

College Innovation Network FY21-22 Annual Report

Building Engaged Learning
Communities Where All
Students Belong

Please direct media queries to:
cin@wgu labs.org



College
Innovation
Network

Table of Contents

02	DIRECTOR'S NOTE
03	WHO WE ARE
04	OUR FOCUS
06	MEET THE NETWORK
08	OUR IMPACT: RESEARCH
10	OUR IMPACT: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
12	JOIN US

Director's Note

It is my pleasure to share with you our Annual Report highlighting the impact of the College Innovation Network (CIN) over the past year. As CIN has matured in its second year of operations, we've carefully reflected on the needs of our member institutions and their students to drive change in our network.



Throughout our development, we've grown in our operations and impact toward our mission, including:

- Completing our first EdTech Cycle of Support.
- Welcoming the second cohort of CIN institutions.
- Publishing a mounting body of research reports that demonstrate the potential for positive impact on student experiences resulting from needs-aligned EdTech solutions.
- Uncovering a critical gap in the EdTech marketplace to better support students, and developing a custom, homegrown EdTech product (Navigate U™) to better connect students to essential resources.
- Hosting a highly successful, informative, and engaging in-person CIN convening in Salt Lake City.
- Honing our mission of supporting solutions that boost belonging and engagement.
- Securing two more years of funding, generously provided by the Charles Koch Foundation, providing for an extended runway to continue our work.

What has become clear in the past year is that higher education is in the midst of a technological transformation in which we must re-envision how and where learning takes place. We have found that technology can be an effective solution to the social connection challenges facing students today, as we demonstrate through our research shared in this report. We believe that effectively connecting students to each other and to their learning experiences has the promise of improving the social foundations of effective learning. Our efforts continue to focus on supporting our member institutions in pursuit of these goals.

As we move into the new year, we're excited to see what new insights we can discover. During FY2023 we aim to:

- **Expand our network** to build a collective voice that can inform the higher education sector on what collaborative innovation looks like, with an eye toward influencing policy and funding priorities around the insights uncovered through our research.
- **Launch a revised needs assessment process** that our new institutions will go through to keep a continuous pulse on students' evolving needs from enrollment through graduation – and beyond.
- **Build strategic partnerships** with other groups and organizations to expand our impact toward our mission.
- **Learn how to better engage with faculty** – the brokers of innovation and the cultural architects of belonging in the classroom – to better support students' success.
- **Continue our research program** to identify the levers that can boost belonging, facilitate engagement, and promote equity for all students.
- **Develop a sustainability model** that leverages grant funding, licensing from product development, and supplemental services and training.

I'm proud of the impact that CIN has had over the past year, and look forward to the progress we will make toward our goals this year. We believe that collaborative partnership is the way forward in higher education. If you are interested in becoming involved with CIN, please get in touch with us – we would love to connect and expand our network to build engaged learning communities where all students belong, together.

Regards,
Omid Fotuhi
Director of CIN

Who We Are



The College Innovation Network (CIN) at WGU Labs supports educational institutions by **identifying areas of need, implementing effective education technology for students, and demonstrating impact through research.** Our goal is to evaluate impactful solutions that promote belonging, engagement, and equity, and extract powerful insights that will impact higher education at large.

CIN member institutions are part of a network of diverse educational institutions with innovative leaders dedicated to leveraging technology to build highly engaged learning communities where all students belong. CIN engages with our member institutions across **three primary engagement pathways** to ensure that each member gets the support they need to meet their institution's student experience goals from enrollment through graduation – and beyond:



ED TECH CYCLE OF SUPPORT

Our EdTech Cycle of Support is our core service offering to institutions that involves identifying needs of students, implementing EdTech solutions to address those needs, and then rigorously evaluating the impact of those solutions on various student outcomes.



ED TECH SURVEY SERIES

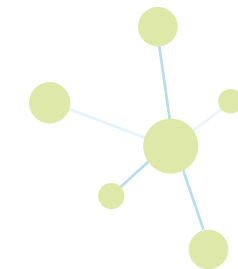
Our EdTech Survey Series is a twice-annual network-wide survey study that leverages the diversity of our member institutions to generate knowledge and actionable insights about student and faculty experiences with EdTech, learning, and teaching.



