

Articles

Developing a Master of Continuing Education Degree Program: The Way It Was!

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ABSTRACT

The approval of the Master of Continuing Education degree program at The University of Calgary was the culmination of a five-year project. While the program has many innovative aspects, it is the process of developing and approving a proposal for a professional, course-based program by a faculty perceived to be "service" oriented that is described here. The challenges, political realities, and fortuitous events are chronicled, along with the lessons learned.

RÉSUMÉ

L'homologation d'un programme de maîtrise en éducation permanente à l'Université de Calgary est l'aboutissement d'un projet de cinq ans. Si le programme possède de nombreux aspects innovateurs, c'est le processus de développement et d'approbation d'un projet de programme professionnel basé sur des cours par une faculté perçue comme étant orientée sur le «service» dont on traite ici. On rapporte les défis, les réalités politiques et les imprévus, ainsi que les leçons que l'on en a retiré.

INTRODUCTION

In September 1994, The University of Calgary received permission from the Government of Alberta to go ahead with its proposal for a Master of Continuing Education (MCE) degree program. This was the culmination of a five-year process and resulted in the Faculty of Continuing Education becoming the first continuing education (CE) unit in Canada to offer its own graduate degree. Gaining permission to grant this degree was a fundamental step in recognizing continuing education as an area of specialization in Canadian university study.

Like most Canadian universities, The University of Calgary has well-defined procedures to govern the introduction of new programs. These rigorous procedures, designed to protect the essential academic standards of the University, operate within a political system that is as much a factor in the development and approval process as the procedures themselves—especially in the case of a graduate program offered by a faculty of continuing education. A number of key issues emerged during the process, some of which were related to the mandate of the Faculty of Continuing Education, others the result of the program's innovative nature. What follows is an account of the developmental process that led to the approval of the MCE, of the issues that emerged, and of the way that they were handled. Other CE units may well find useful lessons in this case study. The authors of this paper were largely responsible for guiding the proposal through University channels, and their interpretation of the events is based on meetings, correspondence, and conversations with key groups and individuals within the University over that five-year period.

THE MASTER OF CONTINUING EDUCATION (MCE)

The MCE is intended to develop professionals who will play a leadership role in creating and shaping learning environments that foster individual and organizational success. The program can be characterized in terms of its relevance, accessibility, and innovativeness. As to relevance, the program's specialization of "learning in the workplace" was intended to respond to an emerging need, something that was ultimately confirmed by the hundreds of inquiries about the program and the large numbers of qualified applicants. Accessibility was achieved by facilitating learning at a distance through the interactive capabilities of computer-mediated communication (CMC). The program is innovative in that it is the first part-

time, professional graduate program in Canada specializing in organizational learning and being offered by a faculty of continuing education.

The course-based program (six full courses) is designed to be completed in a minimum of two years of part-time study. It is also cohort based to include a variety of large-group, small-group, and individual learning experiences. The program began in the spring of 1995 with a three-week, face-to-face institute; courses will be offered in the Fall and Winter terms using CMC and teleconferencing. The second year follows a similar structure. Elective courses are also offered at a distance. A practicum/project and a comprehensive oral exam complete the program.

A program fee of \$3000 is charged for each of the first two years (\$1000 for each subsequent year), in addition to course tuition fees. Students must have a GPA of at least 3.00 in their undergraduate degree to enter the program, as well as at least three years work experience. Since much of the class discussion during the Fall and Winter terms will be via computer conferencing, students must have the necessary computer hardware and software. Communication costs will be the responsibility of the students.

DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS

In describing the developmental process for the MCE it is important to understand the context within which it occurred. Many of the broader features of the context surrounding a faculty of continuing education in a university setting have been sketched previously (Kirby, 1992). They are, in essence, diminishing resources, higher revenue expectations, and, for many elements of its operation, a lowered priority within its institution as universities struggle to preserve their core function. Exceptions to this tale of woe do exist, as many institutions are increasing their distance delivery capacity and international work; however, these ventures are often expected to be cost-recoverable—if not revenue-generating—and frequently become the target of take-overs by other faculties on campus. These economic and institutional pressures are, by and large, eroding CE units and placing considerable pressure on much of their social-action programming, which is considered by many units to be central to their mission. In addition to these general factors that seem to be besetting most CE units, some other factors proved relevant to the unfolding of the program's development process.

