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Higher Education's Future

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Educating the next generation is one of the most fundamental human obligations. For more than a decade, changing demographics, budget pressures, and ever-increasing costs (e.g., tuition) have created tension between the mission drivers and business models of higher education. Now, with COVID-19 and the associated economic crisis, institutional leaders are being forced to re-think many aspects of their offerings. Changing delivery models (in-person, online, hybrid/hyflex) have been the most visible impact, but the changes extend to every corner of the academic enterprise. It seems clear that the institutions that adopt and adapt to technology integration the fastest will be the ones who build the future.

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Sincerely,

Ann Merrihew

Ann Merrihew
Director, U.S. Higher Education, Amazon Web Services

"We are dedicated and committed to working with institutions to ensure that education is always available, personal, and that learning can be lifelong for everyone."

-- Ann Merrihew, AWS

Introduction

As 2020 began, higher education institutions were under significant pressure from many angles -- demographic, financial, political and operational. Then the novel coronavirus descended, spurring a global pandemic and a worldwide economic downturn, and the United States was shaken anew by a national dialogue about racial justice and equity.

Exactly how those developments alter the higher education landscape remains blurry, but they are likely to intensify the pressure on colleges and universities to find new, better ways to serve their students, their local communities and, collectively, the country.

Just about everyone has an opinion about how they should respond. In this collection of news articles and opinion essays, thoughtful analysts and experts offer perspectives on possible approaches higher education leaders should consider to transform their institutions to meet the needs of their many constituents. We hope it helps you and your colleges and universities as you navigate the path forward.

As always, *Inside Higher Ed* welcomes your ideas and comments for coverage of the issues explored in this compilation.

--The Editors
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NEWS

Future of the Academy

At the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, academics discuss how to rethink the academy and how to separate it from the university.

By Madeline St. Amour // January 27, 2020

SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES/SOLSTOCK

David Staley believes the university's future has yet to be determined.

While punditry about higher education suggests otherwise, said Staley, director of the Humanities Institute and an associate professor of history at Ohio State University, the academy has the power to imagine a different future from the headline-grabbing innovations of online learning, upskilling and mega-university models.

"Ours is a particularly fertile moment to imagine something new," he said to a packed room Friday at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in Washington.

Staley and others were discussing what the "college of the future" might look like. Johann Neem, chair of the history department at Western Washington University, said a key piece of that imagining is to separate the academy from the university.

"Instead of the universities getting rid of professors, what if we got rid of the university?" Neem said.

People have an innate curiosity and desire to learn and build a community, he said, which is why they go to yoga studios and join book groups. What if the academy set up shop in a similar fashion?

"We're afraid that, unless there's a credential with a degree, nobody's going to want to learn from me," said Neem, author of the recently published book *What's the Point of College? Seeking Purpose in an Age of Reform* (Johns Hopkins University Press). "We insult people when we pretend that the only way they're going to develop their intellect is because we force them to."

To create something new, higher education will inevitably have to change. One piece is the departmentalization of college campuses, which Kathleen Fitzpatrick, director of digital humanities and an English professor at Michigan State University, said is one reason university structures today are quite rigid.

Instead, Fitzpatrick said universities should be looking for ways to convene groups who are inter-

ested in particular issues, an approach that doesn't align with departments.

Chad Wellmon, professor of German studies at the University of Virginia, said a "college corporate body" should give faculty members the responsibility of creating curricula, rather than pushing strategies like student-centered learning.

Staley said students seem to want an ability to design majors around an idea rather than a specific department. For example, one of his students said he is interested in happiness, which doesn't have its own department but has been examined by philosophers, psychologists, writers and more.

And, while "breaking down silos is great," he said faculty members then go back to their departments, where they are promoted and seek tenure.

Technology inevitably will be a factor in the future of higher education, but the panelists cautioned attendees against using it in the wrong way.

"I get super, super nervous when developers of technology like extended reality start talking about technology as an easy path to empathy," Fitzpatrick said. "You can step into somebody else's shoes in [virtual reality], but you've still got your own feet."

> "Instead of the universities getting rid of professors, what if we got rid of the university?"

While people often point to literature and reading as a way to build empathy, Fitzpatrick said that ability actually is developed in the discussion of reading, where people wade through what the words meant and how they each read it differently. She added that "shortcuts" to building community don't exist.

And the absence of such communities is a problem now, the panelists said. The future, Neem said, should center on how to build communities around shared pursuits of knowledge, and then upward from there.

Wellmon shared a similar vision, adding that "the academy is in a precarious position" right now, so protecting it -- through writing, teaching and researching -- is his focus.

"I'm no longer in the business of defending the university," Wellmon said. "I'm here to defend and argue for the academy." ■

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Trends in the new world of education: Download the new eBook

Educational institutions are responding to challenges that have become more complicated since the start of the pandemic. New learning models, declining enrollments, rising health and safety costs, and cuts in public funding are forcing education leaders to rethink ways to deliver quality education in a more cost-effective, agile, and scalable way. Despite these challenges, educators report that technology has made it easier—and faster—to innovate, and to meet students' evolving needs. In this recently released paper, learn the seven trends in the new world of education that most commonly arise during our interactions with customers and education leaders, and how the cloud can help.

The biggest trend is the rise of online, flexible learning, which offers students more freedom in shaping their learning experience. To enhance teaching and personalized education, educators can use technology to help engagement and how students connect with content. One of the concerns associated with more online learning and lack of social interaction among students is its potential effect on the mental health of students and faculty. In fact, a recent survey of 300 university presidents by the American Council on Education identifies student mental health as a primary concern. One of the solutions is setting up hotlines and chatbots, which help reduce the administrative burden of increasing call volume and enable health professionals to spend more time with students. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District in the US set up a cloud-based call center to provide mental health support to students and families a few days after the outbreak.

Academic institutions are also adjusting their offerings to enhance learner employability, especially in this time of economic recession and increasing unemployment. To address this employment crisis, some countries cut public spending on universities. In parallel, industry continues to face a shortage in skills needed for today's jobs—both specialized as well as what many call "employability skills," i.e. communication, teamwork, and adaptability, among others. Amazon Web Services (AWS) offers a range of training and certification resources to universities and colleges including AWS Educate, AWS Academy, and AWS re/Start. AWS Educate is Amazon's global initiative to provide students and educators with the resources needed to accelerate cloud-related learning and help power the entrepreneurs, workforce, and researchers of tomorrow. AWS Academy and AWS re/Start also help nurture global IT talent around the world. The paper also explores innovative use cases in assessment and research, among other trends.

Download "Emerging Trends in the New World of Education" to learn more about how the cloud is helping organizations drive student objectives and outcomes. To hear it straight from customers, EdTech leaders, and educationalists, sign up for IMAGINE: The New World of Education, a webinar series that explores the challenges and opportunities that education institutions around the world face.

The Dark, Challenging and Fun Future

Bryan Alexander's new book, *Academia Next*, attempts to predict the future of higher education. We asked him a few questions about what's in store.

By Lilah Burke // January 20, 2020

Bryan Alexander is a researcher, writer and frequent commentator on higher education. He is also -- as he reminds readers of his new book -- a futurist, meaning he examines trends to predict future outcomes. In *Academia Next: The Futures of Higher Education*, Alexander describes a few potential scenarios for the higher ed landscape in coming decades. Alexander is currently a senior scholar at Georgetown University.

He responded via email to questions about his book.

Q: Who is your book for and what do you hope it will achieve? Is it your goal to help colleges and universities survive into the future? If so, why?

A: I wrote *Academia Next* for everyone thinking about higher education's future. That includes students, faculty, staff, alumni and trustees, along with directly interested parties: parents of younger students, and state legislators, along with academically involved foundations, nonprofits, relevant government agencies and businesses.

My goal is to help readers think more creatively and effectively about the future of higher education, aiding them as they plan for and make the next generation of colleges and universities.

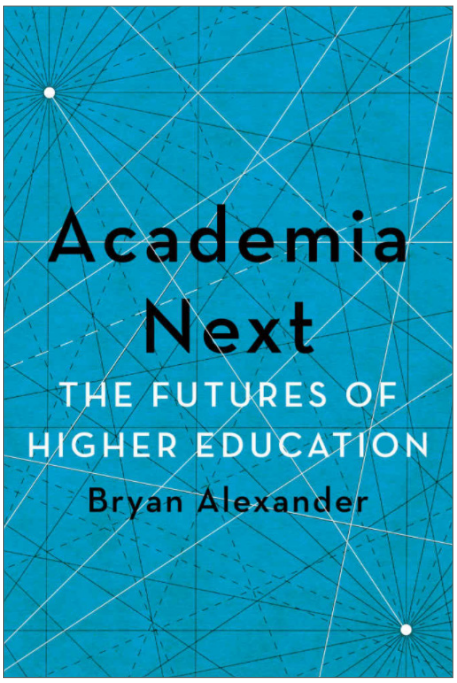
I hope futures thinking can help institutions survive, because at its best, the academy represents an extraordinary combination of learning, discovery, inspiration, knowledge accumulation, personal transformation and social service. I fear that the futures I derive tend to forecast a very challenging time ahead for these amazing institutions -- which is ironic, because in contrast the future looks very bright for learning.

Q: What is your approach to predicting the future? What does the process entail?

A: I don't offer a single prediction. Instead, I explore multiple futures which higher education might inhabit.

Methodologically, in this book I focus on two approaches. The first chapters are a form of trends analysis, which looks to the present day and very recent history for signs of forces likely to change higher education in the future. They consider a broad range of trends, from enrollment patterns to demographics and macroeconomic forces to emerging technologies. Each of those trends is backed up by research, showing how they played out so far in the real world. Assembling that research entailed a nearly decade-long process of continuous environmental scanning, examining a wide and diverse range of sources for what Amy Webb calls "signals" of the future, and published regularly through the "Future Trends in Education and Technology" report. Chapter six ("Connecting the Dots") then directly extrapolates those trends into the short- and medium-term future, creating a first-order forecast.

Next, the second part of the book uses another approach by generating scenarios, or seven possible



forms for higher education. Each is based on one or two trends identified in the first part of Academia Next.

Trends analysis has the advantage of being grounded in material evidence. Scenarios are powerful because they are narratives, allowing us to easily imagine ourselves in their possible worlds. Both give us insight into the futures of academia.

Both of these methods are improved by the help of many people, often through social media. First, I use social media as one source for horizon scanning. Second, readers ping me to share stories they found fascinating. Third, I share stories and thoughts with many different people, including through social media, seeking feedback, improving my thinking and enhancing the

results. Over all this is a very collaborative and social process -- and you can see more about this in the book's acknowledgments.

Q: Some of the scenarios you present in the book describe a challenging future for American higher education. Which of these scenarios do you most fear or are you least excited about?

A: "Peak Higher Education" (chapter seven) is the darkest one. It posits a higher education sector that is smaller than it is now -- or was when I first published the idea here in *Inside Higher Ed* in 2014. Total student enrollment declines for a variety of reasons (demographics, geopolitics, low unemployment, student debt anxieties), leading to a shrinkage in campus budgets and an acceleration in the number of institutional closures and mergers. Competition heats up, and inter-campus collaboration becomes even more difficult than it once was. The 20th-century American idea that the more college and university experience people have, the better, begins to give way.

