# THE POST-PANDEMIC COLLEGE

## AND THE FUTURE OF

**THE ACADEMIC ENTERPRISE** / Bryan Alexander • **TEACHING AND LEARNING** / Flower Darby

**THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE** / Karin Fischer • **DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS** / Anthony Abraham Jack

**BUSINESS MODELS** / Rick Staisloff • **ENROLLMENT** / Cornell B. LeSane II • **COMMUNITY COLLEGES** / Karen A. Stout

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

The coronavirus pandemic has transformed higher education like no other event in recent memory. In a matter of days, colleges closed their campuses and moved classes online, altering every part of the educational experience. As a result of the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis, colleges are facing significant financial losses, as well as a profound rethinking of their academic offerings — all amid the threat of a lingering disease that continues to spread, with no clear end in sight.

In this special report, we asked leading experts to examine how the pandemic will shape higher education in the years to come and what the college of the future may look like. We hope you find the following essays useful and enlightening.

# The Academic Enterprise

## By BRYAN ALEXANDER

**Bryan Alexander** is an internationally known futurist specializing in higher education. A senior scholar at Georgetown University, he convenes, creates, and writes and consults about digital media for a variety of academic audiences worldwide. His most recent book is *Academia Next* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

THE FUTURE of higher education depends much on how the pandemic courses throughout the nation. A chronic pandemic, a single crisis, a series of waves: Each of these potential Covid-19 scenarios presents academic leaders with different challenges and options. As of this writing, three strategic choices are openly discussed, with a fourth evidently in play.

They are: an online campus, with all or nearly all instruction conducted remotely; a reopened campus, with most or all of the academic community returning to the physical institution; and a blended or Hy-Flex campus, where instructors teach simultaneously to students in the classroom and others beaming in remotely. A fourth option, a "toggle term," is when a campus switches between wholly or mostly in-person to entirely online, in response to a pandemic surge. It also describes the reverse, when an administration determines that the physical plant is safe enough to welcome back its remote population.

## 2020-21:
## The first full pandemic year

Since the United States hosts more than 4,000 colleges across a wide range of geography and populations, there is room for a great deal of variety in the upcoming academic year. Here's how important campus constituencies, functions, and trends are likely to be affected — and adapt to — the pandemic environment in the coming academic year and beyond.

### TEACHING CHALLENGES

Teaching faculty will experience a range of situations depending on which strategies their institutions choose and how the infection treats their campuses. Instructors with an online-teaching background will generally find the online and blended scenarios easier to adapt to than those new to digital pedagogy. But over time and with the right support, all instructors can settle into an online practice. Their skills will improve with practice and iteration. Gradually they may think of their office desks — or living-room sofas, kitchen tables, stacks of boxes in a basement, or cars parked outside Wi-Fi hot spots — as their new classroom spaces.

Faculty on campus will have a very different experience. Again, much depends on how their institution proceeds with antiviral measures. They may teach from behind plexiglass shields (either installed or portable) and masks. Their students will very likely be spaced out across a seminar room or lecture hall and also masked.

Faculty will have to adapt to having a

> ### TAKEAWAY
>
> Faculty members will face challenges related to where they teach and in what format, and adjunct instructors will feel those pressures even more acutely.

harder time expressing themselves (voice and facial expressions muted by masks), assessing student reactions (similarly constrained), and assigning small-group work across social-distancing gaps.

Data gathering and analytics become more important, and perhaps even more problematic, than they were before the pandemic struck. Public health dictates that campuses test students (and staff and faculty members), as well as track and trace their movements in order to map out viral spread. That entails a higher level of data gathering, especially by mobile devices, which must be handled by campus IT departments that are themselves possibly coping with budget cuts and viral threats. Further challenges arise as the entire population is asked to comply with such "dataveillance." Contact tracing can reveal relationships that one might rather not disclose. The analysis and use of such data could reproduce patterns of inequity by race, gender, sexual identity, religion, nationality, or economic status. Questions of data security against cyberattacks and errors, already rising in 2019 and 2020, will become crucial. Outsourcing these operations may be one path forward but gives rise to questions of how third-party providers handle this data.

Throughout post-pandemic teaching, faculty will consider the odds of being infected. Instructors older than 60 and also those with comorbidities (diabetes, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary

disease, being immunocompromised) are especially vulnerable, and that will shape the 2020-21 experience. Having to teach in person may become much more stressful, as every encounter with a single student could yield infection. How many instructors who relish interactions with students will now shrink from them? We can imagine anxious faculty moving office hours online or outdoors rather than risk conversation in small, closed office spaces.

In this post-pandemic campus, who can choose which teaching modality is an open question. In one model, faculty members are free to select where they will instruct, either remotely or on campus. In others they must submit a teaching-online request, aiming to meet conditions set by departments or more senior administrators. We can imagine, and some readers may have already experienced, different levels of encouragement to physically return to campus. Obviously such encouragement is especially powerful for adjunct faculty, whose continued employment is decided each semester. Department heads may feel pressure from above to get more faculty on site in order to boost enrollment numbers. They may also hear requests from anxious faculty members to do the opposite.

Professors in a blended or HyFlex situation will grapple with all of the above, depending on timing and personal situation. Additionally, they must learn to think in a bimodal way, constantly seeking to blend

> ## How many instructors who relish interactions with students will now shrink from them?

in-person and remote members of their classes. That changes pedagogy, as each faculty member accounts for feedback and participation from students in two very different realms. They must take care not to neglect one or the other. Group work assign-

ments, for example, should combine students from both physical and remote spaces. Class planning and design also changes, as faculty prepare for both on- and offline experiences, nearly doubling prep work. This additional time burden can lead to further collaboration with instructional de-

### TAKEAWAY
Curtailed access to research spaces, travel, and funding could severely impact certain faculty careers. But those who work in instructional technology and related fields will be in high demand.

signers, reducing time spent on other tasks (research, service), skewing work-life balance, prompting requests for additional administrative support, or simply causing exhaustion.

### RESEARCH AND STAFFING

The faculty research experience in 2020-21 will transform along similar lines. Researchers on site will enjoy greater access to their instruments and materials but mediated through anxiety about infection. How much deep cleaning will be necessary for the faculty to use the tools of their discipline? How many lab spaces will become less convivial because of masks, social distancing, shielding, and generalized dread of infection? How many travel plans to archives will become more difficult, if not impossible, because of public-health measures?

Those doing research remotely have already seen their options curtailed. The 2020-21 academic year may increase some access as more materials become available digitally. Remote instrumentation may improve in some cases. Costs may rise for these. Some faculty, such as those in the humanities, may not be that cramped in their work if materials are available online or through a researcher's personal library.

> **Stories of subpar education may circulate through social or mass media, including accounts shared by dissatisfied faculty members.**

Otherwise some number of researchers will see their research agendas — and therefore their careers — deferred. Evidence from this year suggests such delays will fall hardest on women and people of color. While faculty lives are altered, staff members experience similar transformations. If their institution is operating in an entirely online mode, those who were able to work remotely in the spring of 2020 will continue to do so, with the challenges already known: bandwidth limitations, technological fluency issues, adapting in-person habits to the digital world. As with the faculty, those staff members over 60 and/or with comorbidities are likely to seek remote work.

Each professional area responds differently. Librarians, for example, have accelerated their support for digital materials, which has run into challenges as publishers seek licensing arrangements that reduce access or make them more expensive. Instructional designers, educational technologists, and academic-computing specialists will be enormously in demand and will continue using their remote work as a teaching instance. IT staff see more of their time spent helping remote work and teaching occur; classroom support drops and changes as staff work around physical and social barriers.

### THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Students will experience 2020-21 through similar lenses. Some will avoid campuses from fear of infection or will be sent off campus when an outbreak occurs. Others will take classes in person and gradually adapt to the transformed world of shielded faculty members, some classes online (because of spatial limitations), peers always six feet away, and scant options for social life and entertainment. They will come up with creative ways of describing the experience: Monastery 2.0, Party Never, the No Sex School. And they will also violate public-health measures surreptitiously, openly, cleverly, or brazenly, at times in collaboration with each other.

As the academic year unfolds through these lived experiences, each institution faces choices about the pandemic. "Open" campus leadership carefully and continuously scrutinizes campus Covid data, checking against internal criteria for quarantines or toggling to entirely online operations. They monitor local and regional viral data, seeking to anticipate surges. They also track epidemiological research for best knowledge of mutations, countermeasures, vectors, and new comorbidities. Senior administration tries to navigate off-campus politics, from immediate town-gown relations to dynamics occurring at state and national levels. The latter will be especially challenging as a national election is held, with various crises possible.

## TAKEAWAY

With students facing either unpopular online courses or in-person classes that one expert calls "a combination of a monastery and a minimum-security prison," colleges face an enrollment squeeze.

Enrollment will be vital from the fall term's first day on, especially for the majority of institutions that depend on tuition and fees for their revenue. College leaders will struggle against summer "melt," in which students say they will enroll but then don't show up, and its autumnal successor, dropouts, as students find the online, blended, or "open" experience to be less than expected. Stories of subpar education may circu-

late through social or mass media, including accounts shared by dissatisfied faculty members. An on-campus education may resemble what Robert Kelchen of Seton Hall University described as "a combination of a monastery and a minimum-security prison," and that reputation will not be good for enrollment. Student-retention strategies, such as mobile nudges and increased advising, are ramped up.

### FINANCIAL PRESSURES

For some institutions, the financial pressures are enormous. To begin with, public universities are likely to experience further cuts in support, as state governments suffer declines in revenue (because of the recession) and increases in expenditures (thanks to increased public-health measures). Additionally, families may want to reduce their educational expenditures in that same economic environment. Unemployment rates in the teens mean large numbers of would-be students have unemployed family members, or they themselves are out of work, and prefer to redirect their time to making money rather than academic credits. Alter-

## TAKEAWAY

Already reeling from dwindling public support and enrollment challenges, colleges face even harsher cost-cutting — sharp reductions in programs and personnel, and, in desperate cases, possibly even the loss of tenured jobs.

natively, families may downshift their students' educational experiences by choosing less expensive campuses: a state college instead of a private research university, a community college instead of a state university, and so on.

Campus financials may suffer additional strains. Operational costs will go up as precautionary expenses mount: for testing, PPE, deep cleanings, plexiglass by the

mile, extra hours and hires for health-care and cleaning staff. All of those can rise even higher as infections and injuries occur. Medical costs, already steep, could increase as community members sicken. At the same time other revenue sources can run dry, such as room and board for residential students. A portion of the small number of colleges that turn profits on athletics will fail to do so.

These financial pressures do not strike a higher-education sector in robust health. As others and I have documented, swathes of the American postsecondary world have been under rising stresses for years or longer. Total enrollment peaked in 2012 and has inched relentlessly down ever since. International-student enrollment, so robust in the years leading up to 2016, paused after well-publicized school shootings, and with the implementation of President Trump's immigration policies. State funding per student has dropped since the 1980s. Student debt has shot past one and one half trillion dollars, creating not only human misery but a persistent and durable reputational debacle. Many campuses have tried to handle their financials by differential pricing through variable discounts. Their growing steepness — passing 50 percent at the median — suggested a fragility well before Covid-19 first appeared in Hubei province.

To this shaky structure, the coronavirus appears like a hammer blow. As 2020-21 unfolds, cash reserves dwindle. Expenditures rise and revenue slows. Administrative leaders, who already applied certain measures in the spring and summer of 2020 (pausing searches, furloughing some staff, carrying out voluntary pay cuts, reducing retirement matching, cutting professional development, not rehiring adjunct faculty, offering early retirement), now turn to harsher options. Cuts in personnel, the leading cost of most campuses, appear inevitable. At first this can take the form of salary freezes and benefit reductions, aimed at preserving jobs. Early-retirement offers become sweeter and/or more urgent.

As 2020-21 presses on, reductions in force become more likely. Staff, lacking tenure's protection, can be cut. Full-time, non-tenure track faculty can follow suit.

The more desperate institutions can declare financial exigency to remove tenure-track professors outright. Others will reconfigure academic programs, ending or merging some through prioritization processes of various degrees of faculty participation, removing the rationale to keep tenure-track faculty on the payroll.

Other institutional options may be available. Public-university systems may share programs or resources to save funds, which can mean removing support staff and faculty. State governments may encourage campus mergers as cost-saving measures. Private colleges can seek mergers, which are perhaps better named acquisitions. The number of closures could balloon.

## 2021-22:
## The second pandemic year

What does higher education look like after the first full Covid-19 year? To answer that, we can assemble what we learned in 2020, our models of how higher education functions and changes, and what we can determine about paths for the pandemic.

For the purposes of discussion, I will stipulate that the world will not receive an effective Covid-19 vaccine at scale by the fall of 2021. This is not a wild supposition, since no vaccine has ever been developed, tested, and distributed for any coronavirus. And research, trials, and distribution all take time and depend on something that does not yet, and might never, exist.

We can also stipulate that the virus does not fade away during climate or season changes, or for other reasons we cannot yet anticipate. Indeed, the rising medical consensus seems to be that this coronavirus, like its predecessors, will remain with us for the foreseeable future. Instead, let us assume that the pandemic continues its uneven course through the world during the 2021 calendar year.

Looking to 2022, we can envision some changes in American life overall driven by the Covid-19 experience. The decline in automobile ownership and use, especially among younger people, which led to procla-

mations of "peak car," may reverse, at least temporarily, as cars constitute effective social-distancing technologies, and fears of crowded mass transit remain. On campus we could see an increase in car usage, as well as a drop in shuttle ridership.

> ### TAKEAWAY
> Campus buildings may be built or reconfigured to accommodate social distancing. Urban campuses may lose allure due to anxieties over the pandemic.

### THE NEW BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment may start to change as architects of new and renovated buildings make room for greater social-distancing structures: wider hallways, larger windows and doors that open to the outside, built-in partitions, more elaborate entrance ways, and more home offices. Open-plan offices may vanish while room sizes increase, as we shift away from a sense of being too closely packed together. The number of objects and surfaces needing to be touched should decline in favor of automatic mechanisms or those commanded by mobile devices.

We should expect such architectural changes to start appearing on college campuses. Those in warmer climates will conduct more activities outside under protection that gradually becomes more permanent. New residence halls will combine large open areas with tiny single rooms. Ever-larger lecture halls, for improved social distancing, enter planning.

Urban areas may lose some of their allure. The past century has seen a steady migration away from rural areas and into suburbs and cites, but anxiety over crowding could induce some to prefer the country's low density and open spaces. Perhaps this will benefit rural colleges as they recruit students, faculty, and staff.

On the other hand, the pro-urban tendency may prove too strong to reverse, especially as rural areas still have lower infrastructure, services, and general offerings than do cities.

### THE ACADEMIC OUTLOOK

We may see shifts in majors and graduate degrees as a result of the pandemic. It seems reasonable to assume that more students will enroll in Covid-related fields, starting with the full range of allied health care. A nation facing a major health crisis clearly needs more medical and public-health staff, from nurses and surgeons to hospital administrators, programmers, and first responders. Mental-health demands will be much higher, especially for those dealing with pandemic-related trauma, so psychology numbers could grow. We may also experience an upswing of interest in business and economics, as the nation struggles to rebuild its shocked economy and stressed polity. Other academic fields may pitch classes to meet these needs: history of pandemics, literature of plagues, the ethics of infection. Each of these developments may be supported by outside entities, including state governments, federal funders, corporate donors, and foundations.

