From the Editor

WELCOME TO THE NEW YEAR.

We are excited to share our first print edition of 2018. This issue focuses on a topic that, without a doubt, will provide valuable insights for you and your organization throughout the year: academic effectiveness.

To create this edition, we set out to define academic effectiveness. While many of our daily activities focus on driving academic effectiveness, what exactly is it?

We began our journey to define academic effectiveness by doing industry research, asking our clients, and our team of education experts to share their understanding of the topic. Through past experiences, getting to know the community we serve, and researching the underlying role of academic effectiveness within higher education institutions, we identified key components that drive academic effectiveness and set on a working definition of the term:

**Academic effectiveness: Empowering excellence in teaching and learning.**

Throughout this issue, you will find content related to pursuing academic effectiveness. You’ll enjoy articles on student-centered learning, creating student engagement, academic integrity and assessment, a roundtable on accessibility, and much more.

We trust that you will find meaningful information in the pages to come, and wish you much success in your pursuit of academic effectiveness throughout 2018.

Sincerely,
The E-Learn Team
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Driving Excellence in Education

By: Katie Gallagher

Academic effectiveness serves as central focus for institutions of higher education across the globe. The pursuit of academic effectiveness drives numerous activities within institutions including, but not limited to the following:

- Creating and delivering high quality curriculum and instruction
- Meaningful, relevant, and insightful student, program, and institutional assessment practices
- Continuous course, program, and institutional improvement
- Course design and inclusive learning practices
- Ongoing professional development supporting pedagogical best practices
- Inclusive access of course materials

In short, academic effectiveness refers to empowering excellence in teaching and learning. From leaders, to teachers, to learners, academic effectiveness has a pervasive influence across the entire institution. For an institution to realize its purpose, practices that drive academic effectiveness are crucial.

Today, institutions face several core challenges. As online programs, adjunct professors and large class sizes proliferate, institutions struggle to maintain quality and consistency of their instruction. Additionally, institutions must focus more energy on accreditation and brand reputation with the growth of competency-based education, credentialing, multi-institution students, and online program. And, with stricter legal guidelines, institutions must deliver universal, accessible digital content that improves instruction for all students. By putting the right procedures, training, technology, and metrics in place to empower educators, promote academic integrity and accessibility, institutions can conquer these challenges.

With today’s challenges, learning management systems simply aren’t enough. At Blackboard, we’re building what’s next. Through client collaboration...
and industry partnership, we’re committed to building a better model for educational technology. It’s a model that puts relationships – between learners, teachers, and academic leadership – first. It’s an idea that teaching and learning experiences will never be one-size-fits-all. It’s a concept that isn’t done, and never will be... and we think that’s a good thing. Because the learning journey is never complete, we’re building a solution that never stops evolving. And, we’re building it together.

Blackboard’s comprehensive digital learning environment is designed to provide the foundation to empower institutions to drive academic effectiveness. The learning environment enables scalable, flexible, accessible course design; specialized assessment; collaboration; plagiarism prevention; and facilitates continuous course improvement.

CREATING INCLUSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

To advance academic effectiveness, institutions strive to provide education experiences accessible to all learners. Academic leaders must define and review policies to ensure their technologies and digital content are accessible to all. Instructors need to embrace best practices for accessibility and Universal Design for Learning to create digital content that is accessible. Accessible content is better content for all learners, not just learners with disabilities.

The most engaging courses include intuitive design, engaging and interactive experiences, and rich digital content. Students depend on access to alternative forms of digital content to meet their unique needs. With Blackboard’s digital learning environment, institutions can assess the accessibility of content across the institution and view progress towards inclusivity over time. Within normal workflows, instructors are provided with just-in-time feedback and coaching to nurture best practices for creating inclusive content and remediate accessibility issues with digital content. And, instructors have a full range of rich digital content, tools, and integrations at their fingertips to easily create engaging courses. In Blackboard’s environment, learners have access to multiple alternative formats of digital content, generated by the environment, to meet their unique needs and complement how they learn best. Blackboard offers a fully inclusive and accessible learning environment and alternative content formats to benefit all learners.

PLAGIARISM PREVENTION AND CULTIVATING APPROPRIATE ATTRIBUTIONS

To inspire academic effectiveness, institutions instill respect for the ideas of others, discourage plagiarism, and promote academic integrity. Institutions establish codes of honor and plagiarism prevention policies that translate into higher student retention rates, better prepared students and an improved institutional reputation. With Blackboard’s environment, institutions can implement plagiarism prevention capabilities extending to every learner in every course to both prevent plagiarism and create teachable moments to help learners properly cite their sources and respect intellectual property.

With this technology, instructors can nurture appropriate research strategies and help learners find their own voice igniting a passion for learning and original thinking. Blackboard’s comprehensive digital learning environment supports plagiarism prevention capabilities extending to every learner in every course to both prevent plagiarism and create teachable moments to help learners properly cite their sources and respect intellectual property. With Blackboard’s environment, institutions can implement plagiarism prevention capabilities extending to every learner in every course to both prevent plagiarism and create teachable moments to help learners properly cite their sources and respect intellectual property.

Creating inclusive learning experiences:

- To advance academic effectiveness, institutions strive to provide education experiences accessible to all learners.
- Academic leaders must define and review policies to ensure their technologies and digital content are accessible to all.
- Instructors need to embrace best practices for accessibility and Universal Design for Learning.

Nurture digital collaboration and social skills critical for today’s economy and academia:

- Without question, digital collaboration can extend reach, increase student engagement, nurture collaboration, and provide greater access to instructors.
- In pursuing academic effectiveness with Blackboard’s digital learning environment, institutions empower educators, promote academic integrity, and create inclusive learning experiences increasing student engagement and improving learning outcomes.

RIGOROUS ASSESSMENT AND EFFICIENT GRADING WORKFLOWS

To forward academic effectiveness, institutions must hold themselves, instructors, and learners accountable by evaluating institutional and program effectiveness, as well as student learning. Institutions must be able to efficiently evaluate how effective its programs are at delivering specific knowledge and developing skills through demonstrated competencies by students to continuously improve their programs. Program and student assessments must set the bar with challenging standards to assess the effectiveness of the learning process. Assessments are a critical part of teaching and learning process to help students progress academically. Formative assessments exist to ensure students understand the material, have a strong grip on the subject, or have developed the appropriate skills. Summative assessments exist to ensure students can demonstrate the required competency levels. Teachers must ensure assessments are authentic and truly measure students’ abilities and comprehension, regardless of the form.

In Blackboard’s comprehensive environment, institutions can evaluate learning outcomes at the institutional, program, or individual learning level. Blackboard simplifies continuous course and program improvement and provides evidence for program assessment. Blackboard’s intuitive, efficient, and consistent grading workflows save instructors time and improve grading quality. Instructors can easily provide personalized feedback to improve student learning in less time. Blackboard technology eases the tedium of grading and improves learning outcomes.

Rigorous assessment and efficient grading workflows:

- Institutions must hold themselves, instructors, and learners accountable by evaluating institutional and program effectiveness.
- Program and student assessments must set the bar with challenging standards to assess the effectiveness of the learning process.
- Assessments are a critical part of teaching and learning process to help students progress academically.
- Formative assessments exist to ensure students understand the material, have a strong grip on the subject, or have developed the appropriate skills.
- Summative assessments exist to ensure students can demonstrate the required competency levels.

In pursuing academic effectiveness with Blackboard’s digital learning environment, institutions empower educators, promote academic integrity, and create inclusive learning experiences increasing student engagement and improving learning outcomes.
How to Become an E-Learning Champion

Every month at the University of Cincinnati, a faculty or staff member who goes above and beyond to improve their students’ experience in the classroom, recognized as an “E-Learning Champion.”

**BY: PRISCILA ZIGUOVAS**
**CINCINNATI, OHIO, UNITED STATES**

DAN WADDELL ENTERED THE E-LEARNING BACKPACK Project during his first year as assistant professor of chemistry at the University of Cincinnati (UC). He was one of 36 faculty members that received a backpack full of technological equipment meant to complement the tools and resources available in Canopy, the university’s branded digital learning environment powered by Blackboard Learn, or, as they call it, their E-Learning ecosystem. In return, “backpackers” were encouraged to reimagine how they created and delivered course content, as well as how they engaged with their students.

“It was great having the technology at my fingertips,” says Waddell. “If something popped into my head, I could just do it instead of worrying about finding funding or having to do it out of my own pocket, so it was incredibly beneficial and useful.”

The Backpack Project no longer exists. However, it is a good example of how UC’s e-learning approach is anything but conventional.

**The E-Learning Champions initiative**

In 2014, the university started the E-Learning Champions initiative, offering monthly awards to faculty members who exemplify use and integration of UC’s e-learning tools and resources in the classroom, promote innovation and collaboration, model new techniques, best practices, tools, and ideas, in an effort to provide UC students with a successful, 21st century learning experience.

The Champions can be nominated through an online form by anyone at the university. The winners, elected by a panel, receive a $500 honorarium and have the opportunity to be featured in the Canopy newsletter and UC News. In addition, they may be called on to share their wisdom, providing support for a faculty workshop, knowledge-base article, or a case study video.

Mike Mitchum, interim assistant director of UC’s Center for Excellence in E-Learning, says that the award works as a method of recognition rather than as a motivational tool. “It is a highlight for folks who are really digging in and doing the tough work and using the tools that we put out. And not only the tools, but the pedagogy that comes along with taking those tools into their curriculum. I mean, it takes a lot of work to do this in your class, to do it well, and do it consistently. The people who are doing this work, because they are interested in it, care about engagement, they are not doing it because they want some sort of shiny recognition.”

Meet some of UC’s champions

**Todd Foley, assistant professor**

Assistant professor in the division of experience-based learning and career education, Todd Foley developed a flipped classroom approach for co-op courses (co-op, or cooperative education, combines classroom-based education with practical work experience). He teaches students how to network, create a resume and prepare themselves for the professional world.

