

Othot Talks Higher Ed

Transcript of Episode 1, edited for clarity

March 30, 2020

Thank you for joining us today for our first Othot Talks Higher Ed. My name is Karlye Rowles and I'm the manager of content marketing at Othot. I'm very excited to introduce our Othot Talks Higher Ed series. Throughout the year we will be interviewing higher ed thought leaders and experts. We hope you learn something new or take away a best practice or gain a new perspective on an issue or challenge. Thank you for listening. I'd like to introduce Fred Weiss, President and CEO of Othot.

Fred Weiss (0:31):

Thanks, Karlye, and thanks to everybody for joining us today for Othot Talks Higher Ed. This is our first of several interviews with thought leaders in higher education. As Karlye mentioned, I'm Fred Weiss and I've been in the higher ed technology space my entire career. I spent about 20 years with what is now Ellucian. I'm the former CEO of iModules Software and I'm now thrilled to be the CEO of Othot.

I wanted to put together a series of interviews because I know I've always learned something by expanding the folks to whom I listen. I'm one of those individuals who sign up for lots of industry webinars. I may not listen to them all live, but I do listen to them all.

When we started planning for this interview, COVID-19 was just starting to impact campuses and now campuses are closed, millions of students have returned home, and classes are being delivered online. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Lots of change, very quickly. Today we're going to talk about technology and higher education broadly and in the context of the current environment with COVID-19.

Our first guest on the Higher Ed Talks is Casey Green. Casey, welcome. Glad to have you with us.

Today's Guest



Casey Green

THE CAMPUS COMPUTING PROJECT

- Founding Director, The Campus Computing Project
- Director, Digital Fellows Project
- Moderator, *To A Degree* Podcast
- Moderator, *This Week @ Inside Higher Ed* podcast
- *Digital Tweed* blog at Inside Higher Ed
- Director, USC Center for Scholarly Technology
- Associate Director, UCLA Higher Ed Research Inst. and UCLA CIRP/ Freshman Survey



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Casey Green (1:39):

Thank you. My thanks to you and to Othot for the opportunity to have this conversation.

Fred Weiss (01:45):

Those of you who are listening may know Casey from [The Campus Computing Project](#) or from his popular blog, [Digital Tweed](#). He's the founding director of the Campus Computing Project, which is the largest continuing study of learning and IT planning and policy issues in American higher education. Launched in 1990, Campus Computing is widely cited by campus officials as a definitive source for data, information, and insight about key e-learning and IT issues affecting colleges and universities. Casey also recently served as the director of the [Digital Fellows Project](#) sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and he moderated the Foundation's post-secondary student success podcast. Casey is the author, co-author, and editor of more than 20 books and published research reports, more than a hundred articles, and academic and professional publications. His Digital Tweed blog, which I mentioned earlier, is published by [Inside Higher Ed](#).

Casey received the first EDUCAUSE Award for Leadership and Public Policy and Practice, which cited his "prominence in the arena of national and international technology agendas and the linking of higher education to those agendas." And in [February 2019, Edtech Digest](#) listed Casey among the 100 top influencers in edtech stating that he is a "definitive source for the higher education transformation conversation."

Everybody can see we're conducting today's interview from our respective home offices with me on the East Coast and Casey on the West Coast. We are most definitely practicing physical distancing. So thanks again Casey for joining us and for writing such a wonderful introduction.

Casey Green (03:28):

Thank you. Actually, that was my mom's work. I'm honored that you would tag me as a thought leader. I'm very leery of that term because all the folks who are self-declared thought leaders on LinkedIn, if you have to proclaim yourself a thought leader, you're probably not. So I take some satisfaction in that you're doing it as opposed to me.

Fred Weiss (03:48):

All right, well super. I certainly consider you one, Casey. Over the course of the years that we've known each other, that's always been the case.

Casey Green (03:56):

That's very kind. Thank you.

Fred Weiss (03:59):

So while we're recording in the midst of COVID-19, we think that the topics that you see here are really important ones to explore with you today both in the current context and in the historical context. We're going to start our conversation around overall trends in higher ed tech, then work our way through the use of data and analytics, being sure that we're touching on the human element of those things as well. And then we'll move on to advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning and we'll end with more reflections relative to where we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our Topics

- Trends and observations in higher ed technology
- Data & analytics and decision making in higher ed
- Balance of human touch and high tech
- AI/ML: Think outside the chatbot [box]
- Technology observations for the current environment

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Casey Green (04:34):

Sounds like a plan. Thank you.

Fred Weiss (04:35):

Let's get rolling. As I mentioned, Casey conducts an annual campus computing survey, which is released in the fall of each year. Talk to us a bit, Casey, about the general themes and trends that were uncovered in last fall's survey relative to higher education technology.