Demand for mental-health services, already rising before the pandemic, should increase even further, requiring more resources directed to campus counseling. Faculty may require new levels of support in assessing and responding to students needing psychological aid. Similarly, on-site staff will be needed for pandemic issues, from detection to treatment and quarantine. All of this arrives as campus finances are increasingly stressed.

### TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

Certain technological trends may accelerate. Robots, both autonomous and remotely operated, hold appeal for work in dangerous areas like hospitals, or areas of frequent human interaction. We could imagine a greater presence of bots in everyday life, from retail interactions to deliveries and medical care. Campuses welcoming their popu-

lations back may find automation a useful tool. At the same time, computer-science and related departments could not only contribute research, but also enjoy an enrollment boost from interested students.

### TAKEAWAY

Robots and automation will have a greater presence on campus, the videoconference industry will explode and improve, and computer-science fields will see an enrollment boost.

Obviously, videoconferencing has become vital to everyday life. Video tools now mediate medical consultations, classes, relationships, even weddings and funerals. That industry is under immense pressure to deliver quality and also to innovate. Accordingly, we will very likely see more businesses enter the market, differentiating themselves by better visuals and sound or by additional options. Telepresence robots, like the Double2 or Kubi, may build user bases seeking more interactivity than a flat screen. Virtual worlds, such as VirBELA, will also seek to compete with video. Campus IT departments will have to decide which of these options best suits their myriad needs, including accessibility and bandwidth limitations.

This combination of choice and possibility is most dramatically seen in the world of virtual or extended reality. A VR headset can offer a much more immersive sense of a place or person than a two-dimensional screen does. And yet colleges run into a set of challenges in deploying them: a small amount of educational content, accessibility limitations, and the digital divide in both hardware and connectivity.

Technology in general has lately given rise to widespread concerns about privacy, but the pandemic could change this, as public-health measures demand detailed surveillance and tracking of individuals and sharing of that data. American society and individuals may well be conflicted

about what feels intrusive, yet also needed. It may be difficult if not impossible to strike a workable balance. This could lead to a decrease in privacy across the board as our motions and medical status are routinely tracked, analyzed, shared, and acted upon. We may culturally adjust to this, finding it necessary to prevent human misery and death. We may also see opposition and resistance, such as people refusing to check in with QR codes, disabling smartphone tracking, or calling for open data on public figures as a kind of "*sous*veillance."

Campuses with on-site populations will struggle with this balancing act. Faculty, staff, and students may protest or resist the new surveillance, driving challenges to governance. We could also see faculty, staff, and students criticizing peers for not complying with these public-health measures. American academia's ethos of care for students will be redefined by this argument.

### THE CULTURAL IMPACT

Beyond technology, it is difficult to forecast how science in general will appear in American culture. The year 2020 has revealed several different attitudes to different parts of the scientific enterprise: a sober embrace of medical science against a deadly threat; an opposition to science as politically biased and motivated; a desire to seek alternatives to science in religion, folk tradition, or innovative remedies. Each of these attitudes has roots in recent history and

> ## TAKEAWAY
> As older adults find cherished bonds to academe abruptly cut, a "lost generation" of young adults will struggle to start careers.

culture, so as Covid-19 persists into 2021 and beyond, we could expect all of them to manifest. Academic scientists who look to the nonacademic world for communication, funding, and regulation will have to navigate some uneven and challenging terrain. Public science may be difficult to do, as well as politically fraught. Teaching science, especially topics related to the pandemic, may

> ## Technology in general has lately given rise to widespread concerns about privacy, but the pandemic could change this, as public-health measures demand detailed surveillance and tracking of individuals and sharing of that data.

elicit opposition from students along the lines of creationists pushing back against biologists teaching evolution.

A different cultural development concerns the transformation of two generations. First, unless the impact of Covid changes, senior citizens will continue to face a terrible threat, as they are, statistically, by far the most likely to be gravely injured or killed by the virus. Many have seen their lifestyles upended, forced into nonacademic versions of Kelchen's monastery/minimum-security prison. This is especially painful for those with cognitive disorders and/or major medical conditions.

This matters on multiple levels for higher education. Teaching elders has been an interest for colleges, offered in a variety of ways; those learners would be to some degree reduced. Some seniors retired near campuses to partake of their cultural and intellectual activity; that is now stymied. Many have grandchildren and children who are college students, and now run the very real risk of receiving the virus from their progeny. Covid is sapping the bonds connecting academia with elders.

Second, on the other end of the demographic spectrum, rising younger generations are seeing their lives hit hard right

when they should be taking off. The youngest millennials and oldest Gen Zers are starting careers in the depths of a major recession. Millennials and Zers alike navigate family, romantic, and community relationships through a maze of Zoom and interpersonal infection threats. Those under 25 may well consider themselves a lost generation.

That matters quite clearly for colleges. We seek to inspire and educate a generation in a dark time. Its choices of classes, majors, and careers now take on an economically decisive if not desperate hue. The advising, career, and mental-health needs of these students may skyrocket beyond our present capacity to support. As alumni, they may seek closer ties to their graduating institutions than did older generations.

If we consider all of these developments and trends together, they can illuminate further courses for colleges to take after 2021.

### THE POST-PANDEMIC CAMPUS

By 2022, we can see that American academia has shrunk slightly, at the macro level. At that point dozens perhaps 100 mergers could be underway. More than 100 campuses may have closed. The total number of faculty and staff employed by private and public institutions has declined. Total student enrollment has also declined. Overall, American higher education has contracted as a result of the pandemic.

### TAKEAWAY

By 2022 American higher education will have contracted, with dozens of mergers, more than 100 campus closings, and a decline in enrollment and faculty staffing.

Some fields have expanded while others shrank, compared with 2020. The full reach of allied health enjoys greater numbers of class enrollments, majors, degrees, and institutional support. In contrast, some of the

humanities have dwindled, losing all of the same. All disciplines, regardless of enrollment, have lost members to pandemic-related death, disability, care duties, or financial ruin; not all have been replaced. Some interdisciplinary programs arose, aimed squarely at the pandemic, connecting public health, medical fields, economics, political science,

> ## We seek to inspire and educate a generation in a dark time.

and psychology. "Majoring in Covid" is a fair description for students in those syntheses.

Campuses continue to offer a mix of online and in-person modes for students, faculty, and staff. HyFlex is an overarching concept or ideal to aim for as, broadly speaking, campus populations prefer to choose how to conduct their studies and work. Videoconferencing and immersive reality connect many academics. Part of departmental and divisional administration now entails HyFlex wrangling, including scheduling, arranging technological resources, sharing health information and guidance, and facilitating professional development. The micropolitics of choosing online or in person scores more than a few relationships.

Academic research continues, but it, too, has shrunk somewhat as many projects are delayed or canceled thanks to Covid. Male researchers widen the achievement gap ahead of women, as the latter are more likely to withdraw from academia for family care. White and Asian men are similarly ahead of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, who are not only more likely to exit institutions, but also more likely to suffer from the virus.

Staff members, too, have left and not been replaced. Some are Covid-19 casualties. Instructional designers appear in greater numbers than they once did, although there is churn as some burn out from overwork and others are poached by

the business world (itself working hard to expand its digital training). Librarians continue to migrate resources and access online, negotiating with publishers. Many offices strain to conduct their work with fewer resources, including people.

Student life is a shadow of what it once was. There are few parties, and they are marked either by social-distancing measures or by a daring flaunting of them. Campus events tend toward the digital in the form of meetings and performances. Fraternities and sororities have shrunk in number, as some are suspended and others decide they cannot reasonably operate during the pandemic. Campus athletics are often suspended as well, except for those played in areas with low infection rates and elaborate public-health precautions. Esports, in contrast, keep growing in popularity.