**Todd shares his experience**

“Most of the teaching I do is experiential learning-based, which means that most of it is highly active and discussion-based within the classes, or getting students out of the classroom and doing work in the community. So, not a lot of technology was being used in the teaching that I have done in the past. When I came to UC, I had the opportunity to be a part of the E-Learning Backpack Project, and I received a lot of equipment, most specifically video equipment, that I was able to use both in the classroom and beyond. At the same time, I applied for a mini-grant from the State of Ohio to improve my classes as well. Through those two generous programs I was able to change the way I was teaching all of my classes. Before those grant programs, I was not doing anything with e-learning really, I was not even using Blackboard Learn the way I actually should. After the grants, I changed my perspective; I actually like lecture-style classes; if they are done well, the students get a lot out of the experience. But having done a flipped classroom for a couple of years now, I will never go back to just lecturing students because it really is an amazing way to engage them. One-on-one I can lead them in more personal ways. It really frees you up to do a lot of new things, and it took my teaching to the next level.”
Sarah Schroeder, assistant professor, Field Service at University of Cincinnati

Sarah Schroeder coordinates UC’s undergraduate School of Education e-learning initiatives for pre-service teachers. Along with that, she works on online course improvement and on implementing Quality Matters standards. She has a wide range of tasks that go from faculty member to trainer, to instructional designer, to member in multiple committees.

Sarah shares her experience

“For me the most important thing about integrating technology well is focusing on teaching first and technology second. Always putting good instructional practices and student-centered approaches first. If you do that, and you really focus on the outcomes you are looking for from students and then select your tools carefully, making strategic choices, I think that is what makes good technology integration in the classroom. Not every tool works for everybody, and that’s okay. You need to choose the tools that work best for your subject area, for your students and for yourself, as an instructor. If you do that, and focus on student success, the technology integration is going to be successful, and I think that is where the champion side of me comes in. I am a big cheerleader for finding the right tools for your teaching style and your classroom and your students. If we try to incorporate every single tool that’s been given to us, it can overwhelm the faculty and the students, especially brand-new faculty, and good teaching can get lost in an effort to integrate technology.”

Anton Harfmann, professor and director of Architectural Engineering at University of Cincinnati

Anton shares his experience

“My primary goal is to teach construction technology, but I also introduce the students to the use of this intense 3D modeling system that is now known as Building Information Modeling. We do not have a formal course in how to use that software, so I integrated it into the class. While the class is focused in construction technology, the students learn the software because I use it to teach with, while modeling directly in the class to explain a complex construct, and then they are able to follow along. They are all required to bring their laptops with the software on it and they are encouraged to model along with me. In order to accommodate students who have difficulty, I have a help session before the class starts and they can come and we model everything I did the previous class. Additionally, I incorporated Echo360 Lecture Capture into the course about three years ago. That allows students to watch the lectures outside of class, and that has been a godsend for me, because the class now is able to move at a regular pace and get through all the content in construction, and let the students practice learning the software their own time. We have now a fairly interesting set of options that were not available twenty years ago.”
If we try to incorporate every single tool that’s been given to us, it can overwhelm the faculty and the students, especially brand-new faculty, and good teaching can get lost in an effort to integrate technology.


Sources

Learn from the champions

Inspiring practices and ideas

Do not fall for the “digital native” myth. Students may not be quite the technology experts that we think they are. “Most of them grew up with cellphones and laptops and had technology their whole lives. But what we see is that these students may have had technology, but that does not mean they know how to use it, or how to use it well, and they definitely don’t know how to use it for productivity,” says Sarah Schroeder. Teachers should promote digital literacy and digital equity, “making sure students aren’t just given the tools, but that they know how to use them for more than just entertainment.”

In big classes, consider having learning assistants. “I have learning assistants that go around the classroom and talk to the students, and then they tell me what the students are having issues and problems with, and then I can take that feedback and create short little video tutorials about those topics,” says Daniel Waddell. The assistants are undergraduate students at the university that have already taken Daniel’s class and have done well in it. “The class has been consistently growing with about 450 students in my chemistry lectures at this point, so to try to get some more of that personal touch into that hugely non-personal atmosphere has been a big goal.”

Make your students masters of the information. “Discerning what is good and relevant information is what I think is a good teacher’s primary responsibility. Since we have limited time with the students, and they have to take a course in a particular time frame, our job is to actually develop a path, leading them to good content and content that is relevant and most useful to their needs,” says Anton Harfmann. “And then again, to teach them how to do that process on their own, once they become masters of the information, because eventually they will have to discern for themselves what is good and what is fake news.”

Flip one lesson and see what happens. “I know that the e-learning industry says you need to have a purpose strategy before you adopt a technology. And while I agree completely with that, I also love the idea of just trying something out and seeing if it works,” says Todd Foley. “Technology enables you to think differently, so until you have actually practiced and played with it, it is really hard to imagine how that is going to enhance your teaching. You do not have to convert your entire class to a flip module, for example, but I encourage you to try it, so just flip one lesson. Just pick one day, and instead of teaching in class, just teach out of class and then watch what happens. Once you get your feet wet a little bit, I think that it is really helpful.”

Daniel shares his experience

“I try to genuinely use a measured approach to the technology in that I want to try to enhance the pedagogy of my classroom and incorporate some of these e-learning tools, but I do not want to do something just for the sake of using that technology. I try to sprinkle in little pieces of e-learning throughout my course without changing the structure completely or drastically. I dabble in a number of things. One of the things that students have given me the best feedback from are short little video tutorials that I have created. For instance, a short video of myself on our Blackboard Learn page talking about our syllabus and where things are located as well as the structure of the course. Instead of spending twenty minutes in class just talking at them about it, I make a short little tutorial so they can watch again and again. Now, I can spend the class time talking about the chemistry content and working through chemistry problems and letting them work through things.”

Daniel Waddell, assistant professor of Chemistry

For Daniel Waddell, an assistant chemistry professor, being open and willing to continually adapt is one of the more important things a teacher can do. When he first started at the University of Cincinnati, he had a lot to figure out: new courses to teach and new tools to use.
George Mason University: Designing the Ideal Student Experience

Known for its innovative culture, George Mason University is listening to students, faculty and staff, in order to imagine the ideal student experience and make it a reality.

Sponsored by Blackboard

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY, LOCATED IN Fairfax, Va., is a young public institution that has been growing rapidly. From 2007 to 2016, the number of enrolled students has gone from 30,332 to 35,189, a 16% increase. “Our growth is predominantly in our undergraduate student population, which speaks to the strength of the George Mason University degree and about how it is perceived. However, it is also reflective of the northern Virginia area and its growth in the number of students who are choosing to stay and pursue their undergraduate degrees here,” says David Burge, Mason’s vice president for enrollment management.

Along with the new students came the necessity of rethinking the entire student experience through their eyes: how do students define success and how can the university transform their experience to increase student success? That included updating systems, processes and the way the university is organized, in order to compensate Mason’s “innovation debt.” It was time to focus on addressing student needs with a holistic approach.

With that idea in mind, Mason’s leadership team created the Student Experience Redesign Project, a three-year initiative with Blackboard as a partner in phase one. The ultimate project goal is to maximize student success at the university. But what exactly would student success be?

Defining student success

According to Rose Pascarell, Mason’s vice president for university life, while many institutions define success as getting students to graduation as well as post-graduate career accomplishment, Mason sees it in a broader way.

“We want to know that students who complete their degree have discovered their strengths – academically and holistically,” says Pascarell. “Success means that a student leaves us knowing what he or she is passionate about, feels hopeful about life after college and about his or her future. The successful Mason graduate is an engaged citizen, a well-rounded scholar, who is prepared to act.”

To Michelle Marks, vice president of academic innovation and new ventures, besides completing their degrees and progressing into jobs in their careers of choice or getting into graduate school, students should develop intellectually, socially, and personally during their time at Mason, so that they are better prepared to have successful careers and meaningful lives.

Marilyn Smith, vice president/chief information officer for Information Technology Services, wishes for students to have an outstanding service experience from the university and wants the leaders at Mason to have insight into metrics that define that service experience.

David Burge, vice president for enrollment management, explains the key metrics that Mason is using in an attempt to quantify student success. “The first is the retention metric: what percentage of all first-year students are likely to return for a second year. The second metric would be their speed to degrees, which is to say how quickly do they earn their degrees, and we pay particular attention here to the four-year and six-year graduation rates. The third is a metric that has to do with affinity and the sense of well-being and belonging, which is something that we measure in numerous points throughout the experience,” says Burge. According to him, in the context of the Student Experience Redesign, Mason wants to be able to show some very immediate and lasting results in those three areas.

The Student Experience Redesign Project

Blackboard was asked to be a partner at the beginning of the project, for which the first step was to understand what delights,
difficulties and gaps students were facing in their experience at Mason. In order to do that, Blackboard applied design thinking, the same methodology the company uses when creating new software, in an innovative approach developed specifically for institutional partners.

The design thinking methodology was adapted for business purposes by David M. Kelley, founder of design consultancy IDEO, and has seen a resurgence in the last decade. Design thinking helps solve complex, multi-factor problems, by collecting input and insights from those who will benefit most from its results – in Mason’s case, its students.

“Design thinking is a creative process for innovating. We wanted to use an action-oriented, positive approach that would engage many members of our community – students, faculty and staff. We didn’t want this to be a top-down initiative,” says Michelle Marks.

Blackboard’s team went through thousands of survey responses, years of student records and University data, and interviewed many students. Blackboard’s team also conducted workshops with faculty and staff, and experienced campus life through conducting on-campus exercises with students. Analysis of student data and behavior provided a wide picture of the Mason student experience, from which a roadmap for improvement was developed.

“Blackboard’s conversations with hundreds of students, staff and faculty, identified hundreds of gaps – some large and some smaller – that impact the student experience. These gaps ranged from technologically-focused challenges around sharing data across our systems, to a student orientation with information overload, to daytime-only access to critical student services and advising that prevent access to services when and where needed,” says Marks.

