Chapter 6
University 2.0:
Human, Social, and Societal Issues

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is changing in important and profound ways. New technologies are enabling universities to reach new students and create innovative learning environments. Technology is also allowing students to interact, collaborate, and create customized learning experiences in ways that were previously impossible. University 2.0 offers amazing potential to fundamentally change the way higher education functions in the future. With this change will come the opportunity to improve educational quality, reach new learners, and create new organizational structures, but there will also be many potential problems. Many of the problems relate to the key issue of maintaining the vital human and social dimension of higher education in a rapidly changing, technology rich environment. This chapter describes many of the potential problems that will accompany university 2.0 and provides a series of recommended actions that university administrators can take to respond to the problems.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the modern university can arguably be traced back to any one of a number of important dates and events. While there is no single widely accepted date for the birth of the modern university, perhaps the most important event occurred in the mid-12th century when the modern concept of academic freedom was formalized at the University of

Bologna (Watson, 2005). In the nearly 1,000 years since then, change has come slowly to higher education. Certainly, many innovations, both technical and social, have changed the way universities function over the centuries. Technology in some form has affected the university experience of most faculty and students for many years (Burbules & Callister, 2000). However, despite occasional change, the modern university has remained fundamentally the same since its inception. As a general rule, the university has always been seen as a "place" occupied

by a well defined and relatively unchanging group of faculty who interacted with students in a more or less standard manner. A professor or a student from the University of Bologna in the mid-12th century would likely have felt very comfortable and familiar at most universities well into the 20th century. That, however, is no longer the case.

Recent advances in technology have led to radical changes in the way colleges and universities operate. Technology now allows students to take classes without ever setting foot on campus or ever meeting their instructors in person. Once major factors in a student's decision about which college to attend or degree to pursue, geographic and time constraints have now been eliminated, or at least reduced, for most students. Perhaps as important as the reduction of geographic and time concerns, online learning has made possible an amazing number of pedagogical changes (Pursula, Warsta, & Laaksonen, 2005). University students in online courses can receive information, interact with the material, communicate with the instructor, cooperate with each other, and demonstrate mastery of course content in ways that are impossible, or at least not often attempted, in traditional courses. The use of blogs, wikis, and other types of communication, social networking, and collaboration software has changed the way students work, has created new teaching challenges and opportunities, and will be a major factor driving innovation in higher education in the future (Rantanen, 2007). These tools have the potential to fundamentally alter the university experience and create an entirely new conceptual model of higher education. This new conceptual model of higher education, freed from the limits of geography and time, and based on technologically advanced, student driven innovations in communication and collaboration, is commonly referred to in the literature (e.g., Barnes & Tynam, 2007) as "University 2.0".

Most people would agree that technology has already begun to bring about significant changes to higher education and that the ever expanding power of technology will likely mean that colleges and universities will continue to change at an increasingly rapid rate in the future. This change will have both positive and negative effects on higher education. The potential benefits of technology to colleges and universities have been well documented, but the potential negative effects are less well understood. These negative effects could include loss of institutional and cultural identity, reduced educational quality (Smith & Mitry, 2008), worsening of class and regional divisions, an overemphasis on curricular areas that most lend themselves to online or technical modes of delivery, commoditization of higher education (Rowley & Sherman, 2004), alienation of older, less technologically adept students, and problems related to faculty workload (Oh, 2003). As Volti (2006) writes, "technology does not yield it benefits without extracting a cost" (p. 18). University administrators and political leaders will have to carefully consider not only the potential benefits of University 2.0 but also the potential costs, both fiscal and human, in order to ensure that higher education reaches its greatest potential in the future.

In this chapter, we will discuss five ideas that can help to guide university administrators and policy makers in making appropriate decisions about the future of higher education. First, we will discuss the theory of Technological Determinism (Ellul, 1967). We will provide a discussion of Ellul's framework of determinism including specific examples of how the theory is relevant to University 2.0. Second, we will discuss the theory of Social Construction of Technology. Often considered the polar opposite of determinism, social construction views all technologies as being contextualized within a social system and, as a result, largely shaped by social issues. Many social issues are driving developments in University 2.0 including economic conditions, the rise of global economies, the evolution of knowledge workers, and the breakdown of traditional family and community structures. By discussing University 2.0 using the analytical lenses of both determinism

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