

TWENTY ALTERNATIVE MODELS FOR FAITH-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION

Updated on March 21, 2013

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All of higher education is facing major challenges while monitoring many changes, both from established institutions and from new entities. We are individuals committed to at least encouraging private nonprofit postsecondary institutions, especially distinctly Christian liberal arts colleges, seminaries and Bible colleges, explore a wider range of opportunities that could help each continue with a viable, sustainable, purposeful and successful future. We call our informal network the **Christian Higher Education Futures Panel**, which was formed in the Fall of 2012, and now includes:

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Some credible literature suggests that “disruptive innovation” comes mostly from outside existing, traditional institutions. More pressing is the conclusion of many that the traditional models of four-year liberal arts education, seminaries and Bible colleges are financially unsustainable. In our opinion, some campuses appear to be very healthy and should be looking for opportunities to add to their current programs. Other campuses acknowledge that they are dangerously weak financially, do need to reinvent themselves, but do not have the resources to initiate bold new endeavors.

On struggling campuses it is too easy to get into “my position vs. your position” negotiations where no one feels energized by resulting compromises. Stephen Covey’s book *The 3rd Alternative* urges that all sides agree to find synergy in *new* strategies. Many campuses need a bold new vision.

Just consider the international implications of dozens of elite institutions offering free courses taught by some of the best professors in the world (MOOC’s). Then imagine several highly professional prior learning assessment organizations that grant credit for what a person knows, regardless of how it was learned? We believe this is starting a serious re-thinking of the delivery of postsecondary learning for many motivated students who can learn at their convenience and at less cost. Surely new models and options will be springing up every month.

We think all Christian institutions would benefit from planned dialogues among trustees, faculty and administrators about their future and possible new models. A fundamental role of leadership is to “define reality,” then to generate a vision that unifies and energizes. Author Jim Collins says

every organization must “face the brutal facts.” In doing this at Christian institutions, we fear that so much attention to financial sustainability will lessen the focus on the more important questions around adding value through the integration of faith and learning, their only real distinctive.

Here are several concepts from a number of sources. Some of these “models” overlap. They are listed randomly. Maybe only one or two would fit your culture and vision. We hope you will allow these ideas to stimulate new thinking about the future and even **try to rate each one on a scale of 1 (almost impossible) to 5 (that sounds great for us to consider)**. Even better, what can your campus envision together that is not on this list? Imagine!

1. Across the Street Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Purchase or build Christian living/learning centers “across the street” from major public universities. Rent to Christian students (or even Christians working in the area). Offer the benefits of safe, clean residential housing, but with Christian spiritual formation mentors, a specialized library, life coaches (maybe InterVarsity, Cru or other staff) plus a few classes in the (public) university’s catalog taught on-site by Christian faculty at the public university who yearn to teach more openly from their Christian worldview. Let the public university provide the majority of courses, the main library, science labs, performing arts, physical fitness centers, competitive athletics and other things most students do want. Leave the funding headaches of the amenities “arms race” behind. Charge competitive rents to do the above and use a break-even financial model. This model could be nonprofit or for profit. It could be an add-on by stronger institutions for greater Kingdom impact or an alternative to existing campuses.

2. Across the Country Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

This is a familiar model to some institutions that have set up satellite campuses a few or thousands of miles away in the US. There are cities that are without Christian institutions that desire to have one or more. There are hospital systems that will subsidize campuses to come near them for various health care programs. Some cities are now competing to attract campuses, believing good cities have college campuses. Many denominations have concentrations of churches in parts of the country where there is no nearby campus to serve their interests. Northern campuses may want a warmer climate for their students and faculty to consider spending a semester. There are many reasons to expand beyond one home site.