On the bright side, Mason has found that their student services staff are incredibly devoted to students and go above and beyond to help. “Mason has dedicated talent and it is our job to figure out the best way for all of us to work together across offices, and to serve students in the way that is most helpful to their success,” she adds.

**A university-wide brainstorming session**

After the Blackboard study, the university promoted a day with 250 people divided into tables, including Mason’s president, senior leaders, professionals from different sectors, faculty and students. “They worked together and the result of that meeting was to come up with six teams, exactly the way Blackboard recommended: self-service 24/7 student support; first-year student care network; student initiation experiences; student voice; data-driven relationship management; and culture of service. The groups are coming up with recommendations, and by the end of the year, we want to have a multi-year, multi-faceted roadmap developed which we will implement to achieve our vision for a Mason student experience,” says Marilyn Smith.

The first round of ideas that were generated from this collaborative approach are to be implemented in the coming academic year. “We will implement as many as we can over the next few years – and ideally, in the process, generate a culture that is always thinking about how we can improve the student experience,” says Marks.

**A successful future**

Improving student experience is also a way of guaranteeing Mason’s sustainability. “Mason is a very young institution, we have not been around much longer than forty years; there are not generations of Mason patriots – yet. But the better we are at making sure that the students who attend here feel that they have value and that their degree was meaningful, the more likely they are to promote us to somebody else,” says David Burge.

With such motivation to make the students’ journey at the university increasingly more successful, Mason is on its way to becoming more and more, a student-centered institution.

“I am very positive and excited about moving forward with this roadmap and I think the culture change–getting our people to be collaborative with each other, and not just to look at single functions, but to step back and look at the students’ needs–is a big thing,” says Marilyn Smith.

To Rose Pascarell, the Student Experience Redesign has the potential to positively impact all students. “The Redesign should eliminate many small and large obstacles that keep students from moving forward, and should result in quality interactions with the university. The outcome should result in higher persistence and shorter time to completion, and also in greater student satisfaction.”

“We want all of our students to feel part of an inclusive community of learners, educators, and innovators who share in unified holistic practices and experiences,” says Michelle Marks. “We want our students to actively contribute to the evolving vision and expression of the collective Mason experience. And we want them to consistently experience proactive, coordinated, nurturing interactions and services in every part of Mason.”
More than 5,000 hours of Peer Learning Online: How Western Sydney University Made it Happen

Whether or not you are familiar with the concept of peer assisted learning - where students get together to assist each other with class content and develop study skills - you should take a look at the great work that is being done at Australia’s Western Sydney University (WSU) with the Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Program.

RECENTLY, WSU RECEIVED THE ANZ STUDENT SUCCESS AWARD, a Blackboard Catalyst Award for their PASSOnline program, that recognizes mentoring programs leading to higher levels of student retention and skills, among other criteria.

A Brief History of PASS

PASS is based on the global peer learning program Supplemental Instruction (SI). PASS/SI has been running for more than 40 years, with over 2,000 institutions internationally implementing peer learning programs.

Does your institution already have a peer learning program? At Western Sydney University, online peer learning sessions are a way to get students engaged and improve their study skills. Blackboard Learn resources facilitate peer assessments through machine learning and intuitive grading workflows.

Renée Boucher
PASS program Coordinator, Western Sydney University

Hanan Abu-Saif
PASS online project Officer, Western Sydney University

Leonardo TissoT
Sydney, Australia
PASS is characterized by being peer led, with weekly sessions run in a collaborative way. Senior students are employed to facilitate sessions for their peers.

“It’s about reviewing content, but also about study skills. PASS attendees achieve higher grades, on average. And that happens because they build up skills like motivation, confidence, employability and a sense of belonging to the university,” says Renée Boucher, PASS Program Coordinator at WSU.

For the past four years, PASS has been available online for Western Sydney University’s students. Worried that the online program could become a second-rate initiative compared with the on campus face-to-face experience, the program team worked creatively to retain the existing qualities of the program and deploy them over online platforms.

“We had to reimagine what PASS would look like online and not just take what works on campus and put it in a virtual environment,” says Hanan Abu-Saif, PASSOnline Project Officer at WSU.

A Way to Reinforce Learning

The original name of the PASS Program (Supplemental Instruction) implies that it’s intended to be supplemental to tutorials and lectures. So it’s another way for students to reinforce their learning.

The peer learning experience is key to engaging students in a program like PASS with students more comfortable when learning from peers. For example, “You might ask a silly question in a PASS session, something that maybe you wouldn’t have the confidence to ask in a formal learning environment,” says Renée.

6 Steps to Engage Students in Online Environments

1. Make it as inviting as possible

Sessions are promoted by both the PASS team and academic staff. WSU uses Blackboard Learn with the Ultra Experience. The PASS program has a dedicated site with information about and access to the online sessions. For example, the site contains recorded introductory videos that are used as a virtual way to replicate the experience of a facilitator promoting the sessions in person. “It’s more inviting than just clicking and joining the sessions”, says Renée.

Getting academics on board to support the sessions and actively promote in person and via the unit’s LMS site also plays a crucial role in engaging students.

2. Allow them to engage from anywhere

Students can also join sessions in Blackboard Collaborate from mobile devices, making it possible for them to engage wherever is most convenient.

3. Train your facilitators

The training of facilitators is essential to success in online peer learning. Training includes online modules, face-to-face workshops and ongoing support. “We have got to train and skill them before they support their peers. We developed our training program over the last year and a half to assure that facilitators are prepared for the challenge”, Renée informs.

4. Keep them confident

Students need to be confident with the technology. Students can develop these skills by exploring a virtual room before the sessions or by accessing the automated tutorials. Also, the facilitator runs “ice breaker” activities, so students can get comfortable with both the whiteboard tools and with each other before the learning begins.

5. Keep the focus on collaborative learning, but don’t forget the tech structure

Nevertheless, the best measure for an engaging session in Blackboard Collaborate is quality. That’s why Western Sydney University deploys a range of technological tools to enable interaction between the facilitator and students. Cameras, emojis, and chatbox, among others, are crucial to engage students. “Although, sometimes, it’s challenging to get them to use all of it,” Hanan says. “The chat is the most popular, possibly because they join in a kind of anonymity (since no one is watching them), so we try to get the facilitators to ask questions that engage them,” she explains.

6. Create a sense of community

Maintaining a sense of community is challenging, but essential to engage students. Use collaborative learning to build connections and a sense of community. A range of active learning activities, addressing students by name and encouraging participation by all increases interactions between students, which means they are able take the lead in their learning process.
7 Trends You Should Invest on to Become a Student-Centered Institution

BY: PRISCILA ZIGUNOVAS
INFOGRAPHIC: TRIBU Studio

Educational institutions continuously strive to achieve excellence and stay current and relevant. In a context of restricted resources and limitless demands, they have to do more with less and make smart investment decisions. Here are some of the trends higher education institutions should invest on to become student-focused and ensure sustainability.

### 1. STUDENT-CENTERED MARKETING AND SERVICES

How is your institution communicating with students? How well do you know your target audience? Are you effectively explaining to students the return on investment from their program of choice? And when students need help, how quickly can they get an answer or a solution from the institution? Making sure communications and services are tailored to different student personas and profiles will help increase enrollments and improve retention. This can be done through specialized outsourcing, allowing institutions to better understand the students they are serving beyond demographics, but in terms of their needs and preferences. When that load is taken off institutions, it is easier for them to focus on their field of expertise: academics, teaching and learning.

Is your institution student-centered? Investing in a student-focused approach can ensure a better educational experience and increase student engagement. Virtual student services, the use of mobile technologies and cognitive solutions are examples of initiatives that extend beyond campus reach.

### 2. LEARNING ANALYTICS AND COGNITIVE SOLUTIONS

Using data to improve learning and student experience is one of the strongest trends in education. Meeting student needs in a timely manner can sometimes be challenging, but learning analytics and cognitive computing can certainly help with that. Imagine if, based on the information available, you could predict students’ difficulties or anticipate answers to their questions. It’s a powerful resource meant to be an ally to those who support students.

### 3. MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES

Smartphone usage is rising and most people spend several hours a day looking at their small screens. Media experts say that we now live in an “attention economy,” an approach that treats human attention as a scarce commodity or a valuable currency. If people are spending most of their free time on their smartphones, mobile is a convenient way to deliver education to students, and is also a critical way to raise levels of engagement through real time communication. All activities in apps designed for students and instructors, such as video-conference sessions, tend to be optimized for smartphones and tablets, hence communication doesn’t have to be so concentrated in the classroom.

Is your institution student-centered? Investing in a student-focused approach can ensure a better educational experience and increase student engagement. Virtual student services, the use of mobile technologies and cognitive solutions are examples of initiatives that extend beyond campus reach.
SMART INVESTMENT DECISIONS

It can be very challenging for an institution to make big investment decisions, and technology is certainly an important factor here. Investing in technology fads may be frustrating when you find out that students have quickly moved on to something new. Although it can be hard to tell how education and technological resources may shift in the future, technology should be chosen considering long term availability and scalability.

SOURCES


SHORTER CREDENTIALS

Affordability is a big deal for most students. In fact, it’s the number one concern for all student generations, as shown by recent studies. Another important issue is time. Many students do not want (or need) a bachelor’s or graduate degree. What do they want? Short-term credentials, workshops, seminars. That is, education that takes less time and money, and allows them to learn a competency or skill more quickly. In particular, short-term credentials allow students to continuously learn while maintaining an ongoing relationship with the institution, and many universities are already investing in this approach with great success.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Learning through experience is not a new concept, but many institutions still fail to make experiential opportunities such as travel, internships or immersions accessible. Such experiences are proven to accelerate learning, promote mindset changes and increase engagement. They also deliver extraordinary return on investment, which is something that students need to consider when choosing a program or credential. Even when activities like these are available, they are not always featured. Many institutions are starting to use experiential learning as a way to differentiate themselves and add value to their programs. Beyond that, they want students to see the benefits of combining inside and outside classroom work.

