University Bricks and Mortar—Why They Still Matter
Jonathan Fletcher, Ph.D. and Tom Buckridge, MBA
February 17, 2015

All would probably agree that higher education is in the midst of a revolution. College and university enrollments appear to be leveling off and possibly even declining. The US Census Bureau reported an enrollment decline year-over-year 2013 of nearly half a million students. The five year expansion that began in 2006 appears to have turned starting in 2012 after a 3.2 million student growth.[1] The percent of students taking one or more online courses has been on a steady increase from 10 % in 2002 to 32% in 2011.[2] Because of the cost effective nature of online courses as a delivery system for course content and the concomitant lower tuition for such courses, institutions and students are more and more choosing this delivery option as part of their educational "strategy." The nagging question for institutions with considerable investment in bricks and mortar buildings is the future need for face-to-face education, at a time when college age student enrollments have fallen off by 2% in two years (2011-13). In order to address this question we first need to clarify what we mean by education. Clearly students learn on a number of different levels and learn a number of different kinds of "things" (for lack of a better term). Thus, the educational process is multidimensional. As we understand better the nature of these dimensions of education we can begin to talk about educational efficacy. What are the outcomes of this complex educational process that are both desirable and essential? Once we have begun to clarify the process and the outcomes, we can begin to assess the pros and cons of both online education that requires only a computer and an internet connection versus face-to-face education that may require a variety of bricks and mortar meeting spaces.

---

[1] US Census Bureau, *College Enrollment Declines for Second Year in a Row, Census Bureau Reports*, Release Number: CB14-177, September 24, 2014.
[2] Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States* (Babson Survey Group: 2013).

University Bricks and Mortar—Why They Still Matter
Jonathan Fletcher, Ph.D. and Tom Buckridge, MBA
February 17, 2015

Let us first dwell for a bit on the nature of education. Although this paper is far from a clear statement of the philosophy of education, we might be able to say some common-sense things about historically how the higher educational process has taken place , if for no other reason than we had experienced that process ourselves. Probably the most obvious feature of the educational process of the recent past was the lecture format. The professor stood at the front of the classroom full of students, all facing forward toward the front of the class and took notes as the professor moved through, either clearly or not-so-clearly through some development of the theme-de-jour. Students had a textbook, the content of which they were to varying degrees responsible for, and there were assignments that allowed students to work through exercises that demonstrated their grasp of "the material." In other words, if you grasped the material, you really had no need for the classroom setting. In fact, there are many stories of very bright students who never attended class, unless of course, roll was taken and "cuts" were limited.

Online learning obviated this whole system in as much as the material was all available outside of class. In fact, online learning simply was the logical conclusion of the lack of students having a real need to be in the physical presence of other students or even the professor. If the name of the game is "information delivery," it had become clear to students and institutions that online systems had become much more efficient than classroom systems. The challenge placed before us by this new paradigm is to reevaluate what *could* happen in the classroom and especially what *should* happen in the classroom now that simple information delivery by face-to-face interaction has become effectively obsolete.

If we look back at some of the earlier educational approaches such as the Jesuit system of the sixteenth century, one dimension that jumps out at us is the idea of "disputations." Students were regularly required to defend a position in the face of other students who were tasked with defending the opposite position. We might call that "debate" today, but clearly it was an integral part of the educational process and not simply an extra-curricular activity. From this we see that education is not only about the content of the various positions but also about the way students constructed the positions

and interacted with others. The process of "thinking" may have been much more important than the content to be covered. In fact, the content emerged during the thinking process and became discovered in a manner somewhat unknown to us today.

We might also see the emphasis on rhetoric as a way to stress a thinking process focused on the formation of ideas in clear and expressive communication designed to inform, persuade, and motivate. It involved not only the process of exposition but also of logic. In other words, rhetoric was an expression of the study of the philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It was recognized from reading the great rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintilian, in Latin no less, where students formed their ability to understand and formulate complex ideas and communicate those ideas to others.

With the advent of the scientific and industrial revolutions, the vast expansion of "material" tended to shift the educational process away from creativity toward simply the acquisition of factual information: what is an electron, or heat or the liver? How do we integrate or differentiate a mathematical function? What is the chronology of World War II and the implicit causes and related effects? What is schizophrenia and how is it different from obsessive compulsive disorder? In other words, in order to function in our modern society, the student must have "command" over a vast array of technical tools whose functionality must be known and implemented—not unlike the ability as to when and how to use a torque wrench or a computer program to calculate the root mean square of a probability distribution.

The recognition of this historical shift away from thinking processes toward grasping the functionality of masses of content has created a bit of a dilemma. This shift has been compounded by the hyper-growth of specialization and away from general thinking, or a liberal education. If we find a better way to deliver content than the classroom, why do we need classrooms? The good news is that this challenge is forcing us to reevaluate what goes on in the classroom and decide if it is important. It may very well be that this reevaluation will offer all educators who are concerned with the whole person an opportunity to vastly improve what we are doing and the outcomes that we are looking for—and in so doing find the real value of bricks and mortar.

