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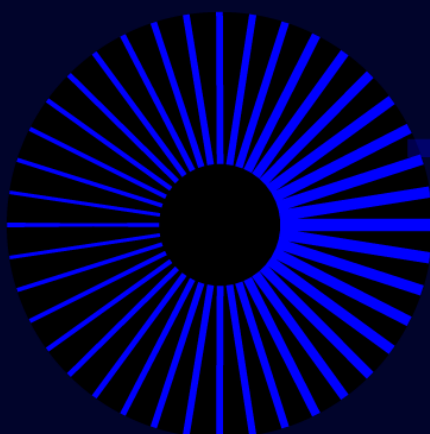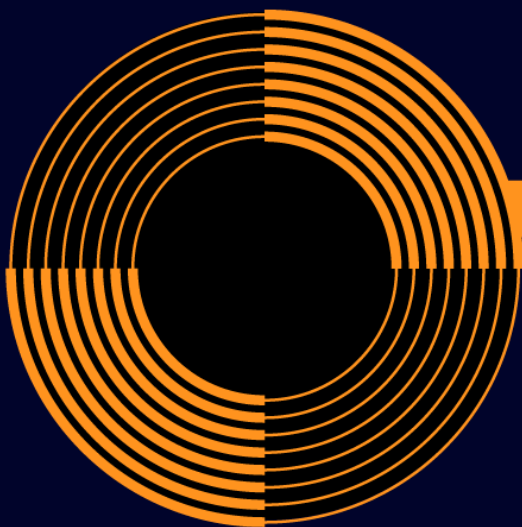# Higher Education

Save costs and modernize as higher education transforms

Higher education institutions face important and complex challenges. I know this because it wasn't long ago I was in your shoes, working to overcome some of the same hurdles from within an institution. Before coming to Amazon Web Services (AWS) in late 2020, I served as vice president and chief information officer for The Ohio State University where I saw swift transformation firsthand.

Now, I'm excited to engage with the higher education community in a new capacity as I lead the education business development and strategy team at AWS with the mission of accelerating digital transformation across all areas of education in the US. And there is much to do.

> A recent **IHE survey** found that "many presidents believe their institutions will respond to the pandemic and economic recession by **transforming their institution** or resetting for growth."

My team is here to support your innovation and whatever transformation means to you.

AWS is supporting this Inside Higher Ed report because we see a world where education is always available, personal, and lifelong for everyone. We know institutions will need to transform the systems, models, and methods of how, when, and where they are able to meet the needs of learners.

At AWS, we're committed to collaborating with you to drive efficiencies and value delivery in your operations by integrating cloud technology and into all areas of your institution. **Contact us** to learn how AWS can help your institution and **join our mailing list** to learn more about cloud success stories and best practices.

"We're committed to collaborating with you to drive innovation at your institution."

– Mike Hofherr, AWS

Sincerely,

Mike

Mike Hofherr
Director Education Strategic Business Development,
Amazon Web Services

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Introduction

Higher education is a hardy enterprise, and colleges and universities are among the oldest and most enduring institutions in our society. For decades, prognosticators have anticipated that scores or hundreds of institutions would close, and yet those predictions have not come to pass.

That's partly because the public's continued belief in the value of a postsecondary education and degree has sustained demand. It's also partly because colleges – while easy to caricature for holding on to traditions – in many cases adapt enough to continue to serve their students and fulfill their other missions.

Many commentators see this moment as different, given preexisting demographic and financial pressures on colleges intensified by the unprecedented impact of the global pandemic and ensuring worldwide recession. Even many college leaders perceive the need to make fundamental changes in how they operate if they are continue to successfully meet the needs of their students and other constituents.

What transformational change might look like can vary greatly from institution to institution based on mission and context. But as the articles in this booklet make clear, certain key elements are likely to be part of any effort to ensure that a college or university is as well-positioned for the next century as it was for the last one: digital capability, cross-institutional collaboration, and a hyperfocus on the needs of students.

This collection offers numerous examples of institutional adaptation, as well as insights from experts on how colleges and universities, individually and collectively, might reimagine themselves to respond to the opportunities and challenges of today's fast-changing environment.

We welcome your ideas for further coverage on these topics, and encourage you to reach out to us at editor@insidehighered.com.

–The Editors

Improving virtual education with the cloud

by Ben Butler

[Cloud Innovation Centers (CICs)](#) powered by Amazon Web Services (AWS) aim to empower public sector organizations to quickly create and test new ideas using Amazon's innovation methodology. In the second half of 2020, all those who participate in the CIC program, from students and researchers to the technology teams from AWS, worked on wide-ranging societal problems. Their focus was on improving education with virtual computer labs, working on climate change initiatives, improving economic and healthcare research, and supporting at-risk high school students. What were they up to at the end of 2020?

Improving student success through virtual education

While connecting communities to services is necessary for citizen well-being, with the move to remote education, schools, teachers, students, and parents continue to need improved access to virtual learning. The California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) DxHub CIC focused on three big projects to help tackle this challenge.

To help educators facilitate lab work from home for their computer science class, which requires students to manipulate operating systems not supported on most personal devices, DxHub developed a website that allows students to spin up and alter the operating systems with Amazon Machine Images (AMI) from home. The solution costs $26 per student, and provides the faculty member full administrative access on the backend to manage spend and appropriate access.
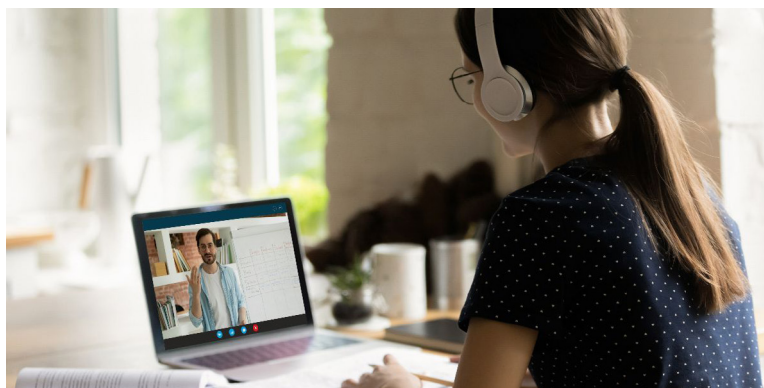
The DxHub also helped with Cal Poly's annual Cyber Range events, which teach high school students cybersecurity skills and test what they learned. The DxHub designed a scalable Cyber Range event using a custom virtual environment for students to access AMIs and perform digital forensics activities like operating system exploitation, analytics, and encryption. Producing a similar experience to an escape room, students explored simulated virtual settings to solve puzzles, find codes, and perform digital forensics activities using AWS. This allowed teachers to assess and teach students using the federally recognized NIST/NICE cybersecurity framework Learn more about the innovation challenge and open source resources.

Any public sector organization, including nonprofits, government agencies, healthcare organizations, and education institutions that are facing a challenge can apply to work with a Cloud Innovation Center to help identify new approaches to problems, leverage leading-edge technology, and explore opportunities to better deliver on their mission. **Send the CIC team a message** if you are interested in working on a challenge to support your digital innovation initiatives and advance your organization's mission. Listen to the latest episode of the **Fix This podcast**, to learn more about CICs.

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Liberal Arts Meets Women's Leadership in Health

Women's liberal arts college is not the first to orient its curriculum around a singular topic, and experts say it likely won't be the last.

By Emma Whitford // February 25, 2021

COURTESY OF SALEM COLLEGE

Salem College announced a new academic model and undergraduate experience Wednesday.

A handful of colleges have debuted health-related programs during the pandemic, and Salem College just joined their ranks.

The small women's liberal arts college in Winston-Salem, N.C., announced Wednesday that it will begin to offer three new health-related majors – health sciences, health humanities and health advocacy and humanitarian systems – beginning next fall. The college will also unveil a curriculum revamp that centers on leadership and health.

Despite what the announcement's timing would suggest, Salem's curricular changes were in the works long before the pandemic roiled colleges last spring. Susan Henking, interim president, said that the college's board and the campus worked together to develop the new curriculum.

Several years ago, the college's Board of Trustees sought to differentiate Salem from other liberal arts institutions. Choosing a focus area helped the college "resist the homogenization of American higher education," Henking said.

It's critical for liberal arts institutions to differentiate themselves and show students why the education they offer is relevant, said Rick Hesel, principal at Art & Science Group, a higher education consulting firm.

"If they don't, I think their survival in the long term is in question," Hesel said. "We've done a number of studies on the liberal arts, and just the mere words give institutions a disadvantage, we found."

Salem is not the first liberal arts institution to try to break away from the pack. Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Ga., has its students focusing on leadership and global dynamics through a signature experience program called SUMMIT. Mills College in Oakland, Calif., also

created a signature experience program several years ago.

Health is a particularly good focus area, Hesel said. Many colleges are currently looking to expand their health care and health-related programs. Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia recently announced a plan to acquire the University of the Sciences and along with it a slate of health sciences programs. A few years ago, Wheeling University in West Virginia gutted its liberal arts programs but left its health-care programs intact.

"The handwriting is on the wall," Hesel said. "We have an aging population. There's a genomics revolution going on that provides encouraging promise for health care, so a lot of places are moving in this direction."

But many colleges are only looking to add health-care programs, and Salem is distinct in choosing to incorporate health into all its offerings, Hesel added.

Before it settled on health leadership, the board examined county-level data that answered questions about what career paths most interested high schoolers. It found that many potential college students were looking at health care. The new focus area fits the skill sets of current Salem students, too — nearly 90 percent of Salem students who graduate with a degree from the natural sciences or mathematics departments are accepted into health-related programs, according to the college.

The board created a set of parameters for the curricular changes and then handed the reins over to the faculty.

"The board has established a set of guiding expectations in terms of an overall trajectory for health leadership," said Daniel Prosterman, vice president for academic and student affairs and dean at Salem. "In terms of the development of the majors, the decisions with regard to the curriculum and the co-curriculum, that was then completed by a campus-designed team that's composed of faculty leaders as well as a variety of members of staff from different sectors of the college."

Faculty members and college boards are notorious for clashing over curricular and programmatic changes, but that hasn't been the case at Salem, Henking and Prosterman said.

"Faculty governance adjusted itself to be able to act more quickly — without being asked to do so — and has really taken a leadership role in a way that I think challenges that narrative that boards are fast and presidents are fast and faculty are slow," Henking said.

The new majors will not require any additional funding at this time, and the college doesn't plan to hire any new faculty or staff members to support the changes. Instead, Henking described funding for the new programs as a redeployment of resources. The college hopes to build on the new programs in the future and may end up adding a few more employees. It will not cut any programs or employees in order to make room for the new majors.

"We wish to build a lot more things over time that will require fundraising, and we are in the process of moving that forward in a fairly aggressive way," Henking said.

The new focus will hopefully attract new students as well as external partnerships, said Lucy Rose, a former Food and Drug Administration executive and global health-care consultant who is vice chair of Salem's board.

