

Transcript - ASU Remote 2022: The future of higher education is blended

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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.

So the final session in this block is the future of higher education is blended. According to the 2022 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report, instructional modalities will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the changing higher education landscape.

So we're going to have you join researchers and authors from the planning for a blended future-- a research-driven guide for educators, and authors of the Blended Institution of Higher Education-- a model for a sustainable institution, to learn how blended learning supports students and how institutions can future proof themselves to build the infrastructure for blended degree programs.

So to get started, I'm going to introduce to you the speakers for today. Tanya Judson is a senior scientist and Director of Digital Learning Research and Development, also advisor to the provost for Innovation Projects at the University Of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She is the PI and Director of the National Research Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements. And has been recognized for her work as she guides strategic digital learning efforts across the globe.

Nicole Weber is the assistant vice president for learning at the Online Learning Consortium. In this role, she works closely with OLC staff and global partners to advance professional development opportunities, continuous quality improvement efforts, and research in the support of quality digital, blended, and online learning. Before joining OLC, she served as the Director of Learning Technology at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater where she led online and blended faculty development efforts, technology training for the digital learning ecosystem, and emerging learning technology exploration and evaluation-- collaborating across the institution to support

student learning and success. So I am now going to hand the floor over to Dr. Judson and Dr. Weber.

NICOLE WEBER: All right. Thank you, Norma, for such a wonderful introduction. And thank you to Every Learner Everywhere for the support of the work that we'll be talking about today. So welcome, everybody, to building your institution's blended future. We're so happy that you could join us today.

Norma did such a great job of introducing us, Tanya. I don't have anything to add, do you?

TANYA JUDSON : No, I don't. Thanks, Norma.

NICOLE WEBER: All right. Fantastic. So Tanya and I are really excited to share the wonderful resources that we've worked on together, as well as share our thoughts about Blended Institutions today.

However, what we're most excited about is to hear from you about how things are going on your campuses. So we want this session to be informal. So we're going to be more conversational. And we really want you to feel free to share your stories in the chat. And make sure to get those questions in the Q&A tab throughout the session today.

So with this in mind, we're really going to focus our short session today in three major places. So first, Tanya is going to kick things off by telling us a little bit about what inspired us to write the Blended Institution of Higher Education, as well as some of the major takeaways.

Then we're going to turn our attention to what you're doing at your institutions to advance a blended approach on your campus, as well as challenges you might be facing. So get those typing fingers ready.

And then after that, Tanya and I are going to set a little bit about some of the driving questions we pulled from the resource. And we'll also end with your questions. So make sure to keep them coming in the Q&A. So without further ado, I'll turn things over to Tanya to tell us a little bit about the resource. Over to you, Tanya.

TANYA JUDSON : Thanks, Nicole. So when Nicole and I were sort of diving into this, we were looking for a resource that could really help academic leaders and thinking about, Where do we go from here? as we were maybe several months or the first year into the pandemic.

And so one of the things that we knew and that we were looking to do is we knew the future was going to be blended, right? Like we were going to have students that were going to be on site, students off campus, or at a distance that was not going to change.

We didn't really feel there was this return to normal. So we knew that universities moving forward in colleges needed to be thinking about the new space location dynamics, the new temporal dynamics because some things on campuses are going to be happening over time. Some things are going to happen real-time.

We have all sorts of new technology and technological infrastructure now that's built. So we still have lean technologies that we're using like email-- and losing, email and chat. And now we have so many richer technologies that we're using like the one we're in today. So more synchronous live real-time video chat.

And this isn't just about in the classroom. This is about our courses, our programs, our academic side, our student support side, and our student life side as well. And so when we start thinking about all of these different dynamics, it's sort of like, where do we go from here?

And so our universities really need to have this moment that sort of restorative, but also transformative. So although this has been a really horrific time that we've had to go through, there's really great opportunity for us to come together and build from here. Now what a lot of us know is we know how great blended learning in the classroom works. So we've got decades of research-- a lot of us have been doing blended or hybrid learning for decades. And so thinking more about taking what works really well at the course level, a lot of us have already spent years, especially at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee building blended or hybrid programs.

