

Transcript - ASU Remote 2022: Strategies for Implementing Digital Learning Infrastructure to Support Equitable Outcomes

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NORMA HOLLEBEKE: Hello. And welcome to REMOTE-- The Connected Faculty Summit. I'm Norma Hollebeke, manager for network programs and services with Every Learner Everywhere. And I will be moderating today's session.

This 90-minute Ask the Experts block is sponsored by Every Learner Everywhere, a nonprofit network that advocates for and supports institutions in achieving equitable outcomes in US higher education through advances in digital learning.

This second of four blocks for Every Learner Ask the Experts sessions focuses on higher education infrastructure. In our first presentation, we'll learn six strategies for improving racial equity outcomes in lower level courses. Our second session provides an overview of how to keep departments accountable to equity goals. And our third session gives us a plan to meet the needs for a changing higher education landscape with blended learning.

And now to begin session 1. APLU has worked alongside dozens of institutions, taking up the call to action to address racial equity gaps in lower level courses. And Tyton Partners has supported institutions in developing strategies and business plans to scale digital learning. Their report, "Strategies for Implementing Digital Learning Infrastructure to Support Equitable Outcomes," summarizes six effective strategies illustrated by institutional case studies.

Our presenters today are an author of the report and faculty leaders who participated in the APLU program. So we're going to get started. I'm going to introduce our first speaker, Kristen Fox. She's the managing director at Tyton Partners, a strategy consultancy focused on the education sector. Kristen has spent over 15 years working at the intersection of higher education, digital learning, and workforce development.

She is a frequent author and presenter on higher education and digital learning. Kristen previously worked as a special advisor at Northeastern University, where she led initiatives focused on creating new pathways for underserved students, building new models for online experiential learning, and scaling career services for students whose needs were not met by the traditional student services model.

Early in her career, Kristen taught undergraduate global history and writing courses at the University of California, San Diego. Kristen holds a BA in international relations and Chinese from Colgate University, an MA in international affairs and economic development from the University of California, San Diego.

Kristen, I'm going to turn it over to you to introduce the rest of your panel.

KRISTEN FOX: Great. Thank you so much, Norma. And it's great to be here with all of you to talk about the really important work that we've been doing with a set of leading organizations and individuals who are really working to produce better outcomes for students.

And so I'm so pleased to introduce Bryan Berrett, who's the Director of the Office of Innovation and Digital Excellence for Academic Success at Fresno State. And by way of a short introduction, Bryan has been in that role or has been in several leadership positions at Fresno State over the last 25 years, and has his doctorate in educational technology from Pepperdine and is a professor of deaf studies. And you'll hear more from Bryan momentarily around his background and work that he does at Fresno State. And then Beth Brunk-Chavez is dean of the Extended University at the University of Texas at El Paso, or UTEP. And in her role, she oversees online education, online course development, professional and continuing education in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

And I'm so eager for all of you to hear from Bryan and Beth about the great work that they are doing as it relates to digital learning at their institution.

So I want to set a little bit of context, though, before we jump into the conversation. And so first and foremost, as we go through our conversation here today, what I want to acknowledge is we're still learning and studying the various impacts of digital learning on different student populations.

But what's clear and what we see in our profiling and the work that we're going to be talking about here today, is that leveraging digital learning, and especially the use of

course materials that can be interactive and individualized, really enables and opens the door to creative, effective strategies that can be used to improve student learning. And, in particular, in gateway courses, as well as across the curriculum, where we know that there's been higher DFWI rates for students who are Black, Latinx, and Indigenous, as well as those from low-income backgrounds.

And so we're going to be talking about some of those strategies here today. What I'd also refer you to is the link to this report that you can see here. We'll put it in the link as well in the chat. But what we want to share with you is a definition for how we're thinking about digital learning and the role that it can play.

We're going to share a framework for thinking about how you implement digital learning infrastructure that supports equitable outcomes at your institution. And talk about where you might start, knowing that we're all at different points in that journey and really share some actionable strategies.

