

# DIGITAL FELLOWS PROGRAM

## Fellowship Application

**Application Deadline: May 19, 2017**

### Overview

In January 2017, the Association of Chief Academic Officers (ACAO) launched the 18 month [ACAO Digital Fellows Project](#). This fellowship program, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is designed to provide senior campus leaders (i.e., Chief Academic Officers or CAOs) the critical information, resources, and support they require to help their faculty understand and adopt high quality digital courseware and related instructional resources that personalize learning and lead to significant gains in undergraduate engagement, retention, and graduation.

Specifically, the project will provide a unique professional opportunity for 30 provosts/CAOs (“ACAO Digital Fellows”) that focuses on the adoption and deployment of courseware and digital learning resources intended to enhance student learning, increase retention and degree completion, and improve institutional outcomes.

The major project activities include:

- Creating a professional development program focused on digital learning for provosts and CAOs;
- Curating an online archive of resource materials to support this and related digital learning initiatives for ACAO and other organizations collaborating with ACAO;
- Four major convenings/retreats for the project fellows;
- Periodic webinars featuring experts on digital learning; and
- Dissemination activities (including reports, conference presentations, campus case studies, webinars, and web resources), which will extend the reach and impact of the ACAO Digital Fellows Program.

### Why a “Digital Fellowship” Program for Provosts and CAOs?

At many institutions, and especially among public comprehensive institutions and community colleges, the provost or chief academic officer sets the academic and instructional priorities for initiatives that will be pursued during his or her tenure. Typically a provost/CAO will focus on issues such as enhancing undergraduate teaching, student research or internship opportunities, internationalization, or service learning as part of their personal visions and institutional goals.

Unfortunately, many CAOs are not familiar with the potential for digital learning to improve undergraduate learning, retention, and persistence to graduation for their students. Although CAOs have come of age, personally and professionally, with the technologies that are now ubiquitous across higher education, many remain skeptical about the impact and benefits of the significant campus investments (money, personnel, and other resources) in instructional technology intended to improve student learning and institutional outcomes.

ACAO hopes that as CAOs better understand the link between effective digital learning resources, student engagement, retention, and degree completion, digital learning will move higher on the list of initiatives that are personally important to chief academic officers.

### What Are the Characteristics of Provosts and CAOs Who Will Be Selected for this Fellowship?

More than three decades following the arrival of the first personal computers on college campuses, higher education continues to debate the impact digital learning on student learning, engagement, retention, and degree completion.

Digital learning is far more than simply posting a syllabus online, or loading course materials into a LMS, or offering online courses for off-campus students. Moreover, digital learning and digital curricular

resources are also far more than the migration from traditional printed textbooks into digital and on-line formats, course materials, and supplemental instructional resources.

We are beginning to see real evidence of impact: well-designed research studies reveal that some digital learning resources do make a difference in student learning, engagement, and retention. We now have evidence that well designed and thoughtfully deployed adaptive learning technologies and various courseware applications really can make a difference in student learning and engagement, and do contribute to improved retention and graduation rates.

In this context, ACAO seeks 30 provosts and CAOs who will provide institutional and national leadership on digital learning – that following this fellowship opportunity these 30 individuals will “step in and step up” on digital learning issues at their institutions and within their respective academic and institutional associations. Applicants should have a good understanding of and some experience with digital learning – perhaps directly in instruction, plus some administrative experience leading or supporting digital learning initiatives at their institution.

Fellowship applicants will need to document, in their own words and also with the letter of recommendation and commitment from their president/CEO, that digital learning is a strategic priority for their institution. The specific nature of this strategic commitment should reflect the institutional mission, student population, and campus culture.

ACAO believes that the Digital Fellows Project – and the 30 provosts/CAOs selected for this fellowship opportunity – will be catalysts for a richer, broader, and better-informed institutional and national conversations among provosts, other academic leaders, and faculty about the role and the benefits of digital learning.

### **How Do I Apply for this Fellowship Opportunity?**

The attached pages provide the fellowship application cover page and the four short-answer essay questions required of all applicants. In addition to the accompanying cover page and the short answer essays, applicants are required to submit a CV (or detailed resume), plus a letter of recommendation from their president or CEO that demonstrates the institutional commitment to the fellowship opportunity. The application deadline is Friday, May 19th.

