

# Proprietary Universities: Drivers of Diversity and Innovation in Online Higher Education

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# Who we are...

## Ron Richard, PhD

- ▶ Manager, Course & Program Development
- ▶ Doctorate in Education from McGill
- ▶ Designer and Instructor face2face and distance courses at McGill, Concordia and U of Windsor
- ▶ LMS, faculty development

## Karen Ludwig, MA, MEd

- ▶ Director, Academic Affairs
- ▶ PhD candidate
- ▶ Award-winning instructor
- ▶ Instructor at MeritusU, UNB, NBCC, UPEI



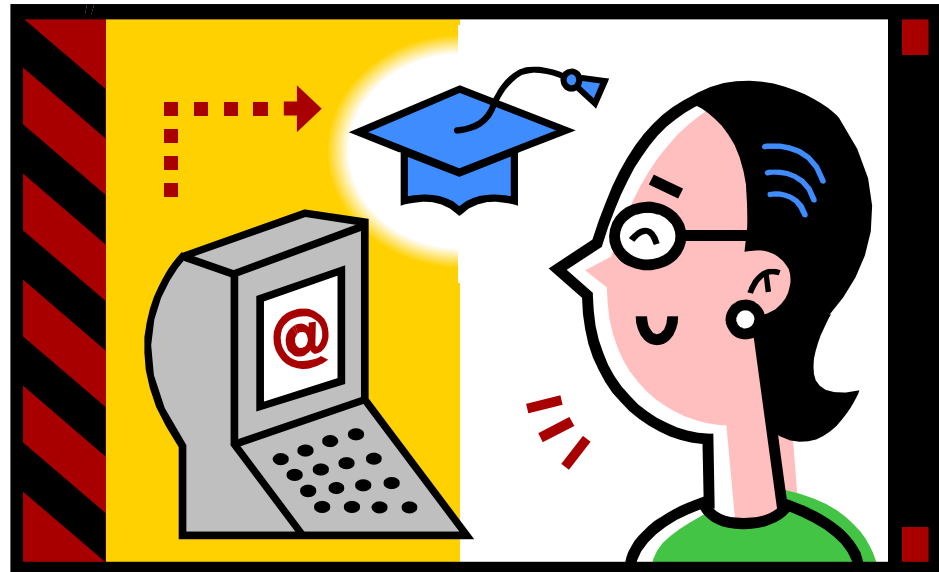
# What we are...

Meritus is a fully accredited, online university

Global, mobile, innovative, and competitive

Proprietary

- ▶ Privately owned
- ▶ For-profit



# Why here (Canada), why now?

- 36%** Percentage of business professionals who said they were interested in completing an undergraduate degree
- 48%** Percentage of business professionals who were interested in completing a Master's degree
- 52%** Percentage of the business community who believes that the value of an online education is equivalent to that of the traditional system
- 88%** Percentage of employers who would hire an employee with an online degree
- 92%** Percentage of the business community who said they would consider online education
- 96%** Percentage of the business community who confirmed that pursuing an educational degree, which enables them to maintain their current working schedule, appeals to them
- 98%** Percentage of employers who would encourage their employees to upgrade their education through online learning



# What do we want?

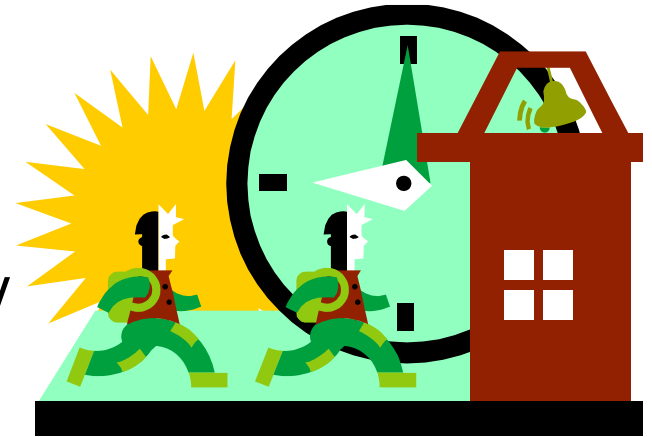
To bring education to people who require different access

70% of jobs require a post-secondary education – but only 40% get it

Our market is the remaining 60% who cannot access a university degree delivered in a traditional manner

“Next generation learners” want to

- ▶ Improve financial security for their family
- ▶ Gain respect from credential
- ▶ Prove their doubters wrong
- ▶ Become role models for their children



# So, what are we...really?

A university that, like any university, must adopt sound business as well as academic practices.

Our business model incorporates innovation in the field of online, higher education.



