DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR GROWTH:

How One University Is Succeeding in Today’s Competitive Market
OVERVIEW

It’s a challenging time to be in higher education. Tuition costs rose 18% between 2006 and 2011, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, and some analysts are predicting a meltdown in the college loan world similar to that of the 2008 subprime-mortgage-loan crisis, as more people default on their student loans. At the same time, MOOCs are proliferating and institutions are experimenting with competency-based degrees, challenging a model of education that has been in place for more than a century. In a profound cultural shift, the value of a college degree is now being questioned, with luminaries such as President Reagan’s former Secretary of Education openly saying that college is not worth the investment for all students. The very measure of prosperity and education in the United States—a college degree—is under threat.

In the midst of these woes, however, one school is finding a way to prosper. It took a new attitude toward higher education, with an emphasis on entrepreneurship and a focus on measurable outcomes and generating positive ROI. Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP), developed a framework for ensuring a legacy by implementing strategies in six areas critical for enrollment growth. This plan is already reaping results; in fall 2006, CSP had 2,046 enrollments, and by spring 2013 that number had grown to 3,015—a growth of 47%. Comparatively, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, overall U.S. enrollments in higher education grew by only 13.7% between 2006 and 2012. But CSP isn’t content to rest on its laurels; it continues to use its framework to reach its aggressive goal of 5,000 enrollments by 2017, many of whom will be in online programs.

Your school can build your own framework for growth using some of CSP’s strategies as a model. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach to increasing enrollments in higher education, understanding how one school successfully implemented key strategies can provide insight into your own decision-making process.
SOME OF THE STRATEGIES USED BY CSP INCLUDE:

#1. TAKING A MARKET-DRIVEN APPROACH
While higher education occupies a unique place in the market, to succeed, it should take advantage of best business practices often found in a corporate environment. Develop degree programs that meet current and future market needs, look for new consumers of your product and find ways to stand out from your competitors.

#2. USING DATA TO INFORM DECISIONS
Use research to determine what programs will be offered, and monitor metrics to decide what marketing channels to utilize, which faculty should get tenure and how to improve operational processes.

#3. FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS AND OUTSOURCING WEAKNESSES
Organizations need to critically assess both their strengths and weaknesses. Understanding not only what is done well but also where help is needed enables an organization to develop partnerships that isolate and address vulnerabilities.

#4. EMPOWERING THE LEADERSHIP TEAM TO EXECUTE A BOLD VISION
While higher education institutions have many stakeholders, it is important to have a leadership team that acts as an agent of change to communicate a bold vision, with the power to execute that vision.

#5. CREATING FACULTY BUY-IN
Faculty can be resistant to change. To keep faculty engaged and committed, hire the right people, ensure faculty are included in the decision-making process, and keep the emphasis on excellence in teaching.

#6. FOSTERING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE
Institutional inertia can paralyze a university, slowing or even stopping growth. Making bold choices, such as investing in marketing or trying a new delivery method, can help keep your institution moving. Don’t let fear of failure keep you from trying new things; instead, embrace and support the possibility of failure, as it can lead to better information and more innovation.
Traditionally, colleges and universities have a reputation for being resistant to change. The stereotype of the ivory tower, where real-world influences have no impact, is alive and well. But for schools to survive in a more competitive marketplace and a changing higher-education landscape, stagnation is not an option.

One school embraced change to not only survive, but thrive. This is its story.

**MEET CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, ST. PAUL**

Founded in 1893, Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP), was initially dedicated to training students to work in the Lutheran church. It is part of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and in the early years of its story, the church played a large role in the operations and financing of the institution. Currently, CSP has approximately 1,200 traditional undergraduate students; 600 adult undergraduate and continuing education students; and 1,200 graduate students. While the university still trains students for professional church careers, it also offers a comprehensive education with more than 50 undergraduate majors, 16 of which are designed for adult undergraduate students and a dozen of which are available fully online. In addition, the university offers 19 graduate degrees, all of which are available online.
Forging A New Path

Nestled in the heart of St. Paul, Minn., CSP found itself at a crossroads in 2009. Enrollments were not increasing significantly; the global economic downturn had shrunk endowments and made students more concerned about tuition costs; and CSP faced stiff competition against dozens of public, private, and for-profit institutions, all within 50 miles. The university needed to jump-start growth quickly, without investing significant capital up front.