So what we're going to be building on and talking about here today are lessons learned across institutions. And hearing from both Beth and Bryan in terms of the work that they're doing. This report, that you can certainly reference as well, is focused on helping institutional leaders who are at varying stages in their digital learning implementation journey that represents small to large student populations and are showing progress in achieving equitable outcomes, using digital learning as a key tool as part of a broader institutional commitment.

Like Bryan and Beth, we have worked with institutions that have a common commitment to and are seeing progress in redesigning policies, practices, and systems that create conditions to better support all students in succeeding in their courses and graduating. And so we're really grateful for the time that all of you are spending with us here today on this topic.

So one thing I want to clarify is as we start this conversation and set the table, is what we mean when we say digital learning. And so as you can see here, how we define digital learning is technology and teaching practices that are using technology to enhance learning. So you might be using digital learning in the context of a primarily face-to-face class, a hybrid course. But we're not talking about online learning or fully online courses per se.

It's a broad range of tools that you might use, curricular models, design strategies that are personalizing instruction for students in these different learning modalities through the use of data, through the use of formative practice, et cetera.

And so one of the things that we see as a promise, and you'll hear about in our discussion here today, is digital learning can really enable instructors and institutions, when it's part of a broader digital learning infrastructure ecosystem, to adapt to different student needs and capabilities. Enable active learning and support learners more effectively with feedback and tracking of outcomes. So again, I think it's really important we're all on the same page in terms of how we're talking about and thinking about digital learning here today.

So what do we mean when we say digital learning infrastructure? So we don't just mean the LMS and the technology systems that obviously are an important part of a digital learning experience. What I think is really important, and you'll hear us talk about here today, is that one of the things that we see as we look at institutions that are sustaining digital learning at scale is that collaboration and integration is happening across disparate departments.

So we're, as you can see here, looking at the role that leadership plays as it relates to having setting culture, setting policy, having budgets that align to enabling faculty to engage in and implement digital learning tools and adjust pedagogy.

The elements of course design and delivery that are really focused on supporting instructors, students, and bringing into place best-in-class pedagogy, et cetera, that is equity-centered and aligned to students' needs and lived experiences.

Student success, we'll talk a lot about that here today. But making sure that, again, teaching is a team sport and that instructors are supported in their work and with support for students where and how they need it. Not just between, for example, 9 to 5. And, of course, partnership with evaluation and analytics, the availability of disaggregated data and information that can enable us to identify where and how students are struggling and enable improvement. And then professional learning that supports faculty and, of course, the technology infrastructure. But what you can see here is all these pieces come together. And it is not just about technology, it's about leadership and it is about that full picture for the institution.

So with that table set, as I said, we are going to turn to conversation and hear from my colleagues, Bryan and Beth, about some of the amazing work that they are doing both at Fresno State and UTEP. And so we're going to start the conversation by a question to each of you.

And we'll start with you, Beth-- or sorry, Bryan. If you could just tell us a little bit about your institution, your role, and the north star for your digital learning work and its role in helping you to achieve more equitable student outcomes at Fresno State.

BRYAN BERRETT: Certainly. Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here. And welcome to all of you. It looks like this is truly an international experience. So very grateful to have the time to be with you today. Fresno State is one of 23 campuses in the California State University system, and we're located in Central California. We have approximately 25,000 students, and we are a designated Hispanic-serving institution and Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander serving institution.

78% of our students are from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and 66% are first-generation college students, with about 60% of our undergraduate students being eligible for Pell Grants. And many of our students come from surrounding rural communities that does not have the necessary infrastructure, such as broadband internet access.

My current role as was mentioned, I'm the interim director for our Office of IDEAS, but I have held various positions. I was a part-time faculty member for many years, a full-time lecturer, have gone through the tenure track process through our system, and earned full professor approximately eight years ago. And since that time, I moved into this role, which is our teaching and learning center essentially, where we provide support for our faculty and training opportunities.

Almost everything that we do follows the ADKAR model for change management, which is a Prosci company. And I'm also a Gallup StrengthsFinder coach. And so those are some of the contextual pieces. I think being a faculty member and being on campus for 25 years really has given me a lot of opportunities to develop really meaningful relationships.

