

Foreword

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Web Portals and Higher Education Technologies to Make IT Personal

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Foreword

Once again, campuses are considering an opportunity to move to a new level of service effectiveness through the application of technology. In the current instance, the technology at issue is the portal and the opportunities it creates for the enhanced use of e-business. Based on the information exchanged at two forums organized by EDUCAUSE and NACUBO, portals and a set of related technologies are raising nearly as many questions as the number of answers they provide. As discussed in this volume, however, answers exist, and it behooves chief business officers and chief information officers to work together to make the best strategic decisions for their specific situation.

There is ample evidence to suggest that many aspects of higher education are being transformed through an e-revolution. One year ago the portal was considered to be at the core of this revolution, bringing with it a need for new business models.¹ These models will entail opportunities for campuses to make major investments independently, in partnership with vendors, or through collaborations among institutions. Increasingly, portals are understood to be an important layer in an overall institutional information technology (IT) architecture—a layer that provides a means to integrate information and services consumed or created by the campus community.

As with so many information technologies and change strategies, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. In fact, there may be as many approaches to portals as colors in the rainbow. Some of the approaches will prove to be poor investments, possibly with vendors who will not survive the initial contract period. For others, careful choices will result in significant competitive advantages relative to their peer institutions.

Once a college or university decides to enter this brave new world, a variety of decisions need to be made, including those as basic as whether to buy, build, or partner to acquire the technology. There is no shortage of firms competing to be the vendor of choice for higher education portals and e-business solutions. Nonetheless, in the one-year period between the two events that refined this content, many firms have entered this arena, have gone out of business, or have been acquired under distressed circumstances. In some cases, vendors have restructured their product architectures to exploit the power of the Internet more fully and to better integrate the portal with Web, security, customer relationship management (CRM), and enterprise resource management (ERP) layers and applications.

In this same time period, a consortium of colleges and universities has worked to support the release of uPortal, a technical framework for assembling and organizing college and university content and service “channels.”

Rather than working with a vendor, campuses may decide that it’s more effective to acquire the tools and other resources needed to develop an in-house solution. This should result in enhanced control over the ultimate solution, but there is no guarantee that it will prove to be cost-effective over the long term. Given the dynamic environment of the technology and the difficulty in retaining staff, the developers may have moved on when it comes time to upgrade to the next level.

A third approach—partnering—might be the most effective for some. There are multiple ways to approach a partnership, including

working in a joint venture with a single vendor or participating in a consortium involving multiple campuses. There are advantages to both approaches and to the many other types of partnerships that could be established to develop portals and engage in e-business activities.

Regardless of the particular approach selected, the most effective applications of portal technology will occur at institutions that consider all campus perspectives. We believe the most successful institutions will be those where the chief business officer (CBO) and the chief information officer (CIO) work in tandem to lead an effort to balance the campus's business, technological, and service perspectives toward achieving its goals. Portals and e-business will serve all facets of the campus, from admissions and athletics to the various academic units and the bookstore. Despite the competing interests and priorities of these diverse units, they must come together under the leadership of the CBO and CIO to ensure that a common approach is taken to gain the most from the technology and the opportunities presented by it.

The chapters in this volume cover a full range of issues to be considered as a result of the new technology and the evolving Internet business environment. The writers examine the business challenges, organizational implications, policy choices, and the technology itself. Many questions are identified, and several solutions are offered. It should be recognized, however, that the environment is far from mature. False starts and other mistakes will be made. We hope the information in this volume will minimize the likelihood of these missteps occurring and the cost of them when they do.

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significantly to the quality of the outcomes through their facilitation during the forum.

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Note

1. See especially, *UC 2010: A New Business Architecture for the University of California*. Oakland: University of California, 2000.