One of the benefits of living through a Minnesota winter, however, is the ability to survive even the harshest conditions, an attitude that CSP took when facing its future. Instead of freezing in place, CSP kept moving, focusing on new ways to deliver on its mission to provide a high-quality education to all students, regardless of age, economic status, or creed—anywhere and at any time.

“There were macro forces happening that led to change,” said Dr. Eric E. LaMott, senior vice president and chief operating officer of CSP. “I think for a lot of schools, they couldn’t give up their historical models of how things are done. But for us, we knew that innovation was critical to survival.”

Choosing which path to take was not done lightly, and it required taking some difficult actions, including the selection of a new leadership team. To survive, the institution knew it needed to set ambitious goals for itself and pursue new opportunities aggressively, while continuing to provide excellent customer service.

The journey is proving successful.

Before 2009, enrollments were not increasing significantly; from spring 2011 to spring 2013, however, overall enrollments increased by 11%, with a 14% increase in adult undergraduate cohort enrollments, and a 23% increase in graduate student cohort enrollments. Given the quadrupling in application flow since May 2012, CSP expects to see adult undergraduate and graduate enrollment increase by 50% in the next 12 months.

That success has led to expanded ambitions.

“Everyone used to say: ‘We’re St. Paul’s best-kept secret,’” said Jason DeBoer-Moran, director of marketing and communications for CSP. “We’re changing that, and now we aren’t a secret at all.”

We want to have 5,000 STUDENTS ENROLLED BY 2017.

That’s an aggressive goal, but I am confident that if we continue to work the way we have been—increasing efficiency, taking calculated risks, and not being afraid to make hard decisions—we can achieve it.”

Dr. Eric E. LaMott
CSP Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
To achieve its goals, CSP made key decisions in six areas to develop successful growth strategies:

**TAKE A MARKET-DRIVEN APPROACH**

Understanding labor trends, demographics and the competition helped CSP develop effective curricula, programs and price points.

**Find new student populations**

Beginning in the 1980s, CSP found its core mission expanding. Although the school remained committed to offering an education based on Lutheran principles, the need for church workers was declining. Instead of backing away from the challenge, however, CSP looked for new students to serve.

CSP developed the Concordia School of Adult Learners (CSAL) in 1985 to tap into the burgeoning market of adult students looking to complete their bachelor’s degree. The university offered the first degree-completion program in Minnesota. Pioneering a cohort model, students age 25 or older attended classes one night a week on campus or at an offsite, rented location, such as space in hotels or classrooms on Air Force bases. Courses were taught using both full-time faculty and practitioners in the field, and programs could be completed within two years.

“When we started the program, we were looking to help a totally new population,” said LaMott. “And that was reflected in the different faculty skills and experience, budget and even culture that grew up around the school.”

The adult education program brought significant success to CSP, and adult students became a core part of its student population. Currently, CSP has approximately 1,800 adult undergraduate and graduate students, and the number continues to grow.

The CSAL program suffered from some unintended consequences, however. “In some ways, our adult education model was a victim of its own success,” said LaMott. “Because it was doing so well, we didn’t make many changes to it over the years. That meant the program became stagnant, and enrollments flattened. Faculty pointed to budgetary reasons for the decline in growth, but really, it’s more that the programs hadn’t changed and the market had gotten very competitive. We knew we needed a change.”
Expand program offerings

At the same time as growth in the adult education program was flatlining, CSP also was looking to expand its graduate programs.

“We took a look at our graduate programs and realized we had less than a dozen graduates,” said Lonn Maly, vice president of academic affairs at CSP. “That didn’t fit our mission, and we knew there was a need out there for graduate degrees from Concordia University, St. Paul.”

CSP knew education was a growing field with ever-increasing credentialing requirements, leading to a market for teachers who needed a master’s degree or higher. In 2007, CSP launched its revamped graduate education programs.

At the same time, CSP decided to take advantage of the growing need for adult students to get an advanced degree for career advancement. Because these students typically are busy with a job and families and are looking for more flexibility in their school experience, the university decided to offer an MBA online. The online MBA program launched in 2007, and was an immediate success. Since fall 2007, the program has had 492 total students, and an 87% degree completion rate.

