



Leveraging Coursera Career Academy at Hawai'i Pacific University

BY CYNTHIA MWENJA, PhD

Mark Rosenbaum, Dean of the College of Business and Professor of Marketing at Hawai'i Pacific University, has drawn on his deep understanding of HPU's place and stakeholders to develop an exciting, groundbreaking initiative. After assessing the history, strengths, and needs of HPU's College of Business, Rosenbaum spearheaded the formation of a partnership between Hawai'i Pacific University and Coursera's Career Academy—the first partnership of this kind in the world.

Articulating and Facing Challenges

As many of our readers know, small liberal arts colleges can face a number of challenges. One such challenge is making courses and their delivery engaging for students. Students are now accustomed to taking in information on their own terms—they desire to “learn in small snippets at various times, based on their individual schedules,” Rosenbaum says. When we think of how people interact with services like Netflix, he observes, we can easily see how the traditional business lecture has become outdated. Unlike hands-on programs like nursing and engineering, Rosenbaum states, business courses at liberal arts institutions have often relied more on lecture and less on active learning. Previously, students attended business colleges, however, because that's where the knowledge was available. Now that people can access information and education in multiple ways, Rosenbaum notes that schools must find new ways to keep students engaged. When he became Dean, Rosenbaum saw that students seemed unenthusiastic about their classes

and, at times, even the incredibly beautiful location. Jasmine Kauhane, Senior Assistant Director of Admissions for several of HPU's graduate programs, says that location has traditionally been a big draw for the Honolulu campus—not just for those who come from other places, but for those in the local community, as well.

Another challenge facing a number of small liberal arts campuses: many universities in high-cost areas can have difficulty recruiting people who have terminal degrees. Rosenbaum himself could have easily been in that situation. He happened to have lived in Honolulu from 2003-2006, and he bought a condominium that he kept when he moved on. He remarks that he might not have been able to return to the area if his home were not available—the cost of living has skyrocketed on the island.

Additionally, faculty at smaller institutions with higher teaching loads often struggle to find the time to be up to date with every aspect of their fields—and the struggle is getting more intense. Rosenbaum states that ten or twenty years ago, STEM

fields generally experienced incremental change. Around 2015, though, he saw that change become revolutionary. For example, he prepared a digital marketing lecture on a weekend in 2017 at the University of South Carolina. By Tuesday, before he gave the lecture, the WIX dashboard had changed. This experience made him realize that industry would have to help in the education process, since information could constantly change between preparation and lecture.

One challenge Rosenbaum faced when he became dean was particular to HPU. A decade previously, HPU administrators decided to move toward becoming a research-focused institution, despite the school having been primarily a teaching university with a long history of having a business college. The business college, in particular, with its location in downtown Honolulu and proximity to the city's business district, generally caters to students who want practical skills—so changing to a research orientation is “not easily achievable in one day,” Rosenbaum remarks; he had to consider the practicalities of such a move.



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Business schools at research institutions generally seek accreditation through the AACSB, which is the “most recognized form of specialized accreditation that an institution and its business programs can earn,” as its website states. The accreditation standards require that the majority of credit hours offered at an institution be taught by people who have terminal degrees in their fields. As Rosenbaum points out, small, private liberal arts campuses—particularly those who lack significant endowments, such as Hawai’i Pacific—struggle to afford the salaries required to meet this AACSB requirement. As a result of pursuing the AACSB accreditation, Rosenbaum notes, Hawai’i Pacific left the military bases where they had satellite programs because they couldn’t staff the hours with faculty who had the required qualifications. With the pursuit of accreditation, the hiring focus

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had to change from hiring practitioners to hiring people with doctoral degrees.

Rosenbaum argues strongly in support of institutions which have a practical focus. Many first-generation and minority students—among others—want to make sure they are building skills that will lead to employment. Rosenbaum admits that it can be controversial to state that some students may attend college for something other than the sake of learning. Additionally, he says, parents almost universally want to be sure their children will be employable upon graduation. Kauhane, from her vantage point in admissions, observes that Rosenbaum clearly understands the community’s desires and their career needs. Having worked with other deans since beginning work at HPU in 2003, Kauhane was impressed with Rosenbaum’s ideas and attitudes; she thought, “Wow! He gets it—what we’re seeing.”

One of the first decisions Rosenbaum needed to make when he became Dean was whether to continue pursuing AACSB accreditation or

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to suspend the process. Given the school's history and the budgetary realities, he decided to take the school back to its roots as a teaching college. As he states, "small schools serve niches."

He realized, however, that he needed a partner to help pivot the business college to a skills-based focus which would link classes to specific career pathways. As Rosenbaum observes, many students question the value of focusing solely on theory in college classes—even though that focus is what many faculty members prefer. When business students are limited to theory, they often wonder why they're in school, Rosenbaum notes; they're asking, "What is the return on this education?" Students at teaching-intensive institutions are demanding real skills.

Coursera's Career Academy

In thinking about all of these considerations, Rosenbaum decided to partner

with Coursera, an online learning platform offering courses from top universities and multi-national corporations. As the website states, "Coursera was founded ... in 2012 with a vision of providing life-transforming learning experiences to learners around the world. Today, Coursera is a global platform for online learning and career development that offers anyone, anywhere, access" to its offerings. Hawai'i Pacific University was the first university in the world to partner with Coursera's Career Academy, states Leslie M. Blood, Professor of Management at Hawai'i Pacific University. Since the beginning of the partnership in August 2022, over 1600 students have taken over 19,000 lessons—data that is continually updated and viewable on the HPU Coursera page—so everyone involved can see in real time the impact and value of the partnership.