**THE NEW REALITY**

Finally, we may also experience a cultural shift. For two generations, American culture has been convinced that more people need postsecondary experience. The number of enrolled students has reflected that, ballooning from the 1980s until 2012. That cultural conviction could change. Fear of student debt combined with anxiety over jobs could make higher ed less appealing. A rising populist sensibility that the entire system is rigged could include higher education within that indictment, deeming the sector to be part of a scam perpetuated by elites to maintain and expand inequality.

Meanwhile, as professionals working in skilled trades age out, demand for young workers in those fields should rise, tempting some teens from the college path. At the same time anti-academic attitudes have grown among conservatives. The "more college for all" consensus could break, drawing down both enrollment and public support.

> For two generations American culture has been convinced that more people need post-secondary experience. That cultural conviction could change.

Yet we may also experience a deep longing for the pre-pandemic campus. Adults and elders will tell nostalgic stories of riotous parties, awkward hookups, crowded concerts, and fierce protests. They will remember their favorite (or hated) professors as bodily presences, making impressions not only with ideas but by tone of voice and particular gestures. As semesters and years pass under Covid's shadow, this vision of higher education may become burnished and romantic, a subject of fascination for those who had not experienced it, and an ideal for a postviral future.

# Teaching and Learning

## By FLOWER DARBY

**Flower Darby** is a scholar and expert in equitable and inclusive online pedagogy. She is the author, with James M. Lang, of *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes* (Wiley, 2019). Her new book, *The Spark of Online Learning: How Technology and Emotion Science Ignite Engagement in Every Class*, will be published in 2021 by West Virginia University Press.

O NLINE EDUCATION will become increasingly important in the wake of the spring of 2020. So will intentionally supporting students of color in *all* courses, regardless of format. The most responsive colleges — those best prepared to adapt to the teaching approaches of the future — will invest heavily in supporting inclusive and equitable online-learning experiences.

To flourish post-Covid-19, colleges must direct resources both to expanding professional development in online teaching and to growing and embedding instructional-design teams in academic affairs. Inclusive online teaching must become central to the mission of every institution, or it will be left behind.

Why make such bold claims? Because we experienced a calamitous, one-two punch in the spring of 2020 that rocked higher education like never before. Because of the coronavirus, we pivoted online in just a week or two in March. The lasting impact of this frenzied shift? Teaching without technology is no longer a thing. If we're teaching, we're using tech. That's not going to change.

But before we had come to terms with our sudden shift to emergency remote teaching, the second blow hit: the brutal death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in police custody in Minneapolis, in May. The nationwide protests that followed, along with growing tensions in our ever more polarized society over race-based atrocities, have uncovered an ugly truth about our teaching: We're not doing nearly enough to support historically underrepresented and marginalized students through evidence-based teaching practices. That's got to change.

We have a choice: Do we adapt, survive, and flourish, like the avian dinosaurs that evolved into birds? Or do we resist adaptation and die out, mired in the mud of how we've always done things?

### ELEVATING INCLUSIVE TEACHING

The future of teaching post-Covid-19 is not just about better teaching with technology. It's about seizing this unforeseen moment to radically rethink what happens in our classes and how that can affect our society. As Beth Zemsky writes in a blog post on diversity, equity, and inclusion in a pandemic, never waste a crisis.

In recent months, faculty members and administrators have spent countless hours evaluating the merits of teaching approaches that were almost unheard of before Covid-19, such as HyFlex and blended synchronous models. Institutions have invest-

ed millions of dollars outfitting classrooms with technology to support teaching in these formats, as well as many hours of staff time to train professors to use new teaching technologies.

### TAKEAWAY

Colleges must offer faculty members better professional training in how to make online learning more inclusive, and they must better integrate instructional designers into academic affairs.

Likewise, faculty members have devoted a huge amount of time to learning to teach online, both synchronously using Zoom or other platforms, and asynchronously using learning-management systems and other ed-tech tools. Indeed, the very fact that the terms "synchronous" and "asynchronous" have become common parlance speaks volumes. In fact, we've always taught in a combination of synchronous and asynchronous formats: We used asynchronous assignments like readings and other homework to prepare students for what we now call synchronous teaching — in other words, what we would do during class.

We would be wasting this crisis if we scrapped all this investment of time, energy, and money once it's deemed safe to be in classrooms together. But there's little chance of returning to old norms. Indeed, pre-Covid-19 studies published in December 2019 by the Educause Center for Analysis and Research showed that while both faculty and students continue to value face-to-face, a slight majority prefers a blend of online and on-the-ground instruction.

Instead, colleges will look to continue and expand these innovative flexible formats, as evidenced by findings reported in "Chloe 5: The Pivot to Remote Teaching in Spring 2020 and Its Impact," published in July 2020. This Changing Landscape of Online Education report is the fifth in a series of studies

conducted by Quality Matters, which promotes equitable and effective online learning, and Eduventures Research. This Chloe study focuses specifically on teaching experiences in the spring of 2020 and what they mean for class formats moving forward.

Of the 308 chief online officers who responded, 80 percent said they intended to strengthen and build upon the hastily assembled solutions devised in March 2020. We can conclude that even postpandemic, online teaching and learning will grow. That means improving professional-development opportunities for faculty members and expanding the instructional-design teams that support them. The Chloe report found that surveyed institutions employed an average of three instructional designers. Many colleges have only one. That's not going to cut it.

Another recent study highlights inequities in students' experience with remote learning soon after the pandemic hit. A July 2020 report from Tyton Partners, a consulting firm that works on

> We can focus on the interwoven aims of teaching with equitable, evidence-based practices and increasing online offerings to improve access *and* degree completion for all our students.

student-centered educational technology, shares findings from a national, random-sample survey of over 1,000 students. "Suddenly Online: A National Survey of Undergraduates During the Covid-19 Pandemic," revealed, among other things, that compared with white students, Black and Hispanic students faced more challenges in remote learning. (Other racial and ethnic categories were not sufficiently repre-

## First-Year Persistence and Retention

Among students who entered college for the first time in fall 2017, Black students had the lowest persistence rate, and just over half of Black students returned to the starting institution.

■ Continued enrollment at starting institution    ■ Continued enrollment at other institution

| | Overall | Asian | White | Hispanic | Black |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Continued enrollment at other institution | 12% | 12% | 16% | 11% | 14% |
| Continued enrollment at starting institution | 62% | 73% | 62% | 60% | 52% |
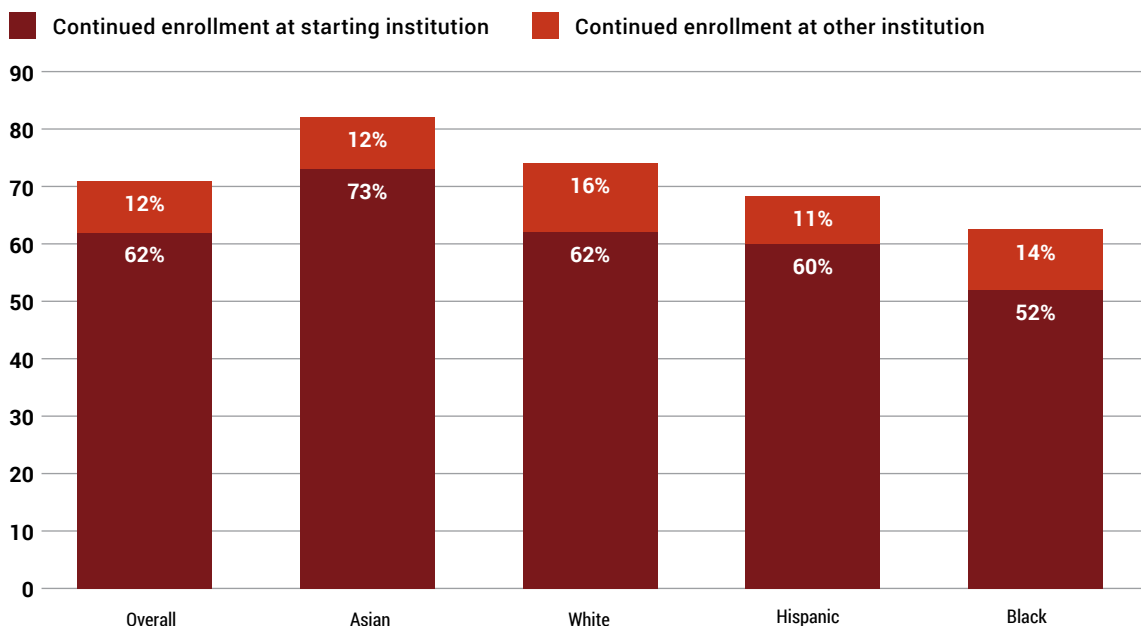
Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