The viability of the online MBA program convinced CSP of the need for additional online programs in the market. However, to achieve the kind of growth it wanted, CSP knew it needed a strong marketing plan (with the budget to match) and an efficient, scalable enrollment management system. Instead of using resources that could better be used to serve the core mission of educating students, CSP decided to hire a partner with the expertise it needed. In 2011, it selected online education services provider The Learning House, Inc., to expand its online program offerings and increase enrollments in online programs. Since partnering with Learning House, CSP has launched six online programs as of summer 2013, and expects to have more than 43 online and blended programs by the end of 2014.

Since its launch, the online MBA program has had 492 total students and an 87% degree completion rate.

TAKEAWAY:

Take a market-driven approach to understand the population’s needs, and then deliver with new students to serve, more relevant curriculum, more effective price points and optimal delivery methods.
Do your research

It seems obvious, but when deciding what programs to offer, it’s important to know what the market needs. Understanding labor trends, competition, and student needs all help schools develop relevant programs.

When CSP first partnered with Learning House, an initial assessment was conducted of CSP’s online program mix, given the current regional landscape and trends in local student demand. CSP has a short-term goal of launching two new bachelors and two new graduate online programs each year. Using market research data, CSP has reworked old programs, offered new programs and is in the process of launching eight online and blended programs in the 2013-2014 academic year. In fact, the university believes so strongly in research data that it is exploring the proposed launch of online degree programs not currently offered on ground, such as the RN to BSN program, and degrees in computer science. The school is researching how to build programs from scratch, including finding faculty and writing course curriculum, because the data supports such degrees in their market.

Market research can help determine when a program is not worth the investment, as well. CSP was considering adding a doctorate of business, but based upon an analysis of the local market and salaries, it was determined that there was not enough demand for the program. The university’s commitment to offering relevant degrees meant that despite faculty enthusiasm, the DBA program was not authorized for the immediate future.

It’s not just new programs that can benefit from market research. Analysis of existing programs and looking for small changes that can make a difference, such as offering specializations within degrees or even title changes, enables CSP to make decisions to help it stand out from local and national competitors.

Ideal delivery methods also can be determined with research. When CSP decided to revamp its graduate education programs, it wanted to develop a model that met the needs of the students it wanted to educate. The existing graduate teacher education program at CSP required teachers to attend on weekdays, after work, on the CSP campus. Classes lasted four hours. Few teachers were willing or able to devote the time and energy needed to complete the program, and degree completion was almost nonexistent.

CSP asked Frankfort, Ill.-based K-12 Teachers Alliance (KTA) to conduct research about what type of programs and delivery method teachers wanted. KTA discovered a need for a two-year program that only required attendance one night a week, that offered summers off, was relevant to teachers’ daily work, and was only five miles from home or work. Clearly, the existing model did not meet these criteria.
CSP designed its graduate education programs to meet the needs outlined by KTA's market research. The new graduate education programs, which launched in May 2007, were relevant, could be completed in two years without summer attendance, required a final project but no thesis, and, most importantly, were not held on the CSP campus but which were taught by CSP faculty and maintained the high educational standards of on-campus classes. Instead, CSP found space near the teachers; in many cases, classes were actually held in the same schools in which the teachers worked.

**Design of Graduate Teacher Education Programs, Before and After Market Research**

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Thanks to offering relevant programs that were delivered in a way that best met students’ needs, success was immediate. When the program launched, 113 students started. To date, more than 3,500 people have graduated from CSP with a master’s degree in education.

**TAKEAWAY:**

Trust the data to reveal opportunities for new programs, markets or students.
Measure success

Once programs are launched, they have to prove their worth.

“So long as you can present a case for whatever it is you want to do, we are pretty game to try anything,” said LaMott. “But we won’t keep going down a wrong path—you also need to prove that whatever program or idea is producing results.”

That means that programs need to consistently meet their enrollment goals, and those that do not will no longer be offered, unless there is another compelling reason to do so.

“The emphasis on offering programs that are popular has caused some tension,” LaMott acknowledged. “We’ve had some programs that had been offered forever, and we had to make the decision to not offer them anymore. Our faculty are passionate about the subjects they teach, and it can feel hurtful when we tell them a class is no longer going to be offered. But I think at the same time, because we’re so data informed, it’s easier to not take it personally. It’s not that we don’t value the class or program being cut, it’s just, here are the numbers, they don’t add up, we need to make a change.”

