Proposal: University of Houston Extend

The University of Houston is home to more than 46,000 students taking for-credit courses in a multitude of disciplines. With very few exceptions, these courses are offered within the traditional long semesters during the fall and spring semesters, and summer sessions. Although additional short sessions allow for courses to be offered at other times during the semester, the truth is that over 99% of courses are offered in the long semesters of the fall and spring, or during the summer sessions. As a result, UH offers very little flexibility in for-credit course offerings, either for students or degree programs. On top of a lack of flexibility in course offerings, out of state students who are interested in our online degree programs are faced with nonresident tuition, while competing universities offer them either a resident rate, or an E-rate that lies somewhere between the resident and nonresident rate. Equally important, students who are accepted to UH during their senior year in high school, have almost no mechanism to enroll in courses at UH prior to the fall semester to which they are admitted. Finally, UH offers little hope of degree completion for former college students whose lives interfered with their earlier college careers, but still hope to complete their degrees. Given the on-demand state of our world, there might be some advantage to creating additional flexibility and affordability, both for continuing and incoming students.

In addition to students who have been accepted to UH, an untold number of students enroll in noncredit continuing education courses through individual colleges at UH, and at least one online vendor partnership. These courses are offered at a variety of times during the semester, but they can only be found by chance, on the individual websites associated with particular colleges or programs, or via a central website where only noncredit certificate programs from the College of Technology are listed. A prospective continuing education student has no mechanism for accessing a full listing of continuing education courses/programs at UH, and UH has no mechanism for accessing the students who are enrolling in these courses/programs, or maintaining records of their enrollment.

We propose a program at UH that offers students and college partners access and flexibility beyond the traditional structure. For the time being, we refer to this program below as the University of Houston Extend program.

We propose that the University of Houston Extend program provide

- an open market for adult learners,
- a portal for college partners seeking to offer noncredit and for-credit courses and programs in flexible and innovative venues,
- an opportunity for recruiting graduate students,
- an early course enrollment gateway for admitted undergraduates,
- a mechanism to potentially improve student success, and decrease summer melt,
- a mechanism for easy return of armed services and former students from years ago, without penalty, through general studies or multidisciplinary degrees offered through Extend,
- an online platform which serves as a UH global channel which would house short Ted type videos by our professors, videos of past guest lecturers, past athletic events and possibly short narrative films and web-series created by students and faculty.

We further propose that Extend college partners

- have the flexibility to schedule courses outside the constraints of traditional course and semester structures,
- have the ability to offer an E-rate to nonresident students in for-credit online degree programs,
- benefit from improved revenue sharing,
- benefit from both vendor and academic agreements to increase college revenue.

We expand on these items below.

**Centralized Portal for Noncredit and For-credit Courses and Programs**

*Extend* will provide a single portal displaying a full catalog of learning opportunities for both non-credit and for-credit students, and provide a way to enroll in both non-credit and for-credit courses and programs offered through *Extend*. College partners offering courses and programs through *Extend* will have the flexibility to be innovative in design and scheduling. A multitude of delivery options will be available, including traditional, rapid pace, immersive, modular, and self-paced. Colleges will have the option to offer courses and programs face-to-face, hybrid, online, or mixed, with nontraditional schedules, outside of traditional semester structures. It will be possible to offer cross-disciplinary courses and programs from partnering colleges through *Extend*, and learners in *Extend* will have full access to selected courses from multiple colleges, as well as library materials related to online and distance learning, and data resources. All *Extend* courses and programs will be offered through a central Learning Management System, with branding consistent with UH and the college offering the courses and programs. Pricing for courses will be set by *Extend* and the Colleges offering courses and programs, with the potential for subscription pricing during selected times of the year, where students can pay one price to access as many courses as possible during a time period. In addition, *Extend* college partners will have access to video streaming services to deliver content for their courses and programs offered through *Extend*, simple captioning capability for video, and mechanisms for archiving and retrieving video content for repeated use. This will promote efficiency in scale and resource utilization, and will also make it attractive for research-active faculty to engage in the *Extend* enterprise, knowing that their initial efforts can have multiplying and long-term payoffs.

Since *Extend* college partners will offer courses through a central hub, all colleges and programs will have access to students enrolled in *Extend* courses and programs, whether for credit or not. Admitted degree-seeking and non-degree seeking students in *Extend* will receive credit in for-credit courses, and continuing education students will receive certificates of completion from UH in non-credit courses. *Extend* will maintain all records for enrollments in these courses, and colleges and departments will have the ability to identify select students in *Extend*, and consider them for admission to their degree programs, and possible use of credits earned through *Extend*. Of course, colleges and departments will make all admission decisions for their programs. Additionally, *Extend* will serve as a central repository of short videos that our students can use to learn about career paths in industry, and professional and graduate school opportunities. At present, much of this information is siloed or difficult to find.

