

**A Changing Business Model in Higher Education:
Emerging Technologies in Teaching and Learning and Discovery
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Elon University**

Overview

The combination of rising higher education costs and the development of emerging teaching and learning technologies is bringing dramatic changes to higher education. This evolution is inspiring Elon University to prepare for changes in how families and students will manage the college/university experience. As new options in knowledge sharing evolve, we are at a time of great challenges and opportunities.

University leaders have been following this evolution closely. Among the questions each member of the community should be asking are:

1. What are the opportunities and challenges for Elon at a time of economic, demographic, and technological change?
2. How can we best evaluate emerging options and support their implementation to deepen learning while maximizing the value and impact of an Elon education and serving the mission of the university and the public good?
3. How must we adjust our business model?

As families seek to control costs, it is expected that students could transfer more credits to Elon from less expensive institutions, including online courses, large and small. Elon's senior staff continually monitors developments impacting higher education, anticipating imminent scenarios and preparing how best to adapt. The expanding options in online education are of primary deliberation. Many institutions are joining online learning consortiums and the nation's best-known universities are extending their reach into massive open online courses—or MOOCs.

Elon currently requires that a minimum of 60 or more credits of the total 132 academic credits be completed at Elon to earn a degree. In addition, the university requires the last term of a student's education before graduation be completed at Elon. While Elon does not anticipate a rush of students to take MOOCs for credit, policies are already in place to protect the core functions of the university, and we are further assessing how to handle the possibilities. With major university systems joining the online education movement and the number of American Council of Education (ACE) accredited online courses expected to escalate, it is just a matter of time before increased transfer credits become a standard, even for some massive online courses.

If each year 5% of Elon students choose to take a semester away from Elon to earn transfer credits online from other institutions or through MOOCs; the impact on revenue is almost \$5 million per year.

As Elon ventures further into the world of online and digitally enhanced education, it is imperative that all courses/programs maintain the highest quality. In striving to do so, we can be guided by best practices for online education developed by the [Sloan Consortium](#) in their Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education Programs. The benchmarks include criteria for: institutional support; course structure, course development and instructional design; technology support; social and student engagement; and evaluation and assessment. An additional resource is the ["Quality Matters"](#)

program, an organization that outlines standards for online education and provides a peer-review process to certify the quality of online courses.

President Lambert and Provost House have initiated discussions over the past year with leaders of higher education to discuss future options. Beginning in fall 2014 Elon will join the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA), which has a strong Academic Alliance that includes some of the nation's leading universities. One possibility is for Elon to connect in an online alliance of summer and semester courses with CAA schools such as Delaware, Drexel, Hofstra, James Madison, Northeastern, and William & Mary. On August 2, 2013, President Lambert and Provost House initiated a conversation with Herman Berliner, Provost at Hofstra and chair of the CAA's Academic Alliance Provost's Council regarding such collaboration in the CAA. He agreed that this should be a top priority of the Alliance.

It is critical that Elon continues to encourage the experimentation and development of emerging technologies in teaching and learning and discovery. At the same time we must continue to focus on our commitment to academic challenge and on highly engaged, face-to-face interactions between faculty and students. It is in this spirit that we invite you to read the full report below to better understand the challenges ahead and how Elon's commitment to innovation and a student-centered and learning-centered community will serve as our compass as we prepare for teaching and learning in the 21st century.

Everyone can sense the powerful forces affecting colleges; some would say they threaten to destroy the four-year residential model altogether. Some expect this to happen fast. ... Online education may force many universities to admit that they are not really in the transformation business. Is a 200-student lecture hall with a graduate student at the front the path to transformation? In many cases, it's barely education ... What exactly makes it worth so much time and money? ... Colleges are better-positioned than most universities in this regard – but online education will still bring real pressure to demonstrate the distinct value of what a college can deliver. ... What are we for? What's the goal? Since there are now innumerable other (and cheaper) ways to be educated, why are we doing this? The colleges with a compelling answer to these questions – where everyone on campus knows the answers – are going to be fine. ... If a college's true product is a transformed student, then the main effect of the next decade should be to redouble every school's commitment to that cause. The explicit goal of residential liberal arts colleges will again be to increase what a student knows and change who she is. If this is true, then the conversations left to be had are about the transformative mission of the school. What exactly is it? Deciding on a clear and important set of goals will not be easy, but colleges cannot afford to kick that can down the road. We each need to figure out what our college is for. Dan Currell, [What is College For?, Inside Higher Education, June 2013](#)

