HIGHER EDUCATION

Some pandemic-era edtech here to stay, says Bradley University professor

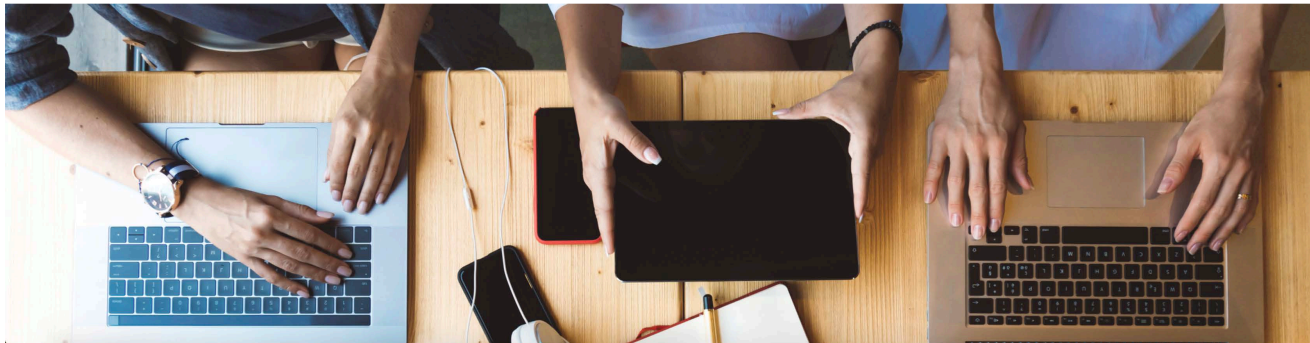(Getty Images)

Written by [Betsy Foresman](#)
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The pandemic has been a disruptive force in education, driving colleges and universities to reimagine through the use of technology how they deliver classes and services and how they engage students. In an interview with EdScoop, Dean Cantu, a professor of teacher education at Bradley University in Illinois explained how the pandemic changed edtech and shared some advice for what he thinks institutions ought to be considering as they adopt new technologies.

Though using technology to support education is not new, many institutions were slow before the pandemic to take big strides in implementing new technology, said Cantu, who also works as an edtech researcher. But the current health crisis thrust higher education into high gear, with rapid technology adoption becoming absolutely necessary to keep student connected to their education, he said.

"It really has expedited that timeline and impacted teaching and learning at the college and university level," Cantu said.

And the momentum of this disruption and subsequent increased focus on educational technology is likely to continue well after the pandemic ends, Cantu said.

How has the pandemic changed ed tech?

Dean Cantu (Bradley University)

"If you look at the technology, you see the adoption, the utilization on a much larger scale to help facilitate teaching and learning to help transition from entirely face-to-face course to either hybrid or completely online," he said.

The pandemic has forced colleges and universities to rapidly scale up their use of technologies, like video conferencing software, learning management systems and data analytics tools, to continue serving students and deliver on their core mission of educating students, he said.

Many institutions have also heavily invested in professional development training for faculty and staff, Cantu said, which has allowed this rapid transition to using more technology happen much more seamlessly. It also encourages faculty and staff to continue using technology and thinking about new and innovative ways to implement it going forward, he said.

"I remain optimistic that we're going to keep this momentum going," Cantu said. "There are faculty that are doing tremendous innovative types of teaching and learning online."

What are some technologies that will continue to be used to support education even after the pandemic?

"What I like are those types of technologies that really transcend degree programs and courses, that aren't isolated or narrowly or assigned to like a particular degree or program of study," Cantu said.

Technologies like video conferencing have been able to support faculty by delivering synchronous learning and asynchronous learning to students, he said, as well as councilors and advisers who now use video conferencing to hold appointments with students.

"Basically, a lot of the interaction that would have taken place in the faculty member's office can take place within Zoom," Cantu said. "And that's one of those things that I think many faculty members post pandemic are going to continue to use."

Learning management systems have also seen a spike in use by faculty, he said.

"I know a lot of faculty, while they may have used the LMS, many of them used only a fraction of the tools, the resources that are available."

Faculty are now using features like recording and editing programs, screencasting software, threaded discussion forums, test and quiz functions and blogs — all of which help students engage more deeply in the material they are learning, he said.

What are some technologies that have not been beneficial to education?

Technologies that don't contribute to improving teaching and learning activities and don't afford students opportunities for communication and collaboration are going to have a short half-life, Cantu said.

"There are certainly some technologies out there that will be short-lived because they deviate from those basic goals and objectives [colleges and universities] have," he said. "We're trying to engage students, we're trying to give them access to the resources that they need, we're trying to challenge them, we're trying to get them to collaborate with one another, to interact with one another and we're opening the door to communication."

Technologies that are designed to be flashy but don't have much depth — like dated material or rudimentary tools that don't challenge students — aren't going to have any long-term benefit to higher education, he said.

"And I think it's going to be easier for [faculty] to distinguish or differentiate between the types of technologies that emphasize communication, collaboration, innovation interaction and the other types of technologies that fall under the moniker of bells and whistles that are very superficial in design because they now have a broader depth of knowledge and understanding and knowing of what's out there," Cantu said.

What should institutions keep in mind as they continue to implement technologies?

"Number one is to involve everyone," Cantu said, "and make sure everyone has a seat at the table."

Faculty, staff, IT experts, administration and students all have different perspectives that should be included in the decision-making process for adopting new technologies, he said.

Secondly, colleges and universities should make sure the technologies they adopt help support their strategic plans and that they benefit teaching and learning, he said.

"The next thing is [institutions] have got to look at the technology infrastructure that's in place to make sure that it can support the online teaching and learning that is going on currently and support what might potentially be continued growth," Cantu said.

And none of this technology advancement can happen at institutions without major investments in professional development for faculty, staff and students, he said.

"That that's a continual investment of time and effort that needs to continue," Cantu said.

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