CAREER OUTCOMES

If your institution is not thinking seriously about how to be more involved with employers, think again. Reducing the gap between university and employers is a big opportunity to offer your students the career outcomes they are hoping for. How to do that? Interacting with employers, understanding the skills and competencies they are looking for, and even going as far as customizing the curriculum and/or programs based on their needs. Some universities have already been working on this for a long time, while others are just starting to explore it, but it’s definitely a big trend to watch out for now and in the coming future.
Create Engagement to Make E-Learning Different

Higher education is saturated with online programs from various colleges and universities. So if a small private non-profit university was interested in expanding its online presence, how would it go about doing this? How would it differentiate itself from the myriad of choices that students wade through when they are interested in returning to school for a degree?

Dr. Torria Davis
Instructional Designer for OPS, California Baptist University

In order to differentiate its online programs in the market and increase online student enrollment, California Baptist University invested in high-definition video conferencing technology, course design facilitation, faculty training, and student advisory services. These initiatives have extended the reach of the campus and promoted online student engagement.

The Virtual Hybrid

Dr. Hong knew from the beginning that offering only asynchronous content would not achieve online student engagement. Working with academic staff, the team proposed a new model called “virtual hybrid” that would take advantage of a Cisco technology called Telepresence. Telepresence is a technology platform that allows for high-definition video conferencing of a typical class size (around 24 students plus the teacher). Telepresence is used in conjunction with other systems such as Webex and Blackboard Learn (a Learning Management System (LMS)) that host asynchronous content.

For example, the online Master of Counseling Psychology program uses the virtual hybrid model in all its classes because it allows students to interact with their teacher and fellow classmates in an immersive way. Because most online students live within 50 miles of a traditional campus, virtual hybrid provide students with the option to come to campus as well as participate remotely if desired. The virtual hybrid model works by sharing the physical class in high-definition with other students who are participating virtually.

Dr. Hong also knew that simply implementing high-definition video conferencing technology would not automatically mean that every student would be engaged, just as a student’s physical presence in a classroom would not guarantee that student would be engaged. At that point, it is up to the class, the faculty and the course design to generate the engagement. If the course is static, neither the content nor the video conferencing will be dynamic. This leads to the next objective of Course Design.

Course Design

The high quality content developed by faculty is made interactive and engaging through good course design. It is essential that the online student experience consist of more
than reading directions on a screen and taking multiple choice exams in the learning management system. Dr. Torria Davis, instructional designer for OPS, partners with faculty to create interactive and engaging online experiences. She supports faculty in three ways:

1. Sharing web tools to create a sense of presence in the online space
2. Training on Blackboard features for interactivity and engagement
3. Supporting the implementation of Quality Matters standards

In order for students to engage in the online classroom, it is imperative that they connect with the instructor, their peers and course content. This is facilitated by using variety of web tools that allow students and the instructor to be seen and heard. One such tool is VoiceThread and this tool has been implemented university wide. Students and instructors can use their web cams and microphones to be seen and heard while having conversations around course content. This means instructors can narrate their PowerPoint presentations, facilitate an asynchronous discussion with students, and create engaging learning experiences in a variety of other ways.

Interactivity is supported through Blackboard. The assignment, test, discussion board, group, and rubric features are used to assess learning outcomes, provide self-assessment opportunities and student feedback on work submitted. Providing strategies for building content that is accessible across mobile devices increases opportunities for interactivity and engagement in a course.

Recently, the academic team decided to implement Quality Matters to strengthen the course design and development processes. Previously, course design and development was guided by Blackboard’s exemplar course program rubric, providing quality guidelines in the areas of course design, interaction and collaboration, assessment, and learner support. The implementation of Quality Matters will contribute a strong alignment between learning outcomes, instructional materials, course activities, and assessments. The result of these collaborative efforts with faculty is a cohesive course design that engages students and supports the attainment of learning outcomes.

Connectedness

Connectedness is a third objective built on efforts to bridge faculty and students. As part of this endeavor, faculty strive to respond to students within 24 hours and even meet with students at local coffee shops or through Telepresence to discuss assignments or lend a helping ear with personal challenges.

Another endeavor in the connectedness objective is the yearly faculty training. Faculty continually learn new technologies and methods in delivering the highest quality interactive experience with students. Faculty incorporate content and technologies in the Blackboard Learn environment addressing areas such as teaching strategies, online lectures, including PowerPoint presentations and YouTube videos, Telepresence, and other technology integrations. New this year, for example, was the use of Voicethread with Blackboard, in order to offer natural online interaction that lends itself to students presenting and defending their work before experts and peers.

An additional part connectedness is its advising service, where every student is assigned a specific one-stop advisor to help with student needs. This includes helping students with academic planning, any challenges or issues with classes, improving grades and financial aid. OPS developed an in-house software system that helps advisors work with students more effectively. This application aggregates student data from various systems to form a student profile that advisors can use to help with advising services which contributes to the retention/completion rates. Faculty also have the ability to communicate directly with advisors when there is a sense that students may need assistance.

Faith Integration

As a Christian university, the combination of technology and course design make it possible for faculty to engage with students more easily when it comes to faith. Asynchronous and synchronous technologies provide the foundation for faith integration and conversations between faculty and students. Weaved within the course content are references to scripture as it relates to the discipline and assignments help students connect this to practice. The video technology is available for faculty to further connect and discuss faith directly with students as needed.

Conclusion

California Baptist University believes each person has been created for a purpose. CBU strives to help students understand and engage this purpose by providing a Christ-centered educational experience that integrates academics with spiritual and social development opportunities. The online division combines these tenets with innovative technologies and course design to create an effective and engaging virtual learning environment so that graduates can live their purpose in the workplace and in the world.
In 2016, an investigation by The Times Newspaper revealed that almost 50,000 students from 129 British universities had been caught plagiarizing in the prior three years. This “plagiarism epidemic” brought several ethical questions to surface, including “contract cheating” – when students pay for individuals or companies to write assignments on their behalf. In fact, student behavior studies show that academic cheating is prevalent and that some forms of plagiarism have increased over the past decades.

The percentage of undergraduate students who admitted to having cheated on written assignments and tests has reached 68%, according to surveys conducted from 2012 to 2015 by Donald McCabe and the International Center for Academic Integrity. For graduate students, the number is somewhat lower, at 43%. McCabe, former professor at the Rutgers University Business School and a leading researcher on the subject of cheating, collected data from 71,300 undergraduate and 17,000 graduate students.

In the article Cheating in Academic Institutions: A Decade of Research, McCabe and Linda Klebe Treviño, a professor from Penn State University, review ten years of research on plagiarism in academic institutions. The authors stress that “universities cannot assume that its students will take the time to familiarize themselves with campus rules about academic integrity on their own, and even if they did, an institution’s failure to emphasize for its students the high value it places on academic integrity sends the message that it is not a high priority.” Therefore, “such institutions should not be surprised if they experience above-average levels of academic dishonesty.”

In fact, a high percentage of students claim that they have not received any training in techniques for academic writing or plagiarism issues. According to the paper Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe: Results of the Project, research conducted in 25 European countries shows that, whilst more than 75% of students said they received training in Austria, Greece, United Kingdom and Finland, less than 35% of students from Italy, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Poland received such instruction.
The implementation of programs and policies promoting academic integrity, such as honor codes, has been proven to positively influence students’ behavior. According to McCabe and Treviño, honor codes can be quite successful; however, “a truly effective honor code must be well implemented and strongly embedded in the student culture,” meaning that merely the existence of a code is not enough to prevent cheating.3

“Many stakeholders are convinced that plagiarism is a serious academic problem and institutions will have to demonstrate that they are tackling it,” say researchers Fintan Culwin and Thomas Lancaster, from South Bank University. In the article Plagiarism Issues for Higher Education, the authors point out that there is a lack of consistency across the higher education sector. “Some institutions have a pro-active anti-plagiarism policy, some a reactive policy and a few still claim, but cannot prove, that none of their students cheat.” From their point of view, “the standards across the sector need to be equal, so that students cannot assume that they can cheat by moving to a more lenient institution.” 5

To cheat or not to cheat: why students plagiarize

Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon, as recalls Chris Park, Professor Emeritus at Lancaster University. In the article In Other (People’s) Words: Plagiarism by University Students—Literature and Lessons, he highlights that “copying from other writers is probably as old as writing itself, but until the advent of mass-produced writing, it remained hidden from the public gaze.” According to Park, “opportunities to plagiarize have expanded greatly since the advent and increased accessibility of the internet.” 6

Amongst the most popular forms of plagiarism by students, according to Park, there are: stealing material from another source and passing it off as their own; submitting a paper written by someone else; copying sections of material from one or more source texts and supplying proper documentaion but leaving out quotation marks, thus giving the impression that the material has been paraphrased rather than directly quoted; and paraphrasing material from one or more source texts without supplying appropriate documentation.

McCabe and Treviño7 mention a few reasons why students cheat: pressure to get high grades, parental pressures, desire to excel, pressure to get a job, laziness, lack of responsibility, poor self-image, and lack of personal integrity. They stress that “contextual factors, such as students’ perceptions of peers’ behavior, are the most powerful influence.” Therefore, students may cheat because they do not want to be at a disadvantage compared to their peers. Studies have also shown that men tend to cheat more than women and young students cheat more than mature students. Additionally, when students know that they are at risk of being caught or punished, they tend to cheat less.

