

Transcription for

THE KEY WITH INSIDE HIGHER ED

EP. 28: STUDENT ANXIETY AND CAREER EXPLORATION

LIVIA MORRIS

JULIA MORRIS

KAI DREKMEIER

NOVEMBER 2020

PROVIDED BY

CAPTION ACCESS

contact@captionaccess

www.captionaccess.com

NOVEMBER 19, 2020



THE KEY INSIDE HIGHER ED

EP. 28: STUDENT ANXIETY AND CAREER EXPLORATION

LIVIA MORRIS

JULIA MORRIS

KAI DREKMEIER

PAUL FAIN

38:19

====

[MUSIC]

PAUL FAIN: Pearson, the world's education company and the renowned authors are bringing engaging and informative sessions to educators on the topics of politics, government, and the 2020 presidential election in a new webinar series. Save your seat by registering at [go.pearson.com/election series](https://go.pearson.com/election-series).

Hello, and welcome to The Key with IHE. I'm Paul Fain, the host of this podcast and a contributing editor with Inside Higher Ed. Today's the day after the election and I don't need to tell you that these are uncertain times. A growing body of evidence shows that anxiety about the pandemic, the economy, racism, and much more is a primary challenge for college students, particularly the most vulnerable. To get a better sense of how students are feeling, I spoke with Livia and Julia Morris, recent UC Davis grads who conducted a qualitative survey of college students around the country in July to hear how they were faring, including about what comes after college. Here's Livia...

LIVIA MORRIS: This feeling that pre-coronavirus they could maybe go to their professors or advisers to get some advice on how to apply their degrees, you know, even it might not have been the most up-to-date advice, that traditional expertise on campus no longer really suffices, because no industries are going to collapse, which ones are going to emerge, you know, which ones are going to be restructured. And there's a lot of frustration, you know, about this lack of contemporary guidance and this feeling of how can anyone help me if no one knows what's going on.

PAUL FAIN: I also spoke with Kai Drekmeier, the founder and chief development officer at InsideTrack, which offers students coaching and other supports. InsideTrack has seen increasing student demand for crisis support in recent years. And the pandemic is only increasing that need.

KAI DREKMEIER: We're finding with most students this is really about trauma-informed communication. If they are reaching out or we have some sense that they need more than the normal, this is really about asking, you know, what's important to you right now? How is this affecting you? What would be the most helpful thing for us to focus on today?

PAUL FAIN: Let's get to the conversation.

All right, so we're live. I'm speaking with Livia and Julia Morris. How are you?

LIVIA MORRIS: I'm well, thank you.

JULIA MORRIS: I'm doing good. Thank you for having us on.

LIVIA MORRIS: That was not the same person who said that twice.

JULIA MORRIS: We've got to find a thing with our voices.

PAUL FAIN: I'll do some Livia and Julia call-outs here. But let's actually start with Livia. Can you talk a little bit about how you came to do this survey, what you were trying to accomplish with it?

LIVIA MORRIS: Well, it actually originally started as a survey, a much smaller survey that was going to be done in support of a project proposal for a project that we both run at UC Davis. But when it started to look like that project, you know, had to be tabled because of the pandemic, I kind of just decided on a whim, why don't we keep the survey going and expand it to all sorts of different universities, not just the UC Davis, see what happens. And I got more responses than I was anticipating, and it kind of just snowballed from there.

PAUL FAIN: Anything you want to add Julia to what you all were trying to accomplish with this?

JULIA MORRIS: We do a speaker series on the campus about the future of work, pairing academics and non-academic professionals to discuss the future of their fields from different perspectives. So we were thinking of how to continue that project into 2020, 2021 onward. And that's why we did the survey, to do a needs assessment for UC Davis students.

PAUL FAIN: Gotcha. So as we've reported, a growing body of national polling data shows that anxiety and uncertainty are dominating college students' feelings for good reasons, and in some cases may even be the top issue even more than finances or other barriers. Sounds like that jells with what you all found.

