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Informational Professionals 2050: Educational Possibilities And Pathways -- Education Trends Panel Summary

By: Susan Nutter, Julia Khanova, and **Ericka Patillo**

Abstract

The opening panel of Mike Eisenberg, Bill Graves, Liz Liddy, and David Silver (moderated by Susan Nutter) addressed the impact of education trends on the future of information professions and professionals. After these four thoughtful leaders presented a five-minute summary of their positions, discussion ensued among the whole body of participants. Generally, the panelists envisioned an educational system that is organic and entrepreneurial and relies less on bureaucratic and rigid business and economic models. Everyone seemed to agree that the rigidity of the current higher education system, especially in public institutions, is an impediment to change and effective learning. The discussion was not focused solely on Library and Information Science (LIS) education but on the broad education trends that would and perhaps should impact the role of information in learning for future LIS students as well as students in any discipline. The primary thrust was on higher education, but several panelists gave examples of learning among younger students to illustrate their points.

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Education Trends Panel Summary

Susan Nutter

North Carolina State University

nutter@ncsu.edu

Julia Khanova

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

julia.khanova@unc.edu

Ericka Patillo

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

patillo@unc.edu

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There was *general consensus* among panel members and symposium participants that:

- It is impossible to know for sure what things will be like in 2050;

- It is possible to extrapolate from analysis of past development and present trends (social and technological);

- There is a need for substantial changes in education and these changes would require significant expansion of information infrastructure, which would depend on having skilled information professionals;

- Education (and educational assessment) should be competency-based.

- Education should be more student-centered, individualized.

The *four panelists* brought the following *salient ideas* to the table:

- Education as common good (and proposal for restructuring educational funding and re-defining the social contract between society and individual students) - **Bill Graves**

- Individualization of education organized around a lifelong Personal Education Record (PER) emphasizing and facilitating learning through a myriad of formal and informal experiences – **Michael Eisenberg**

- Entrepreneurial approach to education, which encompasses teaching entrepreneurial skills to students and being entrepreneurial in how educational organizations are run – **Liz Liddy**

- Importance of developing in today's students the awareness of non-media reality through engaging the senses and promoting longer attention spans – **David Silver**

Some of these *ideas harmonize with each* other, such as:

- Idea of lifetime PER (M.E.) and educational contract between student and society that starts at birth and continues, with modifications, throughout academic path (B.G.), or

- Entrepreneurial approaches (L.L.) and doing away with "tyranny of credit hour" (M.E.), or

- Taking seasonal view and watching vegetables grow (D.S.) and developing ideas from "seed" idea to fruition (L.L.).

Most importantly, the student-centered, contextually aware, individualized life-long education vision is impossible without elaborate information infrastructure to keep track of all the facets of each student's learning experiences and competency attainment throughout his or her lifetime. There is a lot of work for information professionals in the future! The education of information professionals can and should be the area in which these innovations are developed and tested – information education should play the leadership role in education transformation.

Despite the above described agreement and complementarities of ideas, there was also clear **polarity in the panel.** Two members were in the, somewhat radical, "out with the old, in with the new" camp and two members were, in a way, more traditional, emphasizing centuries-old ideas of importance of learning through the senses (which has been advocated by Aristotle) and social contract/public good view of education (which is rooted in the philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment).

While a radical statement questioning value of student's learning philosophy and history did not capture much of symposium members' attention, statements about writing being no longer an essential and important skill, and equivalency between media (such as video) and written expressions of ideas generated a lot of discussion. Overall, there is agreement that newer forms of expressing and sharing ideas, such as videos are good for some contexts and should be included more in academic process, many of the discussants disagreed with dismissing of the value of writing altogether. Some of the forms of writing, such as more traditional business letters may be declining, but being able to clearly express and share important ideas in writing will continue to be an important skill – all truly powerful ideas, historically and today, are ultimately expressed through written word.

Not surprisingly, the more traditional ideas were greeted with all around agreement. Particularly, the notion of importance of students learning though their senses was enthusiastically embraced. Perhaps this is due to many of the discussants feeling concerned about the engineering of new human beings (the re-wiring of the brain through exposure to media and information technologies from early age) and

the implications of this for the future of humanity. People see education as having to strike the balance between taking advantage of exponential technological progress and ensuring we don't lose what it means to be human in the process.

Employers have always played an important role in education in that the skills and competencies that they seek inform the curriculum. However, in the world of the work of the future, competencies and credentials will take a back seat to personal characteristics: employers will seek entrepreneurial problem-solvers who are curious, creative, interpersonally agile, team-oriented, passionate, and can communicate their ideas compellingly in whatever the media of the moment.

Ways in which LIS education in particular and higher education in general can respond to these trends are to develop an educational process that is not limited by the classroom model; incorporate seasonal thinking and learning models that reflect natural rhythms of life; recognize that entrepreneurship and risk-taking are essential in educational systems and enterprise; and embrace the shift of focus from generalist librarianship to the infusion of information expertise throughout institutions and organizations.