



Chillout



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Digital education & millennium learners

The digital age is making education more accessible, flexible and affordable, heralding a new educational revolution in the process



COVER STORY
PG 2, 3 & 4



Ellucian Live 2016, held in Denver, Colorado, saw 8,500 registered participants from more than 2,400 higher education institutions representing over 40 countries.

Breaking the barriers of higher education

Technology-based online education is allowing people to learn at their own pace, thereby revolutionising education



LLEWELLYN FLORES

DOHA

IT'S a new revolution on the horizon. Several things considered essential parts of a student's life even five years ago are becoming obsolete. So one can hardly notice a student with ink marks on the fingers nowadays nor do we bump into those carrying loads of books as often. Things are changing at a fast and furious pace.

For over a hundred years, sitting in a library and browsing through a mountain of reference materials was inevitable in order to finish a paper. It's no longer so for today's students. They do not even need to sit in a class everyday for a lecture, nor schedule a time with a faculty member for feedback. A Masters degree can be ac-

quired from a reputed institution without the student stepping on its premises.

Technology has been both a driving force and framework to these changes. And with the progress of technology, learners have evolved and acquiring learning has changed. Educational institutions, therefore, need to follow suit.

Ellucian, a leading provider of software and services to higher education institutions, with almost 2,200 institutions worldwide using its ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) solutions – Banner, PowerCapus and Colleague – and over 1,400 subscribed to its 'Cloud' service, holds an annual conference (Ellucian Live) that brings together higher education professionals. At Ellucian Live 2016, held in Denver, Colorado, which saw 8,500 registered participants from more than 2,400

higher education institutions representing over 40 countries, innovators and educators deliberated on the role of technology in the dynamics of the education system – how it can address barriers in acquiring higher education, facilitate student success, and possibly revolutionise education.

Speaking at the conference, Ellucian President and CEO Jeff Ray said, "I do believe that we're entering a fourth Industrial revolution. It's very real and tangible. While there's cause for excitement and optimism, there is also a concern about how we can make sure we provide accessibility to all of these technologies and solutions that are being brought about by this revolution."

Student Success

At a panel discussion at Ellucian Live

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Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University Chancellor Dr Mansoor al Awar

2016, Barnard College Information Technology Vice-President Carol Katzman described her institution's view of student success thus: "The expectation is after Barnard, the students leave and become agile, resilient, responsible, creative citizens prepared to serve in their communities."

All educational institutions aim at the best results from their students but getting there is another story.

For students to succeed in higher education, they first have to be given entry and stay so they can pursue their goals.

"One of our goals is to make sure that (students) know what's available to them and how to take advantage of them," Katzman said.

Katzman and the other members of the panel discussion – Jay Fields, Chief Technology Officer at one of the biggest community colleges in San Francisco, City College of San Francisco, and Dr Mansoor al Awar,

Chancellor of the first and only online university in the UAE, Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University (HBMSU) – all agree on the importance of assessment before a student's journey to higher education, "to know where they should be placed in order to be successful," as Fields put it.

To ensure that students succeed in the programme, their progress needs to be tracked and feedback must be immediate. The nature of today's students has to be taken into account, and in case there is need to stop schooling because of personal or financial issues, "to be able to reintegrate them and make sure they succeed even when there is disruption in their education," Katzman said.

Technology has equipped educational institutions with tools that enable them to ensure student success. Qatar University (QU) is a perfect example.

At QU, students can choose courses and register for classes from anywhere they have Internet access – made possible through the ERP 'Banner' by Ellucian. They are equipped with the tools that extend their opportunity to learn and interact with professors and classmates beyond the classroom. A learning management system allows students to communicate

with faculty members, get their materials and track their grades from anywhere. Lectures are captured in video which students can later access anytime and play back and forward. A digital repository to which the university is subscribed, gives students access to a large database of academic

and research materials, beyond what the institution's library provides.

QU professor and Office of Faculty and Instructional Development Director Dr Arslan Ayari said, "The backbone of the university is technology. It is embedded in its teaching and learning dynamics."

This is all very good for learners within an educational institution but not all aspiring learners are able to avail themselves of such an education environment.

A New Breed Of Learners

"Today, it just no longer works for people to sit around and wait for September to go to class and then get out in December and then do it all again," said Ray. "They want to be able to walk into an institution anytime, night or day, based on their demands and begin the learning process. And they want that tight connection knowing that if I finish this curriculum, there is a job waiting for me that is exciting and perfect."

At educational institutions, learners now have

sophisticated demands. Katzman said, "Our students want two things: Printing and Wifi, everywhere, all the time, with all their devices. If they have that, they're 90 percent happy. The other part is, knowing their options in choosing courses and their standing."

Defining today's learner, Ayari said, "Universities are getting the millennium students – the digital students. When he was born, the mobile phone was there, the digital material was there, the Internet was there, he has used it from age 3 or 5 and he'll continue to do so until he goes to a university. He's savvy with social media and with digital materials. He has expectations."

Education Barriers

Ray points out two barriers in higher education: The rising cost of education and opportunity cost. Opportunity cost is the inability to go or go back to school because it means having to leave one's source of income. "We have to find ways of reaching those learners and give them the opportunity to develop the skills that they need," he said. "We can go one of two ways as a society – we can make things better and improve or we can see a continued degradation in the difference between the haves and have-nots."

Opportunity Cost

Opportunity cost is getting better addressed now. Through online courses, professionals can pursue education without forgoing work. There are contents available online that can be certified for college credit, and educational institutions are partnering with employers for training and certification of their employees. The Community College of Qatar is a pioneer in the country in working with employers in certifying their employees in various skill-sets such as information technology, health care etc.

Outside of educational institutions, technology has opened numerous ways of learning almost anything – from simple mathematics to computer programming to life skills. There are an innumerable number of technology-based educational products online, and are constantly increasing. Sites like MOOCs and Udacity and a number of higher education institutions including MIT, Harvard and Yale are offering free courses with certificates. Video-chat tutoring, virtual classrooms, forums and self-learning interactive services are just some of the ways by which teaching is administered and education can be acquired online. All these allow people to learn at their own pace and at their chosen time. An individual can become an expert in computer programming without necessarily getting a degree in Computer Science.

Education Cost

"Rising cost of education is a very real issue not just in the US. It's an emerging issue in the UK; it's an issue in Australia. We can go around the world and see there are more and more barriers to higher



QU professor and Office of Faculty and Instructional Development Director Dr Arslan Ayari



Ellucian CEO Jeff Ray