**Early Course Enrollment for Newly Admitted Undergraduates**

One of the many benefits of flexible scheduling through *Extend* will be the ability of college partners to offer early course enrollment to undergraduate students soon after they are admitted to the university. This process can be used to address summer melt, college transition, and student admission to their first-choice degree program. The University loses a considerable number of students between the time of admission and enrollment the following fall. While the causes of this melt are varied, at least in part, the causes include not being connected in meaningful ways to UH in those intervening months. *Extend* can provide a vehicle that allows admitted students to enroll during the spring or summer, prior to their official fall start, in a curated list of for-credit courses (some taught on campus, and others taught online), and ultimately help reduce the melt attributable to the time between admission and enrollment. This
option might be particularly attractive to early-college high school students if a supplemental articulation agreement can be reached with high schools, making a 3+3 high school and bachelor’s degree program possible. Student success is often a product of students struggling to transition from high school expectations to college expectations. Extend can offer support programs to ease students’ transition to college and to enhance student success. Even though the UH Library does not enroll students, our librarians could use the Extend infrastructure to develop and offer online professional training modules, or even certification for students to demonstrate information literacy, either prior to taking a class or as part of a class. In addition, Extend can assist both students a faculty by linking them to the UH Library Open Educational Resources (https://libraries.uh.edu/oer/). Faculty can help all UH students by building this information into their syllabi. As a result, the Extend infrastructure can also be relevant to the traditional classroom setting as well, and make non classroom activities (perhaps English proficiency, Composition, or Mathematics preparation) easier to achieve, thus encouraging students to enroll. Extend College partners will have the opportunity to increase their incoming enrollments, and also create contracted learning with students who have not been accepted to their programs, but wish to earn performance-based acceptance. Extend has the potential to provide courses to help students manage schedules which will be much busier than their high school schedules, and offer assistance to undergraduate students who learn differently.

Evidence suggests that retention rates are negatively affected when students enroll at UH but are not admitted to their first-choice college or major. Students may choose to not enroll, attend and eventually transfer, or eventually drop out of college, rather than settle for a less-desirable college and major. Extend college partners can create contracted learning for students who have not been accepted to their programs, but wish to earn performance-based acceptance. Extend can offer bridge programs that enroll students in a packaged set of core courses in the summer, prior to their fall enrollment, with the promise that if students achieve a pre-defined level of success, they will be enrolled in their preferred college and major alongside their cohort of entering students. This will likely enhance retention and student success. Students will be enrolled in the packaged set of courses depending on their intended target major and receive coordinated curricula across courses and enhanced support systems aimed at achieving success. If successful, not only would revenue be generated by these summer courses, but also generated by enhanced retention and graduation rates, as well as alumni satisfaction and giving. As an alternative, if issues with early financial aid stand as a barrier to early enrollment for accepted freshmen in spring and summer courses, payments can be deferred until the following fall, with the debt cancelled entirely for students who enroll and pay for 15 or more hours in the fall. Again, we believe the potential increase in future revenue will far outweigh the initial cost.

Degree Completion for Military Personnel and Former Students

Extend can also become a home for military personnel who need flexible schedules to complete coursework and degrees, and Extend can serve as a home for multidisciplinary or general studies degree programs for students who completed coursework years ago, but were forced to abandon their academic pursuits for family or work, and want to return and complete their degree. We propose that these students be allowed to apply their past credits without penalty, through a general studies or multidisciplinary degree offered through Extend. Both groups of students could benefit from refresher courses to prepare in reintegrating themselves into their field, and Extend college partners could offer these courses outside the traditional semester setting.

Optometry currently receives shadowing requests from practitioners who simply need clinical refreshers before they go back to private practice. There is clearly a need, but people don’t know where to begin or
how to ask for assistance. Along these lines, Extend could serve as a centralized hub for internship opportunities for all UH students.

**Flexible Affordable Online Programs**

*Extend* college partners will have the option to offer additional flexibility to working adults in their online degree programs (through innovative scheduling), and also have the option to offer an E-rate to nonresident students in their for-credit online degree programs. Online enrollment at UH has grown significantly over the past few years, to nearly 300k SCH in combined online and hybrid courses in FY2019, and we anticipate 330k SCH in FY2020. Most of this enrollment currently comes from our traditional students taking additional online coursework to increase their SCH, with many of these courses not being part of any online or hybrid degree program. UH has also grown the number of available online degree programs during this time, with the most significant growth at the graduate level. At present, we have 25 online graduate programs (http://www.uh.edu/online/), and all but two of these programs allow students to take courses either fully online or as a mixture of online and face to face. Since the majority of enrollment in these programs is from students residing in the Houston area, we see most students taking a mixture of both. The enrollment of nonresident students in these programs is incredibly small. The total SCH taken in Spring 2019 by nonresident students enrolled fully online, in online graduate degree programs was 104. **This enrollment was the result of 21 nonresident students** enrolled in 10 of our 25 online degree programs. By contrast, thousands of SCH were generated by resident students who were enrolled fully online in Spring 2019 in online degree programs.