sented to draw reliable conclusions). Black and Hispanic students, as well as low-income and rural students, struggled more than white students in several areas, the survey found: They were more likely to use older and slower laptops to access coursework, to struggle with internet connectivity, and to face family demands and home responsibilities that made it harder to find quiet time and space for academic work.

Though these findings relate only to remote learning in the spring of 2020, they highlight the systemic inequities faced by some student groups when engaging in online education. Let's take a moment to ask ourselves some hard questions. Have we truly recognized the opportunity that we as educators have to deal with systemic racial tensions in our society? Have we seen the necessity of helping our Black and Brown students successfully earn college degrees that can promote their social mobility? Have we bought into the importance of educating more of our citizens, knowing that higher-education levels are widely believed to lead to increased tolerance, compassion, and respect for diverse perspectives?

I suspect we have not. But it's not too late. We can focus on the interwoven aims of teaching with equitable, evidence-based practices and increasing online offerings to improve access *and* degree completion for all our students.
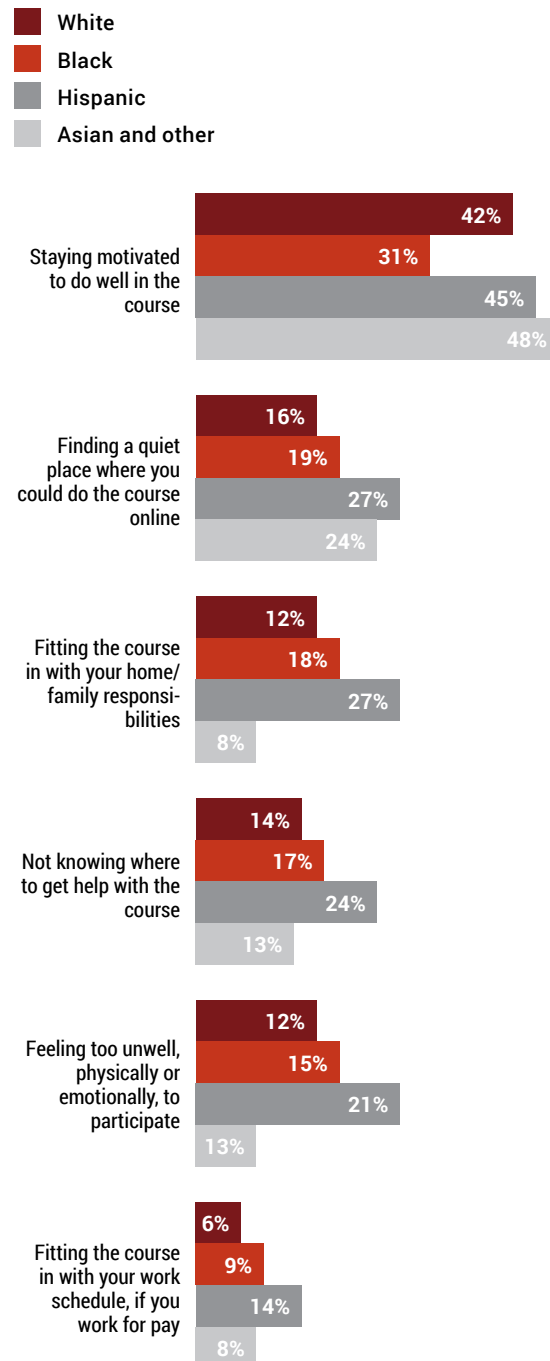
## VALUING NEW LEARNING TOOLS

The emergency online pivot in March 2020 revealed gaps in faculty preparation to teach with tech. My colleagues in teaching centers and digital-learning support teams scrambled to provide training to faculty members who had never even logged in to their college's LMS, and to teach new skills to those who refused to use this powerful technology tool for anything more than posting a syllabus or using its grade center.

We don't want to find ourselves in that situation again. Colleges must help faculty members see the value of these tools and carve out time for them to take part in professional learning opportunities.

More importantly, we must honor the time it takes to adopt these new approaches to

## Percentage of Students Experiencing 'Major' Problems, by Race/Ethnicity

Black and Hispanic students had more difficulties finding a quiet place to work, trying to fit their courses in around paid work, and not knowing where to get help with the course than their white and Asian counterparts.

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian and other

**Staying motivated to do well in the course**
- White: 42%
- Black: 31%
- Hispanic: 45%
- Asian and other: 48%

**Finding a quiet place where you could do the course online**
- White: 16%
- Black: 19%
- Hispanic: 27%
- Asian and other: 24%

**Fitting the course in with your home/family responsibilities**
- White: 12%
- Black: 18%
- Hispanic: 27%
- Asian and other: 8%

**Not knowing where to get help with the course**
- White: 14%
- Black: 17%
- Hispanic: 24%
- Asian and other: 13%

**Feeling too unwell, physically or emotionally, to participate**
- White: 12%
- Black: 15%
- Hispanic: 21%
- Asian and other: 13%

**Fitting the course in with your work schedule, if you work for pay**
- White: 6%
- Black: 9%
- Hispanic: 14%
- Asian and other: 8%

Source: Tyton Partners

learning, to try new equity-focused teaching-with-tech approaches, to reflect on our experiences, to adjust our new approaches, and to reflect again.

Doing this will require us to acknowledge that tech has long been viewed as an add-on at many institutions, rather than being integrated into the teaching mission. Academic technologies have received insufficient financial support, teaching in online spaces has been undervalued, and instructional designers and other support-staff members have been underappreciated by many faculty members.

The coronavirus changed all that. The role of technology in carrying out the mission of our institutions changed in a heartbeat. But the cultural issues run even deeper. Teaching itself has historically been undervalued at many institutions, particularly those that emphasize research.

To be sure, many colleges recognize the importance of good teaching, notably community colleges and other two-year institutions whose mission is work-force training. But there are too many change-averse faculty members who have refused to try new things, and who have not seen it as their job to help *all* students learn.

And many institutions haven't done much to help. My own institution is a pi-

<div style="background:#c0392b;color:white;padding:1em;">

## TAKEAWAY

Higher education as a whole needs to do far more to better integrate technology tools into its core teaching mission.

</div>

oneer of online and flexible educational pathways, a leader in this field. But higher education as a whole needs to do far more to better integrate technology into its core teaching mission.

### HOW CAN MEANINGFUL CHANGE OCCUR?

The future of teaching as I envision it requires true systemic change. How will we do this? How will we enact true and lasting transformation of our centuries-old, deeply ingrained culture of valuing scholarship over teaching?

Fortunately, the pandemic has allowed us to tackle the first step: awareness of the need for change. Anyone who has ever made a lifestyle change, such as giving up smoking or losing weight, knows this truth: In order for a change to stick, we first have to be aware that we need to make the change. When we're blind to our need for change, nothing will happen.