So some things are on site, some things are blend, some things are fully online. And taking that to the institutional level, so we could more or less think and implement a vision that focuses on putting the students in the center, building interactions with the students across modalities. So time, space, leanness and richness of technology, and all of these sorts of things. And so that is the key piece behind our idea of the Blended Institution of Higher Education.

And for all of us, as we're watching this data across the nation, where we're seeing drops in enrollments at two year colleges, four-year colleges, majority of the colleges, we have to really look to implement something pretty immediately in order to ensure

sustainability of post-secondary education at a level of quality that we expect from our higher education institutions. And I could go on, but I'm going to stop right there for now.

NICOLE WEBER: That's true. There's always so much to say, right?

TANYA JUDSON : Yes.

NICOLE WEBER: All right. So now is the point where we want you to get your typing fingers out and to tell us a little bit in the chat about what you're doing to advance a blended approach at your institution.

TANYA JUDSON : And I know it's really great to see some familiar faces or see some familiar names in the chat. So thanks everyone for joining. I know a lot of you at your campuses, colleges, and universities across the globe. And it's so great to see so many folks from different countries joining us here today.

But just sharing a little bit about what you're doing right now, whether it's developing a vision, rethinking your strategy, developing action items, convening groups, whatever it is, what are some things that you're doing right now to help develop a strategy for what you're going to be doing, let's say moving forward in the fall semester? Oh, this is really great to see some things coming in.

NICOLE WEBER: Yeah, it looks like we're seeing some folks talk about how they're strengthening the use of the LMS to support online and in-person approaches, which is really a great support mechanism. We also have a hello from Jamaica, which is, by the way, one of my favorite places.

TANYA JUDSON : Yeah, it's freezing right now in Wisconsin. And I know we have some Wisconsin folks on here. So we're very jealous of those of you joining us from warmer weather places. Yeah.

A lot of times we're thinking about not just what the technological infrastructure is needed for the university or institutions of the future, but we also need to think of the human infrastructure, which in our previous-- the first session today of this Every Learner Everywhere sponsored program talked about. So the importance of the human infrastructure, who's supporting the technology, the use of technology, is it pedagogically effective? And those sorts of things.

And so we really need to make sure that when we are thinking about acquiring technology, learning management systems to facilitate effective digital learning, that we're also thinking about what's the faculty support mechanism for that? What's the

student support mechanism for that? What's going to be on-site?

What support is going to be online? Using which and what version of these modalities would be best?

And then, as Jessica had just alluded to, obviously, not just putting students at the center is important, but also making sure that we're reducing or removing any barriers to equity that are going to make it extra difficult for students who are racially minoritized, first generation, poverty affected, students with disabilities, and so forth moving forward. And this new idea of, what is the university?

We know in some data with the UW System study that we recently did, that only three out of 10 students wanted to return to fully on-site classes. So the vision of the future, the Blended Institution of Higher Education, is about meeting students' needs and providing them flexibility through these models, not just at the course level, but at the program level and at the institution level are super important.

When we disaggregated that data, as Jessica had mentioned was so important, we found out that only 2 out of 10 students of a racially minoritized students in UW System wanted to return to fully on-site classes.

And that was one of the big things in developing this model that Nicole and I spent a significant amount of time of looking at the current data and thinking about, what should be the model of institutions of the future and coming up with this? And I'm glad some of you have gotten chatty. This is awesome.

NICOLE WEBER: And I think what we can do now is shift a little bit to we've seen a little bit in the chat about how you're putting a blended approach into play at your institutions, but maybe now talk a little bit-- get those typing fingers back out and talk a little bit about what challenges you're seeing at your institution to advancing a blended approach.

And while you do that, I'll just expand on something Tanya said a little bit earlier about, I think, a challenge that we're really hearing from institutions across the United States in particular is around this explosion of modalities coming into institutions and making sure that we're really telling students what that means for them, especially in our registration systems and things like that for sure.