The Elon Commitment Strategic Plan—Impact and Value

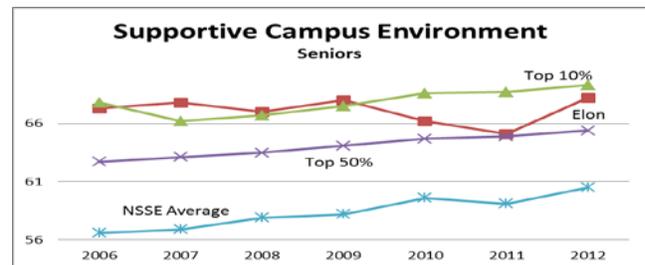
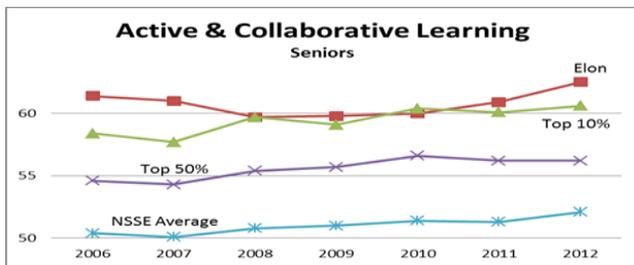
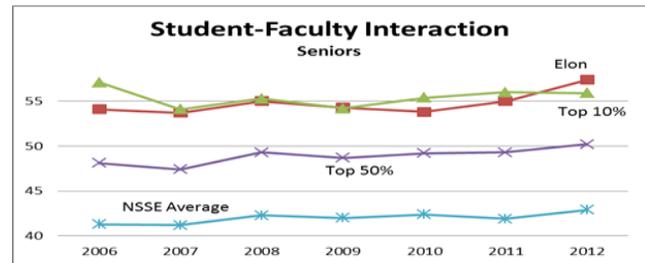
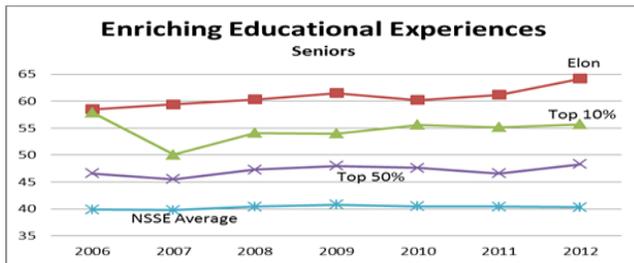
President Lambert's winter 2013 *Magazine of Elon* column ([The Coming Crises in Higher Education](#)) describes the current state of higher education.

Daily news reports and websites are full of data and speculation about the future of higher education, and most of it appears ominous. This past summer, an analysis of 1,700 colleges and universities by Bain and Company found that one-third of the schools are on "an unsustainable financial path," meaning they are overly leveraged, suffering enrollment declines and resorting to deep tuition discounts to attract students. The price of college is reaching \$60,000 a year at some private institutions, stretching the limits of even upper-middle class families with two or more children ... The highly touted launch of MOOCs (massive open

online courses), available at low or no cost by leading universities, has caused some to predict that many traditional brick-and-mortar campuses will soon become a thing of the past. New federal support for higher education is not likely because of the enormity of the national debt, with entitlement spending threatening to swamp every other sector of the budget. Indeed, the seas ahead look choppy. These realities will affect many colleges and universities adversely.

