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Technology in Higher Ed

DIGITAL & TECHNOLOGY, HIGHER EDUCATION
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This summer's trend of retro technology looks to be continuing, as Nintendo will ride the resurgence with the release of the Super Nintendo Classic (arriving in stores on September 29 for those doing early Christmas shopping). This comes after a successful launch of the Nintendo Classic last fall and many establishments popping up all over the United States offering the ability to play classic arcade games. While there has been this nostalgia for classic technology lately, there are some serious developments on the cutting edge of virtual interaction between human and machine. No longer are wired controls and a television needed to jump into a virtual world.

Real developers (not just boy-genius, bearded Keenan Feldspar) are diving into the Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) realm. While these two terms seem like something from the imagination or fresh off the Holodeck of the Starship Enterprise, they are becoming more of a real-life experience. Even Facebook sees the emergence of a virtual reality market and jumped into the industry with a \$2 billion purchase of Oculus rift. Virtual Reality fully engages the user in whatever program is presented on the headset screen. Augmented Reality allows the user to still see his normal surroundings, but additionally interact with new objects. With this comes the chance for a different way to present educational materials and experience new ways to learn, and higher education suppliers are taking notice.

Pearson which is widely known for its textbook material development for educational institutions, has partnered with Microsoft to develop software for Microsoft's HoloLens headset. Currently, the main focus of the partnership aims to develop an interactive learning curriculum focusing on the STEM subject matters. These mediums give opportunities for students to make mistakes in a chemistry or health science simulations without the fear of injury or death and then have feedback in real time to learn from.

While not yet available, the Microsoft HoloLens hardware will be priced around \$3,000, excluding any software. Other available headsets cost approximately \$600 for the Oculus Rift or \$800 for the HTC Vive. However, as institutions look for new and innovative ways to educate youth, the potential for virtual reality to replace the chalkboard seems endless. Already, virtual reality is creating new opportunities for medical students to experiment with cadavers in a virtual environment. Physical cadavers can run into the thousands of dollars and can often be difficult to procure. Also, textbook prices continue to rise for students, and other physical learning tools that have a shelf life or can only be used once can be costly. This leaves an interesting decision that institution leaders are faced with.

As schools continue to look for ways to interest new students and become more

innovative, virtual reality is almost certainly the gateway to the future. The full capabilities of this technology and the related costs are still uncertain, but the future looks full of possibilities for the next generation of educators. For information on how technology is changing higher education, [contact us](#).

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