TANYA JUDSON : Yeah. And I just want to jump into as well and we can share that with you. I see a lot of you, of course, are faculty that you're working on course level

transformations. One of the guides mentioned in the introduction that Nicole and I developed early on in the pandemic is called Blended is the Future Guide for Educators.

This guide is foundationally built off of a review that we did of the literature for the past 20 years. We're so lucky to have Patsy Maskell joining us here in the chat. She's one of the pioneers in the blended and hybrid learning research.

And so what we did is we looked at the research for the past couple decades and used that research to help inform what we should be or could be doing in our courses moving beyond the high flux models, which have been problematic for so many folks, and doing a more pedagogically, constructivist or active learning-focused courses that are carefully integrated across modalities, where we're scaffolding learning and using more student-centered approaches.

And so we'll share that link with you as well. So for those of you who-- oh, Nicole already did. So for those of you who are interested in that would be great. And thanks, Patsy, so much for sharing what you guys are all doing at University of Central Florida. We appreciate your contribution there. And I just wanted to point out-- oh go ahead, Nicole.

NICOLE WEBER: Yeah. We're just seeing a little bit in chat around the importance of something you were talking about a lot earlier is just the importance of instructional development and making sure that we're supporting our instructors, really creating those quality learning experiences.

TANYA JUDSON : Yeah, sometimes when we think about challenges, I always think quality starts at the beginning. And a real key course or key component to quality is faculty buy-in. We need to be incentivizing faculty time.

As Jessica had mentioned, faculty and teachers are burnt out. There's not a lot of time and so forth. And we need to really value their time and provide them meaningful opportunities on how to integrate pedagogies that are new to them, how to support learners in equitable ways, especially in new course modalities, whether it be blended, online, or so forth. And so that's one piece of it.

When I was thinking of challenges, too, I often think that institutions aren't thinking of new ways to think about success. So it's always like, well, it's the same national standards. It's like grades, graduation, course completion.

But, as Michael Crow in this morning keynote talked about sustainability and the importance of that-- and actually, we're working on a new project with shaping EDU

called the Student Global Impact Hub, which focuses on sustainability as a decision factor for students in locating a college.

So when we're thinking about student success factors, we need to move beyond the basic quantitative measures that we report to IPEDS or NCS. And we need to start thinking about what truly matters to students. We need to ask them what matters to you? What is success for you?

And we have to start building some of that into our new thinking about when we're thinking about the vision of the institution of tomorrow, but also that for today. Not all students are just looking for graduation, job, money.

They're looking for other sorts of things like fighting climate change, planet sustainability, social justice. These sorts of issues as well. And so when I think of challenges, I think oftentimes, we're not collecting data about students beyond the typical institutional research data we've always collected.

NICOLE WEBER: Yeah. That's just such a great point, Tanya. And I know we have a short session today. So we're going to head over to some considerations for a blended future and jump things off with this first question around, how might institutions get started in building their blended institutional approach? What do you think, Tanya?

TANYA JUDSON : I probably just gave this away because I was talking so much about data and talking to your students. But I think one of the things that we tend to do in times of change, not that I've experienced a global pandemic before, but we definitely were planning for one with bird flu in 2009.

But one of the things we always have in times of change is, as we tend to put together an executive committee at the university level, a group of us come together and we start doing some strategic planning and brainstorming.

Maybe we'll bring in a couple other groups at some point. But I think what we really need to do to get started is we need to do exactly what I was just talking about. We need to start talking to our students.

So we need to start collecting data from our students. We need to ask them those sorts of questions about mode preference. We need to better understand what's going on in a student's life in the middle of a global pandemic, because students are dropping out-- what is it? 5% to 10% lower enrollments than we've seen in the past, depending on whether you're talking about a two- or a four-year.

The word is we're going to continue to see decrease in enrollments. This is problematic not just for the bottom line of universities, this is problematic for our society. And so we really need to take steps to better understand who our students of today, not just the traditional age students, but all of our students, and how we can design organizations and institutions to better meet their needs.