3. Across the World Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Since 50% of all incoming freshmen today say they want to study abroad (3% actually get that opportunity), a US campus could grow by partnering with the right foreign campus (or build one from scratch) to provide most of one’s education living and learning in another (lower-cost) culture. Many Christian campuses have strong missions organizations and churches with whom they could collaborate. These intercultural campuses would draw students from around the world. Some courses could be taken in a blended class-online format. This model fits with the increasing globalization of almost everything.

4. In the Marketplace Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Create coop-education programs that require (or at least provide for) students to work/learn in the community, resulting in a resume with a degree plus meaningful job experience. Even “guarantee” a job for the first year out of college for those who do not land one on their own. Tap committed alumni/friends who support this concept to provide those jobs. Or refund the last year’s tuition if one is not placed in a job within six months. Build the program around a solid general education core, but offer degrees and certificates that reflect the region's economic future and student career interests. Be open to partnerships with large employers in your community.

5. Work to Learn Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

While Berea College, College of the Ozarks, and only a couple others still exist today, the work college model has many pluses (especially in the minds of donors!). Reduce the non-teaching payroll. Let students learn by building and maintaining campus facilities, managing businesses, and growing food. Working and learning under Christian adults who model character and bring both practical experience and teaching abilities onto campus could make it a “destination campus” for those attracted to such a model. Many retired professionals could be attracted to live and work in this environment. Try this message on prospective students: “leave campus without debt and a unique resume!”

6. The System Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Many denominationally compatible campuses should explore joining together into multi-campus “systems” that share one strong board, central administration, cooperative purchasing capacity, easy transfer of students, faculty mobility among the campuses, leveraging of technology, specialized majors and centers of excellence on each campus. If it works for public universities, maybe we need more multi-campus Christian universities offering a range of programs and degrees. There is experience in multi-campus systems to learn from.

7. The All-Web Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Since the Church is growing most rapidly in the southern hemisphere, we need one or more Christian universities that are entirely distributed learning institutions with a global reach. Major cities could have “study groups” to bring people together, using churches as gathering places, but the instruction would be delivered via the Web with paid or volunteer “course mentors” scattered around the globe and staying in touch with students via email and social networking. Perhaps one of the strong, proven online universities would provide the expensive online courseware and management system, allowing the leadership to focus on the more important strategies of transformation. With Coursera, Udacity and many other new online ventures, there might be other good partnership opportunities. While totally online is not the perfect model, it does have the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of Christians who will never have an option of Christian worldview learning. This can be done using a

nonprofit strategy that will appeal to many donors or in a for profit mode that will appeal to investors.

8. The Residential + Others' Online Courses Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Think about designing the best “co-curricular” program possible that could be implemented on several new “campuses” to leverage the power of Christian community. Maybe several such communities could be centrally managed. Then tap MOOCs and Christian campuses’ online courses to meet one or more host, regionally accredited universities’ degree requirements. This holistic model could significantly “transform” lives in community settings by drawing heavily on local churches, parachurch ministries, businesses led by Christians, etc. The benefit for students would be to significantly reduce the cost of certificates or degrees without giving up the critical nature of living and learning in a Christian community.

9. The Commuter Blended + Others' Online Courses Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Imagine dozens (or hundreds) of “mini-campus” using space in churches and other donated space properties for online students who live on their own but gather and create meaningful “co-curricular” activities while they accumulate credits from several online offerings. This model would need “founders” to create the infrastructure that could then easily be hosted by local leaders in communities of all sizes across America/world. The cost to students would be less than most community colleges, allow them to work and live in their own homes, yet have meaningful “student life” activities that fit the cohort. This model would fit communities with concentrations of ethnic and racial minorities that are under represented at most Christian campuses.

