The 2017 Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

About the 2017 ELI Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

An important aspect of being a member of a community is understanding which activities and concerns hold that community together. Knowing what challenges your colleagues are facing and what innovations they are pursuing can reinforce efforts at your own campus and provide guidance about where the community is headed.

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 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 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 Faculty Development
Victoria Mondelli, Mercy College

Modalities and flavors of faculty development in higher education have proliferated. The quality of these initiatives varies, however, and many stakeholders are not able to gauge the effectiveness of such programs. Increasingly, C-level leaders are interested in measuring the effects of faculty development on student retention and degree completion, but faculty self-reports don't illuminate this connection. As a result, some institutions are moving toward a multipronged assessment process that combines self-reports with a digital showcase of direct evidence of faculty growth and transformation, often using an e-portfolio. Rather than asking whether the faculty are satisfied with X, next-gen faculty developers are investigating questions such as "Does the faculty development experience enable participants to implement best practices, deepen student learning, and improve student success?" and "What evidence might suggest that engaged faculty will be able to sustain these evolving teaching practices?"

2 Academic Transformation
Emma Zone, Colorado Technical University

Academic transformation is an essential piece of how we address the numerous challenges in higher education. As we grapple with how to approach transformation, we must be willing to question the schema we have created around the classroom experience, how and where learning takes place, and student and faculty engagement. We must be nimble as we redefine the truths we have used as our foundation. At the intersection of this redefinition we find discussions of technology, data, and engagement. We are called to rewrite the narrative, and that call leaves us feeling frustrated, exhilarated, unsure, and fulfilled. How can we enable transformation when we are vacillating among these disparate emotions? Through collaboration—with cross-functional partners within our own institutions and with external partnerships—we can forge ahead together. In that way, we seek more than academic transformation—we are creating institutional transformation.

3 Digital and Information Literacies
Phil Ventimiglia, Georgia State University

We are in the middle of a technological revolution that is transforming every aspect of society—from banking to retail

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to education. Students must increase their digital literacy so they are prepared. Jeff Immelt, CEO of GE, recently commented on shifts in employer expectations: "It doesn't matter whether you are in sales, finance, or operations. You may not end up being a programmer, but you will know how to code." To help students succeed professionally, courses across all disciplines should encourage students to solve real-world problems using available technologies—creating a blog using scripting in an English composition course, for example, or visualizing the impact of demographics on an event in a history class. Using these skills, students become self-directed learners who can identify relevant information and assemble technologies to create solutions. Co-curricular opportunities, like hackathons and maker sessions, provide students ways to expand these skills and be ready to succeed in the digital 21st century.

4 Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning

Nancy Swenson and **Karen Tinsley-Kim**, University of Central Florida

Among the hot topics related to accessibility and universal design for learning (UDL) are the understanding and creation of accessible course materials, especially for the online environment. To support these types of endeavors, many institutions are modeling a collaborative approach. The offices involved may include faculty centers, distance learning offices, IT/technical support, and accessibility services. Institutional events, professional development, and meetings held on topics that underscore UDL provide opportunities to strengthen the relationships between faculty and staff. As a result of these interdepartmental relationships and professional development, faculty are empowered with an understanding of UDL principles, as well as the ability to identify and create accessible content, ultimately benefiting all students. The key to the success of a pervasive UDL and accessibility initiative rests with institutional leadership that sets the tone and casts the vision of an inclusive educational environment across the institution.

5 CBE and New Assessment Methods

Kelvin Bentley, Tarrant County College

Many institutions have begun to research, design, and/or develop ways for students to earn credentials through competency-based education (CBE). CBE enables students to move at a pace that reflects their successful acquisition of knowledge and demonstration of skills, independent of time structures such as semesters and quarters. Institutions pursuing CBE models will need to carefully reflect upon and evaluate current policies, procedures, and technologies (e.g., learning management system, student information system) to determine how best to develop CBE programs that truly benefit students. Such

work will require an "all hands on deck" approach involving students, faculty, administrators, staff, and workforce representatives to develop a CBE roadmap that is clear and sustainable. As more CBE programs are launched, collaboration between institutions will also be important. Such discussions will help institutions reach agreements on what competencies should be part of specific certificates and degree programs, which will help CBE programs scale across institutions.

6 Open Education

Deborah Keyek-Franssen, University of Colorado

Open education and open educational resources (OERs) can play an important strategic role in postsecondary institutions, especially those facing pressure to lower the cost of attendance. The use of OERs can increase access, learning, and retention, especially for students who might otherwise choose not to purchase an expensive textbook. Even as promotion and tenure policies lag behind—the creation of open resources does not yet have the cachet of textbook authorship—collaborations nationally and globally have resulted in multiple repositories of peer-reviewed materials ranging from learning objects (MERLOT) to entire textbooks (Open Textbook Library). Launching an OER or affordable learning initiative (see Affordable Learning Solutions for a how-to guide) at the campus, system, or regional level requires coordination and buy-in from a broad range of stakeholders, including librarians, bookstores, faculty, students, IT staff, and often university and government administrators. In addition, MOOC providers are currently unbundling aspects of open education, testing the marketplace to understand the demand and price points for video content (largely still free), expert feedback, participation in a learning community, and credentials (all increasingly available only for a fee).

7 Online and Blended Teaching and Learning

Michelle Pacansky-Brock, California State University Channel Islands

Online and blended learning has reshaped the teaching and learning landscape. These new modalities now stand at an inflection point. As our institutions serve a more diverse student population than ever before, leaders are being challenged to increase graduation rates. Unhinging learning from the walls of a classroom opens unprecedented opportunities to cultivate learning environments and degree pathways that support the success of all students. However, in the age of big data, students in online and blended classes are most at risk for losing the human touch. LMS analytics and adaptive learning are new technologies that may help to identify sticking points in the student learning life cycle, but human relationships must remain at the core of teaching and learning, regardless of modality.