"We expect this transformation to attract more students, partnerships and funding," Rose wrote in an email. "We're excited that our plan, which will be implemented in phases, will offer us an opportunity to work with new partners and organizations that share in our values and will have a direct benefit in developing a new pipeline of women leaders in health."

Salem College's undergraduate enrollment has dropped in recent years. During the 2018-19 academic year, Salem enrolled only 677 full-time undergraduate students, compared with nearly 1,000 during the 2015-16 academic year. The college also enrolls some graduate students and adult learners who are older than 23. ∎

Read Original Article ▶▶ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/02/25/salem-college-refocuses-its-curriculum-health-and-leadership

Creating a culture of lifelong learning

by Kim Majerus

I've always valued education, because it shapes our world and defines our future. At Amazon Web Services (AWS), we work with K12 schools, higher education institutions, education technology and learning companies to support both teaching and learning.

Alongside the education institutions, AWS is committed to providing access to cloud computing and technical skills to everyone, no matter their knowledge level. On a panel hosted by the *Washingtonian* on "**How the Tech Sector Is Upskilling the Workforce**," I shared how AWS is helping individuals on their cloud career journey for reskilling and upskilling, and how other companies can follow.

Collaborating to build pathways to tech jobs

Public-private sector collaboration between education, industry, and policymakers can speed access to education resources, hands-on opportunities for the workforce, and stackable credentials mapped to in-demand tech jobs. AWS has launched statewide announcements with Texas, Virginia, Louisiana, Arizona, Utah, and globally, where we've worked with community colleges, four-year institutions, and high schools as the institutions developed cloud degrees, specializations, certificates, and training programs.

Making tech skills training more inclusive

For individuals without tech experience, or unemployed and underemployed workers, securing a cloud computing job can seem daunting. AWS has a vast portfolio of training programs to meet learners where they are. Nontraditional pathways that focus on in-demand skills through certifications, associate's degrees, and real-world training programs are critical to building a technical talent pipeline. Community colleges are one way we reach diverse communities and individuals with varying skill levels. AWS Academy and AWS Educate work closely with community colleges to equip learners with cloud skills.

Looking ahead as the world continues to recover from the impact of COVID-19, reskilling the workforce will continue to be a critical topic. Watch the *Washingtonian* panel "**How the Tech Sector Is Upskilling the Workforce**," to learn more about how. And learn more in the new Amazon and Accenture study, "**Upskilling for a Post-Pandemic Economy**," which analyzes more than 188 million job transitions completed in the U.S. and shows the increasing importance of acquiring technical and scientific skills to move into high-paying, in-demand jobs.

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'Human Work'

> Author discusses his book on the nature of work – and preparing for that work with education and training.

By Scott Jaschik // October 13, 2020

Jamie Merisotis cares deeply about work, the jobs that will be available in the years to come and the education and training people will need to perform well in those jobs. Since 2008, he has been president and CEO of the Lumina Foundation. Based on his experience at Lumina and past work as president of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, he wrote *Human Work in the Age of Smart Machines* (Rosetta Books).

He answered questions about his book via email.

Q: Many fear that in the age of smart machines, there will not be enough work for humans. You have a chapter on the work that only humans can do. But are there enough jobs in that category? Won't smart machines eliminate some jobs?

A: Most of the thousands of books and articles on the future of work describe what I call the coming "robot zombie apocalypse," in which automation and [artificial intelligence] replace most workers and eliminate many if not most jobs. For example, a report from Oxford said that 47 percent of jobs are at high risk of automation in this decade, and a McKinsey report said 800 million jobs worldwide could be automated in the next 10 years. Like these reports, much of what has been written on the future of work seems to suggest that work

has no future – that work itself is becoming obsolete, and people will need to find something else to do with their time.

Certainly, smart machines will eliminate many jobs, but at the same time, they will do what technologies have always done – create millions of new jobs for people who are prepared to do them. Work is not going away, but it is being transformed by technology. Rather than focus on the future of work, I decided to write about the work of the future and found that most of our assumptions about it will need to change dramatically.

I call the work of the future "human work," because as technology advances, we should assume that any task that is repetitive and predictable – mental tasks as well as physical ones – will eventually be performed by a machine.

So, at its simplest, human work is the work only humans can do. But it is most certainly not the work that is left after machines take over. In writing the book, I found numerous examples of people doing human work, and what I learned from them is that it is not just more secure from technological disruption, it is work that is more fulfilling and meaningful to those who do it.

Q: Can you describe "the contemporary problem with training"?
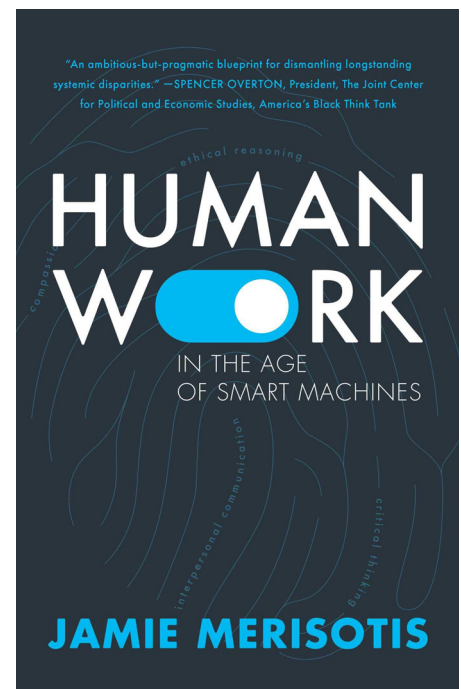
A: We still tend to believe work requires a specific set of technical knowledge and skills that people should learn in the fastest possible way.

We have a process for that called training, and it functioned reasonably well before the demand for talent accelerated and fundamentally changed, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 recession. And then there's another kind of learning called education that we like to believe is at a higher level because it prepares people for life beyond work.

In preparing people for human work, it's obvious that neither train-

ing devoid of broader learning nor education devoid of preparation for work will give people what they need. Indeed, this deeply held belief that education and workforce training are different breaks down. Education and training continue to be viewed as fundamentally different and separate systems, and whatever people learn in one system is often not recognized by the other.

Instead, these separate systems must be redesigned as a broad, integrated system focused on meeting individuals' needs for learning – broad integrative learning and narrow technical learning, both of which people will need throughout their lives. By melding these separate systems of training and education into one flexible system of learning, we also would make strides in addressing an even deeper societal problem: racial and social inequity. Far too often in our nation's past – and sadly, still today – "training" has been seen as the default path for people of color, while their opportunities for "education" were limited. It's well past time we erased this arbitrary line.

Q: Some would say that your arguments about college would lead to a lesser emphasis on the liberal arts. How would you respond?

A: In the book, I cite an example at the University of Virginia of how integrating learning across disciplines can better prepare people for human work. At UVA, medical students study at the university's art museum to hone their observational and diagnostic skills, which are crucial to their success

as physicians. Research showed that medical students and doctors who studied art had more capacity for personal reflection, tolerance of ambiguity and awareness of personal bias. But the medical students are not just taking an art class – this course was jointly developed by the two faculties and is integrated into the medical school curriculum. To me, that's a big difference.

Q: You note that "we don't know what our graduates have learned." What should we do about that?

A: My argument is not that students are not learning. It is that in a world of human work, it is essential that people know what degrees and other credentials represent in terms of learning. In other words, the meaning of all credentials, including college degrees, must be made transparent.

For workers to have to advance in their careers, they must understand the knowledge and skills they will need. For employers to find people who can perform well in their jobs, they need to know the specific knowledge and skills their jobs require. Employers also need to know what job applicants or new employees know and can do. Perhaps most important, workers themselves need to know what they know and can do so they can seize whatever opportunities are available to them to build a satisfying career.

We can solve this problem by assuring that employers, educators and individuals – students and workers – all speak the same lan-

guage when it comes to knowledge and skills. The big advantage of using common frameworks and terminology to define the meaning of credentials is that we can build much stronger pathways through education and careers for everyone, including the millions of people who now lack opportunities for education and employment.

Q: What are some simple things colleges could do to get started in the direction you seek?

A: Here are two ideas from the book. The first is that higher education, even in occupationally focused majors, is often too removed from the settings in which work is actually done. This may not have been a problem when work and education were so distinct. Indeed, some undoubtedly saw it as an advantage.

But in a world of human work, this forced separation creates a range of problems. Work offers excellent opportunities for the kind of active, engaged learning that develops higher-level thinking skills and human traits. It's also true when virtually everyone needs to be learning – and learning all the time – that a system in which learning and earning are treated as separate activities is simply unworkable. These two aspects of life are becoming one, and college should reflect that reality.

The second is that colleges need to do whatever it takes to meet the needs of today's learners. In the book, I wrote about Amarillo College in the Texas Panhandle. Ten years ago, the college had a gradu-

'Human Work' (cont.)

ation rate of 9 percent, and Russell Lowery-Hart, now the president of the college, discovered that issues such as childcare and transportation were the biggest hurdles for students. He set up a series of "wraparound" support services to meet students' needs in nonacademic areas, and 10 years later the completion rate is 52 percent, a nearly sixfold increase. Amarillo College's biggest insight was that colleges must address students' life circumstances. It's a lesson other colleges and universities would do well to learn, especially as today's uncertainty upends students' lives.

(Editors' Note: Sara Brady, *Inside Higher Ed*'s copy editor, was a copy editor for the book. ∎

"

At its simplest, human work is the work only humans can do. But it is most certainly not the work that is left after machines take over.

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https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/13/jamie-merisotis-answers-questions-his-new-book

A New Path to Viability

Notre Dame de Namur appeared on the verge of closure last spring, but a recent switch to fully online, graduate-only programs might save it.

By **Emma Whitford** // **January 28, 2021**

COURTESY OF NOTRE DAME DE NAMUR UNIVERSITY
Notre Dame de Namur University

Notre Dame de Namur University may have found the miracle its leaders were praying for last spring. Through a transformative pivot to online and graduate education, the university may be able to remain open for the foreseeable future.

Just 10 months ago, the private Roman Catholic university's future was more grim. It halted undergraduate admissions after years of declining enrollment and dwindling tuition revenue. Faculty members and higher education experts agreed that it looked as though Notre Dame de Namur was headed for closure within several years. But Dan Carey, interim president of the university, said in March that he

was still looking for a potential intervention. On Monday, he said he'd found one.

The university will lop off its undergraduate programs and focus solely on online graduate education. It may also offer some degree-completion programs for students with associate's degrees. While the university may hold some in-person classes, most teaching will take place online, which frees up the university's operating budget significantly and may help stabilize its finances.

The university's new transformation plan is not a silver bullet. Creating a successful online program

will require more cash than the university has on hand, and standing out in an increasingly crowded online education market will also take work. Carey knows the university's long-term future is not guaranteed.

"I don't know what's going to happen with COVID-19 and the new variants that are coming out, and what's going to happen with our economy," Carey said. "It's possible that we won't make it, but we think it's worth the risk and we're putting together the right people to give this a go."

