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Upskill Uprising: Designing for Lifelong Learning
Episode 21 Transcript

Episode Description:
Imagine earning college credits by watching YouTube videos on your phone – that's the reality Study Hall is crafting! Born out of a partnership between YouTube, Arizona State University, and Crash Course, Study Hall is breaking down barriers to education and signals a coming shift in the modern workplace. That's right, in the not-so-distant future, your office won't just be where you work, it'll be where you learn and your boss may become your professor. In this role twist, designers will need to understand how to design personalized learning journeys in both digital and physical spaces that support upskilling of employees to adapt to new technologies. Join us as we give you the tools you need to design workplaces of the future to support lifelong learning.

Sean Hobson: [00:00] I think there's going to be more and more threading in what happens quote-unquote in the classroom and what happens in the workforce, and the more that both of those sides or institutions can provide a credentialing experience that are consistent with one another or play off one another, I think it's going to be better for both sides and ultimately better for the learner and the employee. Right now, I think those things happen too desperately from one another.

Kaelynn Reid: [00:33] Welcome to the Alternative Design podcast, where we explore the power of foresight and design to create future-ready spaces. In each episode, we talk to diverse voices to discover the ways our world is changing and uncover insights that will influence the built environment of tomorrow. I'm your host, Kaelynn Reid, an Interior Designer and Certified Futurist, and I want to help designers think like futurists so we can take actionable steps today to become makers of a better future. When's the last time you pulled up YouTube to learn something? Looking at my browser history, apparently for me it was yesterday, when I was trying to figure out how to hang ribbon on a Christmas tree. Eighty six percent of Americans say they use this popular video platform to teach themselves new things. In this week's episode, we're talking about Study Hall, a recently launched collaborative project between YouTube, Arizona State University, and Crash Course. Study Hall aims to radically change the formal education process by allowing students to watch videos on YouTube as the on-ramp to gaining college credit. So, all that video streaming can actually be formally recognized. But what exactly does Study Hall have to do with the future of work? Well, we believe education is the future of work, especially when you consider that almost all employees will need to upskill in order to adapt to these new technologies that are popping up left and right, employees are going to need personalized learning journeys, and we're going to tell you how to design workplaces today that will support these journeys in the future. This is episode 21, Upskill Uprising: Designing for Lifelong Learning.

Sean Hobson: [02:29]
My name is Sean Hobson. I'm the Chief Design Officer for a unit called Ed Plus at Arizona State University. I've been at ASU since 2006, working really in a variety of design capacities.

Kaelynn Reid: [02:43] Arizona State University is one of the largest public research universities in the country, with a mission to be measured not by who they exclude, but who they include and how they succeed. At the institution's core is the goal of using design as a process that leads to better outcomes for students. It's in everything they do, so it's no surprise that they're one of the partners and a brand new initiative to get students college credit simply by watching YouTube videos. This project kicked off in 2020, and it's called Study Hall.

Sean Hobson: [03:15] So Study Hall is a destination on the internet that starts with a YouTube channel and a set of videos on that YouTube channel that are really dedicated to helping college hopefuls understand the college journey. Sometimes in higher education we don't use the most accessible terms or the most accessible designs, and so it really started with that. Study Hall starts with a partnership with YouTube and their learning team in an organization called Crash Course, founded by Hank and John Green, two very popular YouTubers but also master teachers who have been developing the learning content on platforms like YouTube for a long, long time.

Kaelynn Reid: [04:07] A channel that boasts over 15 million subscribers. Crash Course has been creating educational videos that transform the traditional textbook model of learning into a fast-paced video format that enhances the learning experience.

Sean Hobson: [04:22] ASU has been committed to serving learners regardless of physical location for a long time, so we have a big online program through ASU Online, serving thousands of students who otherwise can't connect with the university. We're really building a program that is designed to reach learners on platforms that are already native to them. YouTube is the largest learning platform on the planet and it's not even close. Yet we don't really think of it that way when you think about a formal learning or education model.

Hema Bajaj: [05:03] So the content series is how to college and the second is fast guides to majors and electives. So how to college is a video series that really helps someone navigate the college application process, stay on track once they begin their higher ed journey. It answers questions like what is FAFSA, how do you apply, and then fast guides to majors and electives. Includes information about a dozen or so of the most popular college majors, including the classes you have to take to complete that major, but also what are the career prospects that you have after graduation once you've completed that major.

