. Increased enrollment and positive student feedback signify the residency's impact on the distance education experience. The continuation of the residency activity is a method of engaging with students and providing the high quality education expected from University 5.

The adhoc committee will appoint members and convene every 3rd year to review the feasibility of the residency.

The committee review should address the following:

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- Suitability of the Distance Education Division mission, vision statements, and its strategic plan
- Effectiveness of the Distance Education Division's enrollment strategy
- Actions needed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of administrative operations and student services.

Support from Leadership:

A strong governance structure is necessary between the Distance Education Division, Academic Affairs and Enrollment Services. Representatives from these departments should meet quarterly to discuss methods to motivate faculty and staff, set policy and procedures, and manage the objectives set by the adhoc committee. This governance will also provide statistical evaluation of data sources to discern patterns that can assist in making more informed decisions.

Communicating the Change Vision:

The vision and strategic plan will be communicated via several outlets. Representatives from Distance Education Division, Enrollment Service and Public Relations will work collaboratively to develop an awareness campaign. News of the potential cancellation of the residency has caused concern throughout the distance education program. To address any misunderstanding, the awareness campaign will be disseminated both internally and externally.

External:

Public Relations will announce the continuation of the optional residency on the university website. Flyers will be distributed and posters will be displayed on campus. A mass email will be sent to all students enrolled in the distance education program.

Empowering Employees for Broad-Based Action:

Internal:

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The department chair of each discipline in the distance education program will meet with their faculty and managers to inform them of the adhoc committees' decision. Each department chair is charged to instruct their faculty to develop methods of notifying their students of the continuation of the optional residency and promoting enrollment. The Instructional Technology Department and Public Relations are available to offer assistance in making online announcements.

Generating Short-Term Wins:

Celebrating the success of short-term wins will reassure stakeholders that their efforts are producing positive results. It will encourage them to continue their contribution to the cause. Data assimilated from dashboard reports reflecting increase in enrollment, and positive student feedback will be spotlighted on the Distance Education Division website.

Consolidating Gain and Producing More Change:

Dependent upon the continued success of the residency activity, the periodic findings of the adhoc committee will inspire new initiatives.

Proposed Leadership Styles

Transformative Leadership:

A transformative leader requires high standards of leadership and commits others to action. The adhoc committee along with representatives from the Distance Education Division, Academic Affairs and Enrollment Services should be transformative leaders by demonstrating support, providing definitive objectives, and empowering department chairs, managers, and supervisor to be formable in their implementation of the objectives.

Transactional Leadership:

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Transactional leadership is an exchange relationship whereby reward is exchanged for compliance. Education leaders should consider award incentives such as stipends, travel allowances, hardware and software upgrades, and laptop programs to encourage faculty support and participation. These incentives also play an important role in the support and empowering function of transformative leadership.

Analysis of Likely Reaction from Stakeholders

The committee anticipates the majority of the stakeholders' support of the committee's recommendations. It is the expectation of the committee that the research provided will give the Director and Dean a new outlook on the pedagogy of distance education. The committee anticipates that leadership will recognize the evolution of distance education and place emphasis on the psychological, social and cultural period in which distance education takes place. It is anticipated that the student will be pleased with the freedom to choose the method by which they will learn. Additionally, the committee is optimistic the faculty will be motivated by the student success rate as well as increased income, and will continue their support of online learning.

Description of next steps

The next steps are to create a culture of team and collaborative decision making that encourages and supports innovation, provides strong leadership, and recognizes that change takes time. Role models should be visible, communicate expectations and provide support. Inclusive work environments that incorporate the best aptitudes should be expanded. A strong organizational culture of employee empowerment will allow input to be vetted properly with all stakeholders represented properly.

Concluding comment

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In summary, the emphasis of distance education should be placed on the ability to transform with the times. Distance education must answer the call of supply and demand. The students value the opportunity to have the campus experience and the residency has proven to be benefit to the university. The use of the residency is an example of a shift in pedagogy which will allow higher education to pursue market-oriented activities for the purpose of added revenue, increased enrollments, and visibility. The committee respectfully offers these recommendations in support of the residency program.

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