A Case for Investing in and Centralizing Distance/Online/MOOC Education on Main Campus

In the Beginning

Distance education had its humble beginning in 1968 when the CU Boulder campus partnered with Colorado State University Research in Graduate Education (SURGE) to provide graduate-level education through videotaped classes to engineers and scientists in Colorado industry and business. The program known as the Audiovisual College Education (ACE) program was founded and housed in the Division of Continuing Education. In 1983 ACE became the Center for Advanced Teaching in Engineering and Computer Science (CATECS), a program of the Division of Continuing Education under a charter of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education "CCHE" that granted CATECS a "statewide service opportunity and responsibility" to offer its unique programs throughout Colorado. The University of Colorado president, Arnold Weber, formally announced the establishment of CATECS to provide state of the art graduate education and professional development programs. For its inauguration CATECS had an allocation of $6,400. In its heyday (late 1990s to early 2000s) CATECS had a record enrollment of over 1,400 graduate students representing 48 states and 200 companies and international graduate students from 280 countries. Over 100 courses were broadcast to more than 30 job sites in the Denver metro area and delivered online via digital lecture-capture available synchronous or asynchronous access. CATECS brought in over $1,000,000 in net revenue annually.

Today

CATECS has undergone several transitions, name changes, and organizational restructuring and currently resides in the Graduate School as part of main campus. Its live, lecture-capture, synchronous/asynchronous online delivery is referred to as **distance education**. The Division of Continuing Education continues to offer **online** (pre-recorded, asynchronous) mostly undergraduate courses in numerous disciplines across campus. Additionally, the Office of Strategic Initiatives is creating **on-demand** (massive open online courses or MOOCS) courses offered through the *Coursera* platform. Moreover, there are individual innovative instructors who are "doing their own thing," offering courses in a variety of modalities using an array of technology. These disparate groups and individuals who are related in their efforts to offer the world-class education of CU Boulder to adult learners, underserved areas of the state, working professionals, and increase retention and education rates are often duplicating efforts in research, development, assessment, analysis and other areas of joint concern.

The Future

It's a new era for education. Information and technology has exploded offering us unprecedented access to knowledge and new ways to connect with that knowledge. Both traditional and nontraditional students are looking for ways to gain access to CU Boulder's knowledge and training. The students of tomorrow are growing up with this technology and are accustomed to having these resources at their fingertips. Thirst for information is ever increasing and this new generation of students wants to learn ways that work for them. Their reasons range from financial to self-paced needs and from geographical limitations to the desire to participate in group discussions synchronously online with the world's most foremost expert who teaches for CU Boulder but may be physically located in Antarctica. Students a decade from now will not only expect this type of access but demand it. Students want the flexibility to fuse traditional, online and distance offerings to balance work, school and family life. The university must be ready to meet this demand to remain relevant.

How do we get There from Here?
Continuing Education has always had, since I've been associated with them, a "yes, we can make it work" attitude. Extending this approach across campus to permeate every department, program, administrative office, and support function will set the stage for moving forward, overcoming ingrained obstacles and resistance and leveraging the strengths of the university.

Another major component is to fully integrate distance/online/on-demand education into the fabric of the campus:
- write it into the university, campus and each unit's strategic vision,
- set goals for success and expansion,
- incorporate it into the course/teaching load, the promotion and tenure process and the award/recognition processes, and
- expect every administrative office to treat students participating in this education not as "other" but as important, valued scholars contributing to the diversity and vibrancy of the university.

Our faculty and staff are crucial partners in the success of distance/online/on-demand education.

Incorporating distance/online/on-demand education into the structure of the campus will necessitate creating one centrally located office or resource center to coordinate it. This headquarters would house the units or at a minimum a liaison associated with distance/online/on-demand education including the former CATECS/CAETE, Continuing Education, Office of Strategic Initiatives, and the Office of Information Technology. The administrator of this facility would:
- have a title and position with the authority necessary to oversee all aspects of distance/online/on-demand education across campus,
- set and implement policy, and
- have sufficient staff to support:
    - R&D,
    - outcomes assessment,
    - analysis/surveys/best practices,
    - innovation,
    - instructional design,
    - faculty training/professional development,
    - communication/marketing,
    - website/systems/technical support and,
    - administrative/faculty/staff support.

The headquarters would serve as the "go-to" location for faculty, staff, and students for questions, training, creative solutions, and assistance.

What will we Become?
Imagine a global university—one that everyone knows about and respects—a campus with students across the nation and around the globe participating in discussion, research, experiments, and offering contributions from their unique cultures and backgrounds. Imagine the opportunities that could be realized for students from northeastern Colorado and other rural locations, or those disadvantaged or disabled students who can't physically come to campus. Do we want to be an international campus with a worldview? Do we want to be known as the top provider of needed quality education no matter where the students or faculty happen to be? Do we want to be a more student-centered university with increased usability, reach, and

diversity? If we do, then we must comprehensively invest in distance/online/on-demand education. I say yes!

Respectfully submitted,

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