



Reviewing (traces of) European Virtual Campuses

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Glossary of Terms

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The full list is available on: <http://www.virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Glossary>

Benchmarking: A process used in management and particularly strategic management, in which organisations evaluate various aspects of their processes in relation to best practice, usually within their own sector. This then allows organisations to develop plans on how to adopt such best practice, usually with the aim of increasing some aspect of performance.

Blended Learning: According to the dictionary definition, a mixture of various types of learning. Conventionally, one of the main ingredients in the mix is face-to-face instruction. In normal parlance (or what passes for normal among e-learning people) the term is used to mean a mix of face-to-face instruction and electronic techniques. The term *blended learning* became popular as a reaction against the pure e-learning attractive to analysts and dot-coms around the turn of the millennium, that is the complete lack of face-to-face instruction in a course offering. It seems now that the term is slowly going out of fashion again – but it is still popular with some thinkers.

Bologna Process: Process which aims to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010, in which students can choose from a wide and transparent range of high-quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures. The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 has put in motion a series of reforms needed to make European higher education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents.

Ceased e-Learning Initiatives (CELLs): Initiatives which – for reasons other than failure – are no longer active and have officially ceased to exist. These initiatives may come to a planned close due to a number of factors, including re-branding as (or merging with) another institution or initiative; and/or meeting project goals (as in the case of a fixed-term project).

Change Management: The use of theory, processes and tools for managing the organisational and people side of a change from the current state to a desired new state – normally, in our universe, a state where there is a considerably greater use of e-learning in a way which fits the organisation's purposes and finances.

Colleges: In most countries surveyed, institutions which provide tertiary education, but not at the level of university degrees. Exceptions exist, e.g., in the USA, where the term *college* is used generically to refer to any higher education institution which awards undergraduate degrees only. We would categorise these as "university colleges" – and if they offer postgraduate degrees as well, we categorise them as "universities".

Consortia: Associations of partners working towards a common goal. This typically indicates an association of businesses, institutions and/or agencies formed for the purpose of engaging in a joint venture with a substantial e-learning aspect. We speak about a consortium of partners as constituted to develop and/or offer virtual education, where a number of universities join together in a more or less tight organisational framework to wrap a "skin" of virtuality around them.

Critical Success Factor: An element that is necessary for an organisation or project to achieve its mission. This differentiates it from other factors, which are "important" or "nice to have" but not *necessary*.

Digital University: The phrase *digital university* has several meanings:

- The Digital University for finance professionals – see <http://digitu.com/>
- One of several projects at universities such as the University of Hull (UK) – see <http://www.digital.hull.ac.uk/>
- The [Dutch Digital University](#) – now ceased

Distance Learning: A broad definition of distance learning is that the locus of learning is much of the time physically distant from the core premises of the provider. We take distance learning to include such blended learning when the distance learning part is in the majority.

e-Learning: The use of electronic digital techniques to bring about learning, either in addition to, or in part-replacement of, face-to-face instruction and interaction (tutorials, etc.). Conventionally these techniques are taken to include television and video, even when in some cases these are still analogue in nature. The term *e-learning* seems to cause a lot of unease, and there is a reaction against it at the time of writing. Some theorists use the term *blended learning* to denote the reality that e-learning is normally (even if not always) used in conjunction with face-to-face techniques. Purists and those in contact with research and EU circles tend to try to use the term technology-enhanced learning – but the term *e-learning* still has a firm grip on many minds, including most in the benchmarking e-learning community across the world.

Evolution of Existing Institutions: Institutions which – though founded as traditional or standard (paper-based) distance learning institutions – have evolved from their original format to offer courses through e-learning. An *evolution of an existing institution* might refer to an entire university with a significant virtual campus offering; a department (e.g., e-learning or other subject) offering pure-mode online degrees; or an e-learning offshoot which has branched out under its own name/business model (to name but a few of the configurations we have seen).

Failed e-Learning Initiatives (FELIs): Initiatives which are no longer active, and are commonly considered to have specifically “failed” to meet their goals (e.g., by entering bankruptcy).

Giant e-Learning Initiatives (GELIs): Initiatives which are very large major e-learning initiatives (MELIs).