As Rosenbaum points out, the corporations develop studio-grade quality courses,

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and students want that quality. When he looks at Coursera's Career Academy and compares it to what has traditionally been done in business education, he sees a definite disconnect. Companies such as Google, Sales Force, IBM, Meta, and Intuit—world class companies—are paying for world class content. Kauhane admires the way Rosenbaum has spearheaded the effort to develop a stronger focus for better preparing students for specific careers; he has been a “go-getter from the get-go,” she remarks.

The career academy at Coursera offers distinct career pathways. Right now, Hawai'i Pacific students can choose among twenty-four pathways, and there

will be more, Rosenbaum says. Blood notes that students have access to every certificate while they're enrolled; time is the only limitation for how many they can complete.

As Rosenbaum points out, when faculty members use Coursera micro credentials for student learning, then class time is freed up for case studies, field trips, and other high-impact practices—and the faculty no longer need to be the creators of knowledge; they can become coaches, mentors, and guides. Rosenbaum argues that the flipped classroom should be the norm in business schools.

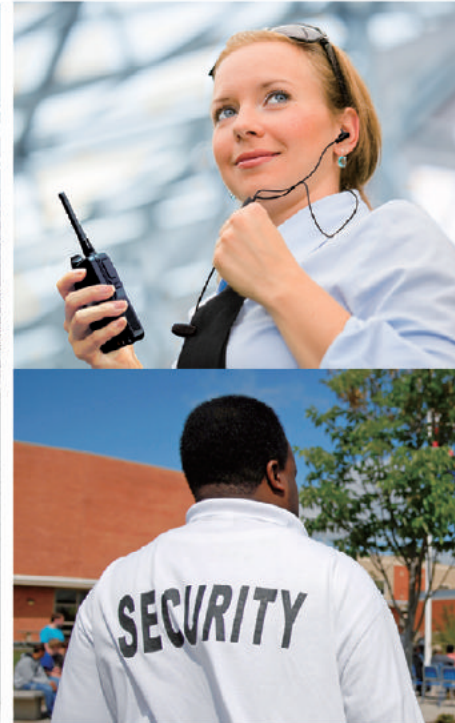
Rosenbaum offers an example of how a professor can tie theory to practice in a services marketing class. Coursera offers a certificate for UX Designers—a profession, he points out, that has a median beginning salary of \$117,700. A professor can give students the opportunity to begin this certificate during the course, linking the content of the course to a career in customer experience design. The certificate has seven courses; some professors may use an entire course as a textbook, and others may assign parts of courses, encouraging the students to continue. In this way, all of the readings, videos, quizzes, etc. are studio grade; all of the well-developed content is broken into chunks that are delivered in three-to-twenty-minute increments. The students can then choose to dip in and out, taking very small pieces at a time, or they can complete multiple pieces in a longer time period—they can choose to learn in the ways and moments they choose. Such combinations of course work, Rosenbaum says, clearly demonstrate a return on the student's investment in education.

Kauhane plays a part in guiding new MBA students. She directs a required one-credit course plotting each student's pathway dedicated to a specialization; specializations are sets of certificates, and each student will leave the program with at least two specializations. Additionally, Blood states, an alternative option for an internship is to enroll in a full certificate;

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this option is more flexible, since it can be completed in a summer term from any location.

Blood appreciates the opportunity to draw on Coursera's certificates to complement her course content. She notes that instructors can

use the certificates as a guide for teaching or a supplement to other course material. In her Fundamentals of International Business class, she requires the students to complete the certificate in IBM cybersecurity. She chose that certificate to complement her class,

and an added benefit is that the certificate is currently "hot"—employers are looking for people who have this certificate and will pay starting salaries of \$85,000 for this in-demand job.

Blood also appreciates that these are real world certificates. She uses the social media marketing certificate from Meta in her capstone class because almost every job now ties in some way to social media marketing. Being certified by known companies gives students an edge. Plus, she points out, the industry leaders are the experts in the fields that the students are learning in the Career Academy.

Rosenbaum states that the partnership with Coursera's Career Academy has really turned the business school around, and they're "slowly making inroads with the undergrads," as well. Kauhane reports that, beginning this fall, Coursera will be available to all HPU students, to be used as a career development resource that will be covered by a small part of the student fees. She says that it's exciting to be able to open Coursera up to everyone. Blood notes that when they told the students about the opportunity to complete Coursera certificates, they really jumped on it, since the opportunity would cost a lot for students to pay for on their own.

Kauhane states that Rosenbaum gladly engages with all members of the campus community—students, faculty, and staff—and is completely open for ideas and innovative collaborations, such as the one with Coursera's Career Academy. She encourages other administrators of private higher education to embrace innovation to reach the current student generation. Blood says that, as a dean, Rosenbaum is very hands-on and student focused, trying to prioritize tools, knowledge, and resources. He is "beyond dedicated" to his role, and he tries new things for good reasons, guided by this question—one that is useful for all small liberal arts college and universities: "What can we do to get our students great jobs upon graduation—jobs that pay well and that they love?"


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