

21st-Century Skills and the Future of Internationalization: Opportunities for Leadership



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NAFSA's 2014 Symposium on Leadership, *21st-Century Skills and the Future of Internationalization: Opportunities for Leadership*, was held at the 2014 Annual Conference and Expo on Tuesday, May 27 in San Diego, California. The aim of the symposium was to guide senior international officers (SIOs) through the latest developments in higher education to better prepare their institutions to provide students with learning opportunities to develop twenty-first-century skills, with a particular focus on experiential learning.

The keynote speaker was **Jeffrey Selingo**, author of the 2013 book *College Unbound: The Future of Higher Education and What It Means for Students* and a contributing editor to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Selingo's presentation was followed by a panel discussion on *21st-Century Skills and Institutional Transformation: Voices from the Field* with **Susan Crichton**, associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and the founding director of the Innovative Learning Centre (ILC), and **Brian Etheridge**, director for the Center of Teaching Excellence at Georgia Gwinnett College and former associate provost for academic innovation at the University of Baltimore (UB). Participants also heard from **Jon Rubin**, founder and director of the State University of New York's (SUNY) Center for Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL).

According to Selingo, the top skills needed by today's graduates include strong written and oral communication, the ability to manage multiple priorities, problem solving skills, and the ability to collaborate with others. Similarly, Etheridge said that recent research confirms that critical thinking, complex problem solving, intercultural competence, and the ability to be creative and innovative are all skills that employers seek in potential employees.

However, as Selingo pointed out, higher education institutions are under increasing pressure to not only provide opportunities for students to develop these skills but also to learn discipline-specific knowledge and expertise—all within the span of 4 years.

Selingo explained that the traditional model was based on 4 years of higher education, followed by full-time employment where graduates learn many skills on the job. Workers would traditionally stay at one or two companies for the entire course of their careers before finally retiring.

"We would get broad liberal arts education and we would get skills training on the job or go to graduate school. Now college is supposed

to provide both broad-based education and skills. The biggest problem is that we tend to feel that we need to stuff it into 4 years. We shouldn't be operating within this box that we consider to be a 4-year degree," Selingo said, adding that the average U.S. worker now switches jobs every 4 years.

Etheridge echoed this sentiment. "The world is changing so quickly that preparing students for individual majors can be useful for that first job, but for subsequent career changes these soft skills are necessary," he said.

Furthermore, students and their needs and learning styles are changing. "Institutions can no longer compete by serving students in a one-size-fits-all model. We need to focus more on what motivates students to go to college," Selingo said.

He explained that the current distinction between traditional and nontraditional students is becoming increasingly irrelevant. He identified six different types of students: young academics; coming of age; career starters; career accelerators; industry switchers; and adult wanderers. To meet the needs of this increasingly diverse student population, which also includes international students, SIOs need to encourage their institutions to embrace different types of learning opportunities to help all students develop the necessary twenty-first-century skills.

Possible learning opportunities include competency-based education, experiential learning, undergraduate research, apprenticeships, internships, online classes, hybrid classes, and low-residency programs, as well as the traditional classroom.

"You can deliver the same courses in new ways. Students move seamlessly between these different methods," Selingo said. "Students can find different features of the traditional classroom, experiential learning, and hybrid models that suit them."

