

## *Scenario – Development of Curation and Collaboration by 2030*

**Scenario Summary:** Chapter II describes the transformation of the Knowledge, Work, and Learning Ecosystem expected by 2030. It also defines the revolutionary changes colleges and universities need to make to become engaged, innovative learning enterprises. A fundamental element of these changes is for institutions to develop the capacity to serve as *curators* of learning from other sources as well as fulfill their traditional roles of providing and certifying learning. This curation will also require expanded and enhanced *collaborations* with a variety of partners to access learning and support resources they do not have the capacity to provide. Most of these collaborations will involve existing vendors and an emerging group of technology-based solutions providers.

The nature of these partnerships is in a state of rapid evolution, as well. Concerns have been raised about some current practices in the online learning market and the capacities of institutional leaders to forge and manage relationships with for-profit partners (e.g., online program managers – OPMs). These issues must be addressed on the road to 2030. To succeed in the 2030 ecosystem, institutional leaders will need to hone their skills and practices in both curation and collaboration, the focus of this scenario.

**Why Read This?** This scenario, and the scenario on “The Growing Influence of Adult Learners in 2030,” expand on the basic principles laid out in Chapter II. Higher education leaders must work to stay current with ongoing changes in the Knowledge, Work, and Learning Ecosystem and the new practices in curation and collaboration and to ensure that their institutions respond accordingly. These transformations are critical to achieving the capabilities of an engaged, innovative learning enterprise:

- Greater openness, innovation, and agility;
- Enhanced learner success and satisfaction,
- Closer links and shorter pathways to employment, and
- Greater learning choice and affordability.



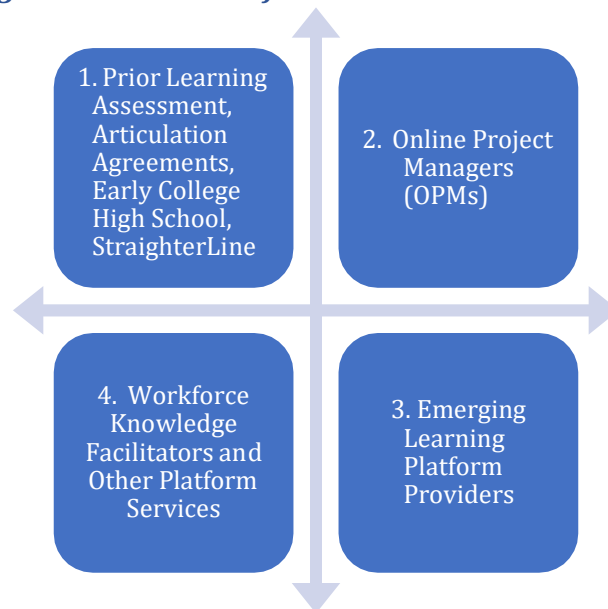
## *The Scenario*

*(Referenced in Chapter II)*

### Overview

To help the reader understand the emerging state of practice in curation and collaboration, this scenario undertakes two tasks. The first is to describe in depth the rapidly evolving elements of curation and collaboration portrayed in Figure 1. The second is to present a brief story, set at Blue Ridge University, that illustrates how university leaders would apply the principles of curation and collaboration in the development of a new program.

*Figure 1 - Elements of Curation and Collaboration*



### Credit for Prior Learning, Certification of Learning from Other Providers

For years many institutions have been enhancing their capacity to accelerate rapid, successful completion of degree objectives. Methods ranged from facilitating the certification of credits from prior learning, transferring credits from other providers, and dual credit and bridging agreements with high schools, community colleges and four-year institutions. Such arrangements will grow significantly in importance by 2030. The tools have included

- ***Prior Learning Assessments.*** For years certification of prior learning has been used to ensure that adult learners do not waste time and money on taking courses in areas they have already mastered. Recent research by CAEL and WICHE focused on the excellent success record of such efforts at 72 institutions (11). The American Council on Education has played a major role in such efforts. By 2030, growing adult learner enrollments should drive increasing opportunities for certification of prior learning.

- **Articulation Agreements, Public Pressure.** While progress has been made in accepting credits for transfer students, much remains to be done. By 2030 public pressure will require most public institutions to accept transfer credits from accredited learning enterprises at all levels.
- **Dual Credit/Bridge Programs, Advanced Placement.** Many institutions support dual credit, advanced placement, the International Baccalaureate, and bridge programs between high school, community colleges, and four-year institutions in areas like nursing and technology. These programs accelerate completion of certificates and degrees and enhance success. They are likely to continue to grow to 2030.



