A Comparison of E-learning with Traditional Models of International Education in Small and Medium Private Colleges

Ronald M. Rivas, Coral Snodgrass, & Julia Wescott

This paper presents a comparison of various E-Learning models along with traditional modes of international education. This paper compares learning experiences across three modes of internationalization, i.e., inward oriented, outward oriented, and through e-learning. These learning experiences are typical of Small and Medium Private Colleges (SMPC). We provide a theoretical model to devise strategies for the use of e-learning along with traditional forms of international education in SMPCs. We defined two factors driving SMPCs strategies: Exposure to Culture and Demand on Faculty Time. Based on these two factors we defined four typical SMPCs strategies for internationalization: Travel, Network, E-Export, and Import. We discuss practical implications for international education in business of SMPCs and the use of e-learning along with traditional forms of international education.

INTRODUCTION

What are the advantages of e-learning over traditional international programs in fostering international education in Small and Medium Private Colleges (SMPCs)? A dominant discourse in the higher education field points towards the need for organizational expansion of higher education institutions. Two main forces exert pressure in such organization: globalization and the rapid development of information and telecommunication.
technologies. The emergence of a global, knowledge-driven economy has increased the demand for creation and application of new knowledge and advanced education, research, innovation and entrepreneurial activities (Deepak, 2008). The market imperative for competitiveness is driving internationalization trends in Higher Education worldwide. Universities recruit foreign students, build alliances to enhance their global reach, build offshore and branch campuses in other countries with the purpose of reaching foreign markets and expand their global brand name recognition (de Wit, 2002; Scott, 1998).

E-learning, among other distance-learning technologies, is used to deliver part or all international educational programs. However, using new information and telecommunication technologies for the sake of global reach has its critics. A misguided use of e-learning in higher education with the main purpose to gain global markets might be detrimental to pedagogy, jeopardizing the very purpose of higher education. Placing pedagogy at the forefront is the main dictate of higher education, which surpasses any type of media adopted to deliver the educational service (Clegg, Hudson, & Steel, 2003). Hence, questions remain as to what are the most effective uses of technology to foster international education. A study is needed to expand our understanding of what e-learning methods may be used to facilitate cross-border collaboration, formation of personal networks, exploration of business opportunities, and development of co-specialized cross-border knowledge needed for students to become better international business managers in the 21st century.

The purpose of our study is to provide a conceptual comparative map of international education and e-learning activities that would be useful to SMPCs. We begin by providing a brief background on internationalization, regionalization and globalization. We then review the main e-learning classifications and provide a synthesis of e-learning and international education modes in SMPCs. We describe four generic strategies to use e-learning along with traditional forms of international education in SMPCs. We discuss the results and implications of these four strategies.
INTERNATIONALIZATION, REGIONALIZATION, AND GLOBALIZATION OF SMPCs

Internationalization, regionalization and globalization are different phenomena that affect higher education. SMPCs are in a vulnerable competitive position due to limited resources in comparison to large research universities. A brief overview of these phenomena and how they affect higher education provides the background to place e-learning into context. First, a brief description of college size would help to set the discussion. According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (www.carnegiefoundation.org) a small college/university has a population ranging from 1,000 to 2,999 full time students seeking degrees. A medium sized college/university ranges from 3,000 to 9,999 full time students seeking degrees. In 2005, Small and Medium Colleges comprised 1,084 or 24.7% of the population of U.S. higher education institutions of which 731 (67.4%) were private (SPMCs) with a total enrollment of 2,389,127 students.

From an organizational perspective, there are two typical growth venues. One path is internationalization, which is the expansion of business activities to gain foreign markets. The other path is product diversification, which is the expansion of business activities by creating and offering many different products or services to an increasingly large consumer base. The spectrum of internationalization forms in higher education includes the following activities: student and faculty mobility, multinational efforts of internationalization of curricula (e.g., through ERASMUS/SOCRATES/ATLANTIS), investment in foreign branch campuses, establishing institutional cooperation agreements and networks, signing mutual recognition agreements, implementing transnational university networks including mergers of institutions, and transnational virtual delivery of higher education or Open Universities (Uzunboylu, 2006; Van Damme, 2001).

