

Transcription for INSIDE HIGHER ED: THE KEY



Ep.78: Dropping the Degree as a Hiring Requirement

PROVIDED BY CAPTION ACCESS
contact@captionaccess
www.captionaccess.com April 2022

DOUG LEDERMAN:

Last month, the state of Maryland announced that it would no longer require a bachelor's degree in the hiring process for nearly half of its jobs joining a growing number of companies and other employers. Hello, and welcome to The Key Inside Higher Ed's News and Analysis Podcast. I'm Doug Lederman, editor of Inside Higher Ed and host of The Key. I hope the flowers are blooming and the temperatures warming where you are. In today's episode of The Key we'll talk about Maryland's decision to more formally look beyond the four year degree. A step that many people in higher education might view as a slap in the face. That might be understandable given that the bachelor's degree has always been the primary "product" for many colleges and universities. And yes, Maryland and other employers that have moved in that direction are responding in part to questions about the value of degrees and growing concerns about the cost and opportunity cost of earning one. But our two guests today explain why Maryland's decision and those like it present as much opportunity as threat for higher education.

First, Bridgette Gray of the nonprofit group Opportunity@ Work, which is helping Maryland identify non degree workers to fill jobs in technology, administration and customer service describes the marking conditions that prompted the state's decision and why equity was a primary factor behind its move. Then Brandon Busteded of Kaplan, discusses the larger forces at play and explains how colleges and universities can respond in ways that not only sustain their relevance but position them better for the coming changes and how learning is likely to happen. Before we start, here's a word from Kaplan, which is sponsoring this series of episodes. (AUDIO PLAYS)

SPEAKER:

This episode of The Key is sponsored by Kaplan. Which serves as a multipurpose strategic partner to universities across the globe delivering more than \$1,000,000,000 in annual economic impact to its partners by helping them grow, diversify and innovate. Find out more at [Kaplan.com/universities](https://www.kaplan.com/universities). (AUDIO ENDS)

DOUG LEDERMAN:

We'll begin today's program with a conversation with Bridgette Gray, chief customer officer at Opportunity@ Work. (AUDIO PLAYS) Bridgette, welcome to The Key, and thanks for being here.

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

Thank you for having me, Doug.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

Briefly outline the new policy that Maryland has put in place to eliminate the bachelor's degree as a requirement for 1,000s of the state's jobs.

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

As we think about the pandemic and the recovery from the pandemic Maryland has made the decision to remove degree requirements from 1,000s of jobs that they have determined no longer need a post-secondary or bachelor's degree or four year bachelor's degree. They were having trouble filling their talent pipelines and so the thought was let's just remove degree requirements from jobs that we feel like don't necessarily need them. So, they're partnering with opportunity@ work to help source that talent.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

What's your sense of what had led those jobs to have degree requirements in the first place? Had that just naturally happened over time? And maybe tell us a little bit more about the process the state went through to try and determine which jobs continue to require a bachelor's degree and which ones didn't.

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

And so when you start to think about degree inflation and when that happen we can actually point that back to the Great Recession in 2008. There was this huge increase in using a bachelor's degree as a tool to screen out workers as employers were struggling to kind of balance the number of applicants that they saw. And so as a result, you had degrees being used as a proxy to determine skills in the mind of hiring managers. And the results of that ended up with 74% of new jobs between 2008 and 2017 were in occupations that required a bachelor's degree but 60% of the adult workforce doesn't have a degree. This has been happening for a long time, so that decreases the amount of US workers that have access to jobs. So, the state of Maryland found themselves in the same space where degree inflation is happening. We're having a recovery from a pandemic that could replicate 2008. You have tons of people that are applying for jobs where people are being very intentional about the jobs that they are looking forward to.

And so Maryland just took a step backwards and thought we are not filling jobs fast enough and we have open roles. So, we need to take a look at where does a post-secondary degree need to live. So, for instance, you think in terms of roles of end user support roles in tech. End users support role is an entry level role. It doesn't need a bachelor's degree but you may need a credential. And so, what we did was work with the state of Maryland to really think through their customer facing roles, if they had any, administrative roles, IT jobs, and really opening up those opportunities for who we call STARS. Those are workers that are skilled to an alternative route. So, they have training, they have skills to do the job today but they don't have the access and opportunity because the position descriptions are already weeding them out because they don't have a four year degree.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

This might be a good time to tell listeners a little more about Opportunity@ Work and the Stars program that Maryland is tapping into to identify non degreed workers.

