Are you participating in the 2014 EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) annual meeting (http://www.educause.edu/events/educause-learning-initiative-annual-meeting) this week in New Orleans.

Face-to-face or or virtual?

Why did you decide to make the trip (or logon)? If you are not participating in ELI, why not?

If you are part of ELI 2014 what are your conference objectives? What do you hope to learn? To bring back to your campus or company?

I'm going to ELI 2014 with one goal in mind, one question that I'm hoping to untangle:

How can every class feel like a seminar?

Come to think of it, this will be the single goal that I'll bring to every single conference and professional development event that I attend in 2014. (I'm not good at multitasking).

This goal, this question, comes loaded with a few assumptions. Let's unpack (and invite you to challenge) all 3:

Assumption 1 – The Seminar is the Best Method for Learning:

We can replace “seminar” with “lab,” or “tutorial,” or any form of teaching that involves students spending some of their time actively doing something.

I like to think about seminars because I'm reminded of grad school. Almost all of my courses in my first 2 years of grad school (sociology / population studies) took place in one first floor seminar room (Maxcy Hall). Those seminars provided the foundation for how I think about teaching and learning.

In that seminar room I learned to present complex ideas, synthesize large amounts of information, and listen closely to people who know more than I do. Seminars were a time to both absorb and produce. To have my thinking critiqued and my ideas evaluated.

The problem with the seminar model is that it does not scale very well.
Get much past 20 people sitting around a table and opportunities for active participation for everyone declines and then disappears.

What if every college course could take place around a seminar table? 20 learners in a room, one of which is an experienced and expert educator. I’d say under those conditions that we could get rid of all technology. Sure, we can think of areas where learning technology improves the seminar (and I’ve seen that happen), but I’d be willing to get rid of it all.

The thing is that the world we live in will not support the 20 person sitting around a seminar table model of higher education. Almost every traditional residential university will, by necessity, offer some larger classes. Even at small liberal arts institutions there remains a certain number of introductory and gateway courses where the student demand exceeds the ability to offer each course as a small seminar.

If you think that the economics of higher ed (or your particular institution) can support turning every class into a seminar led by an experienced faculty member (ideally a scholar–educator creating knowledge in her field), please speak up.

Up until the point where every higher ed class is a seminar class I think we have some running room to make every class feel more like a seminar.

We can combine new thinking about course design and new teaching techniques to enable great student activity in larger classes. We can change how our classrooms are laid out. We can move some material to online formats, enabling students to come to class having already worked through the material and ready to build, create, and collaborate.

**Assumption 2 – The Higher Ed Bar Is Quickly Being Raised:**

The most wonderful outcome of the whole MOOC and open online education movement is that it will force everyone in higher ed to raise their game. If anyone can watch the world’s best teachers anytime and from anywhere on their iPhone for free than we can’t keep charging people tons of money to do something similar on our campuses.

I have little doubt that in a few years a combination of evolved MOOCs and refined personalized learning platforms will offer learning opportunities at scale that will be better (and way cheaper) than a huge percentages of existing tuition funded courses serving enrolled students. The challenge, the imperative, will be to improve the courses that students pay to attend at a faster rate than the free courses are improving. *Student costs needs to be commensurate with learning value.*

Prior to the coming of open online education and personalized online learning platforms the need to have every single tuition supported course be really great was tempered by a number of factors.

First, there was no competition. Nothing could substitute for the introductory courses that were needed to fulfill the requirements for a particular major. If a student wanted to major in a particular field the cost of admittance was getting through a series of perquisites. Sometimes these required courses were terrific. Sometime not. Nobody questioned the system much because there seemed to be few alternatives.

The second reason the system of large introductory courses survived was basic expediency. Large courses subsidize small courses. Large courses are efficient. Large courses are productive. Large course serve well to lay a foundation of knowledge and skills. These are compelling reasons to run large courses, and for most institutions the economics of higher ed will dictate that large courses are here to stay.