My slightly tongue in cheek "Retro Campus" (chapter 13) rejects the digital world almost entirely, and I fear that such an institutional design would lose the many benefits offered by modern technology.

Q: One of your chapters is on the "Augmented Campus," where augmented reality is mainstream and everyone on campus is constantly viewing virtual content on their eyewear. What trends might drive this development?

A: The rise of augmented and virtual reality technologies, then their combination in what some call mixed or extended reality. Mobile devices and speedy internet connections allow for the intertwining of the digital and physical worlds. The creativity we normally demonstrate when faced with new technologies then drives new interfaces, content, experiences, expectations and storytelling.

Q: I noticed that you dedicated your book to adjuncts, who, as you write, "do more than anyone, with less than anyone, to build the future of higher education." What does the future look like for adjuncts and why is the book dedicated to them?

A: I am very glad you caught that dedication. Right now, it looks like adjuncts will continue to represent the preponderance of the American professoriate. They do so now, and there is very little in the way of countervailing trends. Adjunct unions are a good step forward, but the forces driving adjunctification -- research universities overproducing Ph.D.s, campuses facing fierce pressures to keep costs low -- seem likely to persist.

Academia Next is dedicated to adjuncts because they are in many ways a humanitarian disaster that higher education has created. Their labor powerfully shapes the emerging future of the academy, usually without the recognition of others, and I wanted to draw the reader's attention to their work and situation. ■

"My slightly tongue in cheek "Retro Campus" rejects the digital world almost entirely, and I fear that such an institutional design would lose the many benefits offered by modern technology."

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Embracing higher education's future with a technology-driven approach

In this on-demand fireside chat, hear about the disruptive trends facing higher education from Scott Pulsipher, president at Western Governors University (WGU), and Ann Merrihew, director of U.S. higher education at Amazon Web Services (AWS). Scott and Ann discuss WGU's technology-powered innovation and how the university's technology-driven, student-centric approach to learning drives student success.

ANN MERRIHEW
Director, U.S. Higher Education, Amazon Web Service

SCOTT PULSIPHER
President, Western Governors University

LISTEN NOW

This fireside chat is part of IMAGINE: The New World of Education, a global series of conversations with (and for) education leaders.

IMAGINE: The New World of Education, a global webinar series presented by Amazon Web Services (AWS), showcases education institutions and organizations that have innovated in the cloud to ensure that learners of all ages have access to the education, training, and resources needed to keep our world moving forward.

CHECK OUT ALL THE SESSIONS

IMAGINE: THE NEW WORLD OF EDUCATION

Presented by aws

'The Low-Density University'

Authors discuss expansion of their "15 Fall Scenarios" blog post to an ebook.

By Scott Jaschik // August 18, 2020

When Joshua Kim and Edward J. Maloney wrote a blog post for *Inside Higher Ed* called "15 Fall Scenarios" on April 22, they didn't know what the reaction would be. As it turned out, people at 355,134 unique addresses read the story. The scenarios of course were about plans for the fall -- and colleges continue to switch scenarios, even as classes have started at some institutions.

Now Kim and Maloney have turned their blog post (as well as subsequent blog posts) into an 80-page ebook, *The Low-Density University: 15 Scenarios for Higher Education*, from Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kim is the director of online programs and strategy at the Dartmouth College Center for the Advancement of Learning and a senior fellow at the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship at Georgetown University. Maloney is a professor of English at Georgetown University, where he is executive director of the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship and the founding director of the Program in Learning, Design, and Technology. Together, they also wrote *Learning Innovation and the Future of Higher Education*, also from Hopkins University Press.

They responded to questions via email.

Q: Were you surprised by the intense reaction to your original blog post? What do you make of the reaction?

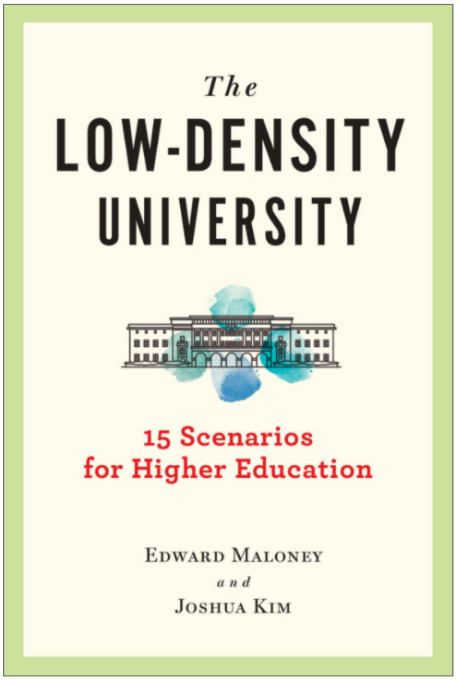
Josh: That is sort of a funny story. Eddie and I have been writing together for *Inside Higher Ed* for a while now. And I've been blogging for *Inside Higher Ed* for years. It was Eddie who originally proposed the idea of writing "15 Fall Scenarios," the piece that kicked this project off.

In my infinite wisdom, I tried to convince Eddie that 15 scenarios were too many. That we should maybe make seven or nine or 11 scenarios. I tried to convince Eddie that nobody would read through all 15 scenarios. But Eddie was firm that we should list the number of potential big permutations we foresaw for the fall of 2020 and not worry about what that number was.

It turns out that that blog post, along with our follow-ups exploring each scenario in some depth, were the most-read things that I've ever participated in writing for *Inside Higher Ed*. There is some lesson in this, although I can't figure out what it is.

Eddie: Well, I think I might remember the origin story a bit differently. While it is true that I suggested we write a list of possible scenarios, I really only had seven or eight in mind. As we started to draft out possible models, the list quickly grew, though. I think I was ready to stop at 10, but Josh, the consummate blogger and educator, told me an odd number was the way to go. So, 11? Thirteen?

In all seriousness, we were gratified by the reaction to our "15 Scenarios" writing. The reality is that back in April and May, when we were first writing the scenarios, [it] was an absolutely insane time for everyone in higher ed. The scenarios reflected the conversations



we were having on our campuses, and that our colleagues were (and are) having on their campuses, to plan for the coming semester. We were trying to engage in that planning under conditions of intense uncertainty, while also managing the ongoing pivot to remote learning in the spring.

Our "15 Scenarios" put some structure and language to the work that many across higher education were engaged, but the intense reaction was less about what we wrote and more about the challenge that everyone was (and is) facing at colleges and universities during the pandemic.

Q: The scenario that seems to be gaining ground right now is abandoning plans to bring back most or all students. Why do you think this is the case?

Josh: We go to pains to point out

in the book that the leaders that we interviewed from across higher education consistently placed safety -- of students, faculty, staff and communities -- as the absolute priority. Everyone is extremely mindful of the educational, social, reputational and financial implications of largely forgoing residential learning opportunities.

A shift to remote learning, whether it be a delay in the start of the semester, as some colleges are doing, or the choice to conduct most courses online, is an incredibly difficult decision for academic leaders to make. The reality that many schools are feeling compelled to make this choice reflects, we think, just how poorly the pandemic has been managed by the federal government and is the result of our society's failures to sustain the proper public health precautions throughout the summer.

Eddie: It makes sense. A theme that runs through *The Low-Density University* is *agility*. In an environment of profound uncertainty, colleges and universities have no choice but to be agile, to adapt to the changing health situation. For schools that made the decision in June or even earlier to bring students back, there were always built-in caveats that indicated the decisions were dependent on the health conditions.

As Josh notes above, the poor response to the pandemic from the current administration has left schools with little choice but to rethink their earlier decisions. Colleges, such as my own, [that] have made the more recent decision to shift the fall semester to primarily remote learning did so because of the current public health situation, primarily. The financial impact of full-scale testing, the preparedness of their faculty and the consistency of the choice with the mission of the school no doubt play a role in the decisions.

> "What we do try to emphasize in the book is the need for any decision about teaching during COVID-19 to be viewed through the lenses of both safety and equity."

Q: Who should decide which scenario a college adopts? In many cases where the scenario involves some face-to-face teaching, faculty object. How should colleges resolve these differences?

Josh: Of course, there is wide variation in how each college and university goes about making the decision about which scenario they follow most closely of those we laid out in *The Low-Density University*. (And to be clear, while we hope the writing was helpful to some in that decision, our contribution if utilized was likely one of many tools and frameworks that schools used.) What was consistent in our conversations with peers in researching the book is that the people involved in these decisions are committed to being data-driven, and to following the advice of the public health community.

Eddie: While we are sure there are exceptions, what we found in talking to peers across a variety of schools in researching *The Low-Density University* is a high degree of support for faculty choice when it comes to decisions about how to teach. There really did not seem to be an appetite to push faculty to teach in a way that is uncomfortable or worrying to them.

Again, we know from reading news stories (including in *Inside Higher Ed*) that this is not universal. What we saw may reflect our network, and we did not try to do a representative sample of interviews. Still, in our discussions, it was more often the case that instructors wanted to move online by and large. This was often driven by concerns about personal safety and a recognition that online learning could be more effective than in-person learning with social distancing measures in place.

Before the recent wave of colleges going online, however, we heard from colleagues at other centers for teaching and learning and units responsible for learning technology that a great deal of work went into figuring out the feasibility of this teaching method. (Scenario 13, HyFlex, in the book).

Q: Are there scenarios that haven't been adopted widely that you

think could be adopted by more colleges?

Eddie: What is important to keep in mind is that the 15 scenarios that we discuss in *The Low-Density University* were never meant to be exhaustive or exclusive. The reality is that colleges will mix and match strategies, adding new methods and techniques based on their local needs and the evolving circumstances. What we do try to emphasize in the book is the need for any decision about teaching during COVID-19 to be viewed through the lenses of both safety and equity.

Josh: As we discuss at some length in the book, the pandemic has both revealed and exacerbated the inequalities of opportunities that students must navigate. Students from resource-deprived and financially or health-stressed households have had to manage numerous personal and educational challenges in continuing their college careers during COVID-19.

So while we think that issues of equity, inclusion and social justice are at the forefront of the thinking of academic leaders, we would argue that these concerns should be vocally foregrounded and articulated in the communications of academic plans.

Q: Are there any new scenarios?

Josh: There are always new scenarios for describing how colleges and universities are navigating COVID-19. What Eddie and I are interested in now is trying to understand what comes after a vaccine for higher education. We've been talking with our colleagues within and at other schools about what the long-term impact of the pandemic will be for how colleges and universities are organized and run.

Eddie: Certainly the flexible schedule was a major element in the mix-and-match approach Josh mentions. Most colleges quickly rethought their fall calendars when considering bringing students back to campus. The Modified Tutorial model, my personal favorite for its pedagogical value, is being adapted in different ways to create more opportunities for student engagement.

But to Josh's point, we actually look at the scenarios we write about in *The Low-Density University* as being relevant once the pandemic has passed. Much of the strategies that underlie the efforts to provide a high-quality educational experience during COVID-19 will apply to when we no longer need to be socially distant. These strategies are built around principles of active learning, student participation in constructing their educational environments and a priority on equity and inclusion.

The emphasis on caring for the whole learner, something that was foregrounded in the academic continuity efforts of colleges during COVID, will (we hope) persist (and expand) once we are past this crisis. ■

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Fresh Guidance for Merging Colleges

Mergers are "one more tactical arrow in a strategic quiver," according to authors of new book offering practical advice on higher ed M&A.