I would say the primary guiding star or north star that was alluded to is inclusion and access. So not only do we invest in professional development for all 1,500 of our full-time or part-time faculty, it's providing the tools, the technology, the support, and more importantly, the access for our students. And so as long as we're focused on our students, we really feel like we can move them forward and empower them for success.

KRISTEN FOX: Great. Thanks, Bryan. And we look forward to digging more into that. Beth, do you mind sharing a little bit of context around the UTEP and the work that you're doing there?

BETH BRUNK-CHAVEZ: Of course. Thank you, Kristen. And I feel like Bryan, we have so many parallels already that I can just insert the places where we might differ. But I'm coming from UTEP-- I'm actually coming from Washington, DC today. But my home institution is UTEP.

And similar to what Bryan described, we are Hispanic-serving institution with about 83% of our students identifying as Hispanic, about 50% first gen, close to 25,000 students, many of them from the El Paso region. We're on the US-Mexico border on the far West Texas side. So Texas is a very big state. A lot of you know that pretty well already. But we're in the far West Texas.

And our school was just recently designated, maybe three or four years ago, it seems fairly recent, though, as an R1 institution. So I think we're both feeling the challenges and the benefits of being an open-access institution, but also one that has achieved the R1 status.

My north star feels very similar to what Bryan just said. Our school motto is access and excellence. And so that's what my group has always achieved to do is to provide that opportunity for students. Our previous president, Dr. Diana Natalicio, used to always say, talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. And so we recognize the value that our students bring to our institution and making sure they have the opportunity to achieve their education.

And then also, like Bryan, I'll just say that I'm also a full professor in rhetoric and writing studies at this institution. And so having that faculty background, I think, has been a huge benefit to the work that I've been able to do. And I've also been on the campus a long time.

And I don't know that we'll have time to get into that, but I think that's an interesting dynamic that if someone is going to take on the leadership responsibilities of online education, thinking about how they can take advantage, I guess, of those values, to work with faculty, to encourage them to do so in the best ways.

KRISTEN FOX: Great. Thank you both. And let's actually riff off of that and go there. And talk about I know one of the things that makes both of your organizations stand out is

not only do you talk the talk, or have that north star, but you really are making decisions, investments, and bringing that to life and using digital learning as a tool to do that.

One of the key recommendations, as we look across organizations like yours and the work that we've done, is that institutions should be creating a learning culture.

Equipping faculty for success through professional learning, and that's inclusive of incentives and technologies. Easier said than done.

So would love to hear a little bit-- and let's start with you, Beth-- around the key activities and things that you're doing to support faculty, bring faculty along in using digital tools and modalities to support students. And understand their really unique lived experiences of the students that you're serving at UTEP.

BETH BRUNK-CHAVEZ: OK, sure. Thank you. So I'll start with a very brief history. But back in, I think, 2004, we were approached-- when I used to direct the first year composition program, we were approached to set up a hybrid structure so that classes would be scheduled one day a week face to face and one day a week online. And we were just asked to do it.

And because I'd had early experience developing an online course with an instructional designer who sat down with me for a full semester to think through the course, I thought, there's no way we can just do this. And so out of that experience, out of that challenge, I suppose, was born what we called the hybrid academy. But it was like a nine-month program with lots of in-face meetings, a few online meetings. This was back in 2004, 2005.

But out of that experience has grown a really rich and robust preparation program that we have for faculty. We have the TOA, we call it the Teaching Online Academy, that we offer three times a year to any faculty at any level-- graduate students, tenured or tenure track lecturers, part time, et cetera. And it's a requirement through our provost office that faculty take this course prior to teaching an online course.

And it's not training in the LMS. That's a separate thing. But this is how to create engagements, to create learning outcomes, to do all the kinds of things that faculty should be able to access, no matter what kind of format they're teaching in. And then we also pair them with instructional designer as they're developing the online course, to help make sure that it's engaging and accessible to students in every sense of the word.

And then as time has moved on, we're still continuing to do the Teaching Online Academy, but we also offer two other versions. One is we've returned back to the Teaching Hybrid Academy for faculty who want to teach an online class. The struggle there is it's not required in the same way as an online instructor is required to take that course. And then we also recently added the Teaching HyFlex Academy for those faculty members who are interested in attempting to teach a HyFlex course since the pandemic.

