

CAMPUS 2007 TECHNOLOGY

“Forget the Deep Pockets: Build a Successful Online Program Consortium”

Tom Kennedy
Executive Director
New Ventures of Regis University

Public mega-universities and for-profit institutions with large endowments aren't the only ones that can succeed with online programs. The Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities (OCICU) mission is to serve the online program needs of independent, not-for-profit colleges and universities through the consortium model. Managed by New Ventures of Regis University, OCICU provides an online infrastructure and program resources, and helps schools cope with associated administrative needs so that the schools have a low-risk, low-cost entry into online learning.

The Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities (OCICU)

According to the 2005 Alfred P. Sloan Foundation sponsored study, *“Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005,”* private not-for-profit institutions lag far behind their public and for-profit counterparts in online program development. Lacking institutional resources, these not-for-profit institutions may desire online programs but don't have the means to establish them. In order to overcome the resources obstacle, New Ventures of Regis University developed a consortium that would enable them to offer online courses and programs to their students and compete with better-resourced institutions.

Consortia have been serving higher education for many years, usually institutions geographically located adjacent to one another. Instead of using transfer credit, these institutions accept courses taught at another college as their own. Founded on the same principle, OCICU has no geographic boundaries and may be located anywhere within or outside the United States.

The glue that holds this consortium together lies in the nature of the member institutions. Like-minded, philosophically similar colleges form a bond by the very essence of their respective missions and personal approach to their students.

Structure of the OCICU and Roles of Members

Membership of OCICU can be categorized as follows:

- Major providers
- Niche providers
- Members with no or very few online courses
- Members with one or two academic programs online

There are presently five **major providers** of online courses that are offered to OCICU members. Together, these institutions offer a total of 500 online courses to members. Members select which courses they want to make available to their students from academic areas such as general education, CIS, education, and business at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Niche providers will be offering special courses beginning in the fall of 2007. These special courses will be in a wide variety of academic areas including: nutrition, funeral home management, holocaust studies, security management, and Native American studies.

For the OCICU member that has **no or a minimal number** of online courses, the Consortium presents a chance to get a jump start in distance learning. For the member that has **one or two online programs**, there is the opportunity to enhance and grow academic programs more quickly.

OCICU members that provide courses through the Consortium have the added prospect to market their online offerings nationally to other members. Faced with insurmountable online marketing costs, members use the Consortium to make maximum use of space available in their courses at nearly no cost.

The Consortium has experienced substantial growth since 2005, generating a total of 4 enrollments in FY05, 184 in FY06, and 900 in FY07. It is projected that there will be at least 1500 enrollments in FY08.

Financial Aspects

Initial OCICU membership is \$5000 plus a subsequent annual fee of \$1000. In order to maintain an active membership, each member school is required to generate at least 15 enrollments per year. Members pay provider institutions \$625 per student enrollment for undergraduate courses and \$700 for graduate and nursing courses (three credit hours each). As the manager of the OCICU, New Ventures receives 20% of the per student enrollment.

Each member school charges its regular tuition for an online course, which might be \$1200, and retains the difference. Member schools have no direct expenses because the provider member pays for faculty and related expenses.

New Ventures of Regis University as Manager

In order for the Consortium to conduct business and coordinate activities, and based on 20 years experience in adult education, the management of the OCICU is directed by New Ventures of Regis University.

A pioneer in adult education, Regis was one of five colleges nationally that in the late 1970s initiated classroom-based, reduced-seat time programs that were highly structured and required extensive out-of-class study and assignments. The University's success in the adult education market prompted the establishment of a "new ventures" unit in 1987. Since then, New Ventures of Regis University has collaborated with small to medium sized independent, not-for-profit colleges and universities in order to help them develop accelerated degree programs for working adults.

By establishing partnerships, New Ventures was able to leverage the expertise and experience of Regis with colleges and universities that wanted to better serve working adult learners in their regions. These partnerships enabled the schools to develop and implement high quality academic

programs in a cost-effective manner and literally accelerate a full-scale operation. Through these arrangements, New Ventures was able to assist more than 30 colleges and universities, the majority of which were members of the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC).

The successes of partnering with CIC types of schools laid the foundation for New Ventures to create a vehicle for new technologies to meet the emerging educational delivery needs related to serving adult learners.

With the advice of the CIC, the Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities (OCICU) was initiated in 2005. Nearly all of the 63 OCICU members are affiliated with the CIC, an organization that prides itself in providing services, networking, and collaboration. The common bond and goal between New Ventures and CIC lies in the respective missions of both organizations: *to provide services and programs that assist independent, not-for-profit institutions to improve educational programs, administrative and financial performance, and institutional visibility.*

Future Plans

The OCICU continues to re-invent itself while developing efficient and effective systems and procedures designed to maximize membership benefits.

The primary goal for the next two years will be to provide the highest academic quality and service possible to OCICU members. Although new members will be accepted on an individual basis, there will be no aggressive effort to increase membership beyond 75 schools.