LIVIA MORRIS: Absolutely. I think before this pandemic, there was already sort of this void in actionable up-to-date career advice for students, you know, really modern career advice, and infrastructure to distribute that information, you know, universities struggling to keep up with this rapidly evolving landscape of work, and it's even worse when you throw a global pandemic into the mix. Students were expressing in their responses how this feeling that pre-coronavirus they could maybe go their professors or advisers to get some advice on how to apply their degrees, you know, even if it might not have been the most up-to-date advice. That traditional expertise on campus no longer really suffices, because no one knows what industries are going to collapse, which ones are going to emerge, you know, which ones are going to be restructured. And there's a lot of frustration, you know, about this lack of contemporary guidance and this feeling of how can anyone help me if no one knows what's going on.

PAUL FAIN: And is that frustration, I guess, aimed at colleges themselves? I mean, I do have some empathy that, as you say, nobody knows what's really going to happen in the next six months, but it sounds like colleges, like everything in the pandemic, maybe weren't doing a good enough job writ large on this even before, and now that problem is even worse.

LIVIA MORRIS: Oh yeah, I do think that the pandemic is just exacerbating existing problems within higher education. And a lot of students did express a profound longing for the university, their professors, but especially administration to be more flexible, enough though it might feel uncomfortable to implement new policies. And see there is actually one quote from the article itself that kind of sums that up. One student said, "Most of the people working there have no idea what the youth is confronted with these

days. They think 'Happy' by Pharrel Williams is the ultimate friendship song and they don't know how to put their Facebook profiles as private. What kind of career advice should I expect with those people? Yes, I know, very harsh."

PAUL FAIN: I imagine that was not the only one like that.

LIVIA MORRIS: No, not quite.

PAUL FAIN: Can you talk about, you know, you talked to students at a pretty broad range of institutions. Did you do regional, publics, community colleges as well?

LIVIA MORRIS: Not really community college. The majority of the responses ended up coming from Midwestern schools actually, a lot of state colleges. We did not have representation really from Ivy Leagues. It was mostly schools like, you know, University of Kentucky, UC Riverside, University of Nevada Reno, you know, all across the country. But not community college, mostly undergraduate students, small number of graduate students, but primarily undergraduate.

PAUL FAIN: So in terms of the anxiety about completing the semester or, you know, how to deal with the virtual experience... I mean, I get for sure that what happens after college anxiety, but did you get much about how to kind of keep track in this bizarre time--keep on track, I should say?

LIVIA MORRIS: I think, you know, one thing is that a lot of students reported feeling quite lonely and how these feelings of loneliness, you know, they felt that it was impeding them from being as academically engaged as they need to be. There is also this pressure, of course, to have the right college experience, and particularly for those lower division students, they reported feeling that the coronavirus has caused those traditional opportunities for growth and socialization to kind of just evaporate. Do you have anything to add, Julia?

JULIA MORRIS: Yeah. I'd say that for recent graduates in particular, it's this strange dichotomy between officially graduating and earning your freedom, in the sense that you're free from the relative rigidity of an academic institution. And having this new realm of freedom and opportunity that's simultaneously constrained by the pandemic, and all of the restrictions that it's imposing, and how to deal with that disconnect.

LIVIA MORRIS: Yeah, and the rigidity, you know, that the students that are still pursuing their degrees are also feeling. A lot of students were talking about how they were adding majors, dropping majors, adding minors, dropping minors... Should I double-major? You know, one student even said that they were dropping out of their four-year institution and transferring to community college altogether because they don't want to deal with the stressors in the four-year program, given all this uncertainty.

JULIA MORRIS: Yeah, I think overall a lot of students just wish for their universities to fully embrace that this isn't a time of normality, and for administration to be more willing to take risks and try new engagements.

PAUL FAIN: So the idea of accepting that this isn't going to go back to normal in any short amount of time, so let's just push into it and try to make the current moment more tolerable?