What are the general themes/trends you're seeing in higher ed technology?

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Casey Green (04:51):

You know, there really is a point of demarcation in terms of the conversation about issues before March 1st and after March 1st because of the coronavirus. Had we been having this conversation in January or February, you would ask me what are the issues that emerge, not just in the Fall 2019 survey, but sort of out of the surveys coming into that. There are a couple that are top of mind. We saw from CIOs, a real concern about the engagement and the level of knowledge on the part of chief academic officers. About a third or more were concerned. They felt that their CAO's were not well informed or well engaged. We've been seeing issues about hiring that campuses are at a competitive disadvantage in terms of hiring and retaining IT talent because of the competition for talent off-campus, given where the economy was again pre March 1st. I've been on a tear for the last several years talking about innovation and infrastructure and particularly instructional infrastructure in terms of user support, instructional support for faculty, and user support for faculty and students.

Casey Green (05:56):

Again, we see that and while, in theory, before March 1st we were almost 10 years past the great recession. We still see campuses across all sectors in particularly public institutions, reeling from budget cuts, both annual budget cuts, as well as mid-year budget recessions. And those have compounding consequences with no lead-up and demand for IT resources and services. And finally, one that I know that it close to my experience and close to your concerns is the issue of analytics. What I see in our data when I talk to CIOs and CAOs and when we do these surveys, that I've characterized as analytics angst, a huge investment in analytics on the part of campuses across all segments and sectors and a real concern that they are not getting bang for the buck. We're not harvesting the benefits of those investments in terms of campus policies, programs, and planning.

Casey Green (06:49):

And we can take that apart as we go forward. Obviously, as we go into the postmarks first, the whole issue with the movement, what I would characterize in the wake of COVID-19, to stream and screen as campuses cut off classes and close. This kind of mad rush, in an incredibly short period of time, whether it was two days or two weeks when faculty were informed, it creates incredible pressures and for all folks in the academic enterprises. It's increased challenges for faculty. They may not have these skills as part of their portfolio. It highlights the absence of instructional support, which we've not done a good job with anyhow. There are challenges for students. I've not seen data for higher ed, and I'm thinking about an article in the [LA Times](#) this week about K-12 in Los Angeles, which is the second-largest school district in the country, where huge numbers of students are not logging in either because they don't have access to the right kinds of tools or resources or maybe it's out of apathy.

Casey Green (07:52):

There are other kinds of issues too. I've been talking about the issue of digital - as we move to digital content as opposed to digital access - from my other surveys with faculty over the last several years. We know there's a big concern on the part of faculty, CAOs, and academic officers that many students don't have the right tools and platforms in the movement to go all digital. I think we should credit COVID-19 with creating a new point on the instructional continuum. We've talked about on-campus and hybrid and then going online. Now we have this point in between of teaching, essentially remote teaching, and no one should confuse that with a well-designed, well-planned online course. I think it was concerning and yet candid on the part of Randi Weingarten, the head of AFT, the largest teacher's union in the country, earlier this week, talking at least about what's going on in K-12, saying that no one should get confused with what we're doing with remote teaching as being the same quality, and that has huge consequences, not just in K 12, but also in higher ed.

Fred Weiss (08:56):

But again, we can come back to that. We're going to probably have to come back to that in this conversation.

Fred Weiss (09:02):

And you know, the other thing that strikes me, I think those are all great points. So, I'll play off a couple of things. One is there's also the issue of the digital divide in terms of who has access to high-speed internet in order to take advantage of this online or, or better termed, remote teaching environment. I know I've spoken to some of our clients who have some staff that now being forced to work out of their homes who actually don't have high-speed internet at home. And one of our staff members is a faculty member at a university in Pittsburgh and he too has said that he's got a number of kids in his class who don't actually have high-speed internet access at their home. So there's that issue of the digital divide as well. And I'm sure you're hearing about that.

Casey Green (09:44):

It's both. You can't go to Starbucks or any place else to access WIFI. But the other part is the platforms. Most students, the vast majority from the data I've seen, have smartphones. A smartphone is not an adequate platform to do classwork. And again, I think we're seeing more of this in K-12 than in higher ed. The rush to buy a small notebook for \$200. Campuses are trying to get platforms to their students. But this kind of trying, to put digital fingers in lots of holes in a dike, it's a huge problem. Playing catch up in terms of how do we get Chromebooks to students? How do we pay for them? For the moment, the remedy du jour, if we can get platforms to students and then how do we get access. Again, I'm hearing of lots of districts that are taking school buses and driving them to neighborhoods to light up for K-12. That's harder to do for higher ed. And for those students who lived in campus adjacent housing or campus housing who are now home, many of them don't have WIFI access to do the work that's being expected of them. It's going to be a lost term.