NICOLE WEBER: Yeah. I think that's so important, Tanya, because I think one of the things that can happen at an institution is we'll start those committees or those task force or those groups, and we'll say, oh, yeah, let's bring in a student representative. And, oh, it's just easy to bring in somebody from the governance group. That's not representative of the entire student population or have really diverse perspectives there. So I think that's-- yeah, the diversity of perspectives is truly important there.

TANYA JUDSON : And I see Kristen from the earlier panel had asked a little bit about, how do we differentiate hybrid and blended? At my institution, we were calling it hybrid learning up until 2008, and then we started calling it blended learning because of a foundational initiative and a grant project in which we were involved in.

But hybrid and blended are pretty much the same. A percentage of the learning activities are taking place online or remotely rather than face-to-face. I think some of us are very familiar with the Allens and Siemens work and their definitions. Our campus is a little bit different because, unless it's 100% online, we don't call it a fully online class. I know some universities, it's 80% or greater will then call it online.

And so we do tackle definitions a bit in our planning for the blended future guide. So all of you can definitely revert to that as well. Years ago also, you asked me to lead a session on defining things.

And it was like what is blended hybrid at the time flipped was becoming really popular. Hyflex isn't new. It actually has been around for almost 20 years. And so it was great to have this session. And what we really found out is that they're all pretty much the same thing.

Each campus might have some unique characteristics about it, but in a lot of ways, they can still be the same. One of the things that Nicole and I and our co-authors proposed in our other resource that's available is I had looked at some previous research by some of the colleagues and some other theories.

And we were thinking more of defining these sorts of models based on the modalities. So how lean or rich is the technology? How instructionist or constructivist is the

pedagogy? Is it onsite or online? And so if we move the levers back and forth between all of these four dialectics, as I call them, we'll have a better understanding of what it is. But it's not one thing and then it's all just the same.

NICOLE WEBER: Yeah, that's very true. All right. So what do you think about creating a culture that focuses more on diversity, equity, and inclusion? How do we do that, Tanya? What do we talk about in the resource?

TANYA JUDSON : Yeah. And it's interesting too because you have a little digital divide here or a little question about the digital divide. It sort of overlaps here. So when we talk about creating a culture, the thing is I think a lot of times as the previous panel has already mentioned, like equity is something that universities are doing.

They're sort of a checklist like hire a VP of equity, start committee of equity or DEI. Check, check. We care about equity. And then it's sort of like let's make sure there's x number. And we've been doing this for years, x number of racially minoritized students or x number of racially minoritized faculty and staff or these sorts of Inventories we've been doing to check off the boxes.

But what we really need to do at our institutions is we really need to create a culture that is exposed through behaviors and attitudes and values that truly understands why we need diversity, equity, and inclusion, that we value these differences that each individual brings to the campus.

And so I think that's something in changing our institutional cultures, which is Jessica had mentioned, are built on systems of racism. And so we need to change that culture and we need to truly start embracing differences.

Now we've seen this in academics already, right? The move from, let's say, post positivism or positivism to more interpretive or postmodern paradigms and research approaches. We need to see that same shift happening on our college campuses. And we need to move beyond centers of excellence for Black students. And we need to move beyond making sure we have x number of faculty of color.

What we need to start doing is in every decision we make, we're ensuring that we are not creating barriers for students or faculty, that we learn how to embrace people who are different and value what they bring. Not looking for people to take on systematic values already that are illustrative of racism and then accept them once they are bought into these new characteristics.

NICOLE WEBER: Yeah, I definitely agree. And I think the first step to that culture shift is really a mindset shift. I think if we can constantly, no matter what role we have across the institution, if we can really focus on constantly questioning ourselves and saying things like, how can we involve students lived experiences? How is culture and diversity portrayed and positioned in our curriculum? And how are we valuing students cultures and lived experiences? And how are we creating those safe spaces that empower that voice and choice I think is just such a powerful first step there.

