Trends in online and blended learning
BUILDING A CULTURE OF LEARNING INNOVATION

BY JENNIFER P. BOTT

Jennifer P. Bott is the assistant provost for learning initiatives and oversees Online and Distance Education and Integrated Learning Institute (iLearn), bringing together student support, instructional design, and faculty and administrative services for online and blended education.

In its evolution, iLearn Trends strives to be a forum, a public conversation open to college faculty, college students, policy makers, and other partners and supporters of higher education.

In this issue, friends, we’re ruminating on the subject of “building a culture of learning innovation.” Ruminate with us at twitter.com/iLearnTrends or facebook.com/iLearnTrends.

Along the road to innovation, we must take four essential and sequential steps that we map as such:

From the Labs > Early Adoption > Now Trending > Best Practices

What’s born in the lab eventually stands on its own two feet and takes steps to the classroom.

1. FROM THE LABS: So let’s start in the lab. Naturally, this is home for research and development. In this issue
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Ball State University practices equal opportunity in education and employment and of the magazine, we consider how iLearn developers are in the research and development phase of a project, Google Glass, that enables to communicate with professors without interrupting the flow and momentum of class presentations (Skip to this story). With wearable Google glasses, for example, students can give feedback to faculty members who receive the “reply” through mere facial recognition. Our developers are convinced that projects such as this one might change the future of online and blending learning in the classroom. So the journey to learning innovation begins.

2. EARLY ADOPTION: Once we leave the lab, we have to create ways to put our new tools into the hands of faculty—who are key in handing them to students—so that both professor and student can share in this new initiative together. It’s critical that both share in the “a-ha” moment when they see the infinite and exciting potential of this tool.

While e-books are not a new phenomenon to many readers, e-textbooks, or e-texts, represent a growing trend in university classrooms. (Skip to this story) Ball State is working with an Indianapolis-based company, Courseload, that makes shifting from one publisher’s e-text to another publisher’s e-text much easier and smoother, thanks to a common interface.

Suffice it to say, it’s critical that faculty be early adopters to make this new tool a success.

3. NOW TRENDING: Whether it’s our informal Faculty Technology Studio Series, our new video management system and desktop publishing tool known as My Mediasite, mini-conferences to showcase faculty innovation, or a range of educational technology workshops from introductory to advanced, iLearn tends to trends and spreads the word of change coming to our world of online and blended education. While on this step, we invite all educators and students to join a trend toward conversation about innovation.

4. BEST PRACTICES: The last step along the road of innovation is the achievement of best practices—and recognition of that achievement, where possible. In 2013 Ball State proved itself a pioneer in online student
is strongly and actively committed to diversity within its community. The information, correct at the time of publication, is subject to change.

We Welcome Your Input
Your feedback is important. iLearn Trends Magazine invites you to contact us at ilearn@bsu.edu. Follow us on Twitter (@iLearnTrends) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/ilearntrends).

services when it became recipient of a New Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) Breakthrough Models Incubator (BMI) national grant, funded in part through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Ball State was just one of seven schools to receive BMI grants given to launch technology-based support programs that inspire student success.

Phil Repp, vice president of information technology, and I spearheaded efforts to secure this grant, and Kay Bales, Ball State’s vice president for student affairs, along with Ted Ward, director of student services for the online and distance education division, are overseeing its implementation. (Skip to this story)
Trends in online and blended learning

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NeGen Devices from the labs pull down

By the Numbers

Net Gen Devices
Chris Turvey, a developer for the Integrated Learning Institute (iLearn) at Ball State, relies heavily on his assistant to help with a wide range of everyday tasks. Having just wrapped up a meeting with fellow developer Wayne Mock, Chris stands up to head back to his office. Before leaving, he asks his assistant to snap a picture of the notes scrawled across several whiteboards, outlining deadlines for the upcoming week. As he approaches his office, he asks his assistant to send a quick message to another colleague, requesting clarification on the scope of their latest project. Seated in front of his computer, Chris and his assistant resume work on the interactive classroom software he is designing. In fact, Chris isn’t designing the software with his assistant but rather for his assistant. When completed, his assistant will help professors connect and interact with students in an entirely new way. Surprisingly, Chris’s assistant isn’t an actual person but rather a new player in technology-driven innovation. Meet Google Glass.