Fred Weiss (10:56):

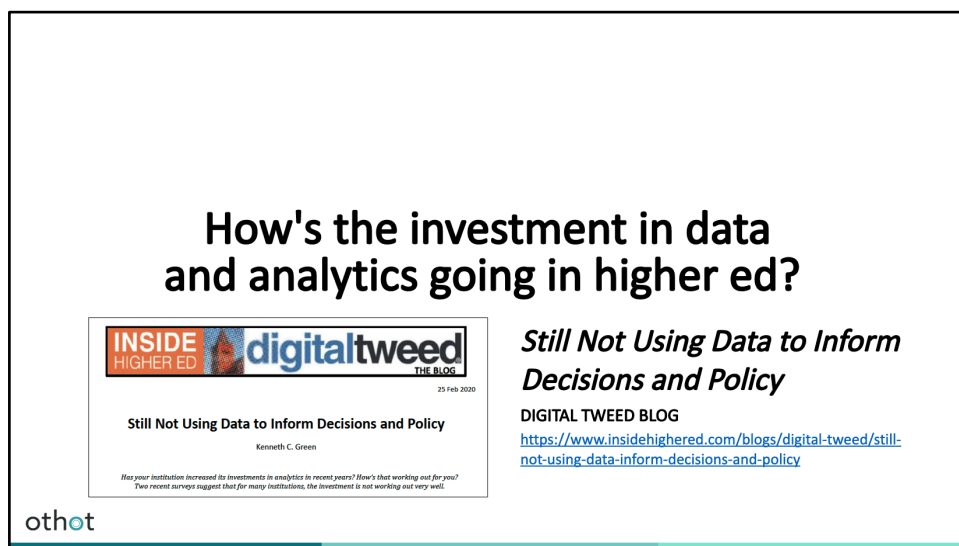
Yes, and then there is the other bit that you mentioned about what you've been seeing in the survey about budgets and obviously in the wake of COVID-19. We know that there's a lot of concerns, especially amongst public institutions, but across all institutions about what's going to happen to institutional budgets. And of course, IT budgets are a big part of institutional budgets.

Casey Green (11:17):

Yes. My concern is, even before the COVID-19 crisis. Campuses are looking at some demographic crisis going forward into the current decade compared to the one we experienced 40 years ago. The so-called great enrollment crisis of the 1980s. There's a tendency to cut IT and that's going to be absolutely the wrong move because that's going to be a downward spiral. If you floated the instructional infrastructure at your campus, that's going to get out very quickly and that's going to create problems in terms of that enrollment pipeline. We don't know what September is going to be like at this point. Certain campuses are safe and protected on the basis of reputation and resources. Many are not up and down and across segments and sectors. And what that's going to mean for students, what that's going to mean for faculty, what that's going to mean for instructional personnel, and the instructional infrastructure going forward.

Fred Weiss (12:18):

Well, you know, we can talk about this slide forever. Let's move on. I know we're also going to come back to that conversation about chief academic officers in a little bit. The next topic that we had on our list, which is about the investment related to data and analytics. You know, Casey, you and I have known each other for years, but it was actually your most recent blog posts that connected us. That article was published in late February on Inside Higher Ed and it was titled, as you can see on the screen, "Still not using data to inform policy and decisions?" What prompted you to write this?



Casey Green (12:51):

So there were a couple of things in terms of, again, looking at what I'd characterize as analytic angst. I ran the Inside Higher Ed surveys of CAOs in the first iterations in 2011 and 2012, and in both the president survey in 2011 and the CAO survey, we saw that a large number of presidents and provosts were saying we're not doing a good job using data for planning and decision making. And then at the end of January, Inside Higher Ed released its [CAO survey](#), and that number was 23 % (it was 31 % in 2012). I mean there's a huge job on the part of CAOs in a moment of private candor to say we're not doing this. And yet we know over those years, Fred, that that institutions have made a huge investment in analytics and some have done it incredibly well. Look at the story and one of the best stories, of course, it's Georgia State, an investment in analytics has had a tremendous impact in terms of retention and graduation rates.