- **Three-Year Baccalaureate Programs.** For years, learners have been leveraging dual credit/bridge programs, advanced placement and summer school attendance to complete baccalaureate degrees in three years. Recently a diverse group of a dozen pilot institutions was assembled by Robert Zemsky, Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and Lori Carroll, Chancellor at the University of Minnesota Rochester, to take serious, fresh looks at establishing three-year degree programs (12). These efforts will roll out over the next year or two. By 2030, there are likely to be a range of institutions that have established three-year degrees.
- **Lower Division Transfer Agreement – StraighterLine and ACE.** Excellent examples of collaborations to support the curation of offerings is StraighterLine and the America Council on Education’s College Credit Recommendation Services (ACE Credit). StraighterLine is a U.S.-based education company that offers low-priced, online higher education courses that are equivalent to the general education courses required for a bachelor’s degree. ACE Credit has evaluated and recommended college credit for StraighterLine courses. While StraighterLine is itself unaccredited, it has 130 colleges and universities that accept and/or offer its courses for credit.



## Online Program Management Partners

Online program managers (OPMs) provide the products and services that allow educational institutions to offer online courses. Most OPMs are for-profit enterprises. They allow colleges, universities and other learning enterprises to enter into the online education business and build market share without the need to build their own technology platform. Examples of enterprises currently operating as OPMs are 2U/edX (largest), Academic Partnerships, Blackboard, Coursera, Emeritus, Kaplan Higher Education, InStride, Pearson Online, Noodle Partners, Udacity, University 18, University Alliance, and Wiley Education Solutions (3).



OPMs increased in number and power during the decline of for-profit colleges (3). They grew dramatically during 2007-2018, and then, during COVID, played a critical role in the widespread migration of higher education institutions to online and hybrid operation (1,3,5). In 2018 and 2020, two former for-profit college companies, Kaplan Higher Education and Zovio, became online program managers. In 2021, two massive developers of massive open online course (MOOC) companies, Coursera and edX, became part of the for-profit OPM industry.

OPMs business practices have also evolved. They basically follow one of two business models. First, a “tuition revenue share model,” where the OPM provides all upfront costs and services then shares revenues. Second, a “fee-for-service model” (recent development) where the institutions contract with the OPM vendor for services cafeteria style. Models blending these two strategies have also evolved, as have OPMS focusing on MOOCs and on for-profit institutions converting to for-profit status.

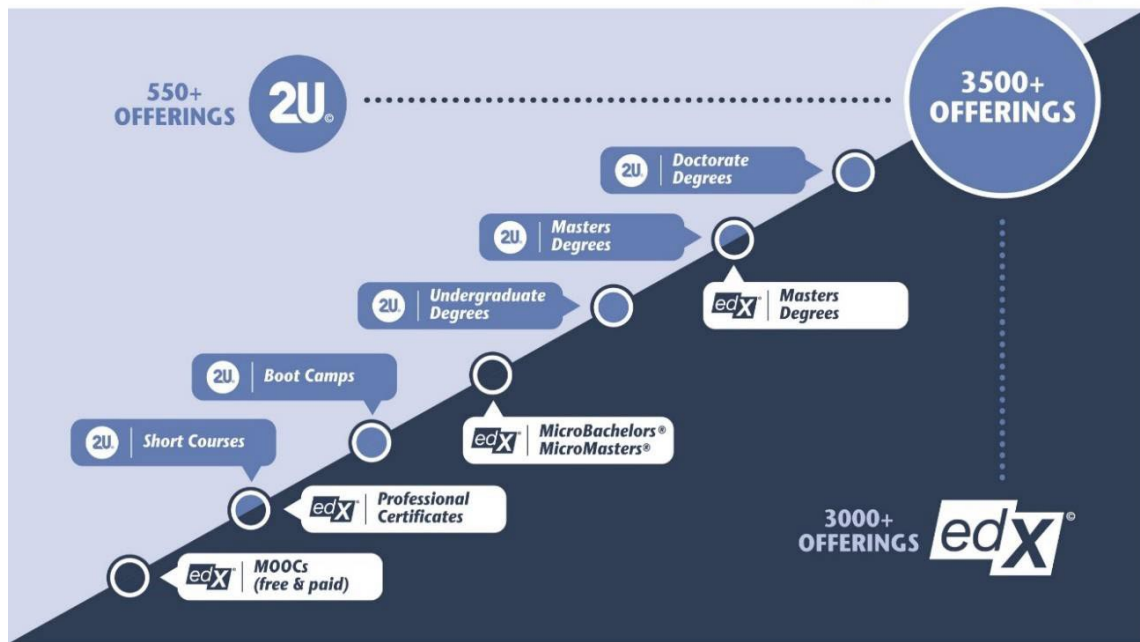
Some OPMs have drawn criticism for their business practices and for unfavorable deals with universities that often occurred because of higher education leaders’ inexperience with such arrangements (3, 6, 8, 9). These issues continue in the news today with the highly publicized disagreement between 2U and USC (*LA Times* headline: Online Degrees Made USC the World’s Biggest Social Work School, Then Things Went Terribly Wrong). Joshua Kim writes that lack of transparency on both sides makes it difficult to determine what is the truth of the matter. This debate can be expected to feature prominently in the ongoing evolution of OPMs (13).