When you first encounter a person wearing Google Glass, it might seem like an ordinary pair of eyeglasses, but Google Glass employs lens that support interactive, smart-phone-like displays. Glass uses Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connectivity on the Android mobile operating system to turn this eyewear into a revolutionary head-mounted computer, communication, and camera system. Moreover, Glass embodies the mission of Google itself. The company’s stated
goal “to make it as easy as possible for you to find the information you need and get the things you need to do done” is apparent in the design of this always-available, ready-when-you-are device. Speaking at TED2013, Sergey Brin, Google’s co-founder says that Google Glass is “a new way of seeing our relationship with our mobile computers -- not hunched over a screen but meeting the world heads-up.”

Glass is part of a larger trend towards “wearable computing.” Moving beyond the portability and mobility of hand-held devices such as today’s smartphones and tablets, wearables are enabling a new type of ubiquitous computing. Developers are creating optical and interactive products that are more hands-free and eyes forward. Such devices will soon become available to the public. Google Glass is expected to hit the consumer market sometime in the second quarter of 2014. As wearables become more available to the general public, these devices will be the latest computing technology to impact education. Developers like Chris Turvey and Wayne Mock are already at work on pilot research projects to explore how Google Glass might contribute to teaching and learning outcomes in online and blended classrooms.

Ball State University has already received several pairs of Google Glass for research purposes. Chris Turvey and Wayne Mock are confident that wearables will enhance the online and blended learning experience, connecting students and faculty in ways not possible until now. They see Google Glass as a creative disruption, one which will engage students far more than it may distract them. For Turvey and Mock, when properly implemented in a meaningful instructional context, Glass will create more student-faculty interaction while reducing classroom disruptions.

Having acquired his pair of Google Glass in May 2013, Chris Turvey sees them as a tool to be utilized in the larger “ecosystem” of higher education. Turvey is most impressed with the hands-free, integrated aspects of Google Glass, especially the “second screen” benefits of having a real-time, heads-up display. He is currently working on a custom-designed software package for Glass, which will enable students to ask questions, share notes and collaborate. Rather than acting as a distraction, Turvey’s software will allow faculty to engage students in what is probably best termed “back channel communication.” Students will be able to use smartphones or tablets to send private texts to the instructor for clarification or elaboration on specific topics without needing to publicly raise their hand or break the instructor’s lecture flow.

Wayne Mock is also working to incorporate Google Glass into the higher education classroom. Receiving his Google Glass in July 2013 through the #ifihadglass contest, Mock is adapting facial expression recognition tracking software to work with Google Glass in order to provide professors with live feedback on the emotional states of students in online or blended courses. Mock says the software could also be used to evaluate pre-service teachers or provide professional development feedback for otherwise qualified faculty struggling with negative student evaluations.

While Glass is still in its early “sandbox” stage of development and not yet widely available to either teachers or students, we can begin to see some of the ways that it may trans-
form our classrooms in the future. But as is the case in the adoption of any new tool or technique, the technology is not the decisive factor. It will be in how educators use it that will determine its long-term value for teaching and learning. Wayne and Chris’s research projects are in the R&D mode at the moment, but their work provides us insights into how wearables might enhance teaching and learning in the next decade. And that leads to many questions worth pursuing: What if wearables result in a more fluid and dynamic classroom space where students access screen-based information in a more mobile, hands-free learning style? How might that change the interactions between instructors and students? How does a real-time heads up display and back-channel communication change the nature of a student-centered curriculum? How does it enliven or even model best practices of student-based inquiry and engagement? These questions demonstrate how Google Glass or any wearable can lead us down new pathways of discovery and innovation, as developers and technologists continue to explore new products and new designs to improve student learning outcomes.
By the Numbers

- The number of tech devices the average college student owns: 7
- The number of tweets a day by frequent Twitter users: 112
- The percent of Ball State's online-only students that are on LinkedIn: 42.1%
- The number of students taking at least one online course: 6.7 million
- The percentage of Ball State's online-only students that have a Facebook account: 87%
- The percent of the campuses with official mobile apps: 79%
- The percentage of schoolteachers that say that the Internet has a major impact of accessing content, resources, and materials for teaching: 92%
- The earning potential of young adults with a bachelor's degree versus a high school diploma: 2x
- The percentage of college students who state that texting is their preferred way of keeping in touch: 97%
- The percent change over the last 5 years of college students enrolled in at least one online course: 23% to 45%
- The percentage of students that use Google as a research tool: 94%
NEXT GEN DEVICES

6 NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

iLearn researchers have been exploring six emerging technologies for their possible applications for teaching and learning. These devices are in their early adoption phases and, to date, have had minimal impact on higher education. Many are not even being directly marketed to educators (yet). However, in their current state of development, they still suggest exciting potential uses for instructors and students.