In response to this challenging future, the Elon Commitment strategic plan underscores the Impact and Value of an Elon education. The Elon Commitment is aimed at engaging students' minds and inspiring them to act as leaders and global citizens. Faculty, staff, and students have enthusiastically embraced Elon's goal of being the nation's preeminent community for engaged learning. The Elon mission statement declares that we are an academic community that transforms mind, body, and spirit. At the core of the Elon transformative experience are faculty who are committed to excellent teaching, active scholarship, and mentoring students as they prepare for their lives as engaged global citizens. Similarly, all 1,300 Elon employees understand their role as teachers and mentors as together we focus on our student- and learning-centered community.

While the classroom experience at many institutions may not have changed much in the “past few centuries” ([Big Data Goes to School, Scientific American August, 2013](#)), Elon has emerged as an innovative leader in active, experiential and engaged learning. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is the most comprehensive assessment of effective practices in higher education, including data this year from 285,000 students at 546 U.S. colleges and universities. Elon students give high marks to the benchmarks of excellence:



Elon’s greatest asset is our shared sense of mission: that we are an academic community committed to student transformation; that we value freedom of thought and liberty of conscience; that we are a liberal arts university with distinctive professional schools and graduate programs; that we believe in active student engagement; that we are dedicated both to teaching and scholarly accomplishment; and that we believe passionately in preparing global and civically engaged citizens for meaningful lives of work and service. Understanding who we are is an asset claimed by few institutions, and it will serve as a compass that will guide Elon in the uncertain times ahead.

The fruits of our common labor are apparent all across the campus. For instance, in the 2008 Association of American Colleges and Universities report [*High Impact Educational Practices*](#) George Kuh synthesized research on engagement and persistence in college to conclude that certain experiences are particularly beneficial for students. These high-impact educational practices include first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, study abroad, service learning, internships, and so on. U.S. News uses these high-impact practices to identify programs that focus on student success ([*U.S. News Best College Rankings List*](#)) and once again this year, Elon is the only school named in seven of the eight key program categories.

Along with our high-impact educational practices, Elon is currently a tremendous value and must remain so. Elon offers a high-quality liberal arts and sciences experience for every student, signified by a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, a top-50 business school, a top-tier school of communications, and innovative and accredited schools of education, law, and health sciences. Only seven private institutions in the nation can boast such credentials. We deliver that level of quality for \$40,000 a year, \$10,000-15,000 less than our peer universities. This partially explains why Elon draws applications from nearly every state and more than 50 nations today. Maintaining Elon's current recognition as a best value ([*Kiplinger's Best Values in Private Education*](#)) will require creativity and resourcefulness as we move forward.

Sustaining Impact and Value

In 2005, the Elon campus examined a paper written by President Lambert titled [*On Arriving, Deepening and Sustaining: Key Questions about Elon University's Future*](#). The report offered that "Elon stands at a pivotal point in its history" and that "the pieces are in place to lead the way to a new definition of quality in American higher education." And yet, "the limiting factor is an inadequate resource stream, Elon is far too dependent on tuition revenue and enrollment growth, and we are fast approaching the day when substantial increases in those two areas will be impractical." At that time 80% of Elon's operating revenue came from tuition, room, and board, compared with 47% at other top private universities in the South. Similarly, Elon's budget was inadequately supported by an endowment that was much smaller than levels at peer institutions. Investment income made up about 7% of Elon's annual budget compared with 29% at other top Southern private universities.

The six factors, or valves as they were called, impacting Elon's business model in 2005 were:

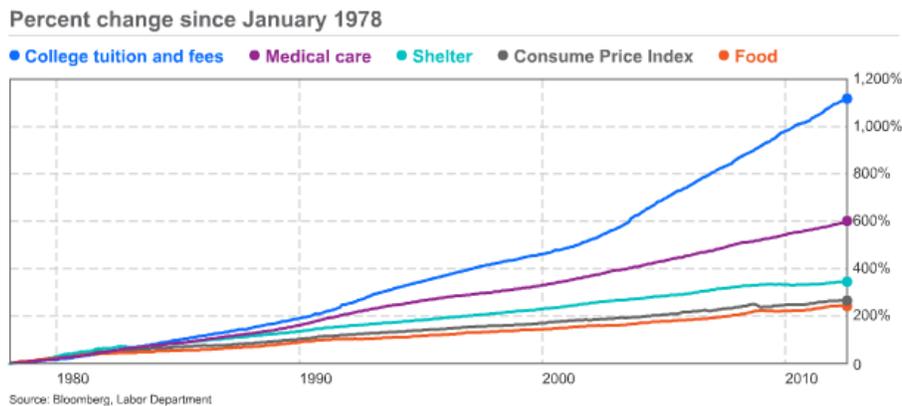
- 1) Enrollment growth
- 2) Tuition, room, and board
- 3) Income from endowment
- 4) Current use/Capital fundraising
- 5) Debt (Bonds)
- 6) Expenditures

Despite the Great Recession of 2008-2009, Elon has maintained its record of strong financial results and stability, operating with a balanced budget for more than 30 years and a surplus for the past 20 years. Although the endowment has increased to almost \$160 million and annual giving has increased to more than \$6.6 million (unrestricted annual fund and restricted giving), like other private institutions, in 2013 Elon continues to draw the majority of its revenue from tuition, followed by private gifts and endowments.

As proof of the university's financial strength over the past decade, data show that:

- Elon has experienced strong enrollment gains throughout the entire period—admission of new students has shown strong selectivity increases—and Elon has experienced consistent increases in applications.
- Tuition, fees, room, and board were increased as necessary to accomplish the University's goals and strategic plans.
- The University has significantly increased its endowment values.
- Elon has one of the lowest tuition discount rates in the United States.
- Elon has seen strong increases in Net Assets.

Although each of the six factors/values has had a positive effect on Elon University's balance sheet, efforts to increase tuition revenue, now the dominant form of funds for most colleges and universities, is running headlong into a public that is reluctant to pay much more for higher education. A recent Sallie Mae report suggests that this reluctance is a reflection of a "post-recession reality" in which families are becoming more cost conscious about both where to attend college and how they can save money while attending ([Holding the Line](#)). Similarly, Moody's Investor Service concluded that at the same time families are more cost conscious the "recent rush by leading universities in North America and Europe to create collaborative networks offering free online courses through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) marks a pivotal development for the higher education sector" and that "MOOCs signal a fundamental shift in strategy by the industry's leaders to use their powerful brand reputations to get ahead of rapid technological changes that could destabilize their residential business models over the long-run." Moody's expects positive credit effects for the higher education sector overall as "elite universities" offer MOOCs; however, there will be "negative effects on for-profit education companies and some smaller not-for-profit colleges that may be left out of emerging high reputation online networks" ([Shifting Ground: Technology Begins to Alter Centuries-Old Business Model for Universities](#)).



Source: [Are College Costs Reaching a Breaking Point, Bloomberg BusinessWeek, August 2013](#)

It is in this environment:

- Where senior academic administrators lose sleep each night because the cost of higher education is beyond the reach of many ([Holding the Line](#)),
- Where politicians and the media daily tout emerging technologies in teaching and learning that can provide high-quality, tuition-free information,
- And, where the Elon Commitment strategic plan motivates us to fund critical initiatives that will transform students.

It is also in this environment that the number of factors impacting Elon's business model are reconsidered. In addition to the 6 factors, or valves, recognized in 2005, four additional factors must now be included in 2013.

- 7) Increased financial aid to support diversity and to support global engagement (100% access to a global experience)
- 8) Availability of high-quality, tuition-free information—online courses and MOOCs
- 9) Students reducing cost by graduating in less than four years
- 10) Students reducing cost by transferring in more credits toward graduation.

As Elon now addresses these factors we can take some solace in knowing that “despite the reluctance to pay higher prices, families still express a belief in the importance of higher education and are willing to take steps to pay for it.” (*Holding the Line*) The public still overwhelmingly believes that “higher education is needed for a desired profession and to earn more money, and almost all view it as an investment in their futures” (*Holding the Line*). In response to this challenging future the Elon Commitment strategic plan underscores the Impact and Value of an Elon education.