## Emerging Learning Platforms

The merging of 2U and edX created considerable debate in the higher education industry (1, 7,8,9,10) about what it meant – opportunities created, dangers signaled, and implications for the future of OPMs. Phil Hill (1) and Stephen Pelletier (5) wrote penetrating analyses of the evolution and future of OPMs. Hill’s portrayal included the graphic in Figure 2 describing 2U/edX as the birth of a new breed in the emerging “Education Platform Market.”

Figure 2

### 2U, edX Combo will have Unmatched Free-to-Degree Offerings



Source: Phil Hill, “Coursera, 2U and the Emerging Education Platform Market, [Phil on Ed Tech](#), 8.5.21

In Hill’s description, 2U is the most strategic company serving higher education, willing to evolve and change strategic direction well before other players see the opportunity. Their vision for their online platform is all about creating *demand and scale*. It offers a wide range of programs and price points, from *free-to-degree*, and from MOOCs and boot camps and short courses to degrees at undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels.

Coursera is also striving to create a market based on network effects. Both 2U/edX and Coursera have yet to prove they can achieve the much desired “flywheel effect” of generating demand by mobilizing consumers without massive, dedicated, targeted marketing. That said, platform-based partnerships between OPMs and institutions and other workforce knowledge facilitators will likely continue to evolve, respond to market forces, and become a major force in the 2030 Knowledge, Work, and Learning Ecosystem. Their precise form will evolve in an expeditionary manner. In addition to colleges, universities, other learning providers, OPMs, and Emerging Learning Platforms, the workforce knowledge facilitators described on the next page will play a significant role.

## Workforce Knowledge Facilitators

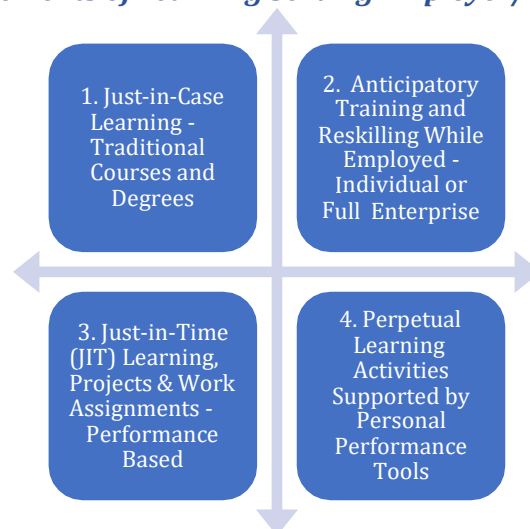
In addition to traditional colleges and universities and OPMs, other parties are involved in emerging Knowledge, Work, and Learning Ecosystem – and the industry supporting it. Our model in Chapter II included the category of Workforce Knowledge Facilitators (WKF) that includes Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Monster.com, Zoom, Indeed, IBM, Elsevier, Burning Glass, Zoom, corporate learning and performance companies and other workforce agencies - and a host of other vendors and service providers. These facilitators are working with leading-edge institutions today to provide learning, knowledge and marketplace services including the integration of workforce knowledge.

Between now and 2030, these marketplace facilitators and the new generation of platform and service providers will become critical partners and collaborators with agile colleges and universities in the transformed Knowledge, Learning, and Workforce Ecosystem of 2030.

Figure 3 depicts the four classes of learning and competence-building activities engaged in by employees and workers at some points in their careers. Just-in-Case Learning (Traditional Courses and Degrees) is largely the province of traditional providers with support from OPMs. The last three types of learning – Anticipatory Training and Reskilling, JIT Learning and Performance Enhancement and Employment-Needs-Driven Perpetual Learning often involve Workforce Knowledge Facilitators as key partners/collaborators.

Just as many OPMs will be migrating toward multi-capability learning platforms, many WKFs will develop and leverage their platform capabilities in knowledge management, workforce, and learning capabilities by 2030. The Scenario on Adult Learners in 2030 describes the nature of the services such platforms could provide. The exact form of the new Ecosystem is difficult to predict with precision, but its general dimensions are clear. It will be complex, dynamic, and adaptive to changing conditions.