Solidoodle 3D Printer

Flipped classroom, personalized learning, gamification, peer-to-peer learning, tangible computing, achievement and badges
tap circles for each story
Ball State University has partnered with Courseload, an Indiana company at the forefront of the e-textbook trend.

Courseload offers universities a common interface for textbooks – no matter which company publishes them.

“This creates continuity with whichever textbooks are being used,” explains Joel Whitesel, director Ball State University’s Integrated Learning Institute.

Courseload works with publishers and universities to convert materials into a common format. Each eText shares a standard format that students and faculty can learn and use from class to class. Ball State faculty members can even pull materials from a variety of sources, essentially creating their own textbooks.

These digital texts address a number of challenges facing universities and students and are becoming increasingly available.

“Most publishers offer an electronic version of their textbooks,” says Whitesel. “However, each publisher has a unique electronic delivery system.”

In other words, each publisher has their own way of allowing users to work within the text including highlighting text, making comments, sharing notes and asking questions. Faculty and students must learn the tools necessary to navigate each system.
Courseload is a system that frees educators from those constraints.

Whitesel believes the continuity created by the use of Courseload is an essential part of maximizing the benefits of eTexts in higher education. He believes that using one platform allows students and faculty to learn the mechanics of various operations and become familiar with the systems tools.

“The mechanics will become second nature to our users, allowing them to interact with the materials in a more natural way,” he says.

That interaction goes far beyond simply reading text.

According to Whitesel, quality eTexts are not simply be digitally formatted versions of traditional books. They should be an engaging platform through which students are able to interact with course materials, professors, and one another. Once course materials have been converted into Courseload, users can complete any number of tasks through their eTexts such as sharing comments and notes, adding links, and asking questions, all within the text itself.

Faculty are able to respond to questions or connect current events directly to a particular passage by creating and posting videos within the text.

“Electronic texts don’t merely contain the information being taught. They enable students to engage with that information and relate what they are learning to the outside world as never before,” says Whitesel.

Courseload also provides faculty with insightful data by providing them with real-time analytics. This data helps instructors to identify students who are at risk of falling behind and enables instructors to adjust methods and lecture material to meet students’ needs.

As more universities follow in Ball State’s footsteps, “There are so many possibilities that will be coming forward as a result of e-texts,” says Whitesel.

Students will benefit from lower costs and increased communication. Faculty will gain insights into their teaching strategies as they analyze the data provided by platforms such as Courseload. According to Whitesel, lectures will be increasingly be contained within the texts themselves, allowing for more collaborative, real-world experiments during class.
In 2013, I embarked on an online learning project to help incoming Organic Chemistry students at Ball State University. Organic Chemistry is a very difficult course for many students. The goal of my project is to review key concepts that are critical to student success in Organic Chemistry, but that should have been learned in earlier chemistry courses. Moreover, if the students review this material online prior to the start of Organic Chemistry, it should have the added benefit of reducing review time during class meetings, opening up valuable course time to cover new concepts.

Initially, I considered creating a series of short video lectures to cover those concepts. But after consulting with learning technologists at iLearn, I decided to see if there were already good videos and materials related to these topics available on the internet. This began my introduction to OER, or open educational resources. OER are freely available teaching and learning materials, created by educators around the world, and shared via the internet through a variety of means from YouTube to OER Commons (www.oercommons.org). By definition, OER are free to reuse by other educators, and most have open licenses that allow for modifications to the materials.

I learned a great deal about open educational resources during my time as a faculty fellow at Ball State’s iLearn. During the initial development phase, it was sometimes challenging to find an open educational resources (OER) video that explained the chemistry concept exactly as I wanted. Therefore I still had to create approximately half of the content of the four modules on my own. The final modules ended up being a mix of OER videos I found on the web and my own short videos that I created on my laptop. To deliver this material to the students I
created a mini-course in the free web resource, Blackboard Coursesites. Before the start of the Fall 2013 semester, I sent out an email with a link to the mini-course to all incoming Organic Chemistry students. The students had the option to enroll in this freely available learning experience. We had about 130 students out of 200 complete some or all of the modules.