Casey Green (13:52):

Not just an aggregate but in terms of separate student populations, but it wasn't just the analytics. It was the morning after strategy. It wasn't just that the analytics would kick out an email to say, Casey, you're going down a rabbit hole. We're monitoring what you're doing on the basis of your interaction with the LMS and other stuff. But they had a strategy and they had an infrastructure and resources for those students. That made a huge difference to eliminate those great retention and graduation gaps. Some other institutions as well have done a tremendous job, but again, the data we see from these independent surveys, what I hear from CAOs in my own survey, we're still not doing a good job in terms of what we hear from CAOs and from CIOs about harnessing and leveraging the power of analytics for planning, programs, and policy. We're not doing the morning after strategy in terms of harnessing those resources, pulling those resources together. This is where we go, this is how we help our students and faculty.

Fred Weiss (14:50):

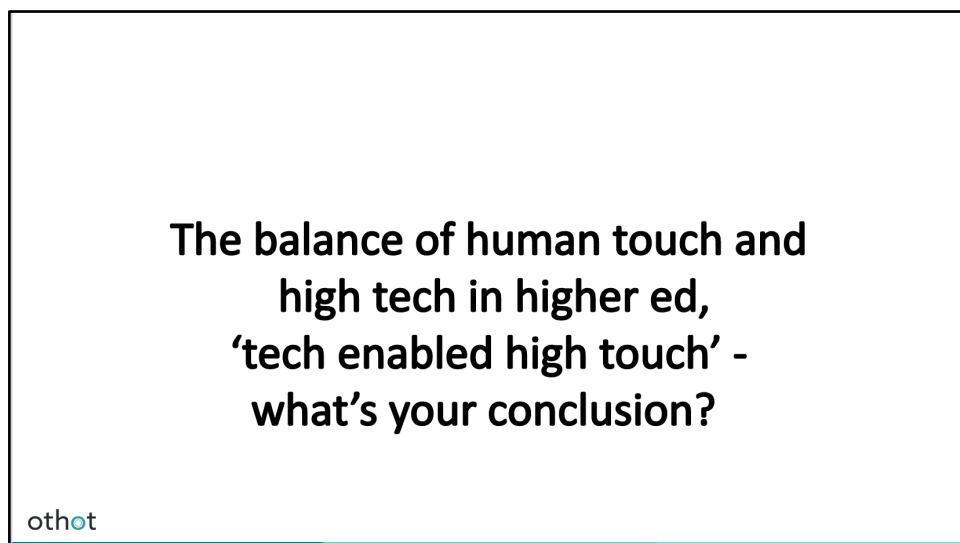
Well, I'm struck by the fact that I've been looking at the survey for years, the campus computing survey, I'd swear that CIOs have ranked a greater investment in analytics and business intelligence in their top five priorities.

Casey Green (15:09):

It's been one of the top issues. And then when you combine that sort of aggregate with student success and there's no question that analytics are a key part of the student success initiatives, you know that in terms of mapping, targeting, or whatever it might be. And then to find, as we see in my surveys and Inside Higher Ed CIO survey, that's still a large proportion saying we're not doing a good job of using our investments in analytics to help guide the planning, programs, and policy. It's distressing at a minimum. And it's a major issue across most segments and sectors.

Fred Weiss (15:49):

Some of our listeners might know that I post regularly on higher ed topics to both [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) and I reposted that article and commented on it. The article that we were just talking about is what led to this interview. So in the article toward the end, and you've kind of implied this a little bit, even in this conversation that what's needed is a real balance for human intervention in high tech in higher ed. That balance between human intervention and high tech and I think you've used the term, tech enabled, high touch.



Casey Green (16:24):

Oh absolutely. You know this is a matter of the sum is more than the parts. Let's go back to Al Gore and the great internet conversation of 20 years ago and we had these tensions between high tech and high touch. Actually it goes back even 20 years earlier with mega 10 trends and John Naisbitt talking about the interaction and that your reaction to high tech versus high touch. But at least my scan of the landscape over the past three decades, the best implementations of technology are tech enabled, high

touch. Certainly, that's what's happening at Georgia State. We look at analytics and some of their other efforts. We look at Arizona State University, which appropriately has gotten a lot of acclaim for its efforts in terms of its online programs. It's not just that they have great content on screen, but they build a supporting infrastructure for their students.

Casey Green (17:15):

Same thing at Southern New Hampshire, same thing at a number of other campuses. It supplements the other. There's a gestalt in this process and if we don't do that, that planning that process to kind of leverage the power of both, then we're not going to get the benefits of either and I think one of the additional challenges that we confronted in this COVID environment with this rush to stream and screen is that how do we do the touch part of that for students? Can we do it with Zoom sessions? Potentially, but now we're seeing is sort of the dark side of Zoom at many campuses. The Zoom bombing and those interruptions. They're creating a lot of campus chaos and discomfort. That will work its way out. It will take time in terms of Zoom addressing some of those issues. Users are getting smarter about how to handle some of those issues.