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Our Community of Practice is a manifestation of the CIN members dedicated to learning from like-minded peers. CIN hosts regular network events throughout the year, including an on-site annual convening, to fulfill our vision of collaborative innovation in higher education.

Through our collective work, we're on a mission to build engaged learning communities where all students belong.



Our Focus



BELONGING

Student belonging is when students have positive and purposeful connections to the institution, and believe their authentic self is validated and elevated by its community.



EQUITY

Equity is honoring individual differences and experiences, and providing effective resources and support necessary for each person to reach their educational goals.



ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is when members of the institutional community act to create individualized connections with each other and provide meaningful experiences

CIN was founded to **drive collaborative innovation in higher education** through the work of dedicated education leaders and rigorous evaluation research. Across our first year, needs assessments of member institutions, various research projects, and an evaluation of our EdTech vendors revealed a pressing need common across diverse types of higher education institutions: boosting student belonging and fostering student engagement.

As we began year two, we focused our mission to reflect the needs of our members and our ongoing research work: **leveraging technology to build engaged learning communities where all students belong.** CIN's renewed mission changes little of the work that was already in progress, but it motivated a framework that better guides future research, interventions, and scope of what we will do in the years ahead as we continue to grow and evolve.

Higher education is experiencing a rapid technological evolution, with increases in online learning, hybrid and multi-modal courses, and a reconceptualization of the college experience. As students communicate a desire for increasingly flexible and dispersed education options, the need to boost belonging, create connections, and foster engagement is greater than ever. Only by creating engaged learning communities where all students feel like they belong, and feel safe and motivated to engage, will student success ensue.

Implicit in our mission, and explicit in our work, is a sharp **focus on equity in higher education.** We intentionally recruit institutions working to serve underrepresented and underserved student populations. That way, our research produces insightful findings across the sector to help all students succeed, not only the most privileged.

In April 2022, CIN convened in Salt Lake City, Utah, to create a shared understanding of what CIN's three pillars of focus – **belonging, engagement, and equity** – mean to us as a Network. This collaborative work will continue to drive our research and engagement in the coming years.

BELONGING, ENGAGEMENT & EQUITY ACROSS THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

At CIN, we know that belonging, engagement, and equity are foundational to student success at each stage of their educational journey, from enrollment through graduation – and beyond. To ensure that we are building belonging, fostering engagement, and promoting equity for students across their entire educational journey, we're using our Student Lifecycle Framework to understand how the challenges and solutions across each pillar of focus differ at each stage.

The **Student Lifecycle Framework** will guide our Network research, member support, community activities and growth by:

1. focusing on the outcomes we measure in our research across the network.
2. identifying key areas of need when matching members with vendors.
3. guiding the selection of new EdTech vendors in our growing vendor catalog.
4. guiding the development of our homegrown EdTech products designed with students' needs in mind.
5. providing a barometer by which our impact as a network toward our mission is evaluated.

Belonging, Engagement & Equity are **central in classroom learning** and is a space that all students experience. How can we improve in this area?

- Representative faculty
- Fun, intriguing, & useful resources
- Student participation
- Multi-modal materials & courses
- Adoption of high-impact teaching practices



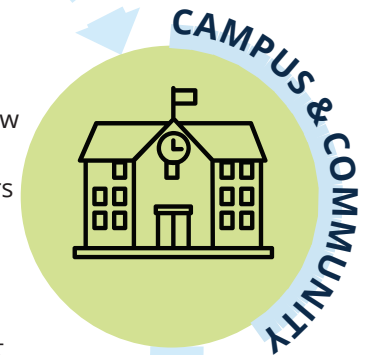
Belonging, Engagement & Equity **start well before a student's first day.** How can we improve in this area?

- Effective advising
- Early connections
- Baseline measures
- Guidance & mentorship
- Positive first experiences
- Transparency
- Flexibility



Belonging, Engagement & Equity are **sustained via the institution's community.** How can we improve in this area?