Data is used for more than deciding which programs to offer, as well. Learning House, for example, provides regular reports for marketing, enrollment and retention, allowing CSP to make informed decisions about those processes. The marketing report shares what are the most effective channels and campaigns, enabling CSP to maximize marketing spend. Learning House also provides enrollment reports that offer information about leads, applications and conversion rates, allowing CSP to evaluate the effectiveness of its policies and procedures. The retention reports from Learning House, meanwhile, share the status of students as well as identifying high-risk students, allowing CSP to take proactive action as well as adjust course availability as needed. In addition, students are surveyed regularly to understand course and faculty quality, how connected students feel to the institution, the level of satisfaction of interactions with various departments (such as the financial aid or registrar’s office), and students’ likelihood of recommending CSP.

The data does not go to waste. The enrollment reports, for example, proved so useful that CSP was able to identify financial aid as a significant barrier to enrollment, since students were unsure of what aid was available to them. Learning House then recommended and provided a tuition planner, who works with students to help them navigate the financial aid process, improving enrollments.

**WHAT TO MEASURE**

**Marketing:**
- cost per lead
- organic vs. paid search
- lead source

**Enrollment:**
- cost per start
- conversion rates

**Retention:**
- lifetime value
- term-to-term retention rates

**TAKEAWAY:**

Don’t use data indiscriminately. Measure marketing, enrollment and retention rates to lead to better decision making.
FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS & OUTSOURCE YOUR WEAKNESSES

Scattered throughout the CSP campus are banners stating the university’s ethos: To provide responsive, relevant, and real education. Every decision made is weighed in light of that mission, combined with the desire to provide exceptional customer service. Keeping those factors in mind, outsourcing functions such as marketing and enrollment services made sense, freeing CSP’s resources to focus on their mission.

“We are here to educate,” said LaMott. “If we can find trusted partners who have expertise in areas where we’re not as strong, then we can spend our time teaching, and not needing to worry about the rest.”

CSP has partnered with KTA since 2006. KTA has helped with marketing, enrollment and retention of the graduate education programs, and has provided significant support to the university. After KTA attempted to extend those services to the online business and criminal justice programs, however, it was agreed that more assistance was needed.

“KTA was eager to try something new,” said Kimberly Craig, director of adult and undergraduate enrollment. “But both partners knew almost immediately that it wasn’t a good fit. And to KTA’s credit, they told us right away that they wanted to help, but they knew we could find a partner who was better suited to our needs.”

CSP began a search for a partner to assist in marketing and enrollment for online programs. “I literally did an Internet search at first,” said Craig. “And we had met people at tradeshows, so I called them and asked if they could put a proposal together. All told, we interviewed probably 6 or 7 companies.”

Over the course of a six-month search, CSP ultimately selected Learning House, signing a partnership with the Louisville, Ky.-based online education services provider in 2011. To enable CSP to focus on its core mission, Learning House provides marketing services (both capital investment and strategic planning, as well as creative execution), enrollment and retention support to CSP for all online undergraduate and graduate programs, with the exception of education graduate programs.

**TAKEAWAY:**
Finding a partner who complements your strengths and supports your vision will allow you to provide a superior experience to your customer the student.

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**STRATEGY #3**

If we can find TRUSTED PARTNERS who have expertise in areas where we’re not as strong then we can spend our time teaching and not having to worry about the rest.”

*Dr. Eric E. LaMott*
CSP Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

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A LEARNING HOUSE CASE STUDY 11
Invest in marketing

If the for-profit model has taught the education industry anything, it is that growth comes from a significant investment in marketing. Many schools, however, have neither the expertise nor capital to successfully market their schools, especially for online programs.

For CSP, striking the right balance between marketing for traditional and non-traditional programs was difficult. Traditional programs, which focused on serving students 18 to 22 years of age and generally took a print-based approach to marketing, had a proven track record, while non-traditional programs, which focused on adult undergraduate and graduate students, had an extremely targeted audience and message. Allocating resources between the two budgets also presented challenges. At the same time, there was internal conflict over how to market the CSP brand and gain visibility for specific types of programs.

Centralization needed to happen. Individual departments were doing their own marketing, using their departmental budgets. To gain more control over expenditure and make sure marketing dollars were being spent wisely, CSP centralized the marketing budget in 2009.

When DeBoer-Moran became director of marketing and communications, he knew he wanted to centralize all messaging, as well.

