



David Clinefelter, chief academic officer, Walden University

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle #920, Bloomington, MN 55437

April 16, 2010

Present : Verne Johnson (Chair); David Broden, Janis Clay, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland (phone), Dan Loritz, Tim McDonald (phone), Jim Olson (phone) and Bob White

Key points made by Clinefelter: *Online and for-profit colleges and universities are the fastest growing component of the post-secondary education industry. They are growing in quality and appeal, serving many students for whom traditional settings do not work well. Increasingly students in mainline post-secondary schools are taking online courses as a supplement, or instead of, traditional classroom options. One way Minnesota could enter this market could be to start its own online public university, with an executive team separate from the management of established colleges and universities.*

A. Welcome and introductions - Verne and Paul welcomed and introduced David Clinefelter, Chief Academic Officer, Walden University. Clinefelter has a B.A. from Graceland University, Iowa and a master's and Ph.D. from the Ohio State University. He has joined Walden University within the last two weeks. Between 2002 and today he was vice president of academic affairs and provost, Kaplan University. Before joining Kaplan, Clinefelter was president of Graceland University. Earlier in his career he worked in K-12 education as a teacher, high school principal and superintendent of schools.

B. Comments and discussion -During Clinefelter's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus, the following points were raised:

1. Distance learning has a long history —The advent of the Internet (with online education) has made major expansion of distance learning possible. Distance learning, both (for-profit and non-profit) has been present for years in the form of correspondence courses, Clinefelter said.

2. Early experience at Graceland University —"When I was at Graceland, we had started a distance learning program in nursing—the first accredited program of its kind. At that time in the '80's it was correspondence," he said. "When I became academic dean at Graceland we expanded our online offerings out from nursing. Then I migrated into the for-profit side. There had always been proprietary schools and career schools operating for-profit. Since the early days of our country there were schools like this, preparing people for trades and business. If you went to college it was to be a minister, doctor, or lawyer."

3. Steep growth in recent years in online and for-profit universities— Kaplan Inc., which had been best known for its testing services, moved into higher education by purchasing another company called Quest Education Corporation. Quest owned a couple of schools in Iowa, including Hamilton College and the American Institute of Business, Clinefelter said. He joined Kaplan in 2002 to help turn the American Institute of Business into their online school, using the existing structure and accreditation as a platform. From this base Kaplan expanded to 60,000 students in seven years, he said.

Walden is based here in Minneapolis and has no campus' it's all online. Walden began in the early 70's, with doctorate degrees. Its niche was to tailor the PhD degree to people that needed independent study and non-traditional schedules. Walden grew quickly as well after being purchased by Laureate Learning Systems-from 5,000 to over 40,000 now. Laureate is an international corporation that owns 40+ universities around the world.

The University of Phoenix is best known nationally. It was founded by a university professor who wanted to serve adults. Phoenix is the largest educational institution in the world, with more than 450,000 students online or on campus.

Capella is also based in Minneapolis and is like Walden in that it focuses on doctorate and masters degrees. Most others focus on undergraduate and professional certifications. The big programs are business, criminal justice, paralegal studies, nursing and information technology.

DeVry, Strayer, ITT and Corinthians are others. "There are about a dozen of these universities that are online, for-profit. Some have campuses and some are all online," he said.

Nine percent of the undergraduate students in the country are attending for-profit universities. They are growing rapidly. "When I came into this industry (for-profit) it was 3 percent. In just under ten years the share of students in the country has tripled."

A study published two years ago in 2008 by the National Center for Educational Statistics found that in the 2006-07 academic year, two-thirds of 2-year and 4-year institutions reported offering online, hybrid/blended learning, or other distance education courses. Sixty-one percent of 2-year and 4-year institutions reported offering online courses, 35 percent reported blended courses and 26 percent reported other types of college-level credit-granting distance education courses.

The most common factors cited as reasons to pursue distance education are the demand for flexible schedules, access to college for students who would otherwise not have access and more available courses.

Find the report at: <http://tinyurl.com/ccbo7m> .

4. Role of non-profit colleges and universities in online learning — Graceland was an early leader and a traditional non-profit, he said. Today almost every public university has some form of online courses. MNSCU has programs that students can go to and take classes online and get a degree without ever entering the classroom.

The liberal arts colleges have been the slowest to get into online learning. Online doesn't make as much sense for their business model, which is about the campus experience.

"Since I've come into this business there has been more and more acceptance of the idea of online learning," he said. The environment was hostile at first. The number of students attending online classes is going up dramatically, both for-profit and non-profit. There seems to be no end in sight for this trajectory.

"There may be a student in a dorm room, on the U of M campus, taking a class online instead of going across campus. Universities have had to restrict this," it is so popular, he said.

A member observed that "non-profit" institutions still must make money and meet costs. The thought processes are not much different between non-profits and for-profits.

5. These schools are legitimate, accredited and on equal standing — A member asked Clinefelter how traditional institutions view the course credits from online, for-profit schools.

"There used to be a very strong bias against online and for-profit. But now with so many schools offering online programs it has faded."

The key thing for transfer of credit is not so much online or ground-based, but the accreditation. There are two forms of accreditation-regional and national. Regional is the most stringent. If you're the student of a regionally accredited institution, your credits will travel from one to another. But even though credits may transfer they do not always count because they may not work toward a particular degree program.

This is becoming an issue, as it is common for students to piece together their education from a variety of sources. "More and more students in the country are graduating with more credits than they need." It's an issue because these credits are paid for, by them and by the taxpayer through federal financial aid.

