

Flexible Learning Futures

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I want to highlight the first ICDE/ICCE conference that I went to in Vancouver in 1982. Some of you may have been there. The theme of the conference was *Technology is the Answer, But What is the Question?* Something that is still somewhat relevant today.

Because of time constraints, I want to concentrate on the financial exclusion divide that's been referred to earlier. It is not just the digital divide that is a problem. There are a lot of people who have access to the internet, but who cannot afford the fees necessary to gain access to online higher education. They are the target group I'd like to suggest that we can work towards helping. I'm not going to talk much about the OpenCourseWare Consortium because many of you are familiar with it. But just this September, at the OpenCourseWare Consortium Conference in Utah, Christine Geith (Michigan State University, USA) and Philipp Schmidt (University of the Western Cape, South Africa), whom I am working with on a project, raised the question, "What might it mean to offer credit for open courseware?" The consensus reached by the Conference delegates was, "Everything!"

I think it is clear as a message in talking about "open courseware futures" that it is just a matter of time before some form of credit is offered to students who study conscientiously using open courseware. Christine, Philipp and I have prepared an application for funding from the Hewlett Foundation to establish three working teams on each of the approaches to credit outlined in the PowerPoint presentation, which also includes some reference to the continuing growth of the open educational resource movement and open source software. Further, the number of open access journals and the number of institutions offering open courseware is growing rapidly.

The logical extension of the open courseware movement is to move beyond content to providing open academic support, assessment-on-demand, varying the curriculum to what I've called open curriculum, and ultimately to awarding accreditation. My own university has registered the domain name for "Academic Volunteers International" and we are developing open source architecture to support the volunteers. Operating as *communities of practice* the volunteers will provide academic support for open courseware students. So that's one approach to managing the variable cost of providing academic support. We can't, however, see an alternative way to provide access to assessment, without the open courseware students having to pay the variable costs associated with the assessment process. The business model underpinning the approach is summarized in this second last slide. The slide also provides a live link to a paper that I published last year, which refers to "Creating a Parallel Universe". The approach is not aimed at undermining mainstream higher education, or challenging the existing business model. At the moment, then, we have learners who only have access to open courseware with no academic support and

extremely limited opportunities for gaining credit. We believe that we could provide academic support by volunteers working in communities of practice by allocating a small amount of their time on a regular basis. There is a strong tradition in Australia of volunteering, and I'm sure that the proposed approach will work.

With academic support available, many open courseware students will achieve a state of readiness to be assessed. What is then required is some form of assessment-on-demand, similar to that provided by Athabasca University in its system of challenge examinations. That's one of the things we are looking at, so that assessment and ultimately credit could be offered for a much reduced fee. It is important that the open courseware student has the opportunity to gain credit for a course. In this model, a number of participating institutions could work together to grant credit by offering perhaps just 5 or 6 open courses from each institution that could be put together to accumulate credit towards a degree. It would then be feasible for a student who couldn't afford the fees for main stream access to higher education to qualify for the award of a Bachelor of Transdisciplinary Studies from the combined open courseware offerings from a number of universities working together.

The expertise, experience and tradition of collaboration based on the existing network of ICDE SCOP institutions could provide a practical foundation for granting an open courseware degree. The business model behind this is that we use the expertise and investment that we have already put into our mainstream courses. We make a selected number of these courses available as open courseware. We support them with academic volunteers. When students are ready to be examined, they should be able to pay a fee for assessment, which would be very much less than the course fees charged for the mainstream higher education experience. By implementing the proposed model, an ICDE SCOP network of institutions working together could enable many students currently excluded by the financial divide to gain an open courseware degree, without challenging the existing mainstream higher education business model.

I ask you to think about the future of higher education. The problems associated with providing sufficient access through conventional approaches to meet the growing demand seem insurmountable. It is clear that we will never be able to meet the exponentially growing demand with the existing systems of higher education. We need more innovation. We need to use the technology judiciously, and we need new business models. Will higher education ever become a viable universal aspiration, or will it remain a universal exasperation? Provided we work together to make judicious use of emerging technologies, and to develop innovative business models, in time ubiquitous access to higher education could become a universal reality. The first meaningful step we can take to tackle the challenge of providing affordable access to higher education on a global scale is to keep an open mind!

Thank you!