According to a model reportedly used by INSEAD, higher education institutions follow one or more of the typical types of internationalization: export, import, partnerships, or network (Olds, 2007). SMPCs
face limited resources as their most important constraint that hampers internationalization efforts. A typical international expansion follows an incremental model. SMPCs initially engage in international student or faculty mobility through international student exchange (Export) or recruitment of foreign and faculty students (Import). These efforts are supported with collaboration with academic institutions abroad (Partnerships). Few SMPCs have invested in branch campuses abroad (Networks). Limited resources typically prevent SMPCs to expand to more sophisticated international activities such as creating transnational university networks. Nevertheless, new information and telecommunication technologies provide opportunities of international expansion through transnational virtual delivery of higher education.

Globalization and regionalization are two aspects of the changing environment of the higher education industry. Globalization is a multidimensional process of incomplete and differential cross-country integration at a worldwide scope. A broader definition of globalization would include the integration of countries along Political, Economic, Technological, Socio-cultural, Ecological lines, among other aspects of human activity. Regionalization is cross-country integration at a limited geographic scope comprising neighboring countries (e.g. Andean Pact, MERCOSUR) or countries with a common geographic domain (APEC, EU). Regions are often defined by national agreements, which are crafted to boost trade among neighboring countries.

“Transnational virtual delivery” of higher education is the most promising form of internationalization of higher Ed because it addresses the main imperatives of Globalization/Regionalization. According to Van Damme (2001), the most salient features of Globalization in Higher Ed are the creation of Mass-delivery of higher Education opportunities, Global/Regional market place for Students, demand for Knowledge Intensive educated professionals, and Global/regional reach of new internet based technologies.

SMPCs using E-Learning systems as tools for transnational virtual delivery would take advantage of global/regional opportunities. For instance, in the context of the INSEAD model of internationalization
described above, SMPCs could substitute or complement to some degree their student and faculty mobility (Export) by cross-border delivery of on-line programs. Similarly, SMPCs could accept the delivery from foreign faculty and participation of local students in shared foreign on-line programs (Import). These efforts are enhanced by collaboration with academic institutions abroad (Partnerships). With the appropriate strategy, SMPCs could create transnational university networks to sustain their on-line programs (Networks). Given e-learning’s importance for SMPCs participation in global higher education’s opportunities, it is fitting to review e-learning’s most salient characteristics.

**E-LEARNING AND INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS IN SMPCs**

E-learning refers to methods of learning which use electronic instructional content delivered via the internet and is synonymous of Web-based or online-learning (Trombley & Lee, 2002). E-learning facilitates distance learning, self-paced learning, and enables students to take control of both process and the content of their learning. E-learning provides time and location flexibility, cost and time savings, promotes collaborative learning environments, and provides potentially unlimited learning material (Zang & Zhou, 2003).

Several forms of e-Learning are available to SMPCs. Wodecki (2006) provides several classifications suitable for analysis of e-learning in SMPCs. E-learning could be classified according to availability of time, technique used, student-teacher interaction, connection with traditional learning, and level of formalization (Wodecki, 2006).

The most salient classification of e-learning systems is according to the availability of time. There are two main modes of time delivery: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous mode promotes learning online by electronic communication media such as chat, messenger, videoconference, or virtual notice boards. Asynchronous mode does not need simultaneous presence of students and uses email, forum, interactive multimedia course, simulations, e-book, video recording of lectures, programs tutorials, and or search engines among other technologies.
SMPCs have widely adopted the asynchronous mode by implementing web-based delivery systems such as “Blackboard” (www.blackboard.com) or “Angel” (www.angellearning.com).

For most SMPCs, e-learning has become synonymous with web-learning. However, other telecommunication technologies are used for distance learning. E-learning could be categorized according to the telecommunication technologies used such as Radio, TV, or computer supported learning (multimedia, courses, program’s tutorials, simulations). The Internet combines information with telecommunication technologies providing rich sources of information (websites, search engines, etc.) and communication tools (chat, messenger, voice/text, forum, etc).

E-learning also provides flexibility to the teacher-student interaction, which is extremely important for SMPCs because they are fundamentally tuition driven and emphasize good teaching to attract students. E-learning provides opportunities for delivery with teacher’s presence (synchronous and asynchronous), without teacher’s presence but based on multimedia courses (planned learning), and with self-paced learning. This last form of independent learning experience is based on information sources available on the internet, and informal communication with other people through forums, emails, messenger, or chat.

