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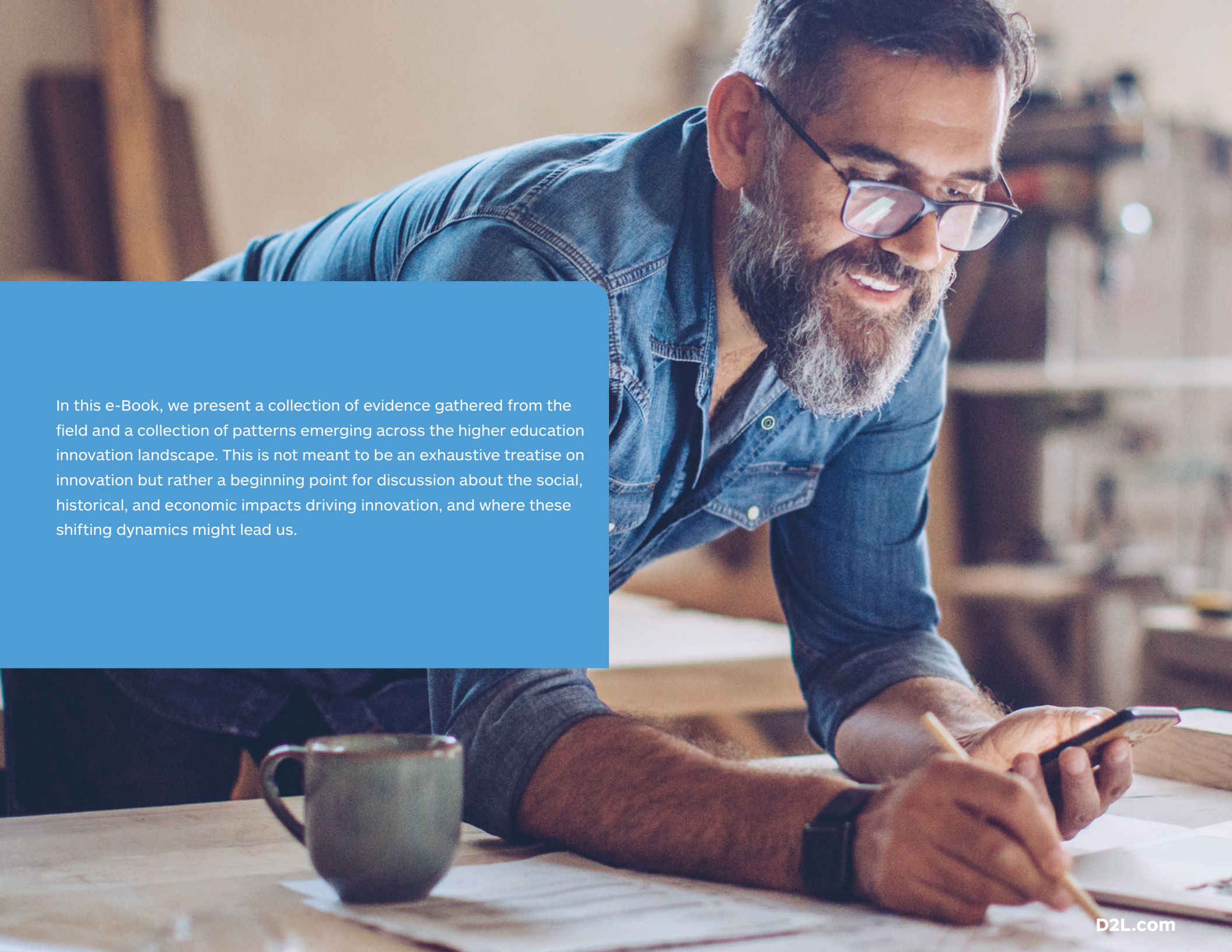
Welcome to a New World of Innovating Education

Why postsecondary institutions are turning to entrepreneurship, experimentation, and discovery to drive innovation.

In this e-Book, we present a collection of evidence gathered from the field and a collection of patterns emerging across the higher education innovation landscape. This is not meant to be an exhaustive treatise on innovation but rather a beginning point for discussion about the social, historical, and economic impacts driving innovation, and where these shifting dynamics might lead us.

Welcome to a new world of innovation

"In all education the main cause of failure is staleness."
- Alfred North Whitehead[1]

In a recent survey, 68% of schools ranked student success as a top-three goal for innovation, with just under half considering it their top goal.[2] Innovation, defined as the implementation of new initiatives to drive growth, increase revenue, reduce cost, differentiate experience, or adjust the value proposition, is now dominating the thinking of educators as postsecondary institutions contend with changing student demographics, growing public concerns about the value of higher education, and misalignment between graduate skill sets and employer requirements.

Innovation comes in a variety of flavors and forms. However, what is important to note is that innovation is about seeing new possibilities in old problems. While the term "innovation" is most often associated with technology or groundbreaking ideas, most innovation is tackled in baby steps. The small wins experienced in the moment are what truly motivate and reward us.

Looking across the higher education landscape, innovation is changing the way courses are delivered, the way learning spaces are designed and organized, and the way programs are paced and priced. Leading institutions are rethinking how best to serve learners across their lifetimes.

