

# The Evolution of Teaching and Learning Professions

## About This Issue

It is well established that metacognition—reflection on and awareness of one’s own learning and learning process—is an important, if not vital, dimension of learning. It is through metacognitive practice that one evolves from being a student to a lifelong learner.

But metacognition is equally important in other practices as well. That is why, in 2016, ELI added the issue of the “evolution of the profession” to the roster of its key issues. Reflecting on and evaluating where the higher education teaching and learning community stands as a profession is an essential exercise for us all. As an indication of its growing importance, the theme of the evolution of the profession rose from 15th on the Key Issues list in 2016 to 9th in 2017.

Initiating conversations on the evolution of our profession is timely, given the storm and stress that higher education is subjected to these days. That turbulence is felt directly in the domain of teaching and learning, with innovations such as new course models, the rise in online education, the exploration of alternative assessment methods for learning, and a renewed interest in student success in general. We find ourselves in a situation that calls for new professional models to accompany the new models for teaching and learning that we are inventing. This evolution also requires new leadership skills to help guide the cultural shifts associated with the transformative dimensions of our work.

For this issue of the 7 Things, we asked a set of seven community leaders—who come from different walks of life in the community—to offer a short meditation on the evolution of the profession. In this issue you will find comments from professionals such as an instructional designer, a CIO, an accessibility expert, and a librarian. We hope that this issue and the spotlight it casts on the evolution of our profession will encourage further conversations about where we are headed and how we can help one another achieve our professional goals.

## 1 CIO, Liberal Arts Institution

Allan Chen, Muhlenberg College

Chief information officers are fast becoming chief innovation officers. It is increasingly critical for the CIO to be an advocate and leader of transformational change on campus rather than a director and manager of IT operations. Operational goals such as cybersecurity must be contextualized within larger strategic and institutional goals such as affordability and student success. A key “big picture” area is the mission of teaching and learning. How do the systems we select today enable improved learning opportunities over the next three years? Will this solution empower students and faculty for years to come or merely meet a tactical need today? The shift may seem subtle but is actually quite dramatic. Deciding to secure a network and infrastructure is one thing, but doing so within the requirements of the larger teaching and learning mission is a different beast altogether. We must shift from operations to strategy to context-informed decision making.

## 2 Instructional Designer/ Technologist

Christopher Blaire Bundy, University of Wisconsin

Faculty are becoming more comfortable with pervasive and standardized technologies. This provides opportunities to move from creating “boutique solutions” for individual courses to working with institutional leadership to lead, design, and develop sustainable models that span the teaching and learning ecosystem. However, the focus isn’t technology; it’s about leveraging technology to create meaningful educational experiences for diverse learners. Instructional designers need to assume leadership roles to help design and deliver impactful learning online, in the classroom, and with community and/or outside agencies. Transitioning from a role of support to one of leadership will require the ability to effectively communicate, influence others, navigate difficult conversations, and solve complex problems. It demands the facilitation skills to demonstrate value to administrators, students, alumni, and potential donors investing in innovations that lead to better student preparation for real-world experiences.

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## 3 Librarian

Joan K. Lippincott, Coalition for Networked Information

Courses that include digital or new-media projects can promote deeper engagement by students in the focus of their work. While there is no need to throw out the traditional text paper, initiatives including the [Degree Qualifications Profile](#) (DQP) stress the importance of students developing arguments, narratives, or explications and communicating them in writing and at least one other medium. There are increasing opportunities for librarians to work as partners with faculty to develop challenging assignments that encourage students to create a project with an output of a video, podcast, website, data visualization, blog, or other format. In order to effectively partner with faculty, more librarians will need to develop instructional design skills, become familiar with new modes of pedagogy, and be able to instruct students in the use of a variety of technologies and tools. Librarians will shift from the focus on basic information skills to embedding concepts and skills into creative assignments.

## 4 Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning

Mary Wright, Brown University

In a recent study, directors of centers for teaching and learning (CTL) named (1) assessment of student learning and (2) teaching in online and distance environments as the top two issues that will have a strong influence on their work. For example, online and blended methods are increasingly used to deliver workshops and programs. CTL directors are designing these programs and assessing their effectiveness at promoting evidence-based teaching and learning in support of a diverse faculty and student body. Additionally, learning analytics will become more central in CTL portfolios to promote data-rich, action-oriented assessment of student learning in online and hybrid environments. The “hub” role that directors play will become increasingly important as they support these efforts by facilitating collaborative relationships among technology and institutional research units.

## 5 Accessibility Coordinator for Teaching and Learning

Sheryl Burgstahler, University of Washington

The role of the IT accessibility leader is evolving toward leading more aggressive, proactive, and compliance-driven support to campus units, at least partly in response to the increasing number of civil rights complaints that websites, videos, documents, software, online courses, and other IT resources used at postsecondary institutions are inaccessible to individuals with disabilities. In the past few years, more than 20 institutions have reached resolutions to address this situation with either

the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights or the Department of Justice. The resolutions require that policies, standards, and processes be implemented to ensure that IT that is procured, developed, and used on these campuses is accessible to faculty, students, staff, and visitors with disabilities. Many campuses are using these resolutions as guides for making significant changes in support services and staff size of accessible IT units.

## 6 Director of Digital Learning Initiatives

Joshua Kim, Dartmouth College

How might the profession of a “higher education teaching and learning support professional” change and evolve over the next three years? This question is instructive in the words we use to discuss our work. Many times, we still use the word “support” in talking about what we do. Over the next three years I hope to see this word disappear from how we describe our work. “Support” connotes a hierarchy that doesn’t recognize that staff are valuable assets who play an important role in postsecondary education. We need to find a new language that promotes the ethos of service and servant leadership, within the context of describing ourselves as non-faculty educators and alternative academics. Those of us in the business of learning innovation need to develop a set of skills beyond our core competencies in instructional design and technology. We need to become fluent with the larger financial, organizational, and structural issues of our institutions and the postsecondary ecosystem in which we operate.

## 7 Faculty Member

Randall Bass, Georgetown University

If higher education designs are to be increasingly integrative, then so too must be instructional technologists and designers. Once, we thought the faculty role was expanding such that instructors would become learning designers and proto-technologists. Instead, an increasingly competitive and austere landscape is putting competing pressures on faculty, either around research expectations or expanded teaching responsibilities, preventing most from expanding their roles. In response, IT/designers will need to be not only domain mystics who know learning systems, coding, analytics, and visualization but also true boundary crossers. They must understand the contours of innovation, institutional politics, the imperatives of equity, and the outlines of learning theory. The IT/designers who only know systems will hit a low ceiling. Worse, they will not be true partners with faculty on the wicked challenge of redesigning an integrative higher education that is sustainable and equitable and delivers on its greater purposes.