# Lessons Learned:
## Creating an Online Business Degree from a Successful On-Campus Business Degree

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## Abstract

*The horse has left the barn.  Distance education is here to stay and the number of degree programs offered online is growing rapidly.  California* State University *Channel Islands (CI) admitted its first students in 2002, and the undergraduate and graduate degrees in business were among its first program offerings.  From its inception, the "foundation courses" for the CI MBA program have been offered online and the campus recently committed to offering the undergraduate business degree via distance education. This paper describes the steps taken to adapt a successful, on-campus, face-to-face program to an online program. It also presents "lessons learned" in several categories: securing institutional support for offering online degree programs, adapting existing curriculum, modifying existing processes (academic advising, evaluating teaching effectiveness and assessing educational effectiveness), and using the accreditation process as a blueprint and checklist for the new online degree program.*

## The Journey from an On-Campus Degree to an Online Degree

Educational offerings via online modalities have been implemented and debated for several decades (Allen and Seaman, 2013).  Faculty members and administrators express a wide variety of opinions concerning online education: some are highly supportive, some are adamantly opposed, and many are skeptical of its effectiveness as a pedagogical tool (Soares, 2013).  The growth of technical capabilities has fueled that growth of online offerings as has pressure from many stakeholders to reduce the expenses related to delivering education.

The Martin V. Smith School of Business and Economics (Smith School) at California State University Channel Islands (CI) offers a BS in Business.  This degree is unique within the California State University (CSU) system.  It is a "liberal arts" based business degree based on the philosophy of Professor Peter F. Drucker.  Drucker characterized business, especially business management, as a "liberal art."  As a graduate student one of the authors had the privilege of studying under Professor Drucker and recalls Drucker often stating that the practice of management required much more than knowledge of business related disciplines.  Effective managers were "whole persons" who reflect a broad range of academic disciplines (Drucker, 1993).  Hence, the Smith School BS in Business was built around "the 5 Cs": critical thinking, communication (oral and written English and mathematics), collaboration (teamwork), conduct (ethics) and competence (in the business disciplines). Consistent with this unusual approach, the Smith School degree is a BS in Business (not Business Administration).  It provides graduates with skills spanning the 5 Cs that are applicable in business, education, government, "hard and soft" sciences, religion, transportation, *etc.*

In 2002, the Smith School began offering its BS in Business to students on its main campus in Camarillo, CA.  Since 2011, the upper division portion of the program, consisting of seventeen courses, has been offered on the campus of Santa Barbara City College.  The objective was to provide students in the Santa Barbara area (located fifty miles north of Camarillo) with access to a public university's baccalaureate program in business.   The program has met enrollment targets and is considered a success.

In 2005, the Smith School began offering its MBA degree.  The MBA core courses were delivered using the traditional in-class face-to-face model.  However, the MBA Program has always had an online component for students without an undergraduate degree in business.  These students were required to take up to five online courses covering the foundations of business including accounting, economics, ethics, law, management, and marketing.

In 2011, administrators and faculty from the Smith School began discussions concerning online course offerings. The discussions were driven by the widely reported development of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and other online offerings in their educational (and competitive) environment. It was decided—by a unanimous vote of the Smith School faculty—to explore offering online courses beyond the MBA Foundation courses. Concomitantly, the CSU began several projects to encourage the creation and delivery of online courses and degree programs among its twenty-three campus system. It created "Cal State Online" as an umbrella marketing program to promote all online programs. It also offered grants to its twenty-three campuses to promote and support online program development. The Smith School, with the close support of CI's Extended University unit, was awarded a $50,000 grant.

The Smith School used the $50,000 grant to fund stipends for seventeen faculty to convert the sixty-unit degree completion program being offered at Santa Barbara City College to the online modality. This conversion effort was done in the spring and summer of 2014. The first online courses were offered to students in September 2014.

Reflecting the liberal arts focus of the BS in Business curriculum, many courses are taught by professors outside the Smith School in such disciplines as mathematics, English, history, chemistry, and performing arts. These professors teach a mix of core business courses (calculus, statistics, and writing) and several interdisciplinary courses unique to CI. Therefore, the seventeen faculty members who developed the online courses were a mix of Smith School tenure-track professors, lecturer faculty and CI professors from outside the Smith School. CI uses a unique hiring process (Cordeiro, 2010) to recruit professors with a passion for interdisciplinary work – to offer students a variety of disciplinary perspectives in both online and traditional courses.

