Imagine a Truly 21st Century Public University
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Imagine what a truly 21st Century public university will become.
It will be a place that models engagement. At some universities we've been practicing outreach for as long as 100 years, but what about true engagement?
A truly 21st Century public university is a place made up of faculty members and leaders who listen as much as we talk, who learn as much as we teach. It will be a place of open access that shares as much as it protects.
Our strategic goals center on expanded Access to learning, improved reciprocal Partnerships, and the new vision of Scholarship that flows from reaching these goals.
A truly 21st Century public university will be a place that understands the value of our inherent competitive advantage in the information marketplace—that being our decades of successful face-to-face education, problem solving and learning.
It will be a place that understands the need to compete head-on with major competitors. Competition with whom, you ask? Think of this, when will we see a yet-to-be education-information conglomerate, like Google/Phoenix? An possibility proposed more than ten years ago by our colleague Richard Katz at Educause. Who else takes on a competitor with combined resources like that effectively? A truly 21st Century public university does and wins. Why? Because we focus on the learner. The truly 21st Century public university listens to the needs of our learners and adapts to their expectations. Are we still the “experts?” Of course, but our expertise includes developing all pathways and partnerships to help our learners become more successful.
Imagine a university where instruction covers the continuum from individual interaction with professors to many, many students learning together and interacting with world-class experts on campus and off.
Where blended courses are the norm and most students culminate their formal instruction off campus working from within the business, or non-profit, or corporate, or community location that they will continue in after graduation.
Picture this: more than half the total student population is off campus advancing toward their degrees while working professionally full-time. Where what we know from decades of working with people in their personal and professional communities actually instructs our on campus learning opportunities, as well as adapting our off campus Outreach work.
Imagine a university where our continually developing expertise in online and blended education is a foundation to offer dramatically expanded access to learning through massive online open classes—open to all who can use the information to improve their lives, as well as open access to learning modules that can be assembled into truly individual learning opportunities. Access to learning and education will expand with both massive access as well as customized opportunities that address individual needs.
Imagine a university where research is truly discovery and provides access to data and information in broad and open forums that include both students and professionals in their discipline.
We have educated so many people in the past centuries, that citizen ability to understand and analyze raw information generated by discovery is strong. Open and transparent access to the knowledge base of the university fueled by democratized technologies means more citizen science, more individualized adaptation, less waiting for journals to validate.
Publishing in recognized scientific journals is still critical, but as much innovation is vetted by users in a vast community of experts on-campus and off who contribute to global solutions in a collaborative and sometimes real-time fashion.
Where citizen science is recognized as having value. Where open science and crowd-sourced problem solving become effective tools in our research world. Where a research agenda is built by listening to the ultimate users of our science and solutions.
An example that is beginning to be adapted by other public universities is the 100-year old network Land-Grant universities have built and nurtured, a network of learners in more than 3,000 communities around the country and a myriad of other partners and stakeholders.
Imagine a university where outreach focuses on engaging and enabling communities—both of place and of interest. Where the new paradigm is not one of distribution of information but one of providing access to information; true and unfettered access to the university-knowledgebase. This will be built on universities that truly listen to members of communities to understand their backgrounds, how the community was formed, and the context of their needs. Listening as much as we talk.
Where we create a spectrum of access that starts with raw data, then leads to outreach learning modules and continues to full credit courses. Where we act as curators providing context and rationale for the solutions available. Our spectrum of access may look like this.
Where a semantic Web-environment is built that provides unique and customized access to data and information in ways that shift to effectively meet the needs of individuals.
Where the university serves as a *convener*...as much as the unique expert.

Where the university serves as a convener of partners to solve problems...as much as the unique expert of the past.
Where the university is a navigator in sea of digital knowledge.
Imagine a university where libraries are centers of knowledge management and development. Where librarians are decentralized partners in all disciplines who provide the expertise to tag and link information at the ground level so that it is accessible in ways that have yet to be invented in the digital world.
Imagine a university that fosters life-long learning so that students are true learners who never assume they have finished their education. Where student/learners move to an off-campus professional environment assuming they will maintain a learning connection to their home campus for new ideas and solutions to the challenges they face in their professional lives, and beyond.
A truly 21st Century public university—continuing to fulfill its long standing mandate to provide access to the knowledge base of the university in ways that other universities are only now learning—will be all these things and more.
It will as different from its competitors and pretenders as it was at its inception. It will be the foundation for every new innovation that can be dreamed by the best and brightest both on campus and off.
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