By Rick Seltzer // October 29, 2019

Mergers between colleges and universities should not be viewed only as last resorts.

So says a new book published today, *Strategic Mergers in Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press). Instead, merging should be "a tactic to be considered proactively, deliberately, and without fear," it says.

But fear tends to creep in when knowledge is lacking. And the book's authors found little existing practical guidance on the process of merging two institutions.

They seek to add to the available resources by drawing on an analysis of over 100 mergers in the United States since 2000, interviews with more than 30 leaders involved in higher ed mergers and their own considerable experience.

The book's authors are Ricardo Azziz, who led a merger creating what is now Augusta University, in Georgia, and who is now a research professor at the University at Albany in the State University of New York system; Guilbert C. Hentschke, who served as dean at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education from 1988 to 2000 and is chair emeritus there; Lloyd A. Jacobs, who led a merger between the University of Toledo and the Medical College of Ohio and who is president emeritus of the university; and Bonita C. Jacobs, who led the merger that formed the University of North Georgia and who still serves as founding president at that institution.

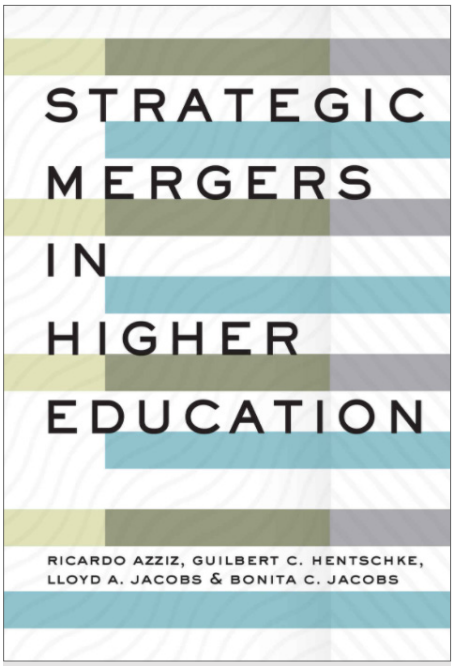
The new book is a "practical guide for higher education campus managers and executives, their boards, and related decision and policy makers," its authors wrote. It could also be useful for leaders who have to execute a merger and for anyone interested in the future of higher education or change management.

It might be publishing just in time for some campuses. Shifts in the higher education landscape have led to increased interest in mergers among college and university leaders in recent years, and many have moved forward with merger plans. Just last week, Henderson State University's Board of Trustees voted to merge with the Arkansas State University system. Only a few weeks earlier, Roosevelt University in Chicago announced plans to acquire its neighbor Robert Morris University.

The new book's authors collectively answered questions via email. The following exchange has been edited lightly for length and clarity.

Q: What barriers do you see to mergers, either across higher education as a sector or repeatedly rising within individual institutions?

A: As we noted in our book, the most pervasive barrier we have observed is the failure of consideration, i.e., the failure of governing boards and executive leaders in higher education to even consider a merger as a proactive option in their strategic planning. Much of this oversight arises from the unfounded belief that a merger signifies failure, even though mergers



Courtesy of Johns Hopkins University Press

are a well-tested approach to rapidly securing growth, stability and value. And many boards and leaders forget that mergers are a two-way street. While some institutions undoubtedly seek a merger when all else has been exhausted -- in extremis, if you would -- for many more institutions, a merger should be and is a significant growth opportunity. An opportunity that many boards and leaders overlook.

A second barrier is the failure of most boards and executive leaders to undertake careful strategic planning with an eye to long-term (decades) sustainability and growth. Many institutional leaders focus solely on this fiscal year, or perhaps the next, an understandable stance considering the role of many of

these leaders as the indefatigable cheerleaders of their institutions.

A third barrier is the belief of many leaders and governing boards that all change in higher education should be incremental and start from the ground up. Unfortunately, transformative change is, by definition, not incremental, and transformative change, with the exception of populous revolts, is rarely driven from the ground up.

A fourth barrier is the fact that most institutions that would benefit from a merger for sustainability and stability unfortunately wait too long. When colleges wait too long, their financial, political and enrollment value declines to the point that they may be unable to find a willing partner. A recent analysis by Robert Witt and Kevin P. Coyne also supports this assertion. In their analysis of mergers since 2016, they found that few if any failing private colleges should expect to find a willing merger partner.

Q: Is there a particular set of institutions that are likely to be good merger candidates?

A: Broadly speaking there are two groups of institutions that should consider mergers. The first are future-oriented institutions that are looking to add value and competitiveness in a significant way for their students and communities through growth and expansion -- growth and expansion of academic programs, geography and reach, physical plant, enrollment, student and faculty diversity, scholarship and research, and the like.

The second are future-oriented institutions that have begun to understand that their future is difficult and not promising, which places their students, faculty and programs at great risk. These institutions want to seek merger partners to enhance the long-term competitiveness, stability and sustainability of their programs, even if that would mean ceasing to operate as an independent entity.

> "Transformative change is, by definition, not incremental, and transformative change, with the exception of populous revolts, is rarely driven from the ground up."

There is a third group, although these are essentially those institutions in the second group above that have waited too long -- and which often fail to find a satisfactory merger partner. As mentioned above, although these tend to be more common today, it is our hope that with better, more comprehensive strategic planning, a more proactive approach to the future and a more complete consideration of all strategic options, options including mergers can be implemented.

We should note that systems of higher education, whether public or private, generally include and oversee colleges and universities that have similar cultures if not missions, and consequently good merger partners are more likely to be identified within individual systems.

Q: Some leaders see mergers only as transactions involving land and physical assets like buildings. Are mergers viable options for colleges that don't have valuable land -- those isolated in rural areas with low property values, for example?

A: When an institution has exhausted its value (see above), then often all that remains is their capital facilities and land -- assuming there are no liens or debt on these! However, this view of mergers speaks to what we are advocating against.

Institutions whose primary goal is to seek greater future stability and sustainability should strive to be of as much value to a merger partner [as possible]. They should definitely not wait too long; e.g., they likely should have at least five, if not 10, years of guaranteed existence ahead.

Alternatively, institutions that are looking to grow should consider acquiring institutions that are more than land transactions, seeking to potentially acquire new students, programs, geographic reaches, etc. Higher ed institutions have a myriad of approaches to acquiring land and facilities, and a merger solely as a land transaction is no merger at all. Nonetheless, such a transaction may be a viable option, depending almost entirely on how

those physical assets (land, buildings, etc.) advance the strategic mission of the acquiring institution.

Q: How do you suggest finding a good merger partner?

A: Many merger partners are discovered spontaneously, either due to personal relations between leaders or mere geographic proximity.

However, as we detail in our book, we believe a better approach for many mergers may be to approach identifying a merger partner systematically, much as one should approach any other major business decision. We speak to proactively deciding what type of merger an institution would benefit most from, exploring strategic and cultural fit, horizontal and vertical integration, and regional reach. However, we do understand that because many merger partners are sought locally, geographic proximity often plays an inordinately important role in deciding on a merger partner.

The search should be conducted quietly and confidentially and should preferably begin with an in-person conversation, rather than sending out a blank request for proposals to the universe of potential partners an institution has defined.

This "search to find" process should only be conducted within the broader context of a coherent strategic plan accepted by key institutional decision makers.

Q: What role should shared governance and the faculty play?

A: Faculty should play a critical role in considering and implementing a merger. Their role in the implementation of the merger process is fairly clear, as faculty and faculty leaders should be involved in all parts of the integration process. However, when engaging faculty in the process of consideration of a merger, there are two issues that need to be taken into account.

> "Considering a merger encourages leaders to critically examine their institutions' future and long-term future prospects."

Firstly, the process of consideration, searching for partners, negotiation and decision making for mergers often, if not always, requires careful attention to confidentiality and privacy. Engaging faculty representatives during this period of time, then, requires that these representatives understand their duty to maintain strict confidentiality, if requested, while accurately providing the faculty viewpoint.

Secondly, as noted above, engaging the faculty must be done through designated representatives. Unfortunately, very often individual faculty members do not feel that their voices are adequately represented by their elected representatives and hence demand that each be heard individually. This, of course, is simply impossible to achieve. Thus, it is critical that elected faculty representatives have the proper degree of delegated authority, leadership and gravitas if they are to be engaged in the consideration process of a merger.

Q: Can boards help mergers by introducing business concepts to the higher ed space?

A: Yes. Governing boards should embrace their generative and strategic roles and support and encourage their chosen leaders to pursue a future-oriented envisioning while discouraging institutions from pursuing the too-frequent race to mediocrity. While introducing business concepts might help, focusing on better leadership development, including the acquisition of business tools and a better understanding of change management, might be a more comprehensive approach.

Q: What concerns other than finances -- like impact on underrepresented students or program availability in a state -- should be considered in a merger process?

A: Students should be the first and primary concern of any institution of higher education, whether merging or not. As such, the impact and value of a merger on students should always be assessed, not only for current students but also those of the future and past. However, often mergers, while painful to many faculty and administrators, are ultimately a positive experience for students. Some mergers may be associated with changes in admission or graduation requirements,

and in these it will be critical to ensure that subgroups of students are not negatively impacted, and if so, have a plan in place to address.

Other concerns when considering mergers include cultural and strategic fit, the driving vision for the merger and the degree of urgency established. Other important concerns include ensuring a robust communication strategy and an experienced project management system.

Q: What can we learn about mergers by comparing other parts of the world to the United States?

A: In our book we explore mergers across the world. The consideration and partnering processes in many parts of the world are more centrally driven than many mergers in the United States, with the exception of mergers of public institutions. However, the actual process of integration -- amalgamation of the various administrative and support entities and the long-term journey to developing a new and broader campus culture -- are similar between the many mergers across the world and those in the United States. International mergers provide important lessons for institutions of higher education in the United States.

Q: What else should leaders know?

A: Mergers are simply one more tactical arrow in a strategic quiver. Considering a merger does not commit leaders to merging but does broaden the options available. And considering a merger encourages leaders to critically examine their institutions' future and long-term future prospects.

Mergers require leaders with vision and courage and governing boards who are willing to provide cover and support. ■

> "Mergers require leaders with vision and courage and governing boards who are willing to provide cover and support."

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/29/new-book-seeks-guide-college-leaders-through-merger-possibilities

Presidents Assess the Uncertain Present and the Future

A new book looks at how the market is affecting colleges' futures -- and where risk is most concentrated.

By Rick Seltzer // February 1, 2020

The appendix of a new book contains everything needed to calculate a score gauging the market stress faced by individual colleges and universities across the country.

It's a provocative idea that could provide information of use to discerning students and improvement-minded administrators alike. It's also an idea that's getting more attention and growing more controversial of late as the higher education sector continues to feel pressure on several fronts and as a small number of institutions announce closure or merger plans every year.

But the authors of the book, *The College Stress Test* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), intentionally didn't include a list of institutions and their market stress scores -- even though they calculated scores for well over 2,000 institutions. Instead, they spend the book's pages examining the higher education market, discussing factors that they used to score institutions' level of stress and discussing strategies colleges and universities can use to change their trajectory.