LIVIA MORRIS: Oh yeah.

JULIA MORRIS: Yeah, I would say that there is also another thing that I noticed. There were a lot of responses that were punctuated by really strong emotions regarding national politics that definitely put people in a much worse mood. You know, some students were using the survey as an opportunity to not just vent about their frustrations with their university but their frustrations with the country as a whole, the upcoming election, you know, what this current administration has done to provide relief for individuals and families who are economically insecure now because of the coronavirus. So lots and lots of, you know, responses that were referencing economy, health care, civil rights, corporations... What does this all mean? Is anything going to change? I feel like one of my, you know, what am I doing here? Everything is basically going to shit a little bit.

LIVIA MORRIS: Yeah, so thinking ahead 10 years, you know, what kind of country is this generation of college students going to inherit and what are the long-term ramifications of the pandemic going to be? I do think it's a lot to think about, and it's breeding feelings of apathy amongst students when it comes to getting through the slog of homework and exams and assignments that can at times can feel very detached from the world that exists outside the confines of the university.

PAUL FAIN: That's really interesting. You know, I, we had seen a series of polls in the last few years of

declining faith in higher ed, more skepticism about its value, but it also jelled with the overall distrust of institutions. And when you brought up the politics pieces, I was thinking about that. I mean, it kind of feels like it's all intertwined, doesn't it, that this overall sense of what is going on, that things are going to shit. Your university is part of all of that overall anxiety of society and the world, it sounds like.

LIVIA MORRIS: Oh yeah, definitely. I mean, online learning coupled with quarantine has created some distance between students and the university. And a lot of our respondents recounted how that space has given them a time to reflect a little bit more deeply on their education. So what is the value of a university education together? What is it that I need to get out of my time in college and what are my nonnegotiables? Is my major actually a good fit for me? And then the big one, is my university truly preparing me for the future? That kind of reflection is understandably sparking a lot of frustration and confusion... [CROSSTALK]

JULIA MORRIS: I think that last one is particularly important. You mentioned that there's been this breakdown of faith, you know, in higher education. I've seen that myself personally, just among my own friends. It kind of feels at times like one of them, one of the major driving forces behind why people got to college is to basically alleviate their insecurity about whether they're worthy to get a good job. And so many students, so many students in this survey were expressing feelings of insecurity, that they don't feel like they're ready to start a new year of college, that they don't feel, you know, ready to continue with their studies, maybe if they're moving to upper division classes... If they're recent graduates, that they don't feel ready to launch professionally, that they don't have enough internships. Their resume isn't padded enough. That they're basically, this feeling of I'm not good enough. I already felt like my majors or minors weren't really [CROSSTALK] practical. Now those feelings are 10 times worse. So really, really strong feelings of insecurity.

PAUL FAIN: What do you think is driving that? I mean, I get it. It's so much uncertainty that it would make you wobble a little bit, but to me it feels like your personal merit, it surprises me a little bit to hear that. I mean, I can see why you'd look externally and say, what is going on? And, I don't necessarily want to keep doing this when I don't know what I'm working toward. But why that would make folks feel more insecure about their place, I'm a little fuzzier on. Do you have any thoughts about that?

JULIA MORRIS: I mean, I do think that students put a lot of pressure on themselves to make all the right moves. You can compare yourselves to your peers on LinkedIn, on social media. And although the university tells you that it's okay to make mistakes and change your mind, I mean, the mainstream media says that as well. You see it in movies, TV, books, etc. That doesn't mean that students don't struggle to internalize that message. And it is really difficult to let go the fear that online learning and

social isolation is going to result in major setbacks and that those lost opportunities will be irredeemable. So I think that that's partly what's driving it.

LIVIA MORRIS: Yeah, and then, of course, you know, there's all the issues of wage inflation, not keeping up, that's a whole other separate issue that was always there and it's just being exacerbated. Like you said, you know, Julia, earlier, that it's more so that it feels like this pandemic is taking feelings that were already there, and it's just amplifying them.

