

Highlights from a recent Campus Technology Webcast on Educational Technology

DRIVE HIGHER EDUCATION HIGHER

Technology is revolutionizing education at the University of La Verne.

Universities are now recruiting and welcoming the next generation of students—arguably the most tech-savvy lot thus far. Classrooms, classroom technology and academic processes are evolving along with student expectations.

Universities and university leadership has to be ready to keep up, says Alan Shark, executive director and chief executive officer of the Public Technology Institute and associate professor of practice at Rutgers University School of Public Affairs and Administration, during a March 3rd Webcast titled “The Digital Revolution in Higher Education: The Critical Role of Leadership in Driving Change.”

“The classroom certainly has changed, but then again, so have the students,” says Shark. “Interactive devices in the classroom are now becoming more commonplace, and I think we’re going to see even more of that. It helps students have a richer experience when it comes to learning. It allows the faculty, in many cases, to gauge how the students are actually learning.”

And it’s not just what happens in the classroom, but how technology helps drive the business of higher education. Campuses themselves are getting smarter; using technology not only for education, but also for efficiency and effectiveness. “There are so many pieces to it, whether it be security, whether it be the lighting, whether it be the ambient lighting temperatures,” says Shark. “It’s become ingrained and technology is in every part

of what we do, and that has not escaped institutions of higher learning.”

University leadership is critical in setting the right tone and creating an atmosphere to foster this level of digital transformation. The head of the college or university plays a critical role in ensuring members from all departments, including all academic and administrative leaders, are

actively engaged in driving this new technological vision forward.

Shark sat down with Devorah Lieberman, president of the University of La Verne, a private, nonprofit and non-denominational, comprehensive university based near Los Angeles to get her take on higher education’s relationship with technology. With multiple campuses, Lieberman is no

CONNECTING KERN COUNTY

As the president of the University of La Verne, Devorah Lieberman measures the success of technology investments in two ways: quantitatively and qualitatively. The first might be gauging improvements in student learning or administrative efficiencies. The second is in how the technology is used on campus.

For example, the university’s Kern County, Calif., campus asked to implement Cisco TelePresence. “Rather than just saying, ‘OK, great, now I can see you, you can see me,’ the question was, ‘What will you do with that TelePresence so you can enhance the student experience, increase the administrative capabilities and potentially reduce costs?’” says Lieberman.

There were three primary results from the Kern County telepresence initiative:

- During lunch hours and evenings, the campus connects students with support service representatives from Career Services, Financial Aid, the library, the tutoring center and the Office of Veterans Students Success. Some of those services aren’t located on the Kern County campus, so a measure of success is students having access to more of these services.
- Kern County is seeking to connect with another University of La Verne campus in Ontario, Calif., to co-teach courses, so now students have access to professors at both locations.
- The campus is working to connect with several local Kern County community colleges to deliver lessons to students who would not otherwise access the university’s courses.

stranger to the impact of technology and the leadership required for institutional transformation.

Lieberman takes a two-pronged approach to applying technology to improve the educational experience. Her focus is not on the use of technology; but rather on asking how can the educational experience be enhanced and how can the institution best serve the students? If technology is a part of the answer, then the institution seeks to explore these options. In order to enhance the learning environment, she tries to lead by example, pushing her own comfort level with technology. This may help others in the learning environment get past their own anxiety about new technologies.

The second is that she provides a consistent message. “We are committed to student learning and student success. And how we do that takes many different paths, but technology, where appropriate is integrated throughout the campus so that we achieve greater student success and also, of course, campus-wide efficiencies. Cost can’t be the driver, but rather student success and administrative ease,” says Lieberman. That sense of consistency is evident in the University of La Verne’s mantra, “We are multiple campuses, one university, with one mission and one vision. Lieberman’s commitment to that idea is so strong, it grounded the University’s 2020 Strategic Vision. The overarching effort addressed how to best meet the institutional mission and student success into the future. “You don’t have the borders just around the campus,” she says. “There are no borders [with technology].”

Of course, the campus culture plays a major role when technologies come into play. Not everyone is immediately optimistic or enthusiastic about change.

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– Devorah Lieberman, president of the University of La Verne

“Transformation does not happen quickly,” says Lieberman. “It happens in various pockets. I think for some ... it’s cajoling. For others, it’s understanding their resistance to change and what role would they like to bring to the future efforts of the institution. And for others, it’s opening that bird cage and saying, ‘How would you like to achieve more than you ever imagined.’ It’s different for every person.”

There is never retribution for faculty or staff who would rather maintain the status quo. However, she does seek to recognize those who are part of the change efforts. This happens in academic programs and administrative offices. Faculty members are encouraged to demonstrate a level of integration into their work. “Integrating technology into the scholarship productivity, into the teaching and into the service in ways that are measurable, may be seen as legitimate parts of a promotion and tenure portfolio in process.”

Technology in and of itself is not the “end,” but if technology can further student learning/teaching and scholarship, it is not discouraged. There are areas in the University that are leveraging their work through the use of technology. For example, instead of leaving conversations about implementing Cisco TelePresence, WebEx and Jabber to the IT team, she traveled with a group of faculty, support service personnel and Center for Advancement of Faculty Excellence administrators to Cisco’s headquarters to see what the company could offer.

Despite this embrace of technology, Shark points out the business and information technology sides can sometimes still be at odds. Lieberman agrees. “There is often a gap.”

Lieberman addresses those potential gaps through her Executive Cabinet, which meets weekly and, when needed, discusses not only technology, but how best to use it. For example, the vice president for facilities and technology made the case for using predictive analytics, saying it would help the whole cabinet become better decision-makers.

“He says, ‘That funding may go toward me to buy the software and the hardware, but it is other areas that will benefit from the predictive analytics,’” says Lieberman. “I really believe that it is working together, problem-solving together that reduces the divide that may exist between the areas.” Although the current strategy sets its sights on 2020, President Lieberman knows a lot can change with technology between now and then. “It’s very important that everyone who’s putting together these long-term plans is not just thinking in 10-year stints, but thinking 20, 30 years out [and] being nimble and fluid so that we can adjust as the technology adjusts,” she says. “There are probably 100 new apps that were created while this Webcast was going on. Technology is evolving more quickly than any of us can even think about.” •

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