“Because they no longer have to worry about marketing, faculty can focus on doing what they do best: teaching,” said DeBoer-Moran. “And we’re not sending conflicting messages anymore; rather, we are giving potential students a clear and focused picture of who we are and what makes Concordia a unique place to pursue a degree.”

To access additional capital and minimize risk, CSP looked for a creative financial solution. Learning House provides all upfront marketing costs, enabling CSP to invest more and leverage risk.
The capital that Learning House provides has increased the marketing budget by more than four times in the first year, enabling CSP to utilize media that previously had been out of reach, such as television ads, mobile advertising, online advertising, outdoor advertising and a concerted public relations effort. An additional resource was also added to the partnership liaison team by hiring an experienced liaison to manage community college and business-to-business relationships.

Learning House provided not only capital, but also expertise. By using best marketing practices, Learning House helped CSP establish a significant Web presence. From May 2012 to May 2013, organic Web traffic to the online campus increased 18-fold. Applications quadrupled, and lead volume for adult undergraduate and graduate programs doubled.

Because Learning House is able to track metrics closely, CSP and Learning House can quickly adapt their marketing mix for the most efficient use of marketing dollars.

**Takeaway:**

To see growth, it will take a significant investment in marketing. When making that investment, have an expert team (whether in-house or outsourced) who can develop an effective marketing plan, understand and react to metrics, and adapt to market forces.

**Streamline enrollment processes for faster response**

Of course, the best marketing in the world is meaningless if it doesn’t lead to enrollments. Learning House brought a more robust enrollment management infrastructure, including contact agents, enrollment counselors, transcript collectors and tuition planners—all crucial elements to scaling online enrollment operations.

The online enrollment expertise of Learning House was leveraged to streamline CSP’s enrollment process for online programs. To increase effectiveness, Learning House operates the CSP enrollment team, employing one enrollment counselor for every 75 active applicants on behalf of CSP. CSP empowered Learning House to automate the application process, implement transcript collection and make the financial aid process more efficient with tuition planning, which begins once a student completes an application. These changes resulted in an enrollment process that is faster and easier for the prospective student. The average time from lead to start is less than 90 days.
Along with efficiency, CSP and Learning House also focused on providing exceptional customer service. All prospective students are contacted within 24 hours, and the emphasis is on providing useful information in a friendly, accessible manner. All enrollment counselors are experts in what CSP has to offer, and can answer questions quickly and accurately. “We are constantly looking for ways to streamline processes,” said Craig. “The culture here is to always ask why we do something the way we do it, and to see if there’s room for improvement. We aren’t stuck doing something just because it’s always been done that way, and that means we are always challenging ourselves to do better.”

The general education trend has been declining enrollments and CSP has experienced their share of enrollment wane with certain programs and enrollment cycles. However, CSP has managed to surmount that obstacle, reversing negative trends. In May 2013, CSP started 194 new students compared to 47 in May 2012—a whopping 313% increase in only one year.

**TAKEAWAY:**

A more efficient enrollment management process with knowledgeable enrollment counselors will lead to better conversion rates, including better contact rates, better application rates and better start rates.
Support student success

Upon enrollment, CSP prioritizes creating a supportive environment to facilitate academic success.

With the growth of enrollments, CSP has continued to grow academic advisors to advise and mentor students proactively; Learning House employs one dedicated academic advisor for every 200 adult undergraduate students and one academic advisor for every 250 to 300 graduate students on behalf of CSP. Comprehensive support includes helping students with course selection and connecting them to campus resources when needed.

In addition to direct student interaction, in the background, academic advisors also monitor each student to ensure they are progressing smoothly through their academic programs. Utilizing information pulled from the university’s learning management system (LMS) and notes collected by the academic advisors, an attrition risk trait-weighting system is used to identify high-risk students. While contact is maintained with all students, a high-touch contact strategy is initiated for those at risk of dropping out of their program.

To facilitate student success, CSP incorporated its continuing studies department into cohort degree planning and streamlined its general education offerings. It is building electives into minors and creating program course maps, so it is easier for students to understand what courses are needed to complete their degrees.

“While there’s always room for improvement, we are feeling good about our enrollment management processes,” said Craig. “Now, we’re focusing on student retention. The expertise that Learning House brings is helping us implement best practices to make sure we’re as effective as possible.”