In a previously unimaginable shift, the pandemic forced us to acknowledge the centrality of technology in our teaching. Without tech, we wouldn't have been able to carry on and finish the spring semester. Technology enabled us to get millions of students across the finish line. In many cases it didn't go perfectly, which only strengthens our growing awareness of the need to better equip faculty members to teach effectively with technology. We see more clearly than ever before that this is a top priority in our institutional missions.

But the online pivot also revealed real inequities in higher ed. And so, equally important, we must help faculty members see the value of equity-focused strategies in their teaching. A pedagogical partnership program led by Alison Cook-Sather as part of the Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr College teams students and faculty members to capture student voices in faculty-development opportunities. Among the recommendations that emerged, for example, was one called "Start With and Sustain the Human." It proposed asking students to complete a survey that invited them to "share what they are comfortable sharing about their living/studying situation, their state of mind/mental health, their access to technology and resources." Another recommendation, "Embrace Equitable and Accessible Practices," suggested posting recordings of class meetings along with a time-stamped topical outline of the recording, so students can navigate to any sections they wish to review in more detail.

With a little thought, it becomes evident that simple changes in our teaching practice can help us better support all of our

students, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. Enacting meaningful and lasting change also requires that we truly *want* to make the change. We'll slide

back into unhealthy lifestyle habits like smoking or overeating if we don't deeply want to change our ways. The same holds true here — we'll slide back into ineffective and inequitable teaching practices if we don't see the value of change. Again, the pandemic has done a lot of this work for us.

No one enjoyed the sensation of being thrown in at the teaching-with-tech deep end. Out of the desire to be more prepared, faculty members across the country have used the summer of 2020 to learn how to better teach in online environments. Institutions must similarly want to change. Unless they buy into the impor-

tance of elevating the value of effective teaching, to change structures and reward systems, we won't make significant progress in this area.

But we must. We have no choice. So this is a call to stoke the fires of institutional desire to change, of our will to change. We must meaningfully support effective teaching, make it a part of our expectations of faculty that we engage regularly in learning how to teach better, and revolutionize graduate programs so that future professors have had effective pedagogical preparation. Without this will to change, we will waste this crisis.

## HOW COLLEGES CAN SUPPORT EFFECTIVE TEACHING

As is probably clear by now, many colleges must re-evaluate their view of the relationship between research and teaching, as well as the relationship between teaching and technology. Among the steps needed to achieve this huge cultural shift:

- Graduate education must devote more attention to teaching. Pedagogical preparation must form a central part of Ph.D. programs, and faculty members must encourage students to focus as much effort and energy on teacher prep as they do on research and scholarship.

- Radical changes in hiring practices are needed. Faculty hiring committees should consider not only job candidates' publications, research grants, and awards, but also their efforts to develop inclusive teaching practices.

- Faculty members should be recognized and rewarded for taking part in professional-learning experiences that promote more inclusive teaching with tech. To do that, we must change the promotion and tenure criteria.

- Colleges must decrease their reliance on student evaluations as measures of effective teaching. Models like those being developed by the National Science Foun-

## Chief Online Officers's Top Targets for Improving Remote Teaching:

- ◼ Faculty training and professional development

- ◼ Standardization on common technology tools

- ◼ Increased faculty-student interaction

- ◼ Enhanced student orientation

- ◼ Introduction of quality standards

Source: CHLOE 5: The Pivot to Remote Teaching in Spring 2020 and Its Impact," Quality Matters & Eduventures Research

dation-funded TEval project, which features a multidimensional view of teaching effectiveness that relies on various factors in addition to student feedback, must be meaningfully integrated.

- Colleges need to better integrate technology and academics. The bifurcation of technology services and academics must come to an end. Information-technology staff members should not tell faculty members how to teach, nor should professors dismiss the recommendations of colleagues in IT.

Within the past few years we've seen the emergence of titles like vice provost for student success, indicating institutions' willingness to invest meaningfully in such efforts. Now may be the time to create leadership positions with a special focus on inclusive technology-enabled teaching — such as vice provost of inclusive teaching with technology. This role would function as a bridge between IT and academic affairs.

## TAKEAWAY

Colleges should support effective teaching with technology by building expectations into the faculty-reward system, offering more faculty training, making instructional design a higher priority, and emphasizing pedagogical preparation in graduate programs.

The person in this role would give equal consideration to technology priorities like classroom and remote-teaching tech tools, as well as to the pedagogical needs of faculty members who use these tools.

Colleges could also create faculty lines within departments that are devoted to improving technology-enabled teaching. Faculty members in these roles would function as experts on inclusive teaching with technology. They would teach courses in their discipline and conduct research on effective, equitable, technology-enabled teaching. While faculty members respect one another, they have not yet developed the same kind of respect for instructional designers and educational consultants.

### TRY, FAIL, AND TRY AGAIN

These changes in institutional structures and culture will go a long way toward transforming teaching practices to better support today's students. But faculty members themselves, of course, must be willing to change their practices.

To be sure, many of us care deeply about our students' abilities to learn and succeed. Many instructors love teaching, thrive on it, are energized by it. We want to learn how to teach more effectively with technology, the primary vehicle for our teaching in the immediate future.

In recent months I've worked with thousands of faculty members across the country. The ones most likely to emerge from this pandemic with powerful new teaching strategies have an internal narrative that goes something like this: *This is scary. I'm not good at it. But I have to teach. And this is the only venue I have. So I'm ready to learn. I'm ready to try, fail, and try again — next time a little smarter. If this is the only way to teach my students during these times, then I'll roll up my sleeves and get on with it.*

When faculty members can take advantage of this opportunity, and when their institutions can make the time and space for this to happen, we have the best chance of seeing equity-focused, technology-enabled teaching that will lead to student success.

# The Student Experience

## By KARIN FISCHER

**Karin Fischer** is a longtime higher-education reporter and contributing writer for *The Chronicle*, who has covered international education, colleges and the economy, the changing student body, and other issues.

T HE GREAT DEPRESSION and World War II shaped the Greatest Generation. The Vietnam War left its mark on baby boomers. For many millennials, the defining moment was the September 11 terror attacks.

The coronavirus pandemic is likely to leave a similar imprint on Generation Z, loosely defined as those Americans born between 1995 and 2010.

The infectious virus has affected the lives of young and old, rich and poor, around the world. But seismic events like this tend to have an outsize impact on teenagers and young adults, its aftershocks reverberating throughout their lives. It can set habits, influence educational and vocational choices, and leave a lasting emotional stamp.

"What happens in adolescence and young adulthood affects how you navigate through life," says Corey Seemiller, an expert on Gen Z and the author of several books on generational trends, including *Gen Z Goes to College*. "Right now they're at a stage of life when they're trying to make meaning."

> "What happens in adolescence and young adulthood affects how you navigate through life."

Covid-19 is multifaceted in its impact: It's both an economic and a public-health crisis. It has changed society and work and reshaped everyday interactions among people. A quarter of Gen Zers believe that they will be much worse off when the pandemic is over.

Much of higher education's response to the coronavirus has focused on preparing for this fall. But Gen Z will fill classrooms and quads for the next decade, and the ways in which Covid-19 affects them will have a long-lasting impact on colleges. And those students who do come to campus will carry with them the aftereffects not just of Covid-19 but also of the protests over racial injustice that convulsed the country in the summer.

Colleges have been scrambling to get back to normal, but they will face new pressures to change and evolve, says Julian Alssid, chief marketplace officer at SocialTech.ai, an online aggregator of short-term credentials and courses offered by community colleges across the country. "I hear a lot of hope that we're going to go back to where we were, that we're going to put Humpty Dumpty back together," he says. "I think that's a lot of wishful thinking."

