Building a Mystery: The eLearning Ecosystem in 2022

by Amy Leonard

As educators reflect on the lessons learned during the past two years, there is no doubt that eLearning has forever changed the landscape of education. The question now is what does the modern eLearning Ecosystem look like for higher education?

Initially, the pandemic had educators scrambling to "Zoomify" their classrooms and survive with basic learning management knowledge, but that has opened the door to robust calls from educators, administrators, and—most importantly—students to build durable and dynamic online learning spaces. Dynamic instruction is fueled mostly by trends in mobile-first learning and virtual reality/mixed reality.
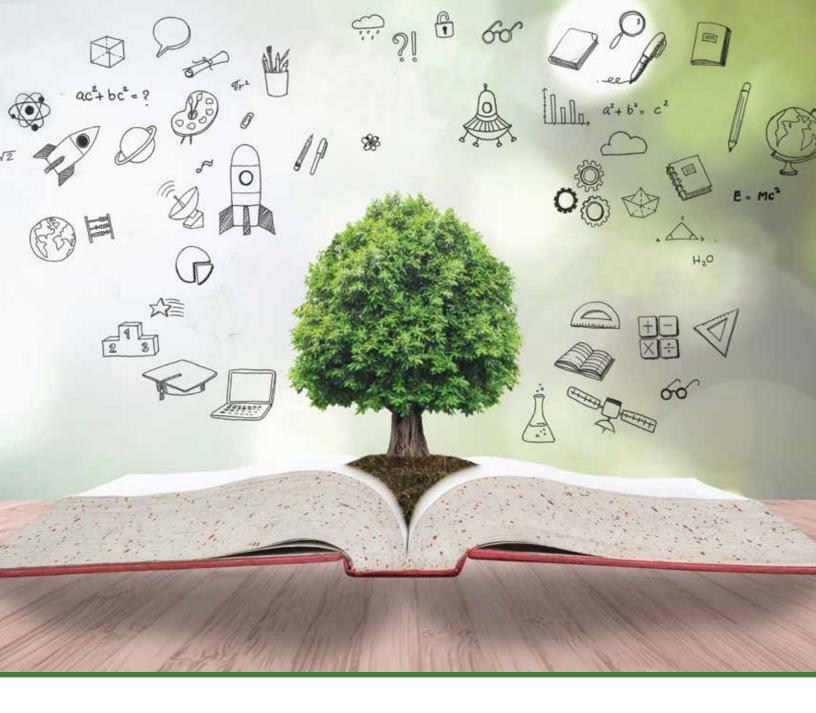
Students want their educational experiences to mirror their daily lives, including on-demand instruction, social platform interaction, and varied mediums of assignment—e.g., Adobe Express style papers, instead of traditional research papers, with podcast and documentary options, Kahoot! quizzes and a general desire to have assignments with relevancy beyond the classroom (Portela 2022). The pandemic pushed higher education to realize there is life beyond the traditional paper or quiz assignments and that to remain relevant, instructors need to create living assignments rather than ones that die at the classroom door.

Furthermore, the pandemic altered the way we traditionally think of socializing. In-person study groups have given rise to class Discord channels and Slack classrooms, transforming how students and instructors interact.

This evolution has created a need to strategize social interactions, as Cavanagh (2021) asserted: "We want to be student-centered instructors, but not at the expense of our own well-being. Strategizing how to be a high-touch instructor can go a long way towards maximizing both the student and the instructor experience of the course." This means that institutions may have to rethink policies on communication and compensation, as well as providing training on new platforms and best practices.

The higher education landscape must now embrace learning management systems. At the community college level, this is challenging because "Nearly half (48%) of respondents to the 2022 ITC Annual National Distance Learning Survey indicated they had no dedicated staff (16%) or only 1–2 dedicated staff (32%) to deal with the challenges of moving all instruction online" (Lokken 2022). To reach this brave new world of high-touch teaching, online education will need to rethink its approach to staffing so that eLearning ecosystems can reflect the dynamism of instructors and the desires of students.

Ultimately, the modern eLearning ecosystem is an evolving space that needs to be nimble enough to meet the changing social and intellectual needs of students, while providing a platform that gives instructors the dynamic capacities to incorporate a variety of learning tools to best fit their content.

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