

Opinion: Colleges should invest in software, not buildings

By Donn Davis, Washington Post

For decades, America's colleges and universities have been on a massive spending spree, building new dorms, student centers, sports complexes, and academic buildings. Despite all these expenditures, the key metrics are not much better. Graduation rates haven't increased at the pace of much of Europe and Japan. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the percentage of young Americans who are less educated than their parents exceeds other leading nations.

What if the leaders of our colleges and universities had channeled just a fraction of this edifice-complex capital into technology improvements instead?

In technology terms, higher-education has spent massive amounts in "hardware" while dramatically under-investing in "software." Software is the technology, tools and systems that make any business or organization more effective and efficient. Ask any of the tens of millions of students back on campus this fall at any of the thousands of universities and colleges: "How has technology been used to improve the classroom or enhance the learning experience" and you will get a blank expression. Technology has infused and changed every part of this generation's life – except for education.

Despite an increase in edtech spending, up 11 percent from 2012 to \$13 billion, 62 percent of that is still spent on laptops, tablets, and netbooks, which can only service one student at a time and quickly become outdated. With more and more students in the position to provide their own devices it

is important to not overspend on hardware and allocate money to software programs that can run on multiple devices and be used by thousands of students at once. Schools will still need to provide a small pool of school-owned devices to be borrowed but this mentality will reduce costs.

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