Relevant Forces at The University of Calgary

The nature of The University of Calgary itself was highly relevant to the development of the MCE. While it is dangerous to characterize universities in a simple manner (they are complex, multifaceted organizations), at the time the Master's project began, The University of Calgary had few provisions for part-time students. This was not so much the result of institutional policy but rather the indifference of individual faculties and departments to the needs of part-time and professional students. Moreover, the institution's highly collegial mode of operation made it virtually impossible to impose central control.

One illustration of this indifference to nontraditional students (i.e., part-time adult learners) is that there was—and still is—no organized, easily accessible, evening credit program for adult learners. Individual departments are presently responsible for the provision of such programs within the institution. At one time, the Faculty of Continuing Education had a mandate to operate an evening credit program, but it was returned to departmental control in 1979 as the result of a decision to decentralize the associated budget, and it subsequently declined. The CE Faculty did implement a modest credit program through distance education in 1979; based primarily on audio-teleconferencing, most of its offerings were from the Faculty of Education and were restricted to individual courses rather than complete programs. Further, the program was viewed as a Faculty of Continuing Education endeavour rather than as a University venture, and indeed the CE Faculty was responsible for funding the technology as well as the infrastructure. This situation has recently changed, however, as the University has funded a substantial expansion of the distance education unit with an understanding that it is to become cost-recoverable in the relatively short-term.

Similarly, despite the strenuous efforts of at least two Deans of Continuing Education and the active support of one Academic Vice-President, at the time the program was approved, no accommodation had ever been made to allow for the transfer of credit from certificate to degree programs. This was, and remains, a particularly important issue for the Management Certificate Program, which has had a substantial enrolment for many years and enjoys a high reputation in the community. A further example of its traditional nature was the very limited number of scholarships targeted at nontraditional students, although this has improved substantially in the last year or so.

These examples not only indicate the lack of awareness of the needs of adult students but also the focus on traditional students (those entering directly from high school) that existed when the development of the MCE began in 1989. In retrospect, this is really quite surprising as Calgary, perhaps more than any other city in Canada, is a corporate city with a highly educated workforce, many of whom are very eager for further education. The fact that a number of offshore universities such as Nova have a flourishing and lucrative market in the city, as do several Canadian universities, is further evidence of the demand for continuing education in Calgary.

The Role of the Faculty of Continuing Education

A second factor relates to the role of the Faculty of Continuing Education as one of 16 faculties within the University. Represented by its Dean at Deans' Council, it has a Dean's budget that is specifically targeted by The University Budget Committee to support its academic responsibilities as they relate to teaching/programming, research, and service within the institution. Of some 50 employees, 13 hold faculty status and are bound by the same procedures regarding appointment, merit, and promotion as any other faculty member on campus. On the surface, the CE Faculty enjoys all the trappings associated with a university faculty, and its faculty appointees, in the main, identify with that role. Indeed, several CE Faculty members could justly claim to be "successful academics" in the traditional definition of that term; during the course of the development of the MCE, however, it became clear that this view was not shared throughout the campus. Some years previously, when the Faculty of Continuing Education proposed to become a joint sponsor with the Faculty of Education of a graduate program in "adult and community education," the proposal was not accepted, basically because of the perceived 'unsuitability' of the CE Faculty. That some faculties are more equal than others is not a new notion (Kirby, 1992) and tends to become more pronounced at times of institutional stress. It was, in fact, a perception that was probably present inside the CE Faculty itself, as evidenced by one long-time member who, when discussing the possibility of the MCE, remarked to one of the authors, "It will enable us to hold our heads up."