**TAKEAWAY:**

Take a proactive approach to helping students succeed, including hiring academic advisors and developing a plan for at-risk students.
EMPOWER THE LEADERSHIP TEAM TO EXECUTE A BOLD VISION

Schools that are making significant changes to how they operate must have strong leadership who fully support the new direction. In 2011, CSP hired a new president, Tom Ries, and made LaMott senior vice president of administration and chief operating officer specifically to execute the goal of expanding enrollments and steer the school in a new direction. That leadership has led the way in increasing online programs, streamlining the organizational structure and holding everyone accountable for success.

Online programs were not embraced by everyone in the administration when they initially began. In fact, the first online education programs were operated out of the human services division, because the CSP School of Education was hesitant to implement the programs.

“Eric [LaMott] was absolutely key to the growth of online programs,” said Craig. “He believed in the online delivery method and knew this was the direction the university needed to go to meet the needs of the adult student. Eric is a numbers guy, so he was able to look at the enrollment and graduation numbers, see that these programs were working, and use that information to help set the new direction of the university.”

It is a running joke on campus that “LaMottomation” is the key to success. LaMott’s background as the former Chief Information Technology Officer and vice president of administration means that he is a strong believer in technology to increase efficiency. He is always looking for ways to streamline processes and increase effectiveness.

A leader should be a change agent.

TAKEAWAY:

In a constantly fluctuating environment, a leader should be a change agent, encouraging a culture of innovation and success.

Provide autonomy

No man is an island, however, and part of the key to CSP’s success is empowering people to make decisions. When Maly became vice president of academic affairs in 2009, for example, he spent considerable energy exploring and refining the roles and responsibilities in the university’s decision-making process. The question he often raised was: Who gets to decide that? These roles and responsibilities were clearly delineated by reviewing existing policies and procedures, and drafting new ones. One clarification made by Maly was that although board approval would
remain necessary to approve all new degrees offered at the university, the administration would approve and implement new programs and courses without needing board approval. This allows for a significantly streamlined development process for online programs.

Such autonomy also enabled the school to respond quickly to changing market forces. For example, as more jobs opened in health care, CSP was able to offer a degree in pulmonary health. This program was extremely popular with respiratory therapy graduates from two-year programs. As the market has softened, however, the school has been able to direct its resources elsewhere without waiting for board approval.

**TAKEAWAY:**
**Hiring the right people and empowering them to execute plans will increase the nimbleness of the institution.**

**Develop a lean organization**

When the new leadership structure was implemented, other changes soon followed that led to a leaner, flatter administration.

“Because both the president and I had backgrounds in finance, we took a businesslike approach to administration,” LaMott said. “So we took a hard look at our organizational structure, and made some really tough decisions. We eliminated a lot of management positions, and reassigned people to different roles. We really tried to streamline wherever we could, and now we feel that we run a lean operation.”

That leanness gives CSP significantly more flexibility. The school is committed to meeting market demands quickly, so decisions are made by all relevant stakeholders, rather than going through a long bureaucratic process.

“We all work together,” said Craig. “It doesn’t work to have everyone in silos. Admissions talks to marketing and academic affairs, and we all try to problem solve together.”

That commitment to working together is reflected even in the office space; LaMott shares an office with Michael Dorner, vice president for finance, to ensure that equal attention is given to budget and execution.

DeBoer-Moran compares the administrative organization to working at a start-up company.

“We’re small and lean,” he said. “If something needs to be done, there isn’t an attitude of ‘oh, that’s not my job.’ Instead, everyone just pitches in and gets things taken care of. It’s really a testament to Eric’s leadership that he creates this culture of hard work and flexibility.”

**TAKEAWAY:**
**Finding the right organizational structure to eliminate bloat and increase efficiency will give your institution more flexibility.**
One of the significant challenges CSP has consistently faced is faculty buy-in.

“I’ll admit it,” said Maly, who was the dean of the College of Education when online programs began. “I was skeptical of the efficacy of online programs at first. But I knew that some people at the university, whom I have a lot of respect for, felt passionately about them, and that they believed that online programs would be an important part of CSP’s future. So I took an online course, then tried to construct one, and then taught a couple of different courses online over several semesters. In doing so, I discovered that there is no difference in the quality of education a student receives between online and on-ground classes, so long as the quality of teaching is there.”