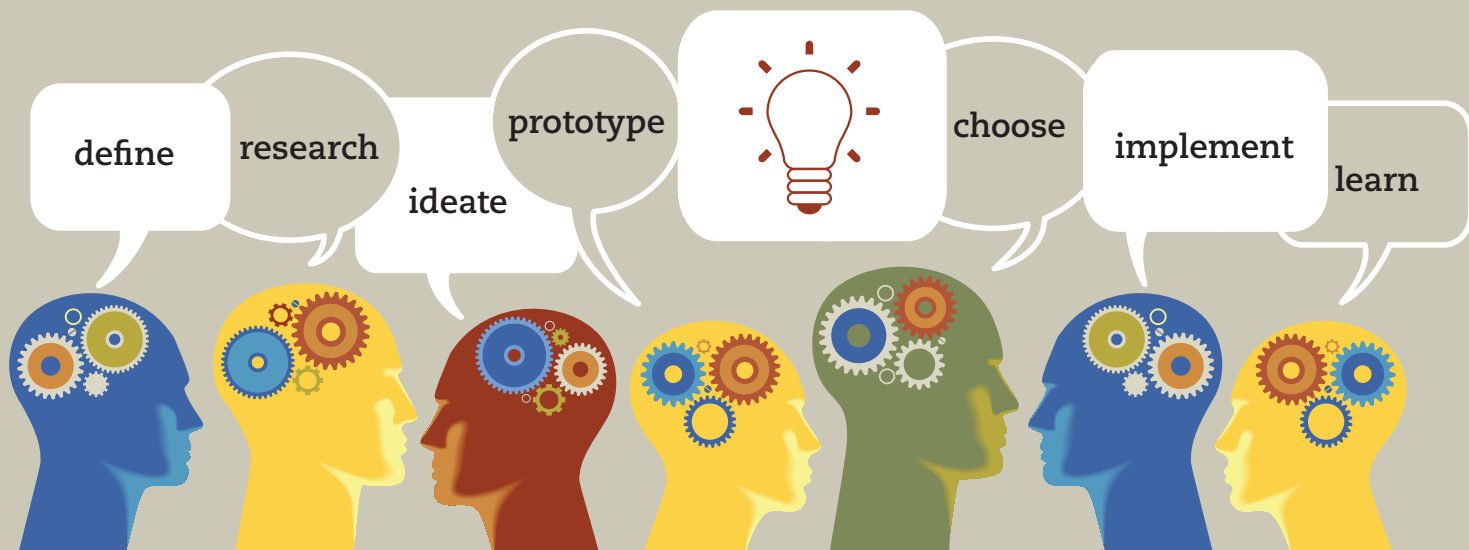


The NAFA 2014 Symposium on Leadership, *21st Century Skills and the Future of Internationalization: Opportunities for Leadership* was organized by the International Education Leadership Knowledge Community (IEL KC). IEL KC chair Penelope Pynes, associate provost for international programs at University of North Carolina-Greensboro, opened the symposium by welcoming the speakers and audience. Doug Palmer, assistant dean of academic innovation at Walsh University, moderated the panel discussion with Susan Crichton and Brian Etheridge. Dlynn Williams, head of the political science and international affairs department at the University of North Georgia, moderated the symposium as a whole.

Selingo said that institutions can harness technology to help provide students with more individualized educational experiences: "Some of this has to deal with setting up the tools that enable institutions to assess where students are at when they come in the door. We all learn at different speeds, we all have different backgrounds, but right now we are all taught the same material at the same speed."

Examples include adaptive learning software at Arizona State University, where technology assesses students' knowledge in subjects in general education

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USING DESIGN THINKING TO PROMOTE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SKILLS

The Innovative Learning Center (ILC) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) has served as a focal point for internationalization across the campus. Situated in the Faculty of Education, the ILC intends to provide appropriate tools for educators and explore innovations in teaching and learning. The ILC has helped consider how all students might take part in UBC's "Go Global" initiative, which is focused on study abroad and other international learning opportunities.

"At UBC-Okanagan, we take an interdisciplinary approach. The university has supported the development of the ILC, which has representatives of all of the faculties. Central to the ILC's activities is our consideration of ways we can scale out ideas like design thinking. This allows us to recast notions of teaching excellence at a university and recognize that a center for innovation needs to be cut across the entire university. We have the support of the provost to explore the ways in which a center like the ILC can lead thinking and disrupt traditional practices," Susan Crichton, associate professor in the Faculty of Education at UBC and the founding director of the ILC, said.

She said that they have taken up with the notion of disrupting current practice within higher education in order to design programs that better serve students and partner institutions. "If you don't disrupt things, you won't change things," she said.

Crichton is a proponent of "design thinking," which encourages creative problem solving and analyzing a scenario from multiple perspectives. By employing

design thinking in their creation of international initiatives and programs, SIOs could potentially discover innovative solutions and avoid unintended consequences. Design thinking is typically described as

... a process which includes the 'building up' of ideas, with few, or no, limits on breadth during a 'brainstorming' phase. This helps reduce fear of failure in the participant(s) and encourages input and participation from a wide variety of sources in the ideation phases. The phrase *outside the box thinking* has been coined to describe one goal of the brainstorming phase and is encouraged, since this can aid in the discovery of hidden elements and ambiguities in the situation and discovering potentially faulty assumptions. One example of a design thinking process could have seven stages: *define*, *research*, *ideate*, *prototype*, *choose*, *implement*, and *learn*. Within these seven steps, problems can be framed, the right questions can be asked, more ideas can be created, and the best answers can be chosen. The steps aren't linear; they can occur simultaneously and can be repeated (Wikipedia, 2014).

"It's incumbent on us to run through a potential activity in a scenario form before putting it into practice as it allows us to explore the potential unintended consequences. We also have to consider the cost and benefits of our international programs for both the in-country hosts and our own institutions and students," Crichton said.

While she didn't discount the value of traditional international experiences, she also encouraged SIOs to "think about the kinds of ways that we can help in an international context at our own institutions rather than just flying kids around the world. There always has to be a weighing of why are you going, what are you doing, and what is the value and cost to all parties concerned."

For example, typical international service-learning programs might involve sending students to do building projects in a community in a developing country. "How much does it cost to have five students who have no building skills but a lot of good will come and help you paint a wall in your school? They drink more water, are high maintenance and are potentially displacing local laborers. You need to do a cost/benefit analysis. If they are going to do that work, we are also going to send some money to offset the cost of novices doing good deeds without professional experience," Crichton explained.