KRISTEN FOX: Great. And I know one of the things that we talked about in some of our prep sessions as well is, and we'll put this out there for folks to consider, but how there's standard practice at many institutions where if you're teaching in an online course or a hybrid course, professional learning is required for that, but not if you're teaching a face-to-face course where you might be blending in or bringing in some digital tools and technologies. So I think that's a place that I know we've talked about and would be thinking about pushing all of us and all of our institutions in considering as well.

Bryan, how about for you? I know you also are doing a lot of work have faculty-led professional learning as well.

BRYAN BERRETT: Yeah, absolutely. And I would just like to start by acknowledging Beth's comments about the value of instructional designers. So if your institution does not have any instructional designers, that is a really good starting point for this great work. So I just appreciated that comment very much as a faculty member who worked with one in the late '90s developing an online class, or a hybrid class at the time.

So our university really starts with a culture of belonging. And it's really getting the faculty to buy into that this isn't a place where we want them to be for the entirety of their career. And that starts with onboarding our faculty, both our lecturers and our tenure track faculty prior to instruction. Where we provide them with an overview of most importantly, what our students' needs are, what are the highest priorities and needs of our students so that faculty can meet our students where they are.

Building trust with our faculty is really crucial. And our office does that primarily by doing listening tours, going to department meetings, having one-on-one consultations. It really is about building relationships throughout the campus and getting buy in. And that includes at our institution anyway, an Academic Senate. So we have a shared governance model that's really important to our digital learning efforts.

And anything that we do, any training that we offer-- and Beth mentioned several that we offer as well-- digital learning is embedded throughout all of those, as is universal design for learning and accessibility, inclusive teaching practices, anti-racism. I mean, all of these things are part of the various trainings we offer. Currently this summer, we have four summer institutes that we're offering. One of those is that HyFlex modality. So faculty being in a classroom, but teaching the students who may be learning synchronously, remotely, and/or asynchronously and/or in person, and that's been a big shift for us.

It really is focusing on the quality of the learning and the teaching and the design of the courses. And any of our trainings start with some face-to-face time, and it's kind of booked in where we have some face-to-face kickoff. We may have some asynchronous or synchronous work, and then face-to-face again. And that happens for the training, but then we additionally have a faculty learning community throughout the academic year. All of our trainings are informed by data. So we leverage our dashboards in our Office of Institutional Effectiveness, which really shows us where our gaps are, equity gaps, especially for our undergraduate students. And we have dashboards that are specific to faculty. So I can actually pull up any class I've ever taught and look at the grade distributions of the students and what that looks like for me, and how I might change my teaching practices and be more inclusive using and leveraging digital tools.

KRISTEN FOX: That's great. And it sounds one of the things that's really important in creating that is a culture of continuous learning at the institution. Transparency around the data and encouraging that. A question that's come in from one of our audience members is around challenges in using digital learning in such diverse learning communities and considering diverse student populations and faculty populations.

Bryan, do you want to speak to that? I know that you've been doing some real work at Fresno State around ensuring that students have the tools and infrastructure to be successful in digital learning.

BRYAN BERRETT: Happy to do that. We're very fortunate that we've had some academic leaders that have had some great vision. And so for example, back in 2014, we started what we call our discovery program, which provided faculty members a week-long training on how to leverage technology tools and make technology transparent as part of their teaching, but also provided any student in their classes an iPad with a keyboard that they could leverage because many of our students do not have devices.

That program has grown since 2014. Over the past academic year, we provided a device to any student who asked for one, and we primarily were sending targeted communications to our incoming freshmen. So we distributed approximately 5,000 devices last year, iPads with keyboards, and another approximately 4,000 hotspots.

So our campus has really focused on providing access to students who may not have it, especially during COVID, where lots of places that may have had internet access were not open or accessible. And so we're very grateful for that. We continue in that effort. But it really is about supporting the students.

So in addition to the devices, we actually have a Discovery Hub within our library, which is centrally located. And we hire student assistants, train them, and they become almost like scaffolding the expertise of how you might leverage the device for learning. And so we have our digital Discovery Hub, which is almost if you've seen or been to an Apple Hub, that was the inspiration. So we're very fortunate in that regard to be able to support our students in that way.