The attachments also provide additional information about the fellowship opportunity, plus a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

### ***For additional information, please contact:***

Kenneth C. Green  
Director, ACAO Digital Fellows Project  
fellows@acao.org  
p: 818.990.2212

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## Application Cover Page

Please complete this cover page and then include, as a single PDF file, the items listed below that are required as part of your application for the ACAO Digital Fellowship. *Application Deadline: May 19, 2017.*

Mr./Ms./Dr.	First Name	Last Name		
Title		Institution		
Address		City	State	ZIP
Office phone	Cell phone		email	

### Required Supporting Documents

1. Your CV or a detailed resume.
2. Your responses to the four (short) essay questions (attached).
3. A letter of recommendation from your president or CEO endorsing your application for the ACAO Digital Fellowship. This recommendation should also confirm the institutional commitment to support your activities as part of this fellowship opportunity.
  - If a fellowship recipient takes a CAO position at another accredited institution of higher education, then the recipient may continue in the program provided the president/CEO at the new institution confirms the institutional commitment support the fellowship opportunity.
  - If a fellowship recipient leaves the CAO position, the institution has the option to continue the fellowship activities under the new CAO.

### Submitted by

Name	Signature	Date
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**Please forward your completed application as a single, PDF document. A complete application includes this cover page, your CV, the answer to the short essay questions, and letter of recommendation from your president/CEO).**

**Please send your application to:** [fellowship@acao.org](mailto:fellowship@acao.org)

***Application Deadline:*** May 19, 2017.

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## Essay Questions for ACAO Digital Fellowship Applicants

On separate pages, please provide a one page response for each of the four questions below.

1. Beyond the use of an LMS or online courses, please describe the current state of digital learning at your institution. Is it widespread, or is it concentrated in some disciplines and areas, such as developmental programs, math, and science. Please provide examples.
2. What institutional issues foster the use of digital learning at your institution? What issues impede?
3. As a provost/chief academic officer, what has been your role/involvement in campus efforts to use and leverage digital learning? Please provide specific examples of your direct and indirect involvement.
4. Looking forward, what opportunities do you see (as provost/CAO) to advance the use of digital learning resources at your institution over the next 3-5 years? Which of these opportunities would be your top priority for your institution, faculty, and students?

**Please forward your completed application as a single, PDF document. A complete application includes this cover page, your CV, the answer to the short essay questions, and letter of recommendation from your president/CEO.**

**Please send your application to:** [fellowship@acao.org](mailto:fellowship@acao.org)

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30 January 2017

## Educating the Provosts

New fellowship for chief academic officers focuses on digital courseware.

By Scott Jaschik

In previous generations, the prime educational materials in higher education were to be found in libraries and laboratories. These days of course, digital materials are crucial -- to teaching, learning and assessment. But do senior academic leaders know the questions they should be asking about these digital educational tools?

The Association of Chief Academic Officers last week [announced](#) a new fellowship program for 30 provosts -- with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Kenneth C. Green, founding director of the Campus Computing Project, will serve as the director of the Digital Fellows Program. CAOs who are interested in the fellowship may express interest via email to [fellowship@acao.org](mailto:fellowship@acao.org).

Laura Niesen de Abruna, president of the Association of Chief Academic Officers and provost of York College of Pennsylvania, responded via email to questions about the new fellowship.



Laura Niesen de Abruna

**Q: Why focus on the provost? Many provosts have designated a vice provost or someone else to take charge instructional innovation and digital learning initiatives. Why is it important for the provost to be as informed and involved in these campus efforts and investments efforts as this initiative suggests they can (and perhaps should) be?**

**A:** We know that at many institutions, and especially among public comprehensive institutions and community colleges, the chief academic officer sets the academic and instructional priorities for initiatives that will be pursued during his or her tenure. Typically a CAO will focus on such issues as enhancing undergraduate teaching, student research or internship opportunities, internationalization, or service learning as part of their personal visions and institutional goals.

Our research indicates many CAOs are not familiar with the potential for digital pedagogy to improve undergraduate learning, retention, and persistence to graduation for their students. Although CAOs have come of age, both personally and professionally, with the technologies that are now ubiquitous across higher education, many remain skeptical about the impact and benefits of the often significant campus investments in instructional technology intended to improve student learning and institutional outcomes.

We hope that as CAOs better understand the link between effective digital pedagogical resources, student engagement, retention, and degree completion, digital pedagogy will move higher on the list of initiatives that are personally important to chief academic officers.

**Q: Do you consider the needs of provosts different in terms of type of institution (ones that caters to at risk students vs. elite students)?**

**A:** The academic and instructional priorities of chief academic officers may differ dramatically depending on the type of college, the mission of the institution, and the profile of the student population. The colleges and universities that serve large numbers of Pell-eligible, first generation, low income, or minority students will, understandably, focus more intentionally on access, retention, and persistence to graduation. For these reasons, the ACAO project will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on provosts and CAOs at public comprehensives and community colleges.