- Ways to connect with peers
- School pride
- Guidance & mentorship
- Community health & wellness
- Engaging events & interest groups
- Reconceptualizing the "campus"



Belonging, Engagement & Equity **within our institutions have continued to impact our communities.** How can we improve in this area?

- Strong social ties among alumni & students
- Celebrating students across their educational journey
- Valuable alumni engagement
- Alumni access to college resources
- Continuing education options
- Holistic career development plans



Meet the Network

MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

CIN member institutions are passionate about improving the student experience, building belonging among all of our students, and learning from peers. Our member institutions form the foundation of our work – without this dedicated community of practice, our work would not be possible.



Rio Salado College, located in Tempe, Arizona, is a leader in online education that supports learners across diverse program offerings to provide high-quality, flexible, and accessible education to empower students to reach their goals.

Arizona Western College, located in Yuma, Arizona, offers more than 100 degree and certificate programs and over 60 clubs, sports, and organizations to fulfill its mission of transforming lives through education and partnerships to create thriving communities.

Central Ohio Technical College, located in Newark, Ohio, is committed to unlocking the full potential of students through associate and certificate programs in high-demand fields thereby connecting students to purposeful careers quickly.

Cuyahoga Community College, in Cleveland, Ohio, creates a positive, nurturing and learning-focused environment for students with a wide array of educational and wraparound services, assisting students on every step of their College journey.

Loyola University New Orleans, located in New Orleans, Louisiana, offers undergraduate and graduate programs in the liberal arts and sciences striving to educate the whole student to benefit the larger community.

Pennsylvania Western University, with three campuses in western Pennsylvania, empowers students to build meaningful lives through a broad array of nationally accredited undergrad and graduate programs, career-focused learning and an unwavering focus on student success.

Northern Virginia Community College, with six campuses in the Virginia Washington D.C. suburbs, offered a world-class education at an affordable price. NOVA is one of the largest community colleges in the United States, with more than 80,000 students.

Piedmont Community College, located in Roxboro, North Carolina, contributes to the economic and educational vitality of the communities they serve by connecting students with degree and certification programs in high-demand industries.

EDTECH VENDOR CATALOG

The EdTech vendors available to CIN members are carefully vetted to ensure optimal alignment with our members. Each product is designed to address part of CIN's mission to build belonging, foster engagement, and promote equity across the full student lifecycle.

In addition to the CIN EdTech vendors, we are actively building out processes to make available innovative mission-aligned startups from our [Accelerator at WGU Labs](#) to expand the potential solutions available to our members.



InScribe leverages the power of community and artificial intelligence to connect individuals to the answers, resources, and people they need to succeed.



Harmonize is an online discussion board built to increase student engagement, promote equitable learning environments, and ease instructor workload.



Nearpeer is a peer-to-peer engagement platform that uses highly effective matching algorithms to serve as a catalyst for meaningful, 1:1 connection among students.



Mainstay supports students via SMS text messaging, social media, web chat, and live chat to help them hit key enrollment and retention deadlines.



You at College unifies campus support systems by delivering well-being impact at scale for students, faculty, and staff.



Navigate U, CIN's first homegrown product, is an intuitive platform that gets students connected to the right campus resources, adapts to changing needs, and normalizes receiving support.

Our Impact: Research

CIN is dedicated to **leveraging EdTech and other innovative solutions** to build engaged learning communities where all students belong. It's imperative that we document our progress towards our mission across our core functions of research and community.

We've made great strides in our research agenda, publishing numerous research reports that demonstrate our impact on student outcomes. This past year marked the completion of our **first EdTech Cycle of Support** with several of our institutions, in addition to publishing two EdTech Survey Reports. Here are the highlights of our research impact this past year.