Carey's announcement was welcome news to faculty members, said Vince Fitzgerald, chair of the

A New Path to Viability (cont.)

English department and president of the university's Faculty General Assembly.

"We're all thankful to the Board of Trustees and the Sisters of Notre Dame for believing in the future of the university," he said. "We have a 170-year tradition, so they're showing their willingness to keep that tradition alive."

Fitzgerald's upbeat summary of the faculty's response is a marked change from last spring, when he called the decision to stop admitting undergraduates a "stay of execution" to an inevitable closure. At the time, faculty also called on several university leaders to resign, but excluded Carey.

In the months since, Carey has built trust among university faculty members, Fitzgerald said.

"Dan Carey has shown a willingness to incorporate faculty voices in this process of transformation," he said. "I think he's earned our confidence in his leadership."

The university did not announce any additional layoffs or staffing changes along with the news of becoming an online graduate institution, but it's possible as many as 50 percent of staff members could be let go, Carey said. Which faculty members are retained will depend on which courses the university will offer, and those details are still being worked out.

"It's likely there may not be room in the short run for full-time English professors, so my time at the university may be coming to an end," Fitzgerald said.

Notre Dame de Namur is not the

> " It's possible that we won't make it, but we think it's worth the risk and we're putting together the right people to give this a go. "

first Roman Catholic college to pivot to graduate education in an effort to stay open. Marygrove College in Detroit cut its undergraduate programs in 2018 following years of enrollment declines and financial instability. It switched to offering seven graduate and professional degree programs.

The move did not set an optimistic precedent for the graduate-only strategy. Marygrove closed in 2019 after the graduate teaching programs it once relied on for attracting students languished when public schools no longer required teachers to have master's degrees.

But Notre Dame de Namur has a shot, said Michael Horn, co-founder of the Christensen Institute, a think tank that works on education issues. Demand for online and graduate education is on the rise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged dozens of institutions to scale up their online course offerings, and carving out a niche in the online space will be essential to the university's success, Horn said.

Carey recognizes that without enough attention, the university's online-heavy model will fail, and that drawing that attention will be a challenge. He hired a marketing consultant to help find new ways to attract students and plans to dedicate more resources to marketing and recruitment.

"For our graduate and online programs that are successful, they're doing serious marketing," Carey said. "While we're going to be cutting back our workforce in a lot of areas, the one area where we won't be cutting back — we'll actually be bolstering — is in marketing and recruitment."

One potential marketing strategy could be leaning into the university's Roman Catholic affiliation. Horn was reminded of Brigham Young University's online education program and noted that it is so successful in part because the university can cater to students who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who want to study online.

A New Path to Viability (cont.)

"Among Catholic schools, I think there's a big opportunity for an institution to go big in online and make their mark there," Horn said. "They have a chance."

But, he wondered, is being Catholic enough differentiation in an increasingly crowded market?

"As everyone is going online, it favors those who have scale and do it well, and that implies a lot of investment," Horn said. "This is a school that obviously has limited resources right now to make that sort of investment, so how are they going to win in, yes, a growing marketplace, but one that's increasingly crowded?"

Successful online programs require a significant up-front investment that Notre Dame de Namur may not have the money to make. The university is working to sell all or part of its nearly 50-acre campus in Belmont, Calif., and Carey and the university's Board of Trustees are hopeful the money will stabilize the university through the transition.

"The Board has acted to continue operations based on a high degree of confidence that financial arrangements in progress to sell lands on the campus to a compatible organization will provide the operating funds required to see the university through to sustainability," Carey wrote in a letter Monday.

While undoubtedly helpful, cash from a land sale might not be enough to right the university's finances. Horn pointed to Pine Manor College, a small liberal arts college in Chestnut Hill, Mass., that sold 5.2 acres of its campus to Tom Brady and Gisele Bündchen for $4.5 million in 2013. The sale wasn't enough to stabilize the financially strapped college, which announced last spring that it would merge with Boston College after its financial woes were exacerbated by the pandemic.

Notre Dame de Namur will continue to lean on alumni, donors and collaborations with local government and community agencies until it charts a path to financial stability, according to Carey's letter.

Last March, Carey said it would "take something major" to keep the lights on at Notre Dame de Namur. On Wednesday, he said the past several months have been full of tiny miracles that allowed the university to chart a new path.

The board and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have been essential to this process, he said. The sisters told him that the university was worth fighting for.

"We've taken risks throughout our existence, from the time we left Belgium and we had to wait three weeks for the wind to be right to take a ship from Belgium to the West Coast of the United States," Carey said they told him. "We've taken risks in the past, and we're going to take risks with this. We want to do this." ■

As Students Dispersed, Tutoring Services Adapted

With the pandemic limiting face-to-face interaction, universities turned to new virtual peer tutoring pathways that save money and can offer sessions at any time of day. But are students booking as many sessions and getting the academic help they need?

By **Greta Anderson** // **March 16, 2021**

COURTESY OF WELLESLEY COLLEGE

Roberta Schotka (center left), who oversees peer tutoring services at Wellesley College, trains peer educators at the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center.

As the coronavirus pandemic forced college campuses to shut down last March, Tiana Iruoje scrambled to quickly transition peer tutoring services at Indiana University's Luddy School of Informatics, Computing and Engineering to online-only appointments.

Iruoje, director of student engagement and success for the school, needed to be able to track student check-ins and tutor hours. She nearly hired a computer science student to develop from scratch a system that could do so.

"The time and resources we would've spent to have him do it were outrageous," she said.

Student tutors are typically available to Luddy students for walk-in sessions most weekday evenings. The tutors sit and wait at tables in a classroom with placards denoting their majors placed in front of them so "clients" — students seeking tutoring — can find the appropriate tutor to work with, Iruoje said. It's a valuable service for students studying difficult technology and engineering subjects, but with the physical tutoring space closed and then reopened only for limited use during the pandemic, Iruoje and the center's staff needed to be flexible and creative.

Learning center staff members across the country faced a similar dilemma. Just as faculty members and mental health support staff members were forced to pivot to remote instruction and online therapy sessions within a matter of weeks, academic support services also quickly shifted gears and made accommodations for the public health emergency. Very few centers had existing online systems established to smoothly transition their traditional, brick-and-mortar centers to online peer tutoring sessions. Tutors also weren't trained to work in that format, said Roberta Schotka, director of programs

at the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

"It was a steep learning curve for everybody," said Schotka, certifications director for the College Reading and Learning Association, or CRLA, a national membership group of academic support professionals that establishes benchmarks and guidelines for tutor training programs and has certified more than 1,200 programs worldwide.

Some institutions, such as the Luddy School, turned to for-profit, third-party companies that provide software for learning center management and an online platform for tutoring sessions. Executives at the companies said their services are being requested more often — and have experienced massive increases in use since the pandemic was declared. They promote their products as an all-in-one solution for colleges and universities aiming to expand the reach of their peer tutoring services, which experts say have the potential to increase students' grades and graduation rates.

But the companies mostly rely on the labor of students hired by their institutions to provide academic help to other students. Learning center directors worried the tutors would step away from their jobs, said Jon Mladic, director of professional development for CRLA. After all, the tutors are students first, and they were experiencing their own uncertainty, adjustments and personal challenges caused by the pandemic, he said.

Mladic, who is also dean of library

> "
> Students suddenly placed in five courses that started out face-to-face and suddenly were all online were desperately struggling to figure out how to survive in that online environment.
> "

and learning services at Rasmussen University in Illinois, said stories from learning centers around the country proved the opposite. As the pandemic caused poor academic outcomes for students during the spring and fall 2020 semesters, tutors, who tend to be high-achieving students, were willing to continue and in some cases increase the level of academic support they provided their peers, he said.

"It's been incredibly heartwarming to hear about programs where peer tutors stepped up," Mladic said. "It was an incredibly selfless act in the moment, and it really made the difference for many programs."

'Educationally Purposeful Peer Interactions'

The level of support and social interaction peer tutors provide to other students is especially important during the pandemic, when students are more likely to be isolated and lacking connection to their institutions, said George Kuh, chancellor's professor of higher education emeritus at Indiana University and a nationally recognized student engagement and success expert.

Kuh considers peer tutoring an "educationally purposeful peer interaction" — activities designed for students to work both academically and socially with one another. Positive indicators and anecdotal data suggest that scaling up structured peer tutoring services at institutions can boost student engagement and, as a result, retention rates, he said.

First-year students who say their colleges provide "quite a bit" or "very much" academic support in general are more likely to want to return to their institution the following year, according to recent results from the National Survey of Student Engagement, or NSSE. The annual survey of thousands of undergraduates is a project of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, which Kuh founded.

Ninety percent of first-year students who said their college em-

[First-year students are more likely to intend to return to institutions that emphasize academic and learning support]

Data from 2019 and 2020 combined NSSE file.

Student: Do you intend to return to this institution next year?		How much does the institution emphasize providing support to help students succeed academically?		How much does the institution emphasize using learning support services (tutoring, writing center, etc.)?	
		Very little/Some	Quite a bit/Very much	Very little/Some	Quite a bit/Very much
No	Count	3,548	4,431	3,229	4,761
	Percent	7.6%	3.1%	7.3%	3.3%
Yes	Count	37,214	130,361	35,891	131,779
	Percent	79.5%	90.8%	80.9%	90.2%
Not Sure	Count	6,041	8,790	5,245	9,586
	Percent	12.9%	6.1%	11.8%	6.6%

Data provided by Robert M. Gonyea, associate director, research and data analysis, Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University Bloomington School of Education
Table: Rick Seltzer, Inside Higher Ed • Source: National Survey of Student Engagement • Get the data •
Created with Datawrapper

phasized using learning support services, such as tutoring or writing centers, also said they intended to return the following year, according to 2019 and 2020 NSSE data provided by Robert Gonyea, associate director of the IU Center for Postsecondary Research. About 10 percent fewer first-year students said they intended to return if their college provided "very little" or "some" emphasis on learning support services, Gonyea's analysis showed.

However, peer tutoring is not offi-cially labeled a high-impact prac-tice, a set of student engagement and learning strategies approved and promoted by the Association of American Colleges and Univer-sities that are proven to improve students' grades and increase per-sistence and graduation rates. The current list of 11 such practices in-cludes first-year seminars and liv-ing-learning communities. But Kuh said the success of peer tutoring specifically has not yet been prov-en through widespread research. He's hoping that will change and believes peer tutoring not only helps the student being tutored but can help tutors develop career skills that employers emphasize in their searches.

"Tutors become more confident in expressing themselves to other people, and there are other ben-efits we assume they will accrue: conscientiousness and the ability to work with a person who's very different from oneself," he said. "These are all qualities that em-ployers say are essential."

However, peer tutoring services have also been difficult for institutions to scale, especially large, public universities with thousands of students and various degree programs and curricula that students need help with, Kuh said. Officials at many colleges know their services aren't reaching "nearly as many students as could benefit from peer tutoring," but they can't afford to simply hire more tutors and build more spaces for tutoring to solve the problem, he said.