The Relationship with the Faculty of Education

The third factor relevant to the background against which the MCE was developed was the relationship of the Faculty of Continuing Education with the Faculty of Education. While the CE Faculty relates to many of the

other faculties on campus, its closest ties are with Education and in particular the Department of Educational Policy and Administration (EDPA). Because of their academic backgrounds, a number of the CE Faculty appointees hold adjunct appointments with EDPA, teaching and supervising graduate students in its programs. Of these programs, the Master's specializing in Adult and Community Education (ACE) is the largest point of contact. When initially developed, this program was conceived as being jointly offered by the Faculty of Continuing Education and EDPA, but permission for the proposal was refused. Instead, the program became vested with EDPA despite the fact that the CE Faculty supplied most of the resources and support until comparatively recently without any formal recognition of that role. This resulted in a sense of frustration among some CE Faculty Members who felt their Faculty was being marginalized by the situation.

THE APPROVAL PROCESS

James Burke (1985), in his program *Changing Knowledge: Changing Reality*, speaks of that flash of insight "which separates the geniuses from the rest of us slob." It is not particularly important who in the CE Faculty had the flash of insight that gave birth to the Master of Continuing Education, but there was more than a touch of irony about some of the individuals who subsequently laid claim to the notion. In the final analysis, however, it originated from a sense of dissatisfaction with the ACE program, with which some members of the CE Faculty were closely associated.

Serious consideration was given to the possibility of offering our own Master's program in the Adult Education Caucus (an informal discussion group within the CE Faculty) for nearly two years, beginning in the 1988–89 academic year with the advent of a new Dean. Initially, many were not willing to abandon the ACE program; the question was whether we could work as full partners in shaping it. The CE Faculty's dilemma was brought to a head by the low priority (or unwillingness) given by EDPA to review the structure of the ACE program, which had not been reviewed or revised since its inception. In September 1990 the ACE Advisory Committee (an informal committee composed of faculty associated with the ACE program) struck a "Study Committee" to look into concerns about the ACE program, with the responsibility to call the meeting left to the Head of EDPA. The Study Committee never met, however, leaving little, if any, opportunity for meaningful collaboration. This situation served to strengthen the resolve of

some of us in the CE Faculty to pursue our own Master's program, particularly when it became apparent that other universities such as Nova and St. Francis Xavier were providing programs to Calgarians—programs that the Faculty of Continuing Education was well equipped to offer.

While this was a turning point, a consensus about the nature of a Master's program was not suddenly reached within the CE Faculty. Some were still reluctant to proceed, due, in large part, to the concern that the proposed Master's would not be sufficiently different from the existing ACE program. Here is where differing philosophies and visions manifested themselves. While some aligned themselves with the traditional adult education approach of the existing ACE program, others wanted to create a relevant, practice-oriented professional program. Indeed, this spilled over into a minor battle during the drafting of the faculty's mission statement when discussion revolved around the language used in describing the proposed program. One group wanted to describe it as a Master's in Adult Education rather than Continuing Education, the eventual descriptor used. The initial stalemate was broken when the Dean asked the Associate Dean to move ahead with drafting a formal proposal for a Master's degree in Continuing Education. In many ways this debate paralleled an earlier one surrounding the faculty's involvement with a then-proposed certificate program in adult education (CACE) that was to be offered at a distance by a consortium of Western Canadian universities. In other words, there was resistance to both innovations since they may have conflicted with existing programs, although in reality, they complemented existing programs and provided a wider and more continuous slate of program offerings.

Consensus building is valuable; however, at some point it is time to move on and focus broad-ranging discussions. This occurred when the first draft of the MCE proposal was presented to the Adult Education Caucus in late 1990. At this time, few were ready to endorse the proposal, but four faculty members moved ahead and organized a focus group in early 1991 to assess the viability of a MCE, a group consisting of representatives from organizations, institutions, and associations in the Calgary community, along with two CE Faculty members. The results of the focus group were positive and encouraging; a small working group provided input and guidance in the development of a formal proposal.

