Frameworks for Comparing the Relative Efficiencies and Effectiveness of Call Centre and Individual Tutorial Support Models in Online University Education

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Athabasca University

- Reduces barriers to university education
  - Open access
  - Prior learning assessment credit
  - Undergraduate students start at any time of year and proceed at own pace

- 85% online and distance education
  - >10% compounded growth over 7 years.
  - >32,000 undergraduate students in 2003/04
  - >45,000 individualized study registrations
AU School of Business

- >11,000 students
- >16,000 registrations
- 25% growth in 2003; 10% in 2004
- 25 F/T faculty; over 70 P/T academic experts
Traditional Tutor Model

- Tutors handle all student queries
- Direct, but limited human contact
- No tracking of student service
Call Centre Model

- FAQs
- Student Queries
- Exams
- Assigns.
Call Centre Differences

- Eliminates unused tutor block time in traditional model
  - In senior courses, academic experts resolve queries only 21% of the time. In junior courses, this falls to 6%. Call Centre, technical, and other staff handle the rest.

- Leverages information technology
  - FAQs
  - Assignment drop boxes*
  - Enables use of Customer Relationship Management software, and in future, perhaps more automated responses
  - Increased efficiency as email supplants telephone contact

- Increases access to student support
  - 60 hours, 6 days per week

- Does not allow direct student-tutor contact, and inhibits relationship building
## Undergraduate Centre Segment Margins (2003/04)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>Other Centres</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/04 Registrations</td>
<td>13,649</td>
<td>32,190</td>
<td>45,839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration fee</td>
<td>$541</td>
<td>$541</td>
<td>$541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wtd avg cost of matl</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. margin per reg</td>
<td>$459</td>
<td>$430</td>
<td>$438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cont. margin</td>
<td>$6,270,074</td>
<td>$13,828,795</td>
<td>$20,098,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre budget</td>
<td>4,219,345</td>
<td>11,159,887</td>
<td>15,379,232</td>
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<tr>
<td>Segment margin</td>
<td>$2,050,729</td>
<td>$2,668,908</td>
<td>$4,719,637</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROI*</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Cost Analysis

- Cost information needed to assess traditional tutor and Call Centre models delivery models
### Analysis Results to Date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School of Business</th>
<th>Other Centres</th>
<th>All Centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs of academic experts</td>
<td>$705,550</td>
<td>$2,559,897</td>
<td>$3,265,447</td>
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<tr>
<td>Registrations</td>
<td>13,649</td>
<td>32,190</td>
<td>45,839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per student</td>
<td>$52</td>
<td>$80*</td>
<td>$71</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Additional Analysis Needed

- Process advantages for either delivery model in meeting student service benchmarks?

- Course completion rates
  - Matched course comparisons
  - Writing Skills; Statistics

- Perceived quality according to students
  – Focus groups
  – Ongoing student satisfaction surveys
Contact Us

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