Having set this background, let us explore a number of possible desirable outcomes from a newly designed classroom experience, one that does not appear to be readily available to the online learner:

1. **Personal interaction**

    It is said that one of the advantages of online learning is that shy students may be more willing to express themselves if they are not intimidated by the presence of others. The only problem with this "advantage" is that in the workplace we do need to interact with others. Planning and brain storming sessions involve this kind of face-to-face interaction. Learning how to interact effectively and creatively may just be one of the advantages of the face-to-face classroom experience—if indeed these kinds of interactions are deliberately built into that experience. Texting the person sitting next to you at a conference table is not an experience we'd be encouraging. Placing emoticons in the text to express some form of emotional content is sadly inadequate ☹.

2. **Communication**

    Engagement of peers and the educator in alternative ideas, substantiated positions and respectful dialogue has value in a conference room-type setting. Body language, expressions and intimacy (in a good way) are delivery tools to be exercised by students as professional training and a means of differentiating themselves from the online learner.

3. **Creative communal problem solving**

    As businesses and professional organizations move toward further collaborative methods of problem solving and product development, our bricks & mortar institutions have a competitive educational advantage. There is much to be said for a project team meeting in a residence hall break-out room at 10 pm over Chinese takeout while they tackle solutions to a problem.

Yes, technology is attempting to mimic some of the collaborative experiences; however, the attempts are not equivalent to the campus experience. It is the obligation of the bricks & mortar institutions to market their differentiated product delivery, even where multiple delivery channels are 'sold' by the same institution. Why? Because their customers are different.

4. **Group project management**

As colleges and universities address the challenges of reduced on-campus enrollment and increasing competition from the vast array of online course and program offerings from non-profit and for-profit institutions across the country, one critical component of the required strategic planning is the design of an optimal mix of online and face-to-face education. The institutions that can most effectively find and implement such an optimal mix for a chosen demographic of students, will survive the turmoil of an earth-shaking paradigm shift. It is clear that simply jumping onto the online bandwagon is not the answer, since the bandwagon is getting crowded, and the low barriers to entry are not likely to improve that situation. The fact that there is a huge overarching investment in bricks and mortar by thousands of colleges and universities across the country and world implies that many institutions will not survive the shakeout. How can institutions find that illusive mix?

In addition to changing the objectives of both classroom and online learning, institutions of higher learning must reach out to the consumer in ways that reveal a college's worth and differentiate the value of the physical campus and its presence in the community:

- Local internships and the leveraging of potential employers and connected alumni on campus

- Corporate outreach to showcase campus programs and research capabilities

- Leveraging of facilities to professional offsite conferences and use of residence halls during off season periods and in conjunction with local hotels during peak attendance

- ROI studies conducted with graduates to reveal (with solid data) the value of key degree programs as centers of excellence inside the campus experience

In closing, colleges and universities with bricks & mortar facilities must become more creative in exploiting their assets to a competitive advantage as a means of attracting and retaining students and in recognizing the values of multiple educational delivery offerings. Failure to do so will place an institution of higher education at a disadvantage at a time when excess capacity looms and a shaking out is inevitable.

Non scholae sed vitae et fructus[3]

Our challenge is to mimic life in a newly configured classroom, not mimic the traditional classroom on the computer. If this is indeed the case, we are in need of new measures of efficacy that reflect this new and broader understanding of the educational mandate. Nummarius LLC and IMS Quantum Corp (N-IQ) have teamed up to provide institutions of higher education with a planning program that is specifically tailored to address this pressing issue in local markets. Specifically the process is designed to answer the following kinds of strategic questions:

1. Should we initiate, expand, curtail, or eliminate our online offerings?
2. How should we refocus or restructure our classroom and online offerings?
3. How should we understand and focus on our demographic base?
4. What are our competitive advantages and how to we capitalize on them?

The process involves a six stage integrated planning program:

1. Develop an Integrated Planning Model of the institution that reflects:

---

[3] *Not for school but for life and fulfillment.*

      a. On campus offerings

         i. Student demographics

        ii. Program capabilities and focus

     iii. Sources and uses of funds including:

            1. Tuition structure

            2. Financial aid capabilities and goals

            3. Institutional Advancement

            4. Cost structure including fixed, variable, and allocated costs.

      b. Current online offerings

         i. Student demographics

        ii. Program capabilities and focus

     iii. Sources and uses of funds including:

            1. Tuition structure

            2. Financial aid capabilities and goals

            3. Institutional Advancement

            4. Cost structure including fixed, variable, and allocated costs:

2. Develop the new paradigm of optimal face-to-face learning (FTF) and online content delivery for a few courses and test the concept for the institution's demographics.

3. Develop an Integrated Planning Model that shows a gradual implementation of the new paradigm.

4. Evaluate the viability of the plan and make adjustment accordingly.

5. Implement the plan and concurrently make adjustments in the plan as experience is gained.

6. Continue the process into the future.

N-IQ stands ready to assist you in this sophisticated integrated planning process. Please contact us at: tom@NummariusLLC.com   or   jonathan@IMSQuantum.com