Teaching E-Business Online: The Universitas 21 Global Approach

Wing Lam, Universitas 21 Global, Singapore

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasingly, universities and other educational institutions are supplementing their traditional campus-based programs with online ones. This paper describes how Universitas 21 Global (U21G), a new online university, has approached the task of teaching e-business as a subject in its online MBA program. Aspects of the pedagogy used by U21G are outlined and the way in which the pedagogy has been applied to the design of the courseware and the student learning experienced is described.

Keywords: e-business; e-learning; online education; pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In the relatively short space of a few years, e-business has evolved rapidly from commercial experimentation to a strategic imperative for many organizations around the globe. Universities have responded by embracing e-business more widely in their academic programs, particularly in schools of business and computer science (Etheridge et al., 2001). Indeed, undergraduate and graduate-level degrees in e-business, e-business management, and strategic e-business are no longer a niche, signifying a willingness by students to major in such disciplines.

At the same time, online academic programs are becoming increasingly popular, particularly in North America, where the success of the University of Phoenix Online and Jones International University, among others, has been well documented (Schooley, 2001). The flexibility of online programs, which typically require little or no physical classroom attendance, holds an obvious appeal to part-time students who, while in full-time employment, might otherwise find it difficult to study further. Increasingly, universities are supplementing their traditional campus-based programs with programs that are fully online or blended in nature (Castro et al., 2001; Evans & Haase, 2001).

These shifts in the education landscape not only raise questions about how to teach a subject such as e-business, but also how to effectively do so in an online
setting. This paper describes how Universitas 21 Global (U21G), an online university, has approached the task of teaching MBA650 e-Business, one of the core subjects in its MBA program. Section 2 of the paper gives a brief background of U21G. Section 3 reviews the literature on e-business education and online pedagogy. Section 4 outlines key elements of the U21G pedagogy and describes how these have been applied to the creation of MBA650 e-Business. Section 5 explains how the approach is being evaluated. Section 6 discusses the key design issues. Finally, Section 7 presents the conclusions. It is expected that the contributions from this paper will be helpful in a more general way to educational institutions offering graduate level programs in an online setting.

BACKGROUND

Universitas 21 Global (U21G)

Universitas 21 Global (U21G) is a new online university established in 2001 as a joint venture between Universitas 21 (U21) and Thomson Learning. U21 is a network of 17 international universities, including the National University of Singapore, Edinburgh University, University of Hong Kong, Melbourne University, and the University of Virginia. Thomson Learning is a leading provider of educational materials. Degrees offered by U21G are accredited by U21 Pedagogica, a quality assurance body established by U21 that independently reviews all of U21G’s academic programs. Programs offered by U21G are completely online (i.e., there are no physical classrooms or physical face-to-face contact between students and instructors). Instead, students interact among themselves and with instructors using a range of Web-based communication tools that include discussion forums, e-mail, and online chat.

The U21G Online MBA

In August 2003, U21G launched its first program, the MBA. Admission into the MBA program is similar to that of the MBAs conducted on campus at the member universities of U21. In short, students are expected to have a first degree, at least two years working experience in a managerial or supervisory role, and a satisfactory GMAT score. For the award of MBA, students are required to complete a total of 18 subjects, comprised of 10 core (mandatory) subjects, seven elective subjects, and a research project (capstone subject). Note that the author uses the term subject for what might be known as a course elsewhere. MBA650 e-Business is one of the core subjects in the U21G MBA, reflecting its importance as an area in which all MBA students should have knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges to Teaching E-Business

Several authors have highlighted the challenges to teaching and conducting high-quality research in e-business (Drew, 2002); these challenges include:

- The recent emergence of e-business
- The rapid change that is characteristic of the e-business domain
- The substantial variance in behavior that is exhibited by apparently similar contexts
- Attention by media and marketing interests, accompanied by inevitable distortions of data
- The multi-disciplinary nature of e-business, which requires academics to understand both business and technology concepts
Related Content

Framing ERP Success from an Information Systems Failure Perspective: A Measurement Endeavor
www.igi-global.com/article/framing-erp-success-from-an-information-systems-failure-perspective/179624?camid=4v1a

Social Media Affordances
Francesca Cabiddu and Manuela De Carlo (2016). Encyclopedia of E-Commerce Development, Implementation, and Management (pp. 2084-2095).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/social-media-affordances/149103?camid=4v1a

Bringing e-Business to the World's Largest Flower Auction: The Case of Aalsmeer
www.igi-global.com/article/bringing-business-world-largest-flower/1474?camid=4v1a
Application of Modified OPTICS Algorithm in E-Commerce Sites
Classification and Evaluation
www.igi-global.com/article/application-of-modified-optics-algorithm-in-e-commerce-sites-classification-and-evaluation/156553?camid=4v1a