"At its core, this effort to identify institutions at greatest risk due to shifting student markets is a quantitative one," wrote the authors, University of Pennsylvania higher education professor Robert Zemsky, former Penn director of institutional research Susan Shaman and Middlebury College professor -- and former provost -- Susan Campbell Baldridge. "We wanted to know which institutions were most at risk of closing and why. But we believe it is also important to understand the emotions that inevitably swirl around questions of institutional viability."

Their findings suggest college closings won't be as frequent as some soothsayers have predicted. No more than one out of 10 of the country's colleges and universities face "substantial market risk," and closings are likely to affect "relatively few students." Six in 10 institutions face little to no risk.

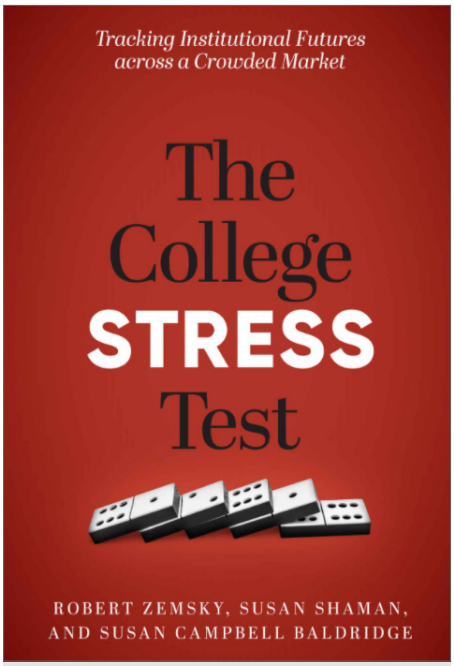
Those on campus should pause before taking heart, however. The remaining three in 10 institutions seem likely to struggle, and it will probably be very difficult for them to change their fortunes or market position.

"If anything, that market is becoming more rather than less fixed, making it increasingly likely that it will be the richer and bigger institutions that reap the benefits of a consolidating market," the authors wrote.

Strategies in tuition pricing, like tuition resets, might buy some institutions time, they suggested. But moving important needles, like freshman-to-sophomore retention, is going to require the faculty to produce changes.

The College Stress Test may seek to have a rational, rather than hysterical, discussion about the pressures squeezing colleges and universities. And it may spare individual institutions from having their stress scores set in print. Still, it is not a blanket reassurance to the higher education sector.

"We caution that failing to pay attention to higher education's increasingly muddled value proposition will yield both institutions at risk and a market that makes increasingly less sense to a public already skeptical of higher education's core values," the authors write.



Courtesy of Johns Hopkins University Press

Zemsky answered questions about the book via email. The following exchange has been edited slightly for clarity.

Q: What did you find to be the greatest predictors that an institution might close?

A: To begin with, we were measuring risk -- the risk of running out of students more than money, though there is an obvious link between enrollment and finance. The best predictor of market risk

or stress was a combination: declining first-year enrollments and increasing market prices over the last 10 years. In short, if an institution is both increasing its discount rate and still having ever-smaller classes of new students, then it is in real trouble. Or, as we wrote, "The really unlucky colleges have suffered a double whammy over the last decade: higher discount rates that yield less tuition income per student coupled with enrollment declines yielding fewer students. Most losers have also experienced financial shifts large enough that budget reductions alone are unlikely to yield sufficient savings to offset losses in revenue."

Q: Are any types of institution most at risk, and do they tend to serve a certain type of student?

A: Very small institutions are identified at risk more often than larger institutions.

There are actually very few demographic tags identifying students more likely to attend an institution at market risk. The most obvious was African American students.

Q: Can you briefly explain the Market Stress Test Score and what goes into it?

A: The methodology identifies how and when continuing downward slopes (actual and projected) are important: more discounting, smaller first-year or freshman class, more attrition in the first year of enrollment. All the data come from the individual reports accredited institutions submitted to IPEDS 2008-2016.

> "It is the market that is shifting institutional futures both up and down. The challenge is for an institution to understand its place in that market and adjust its strategies accordingly."

Q: This book includes everything you need to calculate risk scores for institutions enrolling the majority of undergraduates in the United States. Why not publish a list of them with their scores?

A: Focusing on institutions runs counter to the central finding of the book: it is the market that is shifting institutional futures both up and down. The challenge is for an institution to understand its place in that market and adjust its strategies accordingly. What an institution's market stress score signals is its place in the market. What our book provides is the context for understanding how that market works.

Q: How much do students have a right to know the risks they're taking on when they enroll in college?

A: There are no secrets here -- my experience with readily available consumer data is that such information, except for rankings, seldom plays much of a role in college decisions.

Q: What surprised you most about your findings?

A: Two things: colleges and the universities in the middle of the country face greater risks than colleges in New England, and the best indicator of risk for public four-year institutions is consistently declining state appropriations.

Q: What did we miss in this interview?

A: Not much except that the institutions that can benefit most from our analysis are those in the middle of the market -- they may in fact not fully realize how and why they are at risk in a consolidating market in which the rich are getting richer and the big are getting bigger. ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/01/new-book-examines-market-stress-bearing-down-colleges-and-universities

How Will Higher Education Emerge From the Pandemic?

Solutions, realistic and fanciful.

By Steven Mintz // October 14, 2020

Think things are bad in higher ed? Imagine the theater world. Its primary audience, older adults, is the least likely to return to plays or musicals. Virtually its entire workforce is unemployed, without a paycheck and, in many instances, without benefits. The industry's future is bleak.

The New York Times recently asked theater critics, producers, directors, and actors to suggest ways to rescue the theater.

The suggestions: greater accessibility and affordability. More diversity. A federal bailout. National funding for the arts. Sound familiar, higher ed?

Then there are the more radical and provocative ideas: break free from the canon. Perform more works by African American, Asian, Latinx, and other underrepresented playwrights. Revive plays from the Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts movement. Push boundaries with more edgy and wildly eccentric work. Experiment with profit-sharing arrangements (like the income-share agreements that Silicon Valley touts).

Then there are suggestions that range from the naïve, the silly, the utopian and the irrelevant: performances in the streets. Performances and discounts exclusively for particular audiences. Food and drinks sold during the performances. Term limits for theater management.

Three aspects of the recommendations stand out. First, the contributors conflate theater with Broadway and ignore the places where cutting-edge innovations were already taking place: Off-Broadway and in small and black box theaters in towns across the country. A bit like confusing the Ivy League with higher education.

MOOCS and beyond.

Second, the critics ignore the fact that theater is a large industry with hundreds of thousands of employees onstage and off. No one is going back to crowded Broadway theaters any time soon. Theater income will be depressed for a long time to come. We need to find alternate employment for those who now have no livelihood -- much as we need to do for adjuncts and the ever-mounting numbers of newly minted Ph.D.s.

Third, the recommendations reek of political posturing, rather than realistic solutions to a calamitous reality.

The only realistic short-term answer is obvious: streaming.

Partner with the streaming services, as *Hamilton* did with Disney+, and partner with schools and colleges and universities. Bring theater to the people, rather than people to the theater. Cultivate audiences with more diverse and targeted fare.

The intimacy of the theater will be reserved for a small audience of socially distanced risk takers, at least for now. But the craving for entertainment won't slacken, and it's up to the creatives and the business folk to imagine new ways capitalize on that demand.

What does this have to do with higher ed?

We, too, are witnessing a host of visionary, transformative, eccentric, quixotic, grandiose and half-baked ideas:

- Unbundling, allowing students to

pay for only those offerings that they actually want.

- Course sharing, alleviating the need for every campus to offer its own version of commodity classes.
- Quicker, cheaper alternatives to degrees, like professional certificates and certifications.

Unlike the theater world, we don't have to worry about audience development. Our students (and their parents) have proven themselves willing to go deeply into debt even for a much attenuated version of college.

Nor is higher education's fiscal state quite as dire as the theater's -- which is not to say that it isn't grim. Far too many adjuncts and staff members have lost jobs. Yet while some faculty have lost benefits or pay raises, most are among the privileged minority of adults who can work from home.

Like the *Times'* contributors, we can view the current crisis as an unmatched opportunity to put our pipe dreams into practice. We can -- and should -- lobby for government aid. But what we really need to do is the hard work of addressing higher education's biggest challenges in a context of resource constraints.

How so?

1. The Business Model Challenge

Both public and private nonprofits need a more stable and sustainable financial model, which will necessarily require a combination of cost savings, higher student retention rates and revenue enhancements.

Across-the-board cuts generally make little sense, no matter how politically expedient. Optimizing course offerings makes much more sense economically. So do investments with a high likelihood of paying off, including investments in high-demand programs and initiatives that target new audiences.

2. The Student Satisfaction Challenge

We need to increase student satisfaction. Some carefully targeted reductions in tuition and fees may be necessary, but our institutions really need to think about how to enhance the student experience.

Some solutions strike me as sensible. Place students in cohorts and learning communities and interest groups so that they can develop a sense of connection and belonging. Increase mentoring by faculty and staff. Ensure that students take at least one very small seminar every semester. Embed more high-impact practices into the student experience and expand experiential learning opportunities, including virtual internships and study abroad opportunities.

3. The Political Challenge

It's long been said that Harvard's budget model was simple: "Each tub on its own bottom." This explained why some units teemed with resources while others struggled. But this approach is not confined to Harvard: it pervades higher education, with neighboring institutions competing with one another for resources and political support in ways that are destructive.

We'd do much better to coordinate along the lines of Houston GPS. Neighboring two- and four-year public institutions agreed to align curricula, agree on common degree maps, eliminate barriers to credit transfer, adopt math pathways tied to specific majors and careers, replace remedial and developmental courses with co-requisite courses, and implement a common data infrastructure to identify curricular bottlenecks.

I'd urge them to go even further, by creating a credentials marketplace, so that potential students could easily identify pathways to their desired career destination.

Cross-institutional coordination makes it far easier for these institutions to lobby the city, county and state for resources.

It's funny. We urge our students to engage politically: to inform themselves about issues and policy proposals, register to vote, and become more active citizens.

But oughtn't we to do something similar on our campuses -- better understand our institution's financial health? Shouldn't faculty acquire a firm grasp about their institution's enrollment and student retention trends, its revenue and cost structure, assets and debt, and reliance on international and out-of-state students?

Concerted collective action beats grumbling and complaining every day. ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/how-will-higher-education-emerge-pandemic

We Must Own Our Own Futures

Colleges will have to deal with significant changes in the coming decades, predicts John D. Simon -- changes that can be categorized as the Great Decline, the Great Unknowing and the Great Unbundling.

By John D. Simon // September 24, 2019

We find ourselves at a precarious time in the history of higher education. Politicians and the public are increasingly questioning the value of what we do. The cost of education is rising while a population with greater need for financial aid is growing. Research and teaching are becoming more globalized at the same time that international collaboration is under scrutiny. And technological innovation is rapidly transforming the very definitions and methods of teaching and learning.