After reviewing literature for best practices (Boettcher and Conrad, 2010; Goho and McGeachie, 2003; Lee, *et al.*, 2012; Shattuck, 2014; Swan, *et al.*, 2006), the Smith School implemented several steps to promote quality and consistency:
- A model syllabus template was developed, extensively reviewed and adopted by all parties (Hanna, *et al.*, 2000).
- Cal State Online held three in-person training sessions with CI course developers.
- All CI faculty took online "Sloan-C workshops" (Moore, 2001). Sloan-C workshops are offered by the Online Learning Consortium (formerly the Sloan Institute). The consortium offers faculty development activities in online teaching and learning.
- All CI faculty analyzed their course proposals against a CSU Quality Rubric.
- CI hired an online teaching/learning consultant to offer workshops and advice for faculty as they adapt specific courses for online learning.
- CI engaged the services of a firm (Inside Track) to assist in advising, retaining and coaching students. While all admittance and curricular decisions are controlled by CI, Inside Track provides prospective and enrolled students with an extra level of service. Several authors have stressed the importance of maintaining "virtual relationships" with students (Daves, 2007; Picciano, 2001).

As the business program courses were being adapted for online delivery, the Smith School applied for and received formal implementation permission from a) the CSU system office, and b) from CI's regional accrediting body, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WASC) in the form of a substantive change proposal to offer a degree in a new modality.

**Lessons Learned**

The adaptation of a successful face-to-face degree program into an online degree program is a daunting task. Below are several lessons learned during the adaptation process:

Securing Institutional Support for Offering Online Degree Programs
The idea to offer an online degree would ideally come from the faculty, but that is often not the case. In many instances the idea is handed to the faculty from the board of directors/trustees or the administration. The CSU system has long been interested in offering distance degrees as evidenced by

the creation of Cal State Online.  In any case, faculty support for distance degrees is essential for their long-term success.  At CI, the leaders of the Smith School had monitored the interest of the CSU in online degrees over the last decade and engaged the faculty in discussions about distance education over recent years.  Upon its inception, Cal State Online made a call to system campuses to offer fully online degrees under the auspices of Cal State Online.  It should be noted that degree programs offered via Cal State Online must be 100 percent online degrees.  The Smith School faculty discussed the idea of adapting its existing degree and unanimously voted to do so.  By using this process, there was no Smith School faculty resistance to offer the degree online and the conversion went smoothly.

The Smith School also kept faculty in other disciplines informed of its interest and efforts to offer the business degree online.  This included a report to the academic senate (it is of note that at CI, the academic senate is a "senate of the whole"—that is, all tenure-track faculty members are also members of the senate).  As this is the first CI degree to be offered wholly online, the report to the senate generated some healthy and needed discussion and debate about the future of online degree programs at CI.

Online degree programs place demands on offices across the university.  These include admissions and records, advising, library, IT and other areas.  Of special note is the role of the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO).  With this first online degree program, CI needed WASC substantive change approval to offer a degree in the new online modality.  Indeed, even long established universities will need substantive change approval to offer degrees through this relatively new modality (WASC, 2013).  CI used the substantive change process to organize its efforts to adapt the existing degree program.  The use of the substantive change process is discussed below ("Using the Accreditation Process as a Blueprint and Checklist for a New Online Degree Program)."  The Offices of the President and Provost supported the online degree program and received regular progress reports.  The Provost's Office assisted in coordinating needed activities across the campus.

Lessons learned:
- Frequent and ongoing communication with all university stakeholders involved in the adaptation and subsequent offering of the online degree will make for a smoother conversion process.
- It is important to remember that student, faculty and staff needs for an online program may be substantially different than those of a face-to-face degree.  As such, faculty and staff should be consulted during the adaptation process so that they can provide input and begin preparation for online students.

Adapting Existing Curriculum
Adapting the existing curriculum involves two areas: (1) modification of the existing program for online delivery, and (2) conversion of each course for online delivery.

First, the Smith School faculty discussed whether the business degree was suitable for online delivery and if curriculum changes would be necessary to deliver the degree online.  The faculty determined that the degree could be delivered effectively online and that it would not be necessary, or desirable, to change the curriculum for online delivery.  As a result, while the plan was to offer a degree entirely online, traditional students could also take online courses to fulfill their degree requirements.  There is only one CI undergraduate business degree – which is offered at two locations (Camarillo and Santa Barbara) and online.  In the final evaluation, no changes were made to the requirements of the business degree or the courses that comprise the degree.