This is where ed-tech companies that manage and deliver tutoring services directly to students can be a big help, Kuh said.

Potential Third-Party Solutions

Mladic, of the CRLA, said that as many colleges shut down their centers for in-person services during the pandemic, they also quickly contracted with third-party companies to outsource academic support. Administrators who contract with and are proponents of the companies said they have helped expand peer tutoring services on their campuses while also cutting costs.

Iruoje, at the Luddy School at Indiana University, signed a yearlong $10,000 contract with Knack, a company that connects students with tutors through an application available on a computer, smartphone or other device. The Florida-based company currently also has contracts with the University of Florida, Florida A&M University and about two dozen other institutions, said Samyr Qureshi, co-founder and CEO of Knack.

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> Tutors become more confident in expressing themselves to other people, and there are other benefits we assume they will accrue: conscientiousness and the ability to work with a person who's very different from oneself.
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Knack offers to manage most aspects of a traditional tutoring center, such as hiring and training tutors, tracking their hours, and providing a platform for tutors and student clients to message and work with one another over video or in person, Qureshi said. Students can search for tutors at their college or university based on the specific class they need help with and at any time of day, whereas traditional campus learning centers are open for specified hours each day.

Deals between Knack and institutions range in scale and size. For example, the University of Florida has a $540,000 contract with Knack lasting through the spring 2021 semester to provide tutoring services at no charge to some students. The services are available to low-income students enrolled in courses from which students most often withdraw or fail. Florida A&M, a historically Black university that enrolls about 70 percent Pell-eligible students, decided to provide Knack's services at no charge to all

of its students, Qureshi said.

Jorge Del'Angel, a senior at Florida A&M who tutors through Knack and also at a center in the university's College of Engineering, said the online platform has allowed him to reach and support more students. Since the platform launched at the university nearly two years ago, Del'Angel has had 130 tutoring sessions with 43 different students, he said. He focuses on introductory classes for biological and agricultural systems engineering students that many tend to fail, such as chemistry and physics. It's been fulfilling for Del'Angel to help others in classes he also once struggled with, he said.

"If I've been through the storm already and I can help someone who's just starting to go through it, that makes it all better," Del'Angel said.

Helping other students with these courses has also ingrained introductory material and concepts in his mind, which is helpful now that he's taking advanced courses.

"It's not just a one-way street of me helping someone else. They help me, too," Del'Angel said.

In fall 2019, Florida A&M hired 76 tutors for 133 courses, and by the end of the semester it had provided nearly 1,000 total tutoring hours, according to a case study that Knack conducted at the university. Qureshi said that from 2019 to 2020, overall Knack users grew by 347 percent and the average student who sought tutoring through the platform during fall 2020 used it about four times, or about once each month. He declined to provide exact usage and session numbers, citing competitive risk for the company.

Iruoje said she was initially hesitant about outsourcing the Luddy School's tutoring services to a third-party company. But the partnership saved the school more than $42,000 in tutoring costs in 2020, mostly because the peer tutors were no longer being paid to sit in classrooms and wait for students to seek help. Knack allows for both the students and tutors to work together on their own schedules, whereas previously the peer tutors would get frustrated when students weren't coming in for help, Iruoje said.

"It didn't only save dollars, it also saved my time," she said. "I can focus on other student engagement activities for the whole school on a larger scale, not just focusing on clocking tutors in and clocking out."

Luddy School students who received tutoring via Knack during fall 2020 had a 2 percent higher per-

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sistence rate going into the spring 2021 semester than those who did not use Knack tutoring, according to data provided by Iruoje.

The difference "seems small at first glance," she said. "Even so, the results are positive and promising."

Schotka said Knack is one of three corporate partners associated with CRLA that have developed a tutoring platform or training program to assist colleges attempting to scale their peer support services. In the last two to three years, more third-party companies have entered the market to address the needs of college learning centers, such as providing an online platform through which to deliver peer tutoring, she said.

Association partners that specialize in tutoring services include Innovative Educators, which offers CRLA-certified peer tutor training and Tutor Matching Service, a company with tutor training courses and online scheduling and a platform to connect students with tutors.

A brand-new online peer tutoring service, Knoyo, recently launched this year and offers to connect high school and college students to a national network of honors college students who are tutors.

"There's new players in the field every day," Schotka said.

Qureshi, of Knack, said the company has grown tenfold since the pandemic began, and its contracts with various colleges increased by 900 percent from 2019 to 2020. He declined to provide specific revenue information.

Another online student engagement company, Upswing, which originally launched in 2014, has seen a 400 percent increase in demand since the pandemic shut down campuses last year, said Melvin Hines Jr., CEO of the Austin, Tex.-based company. Upswing provides an online platform through which colleges can operate their peer tutoring services, as well as other tools that can help keep students academically engaged, such as a chat bot powered by artificial

intelligence that sends reminders and nudges to students about upcoming classes and assignments, Hines said.

"We were slammed pretty much from beginning to end," Hines said of 2020. "Demand for online tutoring doubled immediately. We've done twice as many coaching sessions just with our tutors than in 2019 and had a twofold increase in sessions with peer tutors."

Upswing's revenue grew from $1.2 million in 2019 to $2 million in 2020, or by 67 percent, Hines said. In 2019, 66,000 peer tutoring sessions were completed through Upswing over all, and in 2020, that grew to 100,000 sessions. Typically, 80 percent of students who use the platform once return for another session, he said.

Upswing currently partners with 70 institutions and advertises specifically to community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, and other institutions that want to provide more targeted academic support for nontraditional and online students, Hines said. The United Negro College Fund announced last month that it is partnering with Upswing to provide the company's academic support services to more than 500 UNCF scholarship recipients, who are Black and studying science, technology, engineering and math fields.

During a recent Upswing webinar, Joyce Langenegger, executive director of academic success for the Blinn College District, a two-year institution with multiple campuses between Houston and Austin, said

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> If I've been through the storm already and I can help someone who's just starting to go through it, that makes it all better.
> "

Blinn was encouraged to invest in the company's services when the pandemic prompted a significant increase in students who took classes entirely online.

"Suddenly, with COVID, everyone became a distance learning student," Langenegger said. "Students suddenly placed in five courses that started out face-to-face and suddenly were all online were desperately struggling to figure out how to survive in that online environment."

The End-All, Be-All Peer Tutoring Solution?

Most colleges with CRLA-certified tutoring programs have their own homegrown system for tutor training, scheduling and service delivery, Schotka said. Mladic said most of these institutions are not looking to replace their traditional peer tutoring setups with products from outside contractors, but they may be interested in supplementing them in hopes of making existing resources more effective and reaching more students.

"Really, the external resource can only be impactful if it complements the existing internal resources and fits within the larger strategic vision of that institution's online academic support," Mladic said.

Schotka said many learning centers have also stuck with basic videoconferencing platforms — such as Zoom and WebEx — to make peer academic support available virtually during the pandemic, rather than relying on a for-profit company to manage tutoring services. The ways in which institutions shifted to remote services "really runs the gamut," Schotka said.

Across most of the campuses that Knack contracts with, engagement with the tutoring platform has been up as more students are seeking out virtual peer help from locations far away from campus, Qureshi said. Other campuses, however, saw a drop-off in clients during the fall semester, potentially due to students getting used to the online-only version of the platform or institutions moving to pass-fail grading policies, which Qureshi

said de-incentivize students from getting better grades.

While the third-party services may provide cost savings for institutions themselves, students' disengagement from the services could result in lost income for tutors. In a brick-and-mortar center, tutors typically get paid to staff the center, whether they have appointments during their shifts or not. But on Knack, for example, whether a tutor gets work completely depends on their peers' demand for the service. Qureshi noted that at the University of Florida, nearly three-fourths of students who tutor through Knack rely on it as their primary source of income.

Del'Angel, the student tutor at Florida A&M, said he doesn't need his $12-an-hour tutoring income to pay for his basic needs — it's more of a "side hustle." But he has seen a dip in clients since the pandemic was declared last spring. Even students whom he had seen on a weekly basis stopped requesting sessions on Knack, and students he saw over Zoom during the pandemic were in need of drastic and immediate help for an exam or homework due the next day. He believes students preferred meeting with him in person and aren't as interested in a virtual session.

Kuh, who's also a senior adviser for Knack, which is a paid staff position, said in-person tutoring is more effective for students, but it's not realistic to expect today's college students – who are more likely to be working adults with families – to come to campus during the hours that a traditional learning center is open. Companies that help deliver virtual tutoring to those students are here to stay beyond the pandemic, he said.

"One lesson we learned over this past year is if you can't be in the same room with one another, what else we can do to approximate that experience?" Kuh said.

He said that among the various strategies to keep students engaged with their college, peer tutoring "is probably the least used and most promising lever we can pull, if we do it systematically and with greater intentionality." ∎

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/03/16/face-face-peer-tutoring-decimated-pandemic-universities-turn-new-tools-times-and

Eyeing a Crosstown Merger

Saint Joseph's University and the University of the Sciences make a play for scale and health-care programs, but issues of identity will need to be addressed.

By Rick Seltzer // February 12, 2021

A merger proposal between two long-standing private universities in Philadelphia that was revealed Wednesday seems to make sense from the perspective of the institutions' programs, scale, financial condition and the state of the higher education market.

But like any merger-and-acquisition activity between two unrelated universities with hundreds of years of their own history, the potential deal raises deep questions of identity and strategy. It prompts some renewed reflection on a fast-changing higher education market that's leaving some small institutions and their students with no simple options for the future.

The deal would have Saint Joseph's University, a 6,800-student institution on the western edge of Philadelphia, acquiring the University of the Sciences, a 2,400-student university in West Philadelphia. Saint Joseph's would keep its name, and leaders currently want Saint Joseph's to continue operating both institutions' campuses, which are located about five miles apart.

Few details are set in stone at this moment. Leaders at the two universities have signed a nonbinding letter of intent. They'll spend several months evaluating the proposal before making a call on whether it should move forward. In other words, both sides could still walk

CHICAGOMAYNE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
Saint Joseph's University is in talks to acquire the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia.

away if new rounds of expanded negotiations fall apart.

For now, they're saying glowing things about each other.

"Recently, a particularly promising and exciting opportunity has come to the fore," Mark C. Reed, president of Saint Joseph's, said Wednesday in a letter to faculty and staff members. "University of the Sciences, a premier health sciences university located less than five miles away, approached us as part of a structured and thoughtful process they decided to undertake.

We were quick to see many potential benefits of a combination and were happy to begin talks."

His counterpart at the University of the Sciences, Paul Katz, sounded similar notes.

"USciences is built upon a strong academic, geographic, and historical foundation," Katz said in the university's announcement to its faculty and staff members. "In exploring this partnership, we have the potential to be even stronger. We also believe in the rich history of Saint Joseph's and their com-

mitment to the same values that we hold dear."