At the same time, encouraging students to use design thinking in their own learning can help them develop twenty-first-century skills. Within the Faculty of Education at UBC, Crichton has sent teacher candidates to Tanzania and Ghana, where the UBC students write books and design curricula in collaboration with teachers on the ground. This work is done with the intention of creating a process that the in-country teachers can continue the work on their own, using appropriate technologies and tools. "Collaborative approaches such as these need to be done in conjunction with in-country partners after they have been given a chance to articulate what is needed so ultimately they can own the work and process within their local communities. This helps to develop local skills and capabilities while offering a rich global experience for our students," Crichton said.

"Design thinking disrupts the problem-solving process of problem solving and helps to make sure you're not just re-using the skills that created the problem in the first place. It's a process that allows people to integrate empathy and ambidextrous thinking into the design and to consider multiple options and recast a problem in variety of ways."

classes such as math and helps students to focus more on the areas they need to work on rather than the things they have already mastered. "The professor then knows what to focus on for each student. It doesn't replace the professor, but makes him or her much more effective in the classroom," Selingo explained.

Technology can also be used to help students access international opportunities, and consequently, develop twenty-first-century skills. Jon Rubin, for example, spoke about using the COIL initiative to teach students—even those who cannot study abroad—cross-cultural competence and give them experience working in international teams. Through COIL, teachers from two cultures work together to teach a course using an online learning environment where students, for example, work together on shared assignments.

"For U.S. students, the most important twenty-first-century skill grows from the need to recognize that the United States is no longer such a dominant global force and that they need to grasp this and then work to understand the perspective, issues, strengths, and needs of other countries and cultures...Another change is the obvious shift to online communication, which is now often the primary form of contact and interaction between colleagues. Whether one is working on a virtual team or simply negotiating with someone at a distance, one cannot assume that good face-to-face communication skills are adequate. COIL courses can be a way for students to experience this first hand and begin to develop awareness and skills to cope and succeed," Rubin explained.

Rubin added that the twenty-first-century workplace also requires employees to be able to evaluate and then collaborate with potential partners on the other side of the world. Using online learning environments is another way to help students practice collaborative skills they will need to succeed in the real world. (See more about COIL in the May/June 2014 cover story of *International Educator* magazine.)

Selingo particularly emphasized the importance of experiential learning opportunities. "Graduates who self-fulfill are those who see deep connections between in-class learning and real-life experiences,

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such as internships, undergraduate research, and co-ops. Twenty-first-century skills like critical thinking, communication, problem solving, and working in teams are embedded in those experiences. The institutions that are succeeding are those that bake this into the DNA of their culture,” he said.

He cited Northeastern’s Cooperative Education (Co-op) program¹, where students alternate classroom studies with full-time work in career related jobs for 6 months, as one such example. Another example is Worcester Polytechnic Institute’s approach of building a major research project into all 4 years.²

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UB is another institution that has successfully made opportunities for students to develop twenty-first-century skills part of its core mission. As part of UB21, an initiative envisioning what the campus should look like in the twenty-first century, they undertook a survey of faculty that showed that experiential learning was a priority, but that this was still not realized in practice. “Identifying a gap at an institution between where we are and where we want to be is a powerful spur to action,” Etheridge said. Although the school had always had a focus on applied learning, there has been an increased focus since 2011 following the momentum gained from UB21.

UB has subsequently integrated experiential learning into its campus-wide strategic plan as a way to help its graduates develop twenty-first-century skills. In partnership with the Center for Teaching

and the Honors Program, the university has created “Enhanced Courses” open to all students on a first-come, first-serve basis. They have hired a dedicated experiential learning program manager, created a grant program for innovation in the classroom, and offered incentives and professional development for faculty who want create enhanced courses.

“We primarily serve students from the Baltimore area, and some of our students have never left the city. For us, getting them to expand their horizons by getting them outside of their neighborhoods or the city they grew up in can have transformative effects. Experiential learning is a way to give students the same kind transformative experiences and personal growth as study abroad without getting too far from campus,” Etheridge explained.

Senior international officers can help their institutions produce graduates with twenty-first-century skills by providing opportunities for personal transformation. The key, Etheridge said, is to give students opportunities to apply their skills to real-world problems, whether abroad or in their local communities. Like Selingo, Etheridge also highlighted the importance of integrating experiential learning opportunities across the curriculum. “Some things, like critical thinking and intercultural competence, are so important that no matter what your major is, you need to have multiple opportunities to work on that skill or develop that perspective,” he said.

SIOs are well poised to help integrate experiential learning opportunities—whether study abroad or international experiences on their own campuses and in their own communities—into the fabric of their institutions. By helping to create a flexible, innovative learning environment that embraces the power of technology, SIOs can help prepare their institutions—and their students—to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century.

¹ <http://www.northeastern.edu/coop/>

² <http://www.wpi.edu/academics/ugradstudies/project-learning.html>