# A closer look...

Our market is a diverse and uniquely modern entity:

**Adults**

**Mid-career professionals**

**Domestic and international locations**

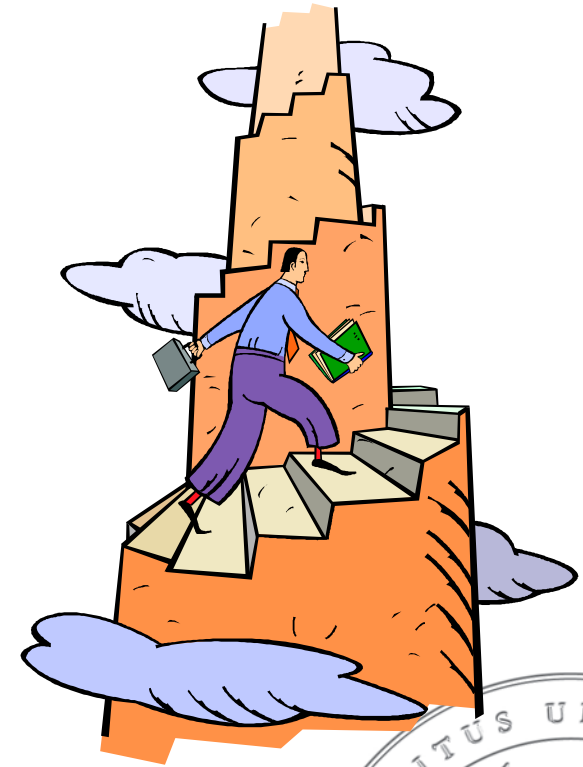
**Personal (family) and professional limitations to their time and geographic availability**

The need in this market is for an accredited university degree.

**To change careers**

**To earn a promotion**

**To meet company PD goals**



# Our market research informs our praxis

- ▶ Stay current
- ▶ Design courses and programs based on sound andragogy (pedagogy for grown ups)
- ▶ Focus on
  - ▶ **Learning effectiveness**
  - ▶ **Cost effectiveness**
  - ▶ **Our students**



## Our product:

- ▶ Is a quality education that acknowledges what the student already knows
- ▶ Is rooted in real-world scenarios and experience
- ▶ Encourages discussion and peer-reaction



# Our product:

- ▶ Uses the same textbooks and covers the same subject areas that traditional universities do
- ▶ Has the same educational objectives that traditional universities do
- ▶ Is facilitated by experts in their fields, but who have also been specifically trained on how to teach our target students using our unique delivery system



# Our delivery method

- ▶ It is delivered entirely online
- ▶ It is asynchronous
- ▶ It has frequent course offerings





# Our delivery method

- ▶ Provides all textbooks and other resources to the students – for life
- ▶ Provides skilled and empathetic advisors (Graduation Team) at every step of the process for every student from application through graduation

**A happy, engaged and successful student is a repeat student, and our best advertising**



# Incentives and Obstacles for Faculty Influencing Higher Education

Incentives	Obstacles
Providing innovative instruction	Time requirements
Applying new teaching techniques	Developing effective technology skills
Fulfilling a personal desire to teach	Assistance and support needs
Receiving recognition of your work	Perceived lack of institutional support and training
Gaining Peer recognition	Inadequate compensation
Building teaching experience	Loss of control over curriculum
Continuing lifelong learning	Lack of release time for planning

(Parker, 2003; Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz & Marx, 1999)

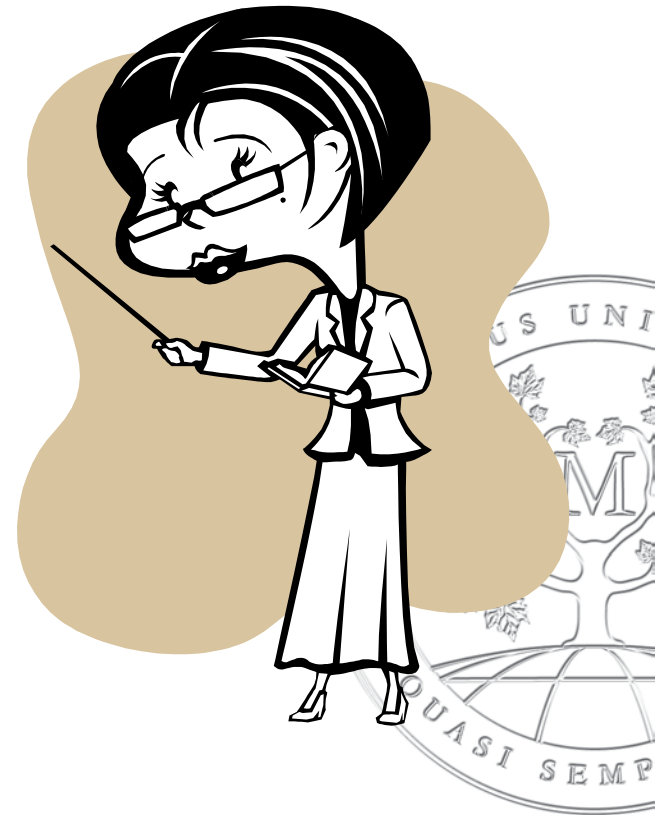


# Unbundling of Faculty Roles

Traditionally, faculty are often expected to fulfill specialized functions:

