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1) Steve, tell us about this new University and how it got started.

Sure. Given the power of the global economy, I feel that it is time for a truly global educational system delivered via the Internet. The rationale for this paradigm shift in higher education is three-fold: rising cost of tuition, increasing demand of new technologies by faculty and students, and the right of everyone to access affordable higher education. However, I am saddened that not everyone can have access to a college degree. Since I feel that higher education is the key to solving our societal issues then I feel obligated to advance the cause of accessible education for people around the world. [Since people around the world would do almost anything for an American education, and since I have that information, who am I to not make it available to everyone? It's my moral obligation.](#)

While building several online university programs I watched as they artificially raised tuition to the student loan cap. I was one of the few for-profit CEOs who doesn't have an MBA or was a banker so I look at things much differently. Last year when I took over as CEO of a for-profit university I decided to lower tuition in order to enroll more students. I found that if you have the same quality of faculty as other well established schools and run a transparent program then people will attend your school if you lower your tuition. At the same time I started to see the popularity of social networking sites explode, while the economy started to weaken. I then realized that three things were hot: social networking sites, online learning and lower or zero-tuition.

Early in 2008, I used to drive over to the University of Phoenix Online and sit in the parking lot in search for inspiration. I would sit there for hours watching the sunset hoping to soak up some of their creative energies, while asking myself, "What would Dr. John Sperling, the founder of University of Phoenix, do today if he were to do it all over again?". I concluded that the first thing he would do is take education to the masses as he did years ago by bringing education from the ivory tower to the community in office buildings then eventually via distance learning. I think one of his greatest keys to success was leveraging existing resources rather than by trying to force people to change. For example, he didn't try to make the corporate offices where they held classes look "academic" nor did he develop some goofy learning management system to deliver their distance learning courses. Rather, they used the existing business offices and Outlook Express. People were familiar with regular office buildings (not intimidating like a college campus) and it was convenient. Also, most adults have used Outlook or Outlook Express so they lessened the learning curve by using systems students would be familiar with, and if they weren't, chances were that someone they knew could help them with it, as opposed to building some esoteric and irrelevant system that wasn't intuitive to adult learners.

So, I eventually thought that if Dr. Sperling were to start over that he would bring higher education to the masses. However, today the masses are in social networking sites. At this point I still had not seen a social networking site, but realized that if they were generating that much buzz that it had to be for a reason. So I logged into one, and instantly said to myself that this is the ideal online classroom! A week later I directed one of my staff members to teach a course in a social networking site -- PerfSpot.com -- since I knew their leadership and found them to be passionate and consummate professionals, dedicated to a global reach -- and it was absolutely amazing! Social networking sites allow the faculty and students to control their online learning environment, and can do all the things that conventional learning management systems can't or won't allow such as video, audio, showing photos of the users, widgets, etc.

Moreover, [using social networking sites to deliver college courses greatly reduces our cost of delivering education since we do not have to pay learning management fees which can be as high as \\$120 per student per course](#), nor do we need to have technical staff for support. In essence, it's a win-win-win because the social networking sites benefit from having more users (our students), we as a college gain by not having any learning management fees, and our faculty and students win because they get to control their learning environment.

2) What is the basic premise behind this "university"?

The premise behind Tech University of America is that higher education should be accessible to everyone. In order to provide accessible higher education to everyone, this model will focus on building a technology company that delivers higher education, rather than building a university that struggles to keep up with the latest technologies. Finally, I was also inspired by William's story to develop this model. William was able to build a windmill because he had access to a book about alternative energy sources. As a result, he was able to provide energy for his family in Africa (see: http://www.ted.com/index.php/speakers/william_kamkwamba.html).

3) What is this "Zero-Tuition Model Using Social Networking Sites"? What does all this mean?

All of our courses at Tech University of America are taught within your favorite social networking sites. By teaching our courses in social networking sites we can deliver distance learning courses in the most dynamic, interactive and current medium of online communications. This also allows us to significantly reduce our cost of delivering our programs and those savings are passed on to our students. Moreover, our courses utilize the growing amount of open source content such as video lectures and scholarly research articles and papers from world renowned professors (see: <http://www.youtube.com/edu> and <http://dspace.mit.edu/>).

This model also leverages the increasing accessibility of free online libraries with scholarly journals and electronic textbooks (see: www.freeloadpress.com). The use of free and open source scholarly materials in this model makes an American education more affordable for students around the world who will not have to buy expensive textbooks. Moreover, eliminating the use of paper books is also better for the environment since printing and shipping burdens are eliminated. But most important, this model presents the faculty and students with the opportunity to engage in learning by using the materials readily available to them via the Internet. Students must now learn not only where to locate data, but more than ever, how to accurately assess the validity and reliability of the information they locate on the Internet.

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Look, the reality is that most students will never open a textbook after they graduate, ever. However, every graduate will use the Internet for research after they finish their studies. Academic quality will be comparable to nationally and regionally accredited programs that are offered via distance learning. All faculty will possess a graduate degree from a regionally accredited university as well as practical experience in their field of study and evidence of college level teaching at an accredited university. Terms are eight weeks long and consist of weekly discussion questions, quizzes, tests, group projects and term papers.

Finally, because this model is lean and the main cost of delivering education is faculty pay, we can eliminate tuition, charge a monthly membership fee of \$99, and still make a profit. It's truly a win-win-win situation.

4) What kind of degrees can students get? Is this for an associates, bachelor's or master's?

We offer the following four academic degrees:

- Associate of Science in Business & Entrepreneurship
- Bachelor of Science in Business & Entrepreneurship
- Master of Science in Business & Entrepreneurship
- Master of Business Administration

Each student must choose one of the following areas of emphasis:

- Criminal Justice
- Sustainability and Green Technologies
- Construction Management
- Computer Science
- Sports Management

5) Would you want (gasp!) me to teach a course? How would this all work?

Yes! All of my adjunct faculty must have experience teaching at accredited universities. While we currently do not offer degrees in education, it is an area of consideration. Our adjuncts develop the courses and then are paid on a variable pay model meaning that they are compensated for each student who completes the course. Because our faculty develop each course they have buy-in with what is being taught and we have a loyalty clause in our faculty contract that states that they can continue to teach for as long as they do well and receive satisfactory evaluations.

6) Are there certain personality traits or skills that your students need?

Not necessarily, but I think that online students who like to learn, have a mastery of the English language and enjoy the Internet and social networking sites will do very well.

7) Where can interested others get more information?

There is a lot of information on our website: www.TechUofA.com. Those interested in teaching for us should join me at LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com/in/stevenhcooper>) as I'd like to see their profile and they way they present themselves in social networking sites since. After all, we are teaching courses in social networking sites!

8) What is your ultimate goal?

By making an open university, and pushing the content to where people hang out (social networking sites), even those who can't afford our monthly \$99 fees can still learn everything Tech University of America students are learning, they just won't receive the academic credit. My ultimate goal is to then allow any university to use all of our courses under the creative commons license, and rather than have them pay us as they would a traditional learning management system, we will actually pay them from the advertising money we earn from each course. [I can show each school how they can turn a current cost \(delivering online learning\) into revenue!](#)

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