As the proposal was being developed, informal discussions were held with the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the Vice-President (Academic), and various University planning committees. Initiated by the Dean of Continuing Education, these meetings were held to assess support and

develop a strategy for having the proposal approved. The upper administration was quite supportive of the proposal, although the Dean of Graduate Studies personally expressed reservations. While the primary concern seemed to be the distance-delivered component of the program, there also appeared to be little support for part-time, professional, course-based programs. As part of the round of informal discussions, the Dean and Associate Dean of Continuing Education met with the Dean of Education and the Head of the Department of Educational Policy and Administration (EDPA) on several occasions. At these meetings there was no expressed opposition towards the proposed program and, indeed, in what subsequently turned out to be rich irony, the Head of EDPA suggested the name of the program: "Education in the Workplace."

The formal proposal was submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in April 1992; its approval was the crucial step in a complex approval process. The Faculty of Graduate Studies Academic Program Committee, with University-wide representation, was to study the proposal and decide whether or not to recommend its approval to General Faculties Council. As part of this process, all faculties were notified of the proposal, and within days, the Faculty of Education expressed its unwillingness to support the CE Faculty's proposal in a terse letter to its Dean. Although the Faculty of Education recognized that the proposed program had merit, they questioned the mandate of the CE Faculty to offer such a program. They also suggested that a revised ACE program, adopting the key features of the MCE proposal, would be in the University's best interest, a somewhat surprising suggestion given that a committee had been struck to do that very thing eighteen months earlier and had never been convened by EDPA, the official home of the ACE program.

This raised a critical issue related to the Faculty of Continuing Education's mandate. Were we only a "service faculty" or did we have full academic status with the possibility of offering credit courses? This was partially clarified by the Vice-President (Academic) with a memo stating that "it is not my understanding that you are 'a service faculty'." The Dean of Continuing Education then drafted a lengthy response to the Dean of Education, with input from a number of senior CE Faculty members. Widely circulated on campus, this letter addressed the numerous inconsistencies in the Faculty of Education's position, such as the fact that recognized CE scholars were apparently welcome to teach in Education's graduate programs yet should not aspire to a graduate program in Continuing Education. A subsequent meeting of the Dean and Associate

Dean (Research) of Continuing Education and the Faculty of Education's executive group resulted in the objection being withdrawn. This, however, was not to be the end of the Faculty of Education's opposition.

Another crucial and fortuitous event concerned the issue of distance-delivered programs at the graduate level. As described earlier, The University of Calgary was at that time a very traditional university, nowhere was this more apparent than within the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and despite numerous meetings and discussions on the subject of distance education, it had remained resistant to the notion of graduate degrees at a distance. This position, shared by other deans of Graduate Studies in Canada (Kirby and Garrison, 1990), was based on the assumption that such study and qualifications were inferior. Thus, the attitude of the Dean of Graduate Studies was crucial to the progress of the proposal. In what turned out to be a considerable piece of luck, the Dean of Graduate Studies made a visit to Florida, and, while there, dropped in to look at the operation of Nova University. Impressed both by what he saw and by the number of students enrolled from the Calgary area, on his return, he became an enthusiastic convert to the possibilities of distance education and was largely responsible for the development of the "Guidelines for Distance Delivery of Graduate Programs," adopted by the Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies in January 1993.

Academic wheels grind wondrously slowly and the Academic Program Committee (APC) of the Faculty of Graduate Studies did not respond to the initial proposal for a full year. Finally in April 1993, the APC submitted an extensive list of questions and concerns. The Dean and Associate Dean (Research) quickly scheduled a meeting with the APC Chair to share the CE Faculty's consternation over some of the APC statements, a meeting that was quite confrontational as the Dean felt aggrieved at the obvious lack of knowledge about the CE Faculty on the part of a committee drawn University-wide. Despite specific complaints about the APC statements, only strategic advice was provided by the Chair of APC at this meeting, and unfortunately, the CE Faculty did not formally respond to these concerns for five months as the Associate Dean (Research), who had written the proposal, was on sabbatical leave. In addition, the Dean was completing his term and was about to step down. Upon his return, in the fall, the Associate Dean (Research) prepared a six-page response, addressing the questions and issues raised by the APC.