E-learning is also categorized according to its connection with traditional learning, i.e., as a supplement or replacement for traditional programs. SMPCs use e-learning as a supplement for traditional learning by developing supporting materials as part of a traditional course, materials such as posted documents on web-based platforms. SMPCs use e-learning as a replacement for traditional learning by developing programs of distance learning that offer exclusively online course delivery. In addition, E-learning facilitates formal and informal learning. Most SMPCs have implemented programs of formal learning (academic institutions). In addition, informal learning (non part of academic learning) is fostered through outreach programs, such as community outreach and alumni outreach programs or professional development programs.

Two classifications are the most relevant for SMPCs based in the previous review: 1) availability of time, and 2) student-teacher
interaction. Figure 1 shows fourteen models commonly used by SMPCs classified according these two categories. Synchronous e-learning and long-term study-abroad stays need higher availability of time than asynchronous e-learning and short-term study abroad stays. The models that involve higher face-to-face time, such as synchronous life videos and long-term study abroad have, by definition, higher student-teacher interaction.

**Figure 1.** E-learning and international education modes for SMPCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Availability of time</th>
<th>Student-teacher interaction</th>
<th>E-learning</th>
<th>Outward mobility (Export)</th>
<th>Inward mobility (Import)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1. Synchronous Live Video (SLV)</td>
<td>2. Dual Degree students -year or longer abroad (DD)</td>
<td>3. Dual degree students from foreign Universities-year or longer (DDF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Hybrid: Traditional + AWP/SLV (T+AW+SLV)</td>
<td>5. Semester Study abroad of faculty and students (SS)</td>
<td>6. Semester Study from Foreign University (SSF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>7. Synchronous Live Texting (SLT)</td>
<td>8. Experiential Learning abroad (EL)</td>
<td>9. Experiential visit from Foreign University (ELF)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>10. Asynchronous web posting + tour (AWP+T)</td>
<td>11. Study Tour (ST)</td>
<td>12. Study Tour from foreign University (STF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>13. Asynchronous web interactive (AWI)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>14. Asynchronous web posting (AWP)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These models comprise the following techniques:

1. **Synchronous Live Video** (SLV). Class or course delivered using a live video stream of a faculty lecture (using dedicated software or freeware such as Skype).

2. **Dual Degree students—year or longer abroad** (DD). Students in these programs are enrolled abroad in long-term programs established by mutual agreement between universities leading to a degree recognized by both universities.

3. **Dual degree students from foreign Universities-year or longer** (DDF). These students are the foreign students in corresponding program as in Technique 2.

4. **Hybrid: Traditional + AWP/SLV** (T+AWP+SLV). This is a hybrid model that uses the traditional class delivery system (lectures, cases, etc.) supported by asynchronous web posting and synchronous live video streaming.

5. **Semester Study abroad of faculty and students** (SS). Non-degree seeking students and/or faculty travel abroad for exchange between universities.

6. **Semester Study from Foreign University** (SSF). Non-degree seeking foreign students and/or faculty travel for exchange between universities.

7. **Synchronous Live Texting** (SLT). This is a course that uses chat-room discussions and file exchange as main delivery systems.

8. **Experiential Learning abroad** (EL). There are different types of stays abroad, usually between three to five weeks, with experiential content such as Service Learning or brief internships.

9. **Experiential visit from Foreign University** (ELF). Foreign students and/or faculty visit usually between three to five weeks. Visits have experiential content such as Service learning or brief internships.

10. **Asynchronous web posting + tour** (AWP+T). Study tour supported with web posting in delivery systems such as Blackboard or Angel.
11. *Study Tour* (ST). Students and faculty(s) visit foreign university(s), sites, companies, and/or other organizations of interest, usually for seven to ten days.

12. *Study Tour from foreign University* (STF). Foreign students and faculty(s) visit local university(s), sites, companies, and/or other organizations of interest, usually for seven to ten days.

13. *Asynchronous web interactive* (AWI). A web-based delivery system that includes interactive pre-recorded video streams, coordinated, slide-shows, and testing dynamic sites suitable for independent or self-paced education.

