

Teaching Matters

Center for Teaching Excellence

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The times they are a-changin’: New expectations for teaching

In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Arthur Levin and Diane Dean discussed highlights of their four-year study of college students. They found students are “similar to their predecessors of the past 20 years, but also unique in ways that have important implications for higher education.”

What is similar includes the fact that current undergraduates are utilitarian in their goals for college, weak academically, engaged in community service, and generally uninvolved in campus life.

What is different “is that there are stark contradictions between student beliefs and the realities of their lives; a gulf between their dreams and the diminished conditions of the world in which they live.” In addition, they substitute impersonal communications for difficult personal conversations.

Levin and Dean identified three factors they believe caused these differences: parents who have made their children more dependent than any generation in 40 years, the prolonged economic recession, and the digital revolution.

Because of these factors, the authors suggest that universities be explicit about our expectations and the rules of the academy; we can-

not assume students know them. Students need an education that helps build the skills they lack, and we need to be honest with students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses.

Levin and Dean conclude, “The greatest challenge for colleges is to transform themselves for the emerging society. Only once has higher education faced a challenge this large: when America made the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society and the 17th-century college gave way to the university. If colleges do not act, the risk is that they will inadequately prepare graduates for living. If they fail to accomplish this transformation, they risk becoming irrelevant.”

This academic year, in *Teaching Matters* we’ll consider how teaching at KU is changing and ways that our roles as instructors are evolving, to educate the students we now have for the society they are entering. We’ll examine this issue at the national, state, and local level. Yes, the times, they are a-changin’.

—J. Eddy

Levin, A., & Dean, D. (September 14, 2012). Today’s students: Same as always, but more so. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 35–36.

It's not your parents' university anymore

Dan Bernstein, CTE

These days reading any account of the state of US higher education will give you the heebie-jeebies. From *The Wall Street Journal* to *insidehighered.com*, there are reports of low student performance and high tuition and student debt. Books like *Academically Adrift* and *The Innovative University* promote major disruption in our structures and products. Even our fundamental form of delivery is being questioned, as one online provider after another is trumpeted as the latest stake in the heart of conventional education. Whether it is degrees offered by private for-profit corporations or famous professors putting video lectures online for thousands of people, we read that our days are numbered, and we better change or get out of the way. I do not wish to minimize the challenges we face, and we do need to increase flexibility and add options to our teaching repertoire. But I would borrow a phrase from Mark Twain and suggest that reports of our death are exaggerated.

At the large scale of the national and global economies, the online revolution in education is not yet directly affecting the core educational mission of large public universities. Undergraduate enrollments remain generally high at universities like KU, due in part to the wide range of in-person activities a university community affords to residential undergraduates and a favorable price when compared with schools that get no public support. Ph.D. education is also not losing substantial enrollment to online programs, at least those that focus on research degrees. The online programs are, however, growing in other segments. The sweet spot is master's degrees for adults already employed; those online programs are increasing their share of students and taking enrollment away from universities like KU. A number of students who finish a community col-

lege degree are choosing online completion of a bachelor's degree. Many online providers also offer shorter sequences of courses that lead to formal certification of achievement, though well short of a program or degree. When online courses are available, some regularly enrolled on-campus students supplement their schedules with online courses that meet requirements or substitute for classes unavailable in a given term.

At the course level, our work is changing more rapidly, and the developments will affect a broad range of educational delivery. As noted by Doug Ward and Germaine Halegoua in this issue, there are many ways that courses within a residential university can be enhanced with online and digital resources. The most important driver of these changes is the need to provide interactive and engaged courses, even as class sizes increase and financial support decreases. If students (and their instructors) are to be held accountable for demonstrated academic achievement, we need to find more effective means of teaching than the conventional lecture. KU is actively promoting this change in delivery, both to energize our large courses and to provide an online portal into the benefits of KU designed and certified courses.

At the basic level, we are working with a somewhat different population of students. I was a high school student in the 1960's, and "going to college" was presented as a privilege reserved for students who performed at a high level, showing evidence of academic talent and sustained achievement. In the 1970's and 1980's, the number of higher education opportunities expanded greatly to meet increased demand from people and from employers for post-secondary degrees.

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Tech users group, teaching without technology set for October

In October, CTE will facilitate two different types of discussions about teaching and technology.