The APC's primary concern was "the basic notion of what is fundamentally an administrative unit offering a graduate program on a

cost-recovery basis." Clearly, many members of the APC had very little understanding of the Faculty of Continuing Education and philosophically were opposed to it offering a graduate program. Notwithstanding the Vice-President's statement regarding the status of the CE Faculty and implicit support for the proposal, the APC was not ready to relinquish the issue of the Faculty of Continuing Education's status. Another important question was: "How can there be a graduate program in a field in which there is no corresponding undergraduate major?" This demonstrated a lack of understanding (or bias) with regard to professional degrees, and it was subsequently pointed out to the APC that there were at least 40 graduate programs in the best universities across Canada that do not have corresponding undergraduate degrees, including the Faculty of Environmental Design at The University of Calgary.

By the fall of 1993 support for the MCE proposal was growing. APC had asked for a revised proposal. The University's Curriculum and Academic Review Committee approved the core courses of the program. However, there were still problems ahead. First, the University library would not give its approval until the CE Faculty agreed to pay for all costs associated with meeting the potential library demands by distance students. This resulted in a charge to the faculty of \$100 per student for each half course offered at a distance, regardless of where the students resided or whether they used the library or not.

Second, the Faculty of Education decided to withdraw its support for the MCE a second time, just prior to the proposal being sent to the Faculty of Graduate Studies' Council, again arguing for a more "collaborative" approach by concentrating efforts on the existing ACE program. However, it was clear that true collaboration was not the issue at this point; rather the Faculty of Education would not concede that the MCE was a new program to be delivered in an innovative manner to an expanded target audience and that the CE Faculty had the capability to accomplish this. Only after the Graduate Studies' Council passed the proposal, and it was clear that the Education Faculty could not block it, was its objection grudgingly removed.

The APC had recommended acceptance of the MCE proposal in February 1994. It was then sent to the Faculty of Graduate Studies' Council for debate and a vote; without the approval of this Council, the proposal would effectively be dead. In April 1994, the Council considered the proposal. The Chair of the APC introduced the proposal and, surprisingly, enthusiastically recommended it. The favourable impact of this presentation cannot be underestimated. There were few questions and only

the Faculty of Education spoke against it. Despite a significant number of abstentions, the proposal was passed. We had come a long way in convincing others in the University community of the innovativeness and viability of the program and of the Faculty of Continuing Education.

By the end of June 1994, the MCE program was approved by the Board of Governors of The University of Calgary, which completed an extensive approval process within the University. The proposal was then sent on to the Provincial Department of Advanced Education and Career Development for final approval, and this was received at the end of September, just in time to market the program for the spring of 1995. The next challenge was to design and implement such an innovative program in less than a year. Although some preliminary work had been carried out with the CMC system, very little planning went on until we were confident the program would be approved. Consequently, much work was done over the summer to plan the program's development. There was an overwhelming response to the program: the CE Faculty had over 100 applicants from which to select the first cohort of 24 students who started on May 29, 1995.

DISCUSSION

This is an account of a CE Faculty proposing to offer an innovative, professional program in a traditional research university. More than simply outlining a somewhat unusual and interesting process, there are useful lessons to be extracted from it. In hindsight, a number of critical events occurred during the process, each of which raises interesting issues relating to the internal workings of a faculty and an institution.

The emergence of the proposal from the Faculty of Continuing Education itself was a hurdle that in many ways was the most difficult to overcome in the overall process. The differing views and motivations of the academics involved in debating the concept of the new program stood in the way of its development. Clearly, agreement was not likely to occur without unilateral action of some kind on the part of the Dean of Continuing Education. For such action to have been taken is somewhat unusual given that in a university setting the collegial model of governance is valued highly and, consequently, makes universities extremely conservative with regard to change.

While decisions based upon a collegial and consensual process may be a useful check to restrict academic programs that do not have lasting merit,

this process does not generally allow universities to respond quickly to the relevant and worthwhile needs of a changing community. For the core disciplines of a university, perhaps change should be constrained. However, relevant professional programs are often seen by the core disciplines as trendy and not worthy of graduate study, and faculty members from these core disciplines do not seem to understand the nature of professional knowledge and the challenge of applying that knowledge in complex and changing contexts. The lesson is that professional faculties (including continuing education units) must be persistent in educating other faculties in the value of what they do. This is done best by integrating within the university community, for being marginal has serious disadvantages in promoting innovation and change.

