



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 24: PAM SUZADAIL – ONLINE LEARNING

Ken White

The College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from all across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. Well, just about every business and industry is dealing with change caused by advances in technology. One field that's experiencing considerable change thanks to technology is higher education, and in higher ed, the world's top business schools have taken a leadership role in bringing technology into the curriculum. In fact, now several highly ranked business schools, including William & Mary's Mason School of Business, offer fully online MBA programs. Technology is having a considerable impact on business education and higher education. Pam Suzadail is the Director of the online MBA program at William & Mary's Mason School of Business. She's been in the distance learning space for 15 years. She joins us on the podcast to discuss online learning and its place in higher education. Here's our conversation with Pam Suzadail.

Ken White

Pam, thank you for being here. Thanks for taking the time. I love talking to you about online education. This is your area. It's a fascinating area, and you spend much of your time in the MBA space, of course. What types of programs are out there regarding online MBAs?

Pam Suzadail

All types of programs exist now, and it's evolving every day. The programs are primarily designed for adult learners, although some schools like William & Mary are now offering courses undergraduate courses for their undergraduate students or students from other schools. When schools are designing programs, the faculty really need to make a decision on whether the program is going to be a blended format or hybrid format or whether they want to go totally online. And then once they decide to go totally online, that's when you start making decisions on whether it's going to be synchronized, asynchronous, whether you're going to have a residency component. And the other features that you see in online

or any MBA program. There's tradeoffs. So these are strategic decisions that need to be made with the faculty and with the administration.

Ken White

So there is not real there's no one definition for an online degree, is there? There seems to be a lot of variation.

Pam Suzadail

Absolutely not. And that's one of the reasons why I really like the field because it's a really you can start to be really creative in what you put together.

Ken White

One of the words you mentioned was blended. What's that mean, for example?

Pam Suzadail

Blended means that there is a significant on-campus requirement or, you know on, site requirement. Doesn't necessarily have to be on the campus. Something like our Flex program has the facility in Newport News at the Peninsula center. So you know, programs like that could start to integrate, you know, online components to it to become blended.

Ken White

Got it. So there could be face-to-face classes and then some that are online or maybe one class that involves both.

Pam Suzadail

Right. Exactly. That's right, and when you said there's no real definition even with blended, I mean you could have, you know, 50 percent of the class could be, the 50 percent of the class itself could be online, or you could have 50 percent of the classes be online. And then the other 50 percent be on campus, you know, be face to face. So yeah. There's really no definition, and you know, I just got back from a conference, and they kind of went through some of how people think about the differences between these programs, and there still really isn't any clear definition across the industry which I think is really fascinating at this point there really isn't anything that defines what exactly is online and what exactly defines blended.

Ken White

So let's talk about a more or less fully online program where someone can stay at home and study. We're launching, or we have launched, William & Mary in the Mason School, an online MBA program. What does a student get there? What what does that consist of?

Pam Suzadail

So I mean, online programs are really the same as far as the education that you're getting. You should be getting the same education as you're getting in your face-to-face programs. They're not watered down. One of my favorite things it's not an easier path to an MBA. In fact, a lot of times, it can be more rigorous. You know the way it works. You know, students log into the website, which we call learning management system, and they know they log in to the site and they log into their class. They get into their class, and whatever that assignment might be for the day or for the week is what they'll be working on. Assignments vary from discussion boards. There's collaboration in these classes. They'll watch some video, and as you know, we just discussed, video is becoming less critical in these programs where there's really becoming there's been a lot of research on how matching learning objectives to the actual activity that the students participating in and video is really starting to not be as prevalent. Students their attention span has been reduced. I'm seeing no 30-second retention spans on video. So there's other ways to engage students.

Ken White

But the student is sitting in the office at home, log on, go from there.

Pam Suzadail

You could be sitting anywhere. They can be sitting on the train. They can be sitting waiting for the airport. You know I completed my MBA online, and I did a lot of my work waiting for the plane.

Ken White

Yeah, why not, right? What a great idea to use your time.

Pam Suzadail

Exactly.

Ken White

Who's attracted to an online degree?

Pam Suzadail

Mostly working professionals, but really at the end of the day, it's people that cannot commit to that face-to-face time and don't think about it. I don't think about geography. It's more about that time commitment. So really, an online student could be next door to the school, but they just can't make it to class every Tuesday night.

Ken White

Right.

Pam Suzadail

Right. And so it's more about that time commitment.

Ken White

In the online program here at the Mason School that you're leading. What's the class profile? Who are some of the people in there? What do they do, age, experience, and so forth?

