



## Introducing ‘Transforming Teaching and Learning’

"Inside Digital Learning" is morphing into something new, exploring the ways colleges and professors are changing how and what they teach and students learn -- with or without technology.

By [Doug Lederman](#)

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*Inside Higher Ed* started “Inside Digital Learning” three years ago this month, with the goal of expanding our coverage of how technology is changing the nature of instruction and learning. We’ve built an audience of tens of thousands of dedicated readers -- recipients of our weekly newsletter and many others who seek out (or stumble across) our content on Twitter or other platforms.

We’re grateful for your ideas, suggestions and constructive criticism during that time. Thank you for contributing.

If that sounds like “Inside Digital Learning” is disappearing, it is -- in a way. But this newsletter is morphing, not ending. And I’m hopeful this new iteration -- “Transforming Teaching and Learning” -- will serve our readers just as well if not better. Here’s what we’re doing, and why.

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“Inside Digital Learning” has published a ton of great news and opinion content over the last 150 weeks, and we've been struck by a few things along the way.

First, colleges and universities and their administrators and professors are equal parts excited and perplexed by, and wary of, the emerging role of technology in learning. In the reportage and commentary we've published, “Inside Digital Learning” has sought to document and explain the expansion of online learning and other forms of digital innovation, without cheerleading for it or demonizing it as much coverage elsewhere does.

We examined scores of topics about how colleges were using technology to enhance and expand their missions of delivering learning, the problems they encountered, and how they adapted after experimentation and, sometimes, failure.

What became clear, though, was that for every good story we came across about how a college or instructor was remaking a course or a curriculum or a learning approach using some form of digital technology -- making it logical fodder for a publication about “digital learning” -- we had to forgo writing about other forms of pedagogical or educational innovation in which technology played no role whatsoever.

And in a world in which most students (still) take most of their courses in physical classrooms, that seemed ... odd.

Technology will be an integral, if not fundamental, element of the future for just about every form of learning at just about every college or university. As a result, covering the role of technology in learning will remain essential for any higher education publication worth its salt (including this one). But technology

is a medium, a tool -- a sideshow, really.

The main event, the core activity, is teaching and learning -- and pressure is intensifying on higher education as an enterprise, and colleges and universities individually and collectively, to do it better.

The nature of that pressure is multifaceted. Some of it comes from external constituents: accreditors, politicians and others who might be characterized as those demanding “accountability.”

Some of it comes from students and families, those “consumers” (forgive the use of that word that some of you dread) who, opinion polls tell us, are increasingly questioning the value of the credentials they earn in college and the time they spend earning them.

And some of it comes from those of you within higher education itself, who are (in some combination) paying attention to that external questioning and, good professionals that you are, examining the ways you’ve been delivering education and asking if it continues to be the right way to fulfill the mission of your course, your academic program or your college or university.

Whatever your motivation, if you are engaged in the process of reimagining how you (or your faculty) teach or your students learn, the “Transforming Teaching and Learning” newsletter is for you.

Each week in this space, I will explore some facet of the changing landscape around teaching and learning. These reported columns could profile a professor’s distinctive approach to remaking a course to try to improve learning outcomes, a college’s strategy to differentiate itself online or a new classroom strategy that is improving student engagement or performance. I’ll

interview thoughtful advocates and skeptics, spur and moderate debates, and, once in a while, maybe even express an opinion of my own.

Here are some of the areas I consider ripest for exploration.

**Quality and assessment:** How much are students learning, and are they learning the “right” things? (And who defines that?) Is competency-based education ready for prime time? Ditto for e-portfolios? Are institutions paying less attention to student evaluations in judging teaching quality? Should they be? Are professors setting the bar too low for the rigor of their courses? More fundamentally, do we know how to judge “quality” in student learning?

**Technology’s role:** How do professors and institutions decide when to use technology to deliver instruction -- and not to? What do we know about learning outcomes in online versus blended versus in-person education? Is that the right comparison? What role do (and should) student data play in helping instructors understand how they and their students are doing?

**The future of the faculty:** Does the current composition of the instructional workforce make sense given how the nature of teaching and learning is evolving? Does the current system by which we prepare and reward faculty members come close to prioritizing teaching and learning enough? Is the scholar-teacher model the right one for the future, or should there be greater variation in roles, with more instructors focused on guiding students on their learning journeys and fewer focused on disciplinary knowledge?

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Beyond this new feature, the “Transforming Teaching and Learning” newsletter will incorporate relevant content that we’ve published that week in *Inside Higher Ed* and include the insights of the great stable of columnists and other higher ed professionals who contribute essays and blog posts.

Careful readers may note that this newsletter's new name is the same as the title of [the IHE Now conference](#) we're putting on July 6-8 in Minneapolis. That's more than coincidence; the Transforming Teaching and Learning conference will over its three days explore many of these same issues, with a fantastic array of speakers and an expected 450 to 500 academic administrators and faculty members. Early highlights from the agenda include talks by Candace Thille of Amazon and Cappy Hill of Ithaca S+R and a debate about the appropriate role of outside providers in online learning, featuring Robert Shireman of the Century Foundation and David Sutphen of 2U.

The content of the newsletter will help us build momentum leading up to the conference and keep it going in the weeks and months that follow.

Taken together, the newsletter, the conference and other content we have planned are designed to signal how important we believe these issues are. There may be no more important challenge (and opportunity) facing colleges and universities right now than proving that they are delivering the high-quality, rigorous education they promise to students (and making sure they actually *are* delivering it).

Significant questions also arise about whether students and families are paying too much for the educations they receive, leading some to doubt whether the education is "worth it." I don't diminish the importance of those questions. But most people will pay what is necessary for something they are convinced has significant value, which is why I believe building great education -- and proving that students are benefiting from it -- is Job 1 right now. That's what we'll focus on here.

I'd welcome your ideas for topics to be explored here, people I should talk to and just about anything else you care to [share with me](#). This is a group effort.

We'll get started for real next week. Hope you'll come along for the ride.  
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Read more by [Doug Lederman](#)

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