Ten Reasons to Tackle the Top 10 IT Issues

The focus of this first issue in the 50th volume of EDUCAUSE Review is the EDUCAUSE Top 10 IT Issues, 2015. These issues represent the critical concerns for our profession. They are complex challenges, encompassing multifaceted human, technological, and organizational issues that can often take years to address. In “Top 10 IT Issues, 2015: Inflection Point,” EDUCAUSE Vice President Susan Grajek and the EDUCAUSE IT Issues Panel describe this year’s top issues and offer advice for tackling each.

The reasons IT professionals should tackle the top IT issues each year—as well as suggestions on how to do so—are woven throughout the past forty-nine years of EDUCAUSE Review publication. This Homepage column singles out and focuses on ten of those reasons. Although the issues may change over time, the reasons behind working to solve them are persistent.

1. Information technology is critical to higher education. Higher education has never mattered more—and information technology has more to contribute than ever. Higher education relies on technology to facilitate learning, scholarship, outreach, and the core operations of the institution. Institutions cannot fulfill their missions in the 21st century without embracing information technology.

2. Information technology is enabling a learner-centered revolution. Ubiquitous Internet access—along with social, mobile, cloud, and analytics capabilities—is freeing institutional leaders to think differently about how to meet the needs of individual learners, whether traditional or nontraditional, and how to help students accomplish their learning and career goals. Digital experiences provide feedback and reveal pathways that can move students forward to their next experience, making learning more engaging, personalized, and visible. This learner-centered revolution uses the best that technology has to offer, combining the physical and the virtual and engaging each learner.

3. Higher education’s goal of student success is advanced by IT-enabled personalized pathways. All learners should be supported with a clear, visible, and individualized pathway to their college and career success through a progression of courses, competencies, and/or experiences. Various IT-enabled approaches to student support have the potential to significantly improve student outcomes and graduation rates, addressing individual students’ needs while using institutional resources more effectively.

4. Administrative systems can improve not just operations but also institutional competitiveness. Higher education institutions may be able to reduce or avoid costs through the standardization and redesign of business processes. But they can go beyond efficiency and effectiveness by strategically using system data to provide decision support and business intelligence. Developing an institutional analytics strategy will increase the degree to which administrative systems and their data can inform institutional decisions.

5. Information security matters to everyone. Data and information systems are central to the learning, scholarship, and administrative functions of higher education. Good information security practices are essential to reducing risk, safeguarding data, information systems, and networks, and protecting the privacy of the higher education community. Cybersecurity is an important institutional and community responsibility that requires an effective partnership between the IT organization and the entire campus community.

6. We are building tomorrow’s infrastructure today. Our connected, mobile world is reshaping expectations and experiences. The cloud represents the ubiquitous large-scale technological infrastructure of contemporary society. As BYOD and cloud become even more widespread, IT professionals will need to ensure that their campus infrastructure is ready for the future.

7. New models are reshaping higher education. New companies, new organizations, and new units of existing institutions are emerging, offering unique services predicated on ground-breaking assumptions and models. Although traditional institutions will not disappear, new models are shaping expectations and options. As higher education becomes more diverse, understanding where and how to leverage technology for the mission of an individual institution becomes ever more important.

8. Information technology can change the game. We use technology to do many of the same things that we’ve done in the past—but we do those things differently. Processes are automated, for example. Information technology can also
change the game. New forms of scholarship, such as computation science and digital humanities, are changing what we do and the impact that information technology can have on solving society's most challenging problems.

9. **Community connections solve problems.** Our community has common problems and common solutions, and it grows stronger as we work together to address problems in the present and the future. As platforms, applications, and approaches continue to evolve, the community's problem-solving power is evolving in exciting new ways, using tools such as crowdsourcing. With the common goal of advancing higher education, our entire community can have collective impact.

10. **Information technology is about people.** Information technology is about the people who make everything work. Some are visionaries and entrepreneurs. Others specialize in “getting it done.” As technology changes, as issues ebb and flow, and as institutional directions are refined, the profession and its needs change. Our roles, responsibilities, and competencies must adapt as well. No matter what the issue, we must develop people and their potential.

Tackling the top 10 IT issues in 2015 will be challenging and complex. But the reasons for doing so are compelling. As we start the 50th volume of *EDUCUSE Review* (“Why IT Matters to Higher Education”), we know that it's not just information technology that matters—it's what we do with the technology that counts. And few things count more than education.

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