Casey Green (18:01):

But again, you know, there's not one technology that's the panacea, that's the silver bullet for this thing. And we've got this time pressure to do it fast. We've got this time pressure to do it now. We're going to have huge questions about quality. Obviously we should not in any way think that what's going on now, whether it's a freshman gateway course or trying to teach organic chemistry, the last part of the term, you know, online like this, the loss of lab courses or anything else is going to be comparable to what it might've been before March 1st. In terms of what's going forward, over the next several weeks, and how do we recover that now for the students who are trying to graduate, the students who are in gateway courses to their foundations, and all points in between for the faculty who find themselves overwhelmed or being told, you've got to do this for work. Where's my instructional support to help me do this. That's not of my tech portfolio.

Fred Weiss (18:55):

Speaking of the current environment, on the recruiting and admission side, and thinking about where we are in the calendar, institutions are worried about a decline in international acceptances or enrollments. Institutions are really worried about what that does to net tuition revenue. Institutions are worried about the loss of in-person events for admissions programs. All of those impact on what yield is going to look like and what the shape and formation of their classes are going to be. It strikes me that technology can help with that, but only when there's the human overlay to help people better understand what are the potential impacts and thinking about how do we use tech to point us in a particular direction, but just use our knowledge of our own institution, the cultural aspects of our own institution, the student experience at our own institution. And combine that with technology as something that enables decision makers.

Casey Green (19:54):

No question. And on the instructional side, I've often said we need to make technology safe for faculty. The fact that they can feel comfortable and confident, does this stuff work? Does it bring a benefit to my students? And I'm not talking about just posting a syllabus online, but some of the other things that are coming to us in terms of classrooms, resources, and services and that safety issue has just been elevated. You know, Zoom was the solution, but now Zoom brings its own problems. Again, I'm confident that that's going to get worked out in a week or 10 days for most of us. But you know, again, for the campuses that are using Zoom as an alternative to those kinds of meet and greet sessions towards close, the campuses that are using Zoom with large undergraduate survey gateway courses or for graduate seminars and all points in between. There's still a huge great unknown that we confront.

Fred Weiss (20:45):

I guess I'll use this opportunity to put in a shameless plug for Othot. I think as you know, Casey, what we do is provide a technology solution that optimizes the relationship between institutions and their constituents. And we do that by providing this prescriptive analytics platform that delivers understandable AI at the individual level that helps our partner institution accelerate growth and improve student success and drive alumni engagement. And we know that our partners, to your point, that are most successful are the ones that combine our prescriptions with that human interaction, and we have case studies about that. Whether it's for example, Texas Tech University or the New Jersey Institute of Technology, you can learn more about those on the Othot website. It reemphasizes your point, Casey. It's gotta be tech-enabled, high touch. How do we bring these things together to best serve our students, investor of our institution?

Casey Green (21:40):

Yes, absolutely.

Fred Weiss (21:43):

I want to change gears a little bit. It continues the conversation about analytics and raises something that I think you know gets under my skin a little bit. Every once in a while, as you all know, EDUCAUSE creates and publishes these [Horizon Reports](#). And most recently, maybe about two or three weeks ago, EDUCAUSE published their Horizon Report for Teaching and Learning. And they had a chapter in that report about artificial intelligence and machine learning, but they essentially defined these as chatbots. Now, that's a very narrow definition around AI and machine learning on campuses. And it pretty much leaves aside the further aspects of both predictive and prescriptive analytics. What's your thinking about how we can get campus leaders to think about AI outside of what I call the chatbot box?

How can we get campus leaders to think about AI outside of the chatbot [box]?

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Casey Green (22:37):

Well, I think one of the reasons the focus is on the chatbot, Fred, is because that's what most of us are familiar with from the consumer experience. We log into a website, and Amazon is one example, and boom, that window comes up that says, how can I help you? In one sense it's kind of a tier-one service or support tier-one response and there's some value to that. I was thinking about Amazon's website compared to campus websites. If you think about Amazon, you buy something, I buy something. All you know there's a crowdsourcing intelligence. If you think about how that might apply to a college syllabus, so the faculty member says for the next class, read all this. But with AI, if I can tag what the smart kids are doing as opposed to what the professor said I should do. I would follow the crowdsource intelligence of what the smart kids are doing, which may not be what the faculty member has said.

Casey Green (23:26):

It's this kind of bringing that together. And yet there is so much more, when I look at our survey data from CAOs about AI, a couple of things emerge. One, the early implementations are going to be those that are baked in. You know, there's a thing about AI after the implementation as opposed to operational ERP, organizational kinds of issues. It's the ones that get baked in by third parties that will be the ones that will be easiest and most widely deployed because they don't require an individual's involvement. It doesn't necessarily require an individual to sign off or do any custom design work on some of these issues. And potentially there's an immediate, and at least in the presentation, if it's done right, there's an immediate added value. If it's done well and it's done right. But again, with any kind of technology, there's a learning curve for this.

