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Four Forces Positively Impacting Cost of Higher Education for Adults

By Ian Tebbett

President and Chief Executive Officer, ADEC

Welcome to the next digital decade and the structural transformation of the education industry. Everywhere you turn, transformative trends are shifting the core mission of universities. These fundamental forces are altering the way students, faculty, curriculum and technologies interact and the financial models that drive them.

My association, the American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC), is a network for engaged educational universities and colleges to collaborate in discovering and sharing best practices in online education. We are confronting the critical challenges in online education, including how best to bring education to adult learners in the most cost effective way, and have determined four major forces shaping the next decade's cost models.

1. Growing demand for online education drives economies of scale

For years, individuals and institutions have been looking for ways to earn high-quality degrees through first-rate learning opportunities at a low cost. ADEC has been a powerhouse in building the demand for online education, driving thought leadership with major universities across the country as well as supporting and developing education in instructional design, learning management systems, enabling

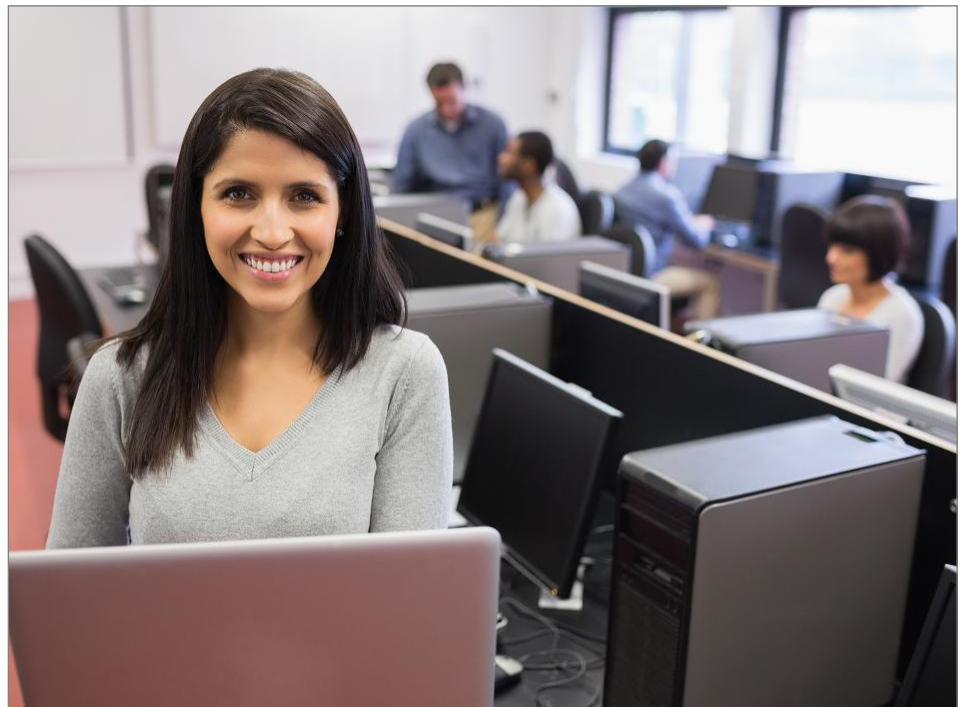


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Higher education institutions can significantly reduce costs for students, both domestically and internationally, by exploring online learning opportunities.

technologies as well as essential new teaching modalities.

The combined effect of these services and technologies has resulted in valuable and affordable, tailored degree completion including master's programs and PhDs. As online demand continues to grow, so too will the economies of scale. Innovation in offerings and technology will benefit all adult learners, providing them with more options in every price range.

2. Individualizing online learning

methods provides a cost advantage to adult learners

The knowledge-based job market has accelerated innovation in every field requiring professionals to retool, often several times in a career. Adult learners are searching for new ways to balance continuing education with their jobs and personal lives, and online learning is a cost-effective alternative to on-campus master's and bachelor's degree completion from the nation's land-grant universities, community

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colleges and other highly engaged universities.

For example, the University of Florida's forensic science program, launched in 1999, is now the largest forensic science master's degree program in the world. This program has given forensic scientists the flexibility to access superior education and dramatically reduce the cost of higher education by removing the need for these professionals to make tough choices, such as resigning from full-time employment and relocating their families to pursue on-campus education.

In many cases, the opportunity cost of quitting their CSI jobs and relocating to Gainesville, FL to earn their master's degree in a traditional environment would have far exceeded the tuition of the education. This opportunity cost has been completely eliminated with the advent of online and blended learning.

3. Accelerating collaboration and sharing coursework reduces course development and teaching costs while increasing specialty options

The ADEC model has enabled like-minded educational institutions to offer students the ability to take specialty online courses that build on the particular expertise of one institution. This cross-acceptance of credits has reduced course development and teaching costs. Better yet, students have a wider set of specialty options, which ultimately drives higher enrollments.

Continuing with the example of University of Florida's forensic sci-

ence program, a U.S.-based student interested in forensic death investigation can take highly tailored courses offered by the University of Edinburgh combined with courses offered by the University of Florida. This arrangement allows the student, at the same reasonable tuition rate, access and instruction from the best in the world, no matter where the professor is located.

4. Globalizing online reach provides economic benefits for both universities and students

Through its multiple global partnerships, ADEC has enabled ubiquitous access to higher education for qualified students around the globe. Through the ADEC-supported model, students from 42 different countries have been able to earn a master's degree in forensic science from the University of Florida for less than \$17,000 (total).

International students no longer have to spend large amounts of money and time on immigration, travel and relocation to the United States to earn a master's degree or PhD. Online curriculum with global reach eliminates these expenses. What was once unaffordable for international students and a logistical admissions challenge for institutions will disappear before the end of the digital decade.



AUTHOR PROFILE

Current Position and Past Experience

Since 2013, Ian Tebbett has served as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC). Dr. Tebbett is also the director of the UF Forensic Sciences and Pharmaceutical Chemistry Programs and a professor in the University of Florida colleges of Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine. He previously held faculty positions with the Forensic Science programs at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland and the University of Illinois at Chicago (1988-92).

Education, Honors and Achievements

Tebbett earned his Bachelor of Pharmacy from London University and his PhD from Strathclyde University.

In 2011, Tebbett earned ADEC's Irving Award.