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

So, opportunity@ work we're a social enterprise. Our mission is to increase career opportunities for STARS and that's for more than the 70 million adults that are out here. And as I mentioned before, STARS are workers that are skilled to an alternative route. And so what that means is they gain their skills through their many years of work experience. They gain their skills through a community college or a military service program or even through a workforce training organization. And these are people that make up the bulk of American workers. And Maryland decided to partner with us because there are a few reasons why. So, one is we have this focus on skills based talent and we've been very clear about who's STARS are. They are a talent category. Through our conversations with Secretary Robinson and their chief strategy officer, Joe Farren, we really had these conversations about how can we bring talent to you so that you're able to open up more opportunities for Marylanders who are looking for those jobs.

And so they decided to partner with us because we have direct connections to talent and developers. We have direct connection to helping them figure out which jobs necessarily don't need a post-

secondary degree. And so that's why they're partnering with us. The biggest reason too is because we have a platform that's called Stella Wax, wax with an X. Stella Wax is an aggregator for supply and demand. It's a one stop shop for employers to be able to support STARs talent. And it's a one stop shop so that STARs know when they go to this platform it is the only one that's been created for them. So, there's no competition with anyone with a four year degree.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

Is there a certification process for somebody to be considered a STAR? Is that something that you determine or can it be self-determined?

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

Currently, we partner with talent developers. So, all of the organizations I've mentioned before whether it be a community college or someone that's training talent and when they create a profile on our Stella wax platform they upload their curricula. And so once their curriculum is uploaded, there is an algorithm built into our system that pulls out the skills that people would learn based off of that curriculum. And the next skills algorithm is then matched up with what employers are actually putting on the platform as far as roles. And then there's a skills matching and a number that shows what the match score looks like.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

If I'm hearing you right it sounds like the decision to reconsider degree requirements is heavily driven by a lack of available workers just like the degree requirements were originally imposed because of employers desire to differentiate among what they viewed as too many potential workers 15 years ago. Is that accurate?

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

So, I would actually take it a step backwards. I would say that it is the thing that prompted the conversation. If you're not able to fill your talent pipelines and you're leaving positions open that are critical to the state it's making you stop for a second to think about what are we not doing accurately? So yeah, that may be the impetus to getting the conversation started but what it quickly morphed to was equity. It was really about the state of Maryland really wanted to create an equitable process where more Marylanders can see themselves in opportunities to move themselves into the middle class. Some of the state jobs they pay really well and so it's a great opportunity. There's benefits. There is all the things that people want. So, the impetus for that was, yes, we can't meet the demand but we can also be very equitable in how we think about approaching these jobs.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

Some of the people who advocate for ending degree requirements also question whether going to college is worth it. Sometimes with a real political bent. So, it's probably understandable that a lot of people in higher education may view efforts to eliminate degree requirements as a political statement or an attempt to diminish the importance of colleges and universities. Do you separate the decisions to limit the preference for degrees in hiring from the public questioning of the value of a degree? What's the interaction here?

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

That is a really good question and I think it's one that we just as a country need to have a deeper conversation around. Because opportunity@ work stance is not it's college or it's college end. I don't think at all this is a political move at all. The way I would frame this would be we can't continue to have

one pathway for people to be able to have upward mobility and upward economic mobility and family sustaining wages. Like we just can't. And when we think back, I think back to the time when my grandparents and other people's grandparents and parents went through vocational training potentially or went through an apprenticeship model there wasn't this degree inflation. There was a space where there is good hard work that you can do that pays really well if you just go to a vocational training. We've gotten away from that and we flipped it. And so when the bulk of people in this country can't afford college, what happens to them? It's an equitable thing. The other thing is I would say is college still is super important.

Like you have to have a degree if you want to be a doctor or an attorney or an engineer. But do you need a degree to code? No. You don't need a degree to code. You need curiosity. And you need to be a lifelong learner when you're working in tech. I would say that we need to have a deeper conversation just as a country to understand no one should feel threatened in a situation like this, whether you have a degree or you don't. The other thing, Doug, I would say is the pandemic happened and essential workers became the most important people in this country when the pandemic happened. And so is it right and fair to tell essential workers that they don't have the ability to compete for jobs that really shouldn't require a degree, but that do when they were making critical decisions and problem solving. That's not fair. And we saw them as valuable. So, let's see them valuable as valuable enough to be able to move system upward mobility and opportunities.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

I read that roughly half of Maryland state jobs were deemed not to require a bachelor's degree. Can you say a bit more about how that analysis was done? What tended to get jobs put into one bucket or the other?

