

# Individualisation, diversity sets education providers apart

 By [Murray de Villiers](#)

10 Mar 2015

Digital technologies including cloud computing, mobile devices and the Internet have the potential to transform the content offerings of schools and universities. Education institutions are no longer limited to the usual subjects of maths, science and languages. They now have an opportunity to diversify their subject and course offerings to include unconventional choices such as aviation, catering, music, ballet and anything else in their curriculums...



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Students are spoilt for choice when it comes to which university to attend and what to study, increasing competition among institutions to attract top students. However, universities tend to offer the same or similar study options, delivered via rigid courses that offer little in the way of individualisation.

For example, a student who hopes to one day own a photography studio should have the freedom to combine the disciplines of photography and business administration so that they get the most out of their studies and are adequately prepared to set themselves up for success. This particular student may not have an interest in human resource management, for argument's sake, preferring to one day outsource that function, and would rather supplement their degree with a course on effective studio lighting.

Providing this level of choice and course customisation to students is ultimately what will set universities apart. Of course, it is not feasible to expect a university to offer every degree imaginable, which is why partnerships with other institutions are crucial. Universities should team up with private sectors, such as media and technology, to stimulate innovative thinking and establish new markets.

## Learning can no longer be approached from a one-size-fits-all standpoint

We are seeing an increase in inter-university collaboration to produce combined qualifications, such as a university of technology providing the application-centric training and a business school providing more theoretical training to produce comprehensive, multidisciplinary courses that provide for a continuous career-building path for students. Learning can no longer be approached from a one-size-fits-all standpoint. We have the technology and information today to tailor courses to meet each student's requirements, which increases success and satisfaction rates.

Another option is to team up with universities in other countries to allow students to study towards a double degree - either in the same or different subjects - as a way to attract top students and strengthen partnerships between universities. As an example, Stellenbosch University has partnered with a number of global institutions, including the University of Venice, to offer a well-rounded Master's Degree in Sustainable Development. This has allowed the universities to leverage each other's strengths and learn from the experiences of the different countries.

Youth unemployment is at a worrying 36% in South Africa owing to a mismatch between skills and available jobs, according to Stats SA. Students need assurances that the university and course they choose will adequately prepare them for opportunities in the real world.

Key to attracting and retaining students is not only through diversified and differentiated course offerings, but also through programmes that help students make the best of university life.

It's all about differentiation. Multidisciplinary courses delivered using content-rich mediums and optimised for mobility immediately give universities the competitive edge. That edge is crucial in attracting public and private sector sponsors, funding and, ultimately, students.

## ABOUT MURRAY DE VILLIERS

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