

The Continuing and Professional Education Learning Collaborative Assists Boston University in Determining Feasibility of Proposed Programs

Challenge:

Boston University was considering the launch of two new online programs, a Master of Music in Music Education and a Doctor of Musical Arts in Music Education, but first wanted to better understand the landscape of existing online programs in music education.

Solution:

The Continuing and Professional Education Learning Collaborative (CPE-LC) research team examined the marketplace of existing online music education providers to answer several questions for Boston University:

- What is the state of the current marketplace for online graduate music education programs?
- How are similar programs structured in terms of curriculum, price and delivery formats?
- Are there any online providers currently offering a Doctoral program in music education?

Results:

With the insight received from the research, Boston University decided to launch both the online Masters program as well as the online Doctoral program – the first online Doctoral music education program ever offered by a US institution.

About Boston University:

Location: Boston, MA

Carnegie Classification: Doctoral

Ownership: Private Institution

Size: 16,685 Undergraduate Students (2007)

About the Continuing and Professional Education Learning Collaborative:

CPE-LC helps universities and colleges identify new revenue and growth opportunities, improve organizational operational performance, and stay abreast of leading management practices within the continuing and professional education community.

An Opportunity to Expand Online Programming

In the Fall of 2004, John Ebersole sensed an opportunity. The newly appointed director of the Division of Extended Education at Boston University (BU), Ebersole was looking to expand online programming and was looking for departments at BU to partner with in this effort.

The timing was fortuitous as an opportunity soon arose with the School of Music. André de Quadros, who had recently taken over as the School's director, had previous experience with distance education and quickly realized the school could expand its presence by offering online graduate programming. Discussions were soon begun to determine the feasibility of offering programming in the area of music education and after much discussion two options emerged as strong possibilities for online programs – a Master of Music in Music Education (MusM) and a Doctor of Musical Arts in Music Education (MusAD).

However, due to some internal skepticism, especially regarding the Doctoral program, the Division of Extended Education first wanted to better understand the landscape of existing online music education before launching the proposed programs. To help them with this analysis, they turned to the Continuing and Professional Education Learning Collaborative (CPE-LC) for assistance.

Examining the Current Landscape

The CPE-LC research team first undertook a broad environmental scan of programs in music education via industry journals and association web sites to provide an overview of the current marketplace for graduate-level online music education programs. Relevant programs were then examined in detail through an investigation of institutional web sites and other sources to provide insight into how similar programs were organized. Among the areas researched were program structure (including core curriculum, electives and credit hours), total cost and tuition per credit hour.

Finally, the relevant programs were then compared against the proposed Boston University programs to better understand how BU's offerings would fit into the existing marketplace.

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Patricia Mitro
Senior Assistant Dean
Enrollment Services
College of Fine Arts
Boston University

According to Patricia Mitro, the Senior Assistant Dean of Enrollment Services at Boston University’s College of Fine Arts, “The online programs seemed like an interesting idea but we had no idea what the market was for these programs and whether or not this was even viable. When the Division of Extended Education told us they were going to work with CPE-LC on this project we were very interested in seeing the data. We wanted to know whether the demand existed for this to be worth our while to pursue.”

Data and Insight to Inform Decision-Making

The research determined that a strong opportunity existed for the programs under consideration. While there were ten other institutions that were currently offering masters programs in music education with at least a significant

online component, the majority were located in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic and no other school in New England was offering similar online programs. In addition, Boston University was surprised to discover that not a single online Doctoral program in Music Education was being offered by a US institution, a clear market opportunity.

The research also provided insight on how potential competitors were organizing their programs and showed that BU’s proposed program design was consistent with other providers in regards to program structure, core curriculum and credit hours. However, according to Mitro, one of the most significant findings in the research was the analysis of the planned tuition levels of the proposed programs. The research determined that the total cost and tuition per credit hour were comparable to other institutions offering online masters in music education, assuaging internal concerns that BU’s programs would be too costly for potential students.

Proving Program Viability

After presenting the research to the Provost the programs were approved and were launched in the Fall of 2005 with a total of 67 students in both programs. With 450 – 500 students enrolled at any one time over the past few years the programs have been a success for Boston University on several levels. Said Mitro “Aside from the revenue they have generated for the School of Music, the programs have provided several other positive results for Boston University. They have invigorated our music education program which has expanded considerably, allowing us to bring in very strong faculty and establish more of a national presence.”

She went on to say “We would not have launched these programs without the insight produced by the CPE-LC research team as we did not have the background to do this type of research ourselves. The thing that has been especially gratifying is we are serving a population of students we would never have reached before that don’t have access to high quality academic institutions offering programs in music education.”

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