The first is the Using Digital Technologies working group, which will meet on Friday, October 26, 12:00 – 1:00 PM at CTE in 135 Budig. Germaine Halegoua, film and media studies, and Doug Ward, journalism, will lead the group. The group will also meet on November 16 at noon at CTE. These gatherings will give participants an opportunity to share ideas about using technology in and out of the classroom and learn about new technology tools. Q&A will be a key part of each session. Participants may contact Germaine (grhalegoua@ku.edu) or Doug (dbward@ku.edu) with their tech problems/questions, which will be discussed during the meetings. Lunch will be provided; RSVP to cte@ku.edu.

On October 12 from 1:30 – 3:00 PM in the Kansas Room of the Kansas Union, CTE will host a workshop with José Antonio Bowen, dean of the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University. Bowen's workshop is titled "Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your Classroom Will Improve Student Learning." Participants will learn new ways to think about learning and technology that prioritizes the benefits of the human dimension in education. Bowen will offer practical advice on how to engage students with new technology, while restructuring classes into active learning environments.

To participate in this workshop, RSVP to CTE at cte@ku.edu by October 10. Open to faculty members, instructional staff, and GTAs. Please note that space is limited.

It's not your parents' university anymore

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Going to some form of college became more of a right for high school graduates who were willing to put time, effort, and money into a degree. In the new economy, students feel obligated to get post-secondary degrees as a minimum credential for entry into a skilled workforce, so we have a number of students who feel entitled to a degree in return for being present and paying fees. As Amy Rossomondo points out, our current students also may feel they should be able to hold extensive employment while enrolled full-time. This puts pressure on us to demand only such study as can fit around students' employment commitments. At the same time, Amy notes that many students assume an attitude of familiarity toward faculty members, perhaps seeing us as service providers. Teachers need to recognize a shift in students' expectation of interaction: from deference toward an honored but distant scholar

to challenging an informal helper to assist in a common goal of rapid and successful completion. Amy argues that whether we think that student attitude is good or bad, it has become part of the educational community we work in.

So our students are different in some ways, our courses are enacted with different tools, our institutions are changing, and our spot in the larger educational marketplace is shifting rapidly and in unpredictable ways. We have no choice about whether our profession will evolve or not; that evolution is occurring fast. There is no benefit to us as individuals or as institutions to sit it out and hope that the educational fads *du jour* will fade away, leaving us to continue working as we have for decades. So far, we can still choose what aspects of those changes we embrace and determine how we address the changing conditions of our profession. That may be our best path forward.

A 'tsunami' sweeps through higher education

Doug Ward, Journalism & Mass Communications

Online education has swept through colleges and universities at break-neck speed over the last several months, unleashing changes that have been described with terms like "historic," "seismic," and "revolutionary."

Top-tier universities that have created large, free online courses have drawn the most attention. Harvard and MIT, for instance, each committed \$30 million to create a new online learning platform called edX. Coursera, an online education consortium created by two Stanford professors, recently signed 12 additional universities, including Duke, Illinois, and Virginia. In June, the Gates Foundation announced \$9 million in grants to support development of free online courses and alternative approaches to learning.

Those are just a few examples of a much broader movement to incorporate technology into learning. Motivated by everything from cost savings to the potential for improved learning, colleges and universities have been experimenting with non-traditional course formats and expanding their online offerings.

The move toward online and technology-aided learning is likely to accelerate in coming years. Many K-12 schools have been investing in tablets and other technology in hopes of reducing textbook costs. Others have embraced a bring-your-own-device model, which draws on students' growing ownership and use of cellphones and laptop computers. Many are experimenting with hybrid and online classes.

Countless universities are also experimenting with hybrid classes, which combine online elements with classroom instruction. Online and hybrid courses are part of what the Alliance for Excellent Education calls "learner-centered instruction." This type of instruction replaces a top-

down strategy with one that puts more responsibility on students. It depends on a flexible model with materials that students can access anytime, emphasizes collaboration, and allows material to be personalized to fit student needs.

This approach also changes the role of the instructor. For centuries, education has embraced a top-down, curriculum-centered approach to learning. Information was uniform and static (i.e., textbooks and other printed material), with instructors imparting knowledge to students. This approach forces instructors and students to adapt to a single body of knowledge.

Digital technology has changed that model dramatically. Learning still relies on an instructor with a broad understanding of a subject and still uses lecture-like material (online videos, podcasts, and other digital media). It goes far beyond the bounds of a static body of knowledge, though, drawing on digital resources online and pushing students to demonstrate their learning through many forms of media.

