

**YOU  
ARE  
HERE**

“The college is just so big”:  
Supporting students by reframing  
the higher education experience

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BMCC Students (image credit: Louis Chan)



Library Research Seminar 8:  
Telling Library Stories

University of Kentucky  
September 16, 2024

## Presenters & Abstract

- Africa Hands, University at Buffalo
- Melissa Blankstein, Ithaca S+R
- Jean Amaral, Borough of Manhattan Community College

“For me the college is just so big. Sometimes you get bounced back and forth from departments to departments... you get lost in bureaucracy.” For prospective and current students, the culture, nomenclature, and organization of higher education systems is often confusing, creating barriers to accessing needed services and information for enrollment and persistence. This panel will discuss the library’s role in supporting student navigation of services and resources, reframing the higher education experience through the concepts of college literacy and college fluency.

College literacy, focused on the pre-college information experience, is the knowledge base needed to make informed decisions about one’s entry into higher education. College fluency refers to the knowledge and set of abilities that enable students and staff to effectively locate and utilize relevant college services, programs, and resources, ensuring that students can successfully engage with and self-advocate within the culture and bureaucracy of higher education in order to achieve their goals. The focus of two ongoing IMLS-funded research projects, these complementary concepts provide an opportunity to rewrite the perception of prospective and current college students and their experiences within higher education through services provided by both public and community college libraries.

Panelists will highlight insights gained from their complementary research initiatives and provide polling opportunities for attendees to gauge their own college literacy and fluency needs, as well as that of their institutions. Panelists will facilitate a hands-on exercise guiding participants in applying findings to their own institutions and leading to concrete action steps.

## We Are of a Tribe

by Alberto Ríos

We plant seeds in the ground  
And dreams in the sky,

Hoping that, someday, the roots of one  
Will meet the upstretched limbs of the other.

It has not happened yet.  
We share the sky, all of us, the whole world:

Together, we are a tribe of eyes that look upward,  
Even as we stand on uncertain ground.

The earth beneath us moves, quiet and wild,  
Its boundaries shifting, its muscles wavering.

The dream of sky is indifferent to all this,  
Impervious to borders, fences, reservations.

The sky is our common home, the place we all live.  
There we are in the world together.

The dream of sky requires no passport.  
Blue will not be fenced. Blue will not be a crime.

Look up. Stay awhile. Let your breathing slow.  
Know that you always have a home here.

From Poetry of Presence: An Anthology of Mindfulness Poems, (Grayson Books, 2017). <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/151647/we-are-of-a-tribe>

How do these concepts resonate with your library's practices and context?

What ways can you engage in this work?

Are there existing services/programs that you can reframe within the context of college literacy or college fluency?



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<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/people-social-game-team-teamwork-8027909/>

### *Today's Session:*

- Introduction
- The problem with higher education
- Defining terms
- Audience reflection
- Personas
- Audience reflection
- Discussion



## COLLEGE LITERACY

The literacy or knowledge base needed to make informed decisions about one's entry into higher education.



## COLLEGE FLUENCY

The knowledge and set of abilities that enable students and staff to effectively locate and utilize relevant college services, programs, and resources, ensuring that students can successfully engage with and self-advocate within the culture and bureaucracy of higher education in order to achieve their goals.



## MEET DIEGO

- 30-year-old barista, English language learner, aspiring graphic designer
- His daily life balances full-time work, English practice, and online language courses
- Struggles with language barrier in college applications, coursework
- Limited support, primarily from friends and community workshops
- He is determined to attend college and pursue a design career

## EXPERIENCE SCENARIO

How can the library best support Diego and promote college literacy/fluency at different junctures in their student experience?

- Decision making process
- College applications
- Orientation & first semester
- Fall semester
- Spring semester



**How do these concepts resonate with your library's practices and context?**

**What ways can you engage in this work?**

**Are there existing services/programs that you can reframe within the context of college literacy or college fluency?**

Getting to know you . . .

## EXPERIENCE SCENARIO

*What are the holistic or non-curricular supports and services offered by your library or larger institution?*



*How well would you rate prospective or current students' ability to navigate higher education systems?*

*How well would you rate your own ability to help prospective and current students navigate your college's bureaucracy?*

How can the library best support Linda and promote college literacy/fluency at different junctures in their student experience?