Institutional action

Park explains that “some students plagiarize unintentionally, when they are not familiar with proper ways of quoting, paraphrasing, citing and referencing and/or when they are unclear about the meaning of ‘common knowledge’ and the expression ‘in their own words.’” These difficulties in understanding proper citation caused a new cheating resource to emerge: online paraphrasing tools that help students modify original texts in order to write “in their own words.” 6

In the article Using Internet Based Paraphrasing Tools: Original Work, Patchwriting or Facilitated Plagiarism?, Ann M. Rogerson and Grace McCarthy, from the University of Wollongong, Australia, say that “the case of a student submitting work generated by an online tool without appropriate acknowledgement could be considered as a form of plagiarism, and the case of academics trying to reframe texts for alternate publications could be considered as a form of self-plagiarism.” According to the authors, both scenarios could be considered as ‘facilitated plagiarism.’7

Unintentional cheating

Park explains that “some students plagiarize unintentionally, when they are not familiar with proper ways of quoting, paraphrasing, citing and referencing and/or when they are unclear about the meaning of ‘common knowledge’ and the expression ‘in their own words.’” These difficulties in understanding proper citation caused a new cheating resource to emerge: online paraphrasing tools that help students modify original texts in order to write “in their own words.” 6
Cheating in online learning

It may be surprising for some, but evidence shows that online students are not more likely to cheat. Researchers George Watson and James Sottile, from Marshall University in West Virginia, United States, interviewed 655 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in online and live courses. The most important finding from this analysis was that there were no significant differences in the students’ admission of cheating for live (face-to-face) and online courses, the authors wrote. In fact, the results showed higher rates of academic dishonesty in live courses. “One possible explanation is that classroom social interaction in live classes plays some part in whether students decide to cheat,” say Watson and Sottile. “Familiarity with fellow students may lessen moral objections to cheating as they work through assignments and assessments together over the course of a school term.” Nevertheless, the study shows that students were significantly more likely to obtain answers from others during an online test or quiz. This ability to receive answers without the monitoring of a professor presents problems for the standard lecture-based, test-driven course, say the authors. They suggest instructors should “change the assessment from objective measures (multiple choice and true-false) to more subjective (essays and research papers) that require more in-depth understanding of a topic and more personal expression.”

Contract cheating

Universities all over the world have been dealing with the growing business of plagiarism, especially with essay mills, or “contract cheating” – when a student pays a company or person to write an assignment that they will pass off as their own, generally through a website. Many of these websites announce “plagiarism-free guarantees,” or papers tested against plagiarism detection tools. According to recent information from the United Kingdom’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), there are currently more than 100 essay mill websites in operation. In the report ‘Plagiarism in Higher Education’, published by QAA in 2016, the agency states that “there is no single solution” and that universities need “a multi-faceted approach that builds on published research and the steps that universities and colleges are already taking to promote good academic practice by students, to ‘design out’ opportunities for plagiarism in their assessments, and to identify and penalize academic misconduct.”

Government involvement

Although plagiarism is not a crime in itself, helping a student to cheat has become a crime in some countries, showing that governments could also play a part in reinforcing integrity. In New Zealand, since 2011 it is illegal to advertise or provide third-party assistance to cheat, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) has the power to prosecute anyone providing or advertising such services. In the United States, 17 states have some form of law addressing custom essay writing services (data from October 2014).

In the United Kingdom, the QAA recommended the development of “new laws to make it illegal to help students’ commit acts of academic dishonesty for financial gain,” punishable with fines, according to The Guardian. Plagiarism is a major challenge that needs to be considered in the development of institutional strategies. However, it also represents an opportunity for teaching students about the value of integrity and originality, in order for them to thrive in a world where being original is increasingly difficult.
Goethe once said “There is nothing worth thinking but it has been thought before; we must only try to think it again.”1 In an increasingly collaborative, information-based world, is our view of textual ownership becoming outdated?

By: Priscila Zigunovas

There was a shift from a mimetic, biblical, premodern paradigm, to a productive, modern way of thinking. 4

In the premodern paradigm, individual creativity was attributed to a divine inspiration. As a result, literary work was unauthorized during this period. The Enlightenment replaced that point of view for a new one according to which “Imagination was no longer a mimetic capacity, but a productive force.” The humanist subject became “the centre of creativity;” that and the notion of property rights “produced an understanding of individual ownership of ideas and language. [...] This understanding of imagination is clearly closely tied to the development of the notion of the author,” Pennycook writes.4

According to him, the postmodern and poststructuralist positions on language, discourse, and subjectivity, raise serious questions for any notion of individual creativity or authorship. “If, instead of a Self or an Identity, we consider the notion of subjectivity, or indeed subjectivities (we are, in a sense, the fragmented products of different discourses), then we arrive at more or less a reversal of the speaking subject creating meaning: we are not speaking subjects but spoken subjects, we do not create language but are created by it.” To Pennycook, the postmodernist view has moved from “the author owning and creating meaning,” to “meaning being created by the subject.”

The conceptions of copyright and intellectual property first appeared in British law around 1710. 4 It was the beginning of authorship as western societies now understand it, based on a capitalist view of property and ownership, that resulted in the current concept of plagiarism as it is accepted in educational institutions. “It assumes that everything of value can be owned, bought, and sold and that ideas, knowledge, and art are created by individuals who have the rights of ownership,” researchers Lea Calvert Evering and Gary Moorman write.5

Postmodern Questions

But what does it mean to be an author? Is it possible to write only original ideas? Can an author really own an idea? In the 19th century, some new conceptions appeared and the modernist paradigm begins to be called into doubt.

Pennycook points out that “The notion of the individual as creative guarantor of meaning and originality, this particular vision of self and authenticity, has taken a fair battering since Marx, Freud, and others have questioned the notion of the unmediated and authentic expression of self.”4

INTEGRITY IS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS ADHERENCE TO moral or ethical principles.2 Academic integrity, for its part, comprehends a set of well-accepted rules followed by the most renowned universities, mainly western institutions, which receive students from all over the world. However, in order to understand how these rules were created – many of them regarding academic writing – we need to first understand western views of ownership of text.

The western ideological perspective of textual ownership sees the author as the single creator of his texts. In this context, plagiarism is considered as a violation against the author and thereby is morally wrong.3

Alastair Pennycook, distinguished professor of Language, Society and Education at the University of Technology Sidney, however, sees plagiarism as a more complex phenomenon that is associated to the relationships between text, learning and memory.

In his view, what defines plagiarism is the way cultures understand the notions of authorship and textual ownership. The ownership of text, he argues, is a western concept originated in the Enlightenment era, when there was a shift from a mimetic, biblical, premodern paradigm, to a productive, modern way of thinking.4

In the premodern paradigm, individual creativity was attributed to a divine inspiration. As a result, literary work was un-authored during this period. The Enlightenment replaced that point of view for a new one according to which “Imagination was no longer a mimetic capacity, but a productive force.” The humanist subject became “the centre of creativity;” that and the notion of property rights “produced an understanding of individual ownership of ideas and language. [...] This understanding of imagination is clearly closely tied to the development of the notion of the author,” Pennycook writes.4
giving meaning to text to the notion that meaning is derived from the interaction with a text."

Pennycook cites Richard Kearney to suggest that “Postmodernism casts a suspicious glance on the modernist cult of creative originality,” a kind of skepticism that points to the need to “reevaluate beliefs in originality and textual ownership.” He writes, “There is a degree of hypocrisy in the defense of the culture of originality because postmodern understandings of language and meaning, by contrast, point to the possibility of little more than a circulation of meanings.”

Digital Revolution

It was 1967, three decades before the beginning of the internet as we know today, when Roland Barthes wrote The Death of the Author. In his essay, the French literary critic argued that “All writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, which obliquely into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.”

Deceased in 1980, Barthes never came to know the World Wide Web and the technologies and collaborative tools now available that have made the boundaries of authorship so hazy. Traditional definitions of plagiarism are being challenged by the digital revolution, indicating perhaps an approximation with a plagiarism: developing a better understanding of the way cultures understand the notions of authorship and textual ownership.

For researchers Evering and Moorman, easy access to massive amounts of information are making policing for ownership of ideas nearly impossible. “This situation has caused the current millennial generation to see knowledge ownership, acquisition, and distribution in radically different terms than in previous generations.” Clearly, academia is past due in reevaluating the concept and how we deal with it in secondary and higher education.”

They argue that, since much of the content on the internet is free, in their lives outside of school it is second nature for millennials to download, copy, and paste. “Their concept of ownership is different from the one their teachers and professors grew up with and have come to take for granted.” According to the researchers, additional analysis and definition of intellectual property is needed by both students and faculty.

Another issue is the expectations and academic standards imposed on millennials. In assignments that emphasize creativity, innovation, and collaboration, it may be difficult to credit the original source. Also, as collaboration is becoming one of the most desired competencies for 21st century companies, students are highly encouraged to use tools such as wikis, social media, and document sharing and editing platforms. “Web 2.0 tools designed to foster digital literacy and socially construc
tive online learning experiences have altered conventions and cultural norms for writing,” say Evering and Moorman.

Ideological Arrogance?

There are also cultural considerations to be made. The emphasis on creativity and authorship typical of the West is not followed in many cultures around the world, especially in Asian nations, where knowledge can be seen as a shared property rather than an individual possession (see infographic on page 24). Students that come from these cultures to attend western universities often struggle to understand very different concepts and rules about academic integrity, since the modernist interpretation of textual ownership is still eminent in western academia, with an emphasis on individual ownership of text and the need for attribution.

Hong Jian, a researcher from Xishuangbanna Vocational and Technical Institute, compares learning styles of American and Chinese students in a paper called A Contrastive Study of Cultural Diversity of Learning Styles between China and the United States. He concludes that “Due to cultural diversity, Americans […] emphasize the pragmatism of the knowledge, but to some extent, the result of teaching and learning styles tend to lack of systematical knowledge. In contrast, owing to the deep-rooted influence of Confucianism for thousands of years, harmony, unity, and hierarchy are important considerations for Chinese students in the process of learning. Its teaching puts more emphasis on transmission of systematical knowledge, ignoring the cultivation of creativity and innovation,” he explains.