The thing is, at some point students (and the people who pay the bills) will push back. They will start to ask why they are paying so much money if they can get an equally good learning experience (from a professor maybe at a fancy institution) on their iPhone?

*We are not at that point yet.*

The best MOOCs are not as good as the average intro course.

But MOOCs will get better quickly. Open online education will be married with adaptive learning platforms. New low cost models of
teaching at Internet scale will emerge. *Competition is heating up.*

Again, this is a great thing. Investing in learning will be an economic imperative at every level of postsecondary education.

It will become increasingly clear that what is valuable is that which cannot be scaled.

What is valuable, and what people will pay for, is the very thing that happens everyday across every one of our campuses.

What is valuable is the personal interaction between faculty and students.

This happens now, but it is too uneven. Too concentrated on those students that have made it past the introductory courses. Reserved too much for upper level students and grad students.

**Assumption 3 – This Effort Will Require New Methods:**

I want to be clear. Some large lecture classes are amazing. We've all had inspiring lecturers. This is not an argument for a one-size fits-all approach.

But we should be asking a couple of questions. Are we sure that the best lectures equate to effective long-term learning? And is there variation in the quality of courses on campus?

If we accept the economic reasons why every course will need to get better in the future (*and we should debate this assertion*), then we also need at accept that this effort will require new resources.

*Every school in a competitive postsecondary market will need to invest in teaching and learning.*

We should talk about how competitive the higher ed market really is. To what degree competition is stifled by the existing regulatory and accreditation rules and structures. There may be a market for enrollment (many schools to choose from), but then is not much of a market for courses or credit once a student is enrolled. This is changing, but change will be very slow.

What will change quickly will be student expectations. (*And the expectations of the people – including parents – that help pay the tuition bills.*)

At some point our students will vote with their feet. They will expect something better in their courses they are paying for because they have seen something really good online for something that costs nothing (or costs much less).

How this change in student expectations will play out nobody quite knows. But it is coming.

So how do we go about creating conditions, resources, infrastructure, and support for our faculty to evolve their larger enrollment courses?

What is involved in a very hands-on, boots on the ground effort to bring an active learning orientation to classes that have traditionally been driven by imperatives to transmit a certain body of information, and then asses the degree to which that information has been absorbed?

What are the methods, techniques, tools, and designs involved in moving from a model where the instructor is the center of the teaching universe to where learning is a collaborative and creative act involving all parties?

What does a class look like that provides true value in a world where the cost of watching a great lecture has dropped to zero? *This week at ELI I’ll be looking to see how others have approached the challenges of having every course fell like a seminar.*

*What are you trying to learn this week at ELI?*
Chair, Department of Music
Gordon College
Provost
The American University of Paris
Tenure Track Position in Accounting
Dutchess Community College
SHINE Employment and Internship Specialist
Seattle Central Community College
Director of Adult, Transfer and Military Admissions 19443
The University of Toledo

Founded in 1952, Adler School of Professional Psychology is the oldest independent school of psychology in North America...

Since its founding in 1874, Macalester has provided students the inspiration,
insight and experience to become successful and ethical leaders…

(Macalester College)

(MOST)

(Viewed (#))  (Commented (#))

(PAST:  Day (#)  Week (#))

Month (#)  Year (#)

U. of Colorado plans to change culture of philosophy department found to be sexist
(philosophy.department.found.be.sexist)

Harvard B-School Dean Apologizes to Women
(harvard-b-school.dean.apologizes.women)

(Rape Question on Class Assignment Angers Many)

(rape.question.class.assignment.angers.many)

Obama becomes latest politician to criticize a liberal arts discipline
(obama.becomes.latest.politician.criticize.liberal.arts.discipline)

New presidents provosts: Chicago CCCC
(Chicago.CCCC)

Roberts Wesleyan Sacramento State SCC UL
(Va Tech)

(new.presidents.provosts.chicago.CCCC
(Chicago.CCCC)

roberts.wesleyan.sacramento.state.scc.ul)

http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/technology-and-learning/my-goal-eli

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