Kaelynn Reid: [05:38] This is Hema Bajaj, a Strategic Partnership and Programming Manager at YouTube.

Hema Bajaj: [05:44] Oftentimes, especially for first generation students, they don't have the support and guidance that second and third generation students often organically have, even just dinner table conversations. So, there are all these stats that, like half of U.S. undergraduates, come from first generation families, yet they only have about a 15% chance of completing their degree, despite their academic ability. I think that a large reason is because there's so much hidden curriculum that's what we call it. A hidden curriculum that comes when you're applying right, from understanding how tuition works, what is FAFSA and understanding basic college jargon, and so these organic conversations that happen for second and third generation students. We're bringing that now to first generation students and saying here is content you can watch and hopefully it helps you navigate this really complex system.

Kaelynn Reid: [06:33] Study Hall has taken a sometimes intimidating educational structure and made it easy to understand and, frankly, approachable. There's another really complex system that's causing a lot of excitement and some anxiety in the workplace, and it's AI. For a lot of people, terms like large language models, prompting and pre-training are totally foreign, and here's the thing, employees are going to have to familiarize themselves with them and understand how to apply advanced technologies like these into their daily lives. Why? Because 77% of employees are already exploring or using AI this year alone. Human Resources and Workforce Technology Company UKG just shared findings from their recent survey that revealed that companies using AI today estimate that 70% of their total workforce will use AI to automate or augment some of their job tasks by 2028. So, designers, we're predicting a new trend that will change the way you design future workplaces. If employers want to attract and retain the kind of talent that will have these unique skills required to leverage AI for business, they will have to become educators. And if

employers become educators, they will require spaces designed for learning that can connect the digital and the physical. When we come back, the most innovative part of Study Hall that has the power to transform informal learning on your phone into a credential employers will recognize and accept. This past spring, Kimball International held its first inaugural Future X event, where we invited a cohort of designers ranging in experience, discipline, and location to join us in Detroit for a foresight workshop on the future of belonging in design. One of the questions we asked each designer was what are you most excited or concerned about regarding the future?

Iman Khoury: [08:25] So I would say that something that excites me about design is the integration and the inclusivity of wellness spaces and projects. That's one of my goals is to make sure that in every project I get to work on that there is a space for respite, there's a space for someone to take a minute and just being more aware and inclusive of the fact that everyone has moments and everyone's energy levels fluctuate throughout the day, and finding a chance or a moment to yourself and for any stigma around that to really slow down so that people can feel comfortable taking a break. One of the things that concerns me about the future of design is mostly focused on the students and the emerging professionals and institutions or colleges and universities that are starting to get away from emphasizing traditional skills. So, sketching, lettering, drawing, illustrating you know, renderings by hand. I think that that's such an important skill in a creative field and it's also something it's one of the ways that we put thoughts to paper is through sketching it and figuring it out and explaining this, and I think it's one of those really crucial parts of design that is slowly going away with the increase of technology, which is great. I love Revit. Revit is fantastic, but in the design and the creative process, before documenting everything, I worry that we're going to have a lack of that method of expressing creativity and that that will sort of become a dying art, and I don't want that to be something that these future students and professionals miss out on without even knowing that they're missing out on. My name is Iman, I am at Perkins and Will and I am an Interior Designer and you're listening to the Alternative Design podcast.

Sean Hobson: [10:27] And then the third series, or the third component, is what we're calling college foundations, and this is perhaps the most innovative part, where you can actually start to watch videos on the Study Hall YouTube channel and earn progress towards college credit. You watch these courses, you move into an experience where you can work with your peers, you work with faculty, you get feedback, you take assessments, and you can do all that for just $25.

Hema Bajaj: [11:03] You can watch all of the course videos right now on YouTube and then, when you're ready, when you feel like you're prepared, you can transition to the formal course experience. And there's universal eligibility. So, no transcript needed, no application required, no GPA thresholds and there's no penalty for failure. So, you choose, as a student, to pay for credit only when you're satisfied with your grade, and so, ultimately, you can earn college credit and receive a transcript from ASU when you feel like you are satisfied with your grade, and then that credit is also transferable to all of the hundreds of universities that accept ASU credit. So, it's transferable. I'll talk a little bit about this. But it's really that sense of agency. You feel empowered and you feel a sense of agency over your learning. We're often that doesn't feel like that's the case in the way the current model is built.