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

So, the first place we always go to typically is tech IT. So, my background is from a tech developer world for the past 25 years that's where I work. And it was primarily in tech. And just knowing the employers that I worked with over the many years and the skill development that employers do they will tell you they don't need someone to come into their companies with a degree in tech. So, for instance, I'll give you an example. I used to partner with a major bank in this area and their CSO used to tell me all the time, I hate to see people come in with a degree in cyber because they in their minds spend all this money and think they're ready on day one to actually work in cyber when reality is you may not be ready on day one. So, I like to see people that come through with credentials but maybe it's a third that they work with. And so when you have the industry telling you that this particular role may not need a degree that's what arms us to be able to have those conversations with folks like the state of Maryland and other customers and employers we work with.

So, it's really like going back and thinking through your jobs and figuring out which of those jobs could you start to focus on. We only wanted to focus initially on tech, administrative roles and any type of customer facing or something that's customer service. The other thing I will just add on because I agree that you learn a lot in college. When you take a step back or so, the bulk of people gain skills through their work experience. And it's not necessarily through college and so that has to be taken into consideration.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

How typical or how unusual at this point is Maryland in taking this step? We've seen more companies

start to do this, both companies like Google and others that are offering their own credentials and certificates but also just employers that are asking some of the same questions Maryland is. Maryland jumped out at me as being unusual and part of the reason I'm talking to you about this is because it's a government and I'm sure there are others that have done it. Is Maryland out front on this? Are there multiple other conversations that you're aware of? Do you think it will not be the last if it's the first?

BRIDGETTE GRAY:

Maryland is definitely a trendsetter. They are definitely out front. It was a very innovative approach that Governor Hogan took in making this decision. So, they are leading the way and I know that Maryland has had tons of calls asking questions about like, how did you do that? But we've also had states calling us saying that they too want to figure out how to remove degree requirements from jobs that they deem that don't necessarily need those. We've had this also happen trickle down to county government as well as city government jobs. And so that is a trend in these entities, they are responsible for the people in their states and counties and cities. They're responsible for making sure that their constituents have access and opportunity. And so, this is a great way for them to start to think if we can set the standard here around the jobs that we have control over how do we blow this up into the private sector? How do we bring the chambers of commerce into the conversations in economic development when we're talking about bringing more businesses to the community?

Doesn't mean overlooked anyone with a four year degree at all. But be intentional in thinking about the jobs that don't need a four year degree and less open up opportunities where every single resident of city, states and counties.

SPEAKER:

This episode of The Key is sponsored by Kaplan. Which serves as a multipurpose strategic partner to universities across the globe delivering more than \$1,000,000,000 in annual economic impact to its partners by helping them grow, diversify and innovate. Find out more at Kaplan.com/universities.
(AUDIO ENDS)

DOUG LEDERMAN:

That was Brigitte Grey of Opportunity@ Work, talking about how the non-profit organization is helping the state of Maryland expand its pool of candidates for 1,000s of jobs by considering workers who have skills but no four year degree. In part two of this episode, I'm speaking with Brandon Busteed, Chief Partnership Officer and Global Head of Learn Work Innovation at Kaplan. Brandon formerly led Gallup's work with colleges and other public sector organizations. And he speaks and writes widely about higher education in the workforce. (AUDIO PLAYS) Brandon, welcome to The Key and thanks for being here.

BRANDON BUSTEED:

Always a pleasure, Doug.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

We just heard from Bridgett Gray of Opportunity@ Work about the state of Maryland's decision to eliminate four year degree requirements for 1,000s of its jobs. Can you help us put that into some national context and tell us whether you think that's significant? And if so why?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

It's significant in that it's another big announcement around a series of news stories that are kind of

trending in this direction. So to be clear, there's still a lot of value for the bachelor's degree and belief in college. But this is now a state, a fairly prominent state, a state that sits nestled up against DC and federal politics and visibility that has come out and said, hey, we've looked at this carefully and we're not so sure that we need to require a degree for these jobs. And in reality, Doug, a lot of jobs if employers really dig beneath the surface of what is required in those jobs in terms of tasks and skills and things like that, the honest answer is that a lot of them don't actually require a bachelor's degree like we believe that they do. We use that as a sorting mechanism. It can be a helpful sorting mechanism and identifying talent but this is a serious stuff. Google, of course, last year in announcing their Google IT search, in addition to doing that, came out and said we are going to treat these as equivalent to a college degree in our hiring process.