Today, 65% of children entering kindergarten will ultimately end up in job types that do not yet exist[3]. With these new demands of work in mind, more and more college leaders are asking themselves:

- How can we help learners get the skills, knowledge, and abilities they need to start a good career?

- In what ways can we support them professionally over their lifetimes?[4]

So what does this new postsecondary innovation landscape look like? Is it all technology based, rich with makerspaces, artificial intelligence (AI), or robotics? Certainly, technology in the classroom will play a significant and growing role in tomorrow's postsecondary learning, providing important connective tissue for innovation. However, according to experts, successful innovation must also happen on a macro scale. Innovation is about big data and predictive analytics. It is about an evolution of the role of the teacher/instructor. It is about new campus and classroom formats and designs. It is about new forms and styles of classroom and online delivery. And it is about operational change, including disruptive new business models, strategies and processes, and incentives to ensure stakeholders are in informed of future goals.

CHAPTER

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Online Learning

Reaching a place of acceptance of new models for teaching and learning

Over the past two decades, the ways in which we teach and learn have been significantly impacted by technology, specifically the internet. Access to courses and content online has exploded, with institutions of every stripe experimenting with various ways to teach and learn online.

According to a 2018 Babson Survey Research Group report that tracked distance education in the United States, enrollment in distance education courses increased for the 14th straight year, with nearly 31.6% of all students now taking at least one distance education course (a total of 6,359,121 students).[5]

Clearly, the higher education marketplace has voted with its dollars. The past nearly two decades have proven to colleges and universities that online learning is not a fad or trend. It is a legitimate means of doing high-quality business.

To this end, several new opportunities to serve students at a distance from campus have arisen and are worth watching. Here are a few:

Stackable degrees

As the name implies, stackable degrees are degree programs in which students can take a few courses, "stack" them together, earn a certificate, and later apply those course credits toward a full master's program. Such an approach allows students to try out their interests and abilities in advanced courses without initially overcommitting to a degree program. Schools experimenting with this approach include Purdue University, MIT, the University of Illinois, and Georgia Tech.

Stackable credentials appear to be most appropriate for nontraditional students balancing their education with other priorities such as raising a family and working full time. Such flexibility can allow students to step out and back in as their schedules permit. For example, there may be a term when a student doesn't take courses and then a semester when the student doubles up in order to complete the degree at a convenient pace for his or her current situation.

5 Seaman, J. E., Allen, I. E., Seaman, J., & Babson Survey Research Group. (2018). Grade Increase: Tracking Distance Education in the United States. Babson Survey Research Group. Babson College, 231 Forest Street, Babson Park, MA 02457

MOOCs, MicroMasters and digital badges

Massively open online courses at one time represented a terrific idea of making access to higher education courses and content openly available. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum. Interest in MOOCs, while initially strong, faded faster than a bad airport Wi-Fi connection.

However, MOOC innovators and providers such as Coursera and MITx have found a way to capitalize on their initial investments. MITx, for example, has developed a program that allows students to complete five MOOCs and earn a verified certificate from each, and then complete a capstone exam and receive an MITx MicroMaster's credential to exemplify expertise in their subject matter. Similarly, last year, the University of Illinois and Coursera launched an iMBA online program that gives students a variety of options for progression through the program. Students can audit classes for free online, get certificates for individual MOOCs or specializations comprising multiple MOOCs, or finish the full MBA.

Digital badges are a visual way of showing academic (e.g., workshop participation) and nonacademic achievement and experiences (e.g., volunteer activities). They are often associated with competency-based programs where mastery of the content not grades is the primary focus.

While digital badges will not replace bachelor's degrees anytime in the immediate future, an increasing number of colleges and institutions are working with vendors to create and employ badges as value-added complements to degrees in order to allow students to display and showcase skills, knowledge, and abilities that a conventional transcript fails to document.

According to a recent survey of 190 institutions conducted by the University Professional and Continuing Education Association and Pearson, one in five colleges has issued digital badges.[6] Interestingly, most institutions that have experimented with badging hired an outside company to help get the program started.

Brandman University and Capella University both have been actively experimenting with badges. At Santa Barbara City College, students can earn badges in areas such as digital design, blogging for business, and computer hardware fundamentals.

Such outcomes-based credentials are designed to answer these questions: Who did this? What did they do? And who says they did it? In some cases–the Colorado Community College System, for example– employers and colleges collaborate to design the criteria for earning a badge. This way, colleges, their employer partners, and students can be sure that the badge has actual market value.

Credentials that recognize achievement on a smaller scale than degrees do, ranging from digital badges to credit-bearing stackable certificates, are gaining momentum in online higher education. Online students can use the smaller credentials for immediate career advancement and decide whether to continue in their program or stop where they are and still be recognized in some way. While stackable credentials, MicroMasters, and digital badges are still in their early stages, they are catching on and now present a viable option for online learners.

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About D2L

D2L is the software leader that makes learning experiences better. The company's cloud-based platform is easy to use, flexible, and smart. With Brightspace, organizations can personalize the experience for every learner to deliver real results. The company is a world leader in learning analytics: Its platform predicts learner performance so that organizations can take action in real time to keep learners on track. Brightspace is used by learners in higher education, schools, and the enterprise sector, including the Fortune 1000. D2L has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore.

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