CROWDSOURCING IN EDUCATION

IDEASCALE WHITE PAPER
Crowdsourcing In Education

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Crowdsourcing in Education

Changes in technology, society, and the seemingly never-ending trend of rising educational costs are culminating in a rapid transformation across the entire educational sector. Enrollments continue to decline for the fourth straight year according to the National Student Clearinghouse. Innovation that extends beyond research laboratories, special assignments and competitions is needed to reverse this trend.

Innovation continues to change the way administration and learning happen at every stage of education, from primary to post-secondary education. But ideas by themselves are not innovation. Innovation is the (sometimes long) journey of taking these ideas and bringing them to fruition.

Imagine a journey that could be a little less tedious, shorter in duration or fully planned and executed with strategies in place that mitigate delays. Crowdsourcing is the answer and it’s taking innovation in education to the next level.

The State of Innovation in Education

Educational culture tends to be wary of change, but there is evidence to suggest that this cautious attitude is shifting. According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the educational sector is more innovative than society gives it credit for. In fact, 70% of graduates employed in the educational sector consider their institutions highly innovative.

Despite its low rankings in innovation when compared to other countries, US-based institutions are putting heavy focus on innovation. In 2011, 142 major research universities and associations submitted a letter to the Secretary of Commerce renewing their commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship on campus and in their communities according to the Department of Commerce's Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Educational institutions are on board and ready to support innovation and continuous improvement, but it isn’t easy.

Historically, knowledge in many educational institutions hasn’t been collaborative. It’s typically owned and distributed through a few experts deeply ingrained in their research and area of expertise. But, what happens when that tenured expert moves on? Whatever isn’t documented along with years of experience leaves too. Crowdsourcing can help reduce this risk.
With crowdsourcing, ideas are generated from multiple contributors, including experts. It can be a viable model for ideating and sharing best practices that lead to positive student outcomes. As more millennials - who grew up with technology and crowdsourced their consumer purchases – continue to take on more leadership roles, the comfort-level with innovation through crowdsourcing increases.

This paper will provide you with a greater level of comfort with crowdsourcing in an educational environment, which should help you make an informed decision on how you and your organization should move forward beginning with the end in mind.

This paper covers:

1. Application of crowdsourcing in education.
2. Requirements for successful implementation of crowdsourcing in education.

Crowdsourcing is an engagement method whereby organizations (including educational institutions) seek input from the crowd (including students, faculty and staff) or community. It’s mostly gathered through social media, but can also be gathered through other means.
Crowdsourcing in education has had successful effects on student results in many countries. For example, a project called Crowd-sourcing Girls’ Education used a community-based approach to lower drop-out rates in secondary schools in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In Canada, The University of Calgary identified opportunities to make up for 7.3% of the 2013 budget shortfall in about one month. And in the United States, multiple universities continue to implement innovation programs that improve student enrollment and retention, reduce costs and improve faculty and staff productivity.

While educational institutions realize the benefits of innovation, two arguably more important stakeholders can take advantage of benefits they’re not accustomed to receiving. Faculty and students can use crowdsourcing not only to develop the best curriculum but to increase productivity and learning along the way.

Teachers and professors can share lesson plans with each other and find new and innovative ways to share material with students. They can brainstorm together to create a database of resources and best practices that benefit their institution – and then share that information with other schools as well. They can deliver versions of curriculum to students, receive feedback and rapidly implement those changes to the benefit of the next class. Finally, faculty can use peer evaluations to help with grading practices and to receive feedback on their teaching styles.

Students, on the other hand, can follow similar process flows to get help with homework and answers to practice problems. They can create and share summaries of classes, books, and other materials. On another level, crowdsourcing in education gives students a chance to participate in a group process where they are able to evaluate real-life problems and propose creative solutions. By working with others, discussing the topic at hand, they’ll increase their overall understanding of the subject.
Successful implementation of crowdsourcing in education takes careful planning, resources and a scalable platform. Organizations must first understand the goal of their innovation program before they seek to fulfill the four requirements: processes, resources, platform and culture.

**Processes**

Having a clear strategy and vision for the innovation program ensures there is a clear objective for every idea that becomes worthy of implementing. Does the organization seek to increase revenue or reduce costs? Perhaps the goal is to increase recruitment or alumni involvement. Whatever the goal, each idea is evaluated based on its ability to fulfill the program’s mission. Then it’s implemented using a process that incorporates four innovation stages.

There should be underlying processes that explain how the idea will be used, ownership of the design, conflict resolutions, rewards, and team member roles and responsibilities. These procedures will ensure that everyone understands the rules and can contribute with the knowledge that their ideas are valued and appropriately attributed.