Enhanced Financial Aid

In a major initiative to have the campus better reflect the world's socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, the Elon Commitment strategic plan will double the institutionally funded need-based financial aid budget by 2020 and expand endowment-funded need-based financial aid. Elon's classrooms and campus life will be much richer when we recruit more students from a variety of backgrounds who challenge and lead us by sharing their life stories, as our Watson, Odyssey, Eure, and Susan Scholars have done.

Achieving 100% Access to a Global Experience

As part of Elon's efforts to prepare students to thrive in the 21st century, the Elon Commitment includes as one of its main objectives to achieve 100% access to a global experience for students. To be successful, informed citizens of the world, students today must understand and interact with people of different cultures, faith backgrounds, and languages.

Currently, 72 percent of graduating seniors have participated in our study abroad program, which makes Elon the #1 master's-level university in the nation for the number of students who study internationally. By 2020, we want to give all students the opportunity to have a global experience, either domestically or abroad. The launch of Elon's Study USA program in fall 2012 will play a critical role in meeting this goal. The components and challenges of meeting this goal, particularly the financial challenges, are outlined below.

Based on a 2020 benchmark of 90% participation rate and 50% coverage of cost, \$125,000 a year of new funds will be budgeted for 3 consecutive years to a scholarship fund in the Isabella Cannon Global Education Center to support students' global experiences.

Types of Emerging Teaching and Learning Courses

In both academic and popular media, terminology about online education can vary greatly. For purposes of clarity, the definitions provided in the report titled *Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States*—by the [Babson Survey Research Group](#) will be used here.

- **Traditional:** Content where no online technology or web-based content is included. The course is 100% taught in person and materially is delivered orally as well as through books and/or articles.
- **Web Facilitated:** A course that uses web-based technology 1% to 29% to facilitate face-to-face instruction, such as course management system like Moodle to support documents and assignments and/or engaging guest speakers and other resources via the web. The “flipped classroom” format, in which students get content through out-of-class materials and use class time in various interactive ways—but still get all required class meeting hours from face-to-face meetings—fits this model. The wide majority, if not all, of Elon courses during the academic year are web-facilitated.
- **Blended/Hybrid:** A course that blends online and face-to-face delivery with 30 to 79% of the course delivered online. These courses typically have a reduced number of face-to-face meetings because portions of both information delivery and discussion sessions take place online.
- **Online Courses:** More than 80% of the course content is delivered online with minimal face-to-face contact.
- **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs):** A model for delivering learning content online to any person who wants to take a course, with no limit on attendance—MOOCs have enrolled tens of thousands of students in to a single course—MOOCs are typically offered free of charge, although there may be modest fees for completion certificates or proctored exams.

The 2010 report [Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning](#) from the Department of Education indicates that:

- Online learners, on average, perform modestly better than those learning the same material face to face, but the advantages observed for online learning conditions may be the product of aspects of those treatment conditions other than the instructional delivery medium per se
- Blended/hybrid courses are more effective than completely online courses
- Online teaching that is interactive has stronger positive results than online courses that require students only to work independently
- Most of the variations in the way online learning is implemented do not affect student outcomes in a way that is statistically significant

The dominant method of instructional delivery with MOOCs is a combination of instructor videos, quizzes or projects, online discussion threads, and a final exam. Assignments are either machine-graded or crowdsourced: students use rubrics to evaluate each other’s work. “That way a lone professor can support a class with hundreds of thousands of participants” ([What You Need to Know About MOOCs](#)). For example, in fall 2011, more than 160,000 students from almost 200 countries enrolled in an Artificial Intelligence course taught by Stanford professor Sebastian Thrum and Peter Norvig, a Google colleague ([Instruction for Masses Knocks Down Campus Walls](#)).