Neither university made their president available for interviews Thursday. They told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that the proposed deal is about growth and scale but that it's too soon to say whether it could lead to job cuts.

Faculty members at the two institutions were optimistic and even enthusiastic about the deal's possibilities. Saint Joseph's is a small, liberal arts-focused Jesuit institution in a competitive higher education market that increasingly demands scale, they said. The University of the Sciences is even smaller and has faced greater financial challenges of late, but it brings a suite of desirable health-care programs to the table.

"I'm really excited," said Ann Green, a professor in Saint Joseph's English department, president of its chapter of the American Association of University Professors and a past president of its Faculty Senate. "I think the partnership with the University of the Sciences brings a lot of new fields to Saint Joe's that would really benefit us, and hopefully they're as enthusiastic about liberal arts as we are. It gives everybody a lot more opportunity for growth."

Green said she teaches a course in medical humanities. She's excited to work with physical and occupational therapy students, as well as other students interested in health professions, if the deal is completed.

Saint Joseph's opened its first new

> " For Saint Joseph's to be a Philadelphia university and not have a strong health presence beyond what we currently have, that would be tough. "

school in three decades, the School of Health Studies and Education, in 2019. It was a foundation for health care-related expansion, said Ronald Dufresne, interim chair and associate professor of management and director of the leadership, ethics and organizational sustainability program at Saint Joseph's. But adding the University of the Sciences would represent a whole other level of opportunity.

The University of the Sciences, which was known as the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Sciences before 1998, considers itself the first college of pharmacy in North America. It was founded in 1821, making it older than Saint Joseph's, which opened in 1851.

"We have a great history and we do great work," said Dufresne, who is also a past president of the Faculty Senate at Saint Joseph's. "We just haven't had a big presence in the broad health-care realm in ways that schools really need. We have a really great health studies program, but we're lacking all sorts of other programs in the health space.

To merge is a great way into that space."

Still, many issues remain to be hammered out. Some students and faculty members at the University of the Sciences are uneasy with the idea of their health-care programs being absorbed by a university related to the Roman Catholic Church, with its widely publicized stance against contraception and abortion.

"It has been a question from the student perspective, for me and for many other faculty who are not Catholic and not Christian," said Eric Pelletier, an assistant professor of physical therapy at the University of the Sciences and Faculty Senate president there. "I think there will be an open dialogue about that. I really believe that will be discussed. If such a merger happens, it will be with an understanding that we need academic freedom and freedom for research."

Nonetheless, Pelletier described a largely warm reaction to the news that Saint Joseph's was a potential

acquisition partner. Faculty members, who knew USciences sought a deal, were wondering whom the partner would be and how well they would know it.

"It's interestingly positive, being a local university we're all familiar with," Pelletier said. "We know Saint Joe's in the community. I think with the potential of this large change, there is some anxiety. But I think it's more tempered with this sense of there is an opportunity here."

Universities' Challenges in a Tough Market

The University of the Sciences has been seeking to improve its market position in light of financial challenges. Its leaders have been open about seeking institutional partnerships. In 2019, the university announced agreements with Salus University to set up an optometric clinical site and give USciences students pathways toward doctoral degrees in audiology and master of medical science in physician assistant studies degrees.

In 2018, USciences executed a tuition reset, slashing annual undergraduate tuition and fees from $39,994 to $25,000. Professional program tuition also dropped. Undergraduate enrollment jumped from 1,231 in 2018-19 to 1,405 in 2019-20, although enrollment of graduate students, whose tuition was not reset, fell by seven students to 913.

Even so, the University of the Sciences has seen the number of its undergraduate applications fall and its acceptance rates rise since the 2018-19 academic year. Its

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endowment and similar funds declined from $171.8 million in 2018 to $145.6 million in 2020, according to documents filed for bondholders.

This December, Fitch Ratings downgraded its rating of the University of the Sciences bonds and revised its outlook to negative because the ratings agency didn't expect improving cash flow margins.

"The university continues to weather challenges presented by its business profile, characterized by volatile enrollment and demand and high tuition dependence, as well as declining but moderate capital needs," said a notice from Fitch explaining the move. "The Outlook is revised to Negative reflecting USciences inability to stabilize operations in the near term, which drives the need for ongoing support from its quasi-endowment and which relies heavily on investment returns for growth of its resource base."

Moody's Investors Service issued a similar downgrade earlier in the year. Both agencies kept the university's ratings in the lower range of investment grade, however.

Saint Joseph's offers the potential for a more secure future in the eyes of some faculty members at the University of the Sciences. Saint Joseph's net assets increased by almost $1.8 million in the 2020 fiscal year, according to audited financial statements. The University of the Sciences saw its net assets decline by about $13.3 million.

The 2020 fiscal year was a difficult one for many institutions because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The divergence in the institutions' financial performance was even more stark in the prior year. Saint Joseph's added $8.5 million in net assets, while USciences lost $10.8 million

"From my perspective as a faculty member, it is having more finan-

cial stability and trying to worry less about drawing down the endowment," said Pelletier, the Faculty Senate president at USciences.

It should be noted, however, that Saint Joseph's is not a big fish in the pond — and the pond in Philadelphia isn't expected to grow. Saint Joseph's total head count, including undergraduates and graduate students, fell from 8,415 in the fall of 2016 to 7,362 in the fall of 2019. This fall, it fell by almost 600 more students.

Demographers project the number of traditional-age students entering college from the Philadelphia market and the Northeast to decline in coming years. Projections in well-known demographer Nathan Grawe's new book expect the number of high school graduates attending private four-year institutions after graduating from high school to be 5 percent lower in 2025 than it was in 2018 for Philadelphia. By 2035, the number is expected to be 36 percent lower than it was in 2018.

That's important because both Saint Joseph's and USciences draw heavily from the surrounding area. About four in 10 enrolling Saint Jo-seph's students come from Pennsylvania, and another four or five in 10 have come from the Mid-Atlantic in recent years, according to documents filed for bondholders. That's not far from enrollment at the University of the Sciences, where 54 percent of students came from Pennsylvania in the fall of 2020 and 34 percent came from New Jersey.

Simply expanding outside the region isn't necessarily the answer. Demographic declines are expected to be felt in different ways across the country as a drop in birth rates following the Great Recession hits colleges and universities in the coming years.

The same trends are unfolding in the Northeast and across the country, said Omar Blaik, CEO of U3 Advisors in Philadelphia, which consulted with Marygrove College in Detroit as it faced challenges in recent years, ultimately deciding to repurpose its campus. U3 has done some work with USciences in the past, but not recently or regarding the new acquisition proposal.

"There is a stagnation in birth rates that probably will be with us for at least two decades if not longer, which basically is saying, in lay-man's terms, we have more seats than warm bodies to fill those seats," Blaik said. "Who is being affected the most? It's the smaller colleges that have higher tuition than publics."

But Saint Joseph's reported the biggest enrollment declines over time in its College of Arts & Sciences. Its new School of Health Studies and Education received just under 100 deposits in its first two classes.

Eds and meds are extremely important to the Philadelphia economy. Eleven of the 15 largest private employers in Philadelphia were in education and health-care professions, according to a 2019 report from the Pew Charitable Trusts. Eight of the top nine largest employers were in those fields.

"For Saint Joseph's to be a Philadelphia university and not have a strong health presence beyond what we currently have, that would be tough," Dufresne said. "For us to be able to do it here with a merger, it's very much what Saint Ignatius, if he were alive today, would be doing — figuring out how to partner with others to advance the mission." ■

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VIEWS

'Failure to Disrupt,' Learning at Scale and Higher Ed After COVID-19

Why you should read Justin Reich's essential new book before planning your school's next big educational technology-related initiative.

By Joshua Kim // February 23, 2021

Failure to Disrupt: Why Technology Alone Can't Transform Education by Justin Reich

Published in September 2020

Justin Reich is the OG of MOOC research. Patient zero when learning science and scaled online education first collided. As a researcher at Harvard and then MIT, Reich and his collaborators conducted the foundational investigations in which subsequent research on postsecondary online learning at scale has been built.

I'm not sure if Reich is as famous outside of learning science and online education circles as he is inside. He should be. Maybe his important new book, *Failure to Disrupt*, will bring Reich to a broader academic audience.

Failure to Disrupt is exquisitely timed to our pandemic moment. While not about higher ed during COVID-19, as Reich tells both a longer story and one that encompasses both postsecondary and K-12 education, the book should be required reading for everyone thinking about the post-pandemic university.

Higher education's relationship with technology calls to mind the quote attributed (perhaps erroneously) to Mark Twain that "history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." The next educational technology hype

bubble will be different from the last one, but if we are not careful, it will do just as much damage when it inevitably pops.

The last ed-tech bubble to inflate was MOOC mania, peaking in 2012 with the *New York Times* story "The Year of the MOOC." This massively open online course bubble, which Reich tried his best to slowly deflate with rigorous data-driven scholarship, is at the heart of *Failure to Disrupt*.

Reich has no interest in piling on to MOOCs, as he recognizes that higher education and the leading platform providers (edX and Coursera) are mostly over the "open" part MOOCs. Today, the real story is about (paid) online learning at scale and the shift to noncredit alternative credentials and new low-cost online degrees.

For Reich, the MOOC story is illustrative of the tendency of both techno-enthusiasts and wannabe education reformers to inappropriately apply simplistic business thinking to the complex realities of educational ecosystems. If Amazon can "disrupt" retail and Netflix can "disrupt" theaters, why can't scaled online learning "disrupt" higher education?

As Reich goes into great detail in pointing out, however, universities (and schools) don't operate like
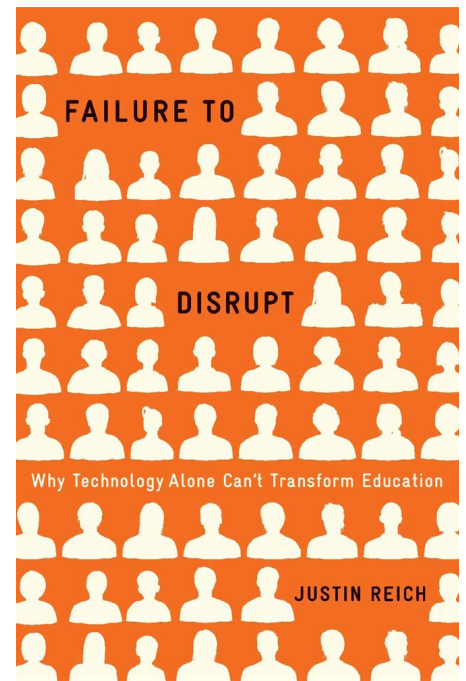
businesses. Learning is enormously complex, and the structures that have evolved over many decades (or longer) at every level of education do not disappear when a new technology is introduced. Instead, new technologies get grafted on and absorbed by existing organizational structures and cultural norms.

