



WEBINAR HIGHLIGHTS

The Laws of Attraction

Learning design methods that captivate students and drive outstanding outcomes

Authentic learning experiences help students understand the relevance of what they're learning and how they can apply new skills in the professional realm. Research shows that when learning is relevant to students, it is more effective. When students understand that their work can have a real-world impact, they're more invested in the outcomes.

Everspring, a leading provider of higher education technology and service solutions, asked leaders at its longtime partner, the University of Kansas (KU), to discuss how they leveraged student-centered design and technology to create collaborative online learning environments that have led to outstanding outcomes for students in the Educational Administrators graduate program. The panel included:

- Dr. Cynthia Mruczek, KU's School of Education and Human Sciences, Department of Special Education
- Dr. Jennifer Bessolo, KU's School of Education and Human Sciences, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
- Miriam Ofstein, Executive Director, Academic Operations, Everspring

Dr. Leah Howell, Director, Learning Design at Everspring, served as moderator. Following are some key takeaways from this important event, which is available to stream immediately [here](#).

Build student-centered learning experiences

Student-centered learning is a paradigm that places students in the driver's seat of their learning process. The core components are creating a space for personalized learning and recognizing that students engage in different ways, at different paces, and in different places.

In an asynchronous learning environment, high levels of engagement have a significant impact on the learner's knowledge, retention, and transfer. Studies have shown that increasing engagement in online environments is critical to student satisfaction. Student-centered learning is also competency-based and is not restricted to the classroom. Students can take more responsibility for their learning and support each other in their progress.

"At KU, we really work hard to support the students in taking what they're learning — the research, the theoretical concepts, the conceptual frameworks — and applying them directly to their practice," said Dr. Mruczek. "Authentic learning bridges the perceived research-to-practice gap."

"Education has come a long way in this area," said Dr. Bessolo. "But sometimes we still have a habit of teaching in isolation or trying to apply one or two skills in isolation. And that's just not the reality of any school leader right now."

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-Dr. Cynthia Mruczek

Take a holistic engagement approach

Everspring's core tenets of design consider engagement from three perspectives: instructor-to-student, student-to-student and student-to-content. All three are crucial to designing an asynchronous virtual environment. This approach helps students connect their learning to the world.

- **Instructor-to-student engagement** is the most traditional approach. It can include implementing office hours, providing feedback and assignments via video, utilizing Q&A forums, or other informal interactions within your learning management system.
- **Student-to-student engagement** can include group practice activities that apply the content to real-life scenarios or working through challenges in teams.
- **Student-to-content engagement** can involve third-party videos, relevant articles, guest speakers and other resources from outside the traditional textbook content that bring the subject matter to life.

Begin with your mission

The best way to develop an authentic learning experience is by starting with the values of your institution. They provide a foundation for the curriculum and a strong bond with students.

Everspring's team of instructional design experts helps faculty align learning outcomes to the institution, the student experience and the requirements of accreditation. By building a strong foundation based on the mission of the school, courses can be meaningfully aligned with the principles of student-centered learning.

KU's School of Education and Human Sciences program began with this mission:

- Prepare students to be leaders and practitioners in education and related human sciences fields.
- Expand and deepen understanding of education as a fundamentally human endeavor.
- Help society define and respond to its educational responsibilities and challenges.

Everspring collaborated with program chairs and faculty to discuss the mission and their individual goals for designing student-centered programs.



Integrate backwards design

Everspring typically recommends a backwards design approach, beginning with desired outcomes. For example, the outcome of a school resource management class might be the ability to design a budget.

“If we were to start with that assignment, it would clearly be overwhelming,” said Dr. Bessolo. “So instead of that, we teach the concepts and break down the benchmarks. We talk about pressure groups and stakeholders and leadership approaches and the multiple ways to do budgeting including zero-based and site-based. It builds a certain confidence that I haven’t seen when you study or design in isolation. Writing a budget requires a lot of critical thinking and originality that isn’t going to be specified in theory.”