JULIA MORRIS: I mean, I'll say that I was reading an article recently where the professor was talking about how, you know, technology and social media, etc., has, how a lack of uninterrupted introspection increases anxiety among young people. And I think that, when things are, you know, business as usual, everything is so fast paced that you don't have the time to stop and think. That creates anxiety. And this is no different even though classes are online. Students are feeling busier than ever, and just overwhelmed.

PAUL FAIN: I get that. Thank you for indulging that. You know, that that resonated. All of us have, interruptions are the norm these days. Uninterrupted time is hard to find. Can we talk just a minute about the loneliness piece in what you heard there. Livia, you mentioned that. We're hearing that in all the national polling too, that this kind of isolation has been incredibly difficult for students.

LIVIA MORRIS: Yeah, this isolation, sort of mourning the college experience... For some students, you know, some students didn't care. There were students in the survey who were very frank about, I don't really mind switching to an online format. I actually prefer it. But I would say that probably the majority were expressing the sadness of I can't go the library to study with my friends. I can't go to the gym. You know, I can't really do much of anything anymore is what it feels like. And how is that going to affect my college experience as a whole?

JULIA MORRIS: A lot of students also mentioned that being on campus surrounded by their peers, it creates this sense of accountability.

LIVIA MORRIS: Oh yeah...

JULIA MORRIS: Your friends, your study groups can help keep you on track. And now that you're alone,

many students back at home with their parents, and you regress a little bit into old patterns from high school.

LIVIA MORRIS: Especially if your home environment isn't really conducive to online learning.

JULIA MORRIS: And it's dysfunctional, that they feel like their kind of left in the deep end and they're drowning a little bit.

PAUL FAIN: That all makes sense. So looking forward, colleges are going to be in a moment like this for a while we know now. Things aren't going to go back to normal for a while. As they try to figure how to do better, any trends that you heard that would really help college administrators think about how to help students feel less anxious and deal with the uncertainty they're dealing with?

LIVIA MORRIS: We have a section where we collected... [CROSSTALK]

JULIA MORRIS: You said the college administrators...

PAUL FAIN: The college administrators, the college leaders, but, you know, anyone who cares about higher ed. I mean, given what you've heard, what are some of the key things they've heard about to try to do better?

LIVIA MORRIS: Well, we actually did have a section in our survey called "What the university can do to help," where we asked students to list some of the career and internship related services or resources that they wish the university would provide to them. Some students conveyed anger that they feel toward their universities for limiting their on-campus work hours, without supplementing for lost income. A couple of students suggested that because the economy is so bad that the university should in a sense be providing students with on-campus internships even if they aren't paid. You know, if the number of available jobs are going down, then the university should create more positions, even if it's just expanding research opportunities to give as many students as possible something to put on their resume or some channel to get experience. Looking for a better coordinated university response was also communicated by several students, that they wish that there was some uniformity between universities on what are requirements to graduate now that we have to take the pandemic into consideration, being a little bit more lax on general ed requirements for those who are looking to apply

to graduate school, the desire for universities to drop the GRA, for there to be some kind of consensus on what you need to be considered eligible to apply in this cycle.

JULIA MORRIS: I mean, I would say that, you know, if university administration leadership is looking to quell some of their anxieties, I mean, if I were in their position would I would do is I would honestly try to collect as much data from students themselves, because rather than trying to extrapolate, you know, what might students want from national polls and what you hear through the grapevine, I think it's always better to just go to the students directly, give them an opportunity. Anonymously, you know, has its advantages, because students tend to be more honest and upfront even if they can be a little mean too. And just ask students to be upfront and honest about what do you want? How are you feeling? What can the university do to help? And take that data seriously.

LIVIA MORRIS: And I think that getting students involved in data-collection is important as well.

JULIA MORRIS: Oh, yeah, that's a big one.