**Q: How strong a link do you see between educational materials (digital and otherwise) and student success?**

**A:** There is a growing body of research which confirms that students can and do learn more and pass more courses if they have access to effective digital course materials and experiences that

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## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### The ACAO Digital Fellows Project

#### Overview

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Specifically, the project will provide a unique professional opportunity for 30 provosts/CAOs (“ACAO Digital Fellows”) that focuses on the adoption and deployment of courseware and digital learning resources intended to enhance student learning, increase retention and degree completion, and improve institutional outcomes.

The major project activities include:

- Creating a professional development program on digital learning for provosts and CAOs;
- Curating an online archive of resource materials to support this and related digital pedagogy initiatives for ACAO and other organizations collaborating with ACAO;
- A national survey of provosts/CAOs, scheduled to launch in spring 2017;
- Four major convenings/retreats for the project fellows;
- Periodic webinars featuring experts on digital pedagogy;
- Dissemination activities (including reports, conference presentations, campus case studies, webinars, and web resources), which will extend the reach and impact of the ACAO Digital Fellows Program.

ACAO believes that the Digital Fellows Project – and the 30 provosts/CAOs selected for this fellowship opportunity – will be catalysts for a richer, broader, and better-informed institutional and national conversations among provosts, other academic leaders, and faculty about the role and the benefits of digital learning.

#### Who is eligible to apply for this fellowship opportunity?

The fellowship opportunity is intended for chief academic officers – in essence, the senior academic officer of the college or university. At some campuses this individual will hold the title of provost, vice president or vice chancellor for academic affairs, or chief academic officer. Yet not all institutions use these titles. For example, at many community colleges the senior or ranking academic officer might hold the title of vice president of instruction.

But regardless of title, the clear and simple standard for eligibility is that prospective fellowship applicants must be the senior or ranking academic officer at their college or university. If you report up to someone other than the president, chancellor, or CEO, then in all likelihood you would not be eligible for this fellowship program.

**What about institutional affiliation? Is the fellowship program intended for (or targeting) CAOs from specific types of colleges or universities?**

There are no restrictions regarding institutional affiliation. The fellowship opportunity is open to CAOs from any accredited, degree-granting public, private non-profit, or private for-profit two- or four-year US college or university.

The [postsecondary mission](#) of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is to “work with partners to transform higher education models for colleges and universities so that more students – especially low-income and first-generation students – graduate at higher rates, with high-quality degrees or certificates at an affordable price.” Consequently, the Gates Foundation and ACAO hope that this fellowship opportunity will attract candidates from two- and four-year institutions that serve significant numbers of the “new majority in higher education” – first generation, low income, and students of color.

**Is this a “professional development” program that will to teach me to write code or design courseware?**

The quick (and light) answer is that the ACAO fellowship program is not intended to help you learn to code, design software for a course, or create the “killer” mobile app for your campus or for your course.

The serious (and significant) response is that ACAO fellowship is intentionally different from more conventionally structured (yet also high quality) professional development programs or fellowship opportunities common to American higher education.

Most fellowships or professional development opportunities are intended primarily to enhance the portfolio of the individual recipient. For example, many academic fellowship programs provide an opportunity to travel, lecture, or do research. And traditional professional development programs typically are designed to introduce, enhance, or expand a specific set of skills and competencies. In both instances, these experiences enhance the *personal portfolio* of the individual fellow or program participant. The recipient is the primary beneficiary.

In contrast, the ACAO Digital Fellowship is designed to benefit both the individual recipient as well as the larger community of chief academic officers and other senior campus officials interested in and concerned about exploiting the benefits of effective courseware and digital learning resources to enhance instruction, increase retention and graduation rates, and improve institutional outcomes.

**What’s the project calendar?**

This is an 18 month project, which launched in January 2017. The first months will be spent promoting the project and encouraging CAOs to apply for the fellowship. We plan to announce the fellowship recipients in May, ahead of the first of four convenings or retreats in July. Additional convenings are planned for late October 2017, and also February and June 2018. The project ends in June 2018.

However, the end of the project in June 2018 is not the end of the actual fellowship activities. ACAO expects the 30 Fellows to be involved in dissemination efforts focused on peer institutions and also academic and professional associations.

**What’s the expected individual time commitment?**

In addition to the four, three-day convenings, the project will schedule periodic webinars to connect the fellows with leaders in the area of digital learning. And over the course of the project Fellows will be expected to work on a digital learning plan for their own institutions.

**Is there an individual or institutional financial commitment or obligation?**

There is no individual or institutional cost to participate in the ACAO Digital Fellows Program. Courtesy of the grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ACAO will cover all the direct costs for the fellowship recipients.

**Will I receive a stipend if I am selected to be an ACAO Digital Fellow?**

No, the ACAO Digital Fellows Project will not provide individual stipends. However, as noted above, the Fellows program will cover all costs for the four convenings or retreats (travel, hotel, etc.).