In order to reduce the number of violations due to unintentional cheating, institutions should develop specific policies and support mechanisms for foreign students. It is important that faculty is flexible and understands that they come from a different sociocultural environment, and teach them writing techniques so that they know how to put into practice a new interpretation on integrity, as opposed to criticizing or invalidating their knowledge, learning style or educational experience.

Deriding other cultures for their supposedly imitative cultural practices may be a form of ideological arrogance, as Pennycook points out. “The important point here is that whereas we can see how the notion of plagiarism needs to be understood within the particular cultural and historical context of its development, it also needs to be understood relative to alternative cultural practices.”

Defining what it means to act with integrity in academia might become more and more challenging as the world turns increasingly globalized and digital. What we know for sure is that institutions will need to strive to understand the needs and conceptions of the incoming student generations. It may be time to rethink some of the western notions of textual ownership, and look at the collaborative world that is emerging from a refreshed and more flexible point of view.

Sources

Assessment in The Academic World

Assessment is an essential part of education. Assessment plays a critical role in the teaching and learning process for individual students and in the evaluation of both program and institutional effectiveness. In this piece, we will explore each of these types of assessment and how they improve education in the classroom, in programs, and throughout institutions.

Outcomes-Based Program Assessment

Currently, outcomes-based assessment is the dominating approach to measuring and evaluating the quality of education. A learning outcome expresses what a student should know or be capable of doing based on the knowledge or skill acquired through the learning process as part of an academic program. Outcomes can be observed and measured, which is why numeric values can be given to qualitative attributes. Also, an outcome should be named according to the criteria used to assess it. For instance, the attribute “critical thinking” may consist of – depending on the definition of the criteria – the student’s ability to infer information from a text and formulating a critical argument for or against it, so the presence and quality of that ability is measured as an outcome. Thus, outcomes-based assessment provides a means for understanding the quality of academic programs. With thoughtfully designed evaluation methods, data can be generated to enhance the program’s performance on an outcome over time, as well as potential improvements in the academic process.

Assessing Student Learning

Two of the most prevalent methods for measuring and evaluating individual student learning are “formative” and “summative” assessment. Formative assessment is meant to be diagnostic and is sometimes referred to as “low stakes” because it tends to have a lower impact on the final grade. Yet, it is very important within the learning process, as it consists of the teacher’s feedback student. Within formative assessment, this feedback is critical to help the student grasp the concept and refine their understanding during the process of acquiring the knowledge or skill. In this type of assessment, student work is monitored at all stages of a given assignment (e.g. such as a project, workshop or paper), so that constant feedback is provided. Formative assessment is in its essence, is used to identify student strengths and weaknesses and to make necessary improvements in targeted areas within a short period of time. Drawing concept maps, summarizing texts and submitting research proposals are all examples of formative assessment.

On the other hand, summative assessment shows how well a student has met the learning objective following the learning process, and provides a quantitative evaluation that serves both as a reward for good work, as well as a measure of how the student stands against a standard performance level. It is often called “high stakes,” for it often represents a higher value against the final grade and comes in the form of a paper, midterm, or final exam.

The aforementioned methods, as well as multiple variations of those – such as criterion-based and interim assessment – are generally applied with a more traditional approach to assessment, which gives more importance to strictly right or wrong answers, and measures proficiency through multiple choice tests or written exams. Alternative methods, however, are growing in use and institutions are showing interest in experimenting with some of them.

Alternative assessment falls within the limits of both formative and summative methods, but with a different approach. What makes it “alternative” is how it uses those methods in a way that deviates from scrutiny and pressure, to one that aims at nourishing critical thinking and creativity. Of course, students will always prefer the evaluation methods with which they can score higher grades, as is the case with alternative methods. However, those in charge of assessment in institutions have traditionally
been reluctant to follow student demands regarding how they are graded, as it may appear to challenge the institution’s authority. Only recently have researchers and faculty wondered why methods in the alternative spectrum score higher grades and what would happen if evaluation could let go of traditional assumptions.

Recent research shows that students prefer alternative methods, which is no surprise, with the portfolio, project and self-evaluation as the most popular ones. Those methods are refreshing written papers or multiple choice exams, while the alternative assessment brings students into new scenarios and challenges them to think differently and as a result motivates them.

Although alternative methods are gaining more traction, traditional ones have no reason to go away anytime soon. Combining both approaches could be the most effective way for institutions to obtain diversified results, in both assessment methods and criteria, which can contribute to assessment validity. According to a survey on student perception regarding learning assessment in higher education, both low stakes and alternative methods are more popular. Quizzes (traditional), projects and portfolios (alternative), are the most ideal methods for students because they provide both qualitative and quantitative results with constant feedback and represent a lower percentage of the final grade. Also, the majority of a student body would have at least one preferred assessment method according to their strengths and weaknesses.

**Understanding Assessment in the Academic World**

Torrence points out that a paradox can be seen in the formative assessment implementation in higher education. It expects more independent, critical and creative self-learners, while applying restrictive assessment procedures. There are a number of misinterpretations about outcomes-based assessment and how assessment methods should operate. The most fundamental is, arguably, that institutions work with an objective, but in the case of schools, colleges or universities, that objective is to produce learning. With his in mind, for institutions to meet their goals, management must make decisions adjustments accordingly. The paradigm here becomes clear: the success of educational institutions relies on assessing the quality of the education they offer, which in turn is measured through the assessment of student work. Hence, it is easy to wrongly assume that both student and outcomes assessments can be carried out simultaneously, with organizational practices working in hand with pedagogical ones, so, this is something the current outcomes-based assessment models try to avoid.

Interestingly, a learning paradigm has emerged in which institutions are also thinking of themselves as learners and run separate assessment to their administrative processes. By approaching institutional, grading and outcomes assessment separately, both the academic an administrative spheres of an educational institution can be measured and dealt with separately, always ensuring a student centered education.

Focusing on outcomes can also be a positive approach, as long as they are designed to make learning effective at all stages of the educational process (K-12 and HE). This is why outcomes are thought of as long term objectives that should produce learning, in order to prepare students for the next stage of the academic process.

**ASSESSMENTS TYPES**

*Combining approaches for diversified results*
7 Tips for Proper Assessment Conduction

When approaching student grading and outcomes assessment, many questions arise as to how these processes can be conducted effectively and without interference. The purpose of outcomes assessment in education is defining outcomes, evaluating how they are delivered, and acting to improve. So, what are the best ways to approach evaluation at different levels within institutions? How does technology help? What are some of the risks and benefits?

1. Take outcomes assessment out of the classroom
For outcomes assessment, a simple question must be answered: Did the program or institution deliver on the expected outcomes? In the case of outcomes assessments, we only need to assess mature student work—typically a sample of papers from students that are about to graduate. Through careful artifact selection, institutions can use the same artifacts to score multiple outcomes. For example, a capstone project should be able to produce assessments for critical thinking, written communication, and information literacy.

Often times, institutions argue that the evaluation process is redundant and they try to tackle grading and assessment at the same time. This is misguided for several reasons. First, a grade typically combines competencies like writing, critical thinking and disciplinary content. You can begin to see how, in this scenario, outcomes assessment begins to interfere with classroom grading. Secondly, this approach typically generates unnecessary work if you consider multiple faculty across the institution evaluating all their students. Whereas in a separate, secondary outcomes evaluation processes, a small team of evaluators can divide a representative sample and complete the assessment for the whole institution in a few hours.

2. Keep assessment focused on how to improve delivery on the outcome
In the outcomes assessment process, graded student work is systematically collected, the population is then sampled
and scored with a common rubric. Rubric scores are aggregated to evaluate program performance by faculty, who then collectively develop changes in either the design or delivery of the curriculum to improve outcomes institution-wide.

An example of this process is an institution that has scheduled the evaluation of critical thinking for the upcoming year. Critical thinking is defined as: Learners identify issues, recognize context, take perspective, and evaluate assumptions, evidence, and implications related to specific issues and topics. After collecting, sampling, and scoring their sample, and with the aggregated results of the evaluation, the institution brings the faculty together to interpret the data.

When the faculty see that the data reflect a low score for “evaluate assumptions,” for instance, the conclusion would be that the institution is not delivering on that specific criteria. The faculty would then develop strategies to develop this skill, and implement them across the institution. They might, for example, agree that in all courses, a specific exercise will be introduced to develop students’ ability to evaluate underlying assumptions in a given scenario. With a program in scientific research or social scientific research, this method could be used effectively. Institutions should not tackle more than one improvement strategy per outcome per year in order to effectively disseminate new practices.

Numbers are used to focus on evaluating learning outcomes. These numbers come from rubrics, which are quantitative expressions of quality. The rubric evaluation process is indeed qualitative, but numeric values are applied to those expressions.

Test scores from comprehensive exams can be used, provided the test items and score values are aligned to specific criteria, in order to achieve sufficient granularity to understand how to improve programs. For example, if the average grade of a physics final exam is 75% or C, nothing can be done by way of analysis and program improvement because it is impossible to know exactly what needs to be improved. In contrast, evaluation rubrics are clear as to what composes each criteria and make it possible to assign numbers to each one. By achieving this granularity, more precise actions can be taken, as the failures are localized. For example, institutions can consider the implementation of more critical thinking activities in their courses if the rubrics show that component is lagging.

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An example of this process is an institution that has scheduled the evaluation of critical thinking for the upcoming year. Critical thinking is defined as: Learners identify issues, recognize context, take perspective, and evaluate assumptions, evidence, and implications related to specific issues and topics. After collecting, sampling, and scoring their sample, and with the aggregated results of the evaluation, the institution brings the faculty together to interpret the data.

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**Use standard rubrics with descriptions for each performance level to define each outcome**

Survey results have a very limited and tangential role in outcomes assessment. Surveys are classified as indirect methods of assessment. The self-reporting nature of these instruments are subject to politics, emotions and other factors that should not influence the processes or judgments about what’s working and what is not. That said, certain survey items might provide information on why results turned out the way they did. For the most part, outcomes assessment uses direct methods, which means tests and rubric evaluations.