Second, each course would need to be modified for online delivery.  This modification activity was aided by the faculty's experience with CI's computer assisted instruction technology. Many faculty already use technology to enhance learning in their traditional face-to-face classes.  These faculty served as mentors for other faculty new to online course delivery.  With so many tools and techniques emerging for online education, it is important to provide continual support for all faculty in online course design and delivery.

A key element in supporting the faculty is the selection of a learning management system (LMS) with a range of online teaching and learning tools.  CI uses Blackboard to support both online course offerings and face-to-face courses.  Blackboard is a widely used LMS with a full suite of course management and

teaching and learning tools. CI was fortunate that its existing LMS could be used for online degree delivery. While Blackboard is already familiar to CI faculty and students, for online course delivery, many faculty will begin using LMS components previously unused. CI's use of Blackboard reduced what could have been a very steep learning curve for students and faculty.

Preparing a course for online delivery will usually result in reorganizing the course. A possible delivery method could involve simply taping of lectures for online delivery. While possible, this is not among the best practices in online course delivery. Best practices require a redesign of the course to take advantage of the strengths of online course delivery. For faculty new to distance education, there is a steep learning curve in developing the expertise to adapt courses for delivery online. Furthermore, it is a "moving target." An example: faculty members are currently looking at ways of using Twitter, a platform that has existed for only a few years, to enhance student learning.

The Smith School faculty (as well as faculty from other CI schools) were offered the opportunity to adapt their existing face-to-face courses to online courses. Interested faculty were required to complete online teaching/learning workshops (Sloan-C workshops) and were provided with additional support to adapt specific courses. CI received a grant to provide financial support for faculty members interested in moving their courses online. Finally, CI developed internal support system for online instruction, including a new office of online instruction staffed by a faculty member with expertise in this area.

Lessons learned:
- Employ a learning management system that supports a full array of distance education tools.
- If possible, provide financial support for faculty engaged in the adaptation of courses.
- Provide faculty development support in the form of training and individual consultation to assist faculty with online course design and implementation.

Modifying Existing Processes for an Online Degree Program
When adapting an existing face-to-face program to an online program, it is important to review existing processes with a focus of how the processes will work for online students, for the faculty, and for the supporting staff. Several of these processes are discussed below.

*Student recruitment and support for prospective students.* Prospective students for an online program are likely to rely heavily on online materials, email and telephone contact as they seek information about academic programs. While CI did not have expertise in recruiting and supporting online students, it was able to use external agencies to provide high quality support. First, student recruiting is handled through Cal State Online. Cal State Online was established by the CSU system to provide a common internet website and marketing for online degrees offered by the CSU system (for more information see www.calstateonline.net). The website provides information about programs and contact information for prospective students. Second, CI contracted with a firm to provide individual advising for students under title "Inside Track." When prospective students decide to apply to CI, they are assigned a coach from Inside Track who guides them through the application process and continues to provide assistance through the first year of the program.

*Academic (Major) Advising.* As noted above, Inside Track provides prospective and new students with general assistance and advising through the first year. But, Inside Track does not include academic advising, which is provided at CI by faculty advisors. Similar to on-campus majors, online business majors receive academic advising from the business program's faculty advisor. However, with online majors, it is anticipated that most student contact will be via telephone or email.

*Evaluating and Improving Teaching Effectiveness.* Like most universities, CI has a process to evaluate instructors to provide feedback to improve teaching effectiveness. Two evaluation tools directly relate to online modality: First, the Smith School administers a student evaluation survey at the close of each course. The survey was selected by the CI Academic Senate and is used across the university. Until recently, this anonymous survey was distributed on paper in class,

but recently it was converted to an online process for the entire university. Therefore, no changes are needed to deliver the survey to students taking online courses. Second, the Smith School conducts a peer review of all faculty every academic year. The peer review includes a classroom visitation that has provided valuable feedback to improve teaching. For online classes, the "classroom visitation" has been modified and will involve an observation of the professor's interaction with students by monitoring online communications for a two hour period and by reviewing student feedback in available online collaborations (for example, chat rooms or other online forums).

*Assessing and Improving Educational Effectiveness.* In 2001, a plan to improve student learning (i.e., educational effectiveness) became a required element of accreditation (WASC, 2001). Such plans include developing sets of observable and measurable program and course level student learning outcomes (SLOs) and an ongoing process to assess student learning.