I have a few takeaways for educators interested in exploring OER. First, if you are an instructor, you probably won’t find everything you want in exactly the way you want it in OER. However, there are frequently lots of choices online and a growing archive of materials as OER has grown rapidly over the last few years. It is worth spending some time searching out materials on a variety of websites and portals to see if you can find what will work for your teaching style and your students. Moreover, OER videos do have the advantage of bringing in the voices and styles of other educators and exposing students to other ways of learning about these topics and concepts. My initial sense is that the students had no issues with the different instructors on the videos. I think they have generally enjoyed and benefited from these modules. In fact, personal conversations with several students have indicated that they felt it was a good review of important concepts from General Chemistry, the prerequisite for Organic Chemistry.

Second, as with any new approach to teaching and learning, make sure you have an assessment plan to track student learning outcomes. With iLearn, I am conducting a student survey to see the impact of these modules. I will be analyzing that survey data at the conclusion of this semester. I plan to share the results with my colleagues in the department.

Third, seek copious feedback from the students themselves. They are usually your best barometer as to whether a new approach is working or not. Already a few students have offered some constructive criticism, including a subject for a potential fifth module. Feedback like that is very useful and helps me to consider improvements to the prep modules. As this is an ongoing project, I hope to have improvements in place for the fall 2014 semester. Additionally, I look forward to comparing student experience and performance in the spring 2014 Organic Chemistry class, which always has a slightly different demographic of students compared to the fall semester.

Review or preparatory modules like Organic Chemistry Prep can potentially be very useful to many different types of classes. Students are more and more willing to work online and view material presented in the online format, so this method of delivery is very comfortable for them. If instructors have the opportunity offer a relatively small amount of optional material for the students to refresh important concepts before the semester begins or perhaps in the first week of class, it will allow more time to be spent on new material, and less on concepts that should have been mastered in previous classes. I believe this will lead to less frustration on the part of the instructors and it will help students be better prepared for potentially challenging courses like Organic Chemistry.
MOBILE APPS
FOR THE BLENDED CLASSROOM

Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson are most often associated with their widely shared Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.

In many ways, that book is an inventory of best practices that support improved student learning outcomes and can be considered by most instructors as core pedagogical strategies. Chickering and Gamson’s principles have been supported by many studies as to their effectiveness in the college classroom. But most of these studies have investigated these principles in relation to the face-to-face classroom.

In the blended classroom, do these principles still matter? How about in relation to classrooms where iPads or other tablet computers are used?

Below is a quick look at some mobile apps that can be used in the classroom in ways supported by Chickering and Gamson’s seven principles.
STEP ONE: MAKE IT PERSONAL

Engaging the faculty is essential to the improvement of student learning outcomes. iLearn’s new modes of delivery are constantly changing to continue to meet the needs of faculty members—whatever their level of technological savvy.

BY BARB WILLS, LEAD LEARNING TECHNOLOGIST

Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches to faculty training and development. Personalized engagement is essential.

Engaging the faculty is essential to the improvement of student learning outcomes. iLearn’s new modes of delivery are constantly changing to continue to meet the needs of faculty members—whatever their level of technological savvy.

We help to promote discussion among faculty regarding what methods they are making use of in their classes, address inquiries from faculty, and provide educational opportunities on how to effectively employ new tools as they become available.

Our services not only enhance learning and encourage communication between students and faculty but also encourage sharing and collaboration among colleagues as well.

Here are five key lessons that the Learning Technologies team within Ball State University’s Integrated Learning Institute (iLearn) has learned about supporting faculty development, creating workshops and tutorials, and the challenges of implementing new educational technologies at Ball State.
With the growth of online, blended, and flipped courses, many instructors have greater media production needs than ever before. When faculty members are interested in moving some of their course content online, the desire to innovate around classroom pedagogy and learning objectives can meet the constraints of faculty development and technology training.

In order to flip their class on their own, an instructor would need to create video lectures and modules, share those videos, and finally archive for their students. While many free options are available online such as YouTube and Vimeo, faculty and instructors increasingly are interested in integrated their media with existing learning management systems (LMS) that offer secure video management.

Ball State University has implemented a new desktop publishing tool, Sonic Foundry’s My Mediasite, to support this growing trend towards anytime, anywhere media publishing by faculty. My Mediasite allows an instructor to record screencasts, slideshows, and video using a computer’s camera and microphone.