10. The For-Profit Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

To realize the efficiencies and focus on working adults similar to the 800 fully accredited, degree granting for-profit campuses, we need Christian investors and educators to provide adult degrees from a Christian worldview in this market. Currently, Grand Canyon University (Phoenix) is one strong model. A stronger model may be for an existing nonprofit campus to create or purchase a subsidiary for-profit so the profits would go to the parent nonprofit institution rather than to private investors (keep you eye on Azusa Pacific Online University). Many Christians are squeamish about education being a “business,” but more exposure to for-profit institutions may reduce the skepticism. With more than 125 million formal learners in the U.S., and only 18 million of those counted as enrolled in “higher education,” the market is huge. And some educators have the skills and instincts to take a responsive, entrepreneurial model to new markets of learners. Another strategy would be for a nonprofit campus to “co-brand” itself with a for-profit, sharing some tuition revenue with a good for-profit that has good systems already in place and working well.

11. Adopt Your Town Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Some Christian institutions are in small towns or cities of less than 25,000 residents. Imagine an existing campus “adopting” the town – a vision to make it a model place to live and work. This model would emphasize experiential and service learning. Students would volunteer or be employed in every aspect of community life – environment, health, schools, businesses, nonprofits, churches, and clubs. Faculty would align coursework with community needs and opportunities. There would be more independent study projects. This kind of “destination campus” would likely attract students from small towns who may want to settle in their campus town or a town similar to it. Imagine!

12. The Two-Year Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Half the freshmen in the United States attend a community college. Many people, especially those who prefer to work and learn at the same time, have educational goals that could be completed through a badge, certificate or associate’s degree program. If 30-40% of American adults are evangelical, and a high percentage of them want only a 6-month certificate or a two-year degree, where can they go today where faculty and administrators see them as the primary student body and offer what they want at a price they can afford? Maybe such a campus would offer only a portion of the credits, while the student also attended the public community college a few miles away or next door.

13. The Three-Year Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Europe may bring pressure to bear on the U.S. to compete with three-year undergraduate degrees. A few campuses are experimenting now. As a distinctive, Christian colleges would need some “guarantee” that certain majors could be accomplished in three years for highly motivated students. Maybe high school grads bringing earned credits with them would be needed. Most likely, students would need to be enrolled twelve months a year. Could a three-year degree thrive in a traditional four-year campus? It holds many attractions for some students.

14. The Network Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Few campuses can individually fund all the courses or majors their students desire. Develop a network of campuses that will market one another’s best courses and majors by co-branding or offering degree programs under a larger, collaborative name. Students might live on one campus but travel to other campuses for a term or two. Courses could use interactive video, in-class, or online. One partner could be <http://christianuniversityglobalnet.com>. A group representing all the institutions would provide governance/leadership for the shared curriculum so the administrative functions could be coordinated efficiently.

15. The Integrator Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

Today’s faculty integrate into their classes various articles, books, videos, Internet sites, etc. to create a robust course. Push that concept further to articulation agreements with other colleges, including community, public and private four-year institutions to tap the widest range of possibilities. Go even further with assessments of learning from best-in-class

conferences, seminars, apprenticeships, internships, travel, etc. Proactively customize the best learning experience for each student based on his/her interests and learning styles.

16. The Dual BA/Masters Five Year Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ___)

An emerging and available model is to merge a BA and a master's level program such as a MBA or M.Div. into one five-year integrated curriculum. It saves time and money for those who are sure of their career direction. It may allow better sequencing of courses, partnerships with other institutions, or the use of available online courses. Administrative systems would not need to be duplicated. It could be a good distinctive unless hundreds of institutions adopt this model.

17. The Merger Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ___)

This model has some history, but mergers have proven to be difficult. Some campuses are near one another and should consider merging for the future of both. Other campuses are owned by the same denomination and could merge while treating the smaller or weaker campus as a satellite of the larger or stronger one. Every day we read about businesses that read the signs of change and merge while there still are win-win options. Campuses tend to wait too long for this option, bringing to the table a negative balance sheet and a run-down physical plant. This is an area in need of further study. Perhaps philanthropic organizations could be helpful in convening and funding a careful process where several institutions could discreetly explore this option.

