



# Proceedings of the Informing Science + Information Technology Education Conference

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Online July 6-7, 2022

## DIGITAL LITERACY IN THE CORE: THE EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

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### ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Digital literacy is critical to participation in a contemporary knowledge-based society and is requisite to both academic success and career development. Institutions of higher education have been slow to define, assess, and amplify digital literacy in parallel with advances in the enhancement of reading, writing, and arithmetic literacy. Perhaps as a consequence of the pandemic, awareness appears to be growing of the need to infuse digital literacy at both institutional and individual levels. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the promotion and amplification of digital literacy within top universities around the globe.
Background	For years, the role of higher education in the amplification of digital literacy among college students has been debated, but efforts have been limited primarily to ad hoc, unsystematic attempts to rectify disparities between students' exposure and understanding. The impacts of COVID-19 exposed the reality that many institutions, professors, and college students were under-prepared for the surge in reliance on digital technologies.
Methodology	This paper explores the prevalence of digital literacy in the top public and private universities around the globe by conducting a qualitative examination on compulsory requirements, digital literacy offerings, university identified digital literacy initiatives, and university strategic plans.

The full paper was previously published as the following and is being presented at this conference:

Murray, M., Pérez, J., & Fluker, J. (2022). Digital literacy in the core: The emerging higher education landscape. *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology*, 19, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4957>

Abstract published in *Proceedings of InSITE 2022: Informing Science and Information Technology Education Conference*, July 6-7 [online], Article 22. Informing Science Institute. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4915>

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Contribution	This paper contributes to the body of knowledge by providing evidence for the need to expand the constructs of what it means to be digitally literate to address the ever-expanding range of emerging technologies and the impact of those technologies on society.
Findings	The review of digital literacy amplification at top universities showed that none of the universities' admissions requirements required students to demonstrate digital competence and compulsory digital literacy was uncommon. However, a majority of universities undertook some form of initiative to promote digital literacy. These initiatives included a focus on developing digitally literate society and workforce or developing innovative approaches to digital literacy education.
Recommendations for Practitioners	The pandemic has generated a greater sense of urgency for institutions of higher education to ensure access to and understanding of digital technologies by students, faculty, and staff. Educational institutions will have to adapt their methodologies to promote explicit and intentionally reasoned digital literacy strategies that combine the competencies possessed by users of technology with the generation of new competencies required to successfully participate in the digital transformation of education, business, and society.
Recommendations for Researchers	This paper examined the top 50 universities around the globe. Additional research is needed to examine national, regional and local efforts in the quest to address the need for a digitally literate citizenry.
Impact on Society	COVID-19 has thrust us into a new normal wherein digital competence is foundational to success in an ever digitally reliant world. Institutions of higher education are best positioned to carry out the initiatives, programs and research needed to enhance the digital literacy of all citizens, not just students and employees.
Future Research	Societal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to emerge and will resonate for decades to come. Continued investigation, exploration and dissemination of information related to effort to enhance and amplify digital literacy is necessary to ensure momentum to reimagine digital literacy education is maintained.
Keywords	digital literacy, digital competency, critical digital literacy, digitally centered

## AUTHORS

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**Meg Murray** is a Professor of Information Systems in the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University. She holds a Ph.D. in information systems and has over thirty years of experience in academe and industry, and has received several National Science Foundation grants to enhance STEM education. Dr. Murray specializes in the development and implementation of emerging technologies to meet educational, business, and societal needs. Her current work devises strategies to assess, remediate, and amplify skills needed to leverage IT in innovation, a primary driver of economic growth.



**Dr. Jorge Pérez** is associate vice president for institutional effectiveness at the University of Tennessee System. Dr. Pérez joined the UT System in 2018 after twenty years at Kennesaw State University, where he was vice provost for institutional effectiveness, SACSCOC accreditation liaison, and professor of information systems. He holds a bachelor's degree in English, an MBA, and a Ph.D. in information systems from Florida State University. Digital literacy is the focus of his current research. Dr. Pérez has industry experience as a systems analyst, web developer, and consultant. He was inducted into the PhD Project Hall of Fame in 2019.



**Joy Fluker** is an IT professional with more than 18 years of experience in industry serving in roles including program management, portfolio management, transition management and business relationship management at Hewlett Packard Enterprise and most recently at Microsoft. She holds a Doctor of Science in Information Systems. Her current research focuses on unified communications in the workplace, specifically assessing its impact on perceived productivity and relationship building. Dr. Fluker also teaches in higher education in the area of Information Systems.