BY THE NUMBERS

6 ED TECH PRODUCT EVALUATIONS COMPLETED

5 PUBLISHED RESEARCH REPORTS

3 NETWORK RESEARCH PROJECTS CONDUCTED

2 NEW EDTECH PRODUCTS IN DEVELOPMENT

RIO SALADO COLLEGE IMPLEMENTS INSCRIBE

A longitudinal research study with more than 200+ fully online students showed that engagement with the virtual community, RioConnect (powered by InScribe), was associated with a significant increase in sense of belonging and peer connectedness for students.

PENNWEST (FORMALLY CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA) AND LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, NEW ORLEANS IMPLEMENT NEARPEER

A multi-institutional survey of students using a peer-engagement app, Nearpeer, showed that 91% of students made at least one peer connection on the app, and 41% of Nearpeer users made a "real life" friend because of the app. associated with a significant increase in sense of belonging and peer connectedness for students.

PIEDMONT COMMUNITY COLLEGE IMPLEMENTS HARMONIZE

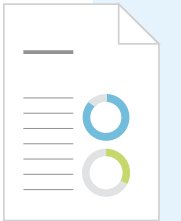
Case studies with faculty using a multimedia discussion platform, Harmonize, share the positive impact that the product had on student participation in course discussions; and in a sample of courses, students in courses with Harmonize earned more As and Bs than in courses without Harmonize.

2021 EDTECH STUDENT SURVEY

Our inaugural EdTech Survey of nearly 700 students, published in July 2021, revealed a new digital divide among students: inequity of experience accessing, using, and learning with EdTech. We evaluated for the first time students' confidence in their ability to learn and use EdTech for learning, which was robustly associated with their overall learning experience during the 2020-21 academic year.

2022 EDTECH FACULTY SURVEY

Our first survey of 400+ faculty across eight institutions revealed that faculty view themselves as leaders in the EdTech space, with 41% of faculty identifying as EdTech leaders at their institutions. However, we found that institutional and market systems are not designed for faculty to effectively use EdTech. Institutional changes that provide more time, better training, and a seat at the decision-making table are starting points for an improved faculty EdTech experience.



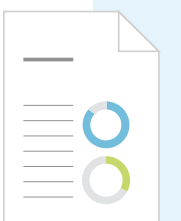
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Our Impact: Community of Practice

Our goal at CIN is to provide **expert support to institutions** in service of our mission, and to provide valuable programming and resources for members that will aid them in leading change within their own networks. We know that engaged learning communities are not only beneficial for students, but also for us as college leaders and change makers. By nurturing a community of practice among leaders at our member institutions, we can have a positive impact on the students at our institutions.

Each year, we survey our members to gain feedback on how we are doing. As CIN has matured, we have refined our mission, offerings, and programming. As a result, we've strengthened our community of practice. **Our year-over-year results demonstrate the positive impact of this effort.** Here are the highlights of our community of practice impact this past year.