*Survey results have a very limited and tangential role in outcomes assessment.*

**Technology is a great opportunity schools should leverage**

Generating outcomes assessments on a paper basis is very burdensome, but there are now technological means to gather artifacts and samples, distribute to evaluators, provide electronic rubrics, monitor the evaluation process, and generate reports. There are two issues where technology and practice present challenges. Firstly, when the institution’s processes are relatively new and the institution is still unclear about what quality, measurement, and improvement look like, and may expect the technology to help them answer those questions, which is not a realistic expectation. Institutions should identify best practices and set up their implementation process before deciding on which technology best suits their needs.

**4. Use standard rubrics with descriptions for each performance level to define each outcome**

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**6. Write down clear processes for staff and faculty to follow**

Outcomes assessment can lead to a higher quality of education while relieving institutions from bureaucratic burdens, but the processes must be laid down clearly. For instance, a glossary of terms is in order to unify language. Also, governance oversight has to be assured, in conjunction with the definition of key assessment elements and templates to carry it out. Some institutions could be ready to conduct a solid outcomes assessment and they might not even know it. In these cases, the institutions have every outcome defined to maintain compliance with government requirements. With outcomes already defined, it is an easy transition to put the static list of outcomes to work through the assessment process.

**7. Link improvement strategies to the assessment data**

In many cases, data are presented together with a list of improvement strategies that have no relationship to the data. Often, programs will propose strategies based on a general and decontextualized idea of assessment, without thinking if those proposals will work with the reality shown by the data. This is a huge missed opportunity to improve the quality of education and is a recurrent scenario in many institutions. To manage this, leaders could develop processes to educate their communities about assessment, but more importantly, instruct on how to use data for the improvement of educational practices.
The Challenge of Making Education Accessible to All

Although accessibility awareness is growing, putting theory into practice can be a tough endeavor for educational institutions around the globe. To better understand the challenges of making education accessible to all students, E-learn interviewed speakers from Blackboard’s Global Accessibility Awareness Day webinar series.

By: Priscila Zigunovas

Curb cuts - the small ramps built into the curb of a sidewalk to ease passage onto the street - started to appear in different cities around the globe in the early 1990’s. That small change ended up making a big difference for people in wheelchairs, and ultimately brought benefits to a much larger community, from mothers with strollers to cyclists and skateboarders.

These changes in accessibility to the physical environment did not happen spontaneously. They were enforced by law. Canada was the first country to legislate standards of accessibility, through the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1985.1 In 1990, the United States instituted the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for people with disabilities.2 The act has also established that new business constructions must be accessible and that existing businesses are required to increase the accessibility of their facilities when making renovations. Since then, many countries have created similar legislation, such as Australia (1992), South Africa (2000), France (2005) and Norway (2008).1

“We had the laws and the standards in place [in the United States] so that the physical environment had to become accessible. Buildings had to have elevators and ramps installed. The sidewalk curbs had to be cut out in order for individuals with wheelchairs to be able to easily cross the streets,” describes Scott Ready, Blackboard’s Principal Strategist for Accessibility.

A complex global problem

More than a billion people in the world live with some form of disability.3 However, disabilities disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, generating a cycle that is hard to break. People in poverty are more likely to become disabled, and people who are disabled are more likely to be poor.4

According to the World Health Organization, people with disabilities experience lower educational achievements and less economic participation.3 Children with disabilities are less likely to start school, and have lower rates of staying and advancing in schools.1

“Promoting accessibility in education is the best way to change those numbers. “Throughout the world, accessibility varies from country to country, and there’s different cultural values that come into play, as well as the legal aspects of region to region that impact how well accessibility is provided,” said Ready.

Promoting accessibility in digital environments, ensuring all course interactions and online teaching are accessible to learners of all abilities, is the next big challenge for educational institutions in order to offer equal opportunities.
According to Ready, one trend today is that students are becoming much more aware of their rights and also more active in fighting for accessible education. “The other trend here in the United States is that there’s been a surge of litigation and investigations in higher education to identify barriers or those that are violating accessibility. Often times, the remediation of that is to force the institution to review and to make their learning environments accessible. That is changing the environment for students with disabilities, as institutions realize that it becomes very expensive to go through a litigation process.”

If we think about the curb cuts example, we will see that accessibility imposed by legislation eventually led people to understand the importance of such measures and as a result, awareness about physical accessibility followed. The same should happen now with digital accessibility.

Institutions and accessibility

“The cost of inaccessibility is that people are not receiving the education that they want, so basically the institutions are not able to achieve their mission,” says Lucy Greco, Web Accessibility Evangelist at the University of California, Berkeley. As an evangelist, Greco works with people who are new to accessibility in order to teach them how to incorporate accessibility into their work. Blind since birth, she has been working her entire life helping people with disabilities find unique ways to get tasks done, mostly with the support of assistive technologies.

“What is happening in education today is that educational institutions are all aware of what accessibility is, and all have kind of a basic idea that they should be including people with disabilities, but very few institutions actually have the resources, or understanding, or knowledge of how to accomplish that,” says Greco. For her, that is why it is important that institutions create an accessibility policy, and specifically a policy document to help people understand which path they need to take.

“If you work on accessibility, you are improving yourself as an organization, and the impact for everyone at your institution is greater and more effective than anything else you can do,” says Greco. “Improving accessibility is just making a better product, and including individuals of all different styles, abilities, understanding and comprehension is what education is all about. We don’t teach to teach the privileged and the few, we teach to teach all, and if we don’t become accessible, we are not teaching everyone.”

For Greco, the best way to work on accessibility is to include people with disabilities. “There is a common statement here in the United States, ‘Nothing for us without us.’ You can’t understand how to include a person with a disability until you include a person with a disability. You can’t create a tool that you think is accessible without having a person with a disability there with you, because you don’t know. And the only way for you to know and understand how a person with a disability works is by interacting with them, engaging with them, and realizing that, first of all, people with disabilities are people, and they can contribute.”

A way to teach all: Universal Design for Learning

James Cressey is an Assistant Professor of Education at Framingham State University in Massachusetts, United States. As a licensed special educator and nationally certified school psychologist, he teaches courses in special education at the undergraduate and graduate levels, with a focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a set of principles for curriculum development intended to give all individuals equal opportunities to learn.

“In my classrooms, I see amazing future teachers who are ready to master the art and science of teaching, and I find that they are very interested in UDL and special education,” says Cressey. “They are going to be general education teachers, but UDL really helps them think about the complexities of a classroom of students with and without disabilities.”

According to Cressey, traditional, inflexible teaching can have harmful psychological and academic consequences to students, and the root causes to that are sociological and systemic. “In my teachings and presentations I frame that through ableism, which is discrimination and stigmatization of
disability and people with disabilities. Ableism can be seen as inherently linked with racism and sexism, heteronormativity, xenophobia and ideas like English-only teaching or the unfortunate ‘America first’ kind of thinking. Ableism supports this paradigm of the mythical ‘normal’ or ‘average’ student. If teachers are replicating that way of thinking in the classroom, they are really creating trauma for students rather than helping them learn.”

In the United States, says Cressey, enormous research goes into the testing, evaluation, and the eligibility determination process for disability. “If we could use UDL more, we could reallocate some of those resources, and special educators and school psychologists could build more UDL practices into classrooms and partner more with teachers to build in accessibility. And then we can spend less time sorting children into categories of disabled or not disabled and more time building high-quality learning experiences.”

In Kansas, an inspiring experience from Deerfield Elementary

Diana Bailey is a fifth grade teacher at Deerfield Elementary, a public school in Lawrence, Kansas (United States). Four years ago, she implemented the blended learning model in order to personalize learning for every student in her classroom, along with Kyleigh Edwards, a special education teacher. “Four years ago, there was really that old factory model, as I like to call it, a teacher in front of a classroom, rows of desks, and the teacher would be kind of shooting for the middle of all abilities. Then you have your higher kids being bored and unengaged, and your lower students, who are struggling to understand the context, feeling frustrated. It was just not working,” tells Bailey.

At that time, special education students had to leave the classroom at certain periods to study with Edwards. That separation was not working either. Together, the two teachers made a plan to implement a more personalized learning model in order to keep special education students in the classroom, learning at their own pace. The changes ended up benefiting all the students. “I can see on the kids’ faces that they are excited to be in this room, they are excited to engage in the assignment,” says Edwards. “And especially the special ed students, who are excited because we found a way to make them successful based on their strengths and what they are interested in.”

For her innovative work, Bailey has been recognized with multiple awards, such as the Unusually Excellent Educator Award and the Lawrence School District Teacher of the Year for 2014. “All students can learn and they have a deep desire to do so,” says Bailey. “It is just a matter of giving them more choice and allowing them a myriad of ways to demonstrate their knowledge instead of making that so rigid like it has been in the past.”

Learn from Bailey and Edwards

- **Start small.** Choose a single subject area, a single class, or even a single activity to allow your students to tailor that assignment or that objective to their personal needs.
- **Get to know your students.** Talk to the parents, create surveys or activities that allow students to talk about themselves.
- **Be flexible and have an open mind.** “I like to consider myself this architect, that designs learning paths for each student, instead of that ‘sage on the stage,’ standing in front, kind of controlling everything about their day,” tells Bailey.
- **Celebrate diversity.** “There is no one right answer to how to teach and how students learn,” says Edwards. “Nobody is the same and we should not expect them to be the same, because our diversity is what makes us unique, and is what makes things interesting and fun in the classroom.”

Born to be accessible

Universidad Abierta y a Distancia de México (UnADM) is a unique institution. It was created in 2012 with the mission to guarantee access to education for the most vulnerable populations in the country, such as people with disabilities, people deprived of their liberty, ethnic groups, and indigenous communities. With
Learn from UnADM

- Education for all. Instead of aiming for the middle, consider a wide range of learning needs and styles.