Simple editing features allow instructors manipulate their media, and all My Mediasite assets are stored in a secure video management platform that integrates with Ball State’s LMS.

Ball State is already seeing strong adoption rates among faculty. For example, more than 100 faculty members attended voluntary training sessions for My Mediasite.
As the famed Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “The only constant is change.” Each year produces a new set of trends and innovations in online and blended education. Sometimes new trends feel like they have matured gradually and their time has finally come. Other trends feel disruptive, as if they came out of nowhere, and challenge our expectations of “what is possible” in higher education. eTexts might be a good example of a gradual trend, whereas MOOCs have seemed to be more of an unexpected disruption.

Regardless of what trends are shortly arriving or which ones remain just beyond the horizon, it is important to “tend to trends,” to be aware of the potential changes and disruptions that are likely headed towards online and blended education in higher education. This is no longer an area of speculation or analysis that only concerns a small handful of researchers and professionals on campus. Many of the coming trends (from flipped classrooms to big data) have the potential to influence and transform the entire higher educational landscape. Most trends that eventually make it to the front page of the New York Times or get written about in The Chronicle of Higher Education are initially debated and discussed on Twitter, Facebook, and on educational blogs.

### Six Recommended Blogs on Education and Innovation:

1. **Hack Education**
   - [http://hackeducation.com](http://hackeducation.com)

2. **Bryan Alexander**
   - [http://bryanalexander.org](http://bryanalexander.org)

3. **EdSurge**
   - [https://www.edsurge.com](https://www.edsurge.com)

4. **Cathy Davidson**
   - [http://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson](http://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson)

5. **edcetera**
   - [http://edcetera.rafter.com](http://edcetera.rafter.com)

6. **Getting Smart**
   - [http://gettingsmart.com](http://gettingsmart.com)
One of the goals of iLearn Trends is to be a part of the conversation around educational innovation. We hope, in addition to checking out the stories and features of this magazine, that you connect with us on Twitter or like us Facebook. Nowadays, with the pace of change accelerating around us, we find that tending to trends involves honing our online curation and communication skills. It is about participating in and connecting to a growing community of theorists and practitioners, researchers and educators, who desire to build new cultures of learning innovation and seek to understand the changing landscape of 21st century education.
Supporting at-risk Students
As a result of being awarded one of seven Breakthrough Models in Innovation Grants, Ball State University is developing new tools designed to support academically at-risk students.

By thinking beyond the borders of higher education and looking to outside industry models for inspiration, Ball State is developing a unique technological support network for students.

“The grant is providing us with funds to develop an innovation—the impact of which we can then test and measure,” says Kay Bales, vice president for student affairs and lead administrator for the Ball State project. “Part of that process will be to look at return on investment. Is it something that we find is successful in helping us in working with our at-risk population? Is it valuable enough that the institution will then want to sustain the innovation? Those are the questions we will have to ask.”

Bales notes the Breakthrough Models grants are intended to help institutions like Ball State “look at how technology can help in retaining students and persisting to graduation. They are to focus on at-risk populations and how technology can help students to get through school and to do so with reduced costs.”

**Focus on Pell Grant Students**

At Ball State, the Breakthrough Models team is focusing its retention and persistence efforts on Pell Grant recipients. For this group of students, first-year and second-year retention rates lag behind those of other incoming students by six to eight points.

“The team decided if we are going to have this opportunity to experiment, let’s focus on a group of students who we obviously need to reach and support,” said Bales.
The next step was to consider how to best to reach out to Pell Grant recipients, which makes up one-third (around 5,300) of all Ball State students. Pell Grants are need-based grants given to mostly undergraduate students.

“That's a lot of people for the one or two individuals who are tasked with helping to retain them,” Bales said.

So the team began to ask how could they use “technology to engage those students, connect them to the institution, provide them with a support of peers through technology,” said Bales.

Faced with needing to reach thousands of students, the team asked themselves how they could ensure that at-risk students were getting the critical information they need to maintain their academic plan.

“It’s an opportunity for us to look at ways we can augment that personal touch with a large group of students,” noted Bales.

**An Unlikely Inspiration**

In Seattle, the team was encouraged to look for models outside of higher education for inspiration. And they found it, unexpectedly, in a company that has long understood how to incentivize people to meet difficult goals—Weight Watchers.