LIVIA MORRIS: I do think that students were more open to this survey, because we were very honest about the fact that we were recent college grads, so it did feel like it was communication with one of your peers, rather than some faceless entity that is the university administration.

JULIA MORRIS: I did put one Sponge Bob meme at the end. I feel like that also helped a lot.

LIVIA MORRIS: That definitely helped. [LAUGH]

PAUL FAIN: Well, to that end, thank you for helping me better understand what students are thinking and it's an important contribution you both have made. And I hope that you'll keep doing it in some form or other, because the need is there. So thanks for your time as well.

JULIA MORRIS: Well, thank you so much.

LIVIA MORRIS: Thanks, I appreciate that.

PAUL FAIN: If you're looking to go even more in depth in IHE's news coverage, check out our special reports. These deep-dives feature rich data and reporting, as well as thoughtful, substantive analysis you can trust. Visit insidehighered.com/special-reports, to view the topics we've covered and to purchase the report that best supports your area of work or study.

I'm speaking with Kai Drekmeier. How you doing, Kai?

KAI DREKMEIER: Very well... Thank you very much for having me on.

PAUL FAIN: Well, thanks for making time for me and our listeners. You know, I've followed the InsideTrack model for a pretty long time now, but I gather you all are doing more than you did a few years ago, and in different ways. I'm curious what that is and how this crisis has helped shape what you do as well?

KAI DREKMEIER: Yeah, thank you. As you know, our coaching model is generally focused on helping all students improve their wellbeing and outcomes, and really be the best students that they can be and address issues that come up. More than 10 years ago, we realized that when you're doing that, certain challenges some students are having are surfaced, and we have a need for kind of a backup crisis support service. So we started developing that, and for multiple reasons. But we certainly want to make sure if a student is having some more acute challenges, that we bring the right resources to that. So that's become a bigger and bigger part of our work.

And while higher education, well, students, it's not a homogeneous bunch as you know, with a huge variance, particularly on income. And so what we're seeing is students across the board need support, those low-income students over the last several years have...we've just seen a much greater need in terms of mental health support, crisis support in general. And this precedes the pandemic, by the way. An increase in housing insecurity, food insecurity, all of these issues... But under the pandemic, or really since April, we have seen almost a tripling, more than doubling of the number of cases we're addressing annually than the prior year.

PAUL FAIN: In terms of just the basic model and how it works, I know there's a lot to it, but can you kind

of blend the mental health crisis work in any way with academic advising and helping people keep on track academically, or are they really pretty separate pieces?

KAI DREKMEIER: They really do go together. I think for any type of student support, we have found that the key thing is to be proactive, to provide assistance to students early, and even before they run into trouble, because you can, number one, encourage better help-seeking behavior, so that they realize that it's normal, it's okay to reach out. And if someone reaches out to me, there's a good chance for conversation. Once you have some relationship with an adult or several adults on campus or associated with the institution, students are much more likely to talk about what's going on. So I think right there you're starting to surface things.

There is an element, if a matter becomes more of a serious situation, you really need to obviously protect the student first and foremost, but also the staff member and the institution. So that's when it's important to bring in a second professional often.

One thing that has changed a little bit is that we're finding that institutions have embraced this. I would say the role community colleges and how they see themselves has changed over the last several years. They're not just academic institutions but they are centers of social support and for their students, because it is such a high need population.

So we now are providing crisis support services in the form of what we call emergency coaching on its own. And in fact, you may know this, but we became nonprofit earlier this year. That's our new status and that's allowed us to pursue grant-funding with much greater ease. And currently we have a grant from the ECMC Foundation and Strada to provide emergency coaching to roughly 5000 students. So that is now kind of a more of a referral service, a little different than the proactive piece, but we're finding pretty interesting levels of uptake on that and use and utilization. And so related to this, we're surveying former Cal Grant students, Cal Grant recipients in California for a separate project to populate an RCT we're getting ready to do.