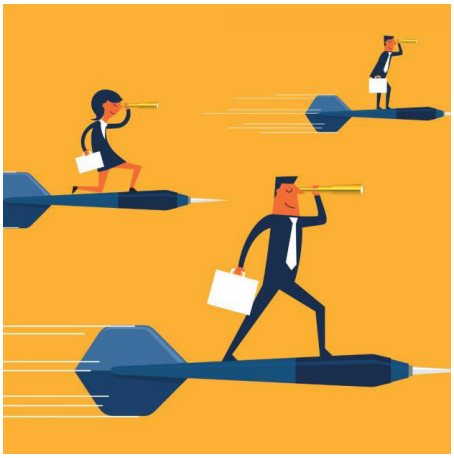
As a sector, all of us in higher education must be to be able to adapt to the changing needs of our institutions and the larger society in which those institutions exist. The changes I see coming in the next decades fall into three categories: the Great Decline, the Great Unknowing and the Great Unbundling. Even more important than anticipating these changes will be responding to them not as challenges but as opportunities.

The Great Decline

College and university leaders face difficult demographic headwinds at the undergraduate level. According to data that education expert Nathan D. Grawe analyzes in *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, between the years 2025 and 2030, the number of native-born children reaching college age is expected to decline by approximately 650,000 (on a base of around 4.5 million) -- a decline of over 14 percent. And we have no particular reason to expect, amid that decline, that the numbers of people choosing -- and able -- to attend four-year colleges and universities will remain steady if we are unable to serve the needs of an increasing proportion of those students.

When it comes to attracting applicants, higher education must pay attention to such shifting demographics. Of course, just getting students to apply isn't enough. Across the higher education ecosystem, we must establish stronger support infrastructures to ensure that students succeed after they arrive on our campuses.

At Lehigh University, we are making progress on this front, although, admittedly, we still have much more work to do. Our recently appointed vice president of equity and community has created the Center for Student Access and Success, designed to increase access for all groups that are currently underrepresented at the university, with a focus on first-generation and lower-income students. A key goal is to ensure that support systems are in place to enable all students to have enriching and successful experiences. For example, our Mentor Collective is a peer mentorship program that begins during the summer and is designed to help first-year students make the most of their college experience. Our High-Impact Experience Opportunity Fellowship provides our first-generation, low-income and other underrepresented student populations greater access to educational experiences beyond the classroom -- including study



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abroad and other global experiences, career and professional development, research, community engagement, internships, and leadership development.

The Great Decline also encompasses challenges related to recruiting top global graduate student talent. The number of American students now seeking, and who will soon seek, graduate degrees is limited -- particularly in science and technology fields. And two related geopolitical forces are at play that can cause international student enrollments to decline significantly: first, increased political tension, especially with China, could directly alter the student visa landscape and the desirability of the United States as a destination for Chinese students. And concerns about Chinese government use of American universities' open intellectual environments as sources of competitive economic advantage and assertion of soft power could give rise to further restrictions. The U.S. Congress, intelligence agen-

cies and research funding agencies are all heightening their attention to this latter issue.

A second, longer-term force at play is the growth of colleges and universities around the globe and the resulting reduction in the assured pre-eminence of the United States as a destination for study. In short, world-class research is becoming globalized. While in the past, American colleges and universities could safely count on large numbers of highly capable students aspiring to work with their graduate faculties, those students now have more choices. And their choices may come with differences that matter in postdoctorate career opportunities. When it becomes easier for a recent Ph.D. graduate to launch a start-up in India, or China, or Singapore, our circumstances in the United States fundamentally change.

Small adaptations are unlikely to be sufficient. As we confront the future, some questions we might ask ourselves include: What do we provide our students that is essential and irreplaceable? (A hint: it is not transmission of readily packaged content.) What about other stakeholders? What do we provide, or could we provide, to those who rely upon our knowledge-generation capacities and our impacts on host communities? More fundamentally, what do our students and our stakeholders need most from us going forward? This last question brings us to the Great Unknowing.

The Great Unknowing

The Great Unknowing relates to all that is unknown for our students. The pace of change in the workplace has increased to a point where they will need to be able to adapt to rapid shifts in the workplace and in society and to become adept at learning even totally new fields. In addition, today's graduates will probably work longer than boomers or millennials. We as higher education leaders no longer know the demands various professions will make of our students over their lifetimes -- or what the requirements for success will be.

> "What do we provide our students that is essential and irreplaceable? (A hint: it is not transmission of readily packaged content.)"

Moreover, as opportunities become increasingly global, our students may not know where -- in what city, even in what country -- they will create their lives. And for many students, success will be measured more by team contributions than solo accomplishments. Such teams will likely include members from around the globe, and they will draw on the knowledge of multiple disciplines and cultures. In other words, how work gets done will change in ways we can't fully predict.

The prospect of such fundamental change suggests a few things we should deeply consider. It means change in how many professions are organized -- and that addressing the knowledge and experiences required for success may often outpace our current processes for revising our curriculum and core requirements. It means we should question fixed views of what a person needs to know to function in any given profession. It also means instilling in our students the same taste for ambiguity and gravitation toward the unknown that animates our scholars. It means enhancing the opportunities for purposeful experiential learning. And it almost certainly means embracing the Great Unbundling.

The Great Unbundling

Our students will need to know how to continually learn, and educational institutions will have to remain flexible in response to that need. The generation currently known as Alphas, those born beginning in 2010, will arrive on our campuses in less than 10 years. In addition to being the most technologically savvy generation, Alphas are the children of millennials who experienced college as an incredible expense -- and often a source of significant debt. The very concept of "unbundling" education -- access to education in modular form, one career step at a time -- comes from those millennial parents.

The millennials are the people

who, during their early work careers, appear to need to continually navigate the repeatedly disrupted workplace of today and of the coming decades. Many are doing so by credentialing themselves with postcollege certificates, mostly from online programs. Elite colleges and universities now increasingly offer such certificate programs, not just the for-profit institutions that predominantly did so in the past.

In fact, for those millennial parents, lifelong learning is a given. Their goal will be to equip their children, the Alphas, in a cost-effective fashion, so that they can gain a foothold in a career. Precarity -- the absence of any real assurance of one's station in society -- will be a continuing concern for these parents and their children. They will look for what provides a sound start and equips them to move on with at least a reasonable assurance of success.

The drive to unbundle may necessitate new approaches. Consistent with liberal education traditions, and with existing catalogs of graduate offerings, we can fully dispense with the idea that a student is done upon graduation. It also suggests that we at four-year residential research universities should revisit and recommit to what we do that isn't captured in componentized, knowledge- and skill-centric educational pathways. It seems clear that badges in data analytics are valuable. But what about the responsibilities that come with a rarefied education? Creativity and ethical action? The capacity to understand and respect different cultures? Productive collaboration? The ability to recognize the ways in which society's problems are new and the ways in which they are 1,000 years old?

We in higher education can offer the relentless pursuit of knowledge and the richness of collaboration across disciplinary lines. Our intellectual independence and our ability to pose questions without fear of the answers makes us indispensable in a society that depends not only upon technological advancement but also on reason, perspective, open discourse and an appreciation of history.

Such offerings will be of far more enduring value than course schedules and curricula. As change occurs around us, the imperatives for change in how we go about our work will grow. Amid that change, our priority -- right alongside doing the best by our students and stretching ourselves in our scholarship -- should be on becoming universities intent on owning our own futures. ■

Bio

John D. Simon is president of Lehigh University.

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Crafting a Post-Pandemic Strategy for Your College and University

Only steal from the best.

By Steven Mintz // October 1, 2020

In 1920, T.S. Eliot memorably wrote: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different."

Academic innovators should only steal from the best.

Times of crisis ought to inspire creativity, critical reflection, transformation, and renewal.

When we look back on the pandemic, we will see that it produced a raft of innovations that should inform future practice – and that will help make higher education what it aspires to: A catalyst for equality and social mobility.

During the pandemic, a number of colleges and universities responded to the crisis with extraordinary boldness: Not simply shifting courses online, but, rather, radically rethinking their admissions practices, their curriculum, and the student experience.

What have these innovators done?

1. These institutions divided the Fall and Spring semesters into two parts, allowing students to take immersive courses or semester long courses.

Dividing the semester isn't a wholly new idea. Within the City University of New York system, Guttman, Kingsborough, and LaGuardia Community Colleges offer 12 and 6 week terms in the Fall and Spring. Students take fewer, but more intensive courses in the 12-week parts, and if they failed a course, they can make it up in the following 6-week part, or take something else. This was attractive to faculty because they did not work all four terms.

MOOCS and beyond.

In the midst of the pandemic, Barnard and Columbia adopted a somewhat similar approach, consisting of two 7-week Fall terms and 7-week Spring terms.

Juggling five online courses simultaneously strikes me as unreasonable. For non-traditional students who must balance schoolwork with jobs and family responsibilities, the traditional model can be overwhelming. It's time to consider alternatives.

Shorter, more intensive and immersive courses are not only more compatible with the realities of online learning, they also can contribute to a greater depth of engagement in a course's subject matter. Such courses work during the summer. Why not during the regular semesters?

2. These colleges and universities created shared academic experiences.

Big problem courses, which tackle a significant societal challenge from multi-disciplinary perspectives, offer one way to connect students and faculty in a common intellectual endeavor. Possible topics are obvious: The pandemic, racial justice, climate change and sustainability, politics in a polarized society, or the experience of "otherness" and difference.

The most innovative of these shared courses incorporate an experiential or service dimension in which students do something, for example, conduct interviews or surveys, engage in field research, or respond to a local problem.

3. These institutions offered courses that speak to this historic moment.

These include classes that address criminal justice reform, disaster management, environmental and climate change and sustainability, or monuments and memorials, the depiction of historical figures and events in the public sphere and the aesthetic re-

sponses to historical traumas. But faculty might also offer experiential learning opportunities: to document the pandemic, meet with social entrepreneurs, and engage in public service and social impact projects.

4. These institutions delivered robust co-curricular experiences.

Examples include skills-building workshops, leadership training, financial literacy programming, virtual field trips, digital meet-and-greets and networking opportunities with alumni, employers, and others, as well as online innovation institutes (offering financial, legal, and technological coaching).

5. These institutions made Summer 2020 as accessible as possible.

As a way to keep students on track to graduation, many institutions made Summer 2020 courses free or extremely cheap. Why not make summer a more integral part of the undergraduate experience, and begin it earlier, so that students can still participate in internships or take part in summer jobs.

How might these imaginative responses to the pandemic help to shape our thinking about the post-pandemic future of higher education?

The pandemic has underscored the importance of equity, safety, flexibility, and responsiveness. It awakened many institutions to their students' vulnerabilities and needs. It also underscored the importance of belonging, connection, and community.

Here are ways we can build on these insights.

1. Let's make our education more flexible.

One way to ease work, family, and school conflicts is to adopt a structured schedule that divides the day into consistent time blocks. These typically consist of a morning, an afternoon, an evening, and, sometimes, a weekend block, allow a student to plan their work schedule.

> "In the wake of the pandemic, campuses, more than ever, will need to demonstrate their value proposition."

Another way is to adopt a highly flexible course delivery model that makes essential courses available in a variety of modalities. Many of today's extraordinarily diverse post-traditional students would benefit from the ability to take courses in multiple ways, whether asynchronous or synchronous online, hybrid, self-paced, low-residency, in-person, or in an emporium approach.

Perhaps the most exciting innovation would be to consider offering more modularized courses and intensive, immersive classes. This would not be the Colorado or Cornell College model of one-course-at-a-time – but it would give students more of an opportunity to focus on a smaller number of subjects at any one time, while still being able to study a broad spectrum of topics with a wide range of professors.