Casey Green (24:14):

I think about where that applies to analytics, where it applies to some other kinds of institutional resources and services, these things are going to take time. We're going to have to get past this kind of, as I would characterize them, these as kind of a tier-one response. The chatbot pops up and says, "how can I help you with tutoring?"; Or "how can I help you navigate the campus website or financial aid?"; or

some of these other kinds of issues for additional added value resources and services to other constituencies and other stakeholders.

Fred Weiss (24:48):

Yes, it's interesting. You've mentioned two stellar examples of the use of AI. To your point, that the chatbot is what we're most familiar with. But I think what is really lost on a lot of folks is how much of AI and machine learning is going on behind the scenes at Amazon and also Netflix. Those are considered category killers in their worlds because they're using AI to make predictions about what you are most likely to want to acquire. And, and I think people are really familiar with that in the Netflix world because of all the suggestions that they're making for the TV programs you should watch and the movies that you should watch based upon your viewing habits across the months or weeks or even in the current environment, the days that you're streaming. It strikes me at least, that there are probably category killers like Amazon and Netflix, that might be coming for higher education. But to your point, there's still a ton of education that's needed to get beyond this kind of tier-one applications.

Casey Green (25:58):

If we use the Netflix or Amazon analogy for a moment, there are applications out there, for example, that do that with course selection for students, in terms of major and essentially degree completion and other kinds of issues. And to me, that again that's a high-level tier one, but it's the tier one. It's kind of a mapping, it's taking again this experience of you and other majors in terms of where you are and what you'd like to do, but that doesn't require training on the part of the end user. It says that's delivered to you. And as we think about what may be the higher order opportunities in terms of faculty looking at what's going on in their classes, deans and administrators looking at what's going on in departments, and across the academic enterprise, there may be more training and user engagement other than the kind we're going to just present this to you as a fait accompli. And that's going to take more work on the part of both users and providers.

Fred Weiss (26:51):

Yes. Good point. So, now we're really going to change gears. You served as the Director of the Digital Fellows Program for a fellowship program for 30 provosts. And you got to know that group pretty well. What are some observations or advice you would give to C-level administrators in higher ed?

What are some observations or advice you would give to Chief Academic Officers in higher ed?



Provosts as Digital Leaders
DIGITAL TWEED BLOG
<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/digital-tweed/provosts-digital-leaders>

Exploring the CAO Role in Digital Learning
EDUCAUSE REVIEW
<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2019/2/exploring-the-cao-role-in-digital-learning>

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Casey Green (27:20):

Here is some background on that. This was a very different initiative from the Gates Foundation. Up until this program, a lot of their stuff was sort of on the ground. This was really targeted as a leadership development program. It was a national competition for 30 provosts and unlike other kinds of traditional fellowships, which is about my portfolio, this was about helping provosts develop a portfolio to help their institutions. Some had some experience in digital learning, some did not, but it was an attempt to say, we're going to create professional development opportunities and we're also going to provide a little seed money in terms of what you might do at your institutions to provide additional leadership and additional support. This program was incredibly successful. The million-dollar grant generated another \$8 million in campus commitments for various kinds of digital initiatives across the campuses that were involved in this program.

Casey Green (28:11):

I think for many of the provosts, some were surprised when they actually had to go pull back and see what was the inventory and activity at their campuses. For others that opened up issues about how do we deal with recognition and reward for faculty members and for many to affirm a new level of commitment in terms of their interest in and their understanding about instructional infrastructure, user support, and strategic planning on the instructional side in terms of looking at that tech enabled, high touch part of it. I think, as kind of the summary of a year in the CIO role, the kind of the learning outcomes for many faculty members. This is not easy. This is not bolting on technology. There's a lot of planning. You have to have faculty engagement, instructional support. To me, one of the most successful examples we saw at some institutions was that some of them created their own version of a digital fellows program in terms of we're going to give you a small grant to do something in your courses rather than just saying, okay, you are a digital fellow waving a wand at Acme College, they did ceremonies, they did campus announcements to elevate those folks, but at the same time they did a public marriage ceremony in the sense that, by the way, this is Susan Jones or Robert Smith from the campus technology center.