Kaelynn Reid: [11:55] You heard that correctly. You pay after you've passed and it's totally transferable to other institutions. We know that the norm is to pay upfront for your course credits and then hopefully you pass, because if not, you don't get a refund. Study Hall has essentially de-risked the education process, made it more accessible and given learners the agency to get their education on their terms. This signal of change seems like it's all about education, but I think it's actually relevant for the future of work, particularly when you think about the big question it raises.

Hema Bajaj: [12:28] So the fact is, learning on YouTube is an almost ubiquitous experience. Nearly all users say that they do it and it's happening organically, and the data shows that a post-secondary education is one of the best drivers of economic and social mobility. And yet the path to higher ed has so many barriers, particularly the exorbitant cost, and it's made attaining a degree almost unattainable for far too many, for far too long. And, frankly, it's not just enough for that informal environment to play the role of like providing you that information. I think equally important is, then, that external recognition and gaining credit for that learning right. There are many people who learn something on YouTube, but it's to say, will that business, will that company, will that university then say that's enough and that's what we're trying to shift with Study Hall to say now there is a direct path from your intrinsic love and and you're spending time on this platform and consuming this content. How do we ensure that we can show that you learned something from it?

Kaelynn Reid: [13:36] Will companies that have required traditional degrees accept learning credentials received on YouTube? It's a fascinating question. We're already seeing an evolution of opinion on this front, and it's important to understand how this could influence the way designers will shape offices of the future. The share of jobs that require a college degree actually fell to 44% last year, down from 51% in 2017, according to research from the Burning Glass Institute. There's a lot of buzz around this idea of micro credentials where, similar to Study Hall, learners get certifications for a very specific set of skills. This narrowed focus means that a learner can demonstrate proficiency in a given area and often do it a lot faster than a full degree program.

Hema Bajaj: [14:22] One of my favorite examples is the veteran. His name was Joshua Carroll, and he came out of the military and taught himself advanced math on our platform and is now realizing his dream of working as a physicist. It's just a great example where, I mean, he was obviously intrinsically motivated to do it, but he did. He used the platform and he built an entire learning pathway and gained all the knowledge that he needed to then become a physicist, and so he's one of my favorite examples, to just go. You know, it just goes to show you that that content is there. There is a huge breadth and depth of content in the platform.

Kaelynn Reid: [14:58] As of right now, Study Hall is the on ramp to receiving a traditional credit from a university, but it's signaling a change in how to get that credit, and it's very possible that will continue to see companies changing the way that they've always done things and accepting different proof of qualifications for employees. In fact, some have said that micro credentials are more telling of the kind of skills that will be needed for a given job. Okay, so why does this matter? Well, for starters, it could mean that your coworker didn't graduate from an accredited university with a bachelor's in interior design, but instead got an array of credits proving the same knowledge set that you received. But, more interestingly, it could mean that employers start offering these new pathways of learning themselves.

Sean Hobson: [15:43] We created the video series on data literacy, and it was really interesting because we had students who just wanted to learn about that. We also had some organizations and government organizations reach out to us and say, hey, we'd love to use this content for our training programs for our employees to help them upscale in these particular job areas and get everybody on the same page, and so those types of things are right in, I think, the wheelhouse of what you're describing and certainly an area of growth for Study Hall.

Kaelynn Reid: [16:22] Employers will have to become educators to keep up with the changing demands of the market, adapt to new technologies like artificial intelligence, reduce skill gaps in the organization and retain talent by offering opportunities for growth and development. But how well they succeed in doing that will be based on how well they tailor the education experience to the employee by leveraging a variety of proven ways to learn things.

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Sean Hobson: [16:47] Every one of us has...not every one of us when you think on a global scale, but in this country, the majority of us have a super computer in our pocket and so I think I think there's been a lot written about and a lot of research around the benefits of a real personalized learning experience. I think we're at a time now that that makes some of that a possibility where I can, as a student, no matter where I am in my life, where I am in my area of interest, I can get a personalized experience. Hopefully that helps level the playing field around access. Hopefully that puts some of the opportunity in the hands of the learner.

Kaelynn Reid: [17:55] We know that one of the biggest current complaints about returning to the office is the commute. Employees want to reclaim that seemingly wasted time, however they can, with most choosing to work from home to recoup this loss. But what if there was a different solution? What if you could turn your boring, sometimes stressful, commute to the office into a customized micro learning session, simply by watching engaging videos on a platform that could give you immediate credit for what you just learned? Imagine opening an app, telling it that you want to take *Prompting 101* and that you have a 23-minute commute to the office. In no time at all, your customized course begins and by the time you've reached the coffee machine, you have a credential that any employer would recognize. That could help influence a promotion or even a job application.