- ▶ Research
- ▶ Teaching
- ▶ Departmental commitments
- ▶ Course design or curriculum
- ▶ Course development
- ▶ Academic Advising
- ▶ Limited technical support

(Paulson, 2002)



# Unbundling of Faculty Roles

Meritus faculty are expected to fulfill a single specialized function:

## Teaching

*(facilitation, not lecturing)*

Research and course development are optional

- Faculty can apply to the University Academic Council for research support
- Faculty often choose to serve as Subject Matter Experts in a separate course development process, in conjunction with instructional designers





# The Meritus Example

## Preparing Faculty for Online

### Meritus University (it's not about the technology)

Time management strategies are incorporated into faculty development program

Courses developed by a team of subject matter experts

Faculty are provided with course materials, grading rubric, and guides

Faculty and students have access to 24/7 technical support

Professional development opportunities are offered to faculty and students

Faculty are coached and mentored by seasoned colleagues through their first few classes

Appropriate hardware is a prerequisite

Appropriate software is a prerequisite



# The Meritus example: One step toward the new paradigm

- ▶ Online seminar format: reading, research, writing, discussion, simulations, group work, problem solving; lectures, tests and exams avoided
- ▶ Curriculum and courses: centrally developed to high and consistent standards
- ▶ Teaching: faculty practitioners to facilitate and mentor; faculty are trained, monitored, and supported
- ▶ Students: incentives to read, write, discuss, participate, collaborate
- ▶ Not technologically sophisticated.



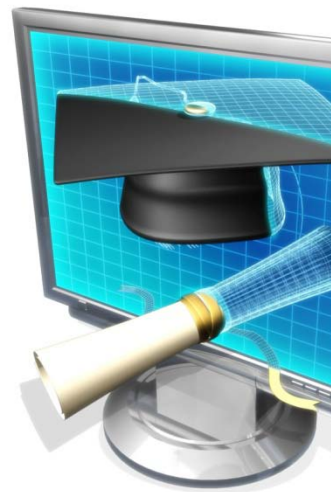
# Strategies for developing quality *Faculty* experience

- ▶ Offer ongoing faculty coaching
- ▶ Fund faculty research requests (2% of revenue to support research)
- ▶ Facilitate regular online faculty seminars to exchange ideas and discuss best practices
- ▶ Connect faculty who teach same subject areas
- ▶ Encourage faculty feedback in course content



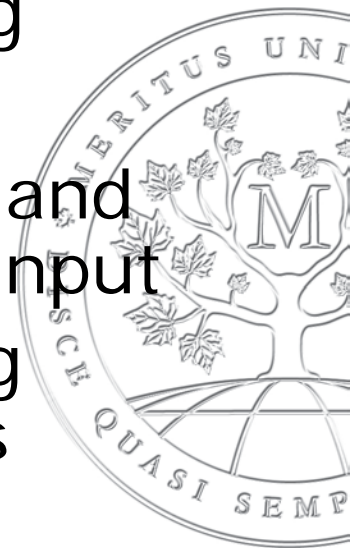
# Strategies for developing quality *Student* experience

- ▶ Offer an extensive and inclusive academic advising and support system
- ▶ Provide a “Walk to Class” and on-going follow-up
- ▶ Value international student experiences and incorporate them into a globalized approach to content and collaboration
- ▶ Provide lifetime access to graduates to the University library, tutorials, WritePoint, Plagiarism Checker, and E-Books



## Wrap-up: Unique features to the Meritus Model

- ▶ Target next generation learners
- ▶ Lifetime access to learning through access to library and e-books
- ▶ Personalized and individualized academic advising support
- ▶ Faculty training and on-going coaching
- ▶ 24-hour response to student issues
- ▶ Courses are independently developed and revised based on student and faculty input
- ▶ Nimble approach to change in meeting industry, teaching, and learning needs



# References

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- Rockwell, S.K., Schauer, J., Fritz, S.M., & Marx, D.B. (1999). Incentives and obstacles influencing higher education: Faculty and administrators to teach via distance. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, II(III). Retrieved from <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/rockwell24.html>

# Questions?

- ▶ We will make copies of this presentation available to CAUCE for inclusion in the conference resources.
- ▶ This presentation will also shortly be available online at SlideShare (*login at <http://www.slideshare.net/search> and search: Meritus*)
- ▶ *Or, contact us directly! We'd love to hear from you.*
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