Three companies currently dominate the field:

- Coursera—is a Stanford spinoff that partners with [62 universities](#) and offers more than 300 courses (note that Coursera only partners with elite institutions—the members of the Association of American Universities or top five universities in countries outside of North America ([Coursera's Contractual Elitism](#)))
- edX—founded by MIT and Harvard—now has [10 additional partners](#) and offers at least 25 courses
- Udacity—founded by Stanford professor Sebastian Thrum—works with individual faculty rather than schools and currently offers more than [25 courses](#) primarily in computer science.

Although MOOCs have garnered considerable press coverage recently ([What You Need to Know About MOOCs](#)), they are not widespread. Only 2.6% of higher education institutions currently offer a MOOC and only 9.4% have MOOCs in the planning stages. The majority of institutions (55.4%) report they are still undecided about MOOCs, while almost a third do not plan to offer a MOOC. Surveys indicate that academic leaders remain unconvinced that MOOCs represent a sustainable method for offering online courses, but do believe they provide an important means for institutions to learn about online pedagogy ([Babson Survey Research Group](#)).

Despite the many hurdles facing MOOCs, some higher education leaders, including William Bowen (former president of Princeton) and John Hennessy (president of Stanford), maintain that some future version of a MOOC will indeed be a disruptive innovation that fundamentally reshapes the higher education sector, just as the media industry and publishing and music retail businesses have been overturned by rapid technological change. For this kind of disruption to occur, technology will need to be developed that can provide high-quality, customizable feedback on student work. No such tools exist currently, but Carnegie Mellon University, edX, and many other institutions are pouring significant resources into developing such tools for large enrollment courses, particularly in STEM fields. If these efforts succeed, then MOOCs may suddenly become a viable option for many students, forcing institutions like Elon to respond to competition from high-quality, inexpensive courses.

Benefits of Online Courses

Scholars have identified a number of potential benefits from online courses, including:

- **Access:** A 2007 Sloan Consortium report ([Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning](#)) indicated that the primary reasons universities offer online courses is the ability to improve student access thereby improving retention and degree completion.
- **Outcomes:** Online education works better for some students than others. A recent study of community college students by Columbia University ([Adaptability to Online Learning: Differences Across Types of Students and Academic Subject Areas](#)) indicates that online work is a challenge for the most vulnerable students, including students who had taken remedial courses or who had low GPAs.
- **Flexibility:** Advocates for MOOCs, and online teaching in general, often tout the flexibility students have to choose when and where to study, and online materials allow students to move quickly through or return repeatedly to course materials.
- **Efficiency:** Blended courses may allow institutions to more efficiently use classroom space and also may enable faculty to use their time with students more efficiently (less time presenting material, more time interacting).
- **Reputation:** A March 2013 report titled [Massive Open Online Courses \(MOOCs\): A Primer for University and College Board Members](#) suggests offering MOOCs can enhance reputation or provide [“brand extension”](#) to elite research institutions. It is also likely that offering a MOOC

will attract students to for-pay courses and programs. Others see MOOCs (and other online programs) as a form of outreach to alumni.

- **Pedagogy:** The process of developing high-quality blended/hybrid courses may enhance all types of teaching. The course design process requires that professors become adept at matching teaching tools to learning goals and incorporating active learning environments. This innovative thinking can bleed over into other teaching methods so that as faculty familiarity and experience with digitally enhanced technology grow, their expertise will be applied in fully face-to-face classes (such as the “flipped classroom”) in which technology seamlessly supplements but does not replace any of the contact hours.

Elon’s Current Offerings and Resources

Elon University’s engaged learning program is currently rooted in a face-to-face instructional model. The university’s 55 online courses (44 online courses were offered in summer 2013) are available during Summer Session I and enrollment is open only to Elon students. In 2003, a faculty committee exploring the future of online education at the university recommended this pathway, which was implemented in the summer of 2008. However, assets of online education are present in many of our courses throughout the school year. The faculty frequently leverages the Internet and its ability to expand knowledge and connect us to the world in their courses. These assets of online capacities and our desire to create engaging teaching environments that result in the global citizens we seek our students to become are what prompted a reconsideration of online education at the university.

