Frye Leadership Institute 2.0: Educating, Incubating, and Innovating Change

For ten years, the Frye Leadership Institute has been preparing and developing the next generation of leaders in libraries, information services, and higher education. The institute—named after Billy E. Frye, Emory University’s former chancellor, in recognition of his longtime efforts and advocacy in the field of library and IT administration—engages those who are already leaders in their profession, further developing their skills. But much has changed in a decade: economic globalization, massive advances in how technology supports institutions, and an academic product facing increasing fiscal pressures and commoditization. Higher education is on the cusp of a “new normal.” If it is to sustain itself in a competitive marketplace, leaders must do more than make incremental improvements to their product; they must transform and innovate. Now more than ever, higher education requires leaders, particularly in the information sector, who can inspire, advocate, and implement fundamental collaborative and innovative change.

In 2011, the Frye Institute launched its new “Frye 2.0” curriculum designed to address higher education’s leadership needs in this era of unprecedented change. The institute continues to foster leadership; in its new iteration, however, the program has shifted to embrace collaborative learning and projects that advance higher education as a whole.

Curriculum
The Frye Leadership Institute offers a unique environment to inspire creativity. A cohort group attends an immersive experience that instructs through a combination of lecture, dialogue, question-and-answer, and breakout sessions. This experience is coupled with long-term mentor engagement and post-experience projects supported by the leaders and members of EDUCAUSE and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR).

Instructors, mentors, and speakers headline the program, establishing bonds between current higher education leaders and the next generation of “Fryers” (as they will become known). The presenters and lecturers provide a deep knowledge of higher education trends and topics while simultaneously sharing their personal experiences, including the successes and failures that made them the leaders they are today.

The curriculum changes were welcomed by the class of 2011 (of which we were members), although some participants wondered if they would be missing out on anything as a result of the new timeframe, which was shortened to six days. That fear was diminished when participants received a daunting pre-conference reading list and day-by-day itinerary. From breakfast meetings with mentors to late-night group work and team sessions, Frye 2.0 was run at a commando pace. The program’s aggressive timeline, tempo, and requisite attention to detail facilitated an escape from the barrage of campus e-mails and other distractions readily available at participants’ fingertips. Unfortunately, the packed schedule also left little time for non-curriculum-driven professional development activities such as touring the host institution or meeting with local experts. As with all academic products, the instructors and organizers plan to tweak timings, logistics, and events to optimize the experience for future classes.

Even though the pace is fast, the benefits of the Frye opportunity are tremendous. The six-day format makes the institute more accessible to professionals whose schedules can better accommodate the shortened timeframe. The new blended model of offsite preparation, onsite cohort, and offsite project work delivers an intense educational experience that is deepened through both pre- and post-workshop engagements. In addition, the curriculum has shifted to a new collaborative and outward-facing concentration. Rather than focusing on individual, introspective, or institution-specific projects, the twenty-two participants collaborated and developed ideas for big-picture projects on behalf of the academic IT/library community. This new model of multi-institutional collaboration, which mirrors similar initiatives at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation, is looking to develop a best-in-breed approach.

The breadth and depth of the curriculum is truly exceptional. Throughout the six-day experience, participants are introduced to major topics that will be mainstays for higher education today and in the future. From the U.S. perspective on trends such as the use and growth of cyberinfrastructure to global perspectives on open-access journals, e-texts, and copyright—all are examined to see how they might affect higher education and apply to campus life. Other lessons are more simplistic and encourage participants to put aside the posturing and politicking that goes on at individual campuses and to concentrate instead on raw collaborative solutions.

Overall, the Frye Leadership Institute focuses on developing a theoretical experience, leading its students to learn how to set goals and directions as opposed to mapping out long-term plans. The institute addresses challenges in higher education through a variety of topics, empowering librarians and IT professionals to
promote conversations and take action on issues of importance not just to their individual institutions but for the entire higher education community. Through case studies and role play, participants learn to identify innovative disruptions and create a toolkit for evaluating and harnessing future technology breakthroughs.

Who Should Apply
All individuals who aspire to do great things on their campus and within the higher education community—whether they are CIOs, librarians, IT professionals, or administrators—would be well-served by the Frye experience. The institute serves as a melting pot for participants across a broad range of institutions, from small private liberal arts colleges to large research universities and systems. It is this comingling of hard and soft skills, disciplines, and institutional profiles that helps to create an environment with fresh out-of-the-box thinking.

The application process is competitive, and selection is made by a committee with the goal of creating a cohort possessing diverse experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. A small number of scholarships are awarded to assist qualified applicants with tuition and expenses.

Perhaps more than the curricular content, Frye is about the collaborative experience. Beyond the six days of the institute, participants receive support from individual mentors as well as from a network of more than three hundred Frye alumni. More immediately, members of the Frye 2011 class are looking forward to seeing the results of their collaborative projects. Topics include the impact of mobile learning, the transformation of libraries to support digital projects, and author-friendly boilerplate contracts for university presses. While participants are still honing their plans, the results of the Frye 2011 experience will be arriving in the summer and fall of 2012 in the form of white papers, conference presentations, workshops, and websites.

The group projects coming out of Frye will be especially interesting to watch as they unfold and may influence the future direction and growth of the program. Participants in the 2011 cohort acknowledge that the shift from a guaranteed project focused on the home institution to a bigger-picture collaboration may not attract as much support from campus administrators, thus presenting a degree of risk for the institute.

An Experience of a Lifetime
The Frye experience is more than the sum of its lectures, discussions, and reflections. Each participant will take away different ideas and will use the Frye forum for solving problems and sharing solutions. The Frye experience changes participants forever, equipping them with raw skills while simultaneously creating a sense of urgency and empowerment. As a testament to the continued value of the experience, participants from the 2001 Frye Institute recently remarked that they still refer to their notes. Graduates of the new Frye 2.0 curriculum left Emory University with a new sense of purpose, empowerment, and collaborative spirit.

Higher education is facing some of the largest changes in two centuries. Innovation is no longer optional; it is critical. The Frye Leadership Institute is designed for CIOs, librarians, IT professionals, and administrators who are interested in working collaboratively to promote and initiate change on the critical issues affecting higher education today. The institute offers a transformative experience that increases attendees’ knowledge of these critical issues while also deepening their environmental and social awareness.

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