2. Let's implement common academic experiences.

To foster community and a sense of belonging, we need to provide students with more common experiences. There are many ways to do this. We might place students in a learning community or a Meta Major or a cohort organized around a common theme, interest, problem, or broad career goal. Or we might engage large numbers of students in a "big problems" course or a first year research experience.

The pandemic underscored the human need for connection. Let's not allow our students to feel isolated, disconnected, or alone.

3. Let's encourage faculty to offer courses that are relevant and timely.

There is no reason why our curriculum shouldn't be responsive to our times. Let's offer more courses that place current events, developments, or controversies in a fresh academic perspective. Students are most likely to be engaged and motivated when the subject that they study strikes them as relevant.

We might also consider scaling these timely courses and giving them a community service or experiential learning dimension. These courses offer a chance to create communities of learning and of practice.

4. Let's make Summer an integral part of the academic year.

One way to help students grad-

uate quicker and to reduce the actual and opportunity costs of higher education is to make Summer (and accelerated intersession courses) a normal part of the student experience. For a variety of reasons, fewer students now hold summer jobs; let make sure that their summer is as productive as possible. We might consider starting the summer term earlier to make sure that it's compatible with summer internships and traditional study abroad or its more recent variant: faculty-led overseas research trips.

5. Let's make co-curricular activities and experiential learning bigger parts of the undergraduate experience.

Let's help our students build more career-relevant connections, with alumni or potential employers or mentors, and give them more opportunities to undertake virtual internships and complete digital projects, which students can include in an electronic portfolio. Intermediaries like Riipen and EduSourced can help campuses develop identify virtual internships and digital projects that can be integrated into individual classes.

6. Let's significantly strengthen our systems of student support.

Enhancing support is not simply a matter of placing a writing center or a math or science learning center online. It's about creating an integrated system of academic, personal, and technical support that can identify barriers to student success, respond proactively to early signs of trouble, and reach out electronically or in person with emergency aid, nudges, coaching, or more intrusive interventions when necessary.

To overcome the academic and non-academic barriers to student success, a coordinated system of support must bring together academic advising, career and pre-professional counseling, disabilities services, financial aid, academic tutoring and other learning support services. This support network must also be in close communication with provosts, deans, department chairs, and individual faculty members to address systemic problems, including achievement and equity gaps in programs and specific courses or sections.

We might also learn from the major online providers, who have put in place coaches and mentors to accompany students through their program of study and, at their best, are highly responsive to academic and personal problems that students encounter. Expanded use of well-trained peer mentors offers a cost-efficient way to scale services.

8. Let's expand opportunities for students to enhance their career-readiness.

In his most recent Gap Letter, Ryan Craig, University Ventures' managing director, calls on colleges and universities to get serious about equipping students with the digital skills that will enhance their employability. These include both "hard" skills, like training in project management, research methods, or spreadsheets, and "soft" skills, like active listening and conflict resolution.

Craig also urges our institutions to aggressively pursue those whom 4-year institutions, in the past, served poorly or not at all, especially those who were previous employed in the service sector, who desperately need inexpensive, fast pathways to skills-based certificates and professional certifications.

In addition, Craig advises post-secondary institutions to adopt a more proactive approach to career services, including partnerships with business service companies and staffing firms.

All solid advice.

Let's not let the past define our future. In the wake of the pandemic, campuses, more than ever, will need to demonstrate their value proposition. Pace-setting institutions are already showing the way. Let's follow their example. ■

Bio

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Higher Ed and the Airbus A380

What might we learn from the demise of this amazing double-decker jumbo jet?

By Joshua Kim // October 27, 2020

SOURCE: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Airbus_A380_overfly_crop.jpg

The Airbus 380's troubles predate the global pandemic. The $450 million, 853- (all economy) seat, four-engine jumbo jet was already considered a challenging economic proposition for airlines. Compared with less expensive and more fuel-efficient wide-bodied twin-engine jets, such as the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus A350 XWB, the A380 is immensely costly and inefficient.

While the A380 was certainly sick before the pandemic, COVID-19 has likely killed the plane. Long-haul flights across international borders from hub airports, the routes that the A380 was designed to serve, have mostly been stopped. In September, the last A380 completed its final assembly in Toulouse, France. In total, only 242 A380s were built. This is one-third of the A380 sales that Airbus projected when the double-decker jumbo was launched 15 years ago.

If you've ever been lucky enough to have flown on an A380, you know that the experience is unforgettable. Even in coach class, the cabin is spacious, comfortable and quiet. By all accounts, the A380 is a technological marvel. The A380 is not only enormous. It is safe and reliable and, in every way, impressive.

What the A380 is not is efficient. The plane costs between $26,000 and $29,000 an hour to run, with most of those costs going to fuel ($17,500). In comparison, a long-range twin-engine Boeing 787-9 only costs $11,000 to $15,000 per hour to fly.

Can higher ed learn anything from the failure of the Airbus A380?

Are there analogs to the A380 within our colleges and universities?

Three candidates come to mind: large lecture classrooms, residence halls and campus offices.

Large Lecture Classrooms

The large lecture classroom is probably the closest analog to the A380. Both were designed primarily for size, built to take advantage of economies of scale. The large lecture class's growth, particularly for introductory and gateway courses, was a function of the dramatic increases in enrollments driven by a combination of public policy (the GI Bill) and demographics (the baby boom).

The large lecture class was never designed to maximize student learning, just as the four-engine jumbo jet was not designed to maximize fuel efficiency. Fuel-efficient

twin-engine wide-body jets can fly long distances efficiently, eliminating the need for refueling stopovers. Blended, low-residency and online courses do not have the scale of large lecture classes (for the most part) but are preferable if your educational goals involve optimizing for active and experiential learning.

Beyond the challenges of student learning in large face-to-face classes, there is the challenge of density and health. How long will it be before schools are comfortable cramming hundreds (or more) students together into a single classroom? Even after a safe and effective vaccine has been disseminated, will we think that relying on large lecture classes for instruction is a recipe for institutional flexibility and resiliency?

Residence Halls

Up until the pandemic, campus residence halls seemed like a sound economic bet. Colleges and universities could expect to receive reliable revenues over a residence hall's life span. Students at residential institutions could be required to live on campus for some portion of their education. As freshman (and sometimes sophomore) dorms don't operate in a competitive market -- with students required to live on campus -- schools could put off investing in updating and remodeling.

COVID-19 has revealed the extent to which many colleges and universities depend on residence hall fees to balance their books. A March 13 article in *Inside Higher Ed* called "Coronavirus Closures Pose Refund Quandary" provides some examples. Residence hall and dining fees make up 16.5 percent of total operating revenues at Smith College. At Amherst College, that figure is 9 percent. Wealthy institutions depend less on revenues from room and board. At Harvard, only 4 percent of the operating budget comes from these sources. The loss of state funding and the necessity for tuition discounting has caused schools to increase their reliance on auxiliary incomes such as residence halls fees. According to a March 2020 article in *Education Dive*, auxiliary revenues make up between 9 percent (public university) and 11 percent (private college) of revenues.

> "COVID-19 has revealed the extent to which many colleges and universities depend on residence hall fees to balance their books."

Once the pandemic is over, will colleges and universities continue to rely on residence halls to make their business models work? Residence halls are expensive to build, maintain and renovate. Residence halls are mostly fixed costs in an increasingly variable postsecondary economic environment. We don't know if the COVID-19 shift to online education will entirely revert to pre-pandemic norms. Demographic shifts, concentrated in the decline of traditional college-age 18- to 22-year-old cohorts in the Northeast and Midwest, may also decrease demand for residence halls. Colleges and universities may choose to rely on more flexible outsourced relationships for student housing, freeing up capital for investments in their differentiating academic strengths.

Campus Offices

Like some of you, I can't wait to get back to my campus office. It will be great to see something different than my house. Much of the joy of working in higher ed comes from the energy of students and colleagues. Plus, it is exhausting to spend one's days meeting on Zoom.

However, the reality is that the cost of having me (and folks like me) on campus may not be worth the expense. Faculty need offices. They need quiet places to write and to think. Professors need private places to meet with and advise students. There is an enormous need across higher education for adjunct faculty to have quality office space.

But what about those of us who are not professors? Will we need our offices once the pandemic is done? For the most part, the reality is that we've been able to adapt to remote work. We may want to have physical offices and face-to-face meetings, but do we need to? It is also possible that the norm of face-to-face work from campus offices did more harm than good in terms of schools' ability to recruit and retain top talent. Remote work enables geographic flexibility.

Of course, many people who

work in higher ed do not enjoy the benefits of an office. The horrible idea of the open office plan has been widely adopted as a cost-saving measure by many schools. Sold as a method to increase collaboration, open offices are a cost-saving action disguised as a productivity strategy. I'm convinced that remote work is almost always preferable to working in an open office.

How much money colleges and universities would save by converting some campus offices to other uses is not obvious. Office space is scarce for adjunct faculty and graduate students on most campuses. Perhaps some campus offices could be converted to group study spaces. Schools with plans for new buildings should think long and hard before creating any new office space.

> "The reality is that the cost of having me (and folks like me) on campus may not be worth the expense."

Of course, there are limits to using the Airbus A380 as a metaphor for thinking about higher education. Flexibility and efficiency should not always be the goal of colleges and universities. This sort of lateral thinking is sometimes illuminating and almost always fun when trying to make sense of how higher education should adapt and evolve in the years ahead.

What do you think the fate of the Airbus A380 reveals about the future of higher education? ■

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Thinking Like a Designer in Uncertain Times

In times of crisis like today, colleges should think quite differently than they do in a traditional strategic planning process and consider six basic principles, argues David P. Haney.

By David P. Haney // June 23, 2020

Remember the good old precoronavirus days of strategic planning in higher education?

The president or provost would assemble an ungainly slate of committees for mission, finance, student success, academics, the physical campus, external engagement and every other area the institution was involved in. After months of work, often with the services of a highly paid consultant, The Plan was produced and praised for its uniqueness and the high degree of campus involvement that produced it.

The plan was full of goals, strategies and tactics meant to increase enrollment, reduce dependence on tuition revenue, analyze academic programs and add some new ones, take care of deferred maintenance, and engage more fully with the community -- all the things every other college or university was promising to do in its strategic plan. KPIs (key performance indicators) and responsible parties were then added so that progress could be tracked.

The plan was then sent to marketing to be dolled up and put on the institutional website -- with pictures of happy students, earnest faculty and random campus buildings surrounded by blooming vegetation -- as well as given a catchy title. (Luckily it is already 2020, so we are free from the last decade's "2020 vision" puns. Ithaca College even got to call theirs "IC 2020.") Then, a month or so before each board meeting, the president would ask their senior staff, "What have we done lately that shows we are making progress on the strategic plan?" And those items would then be dutifully inserted into the board report.

OK, not all planning processes have been this bad, but having been involved in higher ed strategic planning as a faculty member, department chair and senior administrator at five different institutions (large and small, public and private) in the past few decades, I have seen way too much wasted effort of this sort. And in a postcoronavirus world, we can no longer afford any waste.