Failure to Disrupt is an argument for educational tinkering over radical disruption. Reich sees potential in scaled online learning to benefit some learners in some circumstances. Still, he wants to see careful research done on where it is appropriate to apply new digitally

mediated educational methodologies and where it is not.

As Reich points out, low-cost scaled online learning programs may work particularly well in areas of skill acquisition. As his research has also demonstrated, low-cost scaled online learning programs are most likely to benefit those who already have achieved a higher level of education. For many areas of teaching and learning, and for many learners, educational environments that are not built around an intimate educator/student coaching and feedback model will be ineffective.

We need good research – and more investment in learning science – to figure out how to effectively iterate toward leveraging technologies to drive improvements in access and lower costs.

My hope is that *Failure to Disrupt* gets read equally among ed-tech enthusiasts as ed-tech skeptics. Just as it is prudent to question any claims related to technology-powered "leaps" in education and learning (beware VR and adaptive learning platforms), we should not dismiss the possibility of some nonincremental changes.

I'm particularly excited about low-cost scaled online master's degrees in areas of business, educa-

tion and technology. But I've also take Justin Reich's message to heart that success will depend on investments in careful research (and a willingness to rethink our assumptions), as much as in the evolution of enabling educational technologies. It is in that middle area – of experimentation and evidenced-based/data-driven practices – that Reich wants to see the educational ecosystem evolve.

Reading and talking about *Failure to Disrupt* should be a prerequisite for any big institutional learning technology initiatives coming out of COVID-19.

What are you reading? ∎

The Crisis Higher Education Needs

COVID-19 is forcing colleges and universities to reckon with long-standing, long-evaded issues of access, affordability and equity.

By Steven Mintz // December 17, 2020

The pandemic, the financial crisis and the reckoning over race have precipitated a crisis that higher education needs to have.

By exposing and intensifying long-standing problems involving access, affordability, equity and quality, the current emergency is forcing colleges and universities to confront problems that higher education has evaded and responsibilities that it has shirked.

Sometimes, institutions need a crisis. Often, it's only a crisis that can jolt an institution out of its lethargy and complacency, alter existing mind-sets, and make stakeholders demand meaningful change.

I doubt, for example, that our current preoccupation with equity and inclusion would have occurred in the absence of the health crisis and the mass protests precipitated by the killing of George Floyd.

However painful and wrenching the pandemic has been, colleges and universities now have an opportunity to rethink time-honored but outmoded traditions and adopt practices better suited to meeting today's challenges.

The pandemic alerted us to facts that should have been dealt with much earlier, including the number of students who face basic needs insecurity, require more financial support and would benefit from greater

HIGHER ED GAMMA

flexibility in delivery options and assessment modes. It has also forced our institutions to confront biases in admissions and gaps in attainment that are no longer tolerable.

The damage that the pandemic has inflicted is grave. Significantly fewer high school seniors are applying to college or completing applications for financial aid, fueling worries that the crisis will impair underrepresented and lower-income students' future.

Staff and faculty, too, have suffered severe harm. Over the past year, colleges and universities have lost about 150,000 jobs, a decline of nearly 14 percent. The cuts' brunt has been forced on staff, but administrators are also imposing furloughs, trimming benefits and

eliminating pay raises for faculty, shuttering and combining programs, laying off adjuncts, and, in a handful of instances, declaring financial exigency and eliminating tenure.

It's imaginable, of course, that a vaccine will restore the status quo antebellum. Perhaps a massive federal bailout will reimburse colleges and universities for the pandemic's direct and indirect costs. Almost certainly the Biden administration will reopen the doors to international students, restoring the substantial revenue that these students provide.

Alternatively, Congress might take steps to make a college education more affordable, by doubling the value of Pell Grants or making

universities tuition-free for families with annual incomes below $125,000, triggering a significant increase in enrollment. Or maybe there will be a massive infusion of funds for institutions that serve large numbers of low-income students or displaced workers who need to acquire new skills.

However, I'm not holding my breath that whatever occurs will make higher education financially whole.

It's far too facile and sanguine to say that a crisis invariably presents opportunities; try telling that to anyone who has lost a loved one or a job. But there are occasions when a crisis compels necessary changes.

I agree with the argument of two business scholars, Timothy Devinney and Grahame Dowling, that the pandemic offers colleges and universities a once-in-a-generation opportunity to put their dysfunctional strategies behind them and make necessary, if distasteful, changes.

Program closures, departmental mergers, hiring freezes, back office consolidations, administrative and academic reorganization, tenure-line reductions, retirement incentives – all are widespread. Campuses have taken steps – like eliminating admissions test requirements or increasing the availability of pass-fail grading or rethinking policies regarding tenure and promotion – previously barely imaginable.

Already, the crisis has led campuses to ensure that all students have access essential hardware

> **By exposing and intensifying long-standing problems involving access, affordability, equity and quality, the current emergency is forcing colleges and universities to confront problems that higher education has evaded and responsibilities that it has shirked.**

and software and has led colleges and universities to expand mental health services.

If our colleges and universities are to embrace their professed mission – to serve as an engine of social mobility and a force for equity and inclusion – then fundamental changes need to take place.

It is a distressing fact that brick-and-mortar campuses have failed in significant ways to meet the challenges that have accompanied the shift from mass to near-universal higher education. Let me suggest five long-standing challenges that our campuses need to urgently address.

1. Controlling costs without sacrificing quality.

One obvious way to break the iron triangle of access, cost and quality is to welcome innovations that promise to shorten time to degree. Simple steps include insuring that credits from AP and IB courses,

early college/dual degree programs, and community colleges fulfill gen ed and major requirements. Campuses might also incentivize students to take summer or intersession courses to maximize credit accumulation.

Similarly, institutions should reduce or even eliminate residency requirements that make it more difficult for students to complete their degree.

Another promising solution is to blur the divide between the physical and the virtual. Instead of bringing guest speakers or practitioners to campus, why not use videoconferencing? Or campuses might consider video course sharing for low-demand or expensive-to-staff classes.

2. Ensuring equity and inclusion across the academic journey.

The indispensable first step is to pinpoint barriers to equity and inclusion. Campuses need to con-

duct a regular self-study of impediments to student success and contributors to equity gaps – and follow up appropriately. This will require colleges and universities to "process analyze" the undergraduate experience and identify and address bottleneck courses, variances in grading among sections within the same course, classes with high DFW rates and achievement gaps, and overly complex major requirements.

Could your institution do more to recruit and admit students from lower-income backgrounds or underrepresented groups? Do your course registration policies and practices discriminate against particular groups of students, making it difficult, for example, for transfer students to enroll in essential gateway classes?

Is your institution doing everything it can to tackle equity gaps in enrollment in high-demand majors – for example, by instituting summer bridge programs or giving talented but unevenly prepared students the opportunity to participate in freshman or sophomore research experiences?

3. Increasing Student Persistence, Momentum and Completion

Most college student who drop out are in good academic standing. They typically depart or stop out for familial, financial or emotional reasons – issues that can be addressed if an institution is attentive and responsive and has the proper services in place.

Take the step that enhance student persistence and learning. Make

> "
> The pandemic offers colleges and universities a once-in-a-generation opportunity to put their dysfunctional strategies behind them and make necessary, if distasteful, changes.
> "

sure students are actively engaged in the learning process and that feel a strong sense of connection to classmates and faculty, and find personal significance in the college experience. These are variables that conscientious and dedicated faculty and staff members can address.

The keys to increasing student success are not a secret. Here, four-year institutions have a lot to learn from their community college counterparts. The answers lie in a comprehensive approach to student support:

- Place entering students in cohorts, meta majors and learning communities, preferably with a faculty mentor and designated advising and a variety of co-curricular enhancements.

- Institute block scheduling, allowing students to better balance their academic, work and caregiving responsibilities.

- Make sure that every student meets with a professional adviser and receives a well-defined degree map with multiple off-ramps and on-ramps.

- Replace not-for-credit remedial courses with corequisite remediation and supplemental instruction to address deficiencies in academic preparation.

- Expand the use of pedagogies that emphasize active and experiential learning and assessment strategies that involve frequent low-stakes, formative assessments and a variety of authentic, project-based assessments.

- Offer proactive advising and interventions when students are struggling or are off track or delay selection of a major or change majors.

4. Making the Transfer Process More Seamless

With upwards of a third of college students swirling across a number of institutions, it is imperative that campuses make the credit transfer process more seamless.

- Join the Interstate Passport initiative. Under this program, students who meet learning outcomes in oral and written communication, quantitative literacy, creative arts, intercultural knowledge, natural and physical sciences, information literacy, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem solving at one institution do not have to repeat gen ed requirements at the receiving institution.

- Require institutions to publicize statistics involving transfer students, including the number admitted, their retention and completion rates and time to degree, and the proportion of transfer credits that do not count toward gen ed requirements or majors.

- Admit transfer students earlier and expedite credit evaluation to ensure that these students can register for essential courses and take part in book camps and other transition programs.

- Enhance coordination between two- and four-year institutions. Keep community college advisers apprised of changes in prerequisites and other major requirements. Consider co-enrollment and course sharing opportunities. Negotiate articulation agreements that designate community college classes that apply to specific majors. Be transparent about whether certain majors, such as B.S.N. programs, are unavailable to transfer students.

- Ensure that every transfer student meets with a professional adviser prior to entering the receiving institution and gets a degree plan.

- To better support transfer students, offer robust transfer student onboarding and orientation sessions; establish special transfer student advising and support services; and make sure that transfer students are at no disadvantage in receiving financial aid, including merit aid, or in entering honors or research programs.

5. Better preparing students for entry into the job market

Embed career preparation across the undergraduate experience. Open windows into major and career options beginning in the first year. Provide students with information about job market trends. Offer skills and career preparation workshops and consider recognizing participation in such programming on students' transcripts. Expand career-aligned certificate programs.

Higher education, at its best, is much more than mere vocational or technical training. It offers transformative and developmental experiences across multiple dimensions, including the aesthetic, the cultural and humanistic, the ethical, and the interpersonal.

Sure, a college education must stress skills development – including competence in oral and written communication, cross-cultural understanding, and numeracy. But it must also emphasizes the importance of mentoring and social interaction, and it must include participation in well-designed learning experiences, exposure to a variety of high-impact educational practices and participatory forms of pedagogy that treat students as partners and creators of knowledge.

It is my fervent hope that our current challenges are precisely the crisis we need if our institutions are to become more undergraduate focused. You, no doubt, saw reports that the six-year college graduation rate has plateaued at around 60 percent — meaning that 40 percent of entering students exit without a degree and at great cost.

Institutional efforts to increase degree attainment have certainly made a difference, but these haven't been sufficient, and the reasons are obvious. Let's seize the moment and recommit ourselves to better serving our students, closing equity and achievement gaps, and better preparing them for life. ∎

Bio
Steven Mintz is professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin.

GM Sees 2035 Very Clearly. Will Higher Education?

The car company is going electric. Bill Conley and Bob Massa wonder if colleges have the courage to make equally difficult decisions.