Technology offers no magical solutions. Rather, it comprises a set of tools that students adopt ubiquitously but that many faculty members use only sparingly and grudgingly. Those tools offer new opportunities to explore and to learn, though, as well as ways to enliven our teaching.

In their book *Understanding the Digital Generation*, Ian Jukes, Ted McCain, and Lee Crockett offer these thought-provoking questions about technology, students, and educators:

"How can we expect students to remain interested in schools based on 20th-century ideas of what learning looks like? ... How can we think we are adequately preparing students for life in the 21st century if we have not learned how the 21st-century world operates? And how can we

expect our students to follow our advice about how to conduct themselves when we have not entered their world in any meaningful way?"

Those are sobering questions.

Technology alone provides no answers and of itself offers no solutions for learning. The pedagogy must come first. Only by integrating that technology seamlessly and meaningfully into courses can we succeed.

Education of any kind must start with sound models of learning and then adapt technology to meet the needs of students and instructors. That requires innovation and experimentation, open minds, and a willingness to accept and learn from failure. It isn't easy, and it is often time-consuming and expensive.

Despite the rapid changes, online education is unlikely to push aside the need for a traditional college degree in the near future. A college education allows students to make connections with faculty members, to work closely with peers and teachers, to improve their critical thinking, and, perhaps most importantly, to mature as they live away from home for the first time.

If the traditional university is to survive, though, it must provide a clear message to students about what it offers over the myriad digital alternatives, even as it innovates, evolves, and reaches out with those same digital tools.

Who's Using Online Education?

KU has only one fully online degree program. Statistics about online courses nationally and regionally show how far we lag behind some competitors.

Students

- 14% of college students (more than 6 million) are enrolled in fully online programs.
- 31% of all college students take at least one online course.
- Enrollment in online courses is growing 10% a year, compared with 2% for traditional courses.
- More than 40% of high schools offer online courses.
- By 2015, 80% of high school students will have taken an online course.

University programs

- Fort Hays State has nearly twice as many students online (8,100) as it does on its physical campus (4,600).
- Missouri offers 80 online degree and certificate programs and more than 500 online courses.
- Nebraska's Online Worldwide program offers over 120 degree programs and certificates.
- North Carolina, Chapel Hill collaborates with colleges and universities throughout the state to offer 240 online degree programs.
- Open Courseware Consortium's 250 member institutions offer nearly 14,000 free online courses in 15 languages. Members include MIT, Arizona State, Notre Dame, Michigan, Michigan State, California Berkeley, and Tufts.
- The Wisconsin university system announced this summer that it would reach out with online programs to 700,000 working adults who have never finished their degrees.

Sources: Center for Digital Education, Babson Survey Research Group, College Board, Academic Partners, program websites

Beyond Blackboard: Using digital technologies to foster participation

Germaine Halegoua, Film & Media Studies

All classes I teach in the Department of Film and Media Studies utilize digital technology in some way. In most of them, studying digital technologies and practices is the focus of the course.

In my KU Summit workshop last August, I showed examples of how instructors have used blogging platforms like WordPress and Tumblr, as well as collaborative documents like Google Docs and Thinkpad, to encourage students to share opinions and class projects, practice writing skills, and engage and critique larger course concepts. I demonstrated how social media and tools that harness social media (such as Storify) can be used to extend conversations outside of the classroom, help students foster expertise in a given subject, and encourage students to view course material as relevant beyond the university setting. I also showed how services like Google Moderator can allow instructors to gauge understanding of course material by inviting students to ask questions online and vote on which questions are most important to them. Additionally, I introduced an alternative to Blackboard called Lore, which incorporates blogging, social networking, and course management tools and allows for easily embeddable media in a single platform.

I cautioned against viewing these technologies as “killer applications” for class participation. The burden remains on the instructor to generate challenging and rewarding assignments, design intriguing prompts for discussion, bring the information and conversation generated online back into the classroom, and above all, not to use technology for the sake of using technology.

I regularly use Blackboard as a space to upload readings and grades, but my engagement with that system usually ends there. I appreciate all of

the affordances of Blackboard: wikis, discussion forums, podcasts, blogging spaces, etc. But I also have a few concerns with Blackboard that my students seem to share.

Although there are instructions available, the tools for collaboration and student participation are a bit cumbersome to use. Students have mentioned that they don't linger on Blackboard; instead, they do what is required and then sign out.