In analyzing whether to offer the business program online, the faculty decided to offer the same degree as the existing traditional face-to-face degree. As such, there were no changes to the course requirements for the degree or to the program and course level SLOs. The Smith School has an ongoing assessment program as part of its five-year program review (each CI academic program is reviewed every five years). The CI business program assessment plan includes the review of one program level SLOs in every course each semester. This plan has been expanded to include all courses offered online. In addition, assessment findings will be disaggregated to compare student learning in traditional courses with student learning in the online courses.

*Office Hours.* Smith School faculty provide one drop-in office hour per week for every course. While this policy has worked well for on-campus instruction, it has been modified to accommodate online students. Online students are provided with telephone and email contact information; students are encouraged to use email as the preferred method of communication. The Smith School has a policy that faculty will respond to student telephone calls and email within twenty-four hours during the workweek.

Lessons learned:
- It is important to review existing policies and practices developed for a traditional face-to-face program to make sure that they will also work for online students.
- An effective website is an important marketing tool for both traditional and online programs, but is especially important for student recruitment for online programs.
- Consider providing coaches to assist prospective students in preparing applications to the university and financial aid, using the learning management system, and understanding university policies.
- It is likely that policies designed to improve teaching effectiveness and educational effectiveness will require revisions for programs offered using the online modality.
- Policies to ensure timely communication with the faculty should be developed as it may not be possible for online students to contact faculty during traditional office hours.

Using Regional Accreditation as a Blueprint and Checklist for a New Online Degree Program
The founding of CI in 2001 corresponded to a major revision to the standards and criteria for review (WASC, 2001) by CI's regional accrediting body, WASC. This revision reflected a major paradigm shift in higher education to include both institutional capacity and educational effectiveness as required elements for accreditation. CI made obtaining initial accreditation a strategic initiative and used the accreditation standards successfully as a blueprint for building the new university (Cordeiro and Muraoka, 2014).

CI made a conscious decision to employ a similar approach in adapting the on-campus business degree into an online degree. For CI, adapting an existing program to an online degree is regarded by WASC as a "substantive change" that requires WASC approval. A substantive change is defined as a change that may significantly affect an institution's quality, objectives, scope, or control. Examples of substantive changes that might trigger a review by a regional accrediting body include a change in ownership of the institution, offering degree programs at a new off-campus site, or offering a degree in a new modality

such as via distance education. Any degree for which fifty percent or more of the degree may be taken online requires substantive change approval (WASC, 2013).

The substantive change approval process includes the preparation of a comprehensive self-study of the proposed online degree program, and a review of the self-study by peer reviewers selected from the WASC Substantive Change Committee. In assembling their self-studies, institutions are guided by templates prepared by WASC (found at www.wascsenior.org) that call for information about many facets of the proposed degree including:

- Evidence of the need for the online degree
- A description of the degree planning and approval process
- A description of the curriculum including course descriptions and sample syllabi
- A description of the target audience (students) for the proposed program
- A description of student services for prospective and enrolled students
- A listing of the faculty who will teach in the program and a description of faculty support and faculty development opportunities for these faculty
- A description of the plans for the assessment of student learning for the new program and how this information will be integrated with the assessment of student learning for the on-campus program if applicable
- A description of the distance learning environment and infrastructure
- A multi-year budget for the program

In reviewing the self-studies, the review panels seek assurance that the online degree program will be of high quality and that the offering of the new degree program will not adversely affect the quality of an on-campus degree program.

The comprehensive and holistic nature of the substantive change proposal process provides an excellent checklist for institutions seeking to adapt on-campus to online degrees. Adapting existing degrees requires a high level of institutional commitment as the needs and challenges of students taking online degrees, faculty teaching online degrees, and staff supporting online degrees are different from those of on-campus degrees. As it did in seeking initial WASC accreditation, CI used the WASC Substantive Change Process to guide the conversion of the business program from traditional to online modality. The WASC templates provided a framework for internal CI analysis and planning.

Lessons learned
- Substantive change approval from the regional accrediting body is likely needed to offer a new degree.
- Templates for substantive change approval should be referenced at the beginning at the process of adapting the degree.
- The substantive change proposal template may be used as a blueprint and checklist for adapting the degree.


**Progress Report**

The CI Online BS in Business enrolled its first 22 students, and the first classes began in September 2014. Since it is the first CI degree offered fully online, CI's administration and faculty are keenly interested in the online degree program and are closely monitoring progress and pitfalls. Indeed, a proposal for a second online degree from a different school is now under consideration. The administrators and faculty organizing the new proposal are using the lessons learned from the adaptation of the business degree from a traditional degree to an online degree.

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