Major move. There have been financial services firms and major accounting firms who have come out and said, we're gonna drop it as a requirement, we're still gonna take it under consideration but the degree is no longer gonna be a requirement. And it's against this backdrop, of course, of concerns about the work readiness of college graduates and questions about the cost of Higher Ed. And which gets you into a zone of this debate about the return on investment. Is it worth it? Is it worth it for everybody? So, in that backdrop I think it's pretty big news.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

Let's back up and talk a bit about the reasons why the degree had previously become the sorting mechanism that you described. More and more jobs in the economy had come to require a bachelor's degree. Why is that?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

Historically, I think that the bachelor's degree or degree in general has been considered, I'll call it a standard for career trajectory and career success. The idea being that if you really want to get ahead or be a manager or be in a senior level role like college is your path. And we do have data that substantiates those who get a bachelor's degree, for example, over those with only a high school degree they make significantly more over their career. So, that data still holds up. And you're right, it's a bit of two kind of competing thoughts that you have to hold in your head at the same time. Because there's plenty of analysis that says a large percentage of the jobs of today in the future are gonna require a college degree. And the other hand, you're hearing a drumbeat around like, well, does this one really require a college degree? Maybe it's still valuable but it's optional but the reality also is that, I mentioned the two kind of really major headwinds facing higher education.

It's been the perception and reality of rising costs of Higher Ed alongside this stinking belief among the general population, business executives, hiring managers that college graduates are really well prepared for work. Now, we can get into that a little bit more but those two things together are what's really driving big questions. And look, the bigger backdrop, as you know, is that degree seeking enrollments in US Higher Ed have now declined for 13 straight years. We reached peak Higher Ed in 2011 and we've shed in real terms 3.72 million students since 2011. So, there's a real story here that people are turning to other alternatives or nothing. And I'll end on this point, I do believe there are a growing set of college pathway alternatives and non college pathway alternatives to good jobs. I'm not saying it's prevalent but they're growing. And a simple example would be look at all the retail companies and service oriented companies that are now offering education benefits, where I can go work at Walmart or Target or Amazon and get my college degree paid for as part of the education benefits program.

That's a college path but it's obviously very different than what we think of as the traditional route.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

Let's unpack a couple of things. Start with the question of whether college graduates are or are not prepared for the workforce. I've actually heard a little bit less from employers about that than there was a few years ago. But how true is it and how do we know?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

There's a few ways you do it. And I know this is going to sound simplistic to start but perception as we know, is reality to a certain extent. So, it's very clear, this was back in the days when I was at Gallup, extensive surveys of all kinds of different segments of the population, general population, sea level business, even trustees of colleges and universities, Doug. They're actually the most skeptical of any audience on the work readiness of college graduates, which is rather ironic. Now, what's really under the hood? And again, this comes from fairly rigorous research and understanding. One, relatively few students have had real work experience. So, this is a generational thing. Today's 18 to 25 year olds are the least working generation in US history. That is when you measure like have you worked an hour or more in a paid job in the last week? The lowest we've ever measured in 60, 70 years of measurement. So on one hand, you can say, well, yeah, they're not work ready because they're not working as much as any generation before.

And so you could say, well, how is that the fault or the blame of a college or university? Well, I think they have a role but there's other stuff going on there. Then you look at the things that are in the curriculum, like in the control of a provost or a dean or an individual faculty member. And that is only a third of graduates leave Higher Ed having done a long term project that took a semester or more to complete. And only about a third had a job or an internship of some form where they were able to apply what they were learning in the classroom. So, great that it's happening for a third but the reflection of that is for two-thirds of graduates, I'm not talking about the dropouts. But of graduates are leaving college with a degree better than no degree but without having engaged in a long term project or a work integrated learning experience. And those are things that are really important. So, that would be some of the real stuff under the hood that we definitely need to improve upon.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

We do know, and you referred to it earlier, that people with degrees still outperform and pay and other things four year degree outperforms a two year degree. Two year degree outperforms a high school degree. Obviously, the certificates and certifications come in different places depending on what they are, etc.. Those who believe that having a degree still pays off aren't wrong. How do we mesh those two thoughts?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

Well, look, I think if you just take the averages, right, those are truths. But it's the nuances or where the stories and the concern and the risk really gets amplified. So, 40 years ago the graduates were coming out of Higher Ed there was very little student loan debt relative today. So, the stakes are higher because the cost for many has gone up. And the real past of student loan debt is very real. And you hear stories about people graduating from medical school and are going into community health practices as a physician, family physician with \$400,000 of student loan debt. Now, you go well, doctor makes a lot of money. Community health, family physician probably not enough to carry the burden of a four or \$300,000 to loan debt. So, even in some of our Higher Ed professions, there are some stories that are

kind of scary but I think what it plays out is in certain degrees, we know we see this data at a state level, at a program level within a university. There are graduates who graduate with an English degree from one institution in the state of Texas who make a lot less than English majors from another institution in the state.

