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Innovate-Ideagora: What's Happening

by Alan McCord and Denise Easton

In our previous issue, we introduced [Innovate-Ideagora](#), a social and professional networking site designed to enhance professional communication within the *Innovate* community. We are pleased to report that Innovate-Ideagora now has almost 280 members, many of them actively contributing to a lively set of discussions.

In October, we conducted the first of what will be a series of live interviews with innovators, thinkers, and leaders in the field. Julie Little, director of the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative ([ELI](#)), discussed ELI's development of the [Top Teaching and Learning Challenges](#) initiative, which is supported by its own Ning-based [network](#). Like Innovate-Ideagora, the initiative uses its Ning social network to survey the community, brainstorm, and develop resources to address the major barriers to the effective use of technology to improve learning. The Challenges initiative, which is intended to support ELI's wider mission of advancing learning through technological innovation, joins ELI's other outreach and community building forums, including the "[7 Things You Should Know](#)" series, the annual [Horizon Report](#), an annual meeting, and focus sessions and webinars. Reflecting ELI's focus on learners and learning principles, Little also discussed the need to develop and sustain active learning environments where technology tools and pedagogical interactions are used to fulfill content requirements, meet learner needs, and fit instructor style. You are invited to listen to the on-demand [archive](#) of her interview.

What's New on Innovate-Ideagora

We started two follow-up discussions in Innovate-Ideagora to explore issues raised by Little in her interview. One [question](#) focused on the teaching and learning challenges posed by the trend toward technology mobility. The [second question](#) focused on what it means to be involved in—as opposed to simply being a member of—a social networking community. [Tadeusz LemaDczyk](#) and [Jim Shimabukuro](#) exchanged their views on this issue with Jim suggesting that the challenge is "not so much how we can get people to shop in our store but how can we get people to shop wisely."

Another [post](#) by Jim Shimabukuro, this one focused on identifying topics for further discussion in Innovate-Ideagora, generated an active exchange. [Steve Eskow](#) responded with a call to discuss the issue of presence in distance learning, and [Claude Almansi](#) pointed out that "learner's group activities are also part of the learning process." [John Adsit](#) discussed the intersection of educational innovation and government regulation of the education enterprise, especially in the K-12 arena, and Almansi responded by identifying the blocking of Web 2.0 tools in schools as a barrier to innovation. All of these topics promise to fuel passionate discussions in the coming months.

In a separate [discussion](#) echoing [Jim Morrison's](#) August [post](#), [Don Grady](#) raised the challenge of motivating the "technological dinosaurs" among us who do not use technology despite being "excellent facilitators of learning in the classroom." In response, [Linda Morosko](#) suggested that we search for ways to allow instructors to simply "be themselves" in online classes, recognizing that online instruction is not for everyone. Claude Almansi reminded us to be aware of access issues for disabled students.

On a related [topic](#), [Hanan El-Halawany](#) wrote about cultural resistance to technology, noting that in most Arab countries, technology "is considered a Western product. Many view it as the West's tool to impose its culture and style of life on us. It is simply another face of Western domination and another tool of colonizing

the Arab Islamic world." Steve Eskow suggested that education itself was the answer as wider access to education would open up the issue for discussion; El-Halawany responded that education was needed on both sides as part of the problem lay in Arab awareness of the West's negative stereotypes of Arabs as terrorists and extremists. [Alan McCord](#) suggested that this perception was at least exaggerated, and the misperception itself presented an educational opportunity: "So I am curious about what information source(s) you are using to draw your conclusion? Perhaps exploring how information is disseminated using technology can help to improve cross-cultural understanding about technology."

Elsewhere, members responded to a [plea](#) for advice about how to integrate technology in a school district with very few resources. [Bill Belsey](#) suggested that poster [Bill](#) (no last name) turn to his community both for support and to craft a program that fits the context, and Claude Almansi pointed out the wide array of freeware and shareware available. John Adsit advised Bill to make sure first that he has a clear vision for his school district; based on his experience in a Colorado school district, Adsit cautioned that "Imposing a technological solution on a school system that is not totally prepared to embrace it will fail. It is as simple as that. For a change like this to be successful, it must be part of a total vision that is accepted and owned by everyone in the school community." In other discussions, Jim Shimabukuro's [post](#) responding to Steve Eskow's comments on the need to engage with the deconstructionist concept of the [metaphysics of presence](#) in thinking about online education generated several thoughtful replies.

These and other discussions can be found on [Innovate-Ideagora](#); please join in and contribute your thoughts!

Coming Up on Innovate-Ideagora

We have an exciting line-up of expert guests for future Innovate-Ideagora interviews:

- Ross Kimbarovsky, cofounder of [crowdSPRING](#), a new economy company that believes strongly in the creative process and the protection of intellectual property.
- Ed Gehringer, associate professor of ECE and computer science at North Carolina State University ([NCSU](#)), who is currently engaged in adapting social networking to a social learning model.
- Clifford Lynch, director of the Coalition for Networked Information ([CNI](#)), a coalition of about 200 member organizations concerned with the use of information technology and networked information to enhance scholarship and intellectual productivity.
- Tim McLain and Adam Blackwell from [ProQuest](#), which provides access to information from periodicals, newspapers, multimedia and image collections, out-of-print books, dissertations, and scholarly collections in various formats.

We are seeking your input for these interviews. Let us know what you'd like us to ask them by posting your questions to Innovate-Ideagora; we'll create specific forums for this purpose as interviews are scheduled. To find out when specific interviews are scheduled or to participate in the live sessions, please check the Innovate-Live [schedule](#).

As a marketplace for ideas, Innovate-Ideagora lets us all participate directly in wide-ranging conversations about education and information technology. This new feature represents an important step in *Innovate's* ongoing mission to spotlight the latest innovations in technology and explore their implications for education in all its forms. Membership is open to all, and registration is easy and free. We hope you will join us in our experiment. Visit <http://innovate-ideagora.ning.com> to establish your profile and join the discussion!

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