Casey Green (29:29):

This is your new BFF. This person's going to work with you. So it's not a matter of the mad scramble and the closing weeks to say, "Oh, I got to get this done." This is somebody you're going to work with an introduced to, a resource to all sort of front on that planning process and highlight it in a public way and a commitment to assessment on these things. And there was also a commitment, I think that was one of the striking things as well to kind of, which is very hard for campuses and very hard for CAOs. In fact, what did we do well and what do we need to do better? We, in terms of changing the data culture, the data culture in higher ed for too long has been what have you done wrong and how can we beat you over the head with this thing as opposed to let's change that data culture of using data as a resource, not as a weapon.

Casey Green (30:17):

What do we learn from this and how do we go forward? We're not here to penalize you. We're going to say, okay, we're going to understand they're going to go, we're not going to do this a hundred percent well, you know there's, we want to underplay the tendency to over-promise. We don't want you to cook the numbers. We want you to be candid about the numbers and how do we do this on an iterative basis, both that you, the individual campuses, and the group, to collectively learn from these experiences, share from these experiences and go forward using data as a resource, not as a weapon.

Fred Weiss (30:49):

Great point. And I would think that there was eye opening here that digital transformation is not just solely the responsibility of the CIO, but also created a much tighter relationship between these CAOs and the CIOs with which they work.

Casey Green (31:05):

I mean part of the piece that's on the left side of the screen, [Provost as Digital Leaders](#). If you look at this process over essentially five decades, 40 years with the arrival of Maxim PCs, you know, if your hair is gray or thinning, you've been at war around through this process. You know, originally these were viewed as a technology problem. What do we do with these Macs and PCs? And so these became, you know, often the leadership on this, and I say this a little bit flippantly, but respectfully became the heavy metal guys. The people that emerge in these leadership positions with the vice presidents for computing. IT's a pre-CIO term, and it was how do we deal with these, these things for heavy metal guys, they were engineers and came out of engineering and computer information departments.

Casey Green (31:54):

The second wave of leadership, I think were academics who were perhaps not in science and technology fields but saw the power potential and got drawn in as a second wave of leadership. And the third wave to me that's emerged over the last several years is a group of CIOs to whom you know, all of a sudden, they recognize that this is going to go forward. This is about the academic infrastructure, not just the IT

infrastructure all along. This is one of the issues as we look at what's going on in the wake of COVID. In the wake of Katrina, in the wake of Sandy, and other kinds of disasters that have hit regions and individual campuses, a lot of the disaster planning or response was about IT security. It was about operational issues and the instructional disaster issues were effectively dealt with like a snow day. Short-term interruptions which we can easily recover. COVID is not a snow day. This is not three or four days of interruption. This is large. This is significant. This is undetermined in terms of how we go forward and again in this rush to screen and stream has huge consequences for individual faculty members, for institutions, for students, in terms of how we do this now and how we go forward and the absence of instructional plans for that, for these issues and how that will change the larger conversation about instructional planning and the definition and the resources allocated instructional infrastructure.

Fred Weiss (33:28):

Yes. I would hazard a guess, Casey, that the 30 provosts who went through this program are way better prepared than the majority of provosts in the wake of COVID-19

Casey Green (33:39)

I'm hoping so. It's a good question. I'll poll them.

Fred Weiss (33:43):

Speaking of COVID-19, you must have some further thoughts and recommendations. We referenced this earlier. Everything has changed. This is seismic, right? Staff has remote working arrangements. Online learning or remote learning actually is the better phrase for it. Admissions deadlines being changed from May 1st to June 1st, on-campus and off-campus events. The budgeting process being completely blown up by this, including public funding, a student's ability to pay, endowment and fundraising performance. You know, you must have some thoughts and recommendations about technology, its risks and rewards, particularly in the environment of COVID-19.

**Given the COVID-19 pandemic,
what are your thoughts or
recommendations about technology,
its risks and rewards,
in this environment?**

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Casey Green (34:27):

The first thing we do is take a deep breath, but not a long one. And we have to walk. We cannot avoid this. Obviously, most campuses aren't. But you know when I think about some of the press releases I saw that was sort of suggested with the wave of the digital wand, we'll solve this problem. Remote learning is not online learning. This is kind of bolted on at best with flour paste glue for some folks. Some campuses had two days; others had two weeks. I think of Jim Ptaszynski who's the Vice President for Digital Learning for the University of North Carolina system. When I talked with Jim in the early days of this, after the North Carolina system announcement, he was talking about 15,000 faculty members and 54,000 courses over two weeks, and that was the classroom-based courses, let alone anything else.

Casey Green (35:15)

It was already going on online. How do you do that? How do you provide support for that? How do you do training and infrastructure for that? I think that some advocates and evangelists will say, you know, this crisis is a terrible thing to waste. For some faculty members, it will be the catalyst to say, okay, I've got to confront and master some of these tools that I've avoided for a period of time. But that doesn't solve the larger problem. We're going to have to deal with issues with what we have to call the lost term. You know, in terms of what's going on. The conversations about pass-fail. They're going on in both K-12 and higher ed. How do we deal with that instructional experience and doing those assessments?

