

higher education system than as an *alternative* to it. Once considered a place for students who failed to gain entry to state institutions of higher education, Bulgarian private institutions have managed to sustain student interest and earn greater legitimacy. ■

Faculty at Private For-Profit Universities: The University of Phoenix as a New Model?

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With 100,000 students across more than 100 campuses and learning centers, the University of Phoenix (UOP) is perhaps the most well-known example of for-profit higher education in the United States. With an academic model that is unusual by traditional standards, Phoenix caters to an exclusively adult student population in the health care, business, and education professions, using a highly structured, centrally designed curriculum. A typical undergraduate class meets four hours per week for five weeks. Required weekly “learning team” meetings outside of class give small groups of students the additional opportunity to discuss and prepare for the week’s assignments with their classmates.

Given its academic structure, it is no surprise that Phoenix employs a faculty that is similarly unusual. “Unbundling” is a term applied to the UOP model: various components of the traditional faculty role (e.g., curriculum design) are divided among different entities, while others (e.g., research) are eliminated altogether. Faculty are hired primarily to facilitate student learning in a particular course, and their term of employment begins and ends with the five-week UOP semester. Such a transient and diminished faculty role would be a source of concern at most institutions of higher education. The UOP, on the other hand, makes no apologies.

From a market perspective, Phoenix has been successful. As an education institution, it is much more difficult to evaluate. In particular, the limited role of the Phoenix faculty may raise questions about the academic values that underlie the for-profit model the institution employs. The expansion of private higher education in various regions around the world, however, suggests that a range of potential faculty models could be

adopted by these new institutions. As a model for the delivery of educational services, the UOP stands as a prominent example. Whether or not emerging institutions are organized as profit-making entities, Phoenix-like faculty roles may be employed.

Many observers of higher education will view Phoenix with suspicion because of the institution’s commitment to the bottom line. The Phoenix business model, though, is dependent on providing an educational environment that students and their employers will value. The faculty play a key role in creating this environment. At least three aspects of the UOP faculty model deserve attention.

Hiring Strategy

First, the UOP hiring strategy focuses on bringing in new faculty committed to teaching and in full agreement with the Phoenix model and philosophy. Those selected to join the teaching staff have been vetted in a rather elaborate process that begins with an information session and orientation, continues through a formal teaching demonstration and interviews with current faculty, and concludes with a training session that exposes all new faculty to the Phoenix curriculum and classroom expectations. Individuals who are ambivalent about teaching tend not to make the cut. Likewise, potential faculty members not amenable to the specific classroom structures required by UOP are screened out by this process. Phoenix employs a model of adult learning that assumes that students learn best in groups and in practical, interactive, discussion-based sessions. Faculty who believe it is important to lecture about theory unconnected to practice, for example, would not only find it difficult to be successful in the Phoenix classroom, they most likely would never pass muster to get there in the first place.

Professional Experience

Second, faculty teach part time for Phoenix and are expected to bring to the classroom the knowledge and experience from their full-time positions outside the university. In addition to accreditation-specified academic credentials, all UOP faculty members must have current professional experience in the area in which they are teaching, and they must have a full-time job other than teaching at the UOP. UOP training emphasizes that what a student learns in class Tuesday night, he or she should be able to use in the office on Wednesday morning. Faculty are encouraged to use their professional experience as a teaching tool to make explicit connections to the world of work. In this light, even aside from the cost savings important to UOP’s for-profit status, it makes sense to employ a part-time faculty. It has the practical effect of ensuring the relevance of the curriculum to industry needs. It also has the symbolic effect of making it clear to students and faculty alike that the in-

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stitution is about the concentrated study of skills and knowledge with immediate useful application.

Pedagogy and Profit

Finally, classroom activities themselves can be described in terms of both pedagogy and profit. The actual instruction—and the training that supports it—focuses on helping students learn. At the same time, the profit motive dominates the design of the curriculum and the decision to offer a particular program of study. Phoenix is unapologetically an institution for which making money is the bottom line. But within the constraints of a centrally designed curriculum, the faculty are encouraged to adapt evaluation procedures, assignments, and discussions to fit their notion of what is important for students to know. Rather than rote performance of a standardized syllabus, the individual faculty member is directly and personally involved in shaping the course. The decisions and actions made by the faculty in conducting their instructional responsibilities reflect a concern for the student that, for Phoenix, is compatible with the institution's concern for the shareholders.

Implications

The UOP selects its faculty and uses them in the classroom in ways that support the goals of the institution. A fairly rigorous selection process is designed to ensure that faculty are competent, capable, and willing to teach using Phoenix-specified techniques. Part-time faculty members are expected to contribute their full-time pro-

fessional experience to classroom instruction. Limited participation by the faculty in the design of the curriculum is combined with faculty involvement in structuring the classroom delivery of the material. Emerging institutions looking to duplicate the Phoenix approach should understand how these various aspects interrelate to form a coherent academic model. They should also be aware of how the extremely short semester and limited faculty-student contact could continue to raise questions about the ability of the Phoenix model to foster in-depth learning.

The for-profit sector holds great interest not only for its economic implications for the development of private higher education, but also for how it may affect academic culture and faculty identity. Cases such as the UOP can be used to explore the range of practice among for-profit institutions of higher education to identify the ways in which faculty roles differ. How common is it for private institutions to adopt structured, centralized curricula? To what extent are faculty screened for their commitment to teaching or for their practical expertise? Has there been a strategic decision to employ a part-time faculty? Answers to questions such as these will help us map the range of options available to private higher education in a time of global expansion.

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A New Framework for Higher Education in Spain

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At the end of 2001, the government promulgated a new act on higher education (LOU, Ley de Ordenación Universitaria). This act is the last in a series of profound changes in the structure of Spanish higher education that started in the early 1980s. At that time, the Spanish higher education system was a perfect example of the Napoleonic model of the university. Universities were part of the state, professors were civil servants, and they were ruled through typical bureaucratic methods.

Recovering Autonomy

The "big change" occurred in 1983, when the university reform act was instituted after the end of the Franco dictatorship. This act introduced major changes in the legal framework of Spanish universities. Universities, which had been completely controlled by the central government, became autonomous, moving from dependence on the central government to dependence on the regional governments. The decision-making power was transferred from the state bureaucracy to collegial bodies with significant representation of nonacademic staff and students. Boards with many members make the decisions concerning the university and departments and elect the rector, deans, and department heads.

The 1983 reform shook up the traditional university system and produced many positive effects. In addition, the financial resources for universities increased enormously in the last two decades. The main result has been the tremendous expansion of the higher education