In an early chapter of their book ‘The Idea of the Digital University’, Frank McCluskey and Melanie Winters quote the playwright Eugene Ionesco, ‘all history is a succession of crises, rupture, repudiations, resistances’. The authors’ larger idea here is that the 21st-century university is also not exempt from the current socio-technological crisis and rupture occurring through the present digital revolution. The book conducts an exploration of the relatively new phenomenon of the digital online university through perspectives of ancient traditions, disruptive technologies, and current debates occurring in the field of higher education. What is really to be enjoyed in this book is the text’s wide berth, situating the 21st-century university in a wide historical trajectory and within ongoing present discussions. Larger questions that the book grapples with surround how the institution of the traditional university is transforming into larger sets of digital assets to be managed — how and by whom?

Erudite, balanced and measured, McCluskey’s philosophy/academic administration background is in evidence, examining the online university from perspectives ranging from McLuhan and the Toronto School of Harold Innis’s Empire and Communication, to classic philosophical landscapes (Plato, Aristotle, Kant). The book also importantly situates the online university in the context of ‘learning’ and within current technological possibility. The text traverses a historical evolution of the university, ranging from histories of American universities, both the ivy leagues and recent for-profits, to the historical foundations of the institutions at Oxford and the Sorbonne, and to the completely new digital entrants. Present developments of the 21st-century university as database are also explored, including the wealth of digital asset, data and media to be managed, mined, explored and organised. To be sure, this is a fair and balanced text containing a multiplicity of views and offering plenty of room to reflect on the complex debates currently occurring on our campuses. Winter’s background adds the lesser-known ground of the digital transformation of the university registrar’s office, university libraries, student funding and various operational divisions, all explored and interlinked through the technological paradigm shift occurring.
Various sections of this text are worth bookmarking: big data, analytics and the online classroom especially are drawn in careful interrelation. The authors' division of university governance into ‘bureaucracy-centred’, ‘learning-centred’ or ‘teacher-centred’ is also useful for anyone coming to grips with new academic technology possibilities and how to manage the digital assets now contained therein. The book is highly readable: informed and eloquent while not shying away from current contentious debate. Accreditation and online versus face-to-face teaching are all examined from various perspectives. The authors also ask near the book's end ‘What of those teaching moments that cannot be analytically measured or that may be lost? How much can be automated and what must remain for a university to retain its soul?’ (p. 174). Quoting Yeats, the authors comment, ‘Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire’. The book is highly recommended for those interested in the future of education and our universities.

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The Idea of the Digital University: Ancient Traditions, Disruptive Technologies and the Battle for the Soul of Higher Education. Policy Studies Organisation. Washington: Westphalia Press. Google Scholar. Office of the Vice Provost Learning and Teaching. (2013). Better Teaching, Better Learning Agenda. Monash University. Google Scholar. PWC. Digital Technology and the Contemporary University: Degrees of Digitization. Abingdon/New York: Routledge. CrossRef Google Scholar. Walker, R., Voce, J., Swift, E., Ahmed, J., Jenkins, M., & Vincent, P. (2016). 2016 Survey of Technology Enhanced Learning for Higher Education in the UK. Oxford: UCISA. https://www.ucisa.ac.uk/tel/. Accessed 6 Oct 2017. Disruptive education for meeting the challenges of the future. Innovation is one of the watchwords of the 21st century and training must form part of this (r)evolution in order to bring it into line with the demands of an increasingly hyperactive and hyperconnected world. In order to meet these challenges, technology is an essential ally when promoting a disruptive form of education that puts learning in a new light. What is disruptive education? The university's role in disruptive education. The world is currently moving at lightning speed that requires curious, flexible and proactive people. Digital innovation Around 800 universities now have their own virtual areas for training, partnership and shared knowledge purposes. Session Outline The concept of the Digital University - of the Higher Education institution that is digitally enabled and digitally agile in their practices - is being widely debated within the sector (e.g. McCluskey and Winter, 2012), and various understandings of what being digital means are becoming increasingly embedded in the policy, practice and futures planning of higher education institutions. However, what being a Digital University might look like in practice, and what this means for learning, teaching, student support, and research and scholarship, is a contested area. The idea of the Digital University: ancient traditions, disruptive technologies and the battle for the soul of higher education. Washington: Policy Studies Organization. Related Interests. Want to know about Digitization Of Education in the 21st century? Check how the 'old school' educational systems got improvised to 'new school' systems that gave rise to the concept of digital education. During this phase the education system is evolving for the sake of betterment, as this generation's students are not born to be confined by the limits of simple learning; their curiosity is vast and cannot be catered with educational systems that were designed earlier. If we kept on teaching our children the way we taught them yesterday, we would deprive them of their tomorrow. "Digitization is the integration of digital technologies into everyday life by the digitization of everything that can be digitized." Yes!