The theme for the 2008 EDUCAUSE conference was “Interaction, Ideas, Inspiration.” Diana Oblinger, president of EDUCAUSE, welcomed the attendees and told them that EDUCAUSE is “by the members and for the members” and is taking a lot of member input to continue improving the conference. EDUCAUSE wants to be more focused, agile, and innovative in its thinking. As a result, this year’s conference tried to be “greener” by allowing attendees to stuff their own reusable tote bags, therefore taking only the information that they deemed necessary. Also gone this year were individual plastic water bottles, which were replaced with large water dispensers and cups.

New offerings included informal learning spaces, innovation showcases, lightning rounds, point/counterpoint sessions, and power stations. Programming still included general sessions, featured speakers, track sessions, birds-of-a-feather sessions, community updates, corporate exhibits, workshops, discussion sessions, poster sessions, and “meet the EDUCAUSE staff” sessions. The conference was spread over four days with an additional day for workshops. The opening cocktail reception in the vendor exhibit hall allowed attendees to wander around and chat informally with vendors and colleagues. Attendees also enjoyed the conference resources and networked in many other settings, including the annual conference party on Thursday evening. This year’s social featured a variety of food and beverage strategically placed among the sights of Universal CityWalk, which was closed to the public during the private event.

When not networking, attendees took advantage of opportunities to hear featured speakers, knowledgeable and well-respected peers, speaking on key issues in higher education (e.g., Fostering Learning in the Networked World: The Cyber-learning Opportunity and Challenge). The eight track sessions were chosen from conference proposals, were the following: emerging technologies and trends; enterprise information systems and services; information resources, digital content, and libraries; leadership, management, planning, and partnerships; research computing, advanced networking, infrastructure, and middleware; security, policy, and privacy; teaching and learning; and user services. Birds-of-a-feather sessions were impromptu and allowed individuals to come together to discuss areas of particular interest. Discussion sessions focused on specific topics and individuals from institutions across the globe were able to gather and discuss ideas and solutions (e.g., “Library/IT partnerships,” and “Digital Learning Resources: Where Do We Go from Here?”). The table discussions during these sessions are always a great way to chat with colleagues who share similar interests and challenges.

Also new this year were point/counterpoint sessions, which featured opposing viewpoints and multiple options on a variety of complex issues (e.g., Virtual Worlds: Fad or Future?). The innovative lightning rounds showcased several brief presentations on a given topic; each speaker presented a high-level overview of their project or initiative in five to ten minutes, and the sessions closed with a general question-and-answer session for participants. Several of the lightning rounds were then followed with poster sessions where institution-specific questions could be addressed by the presenters for each individual topic presented (e.g., the Library Lightning Round, which included “Build It and They Will Come: Expectations for the Research Commons” and “When MySpace Meets D-Space: Building a Personal/Institutional Repository”). Another innovation for the 2008 conference was the informal learning spaces: model learning spaces that allowed people to visit with other attendees informally when they were not in use for presentations (e.g., “Breaking Out: Learning Spaces to Inspire Faculty and Engage Learners”). There was also plenty of time for networking and meeting colleagues during the refreshment breaks.

Opening General Session: The Unique Human Brain: Clues from Neurology

The conference kicked off with this session given by V.S. Ramachandran, professor and director of the Center for Brain and Cognition, University of California, San Diego. He described several different types of brain disorders and illustrated how the brain works in these instances and what successful treatments have been devised through innovative thinking about the problems. Whereas information technology is the major thread of the conference, this talk showed the diversity of presentations and presenters at an EDUCAUSE conference.

Featured Speaker Session: "Social Media and Education: The Conflict between Technology and Institutional Education, and the Future"

Sarah “Intelligirl” Robbins was the featured speaker and appeared onstage with a bright red streak in her hair. If anyone has not heard her speak, I highly recommend listening to the podcast available from EDUCAUSE (http://connect.educuse.edu/Library/Abstract/SocialMediaandEducationTh/47564). Not only is Robbins entertaining, but she makes her listeners rethink their comfort zones
and take charge of the change in social media on their campuses. Social media is everywhere (Twitter, deli.cio.us, Flickr, Facebook), and we, as educators, are going to have to learn to embrace it. Educators are no longer gatekeepers of knowledge; “the role of educators is changing.” College students and lifelong learners are no longer limited to learning by the “approved” technologies and methodologies for a specific department, and they no longer have to fit into specific institutions. Instructors’ podcasts and written materials are often offered online to the public, not restricted to their current students. Comparisons of various online resources, including instructors’ materials from institutions around the world, that enable learners to gain a more thorough understanding of the problem, proposal or course. Robbins believes that “in a world of social media, educators are more important than ever. If students are on Facebook [during class], it’s my problem as an instructor. I haven’t given them enough to do, or I’m boring them. Got a laptop in my class? I’m going to give you something to look up.” Robbins ended with, “We are in a unique position. We are the last group of educators who will remember the way it used to be.” If a student stops to ask, “Why can’t you put that picture on Facebook,” we are aware of the impacts and repercussions while today’s students are not. It’s our responsibility to inform and educate them and it’s an opportunity we can’t pass up.

**Poster Sessions**

Poster sessions were held on two separate afternoons. As always, the poster sessions were a great way for attendees to meet and talk with presenters one-on-one. Some posters were sponsored as a follow up to lightning round presentations and others brought new information into the conference environment. Following a floor plan with poster titles and locations, attendees could head directly to the presenters they most wanted to talk with to get ideas and contact information for solutions to challenges they were experiencing or anticipating on their own campuses. Poster sessions continue to be a great way for additional information to be disseminated to self-identified target audiences.

**Closing Session: "Why IT Matters: A President’s Perspective on Technology and Leadership"**

Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, gave the closing keynote address. Hrabowski talked about access and how IT professionals can and must be the innovators who create and maintain access in our learning communities. The only way Americans can grow innovative and become more creative thinkers is by using technology to raise the bar for everyone, to get everyone in on similar projects across classrooms and not just allow learners to sit captive in one classroom at a time. The challenge that we face is to find ways to ensure many more people have a college degree and to know the global issues we face in order to be globally competitive. Hrabowski believes that the important theme of this century will be change and that we must be ready to adapt. In the question-and-answer period, he offered advice on how IT executives can get university presidents to listen and prioritize IT; essentially, university presidents must be told how IT furthers the mission of the university. IT professionals must make university presidents see the vision of what education or research can become with new technology we are requesting. Dr. Hrabowski ended with the following:

- Watch your thoughts because your thoughts become your words.
- Watch your words because your words become your actions.
- Your actions become your habits.
- Your habits become your character.
- Your character becomes your destiny.

The EDUCAUSE 2009 Annual Conference will be held in Denver, Colorado, November 3–6, 2009; general session speakers include Lawrence Lessig, Jim Collins, and Brenda Gourley.