14. *Asynchronous web posting* (AWP). Web-based systems (Blackboard or Angel), that host reading and exercises to be completed independently by the student over a period of time, usually the duration of a semester.

**Strategies for International Education and E-learning in SMPCs**

International exchange programs were developed after the Second World War by various governments as a means to increase international mutual understanding, cultural sensitivity and acquaintance, with the hope to foster world peace (de Wit, 2002; Scott, 1998, 2003). Research shows that study-abroad programs increase intercultural sensitivity among participating students (Jackson, 2008). There are benefits to study abroad trips that transcend the original intent of increasing mutual understanding. For instance, research shows that multicultural experiences enhance creativity (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008), and biculturalism improves decision-making in multinational settings (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005).

Two dimensions related to international education emerge from our analysis: 1) Exposure to culture, and 2) Demand on faculty time and other university resources. On one hand, international exchange programs commonly seek to increase cultural sensitivity by increasing
students’ exposure to cultural differences, and exposure to language differences. This is achieved by increasing the interaction with foreign individuals and promoting cross-cultural coordination among individuals of several cultures. This objective is directly associated with the cost of such programs. Conversely, student participation (e.g., students per semester) in international education is inversely related to the cost of such programs.

Previously, in Figure 1 we had determined that SMPCs strive to increase faculty availability of time and student-teacher interaction. These international education objectives put significant strain on faculty time and other university resources of SMPCs. Hence, globalization of international education sets in motion two countervailing forces in SMPCs: a need to increase exposure to multiple cultures, and a need to balance the limited faculty time and other university resources. Figure 2 shows generic strategies that deal with these countervailing forces (See Figure 2).

Figure 2 shows four generic strategies: Strategy I (Travel), Strategy II (Network), Strategy III (E-Export) and Strategy IV (Import). Most SMPCs start their international education efforts with a “Travel” strategy. Study tours and experiential learning trips, or service learning trips are often organized over the holidays break or during the summer. The next strategic move follows Path 1 towards a “Networks” strategy. SMPCs expand their international education efforts by signing dual degree agreements, supplementing their course offering with e-learning systems. Often SMPCs network expansion is followed by a move towards import along Path 2. This path is complementary to Path 1 because an “Import” strategy might be part of the international agreements leading to the Network strategy. The “E-Export” strategy leverages e-learning systems to offer cross-border educational programs. These programs are not only supported, but essentially designed around e-learning systems. These programs require initial high faculty time due to necessary training in information and telecommunication technologies. The administration of the logistics, technological and social resources related to course-delivery puts significant strains
**Figure 2.** SMPCs’ Generic e-learning/international Ed strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY III: E-EXPORT</th>
<th>STRATEGY II: NETWORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Hybrid: (T+AWP+SLV).</td>
<td>3. Dual degree students from foreign Universities-year or longer (DDF).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY IV: IMPORT</th>
<th>STRATEGY I: TRAVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Study Tour from foreign University (STF)</td>
<td>10. Asynchronous web posting + tour (AWP+T).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Hybrid: (T+AWP+SLV).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

on faculty time and information-technology-services team support. This increases significantly the demand on faculty time and university resources.

**Conclusion**

This study provides a conceptual comparative map of international education and e-learning activities that would be useful for Small and Medium Private Colleges (SMPCs). We provide a background on internationalization, regionalization, globalization, and internet technologies and analyze the pressures these phenomena put on SMPCs. We provide a theoretical framework useful to devise strategies for the use
of e-learning along with traditional forms of international education in SMPCs. We defined two factors driving SMPCs strategies: Exposure to Culture and Demand on Faculty Time. Based on these two factors we defined four typical SMPCs strategies for internationalization: Travel, Network, E-Export, and Import. We proposed three paths of growth: Path 1, from Travel to Network, Path 2, from Travel to Import, and Path 3, from Travel to E-Export.

Several questions emerge from this framework. For instance, what should SMPCs do, go global or go regional? Regional strategies could provide a focus for limited resources. Global strategies could help improve worldwide brand name recognition. What is then the growth path most efficient for SMPCs? We identified two factors affecting the choice of e-learning and international education strategy: Exposure to Culture, and Demand on Faculty Time. Are there more factors affecting such choice? If so, what is their impact on performance of internationalization of SMPCs? This framework provides a starting point for promising future research.
References