Hire the right faculty

Hiring provides an opportunity to find faculty who believe in the vision of the school and are prepared to execute it. CSP first experienced this phenomenon in the 1980s. When CSP launched CSAL, there was resistance from faculty who wanted to stay with the existing model of serving traditional undergraduate students. CSP responded by allowing those faculty to continue teaching in the traditional model, and hiring new faculty for CSAL programs.

Now, with online programs, the university is following a similar policy.

“I think we’re seeing a fundamental shift in focus right now in our faculty,” said LaMott. “Now when we hire, we look for people who are comfortable online. We don’t require anyone to teach in any specific modality, but we require that they can teach in all modalities. And we’re seeing a lot more enthusiasm from our faculty about teaching online, which I think is due to the new generation of teachers coming up.”
**Encourage all voices**

Inclusion is one of the keys to faculty buy-in success, according to LaMott.

Because LaMott is the department head for Kinesiology, he remains in touch and accessible to faculty members, inviting conversation with them. Regular faculty meetings are held where faculty members can discuss any concerns they may have, and faculty workshops are held in the fall, spring and summer. Faculty also can participate in open houses and recruiting functions, so they feel connected to the university and new students and faculty who arrive.

“We kept faculty as part of the conversation,” he said. “They weren’t shut out, or given decisions that came down from on high. At the same time, we are emphasizing that change isn’t an option, but rather a necessity for the continued growth of the institution we all love.”

**Keep emphasis on the mission**

Because CSP has such a strong sense of its mission, everyone knows they are working together for a common goal: to educate students anywhere, at any time. CSP bases promotion on how well a faculty member teaches, so success is directly tied to how well that faculty member fulfills the school’s vision.

Faculty members are held accountable for the success of their programs, with enrollment and graduation rates measured closely. The university rewards those who have sustainable programs, however, and is willing to take risks if faculty members can make a case for a new course or program.

“If you want to keep teaching a course, it needs to have students in it and provide value to the institution,” said LaMott. “While that was a mindset change, our faculty is really responding to it, because we’re willing to try new things, so long as the data support it.”

**THE CSP ETHOS**

- Responsive to the needs of today’s students.
- Relevant to the skills employers seek.
- Real preparation for thoughtful living and service.

**TAKEAWAY:**

In a constantly fluctuating environment, a leader should be a change agent, encouraging a culture of innovation and success.
FOSTER AN ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE

CSP has embraced entrepreneurship as part of its cultural identity.

“We’re not afraid to try new things, even before all the data is in to show it’s a good idea,” said LaMott.

That entrepreneurial spirit began with the establishment of CSAL, and extended to the implementation of online programs. Once online programs were securely established, CSP looked for more ways to innovate. Blended programs and courses, which offered a mixture of face-to-face interaction and online work, were the next step.

“A lot of people think the progression should go traditional classes, then you try blended, and then you go fully online,” said LaMott. “But that’s not how we did it. We found that there was a real demand for fully online, so we filled that. Only after we had established ourselves in that space did we try blended classes. While not as popular as online, they definitely fill a need.”

The institution also crossed some longstanding barriers between different types of students. Instead of allocating different faculty staff and budgets for traditional undergraduate, adult undergraduate and graduate students, the university pooled its resources, increasing efficiency.

“We operate under the principle that a rising tide lifts all boats, so we don’t silo our people,” said LaMott. “Faculty members have to be able to teach all types of students in any delivery method, and they have to be willing to work together with other departments. That’s how we keep our school unified and working towards the common goal of offering an exceptional education to all.”

TAKEAWAY:
Create an entrepreneurial culture, where risk-taking and innovation are encouraged.
Increase speed to market

Part of CSP’s entrepreneurial spirit is to fast-track the decision-making process and execute quickly.

When the decision was made to re-energize and grow the graduate teacher education programs, CSP asked KTA to conduct some market research. KTA delivered the data to CSP in December 2006. Maly, who was dean of the College of Education at the time, and Dr. Michael Walcheski, then a professor in the College of Education and current dean of the graduate school, wrote the 30-hour graduate programs over Christmas break, and were able to launch by May of 2007. In only six months, they developed an entirely new package of programs—a Master of Arts with an emphasis in one of the following: classroom instruction, classroom instruction with reading endorsement, differentiated instruction, or educational leadership.

