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Educause Learning Initiatives Annual Conference 2012

February 13-15 2012 I attended the ELI Annual conference in Austin TX. The title of the conference was “Taking the Pulse: Connecting, Assessing, and Innovating,” and it was three days of networking, exploring, and learning about teaching, learning, and technology. Why would a librarian want to attend this conference? In many academic institutions instructional and educational technology is part of the library, a department or center in the library, or part of a newly developed learning commons. This puts academic libraries in a position to strategically help faculty and students incorporate both library resources and technology in teaching and learning.

It was very evident from the sessions and conversations that many institutions are trying to figure out how to help faculty adopt technology that supports their teaching pedagogy and increase active collaborative learning. General, breakout, and poster sessions of digital projects, iPad use, online and hybrid teaching strategies, classroom engagement, and the new initiative of learning analytics were just a few of the repetitive themes.

Along with the hands-on opportunity to use iPads in a few interactive sessions to show their potential to foster collaboration and content creation, there were three other sessions that stood out for me.

- A presentation by Northwestern College described the steps they took to develop a sustainable faculty training and development program in innovative educational practices. The difficulty with selling faculty on the need to attend training, incentives, and the issues with sustainability made me think of the issues libraries have with getting faculty and students to attend training about new resources and services. The need for incentives and including the faculty in session development and implementation as well as having some sort of intrinsic motivation were very important in making this project succeed.
- A poster session by a Faculty Technology Liaison from Trinity University (CA) talked about the creation of digital learning materials for incoming students. Librarians and instructional technologists created an online information literacy assignment. This was an interesting concept. More information can be found at http://php.trinity.edu/qep/info_lit/.
- How many of you have thought of the Daniel Simons’ Invisible Gorilla Test and unintentional blindness in the context of students being unaware of the technology tools that are available for them in the library and on campus? Campuses spend a lot of money on technology and students may not see it or don’t know where to go for help. The university of Wisconsin at Whitewater decided to do something about this. They developed a “tech quest” for new students to take that focused on services that students needed to know; login, LMS, email, computing facilities, etc. They got support of the provost

and this “tech quest” became a requirement for incoming students to finish with a certain grade. Students were emailed, twittered, and Facebooked reminders. Advisors were sent the grades. Imagine doing something like this to introduce students to not just technology but also library resources and services,

One of the general sessions with Chri Dede, professor in Learning Technologies at Harvard University gave us a glimpse of the new learning environments that our future students will come from. We got a preview of the EcoMUVE project <http://ecomuve.gse.harvard.edu/> at Harvard which is a blended immersive learning environment that uses virtual, simulations, and augmented reality to teach ecosystems to middle-school students. This demonstrated an environment of active learning that will engage students and foster innovation that is needed in our innovation-based economy. This was a good introduction to the next session I attended where the findings of the 2012 Horizon Report were presented. The annual NMC Horizon Report for higher education is an annual research collaborative venture of the New Media Consortium and ELI that identifies emerging technologies that are likely to have an impact in education in the next five years. The main points of the executive summary are:

- People want to work, learn, and study anywhere and everywhere.
- We are accepting and adopting applications and services in the cloud.
- Educators are turning to collaborative and teamwork based projects, as this is becoming a critical skill in the workplace.
- We are dealing with preparing students for a world where information is everywhere,.
- Educational paradigms are changing to include online, hybrid, and collaborative models.
- Technology is being used to foster active and challenge-based learning to help students become excited about learning and immerse themselves in the subject matter.

The challenges that higher education is dealing with that is also presented in the Horizon Report are worth noting;

- The pressure and competition of economics and new models of education.
- Evaluating new forms of scholarly authoring, research, and publishing.
- Importance of digital literacy in every discipline.
- Institutional barriers to innovative application of technology.
- Challenges for libraries to support and curate new modes of scholarship

The keynote speaker Adrian Sannier, Vice President of Product for Pearson, also articulated some of these same challenges. He spoke about the revolution in education where the old ways are being destroyed in the wave of new. This includes school as we know it, learning from books, printed books. Students use Wikipedia instead of Britannica, information is now democratized where it is

created with access for everyone. Ebooks are durable, portable, interactive, and searchable. We now have iPads vs. computers and MIT, Stanford, and the Khan Academy are offering free open courseware.

As I mentioned, a repetitive theme of many of the sessions was “learning analytics.” The purpose of LA systems/software is to collect and analyze usage data associated with each student from a variety of sources to enable appropriate interventions if necessary to ensure student success. This is not just student opinion on an end of course evaluation but the ability to capture what students actually do throughout a course. A discussion session that I attended revealed concerns about relying on this type of data. Data collected would focus on the performance of the learner without taking into account the background and bias of the actual student. Since students are not blank slates when they enter a learning environment and one approaches each learning experience differently, there were a lot of questions about how to measure these and other personal aspects that affect learning. Since data is already being collected in our learning management systems many comments stressed that we need to use this data appropriately, acknowledging its limitation.

In reflection, an overarching theme of the conference was facilitating technological change. Faculty are given tools but what good are the tools if they don't know how to use them. Sessions stressed that it is time to work together, think of ways for learning to be performance based rather than product based, lower friction for discover and distribution of digital content, find what works, look at learning as a science not an art, study what helps people learn, and use analytics. It is a time to leverage technology, create space to learn and share, and facilitate shared active learning; a learner-centered community of learners. One also should not lose sight of the importance of fostering teaching that is pedagogy driven not technology driven.

I came away from the conference with new ideas to explore and things to think about related to technology in teaching and learning. It was affirmed for me that the library is in a position to play a strategic role in promoting technology on campus. However, it was very clear that there needs to be a shared vision, collaboration, and strategic partnerships between all technology providers on campus in order to respond to the rapid pace of change.