Pam Suzadail

Sure. So we have our first cohort was 50 students, primarily from the state of Virginia. We had 60 percent from the state of Virginia, about 80 percent from the region, and 20 percent from outside of the region. We have an average work experience of 12 years, and they are coming from primarily there was three industries and career areas that they were coming from. It was government, consulting, and financial services, so that made up 50 percent of the class. These are really high achievers in this program. We have a diplomat in the program who's in Beijing right now. And so they're just very. They're high achievers. They've been very successful in their careers, and they're really looking at this as a credential that they just don't have and that they need it to get to the next level.

Ken White

Yeah. Now, this is new for faculty. You know when we think faculty. That's someone who stands up in front of a large group and facilitates or lectures. So what has it been like for you and your career? This isn't new you. You've been doing this for quite a while. What's it like to train a professor to move into this new mode of delivery?

Pam Suzadail

So first, I mean, you have to make sure that you get a faculty member who wants to. Right. There's no it's really difficult to tell a faculty member to that they need to teach online. So that's the first step is you've get somebody who's a faculty member who's very interested in learning about it and teaching online. The second is schools really need to have a fully robust faculty development program for online. And so, and there's two parts of that. One is about developing your class to go online. And then the second part is actually delivering the online content. So there's really two parts of that development. Once you have that faculty develop pretty quickly or adapt pretty quickly, and they really really enjoy it. And it's interesting what fascinates me is when they start seeing how they can improve their face-to-face classes on what they're learning in the classroom. One thing that with online learning, it's really the first time that faculty are working with teaching and learning

professionals and how to best deliver their content. You know face to face classes faculty don't go through development training, really. They are content experts, and they get into the classroom, and they teach the content, but nobody ever really sat down and told them or helped them kind of figure out how they were going to deliver that content in a face-to-face environment. So when they start working in the online, they have that professional that's working with them, and they can really start start start seeing how that can improve their face-to-face classes.

Ken White

We'll continue our discussion on online learning with Pam Suzadail in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. If you're looking to improve your leadership and business skills, the Center for Corporate Education has some terrific programs scheduled in the upcoming weeks. Finance for the non-financial professional, rapid cycle innovation for healthcare professionals, and a five-day certificate program in business management are all on the calendar. For more information, check out the center's website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with Pam Suzadail on online learning.

Ken White

Years ago, when we first started to hear about online education in higher ed, people would roll their eyes right. There was this stigma. How has that changed? How have you seen that change?

Pam Suzadail

It's definitely changing. When I first started, there was very few schools in online, and it wasn't widely accepted. I remember talking to career recruiters, you know, job recruiters, and they weren't even considering online students at that point. So I think as more schools have been, more quality schools have been launching programs. And also as the technology has just advanced to the point where it's actually improving some of the learning outcomes. I think it's definitely becoming much more accepted. The other piece of it is that graduates of these programs are now getting into the workforce, so they know the quality of what they can you know what you can get in an online program, and so they're able to advocate within their companies for these students. So it's definitely changing.

Ken White

Advocate just by their performance alone.

Pam Suzadail

Exactly.

Ken White

They don't even have to talk about it.

Pam Suzadail

Exactly.

Ken White

If they're getting it done, people, people realize. When you get an online MBA or an online degree on your resume, may do you say it's online, or do you just simply list the. Does it matter?

Pam Suzadail

No, you know I don't. I wouldn't say that it matters, but you don't have to list that it's online, and I wouldn't recommend that you do. I mean, the MBA is an MBA. It doesn't matter how it's delivered. And it's this should be the same MBA as you're on-campus programs. So there's really you don't put face-to-face MBA on your resume.

Ken White

Right. When professionals are thinking about an MBA or some other type of a graduate online degree, what do they have to do to prepare in terms of do I need my transcripts? Do I need to take the GMAT exam? What do I have to do?

Pam Suzadail

Well, for William & Mary, we have the same admissions requirements as we have for our other programs. And I think that is something that is important. I mean, the school wants to make sure that you're accepting the same quality of applicants as you would for any of your programs. So that includes transcripts from all of your colleges. That includes essays. There's an interview required for the online MBA. There's an application, obviously, you know, that you have to fill out. GMATs are required, and they still remain critical. Being able to assess math skills is important. However, many programs are now offer waivers, and William & Mary does as well. But again, it's still really. We offer a waiver, and other schools do, but it's still critical that it's some way you're able to assess the math skills. MBA still is a quantitative degree, and so the students need to be able to come in and be able to be successful in those math classes.

Ken White

Behind the curtain, what actually happens? I mean, you don't just start this. You know you're at a traditional campus, and now you have an online program. Do you have partnerships, or how does it actually work?