Casey Green (35:58):

How do we do planning for the fall? Because not only is the instructional infrastructure been overwhelmed, just trying to play catch up now, but for the faculty members who were planning courses and how do they retool those courses based on both this experience and the unknown. What do we have to do for fall 2020 for both in large courses and small and student populations. What's opening going to look like? What's orientation going to look like? Obviously, graduation across the board have been canceled. How our campus is going to deal with the finances on this? There's one part of that for

the room and board operations. Are they going to give back on tuition? We don't know. And there's just the question about where and how we know and who's affected.

This will be a key to the conversation we were having before about some campuses at risk of closing. That's going to be accelerated. We're seeing the announcement of campus closings already. What about part-time faculty? These are the gig employees in higher ed. They're being asked to do even more work than they normally do for a pittance. You know, to carry on their courses. I have no great wisdom. I can raise the questions. I don't have answers. But one thing I would actually say is as campus leaders go forward, the tendency is going to be to cut IT. Don't do it. Don't whack the infrastructure. If anything, figure out how to invest more in the infrastructure because that instructional infrastructure is going to be essential.

Fred Weiss (37:35):

It's interesting because one of the things I was thinking about while you were talking was whether or not there might be a greater tendency to look these days at ROI for technology investments. I mean ROI, I don't have to tell you it's a dirty word in the context of most higher ed institutions. And you know, to your last point about don't whack the infrastructure, do you think ROI becomes a more important part of the conversation?

Casey Green (38:00):

It does, but the fact is this is like testing for the virus. It's too late in many ways. We have done a terrible job of assessing our ROI. Our survey data says that maybe a fifth of campuses do any kind of evaluation of their IT initiatives, whether they're classroom innovations or other kinds of things. So all of a sudden say, wait a minute, we have to stop and do ROI. We don't have a choice. I get to use that bad metaphor. We're building the plane while we fly it. We're going to have to bake some of these in now as we go forward. But the fact is we are going to be even more dependent upon some of these technologies and are going to have to make thoughtful choices. The tendency, I fear, is that many campuses are going to cut back and, and my one statement is dumped now more than ever, You have to invest in the infrastructure, instructional support for faculty, user support for faculty, user support for students, and other kinds of resources to the extent that campuses can provide them.

Whether it's WiFi for off campus populations who have dispersed other kinds of instructional support, Chromebooks for students who don't have adequate platforms. All this is part of the challenges that we confront individually and collectively.

Fred Weiss (39:24):

Great Casey, appreciate those comments. For those of you watching and listening during the interview today, we referenced several blog articles and reports that may be of interest. Be sure to check out these links that you see on the screen here. You can also find the links to these blog articles and reports on the Othot website in the resources section and you would go to www.othot.com to actually find those.

References from Today's Talk:

- *Still Not Using Data to Inform Decisions and Policy*, Digital Tweed Blog
<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/digital-tweed/still-not-using-data-inform-decisions-and-policy>
- 2020 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report™
<https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2020/3/2020horizonreport.pdf>
- Green and Hatkoff, Exploring the CAO Role in Digital Learning, *EDUCAUSE Review*, February 2019
<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2019/2/exploring-the-cao-role-in-digital-learning>
- Provosts as Digital Leaders (Digital Tweed Reprint)
<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/digital-tweed/provosts-digital-leaders>
- Campus Computing Survey
<https://www.campuscomputing.net/>

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Thanks, Casey for not only joining us today but for being our first guest on Othot Talks Higher Ed. I enjoyed the conversation immensely. Appreciate it. As I previously stated, if you'd like to check out Casey's blog articles or learn about Othot, visit the website at othot dot com. If you have any topics or suggestions for speakers, please let us know. You can contact us at othotteam@othot.com. Casey, again, very, very appreciative, you've been gracious with your time today.

I don't know if you've got any closing thanks or comments you'd like to make to our listeners.

Casey Green (40:24):

I just wish everybody well through this, both personally as well as professionally. This is a huge challenge. The likes of which we've not seen. You know, I've lived in higher ed for 40 years, you know, each crisis along the way. People say is this actually going to be the big one.

Fred Weiss (40:44):

I'll echo that in the current environment, please remember everybody to stay physically distanced. Remember all whom you stay home for – the healthcare workers, the service industry staff, your family, your friends, your colleagues. Stay safe and healthy. And everybody, thanks for listening. We'll talk again soon.