

MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2012

Power Share: Next Generation Learning

By [Elizabeth Meyer](#) | Director of Online Learning, UC San Diego Extension

Today, the education construct is rapidly changing due to a convergence of economic pressures and technological innovation. Moving away from closed information systems to open networked 24/7 systems—the worldwide web—the individual is repositioned as a producer of information, no longer merely a consumer.

Personal and institutional wealth slashed in the 2008 recession has drastically reduced the affordability of existing models of higher education. These seismic changes are shaking the hierarchical, puritan origins of university and college structure. “The distributed structure of information, media, and financial networks tends to subvert centralized power and destabilize established authority.” (Taylor p. 71)

E-learning has pushed traditional brick and mortar based education into massive disruptive changes; the tenured professor model is in question. E-learning is not tied to tenure professor performance in many institutions of higher education (IHE) and as a result many professors don’t make the move so adjunct professors are retained.

Bite-sized learning morsels, referred to as “learning objects”, enable students to self-serve education selecting what they need, when they need it. Supply and demand, the hallmark of a commodity-based industry, is driving education.

IHE’s are experiencing stormy conditions on all fronts. E-learning pedagogy is “moving from a transmission model to constructivist, sociocultural and metacognitive models. These models use computer-mediated communication and emphasize students’ responsibility for their own learning.” (Howell, Williams, and Lindsay, 2003). Not to mention escalating costs of higher education (\$59,000.00 one year of private college) and slim post graduation employment prospects (19% of 2009 college graduates employed upon graduation) have created headlines calling into question the value of formal education.

The University of California (UC) has ten campuses throughout the state and was born out of California’s state legislature’s desire to establish an education system for residents. In the past, funding came largely from state funds

supplemented by very modest tuition, but the reverse is true today. The state has slashed funding for both the UC and California State Colleges; it is clear significant change will occur in order for these institutions to remain viable.

Within this economic climate, UC leaders increasingly view the distributed and interactive features of the internet as a palatable course delivery option. Necessity breeds strange bedfellows. In order to survive deep financial cuts, collaboration will increasingly be seen between for-profit and public institutions. Blurring the lines even further are the emergence of the OpenCourseWare movement and substantial private funding for new models of education as seen by the Bill and Melinda Gates Next Generation Grants, aimed at transforming education through technology.

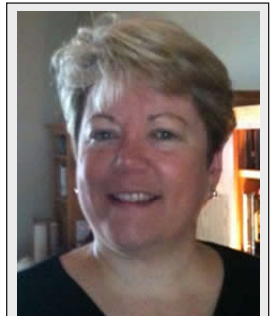
Ultimately, measuring what a person knows may be the primary business of education and where and how they learned it, secondary.

The tools educational leaders seek to stem financial losses are the same tools that learn-

ers and employees use to communicate and form social networks (SN). The implications of the dispersed, open and interactive WWW networks represent opportunity and challenge. The power of an individual and SN’s to influence public opinion and the ability to hyperlink content produced by amateur scholars change the power structure of academia. To have relevance in the future, IHE’s must harness WWW and get out in front with a new vision for education that, like leadership trends, enables a “power share” (Yukl).

Works cited:

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AUTHOR PROFILE

Current Position and Past Experience

Elizabeth Meyer is the Director of Online Learning at UC San Diego Extension.

Meyer has led development efforts for organizations such as McGraw-Hill New Media, Glencoe Publishing, Ford Motor Company, Nebraska-ETV Network, KPBS-TV, and the U.S. Marine Corps.

Personal Details and Community Involvement

Meyer enjoys the many benefits of living in San Diego: the ocean, the beach, kayaking, and sailing. She also enjoys cooking, photography, movies and continuing her education. Meyer is the 2012 Distance Education co-chair for the University Professional and Continuing Education Association National Conference in Portland Oregon.