Opening the Door for Non-Traditional Engineering Technology Students:Online MBA Program with Spanish Language Support

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ABSTRACT

This short paper provides a detailed description of an innovative educational approach specifically designed for Spanish speaking adult learners moving forward after an accredited Bachelors of Science in Nuclear Engineering Technology degree, and an accredited Bachelors of Science in Electrical Engineering Technology degree to an MBA degree with a specialized concentration in Technology Management or Cyber Security Management.

Excelsior College, a non-profit online institution, is introducing in its MBA program several Spanish language supported materials with the aim of enhancing the learning experience and comprehension of its Spanish speaking students. This paper details the assessment investigation procedure followed by the institution to make this project a reality: identification of target courses, translation process, focus group feedback and pilot course offering.

1. INTRODUCTION

Online learning in higher education presents many advantages but challenges as well. It offers the possibility of 24/7 access to educational settings, and open flexible and distributed learning experiences, but on the other hand the learning environment is artificial and disconnected to reality making the experience challenging for adult learners that are not necessary skillful with new technologies (Olson and Wisher, 2002).

With the goal of prepare the engineering technology professionals to advance to managerial positions and better support the Spanish speaking students, Excelsior designed a unique learning model that overcomes these issues while embracing the concept of learning space (Kolb and Kolb, 2005) as a bridge to enhance students learning styles and the online educational environment provided by the school. Experiential learning identifies learning as an adaptation process involving the individual and the environment. Under the umbrella of this theory all learning is relearning and expansion of previous knowledge. The process involves all the aspects of being a student: thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving. The Spanish support materials offered in the MBA program target this process and enhance the interaction between the individual and the content. Approaching learning as a process of creating new knowledge directs Excelsior College to facilitate to its Spanish speaking students another tool to support and enhance their experience.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology is an assessment investigation procedure (Jornet-Meliá, González-Such, and García-Bellido, 2012) of the actual MBA program with the goal of extending the possibilities of success to the Spanish speaking students in the program. This process comprises three phases: preparation, organization and reporting (Elo and Kyngas, 2007). During the preparation phase the units of analysis are selected and the problem is considered as a whole integrated unit of analysis. During the organization phase the data is processed with the objective of changing, reshaping or reorienting the initial goals for the investigation. The reporting phase consists of creating a new direction or possible model to follow during successive iterations of the process.

This practice is taking place during the 2012-2013 school year and still on phase one moving on to phase two.

2.1 PARTICIPANTS

In order to make this initiative a reality Excelsior College created and developed an action plan driven by a committee of experts involving the Faculty Program Director for the MBA, instructors, and current students. The committee has been devoted to this activity since August of 2012, releasing the first course as a pilot in May 2013

2.2 PROCEDURE

In order to collect qualitative data for the study, the instrument used during the first phase of this investigation was a student mini-focus group (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins, 2010). The first module (content unit) for BUS500-Accounting for Managers course was presented to the students in an audit shell, displaying the same online environment features as the other standard online courses offered in the MBA program. The translated materials incorporated within the course where shown to the students and their feedback, suggestions and concerns were collected with the goal of analyzing the data during the next phase of the investigation. The data was collected through a webinar where the students were invited to share their ideas and have a conversational discussion with the program director.

After identifying the members of the committee, an action plan initiative was created. A simplified version of the first phase for the planning it is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Planning (Preparation phase)

Unit activity	Metrics
Identify material to be translated into Spanish	• Syllabus • Module notes • Discussion questions • Assignment instructions • Glossaries
Develop schedule of the courses with Spanish support and when they are going to be released	1. BUS 500: Accounting for managers 2. BUS501: Business Communications 3. BUS57: Information Technology 4. etc
Focus group with students	Test the first module with Spanish speaking students
Release of pilot	

course BUS500	

Once the committee identified the materials to be translated, a focus group was conducted to see the reaction of current students and a first pilot course released in May 2013.

3. CONCLUSION

With the goal of enhancing adult online education and targeting Spanish speaking students in its MBA program, Excelsior College is implementing an assessment investigation procedure while completing some of the MBA courses with materials translated into Spanish. While this investigation is still on phase one and piloting its first online course with Spanish supported materials, the goal is to have a complete MBA program that accommodates bilingual Spanish students.

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