
***SAGE ON THE STAGE
BIG DATA, CUSTOMIZED
LEARNING, AND THE DESIRE FOR
HUMAN INTERACTION***



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Abstract

A research question arising in academia is whether the desire by administrators to collect, analyze, and disseminate ‘big data’ has become a driving force in how education is delivered. One area where data is being collected on students is through the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). We wanted to explore whether students believed that the mass information collected on them would lead to improved customized education, or whether it would be used a cost-cutting mechanism to eliminate the lecturer. Lectures salaries tend to make up the majority of academic budgets. Focus groups were conducted among first, second and final year undergraduate business students. Participants report that they do not wish to see VLEs replace traditional lectures or tutorials and there is some push-back by

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students in that they do not want the ‘sage on the stage’ to be replaced the use of data to customized student led learning. Business students in this sample view the value in VLEs to disseminate textbook and journal article information and to promote collaborative learning and contribute to employability. Implications for higher education are discussed.

Keywords: Big data, VLE’s, austerity, flexible learning, online learning.