Does this mean that we should give up on strategic planning, especially now when the future is so unknown that many institutions don't know whether they will fully reopen in fall 2020 and who will show up if they do? Many organizations have moved away from traditional strategic planning in the past 20 years in light of changing economic and social realities, while higher education has too often stuck to a version of the outmoded model caricatured above. Especially as we look to a postcoronavirus future, commentators are arguing that this may be the time to jettison conventional wisdom, including the traditional, and often generic, strategic plan.

But instead of giving up entirely on planning ahead, we should shift our thinking about it. One of the most promising strategies for planning amid uncertainty is to switch from the idea of planning to

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/TERA VECTOR

the idea of designing -- taking lessons from practices developed in Silicon Valley to design products such as the laptop, the mouse and the smartphone. One of the lessons learned in those practices is that we no longer simply design products but rather human experiences with products.

The very unpredictability of the future and the impossibility of fully rational planning should help us pivot from planning to designing. As Bill Burnett and Dave Evans write in *Designing Your Life*, a guide to adapting the principles of human-centered design to one's own life, "As you begin to think like a designer, remember one important thing: it's impossible to predict the future. And the corollary to that thought is: once you design something, it changes the future that is possible."

"Human-centered design" is now used worldwide for designing everything from organization-

al pivots in corporations to microloan programs in developing countries, often through the influential work of IDEO, whose chairman Tim Brown wrote Change by Design: *How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* over a decade ago. When I used this approach to strategic planning as a college president, I added to the mix a sharp focus on outcomes rather than activities, based on the work of Hal Williams, former CEO of the Rensselaerville Institute. I've been fortunate to work with him in higher education administration, and he has helped me see how, despite the recent emphasis on outcomes assessment, higher ed is still burdened with a focus on activities that should be changed to a focus on results.

For example, why do we count student community service hours when we could be documenting the results of students' community service work? Why do syllabi still list activities to be undertaken instead of results for student to achieve? Why do we have meeting agendas that list the topics to be covered instead of the outcomes we want to see? Why do job descriptions list expected activities (slavishly described as "duties") instead of what employees should be expected to accomplish? (In fact, if working remotely, where activities are relatively invisible to colleagues, continues in popularity, outcomes may provide the best and perhaps only way to measure employee performance.)

The combination of human-centered design and Hal Williams's outcomes focus produces what I call "results-based strategic design." Here are six of the basic principles of this approach and how they can apply to higher education.

> "Designers solve "wicked" problems: multiple and sometimes ill-defined problems that have multiple solutions. Higher ed is clearly rife with wicked problems."

Much of this involves asking questions that are different from the ones asked in a traditional strategic planning process.

No. 1: Recognize that planners plan and designers solve problems. Instead of asking, "Where do we want to be in five years," it's better to ask, "What problems do we need to solve?" That helps shift the focus from what we by definition can't know (the future) to what we can do (solve problems and produce results).

For two reasons, it's not always easy to identify the problems. First, we often jump to potential solutions before defining the key issue. For example, "Our enrollment is too low" does not state a problem. Increasing enrollment is a solution to different potential problems, such as unused capacity or most commonly an operational deficit. Increasing enrollment may be a solution to a deficit, but it may also drive up the discount rate and create additional expenses, so it may not be the appropriate solution, or it may need to be considered in concert with other solutions. As long ago as 2015, some colleges decided to address financial problems by shrinking rather than "chasing volume."

Second, we worry too much about what designers call "gravity problems": issues that are not really problems because, like gravity, they are going to be there no matter what. For example, current demographic trends that reduce applicant pools are not problems but rather inevitable facts. A low yield -- too few accepted students who enroll -- can be fixed, and the pool can be increased by looking in new places. (For example, people that would benefit from what you offer but don't know it yet.) But the demographics are facts to be dealt with, not problems to be solved. Balance is key: some leaders resort to firefighting mode and jump to solutions too quickly, while others demand to understand all the variables before acting, and their response is too slow.

The difference between a designer and an engineer is that an engineer has a problem with a single solution: you need to get people across a river, so you build a bridge. Designers solve "wicked" problems: multiple and sometimes ill-defined problems that have multiple solutions. Higher ed is clearly rife with wicked problems. The

problem-solving mentality can filter through the entire process. For example, instead of a strategic planning committee focusing on curriculum, create a design team to identify specific problems in the curriculum and create solutions.

No. 2: Use constraints to encourage creativity. Designers have learned that truly innovative and useful results come not from "blue sky thinking" but from working within a particular set of constraints. A smartphone can only be so big and cost so much, or it won't sell. The familiar and new constraints in higher ed -- changing demographics, increased competition, public skepticism and now the disruption of an as-yet unknown number of semesters by COVID-19 and the resulting human and economic consequences -- need to be seen not as obstacles to planning but as catalysts for creativity and innovation. The three general constraints on new initiatives that design thinking identifies, and that can spur creativity, are: 1) viability (can it be sustained long-term?), 2) feasibility (do we have the capacity, tools and know-how to do it?) and 3) desirability (does it fit our mission and can we embrace it as an institution?).

For example, an enrollment-related result for one tuition-driven small college in the Northeast, with that region's declining college-age population, was to attract, retain and serve students who didn't know they would benefit from attending college in general or this institution in particular. This is potentially viable because it recognizes the decline in population while building on the fact that more students in that smaller pool need what this institution has to offer. It is feasible because there are many ways for an experienced admissions staff to reach to new areas and kinds of schools. (For example, this college started working with technical high schools and inner-city college-readiness programs.) And it is desirable because it will increase revenue as the institution continues to do what it does best -- as opposed to simply lowering standards, trying to increase geographic reach or pursuing other enrollment-enhancing techniques. Keeping these constraints in mind also makes it much easier to link strategic design to resource allocation, since both viability and feasibility depend on resources.

> "Too many strategic plans try to cover everything an institution does and therefore sink under their own weight."

No. 3: Determine constituents' needs, which may not be what they say they need. This is what is called the empathy stage in design thinking, in which you observe people's behavior in order to find the best solutions. It's not enough to ask them what they need; as Henry Ford probably did not say, but is often quoted as saying, "If I had asked people what they needed, they would have said 'faster horses.'" When your students complain that they face a byzantine bureaucracy, follow some of them around as they leap through the registrar's and the financial aid offices' hoops. Then simulate potential solutions. Or if your value proposition is not getting out through admissions and marketing, observe students' and potential students' responses to current and potential new messages.

I once embedded myself with a summer leadership camp for entering students and discovered that many of the reasons for their choice to attend our institution had nothing to do with what we said in our expensive marketing materials. This is not treating students as customers within a corporate model but simply respecting them as users of the services we offer. (An entire subdiscipline called user experience or UX has occasionally been recommended for higher ed planning.) Especially now that our students are changing from a traditional 18- to 22-year-old cohort to a constituency of all ages with varying and complex life situations -- and will be emerging from the trauma of the pandemic with a host of new and different concerns and needs -- we should carefully observe the quality of their experience. We all pay lip service to the needs of the students we serve, but strategic plans still tend to focus on

the self-preservation and growth of our institutions.

No. 4: Engage in prototyping. Too often institutions spend months planning a major initiative and then roll it out with great fanfare, not knowing whether it will produce the intended results. When possible, it's better to prototype by implementing a small-scale, low-risk version of an initiative that can test the critical concepts involved and allow you to readjust according to what works and what doesn't. For example, instead of launching a new degree program, start with a badge or certificate and carefully examine how it plays with students. A prototype can also be a simulation: before creating a new enrollment office, build a mock-up (physical or virtual) and run students and staff through a simulated set of enrollment interactions. This approach can help create a culture of continuous improvement in which new ideas are constantly tested, evaluated and revised.

No. 5: Resource the early adopters, and let consensus follow later. The downfall of many strategic plans is that everybody agrees with them at the outset. If that's the case, then it is probably too general and probably looks like everyone else's plan because it represents the lowest common denominator.

In results-based strategic design, institutions instead provide resources, often minimal, to individuals and groups so that they can try things (prototyping), and then consensus is built around successful or promising results, not prior agreement. (From a slightly different perspective, the higher ed consulting firm CREDO also advocates abandoning consensus as a goal for the "new university.") The Rensselaerville Institute refers to community members who are energetic early adopters as "community spark plugs." You know who they are on your campus, and they may be administrators, faculty members, staff members or even students -- where they are in the organizational chart is often less important than the energy, creativity and attitude they bring to the table. When other people see that the spark plugs are getting the resources, producing results and having more fun, the number of early adopters will grow.

No. 6: Don't try to do everything. Too many strategic plans try to cover everything an institution does and therefore sink under their own weight. I prefer Hal Williams's definition of strategy: something is truly strategic only if it requires a behavior change when business as usual won't accomplish the desired results.

For example, one institution included as a strategy within their plan to review the food service and facilities contracts with external vendors. Do you really need a strategic plan to tell you to do that? If such reviews are not part of business as usual, then you are looking at problems that are not going to be solved by a strategic plan.

Instead, focus on the things that require major behavioral changes. For example, one institution increased both efficiency and organizational health by changing siloed behavior in administrative offices. They cooperated with other offices to ensure student success became a specific job requirement at every level of the institution -- a result that would be evaluated in performance reviews and lauded when it succeeded. That was truly strategic, because business as usual required a sharp behavioral change. Rather than spending the five years of a strategic plan checking off boxes toward the plan's completion, it is more effective to adopt a strategic design with recursive cycles of prototyping, learning and improvement.

When I led a strategic design process in 2017 as a college president, and the steering committee had completed its preliminary design for the institution's future, an initially skeptical faculty member gave the process an appropriate endorsement: "This process was messy as hell, but the result is good." The times are even messier now, which makes it even more imperative that we design the future of higher education rather than simply try to plan it. ■

Bio

David P. Haney is the former president of Centenary University. He and Jeremy Houska, director of educational effectiveness at the University of La Verne, will present on results-based strategic design at the SCUP 2020 Virtual Annual Conference, sponsored by the Society for College and University Planning. For more resources on results-based strategic design, see davidphaney.com.

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Beyond Incrementalism

In a time of growing and increasingly complex challenges, too many top administrators, leadership teams and boards are focusing on tactics rather than strategy, writes Susan Resneck Pierce.

By Susan Resneck Pierce // September 22, 2020

It is common knowledge that many colleges and universities face growing and increasingly complex financial challenges. Many have responded by incrementally cutting expenses and adding new revenue streams. But COVID-19 has rendered such incrementalism insufficient for those countless institutions -- public and private, large and small -- that might suffer severe cutbacks or even be forced to close if the pandemic persists through the first semester, the coming academic year or beyond.

Coping with these trying circumstances is more difficult than ever, given that past performance can no longer predict what may happen going forward in crucial areas like admissions and retention. As one president told me, "I'm used to making important decisions with the best information I have, knowing it's still only partial information, but I'm now making daily decisions based on no information at all."

In the last weeks, I've had at least 20 conversations with deeply dispirited college presidents from various sectors of higher education who have told me confidentially that they have never been so exhausted. (In the interest of that confidentiality, I'm not naming them.) They've all struggled with whether their institutions should resume face-to-face education, move totally to remote teaching or offer some hybrid approach. In making those decisions, they've sought to make their campuses both safe and financially sustainable, although, in all honesty, those goals may conflict with one another.