灵活学习的未来

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非常感谢！

首先我想提及 1982 年在曼谷召开的首次国际开放与远程教育理事会 (ICDE , 当时为国际函授教育理事会 ICCE) 会议 , 你们中的一些人可能也出席了那次会议。会议的主题是“技术是答案 , 那问题是什么呢 ? ”这和今天的主题仍旧有些相关。

由于时间有限 , 我想集中探讨之前提到的金融排斥鸿沟 (Financial Exclusion Divide) , 这不仅仅是指数字鸿沟而涉及到一个难题。许多人能使用互联网但仍无法承担获得高等教育所必需的费用 , 这正是我想建议大家共同努力来帮助的目标人群。我不想谈论更多有关开放课件协会 (OCC) 的内容 , 许多人对 OCC 都已经熟悉。我想谈及的是今年 9 月份在犹他州举行的开放课件协会会议上 , 和我正在合作项目的克里斯蒂·盖斯 (Christine Geith) 和菲利普·施密特 (Philip Schmidt) 提出的问题 : “为开放课件提供学分将意味着什么 ? ” 克里斯蒂来自美国密歇根州立大学 , 菲利普来自南非西开普大学。关于这一问题的回答 , 与会代表达成的共识是“结论是可能发生的一切”。

在谈论开放课件的未来时 , 我想有一点很清楚 , 即要真正实现为那些想认真学习开放课件的学生提供相应的学分仅仅是时间问题。克里斯蒂、菲利普和我准备向休利特基金会 (Hewlett Foundation) 提出资金申请 , 以用于成立三个工作组分布实施 PPT 中描述的学分授予计划 , 其中也涉及正在不断发展中的开放教育资源运动和开放源代码软件。此外 , 提供开放课件的开放存取期刊 (Open Access Journals) 和开放教育机构的数量也在迅猛增长。

按逻辑发展来看 , 开放课件运动的拓展将表现在从内容提供拓展为提供学术支持 , 提供按需评估 , 评估对象也从课程发展为我们所谓的开放课程 , 并最终授予资格认证。我所在的大学已经为“国际学术志愿者”注册了域名 , 同时我们正在为这些志愿者研发开放源码体系。如同社团实践活动一样 , 这些志愿者将为开发课件的学生提供学术支持 , 为此这是一种对不同类型课程的管理方式。尽管如此 , 我们仍不能设想出不用学习者通过缴纳相关费用来获得评估的可选方式。用来支持这种方式的商业模式在倒数第二张幻灯片中已经提及。幻灯片中还提供了我去

年发表的“创建平行世界”这一论文的连接。这种方式并不是为了破坏主流高等教育或者说挑战现存的商业模式。当前，我们的学习者只能获得开放课件学习而不能获得相应的学术支持，甚至几乎没有机会获得学分。我们相信参与社团工作的学术志愿者通过合理的时间分配一定能够为学生提供学术支持。参加志愿服务在澳大利亚已是一种根深蒂固的传统，我相信这种方式将会发挥很大作用。

在获得学术支持后，许多开放课件的学习者将会处于被评估的准备状态；那时就需要某种形式的个别化评估，类似于阿萨巴斯卡大学在其教学系统内提供的挑战考试。这也只是我们看到的一种形式，因此评估和最终资格鉴定可以通过很少的付费而获得。有机会获得课程学分这对开放课件学生来说是很重要的。在这一模式中，众多参与机构共同努力，每个参与机构可以提供 5 或 6 门开放课程并准予学分，这些学分累积到一定程度可获得学位。这对于那些无力支付主流高等教育的，但有能力通过参与院校提供的开放课件的学习获得跨学科学士学位的学生而言将是可行的。

基于专业知识、经验和合作传统的国际远程教育理事会校长常设会议(ICDE SCOP) 成员机构形成的网络将为开放课件学位授予提供实践基础。这背后运作的商业模式是我们在主流课程上使用的专门技术和投资模式，从中我们选取一定数量作为开放课件，并由学术志愿者提供支持。当学生准备参与评估时，他们应该能支付一笔费用进行评估，这笔费用要比主流高等教育的课程学费少的多。通过实施这一模式，由众多机构参与的 ICDE SCOP 网络能够为那些受金融鸿沟拒绝在外的众多学习者提供开放课程的学位，同时也不会对现存的主流高等教育模式带来挑战。

然后，我想请大家思考一下高等教育的未来。通过传统教育方式提供足够的教育机会及其他问题以满足不断增长的教育需求似乎无法解决。显然，现存的高等教育体系将无法呈现指数级增长的需求。我们需要更多的改革创新，我们需要充分利用技术，我们需要尝试新的商业模式。高等教育是愿意被视为广泛的期待，还是维持一种引起全世界愤慨的状态？假如我们一起努力，充分利用新兴技术，开发创新的商业模式，无处不在的高等教育机会将在全球成为现实。在全球范围内应对提供负担得起的接受高等教育的机会带来的挑战，我们需要迈出的有意义的第一步就是保持开放的心态！

谢谢！

(李娟校)