“We had talked about incentives. Were incentives important to Pell students? We started to think about how we could incentivize students to stay on track and finish. As we kept going through these brainstorming exercises, using the model of Weight Watchers made sense,” explained Bales.

In Weight Watchers, members earn activity points that they can exchange for food. The team began to translate this incentive-based model to the context of higher education. How could they use incentives to spur Pell students on to success?

In order to develop effective incentives, the team first needed to understand what factors were preventing a greater number of Pell students from staying in school and completing their degrees. They began by talking directly with the at-risk students.

“We asked a wide range of questions about what were some of the barriers they dealt with? What were some of the ways they felt supported? Then we also asked about their use of technology and what that looks like,” said Bales.

The Breakthrough Models team took what they knew about these students and their needs to shape their plan and looked again to Weight Watchers for inspiration.

The Weight Watcher program develops a network of accountability for its participants. A network of members generates positive peer pressure to encourage participants to stay on the plan while the Weight Watchers program also uses a variety of technological tools
to support each member.

This support, said Bales, is vital to student success, as well.

“When we asked about support, they talked about their peer network being really important in influencing their decisions about college and staying on track. What we hope through this grant is to create another support network. It’s another resource that students can engage and will contribute to their success.”

Achievements—There’s an app for that

To accomplish this, the university is developing the “Ball State Achievements” app, via the university’s student-run Digital Corps. The app will help students track goals and achievements and award points when goals are reached.

The activities vary in time commitment level and difficulty and include joining on-campus support groups, meeting registration deadlines, and participating in career preparation. The points student earn can then be redeemed for rewards. The list of rewarded activities is still being refined and points values are being assigned with the help of student volunteers.

An initial pilot program of Ball State Achievements will be launched in spring 2014.
GATES FOUNDATION GRANT

Breakthrough Models in Innovation grants are funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and awarded by Educause, the chief association promoting the advancement of information technology in higher education.

The grants were given to institutions who seek to dramatically improve the success of their own students and are willing to share their results with peer institutions.

Ball State was given $50,000 in seed money to fund the planning and design phase of an initiative focused on improving the completion rates and on-time completion rates of at-risk students.

In July 2013, a Ball State delegation traveled to Seattle where they attended a two and half day workshop at the Gates Foundation that was led by representatives from Educause and IDEO, an award-winning global design firm known for innovation and design. The workshop was hands-on and designed to help the teams outline a plan to take back to their campus to fully implement.

The delegation consisted of:

- Jennifer Bott, associate vice president for learning initiatives
- Terry King, provost
- Phillip Repp
- Kip Shawger, associate professor of theater and Faculty Senate chair
- Jo Ann M. Gora, president
- Kay Bales, vice president for student affairs
- Tom Taylor, vice president for enrollment, marketing, and communications
- Randy Howard, vice president for business affairs

In the coming months, Ball State will develop a business plan to Educause with the possibility of getting a $100,000 grant to launch their plan.
It’s no great secret that people react to changes in their work environment in different ways. We’ve heard the cliché of change being inevitable. Sometimes though, change is not only sudden and specific, it can also be broad and overwhelming. Enter the last 18 months for the staff of Ball State’s Division of Online and Distance Education. On the heels of a leadership change from a dean, to a new associate provost, came a complete restructuring of the entire division, implementation of a university-wide enterprise system, and a complete overhaul to the format of online course delivery.

Within student services those changes meant new direct leadership, new technology and systems, new policies and procedures, and an entirely new physical location to the center of campus. The cultural impact upon motivation and morale was overwhelming, to say the least. In a new office environment that was unfamiliar and had a sterile feeling, student services staff were asked to yet again employ ONE MORE new function, the first-time ever use of a customer relationship management (CRM) tool. Fifteen months ago, it seemed nearly impossible to me that the staff would fully embrace not only the use of a CRM, but the value that the CRM presented within our daily operations of working with students.

I anticipated that staff would have varying
responses to the use of a CRM. I eventually experienced most of those that were expected: outright refusal, passive-aggressiveness, forgetfulness, occasional and sporadic usage, misusage, and partial usage. The end goal for student services staff is to capitalize on the CRM to chronicle the full life-cycle of a student, all in one place rather than to have information within individuals’ e-mail or self-created spreadsheets. My thought is, if any student services staff member is addressing an issue with a student, then having access to the history of that student’s involvement with the Division of Online and Distance would be a valuable tool for serving that student in the best possible way.