Determining how to approach the fall semester did not, of course, end the continuing need to make other equally difficult decisions.

For example, as many people anticipated, not all students are adhering to safety practices. As one friend put it, if 18- to 22-year-old students are confronted with choosing between their college's honor code and their hormones, hormones are often going to win. And indeed, a number of institutions that welcomed students back to campus, confronted with daunting numbers of positive cases, have abruptly pivoted either temporarily or in an ongoing way to remote learning.

Campuses are contending with other pressures. Faculty and staff members fearing exposure to the virus seek to work remotely. Families are worried and complaining on social media that safety practices on campuses are insufficient. And some local residents have protested the return of students and prompted new city ordinances requiring masks and social distancing.

Many campuses embracing e-learning are now struggling with student demands for reduced tuition and fees as well as financial relief for students who had leased off-campus housing expecting they would be taking in-person classes. The counterargument that remote education is costlier than face-to-face education is not persuasive to students enrolled at residential campuses who believe that tuition dollars provide for a rich collegiate experience, not just classroom learning.

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/NUTHAWUT SOMSUK

Many of the presidents with whom I talked were dispirited that what they had previously thought were healthy relationships with their faculty colleagues have become fraught with conflict. Some attributed the contentiousness to the faculty's dismay in learning that, although they have primary responsibility for academic matters, the trustees have ultimate legal authority. Many faculty have been equally upset to learn that, in times of financial exigency, boards aren't required to adhere to the processes outlined in faculty handbooks. The result: some faculty members are now attacking the legality of some leadership decisions, while others are voting or threatening to vote no confidence in their presidents.

Two presidents who prided themselves on their collaboration with faculty were particularly distraught that their faculty colleagues had turned on them. When one became president more than a decade ago, the institution was on the brink of closure. Since then, he's worked closely with the faculty to create and practice shared governance. He's spent a great deal of time with students. In recent years, this university's situation improved dramatically, as it obtained healthy enrollments, annual surpluses, an enhanced reputation and a transformed physical campus. But because the institution has depended on robust numbers of international students, indicators are that enrollment will drop significantly this fall. To cover the anticipated multi-million-dollar deficit, the institution has suspended retirement contributions and frozen all hiring. The president explained his stress this way: because of these recent actions, seemingly overnight, he is no longer viewed as the institutional savior but as a villain.

The second president, too, has worked collaboratively with the faculty for her eight years, also emphasizing shared governance in the strategic planning process and involving faculty, staff and students in shaping the institution's budget. She has routinely included faculty members in trustee retreats. She has raised lots of money for faculty positions and programs. Yet despite recently signing a new multiyear contract, she plans to make this year her last. Her motivation for leaving: a portion of the faculty is vilifying her in the local press and on social media for various COVID-related decisions. She is especially stung that even though no tenured and tenure-track faculty have been laid off, not one of those who once praised her has come to her defense. Instead, many have signed a public letter denouncing her as incompetent.

> "Most presidents have been preoccupied with how their campus should function this fall.... They have not in a deliberate way been thinking about the long-term, strategic implications of the tactical decisions they are now making."

All this said, I should also add that some presidents had nothing but praise for their faculty and staff colleagues, saying that the COVID crisis had led to new levels of collaboration. And they admired the resilience and commitment of faculty, staff and students to adapting to the new realities.

Most of the presidents I've interacted with have also been grappling with another almost unprecedented challenge: how to deal with the emerging demands of various campus constituencies that their institution immediately provide significant support to eradicating systemic racism and other social inequities on their campuses -- as well as to improving the living conditions and opportunities of those beyond the campus.

Several presidents spoke of the letters along those lines that faculty members at universities as prestigious as the University of Chicago, Dartmouth College and Princeton University have signed. These presidents all applauded the goals of the protestors and those articulated in statements from members of their campus community. A number observed that their institution's commitment to diversity and inclusion had, in fact, led to significantly more diversified boards, senior leadership teams and student bodies. But they all said they were unsure how much they could actually do right now when they must cut rather than add new positions and new programs at their institutions.

Many were unsettled by being presented with demands in areas for which they had neither responsibility nor authority. Several noted that members of their campus community did not understand that presidents alone cannot redesign the curriculum (for which the faculty has primary responsibility), cannot unilaterally decide to spend money from the endowment (which is ultimately a board decision) and cannot simply by wishing it be so diversify their faculty.

Tactics, Not Strategy

What most concerned me in my conversations with these presidents, however -- and what I believe may be the most fundamental issue -- was how many top administrators and apparently their

leadership teams and boards are focusing on tactics rather than strategy. Understandably, most presidents have been preoccupied with how their campus should function this fall. As a result, they unfortunately also have not in a deliberate way been thinking about the long-term, strategic implications of the tactical decisions they are now making. Rather, almost all have been engaging in some sort of magical thinking: if only we can get through the fall semester, things will somehow return to normal.

Although most presidents who reopened their campuses told me they would probably shut it down if they had a COVID outbreak, very few said they and their colleagues had analyzed in depth the financial and reputational implications of such a closure. I was also struck by how few campuses had engaged in tactical scenario planning beyond this fall semester, anticipating the possibility that COVID-19 will negatively impact the entire academic year and perhaps several more.

In addition, most presidents told me they simply didn't have the bandwidth now to consider -- much less to consult robustly with other administrators, faculty, students and trustees about -- what it would mean for their institution truly to make, and not just give lip service to, a long-term commitment to racial equity and social justice. Those communicating mainly through video calls saw that as a further impediment.

So how should presidents begin to think strategically about the content and the pedagogy of the education their institutions will offer going forward? How should they lead their institutions to take concrete steps to eliminate systemic inequities on their campuses? How can they facilitate a commitment to combat racism not only on their campuses but also in their local communities and beyond? How can they manage all this as many face daily threats to their institution's financial health?

> "One president told me, 'I'm used to making important decisions with the best information I have, knowing it's still only partial information, but I'm now making daily decisions based on no information at all.'"

My own answer to these sorts of questions is, that despite the tyranny of today's immediate, this is a time when presidents, in collaboration with their campus community and their trustees, should lead a review of how they can fulfill their institutional mission post-COVID -- or even whether that mission needs to be revised.

Some of the presidents with whom I talked, along with several trustees and faculty members, have inspired the following suggestions for how at least some campus leaders may begin to think about the future. I want to emphasize that none of these approaches pertain to all institutions. I also want to make it clear that I have long advocated for the value of a residential college experience, recognizing that a great deal of important learning does take place outside the classroom, for example in conversations among students, faculty and staff and in an array of co-curricular activities. And so I am mindful that many of the following suggestions envision a very different model.

Move even more online. Several presidents confided that they had long wanted to advance online learning but could not overcome faculty resistance to the idea. The spring semester, they told me, has changed that dynamic. Many praised their faculty colleagues for their commitment to learning how to teach remote classes effectively and the pleasure many of them took in doing so. Those presidents believe that online teaching will help them address growing concerns about costs and encourage admissions, persistence, improved graduation rates and accelerated times to degrees. Several presidents believe that many students, even those who are residential because they want the college experience I describe above, will nevertheless prefer to take at least some classes online. To that end, they are redesigning all classrooms to enable every student going forward to take classes in person, online asynchronously or, in some instances, both.

New online options could also attract and retain students who

might otherwise forgo college. In addition, traditional-age students could routinely take online courses during the summer, while on study abroad, during an internship or co-op experience, or even as an overload. Institutions might also consider extending the geographical online reach of programs of strength. International students who previously attended or would have attended American universities might now be amenable -- given travel restrictions and financial concerns -- to earning their degrees from these same institutions remotely.

Rethink goals in light of demographic realities, concerns about costs and shifting student interests. Some institutions with large commuter populations have been seeking to become more residential by building additional residence halls and creating a more vibrant campus life for residential students. Those institutions might now instead focus on ensuring that commuter students are appropriately supported. They might work with commuter students to determine what sort of activities are of interest to and value to them, recognizing that many commuters work full-time, have families and are older than the traditional residential student.

Reconceptualize and streamline institutional structures to better serve faculty and student realities. As David Rosowsky and Bridget Keegan recently suggested, institutions might want to abandon the departmental model and move either to divisional or new interdisciplinary structures. And even if campuses wish to preserve the departmental model, they might encourage and support faculty efforts to create new interdisciplinary programs. For example, the University of Puget Sound, where I served as president for 11 years, now offers a bioethics program that, according to the catalog, "encompasses work in the fields of biology, natural science, neuroscience, religion, philosophy, literature, sociology, psychology, politics, economics and business."

> "Presidents, in collaboration with their campus community and their trustees, should lead a review of how they can fulfill their institutional mission post- COVID -- or even whether that mission needs to be revised."

Consolidate student support services. Many institutions have created one-stop shopping for students, co-locating such areas as financial aid, student accounts, the registrar, advising, the writing center and career services. Institutions should also consider partnering with other institutions to create a shared services model and/or to partner in terms of academic programs. Such efforts have in the past been elusive for many campuses because one or more of the potential partners have significant liabilities. Others have faltered because of a failure to agree on matters of governance, the location and even the name of a new partnership entity. But now is the moment to decide to function in ways that will better serve students and more effectively use human and financial resources.

Embrace the virtue of the out-of-doors. Colleges in temperate climates might emulate other institutions that have equipped outdoor spaces with Wi-Fi to create socially distanced classrooms and dining facilities as well as safer venues for students to study solely or in small groups. Post-COVID, such colleges should continue to offer such spaces.

Budget for mission, with long-term strategies in mind. In addition, as painful as it probably will be, institutions with huge COVID-related deficits should engage in zero-based budgeting in order to direct resources to areas that are mission-critical and adequately staff programs with high student enrollments. As one president described this shift in reallocating resources, the board is not changing the nature of the institution but rather seeking to fund the institution it has become.

Address systemic racism, sexism, homophobia and other biases. Perhaps most important, presidents, leadership teams and trustees must listen and be open to suggestions from members of the campus community, particularly those who have historically been

subject to and harmed by such biases. Campuses should work to diversify the faculty and staff at all levels and to institute policies that ensure equity and inclusion. Areas in need of being addressed include hiring practices, tenure and promotion policies, the curriculum, and financial aid.

Administrators should ensure that faculty and staff members from underrepresented groups aren't exploited by the expectation that they serve as diversity representatives on committees and as mentors/advisers to larger than normal numbers of students (a role that they should be applauded for fulfilling but that should also be recognized and rewarded accordingly). In addition, institutions will need to contend with their own histories if those histories are rife with bigotry.

While focusing on such strategic questions today may seem at first overwhelming, I urge presidents to begin to take steps toward doing so, first by listening and then by working together with colleagues, students and, as appropriate, trustees to identify, prioritize, develop and implement concrete actions. For such conversations to result in positive change, presidents must be clear from the outset about who ultimately will be responsible for making which decisions, what criteria they will use and what resources are available so that those who are offering ideas are informed from the beginning about what is possible.

Ultimately, despite all the challenges, presidents must, through collaboration and genuine communication, lead their faculty, administrators and students to focus on not only what their institution is today but also what it can and will be. They must put in place planning processes that allow their institution to pivot so as not only to survive but also thrive in ways that are true to their core values and goals. In other words, they must think beyond the current crises and, while responding to the needs of the moment, think and act strategically for the future. ■

Bio

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