Additionally, the ACAO grant provides some money to help with efforts to integrate digital course resources into one or more courses at each campus. Fellows will be expected to work with one or more faculty members on their campuses on course redesign to deploy and leverage digital learning resources. The individual campus grants, about \$4000, are specifically intended to underwrite release time for a faculty member to work with the CAO on course redesign and also the larger campus plan for digital pedagogy.

**Are there other resources or support services that ACAO will provide as part of this fellowship?**

A key component of this project is the identification and curation of resources – reports, strategy documents, campus case studies, and courseware applications. As part of the effort to identify resources for the broader CAO community, ACAO will review, curate, and post materials to its web site for the use of Fellows and others interested and concerned about courseware and digital learning.

**My institution is particularly interested in online education. If this fellowship appropriate for me if I want to learn more about online education – course design, institutional strategy, and related issues?**

No, the focus of this fellowship program is not online education.

**Please provide more information about the four convenings.**

The project has four convenings (or retreats) that will bring together all the ACAO fellows, plus experts in the areas of digital courseware, digital learning, leadership and innovation, and other related topics. Please note that fellowship recipients are expected to attend all four retreats.

Listed below are the planned venues and dates for the four convenings:

1. *Scottsdale (Phoenix), Arizona: July 16-19, 2017.* The purpose of this first convening is to increase the Fellows' current understanding of the potential of digital courseware and to present research that demonstrates its effectiveness in improving learning for students. We are going to Scottsdale for this first retreat to learn more about the work on digital learning underway at [EdPlus](#), the innovation incubator at Arizona State University.
2. *Philadelphia: Oct 30 – Nov 2, 2017.* The second convening has been scheduled in conjunction with the 2017 EDUCAUSE conference. We are planning two days of meetings ahead of the EDUCAUSE conference. ACAO will make arrangements to provide EDUCAUSE conference registration for all 30 fellowship recipients.  
Coming into and at this second meeting, each of the 30 Fellows will develop a plan for their digital learning plan for their own institution that will focus on faculty understanding, training, and a campus strategy for supporting the appropriate use of digital curricular resources.
3. *New Orleans: late February 2018 (tentative date and venue).* Between the second and third retreats, the 30 Fellows will begin to roll out their campus plans for the adoption of digital learning and courseware resources at their campuses.



4. *Seattle, late June 2018* (tentative date and venue). At the final convening the 30 Fellows will present an assessment of their campus work, their individual plan to sustain the digital initiatives on their campus, and the plan to disseminate their work at professional meetings over the following 24 months.

**What about the application process? What materials will I be required to provide as part of my application?**

Applicants will have to complete a one page bio sheet, submit a copy of their CV, and provide short answers to several questions. Additionally, your president (or chancellor, or CEO) will have to provide a letter of support for your application. Applicants will also participate in a personal interview via SKYPE or ZOOM.

The fellowship application will be posted on the [ACAO web site](#) by March 24th. The application process will remain open through Friday, May 19th. ACAO will announce the names of 30 fellowship recipients at the end of May/early June.

**What criteria will be used for selecting the 30 ACAO Digital Fellows?**

ACAO and the Gates Foundation are looking for provosts and CAOs who are prepared to assume leadership positions in the campus and public conversations about digital pedagogy. Fellowship applications will be reviewed by several members of the project's Senior Leadership Group – other provosts/CAOs, many of who are members of the ACAO Board of Directors. The key review criteria will be responses to the short essay questions on the application, plus the letter of recommendation and institutional commitment from applicant's president/CEO.

***For additional information about the ACAO Digital Fellows Project, please contact:***

Kenneth C. Green  
Director, ACAO Digital Fellows Project  
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personalize the learning experience. The challenge has been to get the attention of CAOs nationwide to focus on this research, to bring it to their faculty, and to apply it at their institutions.

Consequently, ACAO plans to provide a professional development experience that will bring the knowledge commonly shared among instructional technology advocates – often but not always engaged faculty and instructional designers – directly to provosts who are not typically immersed in this research literature or these communities of interest, and who typically do not attend the relevant professional conferences and related meetings.

**Q: Are there a few institutions you consider models in this area?**

**A:** There are a number of two- and four-year colleges and universities that are making effective use of digital courseware and related digital resources and strategies to personalize student learning – and doing so with impressive results. Some widely recognized examples include Arizona State University, Broward Community College, Saint Leo University, Southern New Hampshire University, the University of Central Florida, and the University of Texas at Arlington. The initiatives and activities at these six very different institutions, which serve a wide range of students, are not isolated in silos but rather reflect a clear institutional vision, strategy, and commitment.

Source: <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/01/30/new-fellowship-will-train-provosts-digital-courseware>

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