Here's how Covid-19 is likely to shape the educational preferences of Gen Z:

**Covid-19 will accelerate the move away from traditional face-to-face learning. But even digital natives prefer a blended approach to strictly online classes.**

Gen Z is the first generation of true digital natives, brought up on the internet. Learning, communicating, socializing, dating, shopping, playing — they've always happened online. "It's not change to Gen Z," says Jason Dorsey, president of the Center for Generational Kinetics, a research-and-strategy firm. "It's all they've ever known."

Online learning would seem like a great fit for those of a generation with a reputation for always being glued to their cellphones. But when ReGenerations, a firm that advises companies on generational shifts, surveyed 18- to 24-year-olds in the late spring, there was a broad rejection of remote learning. Just 2 percent were interested in attending college exclusively online, while three in four said they wanted a campus experience.

In fact, research by Strada Education Network during the pandemic shows that middle-aged Americans are more open to online study than are those of traditional

## Gen Z Prefers F2F Instruction

A survey of more than than 500 18-24-year-olds said they'd prefer to go back to in-person learning when the pandemic is over.

- 🟥 In person
- ⬛ Hybrid
- ⬜ Online



2%
25%
72%
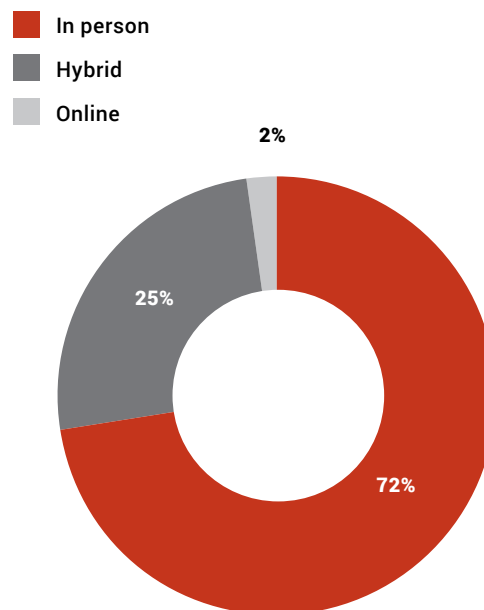
Source: ReGenerations

college age. That may be, in part, because current students' experience with the sudden shift online was less than optimal.

It may also reflect what each group hopes to get out of the educational experience. Mid-career workers often turn to online learning to add or enhance a specific skill or area of knowledge. But it's the social aspect of education and the potential to start building a professional network that are key priorities for younger students. The latter can be more difficult to do virtually, says Andrew R. Hanson, Strada's director of research.

Paul LeBlanc, president of Southern New Hampshire University, says colleges shouldn't read too much into the spring experience. Classes were moved online without much planning. And levels of student satisfaction should be measured against expectations. The students now complaining about the shift to online education were those who had made the decision to study in-person, often in residential settings, he notes. "They signed up for something else."

That said, Southern New Hampshire has seen a movement toward youth among its online students. The average age of its online learners is now 28 and trending younger, with 30,000 of traditional college age. "It snuck up on us," LeBlanc says.

Over all, the number of Americans who enroll in an online or hybrid course has been on the rise, with a third having taken at least one, according to Strada. In recent surveys, six in 10 respondents said they would prefer to learn in an online or hybrid environment, even if Covid-19 were not a threat. Still, Americans' perceptions of online education remain mixed, with about half saying they are confident in its quality and a roughly equal share unsure.

One group whose attitude toward online learning may have changed, however, is faculty members. Margaret Everett, provost at Roger Williams University, in Rhode Island, says she hopes that the pandemic puts to bed the "either-or" debates over online learning. "It's been the culture wars of academe," she says.

The swiftness of the move to online learning gave faculty members permission to experiment with the medium and to see that it doesn't have to mean sacrificing quality. In the future, Everett says, colleges should focus on what particular model best serves a particular group of students, an academic program, or a set of learning outcomes, and not on the delivery mechanism itself. "We should meet the students where they are," she says. "We thrive when we think that way."

### TAKEAWAY

Although Gen Z students might seem to be a great fit for online education, a survey found they overwhelmingly rejected learning that was exclusively online, and wanted a campus experience.

**Gen Z will question the return on investment and look for college to become a better bridge to work.**

Compared with previous generations, Gen Z is more likely to go to college. Fifty-seven percent of 18- to 24-year-olds are currently enrolled in two- or four-year colleges, according to Pew Research. That compares with 52 percent of millennials and 43 percent of Gen Xers at a similar time in their lives.

"They value education," says Ruth Igielnik, a senior researcher at Pew and one of the authors of a recent report on Gen Z. "It's the defining feature of this generation."

But Gen Zers' attitude toward college is practical. They see it as a gatekeeper, a tollway on the path to a career. In the University of California at Los Angeles's long-running survey of college freshmen, the overwhelming majority said getting a better job was a very important reason to go to college.

Stability and financial security are valued by Gen Zers, whose childhood was marked by recession. Covid-19 and the resulting economic downturn — the most severe since the Great Depression — threatens to upend the stability Gen Z seeks. Already,

Pew has found, older members of the generation, those above the age of 18, were the group of adult workers most likely to report that they or someone in their household had lost a job or taken a pay cut because of the outbreak.

> **"We tell them to go to college to get a good job, but there aren't good jobs now. How long can we expect them to listen to our aspirational messages?"**

ReGenerations, the research firm, found that 80 percent of the Gen Zers it surveyed in the spring were concerned about how Covid-19 could affect their financial stability, and that 67 percent said it could worsen their job prospects. Half said they worried it could disrupt their education. Archrival, a youth-culture consulting firm, said teenagers and young adults worried that Covid-19 could leave an "asterisk in their life résumés."

The pandemic could weaken Gen Z's faith in higher education as a guaranteed path to a career, says Seemiller, the author, who is also an associate professor of leadership studies in education and organizations at Wright State University. "We tell them to go to college to get a good job, but there aren't good jobs now. How long can we expect them to listen to our aspirational messages?"

The oldest members of Gen Z, now in college or recent graduates, will enter one of the toughest job markets in recent history. Even so, in a number of fields, such as health care and technology, jobs go begging for qualified applicants. And the shift to remote work could play to Gen Z's digital strengths, says Steven Taylor, founder and chief executive of Ed2Work, which does research and advocacy on developing career-ready skills.

"There are still head winds, but this generation could have a leg up."

Traditional four-year colleges will have to get over the distinction between the academic and the vocational. The challenge isn't just philosophical; it's structural, says Marie Cini, Ed2Work's chief strategy officer. Institutions often do a poor job of integrating career development and education, with the career-services office a place that students visit only in their final semesters.

Colleges will need to make career preparation part of students' experience from the start, with first-year advisers acting as both career coach and academic guide, helping students choose courses that fit their long-term career interests and drawing links between what happens in the classroom and the work students might want to do, Cini says. Throughout their studies, students should have regular connections to work, through alumni speakers or real-world projects. The focus should be on exploration and making connections, she says, not channeling students into narrow vocational paths.

At National Louis University, in Illinois, all undergraduates take part in Career Bridge. Nivine Megahed, president of the private college, says she was spurred to start the four-year-old program after she encountered too many graduates working in low-paying, service-industry jobs —

<div style="background:#c0392b;color:white;padding:1em;">

### TAKEAWAY

Gen Zers will question the value of a college education more strongly than ever, forcing traditional four-year colleges to get over the distinction between the academic and the vocational.

</div>

the same positions they'd had as students. When Megahed spoke with those graduates, she realized that they had struggled to make the transition to work: They didn't

understand what jobs their studies had prepared them for or know how to fill out a professional résumé; perhaps they had bombed a job interview.

Initially, Career Bridge coursework began in students' junior year, but that was too late, Megahed says. Now they start in their first year, learning presentation skills, job shadowing, and pairing with professional mentors. Each student is assigned a career coach in addition to an academic adviser.

