Chapter 20

Re-Imagining and Re-Structuring Scholarship, Teaching, and Learning in Digital Environments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how digital scholarship, teaching, and learning is dramatically changing the educational landscape. New pedagogies are being reimagined and restructured in ways never before conceptualized. Despite the need to transform current models of scholarship, scholars and publishers have been sluggish to do so. The review of literature sheds light upon this hesitation, revealing two themes: 1) the lack of incentives for moving scholarship beyond the traditional criteria for promotion and tenure and 2) lack of technical skills to create digital works. The remainder of the chapter explores these themes further by highlighting topics including the democratization of digital publication, paradigmatic shifts, and digital spaces. Contemporary and future pathways are proposed in accessibility, following magazine publishers’ lead for digitizing scholarship and including analytics in publication. The conclusion reiterates that although new communication methods will yield new methods of society’s organization, the essence of scholarship will remain constant, academics will continue to converse, address problems with evidence, and disseminate findings.

INTRODUCTION

Reaching as far back as 455 BC, history has documented the human understanding that “There is nothing permanent except change” (Heraclitus, Greek Philosopher). The last decade has undoubtedly ushered in a whirlwind of innovation that has dramatically changed the way we communicate, live, and learn. Additionally, it has also ignited the need to cultivate minds that embrace change—for
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without this approach, the world’s inhabitants will assuredly stand merciless against the uncontrol-

able forces of nature. Despite the potential omi-
nous scenario, human beings have maintained a
solid track record of innovative thinking leading
to advances in all aspects of our daily lives and an enduring willingness to improve our world that shows no signs of slowing. Our highly intercon-
nected world stands as testimony to this inherent optimism, which continues to thrive. Those in the field of education, in particular, are witnessing warp speed technological advancements paired with new philosophies and pedagogies that are ultimately changing teaching and learning. The educational landscape has changed so significantly that traditional models, practices, and learning modalities may prove to be ineffective, thereby stifling rich opportunities for student learning.

With the emergence of web-based browsing, in the mid 1990’s, teaching and learning have become increasingly digitized, to the point that one third of all courses, in the United States, are now taken online. In the last decade the tempo has accelerated and the impetus to incorporate online learning in higher education has been contemporaneous with seemingly endless discussions around the positives and the perils among institutional administrators, their faculty, and their students. Those who have already transitioned their practices, course content and methods of communication online, can assuredly attest to these obstacles and successes that this digital environment brings along for the ride. Further, libraries have acquired digitized books, journals, magazines, monographs and a host of other resources, thus enabling more exposure for authors and researchers, as well as an avenue to showcase their work with various forms of multimedia, interactivity, and social networking tools toward engaging their readership. Education and industry alike have developed data repositories, initiated partnerships around digitizing professional development and training, and have provided more digital “connectivity” than ever before. Digital environments offer con-
venience, efficiency, connectedness, individual and collective collaboration, opportunities for creativity, forums to tell stories, share opinions and most importantly, gain knowledge about the world around us.

However, despite the broad range of affor-
dances available to members of the academy, very few have chosen to leverage the potential of digital media to enhance scholarship. When one hears the term scholarship, it inevitably conjures up images of bookshelves lined with leather-bound tomes and musty piles of manuscripts. Sadly, this image is not terribly far removed from reality. All one needs to do is select virtually any scholarly journal and compare the contents from the most recent issue to the corresponding issue from 50 years ago. While the former is likely to have a digital format available, and there will likely have been changes to stylistic guides and formatting, the text-based, linear construction will be consistent. Ignored are all of the potential classes of rich media that are available to convey information and enhance interactivity. Whether an artifact of tradition, the Byzantine requirements for tenure, or simply a lack of innovation, the failure to use transformative technologies perpetuates the cal-
cification and siloing of scholarship.

Although there exists a plethora of opportu-
nities to digitally enhance scholarship, teaching, mainstream adoption remains astonishingly low. Gross and Harmon’s (2013), The Future Is Already Here: The Internet Revolution in Science and Scholarship—an overview of digital advance-
ments in academe, acknowledge an increase in innovative digital projects that have been devel-
oped over the last two decades, but deduced that mainstream scholarship and publishing has yet to be seriously affected. A thorough review aiming to provide examples of academic resources and courses embedding multimedia, interactivity, etc. (which includes the examination of academic jour-
nal articles, books, blogs), confirms that most of the online articles, journals and books that scholars are producing today are not representative of the
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