We've gotten 3000 responses. Of that, I just was looking at the data... I was shocked to see for the students who said, hey, here's why I struggled or why I dropped out, almost 60 percent cited mental health. Even more than that cited finances but also employment and other issues they're dealing with.

PAUL FAIN: You know, I also have seen the philanthropic support moving into some of this work.

Obviously, the California community colleges got that major gift, \$100 million, to do some emergency aid for students. So encouraging it seems like the funder-world knows it can make a difference here. And for the InsideTrack to kind of scale up for community colleges, I can sort of see the benefit there.

You mentioned community college's role. It's a huge role. And I think most of them would say I wish we could do more in helping students stabilize their lives and communities. Are there limitations to what's possible in terms of working with students about anxiety right now? I mean, we've seen the numbers and it makes sense to me that that would be a primary barrier to continued enrollment. But, you know, I do wonder sometimes, as your coaches are out there, like how do you assuage some of this anxiety that is just, it's so big, it's about so much?

KAI DREKMEIER: That's a really good question. I have honestly been surprised, at least right now, and impressed with the way institutions are embracing this and thinking about student wellbeing first and foremost. You would... We may be at a breaking point where institutions have to think about their own survival. But, for example, a student facing really serious challenges--housing, food, mental health, whatever it is--their likelihood of being able to make it and stay in school is low. And a more, gosh, I don't want to say pragmatic, but a really stressed institution could just right them off and they don't appear to be doing that. And they're spending money and the philanthropic community has been all over this. They're really concerned with the level suffering we're seeing. So that really has impressed me. I can't, I don't know how long that continues, because so many of these institutions, their budgets are going to be underwater. And state budgets are going to be really stressed coming up. And we'll probably see cuts. So I don't know how you continue that without a fairly massive rescue package, which maybe we'll be looking at something like that in the new year.

PAUL FAIN: Absolutely, yeah. I mean, obviously, we've all been watching closely the fears materialize, frankly, of an exodus of vulnerable student populations in particular from community colleges and open-access publics, but with that kind of looming second hit of the state and local budget cuts. One of the issues I'm hearing more and more about, and the Strada data has shown this, it's not just keeping on track and dealing with the now, it's what happens after college. You know, I spoke with the Morris twins about this a little bit for this episode, but what are you hearing, and what are some of the general tools in the toolbox to help students think about the bridge to career when there's so much uncertainty about what jobs are going to be available, what the economy's going to be like?

KAI DREKMEIER: That's a really good, big question. And it is fascinating right now that things are so tough, particularly for low-income people in America, that we're not seeing the typical pattern. Community college enrollment is really not up right now. And so I'm assuming this is a blip, but the crisis

is so bad, people are...[NOISE] sorry about that... The colleges are addressing the crisis too. They're just focused on the now and sort of staying afloat. I think that's where people are. My gut is there's not as much of an eye towards the future at this moment.

Adult-focused programs really online for working adults who are a little older, many of those are still doing all right. And so that's a different sector of folks who are realizing, wow, the economy is changing as it always has been. In fact, right now, the other weird thing about the pandemic is it has pushed for more and faster automation. And that's going to be a big disruptor as well. So certainly some folks have the ability and wherewithal right now to look forward, but many don't.

To your other question earlier, I realized I talked a bigger picture, but really what are we doing. We're finding with most students, this is really about trauma-informed communication. If they are reaching out or we have some sense that they need more than the normal, this is really about asking, you know, what's important to you right now? How is this affecting you? What would be the most helpful thing for us to focus on today?

And then we are, we're doing a lot of research campus, community by community on the resources available. And then we're working to connect students with those resources that could be helpful to them. And then the key thing is, we're following up. And I think that is what is sometimes lacking is, if there is a mental health incident or anything with a student, it's kind of seen as a one off. But really, you have to take this case management approach and follow up with students. and I think that alone, along with helping folks realize that this is broad right now, a lot of people are feeling this way or having these challenges, can normalize that get them into a place of action rather than despair and isolation.

