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Mapping the Continuing Professional Development Jungle: The University of Alberta Amazon Project

Higher education institutions in Canada have existed since the establishment of New France (Harris, 1966). As the nation grew, universities developed and expanded to meet the educational needs of the time. Today Canadian universities deliver programs to over 573,100 full-time students (Jones, 1997). It would be a mistake, however, to look at full-time enrollment as a representation of the entire student population. Universities are beginning to see changing patterns of enrollment. In the 1997-1998 school year, for example, 249,700 students studied on a part-time basis (Statistics Canada, 1998). This not only involved students in undergraduate and graduate degree education, but learners in nondegree and continuing professional development (CPD) programs.

What is the reason for this change? A single degree can no longer be viewed as an entry into the world of employment. Continuing professional development has become a lifelong process and a necessity. As society comes to this realization, more people enroll in courses and access knowledge resources that meet their specific needs, whether they are about developing competences, for personal growth, or both. This trend will ultimately lead to further change in enrollment patterns in the university. Institutions of higher education must recognize this and prepare to meet the needs of the future.

This report discusses briefly how the University of Alberta has met the new demand for CPD through the establishment of the Amazon Project, an initiative aimed at mapping CPD activities available through the University. It is our hope that a better understanding of the approach taken for the Amazon Project will help prepare others in the future who choose to take on such a task.

The Institute for Professional Development

The University of Alberta anticipated a change in society's education needs and met the challenge through the establishment of the Institute for Professional Development (IPD) in the Faculty of Extension. The goal of the Institute is to promote the advanced study and innovative practice of CPD. In addition to its research, development, and knowledge management functions, IPD also

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works collaboratively with faculties and professional associations to deliver programs, courses, and other learning resources that knowledge workers require and that are delivered in a manner that meets their needs.

The Amazon Project

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) posit that one of the primary obstacles to the participation of adults in education is a barrier to information. Although many of the professional faculties at the University of Alberta offer degree and nondegree CPD programs, there has been no university-wide organization of these activities to date. This poses a problem to many learners. It became evident to the IPD that a tool was needed to help learners, clients, and partners to navigate through the CPD forest in search of knowledge resources that are often difficult to locate in a large university.

The IPD launched the Amazon Project in September 1998 motivated by the need to gain a better understanding of the landscape of CPD at the University. The initial intention was to create a searchable database or map of CPD resources available through the University of Alberta. By creating a knowledge database that mapped resources and opportunities, it was believed that the IPD would be in a position to provide better service to faculty, alumni, professional associations, corporations, and adult learners around the world. The Amazon Project initiative, however, became more complicated as the team began to plan their journey.

The Forest Metaphor

The first challenge the Amazon Project experienced was defining the scope of the initiative. As the Amazon Project team explored further into the CPD forest, it discovered a wider array of creatures and habitats. Most were familiar species, but others were new and called for scientific inquiry. Mapping the CPD resources in a large institution is like mapping the Amazon forest, a formidable task as the research team explores the ever-changing landscape. Challenges such as how to define the terms *profession*, *continuing education*, and *continuing professional development* have become part of the adventure of mapping the CPD forest. In addition, information and statistics regarding the continuing education activities on campus have been difficult to find, and even when they are available they provide only partial answers that can even be misleading.

Political Implications of CPD Mapping

Another challenge the Amazon Project has faced is suspicion and resistance from various faculties in the University of Alberta. Maps influence the definition of territories. By creating knowledge maps of CPD, the IPD mapmakers may be perceived as having "staked out" their political territories. As declarations of boundaries maps can be a threat to those whose claims have already been made. It has become important, therefore, for IPD to state specifically that it does not directly deliver CPD programs, but rather serves as a center for expertise for others pursuing advanced study and innovative practice. Instead of competing with other faculties, the IPD was designed to work with other faculties and departments in pursuing the missions of the university, specifically in the area of knowledge workers, professions, professional associations,

professionalization, and professional development. IPD's goal is not to provoke political and territorial conflict. Rather, it is to promote the advanced study and practice of CPD by assembling resources, facilitating innovation, and stimulating synergy among stakeholders in the complex jungle of CPD.

Finding Our Way Together

These challenges have had a profound effect on the progress of the Amazon Project. The most important lesson that IPD has learned to date is that it must work collaboratively in defining terms and developing maps. Only when the IPD mapmakers gain a better understanding of the clients' needs will they be able to truly help learners find their way around the University's CPD forest.

The research continues as the team maneuvers through the complexities of the territory. It is important, however, to understand fully the intricate workings of the CPD forest in order to find one's way around. The IPD will continue to move forward through exploratory research, reexamining definitions to be used and collecting more data regarding CPD, hoping that they will all someday contribute toward a complete map.

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