Pam Suzadail

So it's all of the above. Think about it as a startup office that's very much a very entrepreneurial kind of spirit that you have to develop and how all companies launch. I mean, that's how you think about how you're going to launch an online program. So if you have to get into a partnership, if there's some infrastructure that you need to develop, maybe a little bit of both. So schools have to look at what their resources are and what their long-term strategy is and then decide on which kind of direction they want to go in.

Ken White

If I'm if I think, I might be interested in an online graduate degree or any type of a degree online, as the prospective student as they're referred to. Where do you start? What are the steps you should take?

Pam Suzadail

So the first thing is to do your research really. I mean, again, there's a lot of new programs being launched every year. And you know it's really critical that you find a program that's the right fit for you. You know, at William & Mary, we'd love to have everybody be interested in our program, but at the same time, we know we want to make sure that the students would be successful in a program as do other schools. So you really do want to understand your research understand what your options are. The next thing is look at your own support at home and in your office. It's not. I think I said this earlier it's not an easier path to an MBA. It really isn't, and there isn't a time where you need to be on campus, so you really do need to have a support structure in your personal and professional life that's giving you the time and the space to be able to complete something like this. It's a time commitment.

Ken White

Yeah, that's big. That's a big ask. When you say time commitment is there a number? How much time do I spend out of class? Do you get that question? And if you do. What do you say?

Pam Suzadail

We do get that question for our classes, and there's definitely guidelines the state and the credit rating agencies have guidelines for the number of hours that a student should be of instructional time that a student should be participating in for each credit. So for William &

Mary, our program is for our classes are four credits, and so students are spending about 20 hours per week.

Ken White

Oh, okay. You mentioned accrediting agencies. I'm thinking that's a good way to determine quality, right?

Pam Suzadail

Absolutely. That's the first thing that determines quality is looking at the accreditation. So for business schools, you absolutely need a program that's AACSB accredited. The next thing that I will look at for quality is the faculty. So looking that it's the same faculty, some schools you'll see won't have their own faculty teaching in their online programs. So you want to make sure that the online program is an extension of the school and not just kind of this separate entity that the school's putting out there.

Ken White

What do you see as the future? Like you said, you just met with a bunch of colleagues, and just a few days, it was a jam. Right. You just talked about all of it. What's what are the hot topics what's coming down the pike in terms of online graduate education?

Pam Suzadail

Wow. I mean, I think the competition is heating up for sure. I mean, there was this is a small seminar conference that I was at. There was about 35 people in attendance from, you know, senior leadership to faculty to administration, and they, I would say less than half of the people in the room were in the online space right now. So these are schools that are definitely thinking about it. They have plans to go online. The other schools that were in the room are in online and planning to grow it. So number one, the competition is heating up.

Ken White

Yeah, it seems like everybody wants to get into this space. Is that necessarily a good thing?

Pam Suzadail

No, I don't think so at all. Absolutely again, this is a strategic decision for a school. I do think that most schools should start to really pay or, if they haven't, most closely pay attention to or start thinking about the teaching and learning aspect of it, though. I think teaching effectiveness is critical across platforms across programs. It's not just about online. It's about face-to-face as well. And so online is kind of helping us start that conversation in a lot of schools.

Ken White

Going back to the prospective student, you know you mentioned some really great advice. Make sure you have the support at home and at work. You're going to look at so many hours, say 20 hours or so per class. What about cost? Are online programs a little less expensive than where's that land?

Pam Suzadail

Absolutely not, and actually, a lot of schools will charge a premium for the online course because of the flexibility and the convenience factor. So they're not less expensive.

Ken White

Interesting, because I've heard some people who make the assumption, oh, since I'm not using the facilities, it might be cheaper. But if you're talking flexibility and, of course, all the technology that goes into it.

Pam Suzadail

Well yeah, I mean when you're not in the classroom, but there's a huge cost structure to it because of the technology behind it.

Ken White

Yeah. So if I, if it kind of sounds interesting to me, I might want to pursue this. What should I do?

Pam Suzadail

Call the admissions office right. I mean, so you know, go online, go to the websites, take a look at, you know, take a look at the information on the website. Most schools have some sort of form to fill out for more information and start that process. There's phone numbers to call. That's the first step really for any program.

Ken White

And ask all the questions.

Pam Suzadail

Ask your questions and again make sure you do your research because it again it's time commitment, it's financial commitment is a time commitment, and everybody wants to be you know we want you to be successful. You want to be successful, so you really want to make sure it's the right fit from the beginning.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Pam Suzadail, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you get to the next level in your career with business and leadership development programs that specifically fit your needs. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your organization, check out our website at wmleadership.com. That's wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guest this week Pam Suzadail and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe and productive week.