PAUL FAIN: If you're an institution right now who wants to do more here and is resource challenged, can you just talk about the array of tools that are available, and I don't necessarily need specifics, but InsideTrack's in this space, but how much more is needed? How much more capacity is needed? Or are there a lot of tools that, there's a possibility that you could do more at scale even with limited resources?

KAI DREKMEIER: I think so. And this is one of the biggest challenges facing higher ed that perhaps this moment of crisis can help with. There isn't a lot of will to do things differently. Often folks feel, hey, this is my job and this is what I'm prepared to do and going to do. We kind of need to break that down. I think right now, I could suggest a bunch of things that cost money, but I think that's probably not helpful. So I would say, taking more on an all hands on deck approach of helping all student-facing staff

and faculty, not just student affairs but everyone, getting some training and being empowered to assist students.

And we have to remember that those who need help the most often don't reach out. And so we've got to be proactive. And so just thinking in terms of, hey, we're going to do something different here. We're going to call all of our students and we're going to text and email them as well. And we are going to think what is the positive message, and how are we going to ask questions and give them access to us and give them access to support. I think that's critical. And what happens is in some cases you'll be uncovering areas of really deep critical immediate need. But also those can turn into mentoring and advising conversations. And so it's not easy. I know that many folks who work in higher ed are feeling isolated themselves, right, are feeling a little bit of despair and probably low level or real depression. But it get into action is important. And I think this is something colleges could definitely be doing more.

PAUL FAIN: I tend to ask pretty high-level, nebulous questions here, and I've done that in this interview. I'm going to do one last one. You've talked a little bit about the possibility out there for really broad, systemic change in higher ed. You know, how much do you think is on the table in the next year or so for really breaking the mold and for institutions doing things very differently, you know, even beyond the piece of advising and counseling?

KAI DREKMEIER: I am very worried that this current, you know, the fiscal crisis brought to institutions by the pandemic could reduce capacity in the next several years when we really need it. So on the slightly positive side, it is such a disruption that it could really create a window for change. And when we think about what we mean by that, I do think we have to look at the cost structure. Everyone's always talking about the cost of higher ed and the economic sustainability of institutions, but also equity. You know, how can we just do a way better job at providing the resources and support that are going to create great outcomes across the board for all students? I think that is probably central, and right now the racial justice movement is going to be pushing that and we've got to kind of stay on that.

The other pieces are really kind of at the basic core of a college education, whether it be long distance or in person, really making sure we are developing and supporting students who can think critically. That's a major issue right now around polarization, the amount disinformation in our society. And so, gosh, just the basics of having folks who can think critically, who can communicate, who are really dedicated to being good citizens, that's really important. And I think we've learned this year the value of residential education is great. And when it's gone or when it's not the same, you really miss it. This should be a chance to define the components of that and make sure we accentuate the good ones. So there's this opportunity for redesign and improvement.

I'm worried that many colleges are not going to make the tough choices and will kind of get through this largely unchanged. But some could embrace this and get to be better. And I think there's, last thing, there's a number of components, but certainly this ability to flex and do teaching and learning at a distance or in person, that's got to be part of the model.

PAUL FAIN: Well, Kai, I appreciate you discussing these important, very complex topics in this medium. And, you know, InsideTrack, I've learned a lot from over the years. And I remember meeting with some of your coaches in Nashville I don't know how many years ago. You know, I always appreciate the access and what I learned from what you all are hearing out there.

KAI DREKMEIER: Well, thanks very much for having me on. I look forward to talking for addition.

[MUSIC]

PAUL FAIN: Educators around the world rely on the trusted content and digital learning resources from Pearson to improve outcomes in face-to-face or hybrid learning environments. Visit Pearson for all your online teaching resources at go.pearson.com/teachingonline.

That's a wrap for this episode. Thank you for listening. I'll be back next week, hope you'll join me.