By Bill Conley and Robert Massa // March 1, 2021

In our December 2020 article ("Standardized Testing and College Admissions: Plan for a New Relationship") we observed, "For decades, the purchasing of student test-taker names has been fueling college recruitment's time-honored funnel." We went on to discuss the many ways a long-term shift away from requiring standardized testing will reshape higher education admissions.

Having employed the metaphor of what fuels the admissions engine, we were struck by this recent headline: "General Motors sets goal of going largely electric by 2035."

The AP News article closed on this note: "So far, Wall Street has cheered the shift by GM which says the industry has reached a history-changing inflection point for mass adoption of electric vehicles."

The 2035 marker prompted us to think about Nathan Grawe's 2018 book, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*. In the closing chapter ("Looking Beyond 2030"), Grawe writes, "The next 15 years will present serious challenges to much of higher education as demographic shifts already under way are further complicated by a new birth dearth." The Great Recession spiked a decrease in fertility (Grawe: "birth rates plummet[ed] by almost 13 percent in just five years") and the pandemic is already causing a second wave of infertility that will lap on higher education's shore in the mid- to late 2030s. Grawe's sequel, *The Agile College*, has just been released and provides further updates on the inexorable march of college-bound demographics.

It is time for four-year colleges, dependent on traditional-aged high school graduates continuing their education, to acknowledge where current trends lead and pivot like GM. Simply put, there will not be enough traditional student demand to fuel higher education's current scale. Most institutions are already experiencing this reality, but few are truly reckoning with the ominous dashboard signal — low fuel warning — much less the reality of 2035.

The fundamental step must be a rigorous re-examination and communication of institutional mission (i.e., purpose, objectives and how you will achieve those objectives). In his seminal 1990 study of liberal arts colleges, David Brenneman observed that of the nearly 600 liberal arts colleges in the 1970s, only 212 remained in 1990. While fewer than a dozen had closed and some disappeared through merger, the majority evolved their missions to the point of no longer qualifying as a liberal arts college

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according to their Carnegie Classification. A 2012 study in *Liberal Education*, revisiting Brenneman's work, found only 130 institutions remained as "true liberal arts colleges." Citing these studies is not to judge the viability of the liberal arts sector but to point out that there is precedent for redefining mission to adapt to changing market realities. The mission statement is not narrative window dressing. As we will discuss later, a changed mission is the consequence of intentional restructuring of academic offerings and the learning/living environment.

Setting and sharing a realistic yet aspirational vision (i.e., what a company desires to achieve in the long run) for the institution is not just a website "punch list" item. GM, if still dependent on fossil fuel 15 years from now, did not see itself relevant in the automobile market. Or maybe it was just seeing that Tesla's corporate valuation is greater than the top nine auto manufacturers combined. Regard-

less, GM put a stake in the future's ground. Incremental visioning is not sufficient to drive the transformative change required of higher education. The vision statement is not simply a marketing tag line. It must be sourced in vigorous and inclusive strategic planning. Created with broad stakeholder input, a new vision for an institution must resonate with faculty, staff, alumni and students. It must serve as a call to action, inviting faculty to be innovative and students to stretch their limits. And, of course, it must motivate prospective students to inquire, apply and enroll in larger numbers.

Transformative change is not incremental. It is not achieved by tinkering around the edges. Barely a day goes by without a headline announcing that another college is proposing to eliminate a set of majors, programs or even departments. There is not a size or sector bias. In recent months we have read about Ohio Wesleyan University, Ithaca College and the University of Vermont, to name just a few examples. These headlines do not mean that higher education's sky is falling. Instead, it is reasonable to view this downsizing as rightsizing

after years of growing – intentionally or not – beyond mission scope. Visionary change should not be about cutting, but, rather, contouring academic offerings to where the market demand will intersect with the institution's core strengths. In a similar vein, institutions that carry unsustainable overhead costs in co-curricular programs (e.g., student affairs, athletics, centers, etc.) must determine the optimal mix of academic and co-curricular offerings. That will help the college or university to deliver on its promise – yes, its brand.

GM probably has not yet determined the number and styles of cars they will produce in 2035 and at what price points. Assuming a college's enrollment and cost of attendance are analogous to production and price, there is no reason a college should not deliberately establish enrollment and price footprints for the longer-term future. In recent years, a majority of colleges reported they did not meet their enrollment targets and thus fell short of revenue goals.

Perhaps they think it was a consequence of subpar recruitment pro-

grams. That may have contributed to a lackluster result, but in the context of broad enrollment underachievement, it is more likely a reflection of unrealistic goals. If, in a time of relatively buoyant student demand, an institution is falling short, what can be expected when the next 15 years delivers deep high school graduate declines in its primary markets? Setting realistic enrollment goals now and, over time, scaling overhead accordingly, are essential tools with which to address the demographic realities that threaten an institution's position. The goals are not simply numerical (enrolled students) but also financial: Is the institution able and willing to selectively invest in its people and its programs to pivot successfully into the next decade? An affirmative answer along with careful planning and execution will position a college to thrive in 2035.

Explaining his on-ice superiority, Wayne Gretzky offered, "I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it is." GM (and likely, very soon, Ford and other automakers) is taking a page out of Gretzky's book. Will higher education do so as well? ∎

Bio

Bill Conley and Bob Massa are veteran chief enrollment officers with a combined 85 years of experience in those roles. They are now principals and co-founders of Enrollment Intelligence Now.

Read Original Article ▶▶ https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/views/2021/03/01/will-colleges-have-courage-make-tough-decisions-opinion

Higher Education Systems and the Big Rethink

Public university systems are now distinctly poised to leverage the assets of their campuses to address some of the most significant challenges facing humankind, writes Nancy L. Zimpher.

By **Nancy L. Zimpher // March 8, 2021**

I recall one of the very early conversations among board members at the National Association of System Heads (NASH), where I serve as a senior fellow, at the moment our systems were called to shift to remote instruction in midwinter 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. NASH is the leading association for public university systems, and the more than 60 systems in 44 states, two-thirds of which are NASH members, educate nearly 75 percent of the nation's students in four-year public institutions.

You'd think all the talk during that discussion among system heads in the room that day would be about the immediacy of the moment. You'd think they would focus almost exclusively on taking fast action — recognizing it would be a major undertaking, nonetheless — and that the need to transition to remote learning to serve our students, almost overnight, was paramount. But in that moment, while those leaders did, in fact, take immediate action, they simultaneously were also beginning to reflect on the longer term and the big picture — the really big picture.

The big picture is a concept that Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie captured in their 1997 *Harvard Business Review* article, "The Work of Leadership." The main thesis of their work is that lead-ing an organization through major changes, crisis or not, requires its leader to view its patterns as if they were standing "on the balcony." As they note, "Leaders have to see a context for change or create one" — elevating an organization's history and what's good about the past, as well as taking responsibility for shaping the future. They call this the capacity to move back and forth between the field of action and the balcony. All elements and actions then flow from this ability to see the big picture.

That big picture for America's public university systems assumes that we continue to internalize the profound effects of COVID-19 in exposing the limited access of vulnerable communities to quality health care, the overwhelming effects of deep and systemic injustices, and the severe gap in economic opportunity that so many people have experienced. While always vitally important to our nation, university systems are even more crucial at this turbulent time. They provide education from workforce certifications through the most advanced professional and academic degrees. They serve their states and the nation through community outreach and public service. They contribute to economic development, social mobility, public and environmental health, civic engagement, and the nation's

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defense.

In fact, higher education systems are distinctly poised to leverage the collective assets of their constituent campuses to address some of the most significant challenges facing humankind — and imagine what a network of these systems could accomplish to not only improve education outcomes but also expand health care, address systemic racism and strengthen our economy and communities. Thus, the COVID crisis represents a major opportunity for us to get "on the balcony" and reimagine public higher education systems and the new post-pandemic roles they might play in strengthening our country.

University system heads and NASH are now, in fact, giving much

thought to how together we turn this view from the balcony into a transformation agenda, with measurable metrics and an accountability system that truly reflect our collective ability to lead this nation's recovery over the next five years. We are referring to this consequential agenda-setting initiative as "the Big Rethink." To accomplish this task together, we're dividing our work into two parts as follows:

No. 1: A transformation agenda for public university systems. As the leadership association for public university systems in the United States, NASH will develop an agenda to help these important systems: 1) respond to the health-care crisis, the calls for racial justice and the need for economic recovery in the short term and 2) transform themselves to ensure enhanced success for their students and the states they serve for the long term.

Already, NASH has convened four of its systems in leading the change in upskilling their states' health-care networks to increase certification at upper levels of care to provide more ICU nurses and more health-care specialists to buy down the health risks in vulnerable communities. It has developed a broad-based racial equity action framework to advance evidence-based antiracist health-care content and delivery.

NASH systems are also offering more applied learning opportunities by creating a technology platform to get the right students interning and co-oping in our nation's businesses, industries and social service agencies. As to our student success agenda, a network of more than 20 of our systems has created a now seven-year agenda for "taking student success to scale" (TS3), where the delivery of high-impact practices across system campuses are showing results in student success outcomes.

No. 2: Guidance for public higher education systems to propel the agenda forward. NASH also plans to prepare a three-volume publication, Public University Systems: Origins, Impacts, and Possibilities for the Future, with contributions from highly regarded higher education scholars, university system leaders and visionaries that will:

■ Describe the mission, history, structure and functions of university systems;

■ Critically assess the variety of barriers, leadership, innovation and impacts systems are making on important societal goals; and

■ Develop the transformational possibilities for how university systems can lead in a post-pandemic world.

We will be documenting system leadership of programs to counteract systemic barriers and close equity gaps once and for all in the decade to come, such as the California State University Graduation Initiative 2025 and the Minnesota State Equity 2030 agenda. Two systems are also taking on equities across their Indigenous populations: Hawaii and Montana both are engaged in comprehensive system agendas to more effectively reach these populations on campus and through expanded remote instruction. And all member systems are engaged in prioritizing career-related credentials, certificates and badges and in accepting prior-learning credits — thus speeding time to greater workforce opportunities.

We look forward to sharing updates on this transformation agenda and invite you to follow us on the NASH website as our work proceeds.

Perhaps the best way to summarize such an effort is to underscore the significance of this opportunity. This "Big Rethink" is the first major examination of public university systems since Clark Kerr led the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education's foundational studies in the 1970s. Now, a half century later, and in the face of a global pandemic, we as public systems of higher education are called once again to show the way. We must be creative, innovative, compelling and willing to take risks in leading our collective work in this transformative moment. ■

Bio

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Read Original Article ▸▸   https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/03/08/reimagining-new-post-pandemic-roles-university-systems-can-play-opinion

The Disciplinary Trench

What if there were no academic departments? David V. Rosowsky and Bridget M. Keegan explore the possibilities.