Even the process of choosing Learning House as a partner was accelerated, taking approximately six months in a field where the decision-making process can often take years.

“We’re not afraid to admit when we’ve made a mistake,” said LaMott. “So that means we’re not afraid to try new things, because we know we can always change course if it’s not as successful as we hope. That gives us a lot of freedom and flexibility.”

TAKEAWAY:

Don’t let “data creep” paralyze your institution. Make decisions quickly, even before all the numbers are in, and know that these decisions can always be reversed if needed.
Focus on scalability

Once online programs proved successful, Maly focused on standardizing several aspects of online courses and programs, including program length, credit hours and start dates. This enabled CSP to implement new programs more easily, and to provide students with a consistent, high-quality experience.

“A lot of our online programs were labors of love by faculty,” Maly explained. “But that meant that they were being offered for different credit hours, taking different lengths of time, and starting just whenever there were enough people to form a cohort. It was a little chaotic.”

Maly determined the set length of time (seven weeks) and credit hours for each online course (three for graduate and four for undergraduate). He also enforced regular start dates for online programs, so they didn’t run across semesters or overlap with each other. Instead, as with traditional programs, entire groups started at the same time. But because CSP recognized the desire of online students to progress through their programs quickly, the school instituted six start dates throughout the year.

“If you ask online students to wait until the traditional August or September start date, you lose them,” said LaMott. “But by having six start dates, we can generally accommodate students fairly quickly and get them rolling on the program.”

Best Practices for Online Program Scalability

- Standard length per course
- Standard credit hours per course
- Multiple, regular start dates

Takeaway:
Be ready for success. Develop processes to ensure that as enrollments grow, students still receive great customer service.
**Build alliances with the community**

Being a part of the community has always been essential to CSP's success. But since 2009, a significant focus at CSP has been working with community colleges and local businesses to support student advancement.

Maly and LaMott made it a point to build relationships with area community colleges, understanding what their students needed and simplifying the credit transfer process. CSP focuses on offering programs that complement those at community colleges; in 2013, CSP took faculty to community college campuses, rented office space, and made CSP degree programs available to the community college graduate now enrolled in a bachelor or master’s program.

“A lot of traditional institutions kind of look down on community colleges,” LaMott said. “But we view them as partners in offering students an affordable, quality education. If you can get an associate’s at a community college and then finish your bachelor’s with us, we fully support that, and will strive to make the process of enrolling at CSP and transferring your credits as smooth as possible.”

Such partnerships pay off; CSP enrolls several cohorts of students from community colleges each term.

**TAKEAWAY:**

*Look for local opportunities to increase your institution’s presence.*
BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS

There is a lot of chatter in the higher education world that says the sky is falling; enrollments are slipping, student debt rising, and the value of a degree continues to come under fire. But all is not doom and gloom. Online higher education has arrived in the marketplace, and increasingly offers a way for schools to remain competitive. One small, faith-based school is using online education as an integral part of its growth strategy.

As a result of being bold and choosing to adapt to the market, CSP is able to grow enrollments at a time when most colleges and universities are seeing their enrollments flatten or decline. Partnering with expert online services providers and encouraging a cultural shift throughout the school is helping the institution define itself as a leader in online higher education.

Such decisions are not always easy, and they are not made lightly. But keeping the focus on offering a high-quality education to anyone at any time has helped CSP increase its student population.

“We keep innovating,” said Craig. “Not only in the programs we’re offering, but also the quality of what we’re delivering. We are focusing on retention, on improving student services … there’s always an opportunity here to learn and grow and try new things. It’s a very exciting time to be at Concordia.”
ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Concordia University, St. Paul is a comprehensive Christian liberal arts university, one of 10 operated under the auspices of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Since its founding in 1893, Concordia University has been preparing students for successful careers and meaningful lives by providing an educational experience that is responsive, relevant and real.

The Learning House Inc., helps colleges and universities create, manage and grow high-quality online degree programs and courses. Partnering with more than 100 schools, Learning House enables institutions to efficiently and affordably achieve their online education goals. Services include product development and market research, marketing and lead generation, admissions and enrollment management, student retention, curriculum development and management, faculty training and professional development, learning management systems and 24/7 technical support. As a thought leader in the industry, Learning House publishes an annual report on online college student preferences and demographics and presents an annual online higher education conference.