And you go, how is that possible? But this is true. So, I think that's the concern, is that there are enough stories of where I got my degree and it didn't really work out the way I thought that a real concern to people. And of course, when you hear those stories, it gets amplified like that's a real scare story. It's like, oh my gosh, did you hear about the guy with \$1,000,000 in student loan debt? Yeah, there are a few out there, I think 100 Americans, hard to believe.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

Some of the people who advocate stances like Maryland's do so because they question the value of a bachelor's degree. Sometimes increasingly in our ever more partisan society with a political motivation or at least something of one. And there's no question that a lot of people in higher education view initiatives like in Maryland, as a real critique. Why is it become also a political hammer in certain ways?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

The whole topic of higher education has become partisan. And you and I have talked about this a lot but that divide really started around 2015. So, pre-Trump years and then once an issue or a topic starts to split in obvious partisan ways I'm hard pressed to come up with examples where it has recovered. So, this is one of the reasons why I'm concerned about the partisan views of Higher Ed because I don't think it's a temporary issue. I think it's gonna be a painful lasting issue. When it comes to jobs I don't believe that it's an either or. It's either college or something else. And I also don't believe that it's like the liberal arts or careerism or technical training. I think the future is very much about the both end. We'll use another description. A lot of people talk about building a T-shaped student, right? Someone who is broadly educated and specifically skilled. That really is the goal here. So, even if you have a student who is in a classic liberal arts program who's getting broadly educated in the most robust sense that we think about it, I still wanna see that student leave with specific skill sets whether they're proficient in Excel or Tableau or they have a designation in cybersecurity.

And so, whether it's a liberal arts institution or more of a career path, I think ultimately that's the conversation we should have. And we should say what are the elements of college "traditional college" that we really do want to protect and value? And I believe even through a partisan divide there are some commonalities that we can all really grab on to because everybody will agree. If you're a hiring manager you want somebody who can communicate. Who is culturally aware and competent, a critical thinker. But at the end of the day, I think all of us believe in better jobs, in human development and career advancement and better wages. So, I just think we need to take down the arms of like either or. It's like either college or it's something else. That's the dangerous conversation.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

We've got Maryland doing this. We've got various employers that are changing their requirements. We've got all these alternative pathways that the digital explosion and technology have enabled. In that environment, what is the college administrator, faculty member or institutional leader to do? What are the responses and not sort of knee jerk responses assuming that this is a change that is gonna stick around and assuming that it's not political and that there are legitimate reasons to be asking these hard

questions, what are the appropriate responses for institutions that wanna remain relevant and serve their students in this way?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

Well, first of all, I think my advice to most Higher Ed leaders would be if you and your institution believe that your only purview is that of the domain of a degree you're probably gonna be persisting in a declining market. I mentioned 13 years of declining enrollments in degrees seeking programs in Higher Ed. What's growing in Higher Ed for college and universities are enrollments in non degree educational programs. And there's a whole litany of things, right? Certificate level, boot camp, ESC related stuff. So, universities are indeed, I mean not all of them but many are diving into that in response to what students regardless of age need and want out there to some degree they're responding to what employers are pushing for. And so we can embrace that. And we can do it in a smart way. Again, if I'm a Higher Ed leader, where I say, OK, we're gonna take either pieces of the degree and make it available, right? Or we're gonna create cert or boot camp programs, how can we then ensure that the design of those articulates into credit towards degrees?

So, I might not be able to hook somebody into coming full steam into a degree program but if they take a boot camp and then a follow up certificate in pursuit of a more immediate job, and then they realize that, well, jeez, I've already got ten or 12 or whatever credits towards associate's degree. A bachelor's degree, this master's degree, like that then is a bit of the tractor beam that draws people into Higher Ed, maybe not immediately as an instant full time student enrollment but certainly easier on ramps into it. And quite frankly, easier off ramps. So, it's like OK, you started your degree you didn't finish it but we'd like to keep you connected continue to treat you like a student. We're gonna provide you with access to some non degree training that might help you very immediately in your career. So, I just think the embrace of this is it can mean growth in revenue. An alternative revenue sources and growth in mission impact. I mean, if I'm an institution and I want to be in service to society and the world and all these grandiose powerful statements that colleges make in their mission statements, it doesn't always have to be just through the lens of a degree.

