

Good morning. Thank you for having me this morning. I'm excited to be here and the beginning of a new year with so much potential and so many remarkable things happening on campus and throughout Shocker Nation. Welcome back and hope you had a great break! And thank you for everything you do for our students and the university.

One initiative that you've likely heard about is digital transformation. While the term itself might sound like it leans heavily toward engineering and computer science, I can assure you that it's an interdisciplinary field of study that touches all corners of academia, the arts, business and industry, and everyday life.

First, what is digital transformation?

Think about it like this: Think back to the days when we had to have a physical printout of a plane ticket? And if you had a multi-leg journey, you might have had to juggle and keep track of several tickets — both to and from your destination.

Now when we go to the airport, you just open an app on your phone, scan an e-ticket with the airline agent, and board the plane.

One example of digital transformation in higher education is the use of learning management systems and other educational technology to deliver course materials and facilitate online learning. This can allow students to access course materials and participate in course activities from anywhere, at any time, rather than being required to be physically present in a classroom.

It can also enable the use of a wider range of teaching methods, such as multimedia lectures and interactive exercises. Digital transformation in higher education can also involve the use of data analytics to track student performance and identify areas where students may need additional support. This can help educators to tailor their teaching strategies and improve student outcomes.

Here's the other things: It's a vehicle to diversify our economy, makes education more accessible, and contributes to the prosperity of the people and communities we serve.

At Wichita State, we saw a surge of digital transformation and innovation when COVID forced us all to go home and go online — the Geology Department's digital field camp, Zoom collaboration for GoBabyGo projects, virtual classes and commencement ceremonies, Zoom meetings and appointments, online art shows, virtual fine arts performances, and the establishment of the COVID testing facility, the Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory.

In 2020, the Kansas Board of Regents approved the creation of the National Institute for Research and Digital Transformation (NIRDT) at Wichita State. Since then, we've hit the ground running. Last year, we broke ground on NIRDT's new home on the Innovation Campus. This facility will serve as a testing and evaluation facility for new processes and

technology and will open this spring and will be open to faculty and staff and our industry partners with good ideas that need that extra evaluation to see if they work.

Some of you may not realize, you've also created tangible initiatives to support the institute through educational programming.

From fine arts to engineering, you all have developed several curricula in every college, specifically to address the ever-evolving and rapidly growing field of digital transformation — including media arts, applied linguistics, data science, business analytics, and mathematical Foundations of data analysis.....just to name a few

We also have teams of researchers who are working on interdisciplinary digital solutions to high-level social issues. The Center for Educational Technologies to Assist Refugee Learners is working to improve the lives of more than 70 million forcibly displaced refugees worldwide by making education more accessible, and the Disaster Resilience Analytics Center is using artificial intelligence and big data to digitally transform the way communities predict and respond to natural disasters.

Furthermore, several of our faculty have been awarded grants based on their digital transformation research, including English professor Darren DeFrain's Vizling app, which helps visually impaired people read graphics-heavy materials, such as graphic novels; researchers from engineering and the College of Health Professions, who have created a wearable fetal heartrate monitor; and Ajita Rattani's work to bring fairness to facial recognition systems.

As I mentioned earlier, many of us are using digital transformation to help improve student persistence. Some are using analytics and other markers to identify who might be struggling and at risk for leaving the university. This can help us determine who needs extra support — whether that be exploring financial aid options, getting mental health support, or finding tutoring to help students succeed. In particular, these tools help support our initiatives to improve decrease equity graduation gaps between underserved and non-underserved students.....one of our main priorities this year.

These are just a few examples of how Wichita State is using digital transformation to grow the Kansas economy, serve our communities, and prepare our students for careers that will require nimble and digitally savvy professionals.

As you go through the Academic Resource Conference and learn more about how digital transformation, I'll be interested to hear the innovative ways that you'll discover that will help you in your classroom and your research.

Go Shockers!