***Figure 3 – Elements of Learning Serving Employer/Learner Needs***



## Story: Blue Ridge University - Building a General Education Program for 2030

I'm Jane Hampton, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Blue Ridge University. This story describes how we applied the principles of curation and collaboration to meet four key aims that President Jolene Crowder set for the transformation of Blue Ridge's General Education Program. These aims included:

- Vitality connect the new curriculum with learners' general education needs in the emerging Knowledge, Work and Learning Ecosystem of 2030 and beyond and require them to achieve minimum competence on all program outcomes. Assessment of competence should occur in a capstone course and demonstration of minimum competence should be required for the granting of a baccalaureate degree.
- Build a program that is riveted on learner needs, unique, coherent and simple, and driven by Blue Ridge's values.
- Make maximal use of technology, first and foremost to heighten appeal and learning, but also to enhance scalability and external marketability. The program should draw significantly on the advanced capabilities of a wide range of potential collaborators in the marketplace.
- Protect faculty employment, but transform the role they play in the general education process to that of guide, mentor and assessor.



### ***Getting Started***

In collaboration with senior faculty leaders, the Provost, SVP for Finance and Operations and the Deans, we constructed an *ad hoc coalition* to design the new program and help with its implementation. It included influential faculty who had a vital, enlightened interest in general education and the use of technology to improve learning, three human resources executives from key progressive corporations in Charlotte, and the leaders of the University's instructional design team. I chaired the coalition. The SVP Finance and Operations sat in to help our team with negotiations with for-profit collaborating organizations to make sure we were negotiating the best deal possible deal.



Most of the internal members of the coalition had served on other ad hoc coalitions and, in addition, I was a member of the Guiding Coalition for the University transformation process. This background gave us a head start in that we knew how to work effectively together and understood that our job was to transform the program and what that entailed.

We started by completing a *Planning from the Future Backwards* exercise to see what general education outcomes would be needed to prepare learners for 2030 and beyond. Many of the basic outcomes stayed the same—but others were added to consider into account the projected 2030 needs and the imperative to take full advantage of the rich array of new offerings from external collaborators. The outside HR leaders and our CFO added much to the conversation about these outcomes. We worked hard to focus the curriculum outcomes directly on the needs of the learner.

We used a number of the design tools presented in the book and developed a curriculum that was organized around these key themes: *communication, problem solving, responsible citizenship in a cyber world, and maintaining an intellectual, professional, and personal edge through life*. We developed these ideas and decided we should approach a collaborator in the for-profit world to see if we could work with them to redeploy the resources they had developed and jointly build courses that would address the new learning areas we had identified. StraighterLine, a provider of online general education courses and an outstanding partner, worked with us to develop new courses in the responsible cyber citizenship and the maintenance of an edge areas.



### ***Resulting Curriculum***

The result was a *tight, 30-credit curriculum* that had to be completed and assessed before the end of the sophomore year. The curriculum included courses on “maintaining your edge” and “responsible citizenship”—both with a focus on requirements for 2030 and beyond. The maintaining your edge course required a student to develop a one-credit DIY experience, gain a certificate in an area related to their major, and develop a personal 60-year learning plan. The curriculum was offered in a hybrid format to give the students a feel for what higher learning would be like for them in the years ahead.

problem to demonstrate their capability to meet all of the general education curriculum’s



outcomes. To gauge how well our students were doing in relation to their peers at other institutions, we had them sit for the ETS Proficiency Profile examination during the capstone course. We also asked them to assess the adequacy of the general education curriculum during the course and five years after graduation.

### ***Five-Year Transition Plans for Faculty***

The question of what we would do with faculty teaching in the traditional general education courses was a challenging one. President Crowder asked us to develop a *five-year transition plan for these faculty*. From the outset in the implementation phase, we were up front with the faculty that they were welcome in the new general education program if they were willing to work in one of the new positions in that program. These included mentors for the students taking the new curriculum, assessors, curriculum developers, and instructors in the newly designed courses. A handful chose to retire, but the majority found a home in the new curriculum and transitioned well. Because the new curriculum aroused interest across the country and we worked with Straighterline to deliver it at other institutions, we ended up not only using all of the existing faculty, but we also added several positions. By the five-year mark set by the president, the total cost of offering this program was about half of that of the traditional program it replaced.



### ***Communicate, Communicate, and Then Communicate Some More***

Throughout the process of building and implementing the program, we worked hard to communicate with all University constituencies about what we were doing and listening hard to the feedback we received. This communication effort paid off handsomely, because we got a lot of people involved in the development of the program and excited about its potential.

### ***Learner Satisfaction and Outcomes***

Learner satisfaction with the program overall was 4.8 out of 5 points. To all it was clear that the transformation of the general education program was a remarkable success and a significant cost saver.

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