18. The Respond to Cities Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ___)

Smaller cities seem to have concluded that "no real city" is without a college or two. Mostly, they see a college as helping attract jobs and their economic development offices take the lead. In the Phoenix area, Mesa has attracted a couple small non-Arizona nonprofits to start offering programs. Peoria has exclusives with two small out-of-state colleges to develop a plan. The cities often offer space or land or other incentives.

19. The Deep Collaboration Model (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ___)

Retain all the services and programs that differentiate your institution from others AND that compel tuition-paying students to attend. Hang on to those things. Then join with other institutions to massively aggregate all other services and programs. Go beyond tactical savings of transactional purchases to transform the way your institution does its work. Examples include shared attorney services, training, peer audits and reviews that replace expensive external reviews, shared IT services including shared data centers and staff, shared faculty members for necessary or attractive courses/majors for which there are insufficient students, centralized accounting and services, and centralized paperwork handling using image and workflow management tools. For a successful model already growing, see www.thecoalition.us.

20. **The Dream Degree Model** (Your rating of this concept for your campus? ____)

This model will go public around May 1, 2013 as a new nonprofit led by Christians experienced in this model. Soon there will be webinars to acquaint potential partner campuses with it. Basically, this initiative will offer freshman and sophomore general education/elective courses online that are approved for credit by the American Council on Education. The Dream Degree provider will help mostly adult learners with a scattering of courses (minimum 45 credits) enroll in six-week, instructor guided courses for \$250 per 3 semester credits). The Dream Degree website will link the learners to the Christian (and other) participating campuses so they can determine which of the ACE-recommended courses they will accept as transfer credits toward a baccalaureate degree. The vision is to provide low-cost college education to learners and widen the market for Christian colleges of students with a plan for degree completion. More later if interested.

Your Best Model?

You may have it already. But the traditional model looks very much the same to outsiders who know there are 1600 private, four-year, residential campuses, hundreds of Bible colleges, and hundreds of seminaries to choose from. And all look expensive without enough distinguishing features to help students make wise choices. To make the common, traditional model work may require significant layoffs, larger class sizes, less fancy buildings, less borrowing, dropping tenure, freezing tuition, and other difficult adjustments. Not much enthusiasm there!

In thinking about new models, each campus needs to understand and honor its culture. Culture can easily trump certain new ideas. And mission should not be compromised.

But each campus needs one or more distinctives that draw students excited about that particular brand, e.g., one or more centers of excellence, a curriculum designed around servant leadership or some other learning strategy, a highly “student focused” environment that people talk about – each campus needs *something* to help it stand out.

What is your reality? We can’t plan based on the good old days or what we would hope could happen. Higher education is facing a tsunami of change and each campus must be honest with its particular situation.

Making changes of the type envisioned in some of these models cannot be top down surprises. In a day when everyone demands transparency and accountability, there need to be process strategies that allow everyone on campus to learn, discuss and provide feedback. It is time for boards, faculties, and administrators to listen to one another while seeking God’s best for the institution. Besides, most faculty will say “if we were not consulted, don’t count on us to support change.” But ... time is short. We need to learn more about change management.

Some of the new models we are brainstorming about today may need entrepreneurs not affiliated with an existing campus. These risk-taking founders would reflect Clayton Christensen’s “disruptive innovators” theory. But we hope many talented people on existing

campuses could also be attracted to these new ventures. Maybe new kinds of partnerships will emerge between an existing campus and a new venture.

Most important is for each Christian campus to stay confident in the Lord's provision and leading. There is a spiritual discipline each of us must understand to discern God's will.

This is a very exciting time to be engaged in the ministry of education and training through a Christian worldview. Let's make the most of it.

Comments are welcome. Our Christian Higher Education Futures Panel wants to help create safe places for leaders to dream and to dialogue before it is too late for some of the good options to be implemented. Any feedback on the use of this discussion paper on your campus would help us understand the status of campus dialogue on future options.

You can send comments and suggestions to bobandringa@mac.com.