Sean Hobson: [18:43] Yeah, you know, I think increasingly we're going to get to a point where learners have more and more agency around their own learning path. Maybe they do a little bit on campus, maybe they do a little bit online, maybe they do a little bit in the coffee shop and more of a hybrid model. And I think all of that comes with more opportunities to earn a learning credential almost in real time. The more we're doing those in technologies that we can actually measure progress and performance, the more opportunities there is to provide some of these credentialing. I think there's going to be more and more threading in what happens, quote unquote, in the classroom and what happens in the workforce. So you're getting like a reciprocal relationship on learning across those two places. And the more that both of those sides or institutions can provide a credentialing experience that are consistent with one another or play off one another, I think it's going to be better for both sides and ultimately better for the learner and the employee. Right now, I think those things happen to desperately from one another.

Kaelynn Reid: [20:08] We're going to become a workforce of lifelong learners and that means learning can happen anywhere on YouTube, on campus, or in the office. The more we can continue to move away from this binary of it all has to be in person or it all has to be digital and recognize that humans will need both physical and digital experiences to learn and work well. We can focus on using design to enhance both.

Sean Hobson: [20:34] I think for interior designers and architects, I think the medium can tend to be physical design. I think your line of questioning around matching that with the digital world is increasingly important. Even at ASU we've got buildings we're putting together and it's about campus real estate, but increasingly it's going to be about digital real estate too. So really thinking about the design of those spaces and how we want those to interface with the physical world.

Kaelynn Reid: [21:09] Okay, last signal I'll throw at you for today's episode. Since 2022, over 12,000 students have taken an intro to biology class that uses something called Alien Zoo Curriculum. Students are immersed in a virtual environment that has been crafted by none other than DreamWorks Motion Pictures Cofounder Walter Parks and Director Steven Spielberg. Students turn into field biologists to study fictional but very convincing animals and dissect them. Man, I think I had normal bio where we actually had to dissect real frogs. These students get to basically be in a Jurassic Park film and get credit, but at the end of the day, research shows this style of learning that combines cinematic storytelling,

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immersive technologies and experiential learning dramatically improves learning outcomes. Students from all demographics were twice as likely to get A's in this style of class than in the traditional intro to bio course. I share this because new and innovative learning modalities, both digital and physical, will shape an employee's continued education, and designers need to be aware of how both interact with one another. It's possible that designers may be called upon to design the sets of the videos that will be used on platforms like YouTube to onboard employees. It's also possible that designers will need to design former boardrooms into classrooms that enable immersive experiences.

At Kimball International, one of the space types we focus on when designing current offices is called Room on the Move. It promotes learning, training, and hands-on activities in an environment that has versatile and movable furniture. But in a future of work where employers become educators, these spaces will prove even more critical and will require being planned for the overlay of digital experiences. Here's some things to consider when you're designing workplaces that will support these new learning approaches happening in the office. Before getting rid of extra unneeded office space, make sure that the client is looking out ahead five years or so and ask is there a possibility that the space could be leveraged for training. You'd be surprised how much floor plan is necessary to accommodate for the 6 foot by 6 foot space recommended by most VR manufacturers. You'll want to focus on incorporating soft finishes and safety barriers that ensure the safety of the employees who are using these spaces, especially if the client intends on needing to facilitate multiple employees. Specify furniture that is mobile and can easily be tucked out of the way when employees are participating in an immersive experience, but keep that furniture close by, because it's likely that teams will want to discuss or collaborate after they've completed an immersive learning module. And lastly, thoughtfully incorporate sensory design considerations like adjustable lighting to combat glare and temperature control to prevent breaking the immersion. AI is certainly not the only disruptor that will require continuing education to happen in the workplace, and we're encouraging designers to think about how offices can start facilitating lifelong learning through adaptive, personalized learning journeys both in and outside of the built environment. That's it for this episode. A big thank you to our guests, Hema and Sean, for coming on the show. Thank you to Senior Foresight Manager Mark Bryan at Futures Today Institute for helping us learn and adapt their signal collection, trend development, and scenario frameworks as we develop the content for these episodes. The episode was produced by myself and Andrew Reid, audio production and scoring also done by Andrew Reid. Alternative Design podcast is, of course, brought to you by Kimball International. Thanks for listening.