The second crucial event in the MCE process was the somewhat surprising letter from the Dean of Education expressing opposition to the proposal. Although the Dean and Associate Dean of Continuing Education had met with him and the Head of the department most likely affected by the proposal on several occasions, no opposition to the proposal had been expressed at any time. As indicated earlier, this letter prompted a widely distributed exchange of letters and produced from the Vice-President (Academic) a statement that the proposed program was within CE's mandate as a University faculty. The result was the withdrawal, at least publicly, of the Faculty of Education's opposition to the proposal. Fortunately, this battle was fought by a semi-public exchange of letters and not on the floor of any of the University's legislative bodies, such as at the Council of Graduate Studies or General Faculties Council. In these forums, the issue would not have been so easily won and could have been just as easily lost, despite the support of the Vice-President (Academic), since it was impossible to determine how these bodies would have responded to arguments based on mandates and resources from another faculty. The lesson here is, if at all possible, to fight such issues head-on before they get to the floor of an official body, where events cannot be controlled and where time to develop counter-arguments is often not available.

A third crucial—and quite fortuitous event—was the almost evangelical conversion of the Dean of Graduate Studies to the possibilities of distance education. In retrospect, his support, as well as that of the Vice-President (Academic), was essential to the approval of the proposal. While the Vice-President was always supportive of initiatives for nontraditional students, the support of the Dean of Graduate Studies came about serendipitously. In this case, the lesson is the importance of identifying and educating the

gatekeepers, particularly for projects that are perceived as innovative and running counter to the existing institutional culture.

A fourth event was the Academic Program Committee Chair's expressed support of the proposal at the Faculty of Graduate Studies' Council meeting. While we had several discussions with him, his conversion was less likely due to our efforts to explain and gain favour for the proposed program than it was to general changes occurring within the University and the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Generally, there was a sense that the University needed to be perceived by the Province to be providing increased access to the institution and to be reaching out to the community with relevant programs. As noted previously, distance education was getting greater attention—perhaps as a means to increase access. For whatever reasons, the Chair of the APC was instrumental in facilitating the passing of the proposal at General Faculties Council and we were on our way. The lesson, if any, to be learned from this is that timing is everything. While it was the right idea at the right time and place, we had prepared for this moment of opportunity.

Besides these critical events, there were also overtones of attitudes that were less than flattering to those who held them and that, certainly in our opinion, manifested themselves during the process. The academic snobbery of some faculties within the University regarding the Faculty of Continuing Education was a perspective that we encountered directly and tangentially at various times during the process and is one that is common to many faculty members of other Continuing Education units. Unfortunately, professional programs are often wrongly seen as being in conflict with the broad, liberal mandate of universities. While there is a legitimate concern within the core disciplines with regard to “vocalizing” the university, there is also a place for professional faculties who respond to relevant and practical concerns.

We also experienced resistance for political and philosophical reasons, both within our CE Faculty and the University. Early in the process of conceptualizing the program, progress was inhibited as a result of allegiances to other programs. This, combined with philosophical differences regarding the purpose and content of the program, prevented the CE Faculty from reaching consensus. The lesson here is for the larger field of adult education. As adult educators, we find many professional programs usurping the principles and ideas that we have long advocated, and we are in danger of becoming either irrelevant or redundant if we do not respond to the changes around us. Our traditional adult education

programs must develop alliances with other professional fields; by doing this, we can learn much from each other while providing fresh and relevant programs. This is not the time for adult education to glory in its history of marginality.

Within the larger University community, we had to contend with issues of territoriality and what we perceived as jealousy of a new and very financially viable program. Above all, the university is a human system and so human ambitions, motivations, and feelings will be involved in its processes. And while one might reasonably expect positions to be taken and issues to be debated on an objective basis, that is not the way it is—or was. The ultimate lesson is that to get a professional graduate program approved requires academic credibility and political support. From the beginning, we nurtured our political support with the senior administration, and over time, we were able to convince the gatekeepers of our academic credibility.

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BIOGRAPHIES

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