There are two primary factors associated with the lack of enrollment from nonresident students. These are cost and admissions. Currently, all of our online degree programs charge nonresident tuition to nonresident students, even though the policy of the State of Texas allows universities to set their own rates for nonresident students who are fully online. Some of our competitors in the online space have a so-called E-rate for students in these programs, which is charged regardless of their residency status, and others have an E-rate that is charged based upon residency status. In nearly all cases, the E-rate for nonresident students is well below their standard nonresident rate, and well below our current rates. Three examples are shown below for the M. Ed. in Educational Leadership, the M.S. in Business Management, and the M.S. in Technology. In each case, the price point is well below our nonresident price point, making it difficult for our programs to compete for nonresident students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online, Nonresident</th>
<th>M. Ed. In Educational Leadership</th>
<th>M.S. in Business Leadership/Management</th>
<th>M.S. in Information Technology</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UT Arlington</td>
<td>$273 per SCH</td>
<td>$1,174 per SCH</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State University</td>
<td>$615 per SCH</td>
<td>$1,030 per SCH</td>
<td>$944 per SCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn State Worldwide</td>
<td>$903 per SCH</td>
<td>$1,215 per SCH</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UH</td>
<td>$984 per SCH</td>
<td>$1,365 per SCH</td>
<td>$1,129 per SCH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At present, our online graduate degree programs have admission deadlines that are more restrictive than our competitors. The programs listed above are revisited in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2019 Application Deadlines</th>
<th>M. Ed. In Educational Leadership</th>
<th>M.S. in Business Leadership/Management</th>
<th>M.S. in Information Technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UT Arlington</td>
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<td>7/26</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn State Worldwide</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UH</td>
<td>6/1</td>
<td>6/1</td>
<td>7/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enrollment by nonresident students in online degree programs produced a paltry $100k in revenue in Spring 2019. Individual colleges should review their current online degree programs with an eye towards competitive pricing, keeping in mind that our prices will need to fall between resident rates and the prices at ASU and Penn State. In many cases, we will not be able to meet the price point at UT Arlington, and for many programs, their price point should not be our target. However, we do need to be mindful of the price points at PSU and ASU, and we should note that we will have a difficult time competing if we simply meet the rates of ASU and Penn State, because they have aggressive marketing budgets that we do not have, (typically) later application deadlines, and a quicker turn-around in the student application process. As a result, with everything else being equal, the programs at ASU, Penn State, and similar universities, will prevail.

*Extend* college partners will have more flexible enrollment and scheduling options, the ability to determine an E-rate for 100% online nonresident students in their online programs, and revenue sharing (see below) that will motivate participation and drive enrollment. This will no-doubt also encourage some programs to develop online versions of their traditional face to face programs, develop custom online programs tailor made for specific industrial partnerships, and set an E-rate for nonresident students who are 100% enrolled in their online programs.

**UH Global Channel**

*Extend* will allow for the UH community to have access to all kinds of material via the Global Channel with links to UH research talks, TED-type talks, the Special Collection series ([https://libraries.uh.edu/branches/special-collections/](https://libraries.uh.edu/branches/special-collections/)) from the UH Library, and locally produced entertainment, and sell advertising space, provide free access to some content, and charge a monthly subscription for additional content. This centralized media space for the majority of our UH content, both as entertainment and as educational offerings, would create a stronger online community for our students, staff and faculty, and could serve as a "returning space" for our alumni and mature students who want to stay connected to UH, and serve as a central link to social media associated with all programs on campus. The UH Library currently offers an audio/video repository at [https://av.lib.uh.edu/](https://av.lib.uh.edu/) which could partner with *Extend* in this endeavor.

**Extend Program Details**

*Extend* will also serve as a mechanism for colleges to benefit from both vendor and academic agreements to increase college revenue. This will include licensing agreements for content, courses and certificate sequences developed by Colleges, and offered at outside universities, and revenue sharing agreements with conference organizers.

Along these lines, *Extend* college partners will have the opportunity to increase their revenue through flexible offerings, competitive pricing set by colleges (in consultation with the UH CFO office), and a revenue sharing agreement between UH and Colleges. This ability will no-doubt also encourage some existing degree programs to develop online versions of their traditional face to face programs, develop custom programs for industrial partners, and set an E-rate for nonresident students who are 100% enrolled in online degree programs. Revenue sharing between *Extend* college partners and UH in noncredit courses is proposed to be 20%-80%. Revenue sharing between *Extend* college partners and UH in for-credit courses is proposed to be $83.33 per SCH in lower level undergraduate courses, and 40%-60% (based upon tuition) in upper level and graduate level courses. Revenue splits for programs offered through *Extend*, and arranged with an Online Marketing Provider or Coursera, will be negotiated on a case by case basis, and based upon net revenue received after vendor splits.