KRISTEN FOX: Bryan, any comments there or information you'd share to others thinking about both the importance of that, as well as thinking about funding sources? How have you sustained that and thought about that from a leadership perspective?

BRYAN BERRETT: Student stories are very powerful. And if you combine that with the faculty story, their experience of going through those trainings and providing resources to the faculty, it's modest. It's certainly not the equivalent of the time that they put in the course redesign or the training, but providing some faculty these stipends to acknowledge their work I think is critical.

In terms of sustaining the funding, it really is about that ongoing commitment. As a faculty member, I was actually in the inaugural cohort of the discovery program in 2014. And what sold me on it wasn't the technology. It was this idea that I could create a course that had zero-cost course materials. So it wasn't going to cost my students anything. I didn't have to purchase a book. That that's what I bought into.

In terms of the infrastructure, though, and sustainability, there has to be consistent funding in the budget. And that comes from academic affairs, from the president, from the leaders of the cabinet who are committed to that. And if you share the stories and you share the data with them, there's a very powerful impact.

KRISTEN FOX: Great. Beth, anything else that you'd want to add around access for students and making sure that tools are being used in ways that don't further perpetuate equity gaps?

BETH BRUNK-CHAVEZ: Well, I think Bryan covered a lot of ground there that I can't really add a whole lot to that. Except to say that we do something similar here, providing hotspots and the technology and making sure that there's places accessible to students who need to come to campus and work, of course. But a lot of us, I think, figured out how to do a lot of that during the pandemic especially. And so that may be one benefit that we can continue with. Sure.

KRISTEN FOX: Yeah. Great. Well, obviously, each of your institutions have been doing great work to ensure that you're using digital tools to close gaps and measuring those and collaboratively with faculty to do that. In terms of a last question before we move to our next topic and group, what are you tackling as the next priority? And where are you focused and making sure that in your continuous improvement, you are working to make sure digital tools are being used for best impact with students?

Beth, I'll let you go ahead first.

BETH BRUNK-CHAVEZ: I think, really quickly, something we might all be able to relate to is that in many ways, we benefited from having to shift all of our work to a digital platform during the pandemic. But in a lot of ways, it's sort of damaged the perception of what online and digital learning is, because we keep having to remind other faculty that the emergency remote teaching is not good online teaching. Those are two very different things in so many different ways.

And so I think the challenge really in the big picture is defining what are those wins and what are those places where we need to do a little bit more work or a little bit more PR basically, to get us back to understanding what good, engaging, anti-racist, equitable, all those sorts of things we've mentioned so quickly, online teaching is. And I think that's a really great challenge to have. We got to get our feet back under us and get people back in comfortable space of wanting to invest in learning more about that.

KRISTEN FOX: Bryan, how about at Fresno State?

BRYAN BERRETT: I would just quickly add that is so true on every level. This notion that since I've taught remotely for two years, I know how to teach a hybrid or asynchronous or an online course. And that's just not the case. And so I really feel like the biggest challenge, not only for Fresno State, but most institutions, is creating professional

development opportunities now that faculty want to buy into. That they understand the why.

So if you can explain the why, the value of the PD, the Professional Development training, in this context, I think that will help move us further as we transition and continue to transition hopefully to face-to-face instruction, with a new normal. There's got to be some context of meeting our students where they want to be.

KRISTEN FOX: Thank you, Bryan and Beth. We've covered a lot of ground here. And I think this notion of really being clear about what equitable digital learning looks like that is inclusive, anti-racist, et cetera, is a topic that we'll continue to cover in the rest of this session. But I want to thank the two of you for your time.

And for those who want to learn more detail about the great work that Beth, Bryan, and their teams are doing, I'd really encourage you to take a look at the report that their organizations contributed to and to continue to be a part of the conversation and learning. So thank you both.

BETH BRUNK-CHAVEZ: Thank you, Kristen.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: Thank you, Kristen, Beth, and Bryan. And thank all of you all for joining us for this session. We hope that you'll stay for the next session, session 2 of this block, which is titled Structure your Department for Equitable Outcomes.