Examples of how Elon faculty and staff currently use emerging teaching and learning technologies are included on the [summer online course web site](#) and on [Elon’s Instructional and Campus Technologies’ blog](#).

Opportunities for Digitally Enhanced Teaching and Learning and Discovery

While the emergence of MOOCs and other technological innovations present real challenges for the university, digital tools also offer at least five new opportunities for Elon to deepen our mission as a residential, liberal arts university.

1. Pursuing strategic partnerships and consortia that allow Elon students to take courses that the University does not currently offer but that complement our existing curriculum. This typically would involve Elon faculty with appropriate expertise teaching face-to-face portions of (and grading in) courses that are primarily taught by an off-campus faculty member. For instance, Kristina Meinking in World Languages has taught Elon students in an elementary Greek sequence of courses through the Sunoikisis Consortium and the Center for Hellenic Studies. In the 2012-2013 academic year, Professor Meinking taught face-to-face portions of these courses at Elon (approximately 66% of class time, and 100% of the grading) while students spent the other portion of course time participating in interactive online lectures and doing synchronous online work with students at other universities under the supervision of Professor Kenny Morrell, Associate Professor of Classics at Rhodes College.
2. Allowing Elon students who are off-campus (studying abroad, completing an internship, and so on) to enroll remotely in traditional on-campus courses at Elon. In these instances, off-campus Elon students would use digital tools like Adobe Connect to attend and participate fully in face-to-face class meetings on campus. The same technology or other tools would be used for student group meetings and to facilitate student-faculty interaction outside of class time, and to access Belk Library, the Writing Center, and other academic resources. These off-campus students would be held to the same standard as on-campus students, including all of the same deadlines, expectations for quality of work and class participation, and so on. This is not likely to be a widely used alternative, but it could be essential for

some students who are pursuing majors that have tight curricula, who are double majors, or who have other scheduling constraints that otherwise would make studying away difficult.

3. Systematically creating or adopting digitally enhanced course materials to strengthen student learning on campus. This happens regularly, of course, but this work often is done by an individual faculty member. A new initiative in this area could have faculty work together to strategically identify courses (or portions of courses) within a major or a program where students could learn most deeply and most efficiently from digital resources. In content-heavy courses, this might involve developing or acquiring high-quality lectures on a series of topics that all students in multiple sections of a course could study outside of class, freeing up face-to-face time with faculty for higher-order intellectual work. In other courses, this might involve developing or acquiring digital tools that provide high-quality, customized feedback to students on their work, allowing students to receive more feedback on their work than is currently possible, and freeing up faculty from routine grading to have more meaningful interactions with students.

4. Exploring how new digital tools might enable Elon students to integrate their learning from what are currently often distinct parts of their experience as a student—their major, General Studies, Experiential Learning Requirements, co-curricular activities, and so on. Emerging research demonstrates that this kind of integrative work intensifies the effect of separate high-impact educational practices like undergraduate research and study abroad. This kind of integration, however, always has been very difficult to facilitate face-to-face; when it happens, typically a long-term mentoring relationship exists between a student and a faculty or staff member. New digital tools and formats might enable some or much of what happens in those mentoring relationships to go to scale, for students to reflect carefully on individual experiences and on the connections between experiences over time, and for faculty and staff to provide guidance and support to students throughout that process. If Elon could pioneer this approach, we would significantly enhance student learning and development.

5. Considering how to adapt Elon’s academic programs and curricula to enable even more student-initiated learning. Leading scholars of learning and technology, including Henry Jenkins at MIT and John Seely Brown from USC, contend that online environments have created what Brown calls a “new culture of learning.” This new “participatory culture” (to quote Jenkins) is quite different than a traditional university, allowing many more opportunities for students to explore knowledge on their own initiative, rather than consuming pre-packaged courses. A Lumen Scholar project or a robust undergraduate research experience are examples of this participatory culture that is flourishing at Elon. These experiences, however, are available only to a small fraction of Elon students. To create a “new culture of learning” for all students, Elon would need to consider ways to scale up undergraduate research, to expand and promote the independent major, and to support both students and faculty in this new paradigm.