Backwards design can also be used to create an entire curriculum. What are potential students’ goals and expectations from this program? What does your faculty know about the field that will benefit your students?

“In the case of the Educational Administration program at KU,” said Ofstein, “we started by identifying program objectives. We then aligned those to the program requirements, and then participated in exercises that mapped each of those items to the students’ journeys throughout the programs.”



Find the right technology, and take full advantage of it

After determining our goals and outcomes, it’s time to turn your attention to the execution.

1. Make sure that the technology you have completes the task. If your plans require more than a learning management system, find those tools.
2. Articulate and assign roles to your main stakeholders: program chairs, faculty and administrators. Everyone should understand their role moving forward.
3. Consider maintenance of the project. Ensure that whatever you integrate into your program will stand the test of time. It is important to think long-term and consider the implications of the endeavor that you’re about to undertake.

KU and Everspring collaborated to develop Jayhawkville, a virtual school district and interactive space that allows students to experience real-world scenarios in low-stakes environments.

The virtual district is built on vast troves of realistic data, and students engage with little instructor “hand-holding,” Dr. Bessolo explained.

“In some assignments, they choose a school, and then work through a scenario based on that,” she added. “Every school is going to have its own issues, staff makeup, performance scores and community challenges. Our students start to make sense of the different pieces just as they would analyze in a real district. Some of them may have only been at one or two schools in their careers so far, so we want them to experience walking into a new school as a leader. How do you find the data? How do you make sense of it? How do you apply the leadership theories? This is a multi-pronged approach and gets them out of their comfort zones.”

The capstone course for the Leadership in Special and Inclusive Education graduate certificate program engages students through a video game.

“Students are assigned avatars and designated as the new leadership team for the virtual district of Valeria,” Dr. Mruczek explained. “They have to navigate a quest where the district is being sued over disproportionate outcomes for their students of color who are also labeled with disabilities. They have to work as a team, incorporating all the language, knowledge and concepts they’ve engaged with previously. They drive the learning.”

Student-centered design and scalable tech is a winning combination

KU has expanded this approach to several programs within the School of Education and Human Sciences. To date there are more than 100 courses, with more than 1,700 sections, with 5,000 unique users.

Enrollment in these programs has grown by more than 50 percent. Faculty and students report satisfaction rates of 94 and 99.6 percent, respectively. Retention is 99 percent term-to-term and 90 percent overall.

Everspring went on to expand its partnership beyond the School of Education and Human Sciences to support the online MBA program in KU’s School of Business.

Everspring is a leading provider of education technology and service solutions for higher education and partners with colleges and universities nationwide to provide advanced technology, a proven marketing approach, and robust faculty support and instructional design services

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-Dr. Jennifer Bessolo

Learn more about how Everspring’s proven instructional design approach, advanced tech platforms and robust faculty support create unparalleled outcomes for students.

 [Schedule a Learning Design Demo with Everspring today!](#)



Learning Design Spotlight:

Together, we helped more Jayhawks soar.

When Everspring first partnered with the University of Kansas School of Education and Human Sciences, the university needed a partner to help them move online and achieve aggressive enrollment growth goals. We worked together to plan, build and scale a market-leading portfolio of high-quality, highly ranked online graduate education programs.

Together with University of Kansas faculty, we identified and developed a robust portfolio of programs and designed differentiated education experiences. A highlight of our faculty collaboration is "Jayhawkville," a virtual, simulated online school district that presents students with real-world problems and data for practicing critical thinking and honing decision-making skills.



Watch our webinar to learn how collaborative online learning environments can drive meaningful program outcomes.

The Result

We established and accelerated a strong online presence and rise in the rankings.

#1

Online Special Education Program by US News & World Report

98%

Student Satisfaction in the School of Education¹

94%

Faculty Satisfaction in the School of Education¹

99%

Term-to-term Retention Across All Programs

Our success with the School of Education and Human Sciences positioned Everspring as the natural choice to expand to the School of Business, where we built and grew an online MBA that is currently ranked #20 by US News and World Report.

1. Everspring student and faculty surveys