

The Future of College Education: Challenges and Opportunities for FIU

In the last decade we have seen a fast paced change in education. The availability of online courses and online learning components is increasing exponentially. This new form of learning and information delivery has great impact to any university, including ours. On one hand, universities are no longer restricted to their local area of impact and can expand their services to anyone anywhere in the globe. On the other hand, universities are now competing with other institutions from multiple locations. These are the opportunities and the challenges for the future of any university. However, given the nature of FIU, the new model of education brings particular opportunities to FIU and also particular challenges.

Located in Miami, the central hub for all Latin American business and connections, FIU has enormous potential to expand and offer its educational services to students in Latin America. I see a potential for Online courses targeted directly to Latin American Students. Students of Latin America will be interested in primarily in graduate degrees from universities in the US. Offering those degrees in Spanish or a combination English/Spanish will be a great advantage for FIU compared to other universities. Moreover, many FIU faculty have roots in Latin America. FIU can harvest those connections to offer joint programs with Latin American institutions. Online learning brings great potential for FIU to expand its programs way beyond South Florida. Nonetheless, Online Education also brings FIU one of its main challenges.

Now that education is becoming a global business, the main threat comes from monopolization. Those institutions strategically positioned to be competitive in a global market, can take it away from local institutions. A student in Broward or Miami-Dade County can get a degree from any university of his/her choice without ever leaving the comfort of his/her home. For FIU to remain competitive, we must offer a great quality of education to our students and add greater value to our local community. For a quality education, either online or in-classroom, a high ratio of well-trained faculty to students is crucial.

Moreover, for FIU to remain relevant in the local community, it has to offer significant in-classroom learning experiences. Innovation in face-to-face teaching has become just as important as innovation in online learning. There has to be an added value of attending on-campus courses, such as direct faculty-student and student-student interactions. Some suggestions include: implementing Team-Based Learning techniques, Inverted Classrooms, Experiment-based learning. The in-classroom experience has to bring the social component that will never be replicated online. On-campus classes will train students on the material, but more importantly, on how to navigate the social world. Again, the key here is a high faculty-to-students ratio, and faculty training on these innovative teaching methods.

I see a bright future for FIU. We are at a juncture point, FIU will have to jump and get on this boat before it sails or else we will have to sadly watch it depart out of our reach for ever.