This bulletin is one of a series of papers from ECAR working groups designed to help institutional leaders learn about and understand the implications of emerging technologies in higher education. These technologies have been identified as the “Top 10 Confusing Technologies” in the ECAR report *Higher Education’s Top 10 Strategic Technologies for 2015*. Other papers and related resources are available at the research hub for *Higher Education’s Top 10 Strategic Technologies for 2015*.

An activity stream is “a list of recent activities performed by an individual,” typically displayed “in social web applications and services.” The streams are real-time, live feeds of content into a single interface. A common example of this application is Facebook’s News Feed. The JSON Activity Streams 1.0 specification is an open specification for activity stream protocols that was published in May 2011; a W3C working draft of Activity Streams 2.0 was released in December 2015.

The Activity Streams specification provides a “syntax that is sufficient to express metadata about activities in a rich, human-friendly but machine-processable and extensible manner.” An activity stream “can either aggregate the actions of a single user or the actions interesting to a single user—the former is often fed into a profile page, while the latter could highlight activity from multiple people in a project, with a shared interest in a certain event or topic, or in a class together, for example.”

### Importance to Higher Education

Though activity streams arose out of social media, they are being applied in business, at times embedded in enterprise social software or pulled out as a separate collaboration application, such as Yammer.

In higher education, activity streams might be seen in areas such as learning management systems. In 2013, the University of Phoenix was awarded a patent for its “Academic Activity Stream that will consolidate student activities, engagement, and interaction into one unified learning space.” The institution can therefore tie activity for a particular student together into one space for tracking or sharing, or it could tie the activities of multiple collaborators, such as for a social event, class, or project. These streams can be used for learning purposes, for tracking progress, to build communities, or to share information.

### Current Landscape

In the EDUCAUSE 2015 Top 10 Technologies Survey, only 1% of respondents noted that they have activity streams in place, with another 7% planning or implementing the technology now. An additional 16% are tracking it for potential future implementation (see figure 1). Only 16% of respondents were
unaware of what activity streams are, while the majority of respondents (60%) answered that they don’t currently use activity streams and have no plans to put them in place.

Though activity streams may be well known, it could be that their use in higher education is low because they are typically integrated with existing systems or software, rather than requiring separate implementation from IT staff.

Figure 1. Results of the 2015 Top 10 Strategic Technologies survey, when respondents were asked about activity streams.

When You Should Expect It

Activity streams are currently fairly commonplace, particularly for social media, though how—or if—they will become common in higher education—specific applications is uncertain. Although activity streams are something to watch, we don’t expect significant change in uptake in the next several years for higher education.

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<th>Mainstream</th>
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<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

2. “Activity Streams (format),” Wikipedia.
3. JavaScript Object Notation (JSON), a “lightweight data-interchange format.”
5. Ibid.