

The 2016 Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

About the 2016 ELI Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

Identifying a community's challenges and opportunities is an important exercise. It furnishes the basis for a common understanding, a common vocabulary, and a set of shared priorities. By identifying this common ground, we open the door to the productive sharing of best practices and make it easier to establish collaborations that benefit the entire community. Since 2011, ELI's Key Issues survey has been exactly that—a way for the higher education teaching and learning community to discover the common ground that cuts across differences such as Carnegie Classification and FTE counts. The ELI Key Issues (formerly called Content Anchors) offer a window into the technologies and developments that the community finds most important for higher education.

The Key Issues function as navigation points for our work. The context provided by the Key Issues is a valuable resource for framing our day-to-day activities. Knowing what issues the community considers its top concerns enables us to prioritize and sync our efforts against a broader picture. But the Key Issues also help establish a common professional vocabulary, facilitating a way for us to share our experience and insights. Our professional endeavors are a social and collaborative enterprise. By sharing our efforts, wisdom, and best practices, we collectively promote higher education teaching and learning.

This issue of the 7 Things You *Should* Know series consists of short commentaries on the top 7 issues from the survey. These short mediations provide focus, serving as brief, guided tours of that issue's particular landscape.

Seven members of the community contributed to these profiles. Those individuals are identified below, next to the particular issue for which they provided their expertise and knowledge. We extend our thanks to them for their time and to the entire teaching and learning community for sharing its collective wisdom for all to benefit.

1 Academic Transformation

Gardner Campbell, Vice Provost for Learning Innovation and Student Success, and Dean, University College, Virginia Commonwealth University

Must higher education change? An overwhelming “yes” comes from various sectors: the Christensen disruption corner, various educational technologies (and the money following them), the “degree-completion agenda” that also goes by various names connected with “student success” (some little more than high-volume models of “get that C and get your degree”), and the drive toward “economic competitiveness” (a job upon graduation, U.S. market dominance). But another question also deserves our attention: *Should* higher education change? This latter question, sometimes overlooked, engages larger questions of value and meaning at the heart of the practice of schooling we call “higher.” In both cases, the primary agent of transformation, disruption, liberation, or commodification remains the computer, a mind-like invention that can turn relationships into automated transactions, as well as enlarge our capacity to store, retrieve, judge, share, and build on the products of human ingenuity.

2 Faculty Development

Norm Vaughan, Professor, Mount Royal University

Faculty members in higher education are often overwhelmed with the competing demands on their time in the areas of teaching, research, and service. In order to overcome this issue, there has been a growing trend in faculty development to focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) through a community of inquiry (CoI) approach. SoTL attempts to integrate teaching, research, and service through a process of scholarly inquiry into student learning, which advances the practice of teaching by making the findings of the inquiry public. Rather than undertaking this inquiry process in isolation, faculty members are being encouraged to participate in CoIs, which are composed of other faculty, students, and staff. These CoIs engage in active and collaborative research projects that investigate student learning across the disciplines.

3 Assessment of Learning

Bernard Bull, Assistant Vice President of Academics and Assoc. Professor of Education, Concordia University Wisconsin

Assessment is central to the conversation about the value of higher education. Unless we are able to assess what students have learned, how can we show the true value of education? Without assessment, making informed improvements is

The 2016 Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

difficult. A robust and diverse assessment plan for courses and programs provides learners and instructors with frequent and meaningful feedback on progress, allowing instructor and student to make adjustments leading toward greater outcomes. This calls for leaders who are increasingly informed about the possibilities for assessment. These include options such as self, peer, portfolio, narrative, and authentic assessment, as well as rubric design, microcredentials, feedback loops, gamification, and competency-based assessment. Leaders can use emerging technologies to blend these various assessment types in ways that improve student learning, increase engagement and retention, and build a compelling case for the value of higher education. As we pursue such a goal, new technologies and methods blur the lines between assessment and learning.

4 Online and Blended Teaching and Learning

Tanya Joosten, Director, eLearning Research and Development, Academic Affairs, and Co-Director, National Research Center for the Study of Distance Education and Technological Advancements, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Online and blended learning are types of distance education that are completely or partially mediated via the Internet. Online learning usually takes place completely online, whereas blended learning is an integration of online and face-to-face environments. Over the past couple of decades, research has proven the efficacy of online and blended instruction compared to traditional, face-to-face instruction: there is no statistically significant difference. Moreover, students appreciate the greater temporal flexibility. Therefore, many institutions are looking to meet students' needs by offering an education through blended and online courses and programs. More recently, researchers and practitioners are looking to identify what instructional or pedagogical characteristics and interventions can increase student outcomes and enhance opportunities for success. One such effort is seen in the launching of the National Research Center for the Study of Distance Education and Technological Advancements (DETA).

5 Learning Analytics

John Whitmer, Learning Analytics and Research Director, Blackboard, Inc.

This emerging field of academic research and technology solutions applies data analysis for the purpose of improving student learning. There is dramatic variation in what data sources are used, the sophistication in the analytical techniques applied, and the degree of integration into technology applications and existing workflows. As the LMS is used more broadly on campuses, the most popular use of learning analytics is to analyze the “data exhaust” from LMS log files to provide insights into student learning. The most prevalent application of learning analytics has been to improve student persistence/retention,

but there are applications in many other areas including instructional design, student satisfaction, and degree pathways. The field is moving from a focus on predictive accuracy in models (identifying at-risk students) to demonstrating the impact of applying these analytics (increasing course pass rates).

6 Learning Space Designs

Shirley Dugdale, Principal, Dugdale Strategy LLC

The value of spaces that encourage active learning and creative pedagogy is now widely recognized. Many institutions seek ways to infuse active learning affordances into more of their teaching spaces—from flexible furnishings and writable walls to large interactive display walls to support data visualization and interaction with remote participants. The larger area that is required per seat poses implementation challenges across large campuses, but the shift to more hybrid, project-based, and hands-on work is blurring distinctions between formal and informal learning spaces. Focus is shifting to create settings for a wide range of learning activities, such as flexible spaces in libraries, makerspaces, design thinking studios for multidisciplinary teams to solve challenges, and innovation labs as entrepreneurial meeting grounds. Research on the effectiveness of learning spaces is increasing, as is coordination between initiatives, such as the [Learning Space Rating System](#) with [FLEXspace](#).

7 Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning

Frédéric Fovet, Faculty of Education (Graduate and Certificate Courses) at the University of Prince Edward Island, and UDL and Inclusion Consultant (www.implementudl.com)

Concerns and interest around the notion of accessibility, flexibility, user friendliness, and diversity have taken industry by storm, and it could only be a matter of time before these expectations started popping up in higher education. The UX movement in particular is shaking the digital world into an unprecedented awareness of user diversity motivated by both legal imperatives and genuinely fresh awareness of inclusive design. Was higher education ready for these new learner expectations? No, and a clash of cultures is ongoing that is tense for some but creative for many. The process is now taking root globally on most campuses to radically rethink the way we can make learning “hospitable” and open access to all students, in their rich diversity of profiles and needs. This is the juncture where universal design for learning (UDL) has started to appear increasingly appealing as a model that can tackle inclusion. Framed around the notions that neurodiversity is prevalent, that the mythical “bell curve” is an obsolete notion, and that one size does not fit all, UDL has made a reputation for itself of late as a convenient framework for curriculum design and global dialogue around pedagogical reform in higher education.