



CASE STUDY (/CASE-STUDIES)

SNHU: Redesigning the College Experience

IN THIS CASE STUDY

A new higher education business model that will succeed in creating and delivering value for non-traditional students requires re-engineering the entire student experience, including cost, content, delivery, evaluation, and more.

Today, adult, non-traditional degree-seekers make up the bulk of American college enrollment, yet they are also underserved and

T marginalized in traditional higher education. They are intensely focused on gaining the basic competencies they need to get ahead in the workforce. That can be a difficult path, since the traditional college experience doesn't suit their lifestyle, and college classes and majors are organized by subject matter, not competencies.

Southern New Hampshire University sought to meet the needs of non-traditional, adult learners by designing a new learning model and platform to deliver low-cost, high-quality education for these students. The disruptive business model SNHU explored would end traditional higher education's monopoly on education delivery, while outperforming it on measurable learning achievement. SNHU planned to accomplish this by structuring the program using a competency-based approach, in which students are credentialed according to how they demonstrate the knowledge and capabilities required to meet an established skill set.

SNHU then commissioned BIF to create a prototype concept of the digital experience students would encounter in SNHU's online, self-paced, competency-driven Associates degree program.

BIF's human-centered design process included a design brief outlining the challenge, student archetypes that fueled the concept model, three rapid prototyping sessions, and a detailed, clickable concept prototype for the College for America platform that test users could experience and critique. BIF delivered to SHNU a final, recommended concept prototype , which used the prototype, as well as BIF's insights, as a foundation to transition into platform design and development.

SNHU's Associate's degree was the first competency-based AA degree program approved by the US Department of Education. When launched, the \$2500 degree had no courses and no three-credit hour units just

120 competencies students learned to demonstrate, working at their own pace.

Later, SNHU drew on its experience with the online AA degree, including BIF's work on the project, as it worked on a business model and student experience for a Bachelor's degree. The university created a business model for College For America whose centerpiece was a competency-based bachelor's degree that cost only \$10,000. In May 2014, a regional accreditor greenlighted SNHU's effort to offer a \$10,000 bachelor's degree through College for America — the first of its kind in the United States. The degree is marketed not only to students, but also to corporations who have embraced the program to train their employees.

What can other businesses learn from this case?

In order to create a \$10,000 BA degree, SNHU had to question every single "rule" that forms the basis of what college is all about. BIF helped at the beginning of the process, as SNHU sought to understand the needs of the adult, non-traditional student, and to create an online learning experience that would appeal to these students. Knowing that they were upending their entire industry, SNHU took small, deliberate steps to build toward the launch of its \$10,000 BA degree. This approach helped SNHU test and learn its way to implementing the new business model alongside its still-successful, traditional business model.

Renee Hopkins

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