

DisruptED 2013 – Conference Summary

Using Clay Christianson's theory of 'disruptive' change as the jumping off point, the goals DisruptEd 2013 half-day conference were fourfold:

- to build awareness of the extent to which disruptive innovations are already rippling through institutions of higher education;
- to engage the wider UNB community in a dialogue about whether these and other change factors could completely affect the way universities in general, and UNB in particular, work;
- to highlight several innovative/disruptive projects both inside and outside UNB;
- to gather feedback from our faculty and staff about the greatest challenges they see on our horizon.

Peter K. Smith, Senior Vice President of Academic Strategies and Development for Kaplan Higher Education, opened the morning by urging us to accept that there is no such thing as 'business as usual' in higher education any longer. According to Dr. Smith, the formula for disruption is very simple: the world around you changes, but you don't. Because the dominant model in higher education evolved to meet the needs of the few in a context which no longer exists, our institutions are especially vulnerable. Universities cannot rely on either size and prestige or longevity and tradition to ensure their continued survival. In fact, what Smith termed a university's 'muscle memory' makes it very difficult to step outside the lens of our own experience and grasp the magnitude & rapidity of change which surrounds us. The good news is that although the forces for change are outside our gates, the makers of change already exist inside our walls. Smith stressed how important is it to encourage innovators to take risks without knowing what the outcomes will be, to protect them from traditional demands, and to "let them get on with it." For Smith the essential questions driving adaption and innovation should be: "If we are no longer an oasis in a desert of information scarcity, what can we now do well in a universe of information abundance?" and "Given that great content is no longer the differentiator, how will we support students in their sense-making?"

Dr. Smith was followed by a panel of four UNB change-makers each of whom is addressing those key questions in a unique way. The common theme underlying their work was how to leverage new technologies to increase engagement and add value to the learning experience.

Barb Dowding (UNBSJ) is taking advantage of her campus's Top Hat response system site license to poll her students periodically during classes. Top Hat runs on students' own mobile devices and turns them into tools for learning. Using the system has resulted in improved participation and engagement and the generation of real-time feedback that tells both Barb and her students what has been learned and what needs more work.

After determining that approximately 80% of his students were using smart phones, Greg Fleet (UNBSJ) joined Karen Keiller's iPad project to enrich his e-business students' learning experiences with social media and explore what makes for good pedagogy when using social media tools in higher education. Greg's students are using apps to co-create

concept maps (Inspiration) and to share annotations made to inexpensive online textbooks (Inkling). Wirelessly projecting the content they have created content wirelessly in class makes their own work the focus of in-class discussions.

Sasha Mullaly (UNBF) is leading the reinvention of *Acadiensis*, UNB's respected journal of Atlantic history, to ensure its continued survival. This work grew out of her observation that open source publishing and ICT could be either disruptive or enabling for *Acadiensis*, and she chose enabling. Not only has she moved the journal to an online format, she also plans to connect different kinds of content through new mash-ups and to engage new pools of younger readers in conversations with her traditional audience through online discussions.

Martin Wielemaker (UNBF) has become convinced that, because of their huge numbers of participants, MOOCs have had to solve engagement problems which have existed in traditional classrooms for a long time. Examples he shared include: improving video production values to better maintain students' attention, incorporating more social (peer-to-peer) learning, and the provision of more effective feedback. Martin uses several free cloud tools to bring these MOOC 'better' practices to his students: Aropa for peer assessment, PeerWise for active learning, and Socrative which is another student response system.

A fifth innovator from UBC, Rosie Redmond, spoke about the experience and learning she gained from creating and teaching a UBC/Coursera MOOC. She used this as an opportunity to put into practice the changes to teaching and learning that she had been advocating for some time. Interestingly, Dr. Redmond's experiences led her to a different style of video production than that of Martin Wielemaker. Discovering that her MOOC's participants enjoyed the more informal, personal of her less-than-professional videos alleviated her of the pressure to always produce top quality media. She also found teaching the students who finished her MOOC highly rewarding compared to her normal classes because they were intrinsically motivated, and she intends to use quiz and discussion forum data to help her write questions which will address higher order skills in her field but also can be machine marked.

The conference was wrapped up by our own Dean of Education, Ann Sherman, whose talk had the provocative title: *Disruptive Technology, Not in My Classroom*. Dr. Sherman began by clarifying the difference between sustaining and disruptive innovations. Updating content delivery, for example, is 'sustaining' because it consists of incremental improvements that support existing practices and make our lives easier. On the other hand, disruptive innovations, which unexpectedly displace the familiar, can be a wonderful opportunity for renewal, a harbinger of coming obsolescence, or both. She challenged us to think deeply about how to improve our teaching by bringing new meaning to old ideas before jumping on the technology bandwagon. Dr. Sherman's big idea was that pedagogical benefit to students should be the overarching value that drives our decisions. It is the thinking that has to be forward looking, not the technology. When the flow -- i.e. the connection between teaching and learning and technology -- is seamless, then "everything becomes magical and even delightful."