And another resource that we worked on about a year ago that talks a little bit more about putting students at the center and caring for students is the caring for students playbook, where we talk a little bit about how to do that and apply that to teaching and instructional development. And I'll paste that in the chat here too.

TANYA JUDSON : Yeah. And for those of you who didn't make the previous session, please feel free to check the chat or the additional information and looking at the equity audits that are available as well.

And we at data, we also did another study that's referenced in this report where we actually looked and performed a systematic review to identify factors or things we could be doing right now, like Nicole had mentioned, like reviewing the curriculum, implementing course designs that we know work for racially minoritized students, like blended learning.

We have data that a structured hybrid model is most effective for racially minoritized students in STEM courses. These are things that we could be doing right away. And this research review that we did in partnership with WCET is available on our website at dataresearch.org.

NICOLE WEBER: All right. Any last thoughts, Tanya, maybe on how institutions can build capacity to sustain their future? And this kind of connects, I think a little bit maybe to what Jessica was saying in the last session around really thinking about a systems approach. What do you think? I know the systems approach is near and dear to your heart.

TANYA JUDSON : Yeah, I love the systems approach. And we do have in the end of our guide, we have several steps that you can actually take at your institution. So take to your next strategic planning and thinking about all of those external factors that are influencing your institution and your students right now and start there and identifying

different sorts of strategic goals and activities that you should be having on your campuses to ensure that you're putting students at the center. You're addressing-- not only addressing equity, but you're reducing barriers for students, but you're also changing and transforming the systematic racist structures that exist within your campuses. And then you're also thinking about the array of digital modalities that are available to students for their academic and social lives, and how those can be best integrated to meet their needs.

NICOLE WEBER: All right. Hollebeke, did we see any other questions there?

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: I have a few questions for you all if you're game. And let me see if I understand this.

So I'm going to try to interpret this and spell it out as best I can. The debate around the purpose of higher education seems to be framed as an inside/outside debate in which those inside higher Ed take the stand that higher Ed is a holistic learning experience designed to produce good citizens, while those outside higher Ed take the stand that its purpose is to produce people with employable skills.

And I think you all both alluded to this earlier-- on one of your earlier slides, but I think they're wanting an elaboration on that. So do you agree with that framing? And how does the vision of a blended university speak to that debate?

TANYA JUDSON : Yeah, I can jump in. Oh, go ahead.

NICOLE WEBER: I think I'm not a big fan of that framing, I guess. I don't think of it as an either/or proposition. I think of it more as a both/and proposition. And I think as we really work to design our learning experiences, we need to support students in really gaining those integral critical thinking and communication skills around especially understanding audience and the skills that are the building blocks for their career too. And I think this is important to put the whole student at the center. And I'll put a resource in the chat that I always think about. It's called robot ready human plus skills for the future of work. I'll find that really quick and pop that in the chat. But I love that resource. It's a really good one.

But I really think the both/and proposition really aligns with the blended university, especially in the concept of-- the focus on putting the student at the center and really meeting them where they are.

TANYA JUDSON : Coming from the University of Wisconsin system, we have something called the Wisconsin idea that we've had for over 100 years that really encompasses

that. And a key point of that is, yes, we are making sure that our students have the competencies-- the knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to seek employment to move beyond their circumstance.

But we also want to ensure that graduates of UW system are also contributing to our government, to our regions, to our industries, and so forth. And so I think that sometimes, as Nicole said, it's an either/or, and that's not it at all. I think we want to make sure both. And we do talk about this in our guide as well, and refer to some of the new workforce development initiatives and research.

NORMA HOLLEBEKE: So that brings us to the end of this session. Thank you, Dr. Judson. Thank you, Dr. Weber. Thank you to everyone who joined us for this session today. You can access all the resources mentioned for all three of these sessions at the Every Learner Everywhere booth or at our website.

And thank you very much for joining us today. The sessions may be over, but you can still mix and mingle with other attendees in the networking lounges. We encourage you to participate in the themed working networking chats that align with today's topics or head over to the exhibit hall to download valuable resources from our sponsors. So have a wonderful day and looking forward to tomorrow.