One of my biggest issues with Blackboard is that students master a system that has a particular logic to it, but that system is not used outside of university classrooms. Digital skills acquired through Blackboard are not necessarily translatable to students' lives after college. By using other blogging platforms, discussion and collaboration forums, social networking sites, digital audio/video services, and analytic tools for social media, an instructor can recognize the skills students have acquired and teach students to produce content on (and think more critically about) the digital platforms they regularly consume.

As instructors and students continue to experiment with digital technologies inside and outside the classroom, there will continuously be more questions, concerns, successes, and problems to discuss and share. Please join Doug Ward and me for discussions with the new CTE working group on Using Digital Technologies at KU.

Using Digital Technologies at KU:
A CTE Working Group

October 26 and November 16
12 – 1 PM at CTE, 135 Budig Hall
Lunch provided; RSVP to cte@ku.edu.

“Back then”

Amy Rossomondo, Spanish & Portuguese
with Ann Martinez, CTE/English

There is an academic myth that “back then” professors had time to do their research, and their teaching, and their service, and also have a life. Now there seems to be a real lack of time, and it’s not just limited to academia. It’s indicative of the pace of our society. We expect instant turn-around and instant response. This has trickled down to the relationship between student and professor.

Academia is the profession of the over-achiever. The university has always been a pressure cooker, as the goal line keeps getting pushed further and further away, and there’s more and more work the higher you go. But this pressure is not limited to campus, because now we never leave “the office”—when we go home, technology allows us to continue working. This can be a curse and a blessing. On the one hand, we feel guilty not using our home resources as an opportunity to get things done. On the other hand, technology has given us the ability to work anywhere. It’s easier to collaborate on research with faculty from other universities, anywhere in the world. With email, texting, and cloud technology, we can work with anyone at the stroke of a key, leading to less isolation within the academic community.

But this fast-paced technological environment has not only affected faculty, it has also changed the students we teach. “Back then,” it was much easier to find full-time students on campus—students who were only students, and nothing else, whose job it was to learn and focus on learning. Now many of our students work at least 20 hours a week, some a lot more. While no one wants to lower expectations, the reality is that going to school is not the only responsibility for these students. Dan Bernstein always says, “You can’t teach only the students you want; you teach the students you have.”

To be successful teachers, we have to try to adapt and be more proactive about how we reach the goals that we have set. If we are transparent about communicating what it is we are doing and why it is that we are doing it, students are much more responsive to requests about completing assignments. “Back then,” professors felt no need to justify why they were asking someone to do something, but now we have a generation of students who expect to be in the loop, and expect to share in the meta-teaching. To me, this comes from our very limited time: Students have more things on their hands than they have time for, so they are going to have to pick and choose. If you can explain to them why you are having them do something, they are much more likely to do it.

We can’t be just the purveyors of knowledge. It’s not in students’ best interests to simply sit there and listen. It’s our job to figure out ways to get them to interact with the subject matter in ways that are purposeful and productive, and that make their learning visible to themselves. Part of the game is not having them think that we are wasting their time.

I respect our students for the demands that are on them. Many are paying their own way through college, dividing their time between school and part-time work. It’s helpful for us to understand their backgrounds and not assume the reason why they are not doing the work is because they don’t want to do it. There is a lot competing for their attention, and a lot of it is legitimate. “Full-time students” vs. “part-time working students”—it’s not an either/or situation. Figuring out how to make this work is crucial, because students still have to learn, and we still have to educate our society.

END NOTE

Ten best practices for teaching online courses

According to Judith V. Boettcher, faculty who are new to teaching online courses may find these ten best practices helpful:

1. Be present at the course site.
2. Create a supportive online course community.
3. Be clear about how you will communicate and how much time students should be working on the course each week.
4. Use a variety of large group, small group, and individual work experiences.
5. Use both synchronous and asynchronous activities.
6. Early in the term (about week 3), ask for informal feedback on “How is the course going?” and “Do you have any suggestions?”
7. Prepare discussion posts that invite questions, discussions, reflections, and responses.
8. Focus on content resources and applications and links to current events and examples that are easily accessed.
9. Combine core concept learning with customized and personalized learning.
10. Plan a good closing and wrap activity for the course.

For more about these best practices, see *CTE’s Essential Guide to Teaching at KU*, 5th edition. Copies are available at the Center in 135 Budig Hall.

Boettcher, J.V. (2011) Ten best practices for teaching online: Quick guide for new online faculty. Retrieved from www.designingforlearning.info/services/writing/ecoach/tenbest.html.