growing digital

Cultivate digital growth and help your students thrive.

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The power to grow and learn begins in the mind, according to Stanford psychologist Dr. Carol Dweck. Her decades of cross-cultural research show that having a growth mindset—believing that one's intelligence, creativity, and other strengths are not fixed, but can be developed—drives students to reach their fullest potential.[1]

But this concept doesn't just apply to your students. As the classic model of higher education evolves to become more interactive, flexible, and rooted in principles of digital literacy, your entire university must adopt a mindset of digital growth.

The digital natives applying to your institution today are less likely to set boundaries on when, where, and how they learn—so the institutions they attend shouldn't either. To engage students fully, teaching and learning must expand beyond the classroom and integrate digital communication options such as creative tools, video resources, mobile apps, and online content.[2] In addition, students must learn to apply digital resources creatively, using the tools to solve problems, produce innovative projects, and enhance communication—so they can prepare for the real-world challenges of an increasingly digital workplace.

Digital literacy defined.

In the context of higher education, think of digital literacy as a *process* with three stages:

1. **Understand** what digital tools are out there and what they can do.
2. **Develop** skills for using a wide range of digital tools.
3. **Apply** digital skills creatively to solve problems and enhance communication.

Digitally literate students and faculty know how, why, and when to use digital tools. They can identify and make the most of opportunities when developing courses or enhancing projects.

plant a distinct competitive edge with digital literacy.

Universities with a digital growth mindset are focused on increasing digital literacy in teaching and learning so that students can succeed after graduation in a variety of careers—whether they're analyzing data for a Big 4 accounting firm or creating podcasts for an online news show. And students tend to favor institutions that promote digital literacy because they believe the relevant skills will give them a critical advantage after graduation. This view is increasingly validated in the business world. For instance, Forbes magazine lists "Introduction to Digital Media" as one of the nine courses every college student should take.

"Empowering students to communicate effectively in a business environment is a critical component of digital literacy," says Jim Bottum, CIO and vice provost for computing and information technology at Clemson University. "Employers seek out graduates who are digitally literate and understand how to communicate in media-rich ways that can be consumed across multiple platforms."[3]

Digitally literate college graduates will also be able to differentiate themselves in the job market and build a compelling personal brand. The most digitally savvy grads are weaving images, video, and audio into their portfolios and resumés—and finding new ways to stand out from the crowd.

Matthew Sigelman, chief executive at the job market analytics company Burning Glass Technologies, knows which skills employers value most—his company data mines 3.5 million job ads per day. "Employers really value soft skills that are the bedrock of a liberal arts education," he says, and a new analysis suggests "applicants with additional, specific skills, such as knowledge of Java or other programming languages, or proficiency with graphic design tools like InDesign or Adobe Creative Cloud" will significantly increase both their job and salary prospects.[4]

cultivate student creativity with digital tools.

Some of today's most innovative institutions foster digital literacy by making digital creative tools available campus-wide for free. Empowering everyone to add creative elements to their work can stimulate a growth mindset, because it encourages exploration of new ways of producing and sharing ideas.

nurture growth with digital-friendly spaces.

Physical spaces on campus are also being transformed to foster collaboration and creative use of digital media. Illustrating a digital growth mindset, some schools have created dedicated, fully equipped digital studios. Others have transformed lobbies, atriums, and hallways into places where students can comfortably collaborate, recharge devices, and connect laptops to LCD monitors for sharing information.[5]

In progressive academic libraries, informal learning spaces are also getting a digital facelift. For instance, in 2014, the DeLaMare Science and Engineering Library at the University of Nevada Reno remodeled their ground floor into a space for self-directed learning with large 3D printers and scanners, Arduino boards, and Oculus Rift virtual reality headsets and development kits.[6] The transformation earned them a spot on Make magazine's list of "Most Interesting Makerspaces in America."

Enrich learning with digital environments.

These environments deliver the flexibility and anytime access to online resources that digital natives expect, and they can create a more engaging learning experience.

Blended learning combines online and face-to-face instruction. Students can practice critical thinking and collaboration in the online context, developing soft skills that will ultimately help them navigate the digital workplace.

Flipped classrooms make learning even more self-directed. Students absorb essential information before each class via online video, audio, eBooks, or study groups. In class, students and faculty engage in more hands-on, interactive, collaborative learning and deeper discussion.[7] And valuable class time is freed up for problem solving—a skill that's in high demand in the workplace.

Virtual classrooms make live, interactive instruction available to students wherever they choose to connect. At Georgetown University, the Master of Science in Finance program delivers some classes with a sophisticated virtual solution that has the look and feel of a traditional classroom and enables live discussion between instructors and students, plus asynchronous discussion forums.[8] This fully interactive experience prepares students to engage in digital communication at a high level and easily adjust to new ways of learning.

shift the landscape—and help digital literacy take root.

One of the biggest obstacles to adopting a digital growth mindset is resistance from instructors—and for good reason. "It has to do with how faculty are incented and rewarded to move along in their careers," says Tacy Trowbridge, worldwide lead of education programs at Adobe. "Especially at large state universities, research and publication are rewarded, but innovative teaching, maybe not so much."[9] By adding incentives to reward a digital growth mindset—like tenure and promotion criteria that include more emphasis on teaching methods and outcomes— institutions can begin to shift this culture.

Even teachers who want to incorporate digital literacy need a jump-start of inspiration, training, and support. Westminster College instructional designer James Morris believes successful course design can help. And it all begins by understanding what instructors and students need. So when he consults with faculty members to design and develop their courses, he starts with two questions: What do learners need to be able to do? and How can the instructor assess their learning? "From there," he says, "we'll look at instructional design approaches and then attach the right technology."[10]

The digital shift can begin with individual faculty, too. One geography professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison has created a space in the library that teaches students and faculty how to communicate ideas in more modern, sophisticated ways. Displays feature digital literacy projects, such as infographics students have created, and everyone is free to drop in and discuss technology and creativity with a digital literacy expert. Creating a place where students and faculty can easily experiment, explore, and get help is one way instructors can seed change within their institutions.

How to gain acceptance for the concept and practice of digital literacy.

- **Align digital literacy with your core mission**—Build a case to help administrators understand how digital literacy fits in with your institution's stated goals. For example, create presentations that show how promoting digital literacy fosters innovation.
- **Make room for exploration**—Repurpose an underused area as a place where students and faculty can gather to try digital resources, share their experiences, and get help with digital projects. This will create a community that can make digital literacy more accessible (and less intimidating) to everyone.
- **Create a support center for faculty**—Give faculty a place where they can drop in and learn to use digital resources, consult with instructional designers, and discuss ideas for adapting courses with more experienced colleagues.
- **Consider digital elements at the course design stage**—When developing courses, always ask, "Is there an opportunity to add a digital component, and will it enhance learning?" Just introducing the possibility can lead you to new ideas and opportunities.

adobe can help.

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9 Interview with Tacy Trowbridge.

10 Interview with James Morris.

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