BY THE NUMBERS

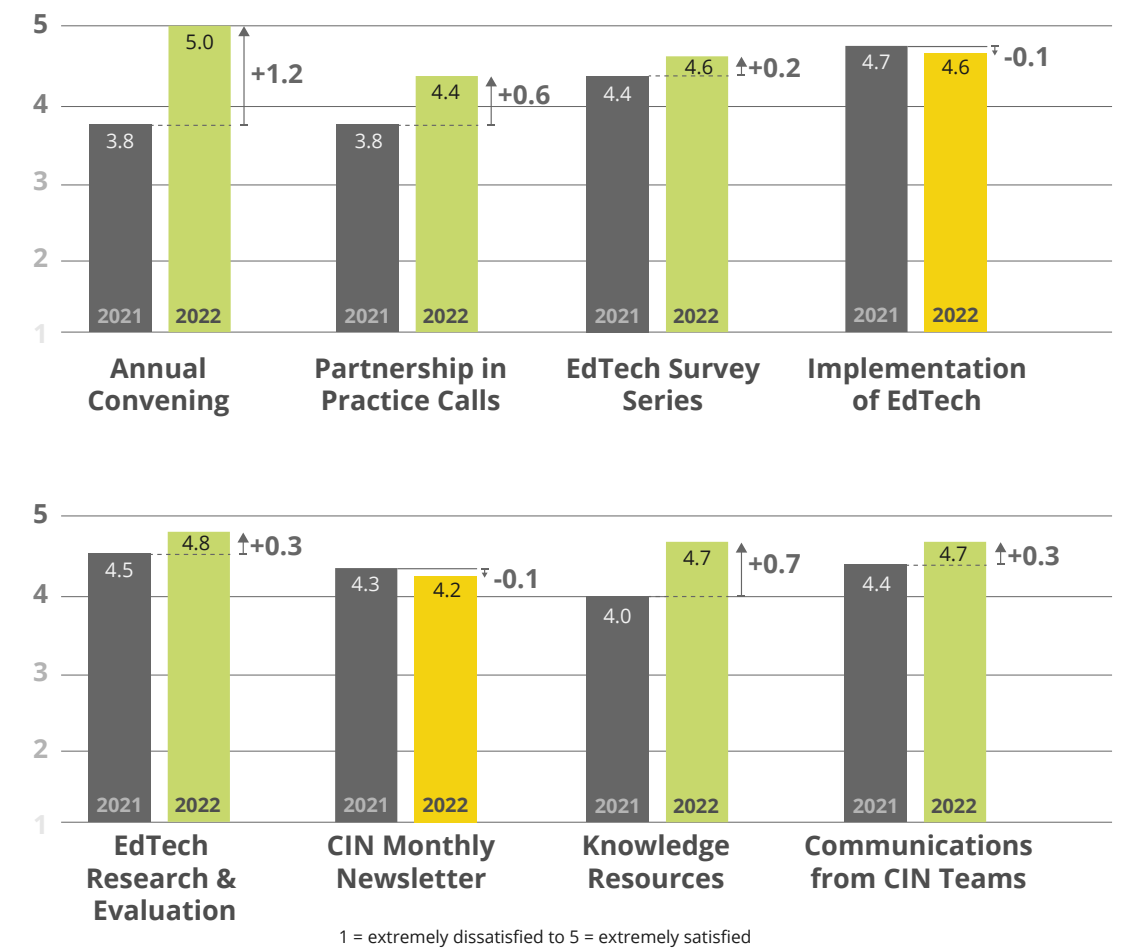
8 INSTITUTIONS WORKED WITH

200,000+ STUDENTS SERVED

1 IN-PERSON CONVENING HOSTED IN SALT LAKE CITY

6 PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE CALLS HOSTED

MEMBER SATISFACTION WITH CIN



TOP 5 MOST VALUABLE COMPONENTS OF CIN FOR MEMBERS



- #1 EDTECH RESEARCH & EVALUATION**
- #2 ANNUAL CONVENING**
- #3 PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE CALLS**
- #4 EDTECH SURVEY SERIES**
- #5 KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES**

Join us

IS YOUR INSTITUTION A GOOD FIT?

We seek institutions that educate diverse student populations - including a significant proportion of traditionally underrepresented and underserved students. By joining CIN, institutions are committed to the common goal of leveraging technology and designing innovations to better support belonging, engagement, and equity - housed within a supportive community of like-minded education leaders.

IS YOUR PRODUCT A GOOD FIT?

Participating CIN vendors create products that show a clear understanding of the needs of faculty and the diverse student populations they serve. Vendors must offer EdTech solutions that clearly address belonging, engagement, and equity at some stage of the student lifecycle, and are able to offer preferential discounts to Members.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

We would love to chat with you and see if your institution would be a good fit for our growing Network.

Contact Business Operations Manager Erika Wandsneider at cin@wgu labs.org to get started.

Join us as we build engaged learning communities where all students belong.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[CIN Membership Pathways](#)

What to expect when you join CIN

[CIN 2022 Post-Convening Report](#)

Get a glimpse into our annual convenings

[CIN FY2021 Annual Report](#)

See our progress since last year

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CIN is made possible through the support of a grant from the Charles Koch Foundation, and through the cooperation of Leadership at our CIN member institutions. The support of generous donors who believe in the mission of CIN make this work possible. If you are interested in supporting CIN, please contact us at cin@wgu labs.org.



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