New models of learning are made possible, by technology. Some online courses do require in-person interaction, so schools may run a 'residency' program. Walden requires 20-day residencies for their PhD's. They rent +-hotel conference rooms for 4-6 days at a time and hold meetings.

In *blended* learning environments, students may come to class one day a week and online two; or classroom two and online one.

6. Facing critics and skeptics of online education— "I've had battles throughout my career," Clinefelter said, "with critics that say it's not 'real' education. Or that the relationships are lacking."

Online learning has a few advantages to the student, he argued:

- You have to be engaged. You can't fall asleep in the back of the room.
- You have to be active, participating in the discussion and communicating with classmates or faculty.
- It is conducive to different learning styles: the time, format and location.
- You can learn at your own time, on your own time.

— A lot of your biases go away when you're online—you deal with people based on their ideas, not their race, gender, or social or economic status. That's a powerful idea.

The US Department of Education commissioned a lit review of studies on online learning, published in 2009 (<http://tinyurl.com/yc9yd7u>). It found that in terms of student engagement, "blended" classroom /online learning turned out to be the most effective, followed second by online learning and, third, the traditional classroom.

Online discussions can be measured and thought-through, or live and spontaneous. There are benefits to being measured, but it is slower too. Online schools can do live discussions and blended programs can have spontaneity in the classroom component.

"At Kaplan we had a 1 hour program each week, where students would enter a live chat room with the professor."

7. Question of student failures — A member asked, what percentage of students at online schools fail? "This is a huge question," Clinefelter responded, "that for-profit schools talk about daily." The main metric they use is completion. Most for-profits do not talk about their graduation rates because there are many qualifiers.

Part of the challenge is that graduation rates have a lot to do with the type of student that enrolls and how schools filter during admissions. For-profits in general have higher-risk students: working parents, people that have not been in learning for a while.

At Kaplan they were comparable to an open enrollment, public university. That would be the 30-40 percent range.

Quality control is a common concern. "When I came to for-profit I was worried and skeptical. Would they abuse students? I found that it is precisely the opposite. The for-profit motive drives you to provide good customer service. You can take shortcuts on courses and quality, but you'll be put out of business."

8. Recommendations to government — For-profits are here, a member said to Clinefelter, and they are working. What should the government do? What would be your guidance to the legislature on what ought to be done to work with for-profit schools?

"It'd be fun to give a practical and impractical response..."

"Practically, provide better access with an online government university." Lay down something like the University of Maryland, University College. That school was set up by the state not as a subsidiary of an established university, but as its own entity.

"I've been involved with these public schools that are designed to serve adults—dealing with entire demographics that are not served well by most schools." They fit a particular mission and they provide access and educate people that the states need; and the states do need them badly.

Clinefelter advocates that the state create something like this. "Create it new and let it run. The United States needs more people with college education. We're slipping dramatically in the world rankings of

people with a college education. We have 28 percent in the country with a four-year degree. To be competitive on the world education stage we need 45-50 percent.

"The one thing the for-profits fear is a public online competitor. The publics have a brand. If the U of M created a good online program they'd be very tough to compete against."

In Maryland, what is the atmosphere between the online and the traditional learning systems? "They don't feel like they're competing, because they're working with two different demographics." They each have their own management.

MnSCU now delivers a very significant portion of its classes online-something approaching 25 percent. "Maybe they are the place where this component of public education will reside."

9. Online schools can be more productive — You must cover costs, a member observed. Tell us about the differences in financing between online and bricks-and-mortar.

Infrastructure is much less expensive at online schools. Faculty work from home. The for-profit folks have been very good at holding costs down because they hire many part time faculty. "But they must have the full time support staff," he said.

Online schools separate course preparation from the teaching of the courses. One group of professionals develops a course and its content. The teachers, then, all work from that developed material. All students take that same course and sometimes move at their own pace. "It is much more efficient," Clinefelter said, than each professor creating his/her own course.

A typical full time faculty member at Kaplan teaches 14 courses in a year. At a liberal arts college it maxes out at 8. And online they have up to 30 students in a course. Yet through the course structure the students communicate more with each other and with the professor than is often the case in the traditional setting.

There is a movement around the United States and around the world to create free material-called open source. There is a video on You Tube that shows a person explaining algebra in a way that is clear and makes sense. It has been viewed millions of times. Materials like this are beginning to replace expensive textbooks and free individual faculty members from designing their own learning materials.

Blended learning opens the proposition of productivity. "This question comes up in the defense industry" a member observed. "How are we going to train our engineers? The answer to which many are arriving is cooperative relationships with business."

Lab courses may be taught virtually and are very impressive. There are programs that do chemistry experiments online that are too dangerous or too expensive to do in person; like landings in a flight simulator. You're absolutely right there are some things that can't be done online, but the technology is getting better and better. Who knows what will be possible?

"This costs much less to the state. The cost is shouldered by the consumer, not the taxpayer."

10. Change is inevitable— "We're just seeing the start of a revolution," Clinefelter said in closing. The technology is moving in such a way that it is going to dramatically remake learning whether the legislature "lets" it or not.

This is called the long-tail phenomena. It's happened to news media and books, retailers and will happen to education. More and more quality educational material is going to be available for free. Wikipedia is creating a Wiki-University, where people can go and learn things from experts, for free. There is a company called Live Mocha that provides free foreign language instruction in part by linking two speakers in different parts of the world.

In this new context, the role of the university changes from providing to also validating the credit. "This is going back to when you just needed to be learned in the law, and pass the bar, to be a lawyer."