**Columbia University Case Study**

Columbia University used crowdsourcing to dramatically enhance the student experience at the school. By allowing students to suggest ideas in the “What to Fix Columbia” community, the school received feedback and implemented changes that made a significant difference in how students operate at school. Some of the low-hanging fruit ideas included small things like revised gate hours and a new mailbox notification system. Other projects included removing the requirement that commencement speakers have a Columbia degree and reducing the bureaucracy associated with change. Through all of the improvements, the students have learned the power of sharing ideas and working together to implement change.
The Four Innovation Stages

STAGE 1: IDEATE

The first stage of successful innovation is to refine your idea and ensure its acceptance. The purpose of this stage is to get the best ideas accepted and create momentum to get them implemented. To do this, you can have various people within your organization submit ideas and vote on the best ones.

STAGE 2: BUILD A TEAM TO REFINE THE IDEA

Once innovation ideas begin to flow into your system, you’ll want to make sure a process is in place to refine and evaluate them. This is best done with a team. You can divide the team into groups, with select members serving as experts in certain systems. In this way, innovations relating to a specific part of your organization can be evaluated by those most likely to understand the impact.

STAGE 3: REFINE IDEA TO ROBUST PROPOSAL

Once the teams are in place, the process can begin. Ideas are submitted, evaluated, and put into an implementation plan. Resource estimates are prepared, time frames are estimated, and the team prepares a step by step plan of action.

STAGE 4: ASSESS AND IMPLEMENT

Once the proposal is ready, the team can pitch it to the decision makers for funding. In this stage, the ideas are prioritized based on impact, ease of implementation, and resource availability. The people who submitted the idea should be involved at every stage if possible. It’s key to include them during this stage and recognize them publicly. Publicizing the many wins the system has created drives additional confidence in the improvement process and encourages more stakeholders to suggest innovative ideas.
Resources

Human and financial capital are a necessity to implement, manage and educate on the innovation program. In addition to the team defined in the Innovation Stages, other individuals need to contribute and the budget must be fully allocated to ensure that the idea makes it through to completion.

It’s also important to have good communication processes in place. This communication can be done through the faculty and staff, but also through standard communication platforms such as mail, email, social media and student portals.

Platform

Once a process is in place with resources to support it, an innovation platform can help scale the program and ensure that procedures are followed, ideas are attributed, and metrics are tracked. The platform should contain centralized information that others can access, such as goals, policies and procedures, rewards, and frequently asked questions. It should be easy to navigate to discover topics, discussions, and ideas. It should have an easy to use interface that makes it quick to signup, submit ideas and get involved.

Culture

Processes and procedures combined with a great marketing campaign won’t get an innovation program off the ground unless there’s a culture in place to support it. It’s important to build a culture that motivates and supports collaboration while at the same time rewarding participation by the crowd at all levels. This requires both a top-down and bottom-up approach where open communication is valued and success is celebrated. An innovative culture requires a holistic approach.
Conclusion

Innovation Isn’t Planned. Students, teachers, and staff are used to education that’s orderly and built upon learning objectives that feed one another. However, innovation isn’t linear. It occurs when people are surrounded by resources, ideas, and opportunities around the globe at any time of day.

Participation is key and incentives can be as simple as the feeling of “being heard” or as complex as “licensing and royalties.” It’s important that everyone understand that they can participate, why it’s important, and how they’ll benefit.

SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION IN EDUCATION

Georgetown University Case Study

Georgetown University uses crowdsourcing to implement the best time and cost-saving innovations suggested by faculty and students. A virtual IdeaScale community allows for idea suggestions, voting, and significant discussion. One of the key time-saving ideas that was employed at Georgetown included bringing class evaluations online. This step alone gives faculty more efficient and effective access to feedback, allowing them to quickly react to student suggestions.
Related Reading

Blogs:
- blog.ideavibes.com covers both crowdsourcing and crowdfunding
- blog.fundchange.com focused on crowdfunding for not-for-profits and charities
- Crowdsourcing Industry Site www.crowdsourcing.org
- Crowdsortium www.crowdsortium.com
- Innovation Management www.innovation.se
- The Daily Crowsource www.thedailycrowsource.com

Articles and Papers:
- Creative Rewards to Incentivize Engagement: https://ideascale.com/resource/creative-rewards-to-incentivize-engagement/

Books:
- The Wisdom of Crowds by James Surowiecki
- Crowdsourcing by Jeff Howe

A Guide to Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing: Advice From Leading Experts edited by Paul Sloane
(First published in Great Britain and the United States by Kogan Page Limited 2011)