International Initiative: e-Learning initiatives straddling more than one country and promoted by an international agency or supranational body such as the EU, World Bank or UNESCO. This typically refers to an initiative taken by a supranational political grouping or range of countries in a region – such as the European Union – to set up a programme focused on e-learning within university-level institutions.

Key Success Factor: A factor whose presence is necessary for an organisation to fulfil its mission, for some subset of virtual campuses – such as [national initiatives](#). In other words, it is a [critical success factor](#) across that subset.

Major E-Learning Initiative: Initiatives which operate on a grand scale within an institution. Detailed organisational criteria are identified clearly on the Re.ViCa [wiki](#) and in chapter 2, *What is a Virtual Campus?*

Multinational Initiative: e-Learning initiatives taken by more than one country but not many, and not by a supranational political grouping or range of countries in a region (e.g., the European Union). As with international initiatives, in this arrangement partners act together to set up a programme focused on e-learning within university-level institutions.

National Initiative: Initiatives from one country – or a region, state or province within that country – involving institutions nationwide, in most cases founded (and funded) by a national agency. This term refers to an initiative taken by a ministry or national agency in a country to set up a programme focused on e-learning in university-level institutions. Note that "national" may refer to an autonomous or semi-autonomous part of a country, e.g., Scotland (UK) or Catalonia (Spain) – or even to one of the states or provinces in federal countries such as Australia, Canada, China, India or the USA.

Newly Created Institution: Institutions created specifically to operate in e-learning mode (usually in or after 1996). A newly created institution should represent a “new build” university, virtual from its inception. Institutions thus classified typically provide either all or most of their course offerings online.

Notable E-Learning Initiative: Initiatives which are interesting in a country, e.g., to other universities or analysts, and satisfy many but not all MELI criteria.

Open University: Generally speaking, distance learning universities which are open to all inhabitants of a region (with few or no prerequisite qualifications). In our wiki, the vast majority of institutions with *Open University* in their name are categorised by us as “open universities”.

Private Provider: Institutions which provide e-learning through a company aiming to produce a profit. (These are known as commercial enterprises under the UNESCO scheme.) When it comes to the matter of private providers, the extent to which a virtual campus can be considered commercial is sometimes opaque. This distinction is not always explicit with respect to traditional universities either, as most of these now operate in the commercial world themselves (to some extent).

Private Nonprofit Provider: Institutions that provide e-learning, which are neither public institutions nor commercial enterprises, but are rather set up in nonprofit form (such as foundations, charities, or religious bodies). Introducing the subcategory of private nonprofit providers allows for further granularity within the category of private providers. Unlike solely private providers, in some countries, these entities may receive public funds.

Quality Assurance (QA): In general theory, the use of planned and systematic production processes, with evaluation and feedback mechanisms, to provide confidence in the suitability of a product for its intended purpose. In tertiary education, it is taken to mean the use of mechanisms to ensure that each institution provides and continues to provide, courses of an appropriate university-level standard for the intended students, bearing in mind the offerings of similar courses at other universities, government requirements, student feedback and staff wishes – and that the institution itself remains at an appropriate level.

University: Degree-granting institutions (public or private) providing tertiary-level education with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees issued in their name. In several countries there are institutions, including prestigious ones, who satisfy the above definition of universities but which do not have the term *university* (or its equivalent in local language) as part of their name. For uniformity, Re.ViCa categorises these as "universities" (along with any other appropriate classification). There are also select National, Multinational and International Initiatives bearing the name *university* which do not meet the criteria laid out herein.

University College: Typically, an institution (public or private) providing tertiary education at the level of undergraduate degrees, which does not have full university status and powers (for example to award postgraduate degrees in its own name). A university college normally does not do research,

but this may depend on the country context. Institutions describing themselves as “university colleges” are typically classified under this name.

Virtual Mobility: A form of learning which consists of virtual components through a fully ICT-supported learning environment that includes cross-border collaboration with people from different backgrounds and cultures working and studying together, having, as its main purpose, the enhancement of intercultural understanding and the exchange of knowledge

Virtual University: A university where there is a rather small core of physical organisation and people carrying out face-to-face teaching, and a rather large amount of distance teaching, usually nowadays carried out with a significant amount of e-learning. There is not an absolute distinction between face-to-face universities and distance teaching universities – most distance teaching universities in fact use [blended learning](#) for their offerings, often via a network of tutorial centres.