- Decision making process
- College applications
- Orientation & first semester
- Fall semester
- Spring semester



## MEET LINDA

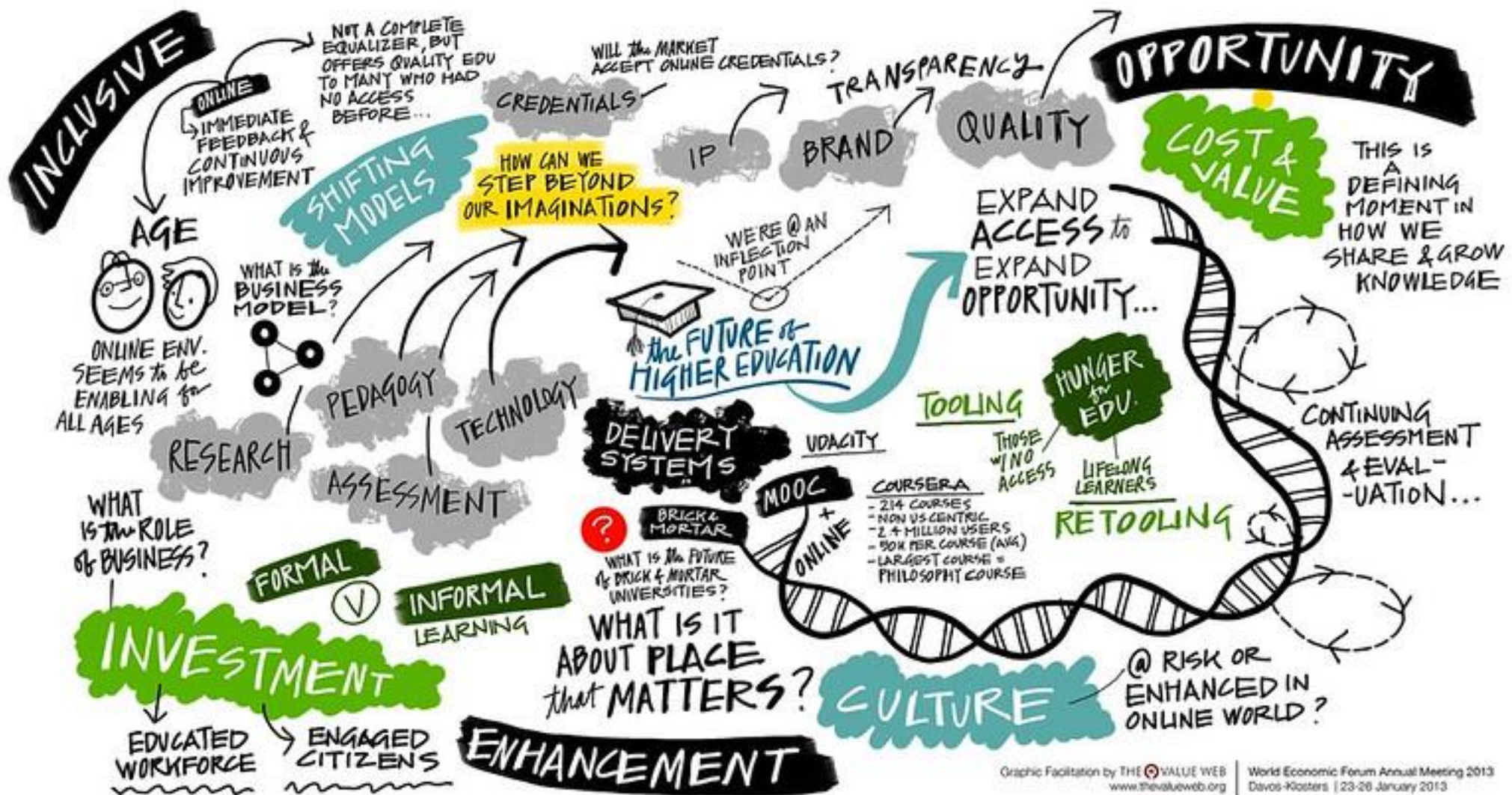
- 42-year-old mother, non-traditional student, works full time as customer service rep
- Her daily life balances full-time work, parenting, household duties, and college research
- Struggles with applications, time management, and financial concerns
- Minimal support, primarily from her teenage daughter's encouragement to return to college
- She is determined to pursue education for a better future for her and her daughter



Photo credit:GlobalIP  
purchased from iStock

The Power of Kawaii: Viewing Cute Images Promotes a Careful Behavior and Narrows Attentional Focus

<https://bit.ly/cutefocus>



The challenge and opportunity of higher ed systems and bureaucracy  
 (image: "The Future of Higher Education: Visual" by World Economic Forum is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)