Seriously addressing these opportunities will be difficult. We not only will need to tap the creativity and expertise of our faculty, staff, and students, but we will need to think carefully about issues including faculty’s roles and rewards, curricular flexibility and revision, and intellectual property. This work also will require careful planning, flexible implementation, and new resources. It won’t necessarily be easy or inexpensive, but each of these themes provides powerful opportunities to enhance student learning at Elon.

Conclusion

MOOCs currently overwhelm the conversation about online teaching and its potential impact on higher education. Carol Geary Schneider, from the Association of American Colleges and Universities, has argued that MOOCs amplify the “least productive pedagogy” in American higher education. However, Schneider believes that digital tools have the potential to produce more engaging education and more meaningful student-faculty interactions. She concludes that “it would be a tragedy if you substituted MOOCs in their current form for regular courses, but it would be a creative breakthrough if you take advantage of MOOCs and other forms of online coverage to make more space and more time for students to apply concepts and methods appropriate to their field to real problem” ([*Beyond MOOC Hype, Inside Higher Ed, July 2013*](#)).

The costs in time, money, and human capital involved in developing and offering a MOOC are significant, and its current financial return non-existent. In contrast to the elite schools with large endowments that first signed with Coursera or edX, Elon might not benefit from the same “branding” benefit that offering a MOOC can provide to a school like Harvard, MIT, or Stanford.

Having said this, Elon needs to keep up-to-date on developments in the MOOC world. MOOCs are evolving rapidly, are attempting to develop the capacity for meaningful student interaction, and can be efficient and effective vehicles for pure content delivery. In addition, as demonstrated at San Jose State ([*California State U. System Will Expand MOOC Experiment*](#)), MOOC components may prove extremely useful as supplements to face-to-face courses when pieces of MOOC materials are offered or marketed separately as part of a “flipped classroom.” MOOCs, or whatever they evolve into, are a phenomenon that cannot be ignored.

It is critical that Elon continue to encourage the experimentation and development of emerging technologies in teaching and learning and discovery. At the same time we must continue to focus on our commitment to academic challenge and on highly engaged face-to-face teaching and learning. Just like all traditional courses at Elon, online course and blended/hybrid courses must be approved, evaluated and assessed by the normal faculty processes and must reinforce the transformative mission of Elon.

In this context, faculty that have already demonstrated skills and experience in providing digitally enhanced teaching and learning should be selected to further develop their courses and serve as mentors and experts for developing additional faculty. Provost House proposes that 3-6 faculty or teams of faculty be tapped and offered extensive, flexible support from the university’s Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and Teaching and Learning Technologies to do this work during the 2013-2014 academic year. Following development of pilot programs, a call will be made to all faculty for proposals on new offerings. A committee consisting of members of the Academic Technology and Computing Committee and the Provost’s Advisory Council will determine projects to support.

As we explore and develop emerging technologies in teaching and learning for summer, fall, winter, and spring, all of these endeavors must include support for faculty and staff willing to be change agents as well as for students enrolling in online courses. And finally, all courses and all of our efforts must be at a level of excellence that we have come to expect at Elon.

“There is still huge value in the residential college experience and the teacher-student and student-student interactions it facilitates. But to thrive, universities will have to nurture even more of those unique experiences while blending in technology to improve education outcomes in measurable ways at lower costs. We still need more research on what works, but standing still is not an option” Thomas Friedman, [*The Professors’ Big Stage, New York Times*](#), March 5, 2013

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you think technology and online courses could complement learning at Elon?
2. What seems realistic or unrealistic for Elon's future?
3. How do you see Elon students' course-taking patterns changing in the future? Will more students want a 3-year degree?
4. How should Elon respond to concerns about the cost of higher education?
5. What advice would you have for the senior staff concerning how to evolve our business model?
6. How can Elon’s academic program leaders respond to the anticipated change and stay ahead of the curve? Should we adjust some programs, expand, or add new components? Are strategic graduate programs ripe for incorporating emerging teaching and learning technologies?