There's a lot of powerful education that colleges, universities can provide short of that. And I think if we break outside of that degree mindset I think we actually improve the value of a degree in doing so. I don't think that we diminish.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

We might have professors listening to this thinking this is my institution's problem if it's higher education's problem at all, what are the responsibilities and maybe the possibilities of the person thinking about this at the individual course level?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

I think it provides a lot of opportunity. Again, how do you want to view this? View it as a threat, view it as a slap in the face or look at it and say there's something happening in the marketplace. There's something happening with the needs and desires of the modern day student. If I, as an individual faculty member, want to remain relevant and feel like I'm making an impact I can continue to do that through the students I serve and degree seeking programs. But I can also think about what parts of this I embrace or augment. So, simple example. There's a lot of universities that in a semester long course, it's part of a degree program are providing opportunities for students to augment that with a digital marketing badge or certificate. Or a financial services designation. Or something that the professor of

that course may not actually teach him or herself, but they're thinking about it as an augmenting educational tool. To bring in to it either as an assignment, a component of the program or opportunities for students to do it in the nooks and crannies of the educational calendar.

I think it's just being smart. It's just like classroom has been enhanced by the technology. And some are using it more than others. But like even smart boards and I mean, we've move past the chalkboard. These have all been examples of augmentation of traditional teaching and there's varying levels of embrace to it.

DOUG LEDERMAN:

There are quite a few people out there kind of short selling the degrees suggesting that it will be replaced or significantly diminished by this collection of alternative credentials pathways providers that you were discussing or by people choosing none of the above. Do you think that's where we're heading?

BRANDON BUSTEED:

Here's another way to look at it. I do think the degree is losing currency. I do believe that. But it doesn't mean that colleges and universities need to suffer the same fate. So, this my point? College and university can maintain and will maintain a very important pole position in the grand scheme of human development, talent etc.. But for those who are wedded to the degree like that's going to be a real challenge. You're gonna be competing for a smaller and smaller number of students. And so, I wanna separate those two things even though they've been like intimately entwined with one another, college degree, degree college. But this is where college and universities can still remain very relevant, as relevant as ever before. We talk about fusing industry skill sets into the liberal arts. I think liberal arts should go on the offensive, meaning, take the liberal arts out of the degree program and put it into skills training, put it into executive training. Most leaders should have an ethics course, right?

Not just how do you do the accounting here in our finance division. So, that's where I think college and universities can maintain relevance even though they may not see it in the growth of the degree programs they are offering. And like I said, if you embrace learners at every level and can show them how those little steps they take could lead to a bigger step that's the most powerful tool to get people to enroll in degree programs is not to hit them over the head with the idea of this whole big thing that I've got to bite off. But to say, hey, I'm gonna take it in little steps 'Cause the reality is you step back and look at the future of learning and work and most of us are gonna be in a position where we're going to have to be constantly learning new tools, new software, the idea that I just learn everything I need to learn in this intense period of four years, I mean, that has been true for forever, right? So, like if we get outside of that idea, I think there's a lot of relevance to colleges and universities.

(AUDIO ENDS)

DOUG LEDERMAN:

We just heard from Brandon Busted Chief Partnership Officer and Global Head of Learn Work Innovation at Kaplan. His comments, along with those of Bridgette Gray of Opportunity@ work, reinforce the idea that while it might be tempting for people in higher education to see decisions by employers like the state of Maryland to end degree requirements in hiring as a kind of diss to a four year education. That's not the intent, and it's certainly not necessarily a productive point of view. It is probably useful, though, for college administrators and faculty members to pay attention to the signals employers are sending when they make these kinds of decisions. As I read it, it's that any entity involved

in preparing somebody directly or indirectly for a specific job or for the workforce generally needs to understand both what employers are looking for. And to the extent possible how well the education or training is developing that knowledge or those skills. If colleges or the students themselves don't have a good sense of the latter there's no reason to think that potential employers will.

Or that will necessarily assume, as they may have in the past, that the skills and knowledge are there. That's all for today's episode of The Key. Thanks to Bridgette Gray and Brandon Busted, to Kaplan for its financial support for this episode. And as always, to you for listening. I'm Doug Lederman, editor of Inside Higher Ed. And until next week, stay well and stay safe.