Looking back, and expectedly so, staff were slow to realize the value of the CRM to them and their particular function within the division. After all, this was just one more change in the virtual cornucopia of changes that they had been experiencing in overwhelming fashion. Beyond the change within the use of a CRM, we were specifically asking staff to give more focus on our students as “customers” in a similar fashion to the way in which a small business views their customers. Each and every one of them are valuable, and they present themselves to us with very specific and valid wants and needs. To be competitive in the online and distance education marketplace, we had to tune in further to our students. To do that, we all have to gain access to varying pieces of information to best understand that “customer” better.

I’ll be the first to admit, even I was not as proficient of a user of the CRM as I had hoped or wanted to be over the past 15 months. Like the rest of my staff, I had moments of forgetfulness, or perhaps even a misplaced thought of “is this even important enough to include?” However, it’s from my own self-reflection about those things that helped me to stay constant on the message and focus to gather all of us as student services staff into consistently using the CRM. As staff explained various “pain points” or dilemmas in their operational duties, I drove their thoughts back to the CRM use. We held planned meetings on customer service itself, and infused those conversations with discussion about the capabilities of the CRM.

Slowly we began to see the use of the CRM steadily increase, and some of those with initial opposition have become great proponents of its usage now. We can, and do, track our students’ progress throughout the life cycle: from prospect, through admission, through active registration, to graduation. Throughout that life cycle, staff are adding and gaining value in the notes and information they are tracking. It’s enjoyable for me to hear them as they share with one another about a student through the use of prior information they’ve obtained.

Our expansion of CRM use into daily operations continues. We input approximately 2,000 interactions each month. The success there is that those interactions are recorded, in one place, for all of the student services staff to be able to gain easy access. These successes have been possible through consistent discussion and demonstration of the value and uses of the tool itself over the past 15 months. What I’m seeing now, is that staff are referencing the CRM themselves,
and reminding each other about its use and the potential it possesses for us within our daily activities for the future.

Anytime you have a new operational implementation, you'll experience a culture shock where there are early adopters and late comers alike. However, what I've experienced with this CRM implementation is a rewarding lesson of change management through patience and empowerment of staff. Together we have adapted very well to the sudden and sweeping changes that were thrust upon us. Perhaps, this is also a lesson in understanding that we all can spare some change, for a good cause.
What are your options when it comes to academically rich online programs?

Ball State University offers transformative, high-quality online degrees and certificates that are respected in the workplace.

For instance, our online master of business administration degree is ranked sixth in the nation among online, AACSB-accredited MBA programs by the consumer group GetEducated.com. And, our online bachelor’s degree completion programs were ranked in the top 20 by U.S. News & World Report.

Plus, our programs are competitively priced, and our professors and advisors give students all the personal attention they expect from Ball State. Learn more at www.bsu.edu/online.

All the programs listed below are fully online, unless otherwise noted:

**BACHELOR’S DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAMS**
- Business Administration
- General Studies
- RN to BS in Nursing

**MASTER’S DEGREES**
- Adult and Community Education (blended program)
- Applied Behavior Analysis
- Business Administration (MBA)
- Business Education
- Career and Technical Education
- Curriculum and Educational Technology
- Educational Administration and Supervision
- Educational Psychology
- Elementary Education
- Executive Development (blended program)
- Interior Design Option
- Journalism
- Mathematics Education (blended program)
- Nursing
- Physical (Coaching) Education
- Public Relations
- Secondary Education
- Special Education
- Technology Education

"BALL STATE PERFECT CHOICE"

After coming to the U.S., Thailand native Prippan Tantiprasertchai earned a professional certificate in interior design from UCLA’s Architecture and Design Extension program. He began his search for a master’s degree after more than a decade with architectural and design firms in California.

“I wanted to be involved in the academic side of interior design,” says Tantiprasertchai, who wanted the opportunity to do academic research.

Believing that Ball State’s undergraduate interior design program had a strong reputation and that the online master’s program would not interrupt his career, he decided our master’s degree was the perfect choice.”

“In addition to the academic research, it’s been a real benefit to share my experiences, visions, and design approach with other students," says the 2011 Ball State graduate who is job captain for Shlemmer+Algaze+Associates, an interior design and architectural firm based in Los Angeles.