By David V. Rosowsky and Bridget M. Keegan // August 18, 2020

If you stay in the trench, you can't see what's in front of you, let alone what's on the horizon. Reflecting upon years of discussion about American higher education, we've noticed that the very structures and principles that have made our model great are potentially holding us back. It's time to ask ourselves: Are those principles and structures ones that we would design were we to start from scratch?

Specifically, does our current system of organizing our institutions as academic schools, colleges and departments still make sense? Have our organizational structures evolved as we have added – but rarely subtracted – new departments, programs and centers? Is a proliferation of departments good for students, faculty members, employers or the university?

In the midst of the tremendous uncertainty we are experiencing with COVID-19, and the numerous changes forced upon our most basic activities, administrative restructuring may not be a high priority for many people in academe. But faculty have demonstrated tremendous creativity in responding to the pandemic, and our hope is that this might inspire greater openness and curiosity, as well as a sense of agency regarding embracing what would be a very constructive change.

If recent developments are any indication, at most universities, we start with a collection of disparate scholars and fields, impose a departmental structure and then go to great lengths to create centers and institutes and cross-cutting programs that work around that department structure. But can universities function with so many different subcultures? Are we broadening opportunities for students or confusing them? Are we creating too many choices? Are we inviting too many surfaces for tension between academic units, faculty or disciplines? Are departments organized to engage in meaningful discussions around interdisciplinary education and scholarship? How about for faculty hiring or decisions about promotion and tenure?

Universities typically revere traditions, both their own and those of higher education generally. Traditions create identity. At the same time, we promote our mission, which also shapes our identities, individually and collectively. For many of us, our organizational structure is the product of tradition rather than mission, of what has been instead of what ought to be. If our mission is to put student learning at the center of all we do and be a force for the public good, does our current organization support those goals?

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The Best Building Block?

As we consider redesigning the university to better fulfill our missions, we should start with the most fundamental unit: the academic department. Is the department still the best building block for organizing our work? Or do we inhibit our institutions by our tendency to conflate three central organizational models for our work: the department, the discipline and the program? While those three can be identical, confusion emerges when that identity is presumed without question. We must remember that departments serve as administrative structures. Disciplines represent coherent areas of research and scholarship. Programs reflect how disciplines (or combinations of disciplines) form curriculum to teach their disciplines or combina-

tions/intersections of disciplines.

For example, while a philosophy department is composed of faculty members who research philosophical questions and offer students classes that form the major program in philosophy, such a one-to-one correspondence is not always the case. Many faculty members presume that this alignment is the only way to organize regardless of whether the context – driven by student needs or institutional type – suggests another reality. Even a department with disciplinary and programmatic homogeneity may have more than one curricular program. For example, in a philosophy department, we might see a specialized pre-law track that lends itself to applied outcomes and moves toward connections with other disciplines.

The opportunities for intentional combinations of disciplines into administrative units has tended to occur in particular fields. For instance, departments of sociology or anthropology may be small and perhaps lacking visibility to potential students. They might join to form a larger department offering two distinct degree programs. Likewise, engineering departments often house multiple degree programs. Many civil engineering departments, for example, offer accredited degrees in both civil engineering and environmental engineering. MANE, a large department at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, offers individually accredited degrees in mechanical, aeronautical and nuclear engineering.

Collaborative combinations can

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bolster disciplines experiencing enrollment declines, such as foreign languages. Combining single stand-alone language departments can create greater intellectual breadth and energy as well and a greater sense of community, which is important to attracting students. While one could argue that merging Spanish, French and Italian signifies a disrespect for the distinct cultures and traditions that those languages represent, faculty members who work together to support each other in their programs and scholarship may have greater success in convincing students of the inherent value of becoming bilingual.

Additionally, despite faculty members' resistance to combining departments, it is increasingly difficult to claim disciplinary "purity" in teaching and research. English and literary research and pedagogy rely frequently on philosophical or historical approaches. Theology draws from techniques in literary

analysis. Would greater opportunities for students and faculty members occur more organically if related fields were brought together administratively? How often are we recruiting faculty members with multiple scholarly interests seeking interactions across multiple departments? Do departmental cultures welcome and support such interactions? What opportunities are we missing in our research (discipline) and teaching (programs) by clinging to administrative structures (departments)? Instead of justifying why not to rethink our administrative structure, we might start by imagining the possibilities for faculty scholarship and for student learning.

Examining Inherited Structures

Faculty members should self-organize and then be supported and provided with resources to be successful. Moreover, they should participate in shaping the university's priorities, while recognizing that the

board and president have authority and ultimate responsibility for decisions beyond those delegated to the faculty through shared governance or other articulated agreements. Our focus here is not on the financial and institutional support for faculty, but on highlighting opportunities for self-organizing, creating appropriate and enabling structures that provide the greatest flexibility and the fewest barriers to faculty and student success. Just as we teach our students to interrogate received paradigms, faculty should examine inherited administrative structures that may no longer support their success or the success of students.

Typically, through board-authorized shared governance, faculty members are responsible for academic matters like curriculum and policies, as well as departmental structure, including faculty hiring, status and leadership. As such, the tendency for faculty to assume the alignment of department to discipline to program is understandable, particularly around the determination of curriculum or faculty status. Expertise in a discipline is certainly essential to offering rigorous programs to students and ensuring the quality of faculty.

Even so, why do faculty often resist creating new scholarly pathways and partnerships, enticing students to explore ideas from multiple perspectives, and creating distinction for themselves and their university? The answers are complex. Maintaining disciplinary standards is often cited, particularly in pre-professional fields where external accrediting bodies can drive

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decisions about internal curricular or personnel decisions. But the fact is that disciplinary boundaries are more fluid than is commonly appreciated. In our experience, the root may be fear: fear of change, fear of loss of relevance, fear of a loss of student interest and a loss of resources.

Faculty (and we consider ourselves faculty first and foremost) are formed by their graduate training. That formation – a remembrance of what was – shapes expectations of what should be. The significant shifts in higher education seem only to be accelerating. But the status quo, or the nostalgic ideal of it, is a known. During times of instability, there is comfort in clinging to the known.

How might we proceed differently? Some universities have experimented with organizing faculty around themes – whether groupings of scholarly disciplines (e.g., health sciences and humanities)

or the so-called grand challenges (e.g., environment and ecology, sustainable development). Some have done this while maintaining traditional academic departments, while others have moved more aggressively to substitute new theme-based organization of faculty and scholarship. Institutions like Arizona State University are hailed positively, but recent efforts at the University of Tulsa have been met with strong opposition. While it may be too early to assess the effectiveness of those efforts, such institutions are in a minority of those that have endeavored to change and can offer a road map to other colleges considering such conversations.

At the University of Vermont, we launched the university's first pan-university institute, the Gund Institute for Environment, to increase interactions among a large number of individuals and programs across campus. The university had environmental expertise

in nearly every college and school. While it prided itself on its environmental scholarship and outreach activities, it lacked a coherent strategy, resulting in far less impact for scholars and programs. The Gund Institute was established as a vehicle for transdisciplinary research, policy work and outreach. Faculty members are invited into the institute but retain their academic (tenure) home. The institute supports scholarship but does not offer degree programs. While it is only two years old, early indicators are positive. We've seen increases in the number of faculty collaborations across colleges, transdisciplinary research activity, extramural support, graduate enrollment and postdoctoral engagement, as well as in the number of scholarly visitors, research productivity (output), philanthropic support and external visibility through national media coverage.

Whether the Gund Institute eventually offers programs, maintains its own faculty or expands its current scope of environmental focus areas remains to be seen. Under the institute's governance plan, this effort will be faculty-driven. And whether the Gund Institute remains the institution's only pan-university institute also remains to be seen. Its success in engaging faculty members, creating new opportunities and creating measurable impact suggests that, properly envisioned and implemented, it can be a powerful model.

Similarly, at Creighton, we recently inaugurated the Kingfisher Institute for Liberal Arts and the Professions. It aims to eliminate barriers

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between liberal arts pedagogy and research and the pedagogy and research practiced at Creighton's professional schools. An incubator for new curriculum and research for faculty across Creighton's nine schools and colleges, the institute is currently contributing to an innovative curriculum in the School of Medicine. Faculty from English, history and fine arts teach in the medical school, and the experience is inspiring them to create a new health humanities minor for undergraduates, as well as to collaborate with colleagues in medicine to study how the humanities and arts impact the education of new doctors. The institute's future projects will be faculty-driven, encouraging collaboration beyond the boundaries of a single department or college.

Such innovations depend upon faculty commitment to the institutional mission, and we recognize that not all faculty explicitly align their research and teaching with their

university's mission. That said, regardless of institutional types, university missions always point to a greater good, whether it be civic good or personal transformation, and should not be inherently objectionable. Missions transcend disciplines, departments, colleges/schools and faculty backgrounds and can be an ecumenical rallying call that brings faculty together around transcendent themes and goals. Speaking personally, each of us have felt pride and a strong calling to our respective institution types. Both land-grant and Jesuit missions are compelling, uplifting and purposeful, inspiring us to ask how our structures can and should enact those respective missions.

Mission as the Touchstone

While support for mission may be difficult to argue against, altering traditional academic structures is likely to generate opposition. Mission must be the touchstone for any consideration of change. Many

The Disciplinary Trench (cont.)

voices may express concern over any plan that outright eliminates departments or replaces the current departmental structure, even if a case can be strongly made. Some people may express concern, others may fear ulterior motives, while still others may dig in and resist altogether. Clear and regular communication coupled with authentic engagement of constituents can minimize both concerns and resistance.

If we rethink our current departmental structures, we could start with a blank canvas no longer constrained by inherited organizational units or confined by campus locations (floors, wings or buildings). We could consider student flow and faculty access, including how best to co-locate academic opportunities and student services – such as academic advising, tutoring and career counseling – positioning staff resources to support the largest number of students and faculty.

No longer would we be constrained by expectations that every department have identical administrative support. Requests for resources would be made based on mission and strategic need, not historic practice, with decisions guided by opportunities rather than entitlements. Faculty hiring could be strategic and collaborative.

Shared vision, shared resources, shared support and shared expectations for promotion and tenure would also create new ways to recruit and retain exceptional faculty. Our experience has been that many of our best faculty candidates have research interests crossing disciplinary domains, responding to changes in extramural funding paradigms, new research questions and student and employer interests. Disciplines have expanded, combined, subdivided and given rise to entirely new disciplines. Our work and how we engage with students have changed. Why do we maintain the same system of academic departments we had more than a century ago?

To be clear, we are not advocating for the elimination of academic departments. Rather, by questioning why we do things the same way and why we resist structural change in the academy, we can all assess for ourselves – within our own campus communities and cultures – what makes the most sense for our institution, our students, our mission and our future. ∎

Bio

David V. Rosowsky (@DavidRosowsky) is professor of engineering at the University of Vermont and served for six years as provost and senior vice president. Bridget M. Keegan (@CCAS_Dean) is dean of arts and sciences and professor of English at Creighton University. Further thoughts on responses to concerns by faculty, students, employers and alumni/donors may be found here.