

The Digital Divide and Higher Education

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An analysis of the magnitude and impact of the digital divide is the foundation of this presentation. The digital divide is changing from one of accessibility to one of a knowledge gap generated by differing levels of digital competencies ([Wang, Myers, & Sundaram, 2013](#)). Real concern is being raised that while digital technologies are becoming increasingly accessible, a new digital divide is emerging ([White, 2013](#)), ([Bartlett & Miller, 2012](#)), ([Resnick, 2002](#)). The divide has broadened to influence social relationships, communities, education and the meaningful way we use information technology and communication (Broadbent & Papadopoulos, 2013; Peña-López, 2010; van Dijk, 2006; Warschauer, 2004; Wei & Hindman, 2011). .

Within the complex array of elements that is the digital divide, tertiary institutions continue to grapple with leveling the playing field particularly with students who are the first in their family to study at tertiary level and those who are from low socio economic backgrounds (Ann Luzeckyj, King, Scutter, & Brinkworth, 2011; Johnston, Lee, Shah, Shields, & Spinks, 2014; O'Shea, 2015). Many university students are neither prepared nor proficient at navigating the digital environment and lack the technical skills to effectively participate in online and blended educational programs (Burck, 2005; Manca & Ranieri, 2013). The lack of meaningful interaction with the digital environment is creating inequality within our society (Haycock, 2004). This presentation intends to develop a critical consciousness regarding the impact of digital learning environments and discuss if a new hurdle has emerged to student retention and success in higher education.