- Consider accessibility from the beginning, in every course and all educational material, rather than thinking about it in terms of accommodations. “This practice allows us to include people with disabilities from the beginning and not wait for the demand to respond to or adapt to the situation presented to us,” says Alpízar.

- Improve your practice on an ongoing basis. Count on the advice of specialized institutions. For example, collaboration with the Instituto para Personas con Discapacidades de Mexico City (INDEPEDI) led the university to detect the need to improve accessibility for the deaf community.

SOURCES


Accessibility: A Universal Language that Encourages Diversity in Learning

The implementation of inclusive education technologies greatly benefits non-native English speaking students and teachers, while favoring different classroom learning methods.

By Juan Francisco Molina Moncada
Laredo, Texas, United States

The Office of Information Technology at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU), current office of Phylis Zimmermann, Instructional Designer, is constantly busy with work and assignments. This institution’s staff is highly focused on its mission, which involves working on videos, audios and online guides intended to guarantee a more accessible education.

But the team is aiming higher: now, their goal is to make sure that the final product benefits everyone, not only students with some kind of physical or cognitive disability.

This task requires agility, effectiveness and, above all, a lot of creativity. To highlight this, Zimmermann constantly cites the needs of an ever-growing international academic community as an example. According to the figures of the Institute of International Education, the United States received a million foreign students in 2016, and 9 of the 10 most represented nationalities do not speak English as their native tongue. Therefore, the challenge to improve learning in students with speaking, listening and writing difficulties becomes increasingly important.

One of the Office’s most common assignments is to caption the videos used in class. This benefits firstly deaf or hearing-impaired students, but it can also help people with English listening difficulties to better understand video content and check for correct spelling. Likewise, subtitles are another prime asset to help students understand faulty material, such as defective audio.

“In our interview, if we had all of the information transcribed, it would be much easier for you to be like: ‘oh, this is what we said, oh, this is how I answered,’” says Zimmermann, who gets thrilled when speaking about something she describes as an added value. “Everybody can benefit from video captioning, transcripts, or images with alternative text, especially those students who speak English as a second language: the comprehension level of these folks goes up when they get that material.”
Occasionally, when work intensifies, the team has to ask for external assistance to cover professors’ requirements. Faculty value this inclusive approach to education, as it works to their advantage. “We have professors who come from all over the world — Zimmermann says — and we do not want them to be shy when they stand in front of the class because they might think students can’t understand them completely. So, we present their materials online with transcripts, which benefits students and faculty as well as the whole school”.

This mission brings forward new challenges and also demands the constant update of technological resources. Blackboard provides tools to improve the comprehension of students with any hearing or visual difficulties, using screen reader programs with the latter and subtitles with the former. In the end, this benefits the entire classroom: those who learn better by reading —via subtitles or the images’ complementary text—, or by hearing or watching the videos.

Zimmermann and the team’s conviction in their work is quite remarkable. Their commitment to accessibility as a universal language is based on their goal to turn it into an opportunity for everyone to succeed in their studies, with no exception.

**Improvement for Everyone**

Beyond TAMU’s experience, research shows the advantages of inclusion and accessibility in education:

- **98.6 per cent of 2,124 students (most of them with no disabilities) surveyed by Oregon State University at 15 public and private U.S. universities claimed that subtitles are a ‘useful’ tool, and 75 per cent confirmed that they use them during online and face-to-face classes.**

- **Over half of the students surveyed recognized that they understood subjects better because subtitles helped them concentrate and retain the most important information. Similarly, the survey published in October last year revealed that transcriptions of audiovisual materials are often used as study guides and as information resources.**

- **Afroditi Kalambouka, Peter Farrell, Alan Dyson and Ian Kaplan, from the University of Manchester, found out in 2007 that 81 per cent of 26 reports comprising a representative sample from a total of 120 documents showed that inclusion had positive or neutral effects on students’ performance.**

- **A study conducted in 2004 by Cassandra Cole, Nancy Waldron and Massoumeh Majd in six Indiana schools revealed that students without disabilities made significant progress in mathematics and literature after using inclusive education resources to benefit students with some kind of disability.**

- **Another study conducted between 1999 and 2000 by Hsin-Chuan Huang and David Eskey, from the University of Southern California, showed that the vocabulary, writing and hearing performance in 30 intermediate English as Second Language (ESL) students improved after implementing English close captions in audiovisual materials.**

- **Earlier, in 1997, Lisa Cushing, Craig Kennedy and Tiina Itkonen, in the Springer Journal of Behavioral Education, had already proven that even people who assisted other students with some kind of disability improved their academic performance and participated more in classes.**

SOURCES

1. Los Angeles Times. Number of international students in U.S. colleges at an all-time high, and California is their top destination. Extracted from: http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-study-abroad-students-20161124-story.html


Texas A&M University: In the Digital Era, Students and Teachers Learn Together

With a wide range of programs at their disposal, teachers at Texas A&M are receiving the support they need to implement technology in their classes.

In order to improve these deficiencies, he used technology to encourage participation and stimulate active learning. He also developed a series of online problem-solving games as a form of self-testing which provided students with immediate feedback, so that they—and along with their teacher—could identify the weak areas and learn how to overcome them.

The technology solution the teacher turned to was the Core Curriculum Technology Enhancement Grant program, which the university made available to teaching staff with the support of Instructional Technology Services (ITS), the department that enables and promotes the effective use of technology in teaching and learning.

“Providing teaching staff with support is crucial to success in the digital environment,” explained ITS Instructional Technology Lead Consultant Sharon Gibson-Mainka.

“At Texas A&M University (TAMU), in Brazos County (United States), teachers not only teach, but also learn how to effectively teach through technology. During an Introduction to Biology class, a teacher realized that in general, his students had trouble when it came to handing in assignments that involved empirical, quantitative and critical thinking skills. He came to the conclusion that 23% of the class was in danger of failing, or even worse, of abandoning the course.

The commitment made to the university, which is centered on a sincere belief of the power of education technology to broaden teachers’ pedagogical skills, is to foster e-learning and to efficiently develop e-Campus, the university’s learning management system (LMS).
powered by Blackboard Learn. e-Campus simplifies the development of online or hybrid courses. Texas A&M’s efforts to achieve its distance education targets came to fruition in 2002, when ITS was formed. The department’s current director, Dr. James Snell, told E-Learn how this came about. “It was originally conceived as a way of providing a centralized education technology resource. But it wasn’t widely accepted on campus at the time.”

However, the situation today is very different. As a result of a variety of programs and initiatives led by ITS, Texas A&M has succeeded in cultivating a big response to online education at every level: among not only administrators, but also students and teachers.

The Quality Matters (QM) program is one of the most successful initiatives. It provides teaching staff with guaranteed course design quality, while focusing on continuous improvement. Due to the support in courses such as course management, instructional design and multimedia applications, teachers are able to produce truly rewarding courses in a more effective way. The campus has thus seen an increase not only in teachers’ willingness to use technology, but also in the quality of teaching.

“Teachers are encouraged to integrate technology into their teaching activities, especially those who find it stressful to keep up to date with it,” said Sharon. “We provide teachers with assistance in all matters relating to integrating technology in the classroom, whether it be to set up an assignment on Blackboard Learn, help design a course, or reviewing a subject in order to ensure that its content meets quality standards. Faculty know we are here to provide assistance in any way we can,” she added.

Bearing in mind their objective of providing support to the T&L community, ITS has for example, started a Liaison Program, where an ITS consultant can be a main point of contact that can offer support whenever necessary, depending on the institution’s needs. This support can include the following:

- Facilitating or scheduling personalized training for teachers, personnel and assistants
- Arranging individual or group sessions on the use of e-Campus, as well as improving course design, etc.
- Attending department meetings, as requested by the dean
- Making university visits periodically (every two weeks, once a month and every three months) to answer questions and help solve technical problems that might arise with e-Campus

Another example of the support that ITS offers the teaching community is the Innovative Pedagogy Grant Program, which gives teachers and staff in general, the opportunity to learn how to effectively incorporate technology to a face-to-face, online or blended course.

The Innovative Pedagogy Grant Project is a three-phase program that consists of face-to-face and online training sessions as well as in-person meetings with the ITS instruction team. Its objectives are to:

- Identify best practices relating to modern pedagogy in a technology-oriented learning environment
- Incorporate active learning
- Identify applicable learning technologies
- Improve learning results
- Increase retention rates

The expected results from this program are to:

- Incorporate practices that will increase student motivation
- Improve student retention
- Develop quantifiable learning results from the course
- Integrate learning technologies
- Implement modern pedagogy

The education technology programs offered at Texas A&M have become so popular among teaching staff, that spots fill up quickly.

“At the end of the program, 17 out of the 30 teacher proposals submitted were chosen. The program lasted a week, and there were various workshops relating to making videos and carrying out activities in flipped classroom mode,” she added.

All these programs attest to the way in which ITS supports the university’s teaching and academic personnel. It is a relatively unique department in the university realm, in that it consists of education technology advisers who are trained in pedagogy and instructional design, and who work hand-in-hand with software system administrators, analysts and developers.

ITS has become a helping hand for teaching staff who are now much more willing to face the challenges of technology, if accompanied by someone guiding them along the process. “In this way, we try new options that will benefit us all in the course development,” concluded Sharon.
Over the past four years, we've focused on collaboration with the teaching and learning community by sharing:

- ideas
- perspectives
- insights
- practices

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“You need to choose the tools that work best for your subject area, for your students and for yourself, as an instructor. If you do that, and focus on student success, the technology integration is going to be successful”

Sarah Schroeder
Assistant Professor, Field Service at University of Cincinnati

“Success means that a student leaves us knowing what he or she is passionate about, feels hopeful about life after college and about his or her future”

Rose Pascarell
Vice President for University Life, George Mason University

“Everybody can benefit from video captioning, transcripts, or images with alternative text, especially those students who speak English as a second language: the comprehension level of these folks goes up when they get that material”

Philys Zimmerman
Instructional Designer, Texas A&M International University