The 2018 Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

About the 2018 ELI Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

Each year since 2011, ELI has surveyed those involved with teaching and learning in higher education to take the pulse of the group about what’s most exciting, pressing, consequential, and relevant. Looking at the ELI Key Issues over time shows which areas hold our attention and time year after year, and it shines a spotlight on issues that rise sharply on the list or fall down the ranking. The survey’s results represent a broad and diverse viewpoint, as we encourage everyone associated with supporting and delivering postsecondary education to participate.

On the whole, the issues tend not to shift significantly from one year to the next. For example, in 2018 the issues of academic transformation and faculty development continue their run at the top of the list. In other respects, however, the 2018 results display a much greater amplitude of shifting than in past years.

Accessibility and universal design for learning (UDL) has made a dramatic ascent over the past four years, moving from #12 in 2015 to #2 in 2018. Perhaps the most striking upward shifts in the 2018 survey are those of privacy and security, which leapt from #14 in 2017 to #4 in 2018, and integrated planning and advising (aka iPASS), which moved precipitously from #16 in 2017 to #6 in 2018.

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

The seven members of the community who contributed these profiles are identified 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
Jonathan Huer, California State University Long Beach

Every major industry has been disrupted, and it’s happening in higher education. Worried about the cost of college? The most reliable scholarship is a job at Starbucks. Need skills? LinkedIn and Lynda.com can provide them and put them on your digital résumé for a monthly fee. Want to work at Google? Try Coursera. Pressure and competition from companies and government create opportunities. Innovation in higher education will take advantage of emerging and existing technology, state and other university systems, and public/private partnerships providing new opportunities to serve a wider range of learners with diverse options. Looking beyond price and prestige, students will decide whether a traditional, online, adaptive, competency based, partial residency, or other program yet to be conceived best meets their needs. Employers, accrediting bodies, and legislatures will also embrace or reject emerging options.

2 Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning
Stephanie Rosen, University of Michigan

It’s time to think of accessibility as the norm. Designing for students with different abilities (universal design) and adjusting when necessary (accommodation) are integral to successful teaching—even perhaps the “most basic act and art of teaching.” Accessibility is moving toward the center in digital design—increasingly desired and expected in the workforce—and in representations of higher education. Educators should know the principles of accessible design, model accessibility in the syllabus and classroom, and start teaching accessibility to student creators and writers. Accessibility drives innovation in technology (think audiobooks and autocorrect) and education. Universal design for learning is becoming mainstream in K–12 and higher education. Still, norms need to be protected, especially when accessibility requirements are pretext for blocking access, and pushed toward inclusive teaching for all students.
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3 Faculty Development
Patrice Torcivia Prusko, Cornell University

Why do we have such low attendance at faculty development workshops, and how do we get more faculty to attend? The dilemma is that we continue to create solutions based on what we think the problem is. As colleges and universities reimagine the student learning experience, we must also reimagine the faculty development experience. A service design thinking study uses an iterative process of storytelling, brainstorming, and prototyping to reimagine a service. This methodology enables you to gain empathy for faculty, understand their pain points, and develop meaningful, human-centered services that solve the real problem. Empathy enables you to build relationships of trust and be seen as solution partners. This process requires a safe space for faculty to be vulnerable and share their story, and time for exploration, brainstorming, and thoughtful failure.

4 Privacy and Security
Sharon Pitt, University of Delaware

Teachers and learners create, use, and share information, and sometimes this information flies under the radar of institutional data protection and privacy models. This is concerning because this information often contains the most personal and confidential data that institutions have. Data governance policies and privacy policies can help faculty and students understand potential risks to the institution and to themselves if certain types of data are misused. Information security and privacy protection practices are designed to protect a range of data—from the most personal and confidential to the most public and informational. Even with technology protections in place, every user has a responsibility to understand the data they use, the context in which they use the data, appropriate protection for the data, and the requirement to report misuse of data.

5 Digital and Information Literacies
Sarah Schroeder, University of Cincinnati School of Education

Learners are consistently variable, and we cannot predict the jobs of the future. These certainties move us away from traditional definitions of literacy to broader skills sets and approaches to learning. Literacy is the ability to find, evaluate, select, use, and create something. Definitions of literacy, including digital, information, visual, media and others, focus on what the National Council of Teachers of English identifies as the demands of 21st-century learning and working, requiring literacies that are “multiple, dynamic, and malleable.” According to the New Media Consortium’s Digital Literacy Impact Study, the shift from a “labor society to a knowledge society,” requires that we address diverse literacies. “Predictions are that 65% of the jobs GenZ will perform in the future do not even exist yet,” making it “critical for workers to be agile, adaptable, and willing to continue to learn if they are to be employable in the future digital world of work.”

6 iPASS
Richard Sluder, Middle Tennessee State University

Higher education has zeroed-in on improving student success, with many initiatives falling under the heading of integrated planning and advising for student success (iPASS). Effective initiatives are characterized by a college-wide commitment, a “one university” approach that both drives and galvanizes the work. Senior leadership—including the president, deans, chairs, directors, and others—support this commitment by sharing responsibility and accountability. These initiatives focus on the strategic application of technology, with an awareness of the critical importance of the “people” element. A fixation on data, allowing everyone to see progress toward goals, helps such initiatives succeed. These institutions both navigate and embrace the change process. A final hallmark is a culture imbued with ever-present reminders about why we are engaged in this work.

7 Instructional Design
Lujean Baab, Virginia Tech

Although the foundations underlying instructional design supported by learning theory remain relevant, the process and roles for those designing responsive and effective learning experiences are evolving rapidly. We need collaborative teams with skills in creation and curation of digital learning objects, data-source identification, data management and analysis, project management, and evaluation both of the process and its products. We must relinquish territorial boundaries, expert status, and lock-step processes to develop cross-trained teams prepared for collaboration, communication, and response to evaluation. We must reach across campuses and offices to request and offer participation in coordinated efforts to meet demands for personalized and interdisciplinary learning experiences. Programs preparing instructional designers must respond to this evolution. Change is not only coming—it is upon us.