Career support doesn't come cheap and requires trade-offs — National Louis doesn't field sports teams, for one — but Megahed believes the investment is worth it. "It's clear to me that higher ed has to own it," she says.

**Gen Zers will seek education on their own terms, in bite sizes.**

The College of Health Care Professions, a Texas-based institution that trains students in sonography, medical billing, and other fields, represents another shift coming to higher education: the breaking down of education into bite-sized chunks, such as short-term credentials or badges that can help students secure work in a tough job market.

While the college offers two- and four-year degrees, most students start in nine- or 13-month certificate programs, which allow them quick entry to the workplace. They can then transfer those credits into a degree program or choose to add other certificates to expand their employment options. The idea is to "stack and build," says Eric C. Bing, the for-profit college's chief executive. "We don't want them to get stuck."

Traditional colleges, too, have begun to move in this direction. The University at Buffalo, New York University, and Penn State's College of Engineering are examples of institutions that offer a portfolio of badges and certificates. Georgia Tech has worked to break down its academic offerings into microcredentials and mini-courses that were more granular and flexible than typical semester-long offerings.

The pandemic could serve as an inflection point. An "unbundled" education, says Strada's Hanson, could be "an enduring legacy of the crisis" as Americans move to

## A Tough Job Market

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the job outlook for recent college grads.

# 63%
of business leaders who actively hire college graduates are halting or slowing down their recruitment efforts because of Covid-19.

# 53%
of businesses nationwide directly recruit college students and/or recent graduates.

# 25%
of businesses are shifting their recruitment of college students to graduates in only certain academic majors.

# Only 18%
of respondents indicated that their hiring practices have not changed amid the pandemic.

# Nearly 7 in 10
business leaders who recruit from online programs have slowed hiring.

# However 74%
of business leaders who actively recruit college students think the quality of online education

Source: Best Colleges

take greater ownership of their own learning experiences. A less-packaged educational experience, compared with a full degree program, could appear accessible to more people, he says.

Gen Z in particular could be receptive to this approach. Even before the pandemic, young Americans didn't share the previous generations' expectations of having one stable job in their careers. Instead, they expect to do different kinds of work as the economy shifts, with 80 percent saying they will be part of the gig economy. Covid-19 could only increase that job instability.

Gen Zers may look for certificates that formalize and recognize expertise they have picked up on their own, such as skills in social media, digital technology, or entrepreneurship. They may also need training in areas where they are lacking, such as soft skills like interpersonal communications and teamwork.

If colleges don't offer those short-term educational opportunities, Gen Zers, who grew up with nontraditional sources of education, like Khan Academy, may be more willing to turn to outside providers. For example, Alssid, of SocialTech, says that during the pandemic, his college-aged son has been taking a coding course through Udacity, looking to augment his education by picking up a skill not offered by his university.

Google announced that it would expand its offerings of career certifications in fields such as data analytics, project management, and user-experience design. In a blog post announcing the new certifications, Kent Walker, Google's senior vice president for global affairs, said it would fund 100,000 need-based scholarships and spend an additional $10 million on job training. More than 50 major employers, including Bank of America, Hulu, and Walmart, have agreed to consider holders of Google certificates, in lieu of college degrees, for entry-level jobs. "College degrees are out of reach for many Americans," Walker wrote, "and you shouldn't need a college diploma to have economic security."

Jim Fong, chief research officer of the University Professional and Continuing Education Association and director of its Center for Research and Strategy, says Google and other nontraditional providers could threaten colleges' long-held educational monopoly. "Higher ed has had a moat around its castle for too long," he says. "The pandemic dried it up."

But it doesn't need to be either-or, experts say. Colleges could embed career certificates in their curricula, as a complement to more-traditional coursework. Colleges also enjoy brand recognition among both workers and employers that nontraditional providers do not, says Taylor, of Ed2Work. Their brand could serve as a form of endorsement or quality assurance, such as a boot camp affiliated with a major university partner.

## TAKEAWAY

In a tough job market, students are more likely to seek out short-term credentials such as mincourses and badges. If they can't get such programs at a college, they may turn to nontraditional providers.

**Students will seek out a no-frills education.**

Covid-19's economic impact on Gen Z is outsize. Workers under the age of 25 have experienced a rate of layoffs almost twice as high as that for those over 35, according to an analysis by Gusto, a company that provides payroll and other support services to small businesses. A survey by the American College Health Association and the Healthy Minds Network found that two-thirds of college students reported that their financial situation had become more stressful under the pandemic.

With many members of Gen Z, or their parents, un- or underemployed, they may simply not be able to afford tuition and fees. In the short term, students surveyed in the spring by Archrival, the consulting firm, said they may put off college or

choose an institution closer to home so they can live rent-free or support family members whose careers were upended by pandemic.

Before Covid-19, the most seminal experience for Gen Z, especially for its older members, was the Great Recession. For many, seeing their parents lose hard-earned jobs and homes is one of their first memories. As a result, today's teenagers and twenty-somethings were already frugal. One in 10 Gen Zers begin to put away money for retirement before they ever graduate from college and enter the workplace. "They were saving for a rainy day," says Seemiller, the author and Wright State professor, "and these days it is raining very hard."

Gen Z will enter a job market shaped by recession. If previous downturns are a guide, the disadvantage of taking a lower-paying job at the beginning of their career could dog them for years.

Such realities will color their approach to paying for college. Eighty percent of Gen Zers are concerned about the cost of college, Seemiller found in her research. Seventeen percent rated it as their greatest social concern. As a result, Gen Zers may get jobs first, to save money for tuition, or choose to go to college part time, so they can continue to work. They may also gravitate toward companies that offer tuition-assistance benefits, she says, like the Starbucks partnership with Arizona State University.

# 25%

**of Gen Z believe that they will be much worse off when the pandemic is over.**

Source: Center for Generational Kinetics

Colleges that offer a no-frills education will very likely appeal to that budget-conscious attitude. Millennials favored the full campus experience and sparked an amenities arms race among colleges that came

---

## TAKEAWAY

Gen Zers who can't afford higher tuition and fees may put off college or attend one closer to home. They're interested in value — not lazy rivers.

---

to be typified by climbing walls and lazy rivers. Gen Zers care less about such add-ons — and don't want to pay for them, says Fong, of the continuing-education association. "They don't want the $50,000-a-year model of higher education."

For a long time, the calculation was that students wanted more, and that the debate was over how much they were willing to pay. Now, says David Strauss, a principal of the Art & Science Group, a firm that advises colleges, the question is, "Would people accept less in exchange for paying less?"

**Gen Z will insist on a greater focus on equity and diversity and a more inclusive pedagogy.**

Even before the summer of protest sparked by the killing of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis, Gen Zers were attuned to issues of diversity and equity. Two-thirds of this generation say Black Americans are treated less fairly than whites, according to Pew Research. They see societal change, including gay and interracial marriage and transgender rights, as a good thing.

And they expect higher education to respond to these shifts. In a recent survey by StuDocu, an online-study platform, nearly 60 percent of students said that if their college remained silent about racial inequality and the continuing protests, that would affect their perception of the institution.

Gen Zers reflect the diversity they support.

A bare majority, just 52 percent, are non-Hispanic white. One in five teens or young adults, Pew found, has at least one parent who is an immigrant.

Given Gen Z's diversity, one question emerging from the pandemic is how well-suited online education is to serve first-generation, low-income, and minority students. The spring experience revealed real equity issues, with some students lacking access to computers, reliable Wi-Fi, or a quiet place to study. If colleges move more permanently to online or hybrid courses, they will need to find ways to reduce this digital divide, such as providing students with computers or tablets, adopting online platforms that work on mobile devices, or supporting the expansion of high-speed internet to poor urban neighborhoods and rural communities.

Yet, the diversity of the student body stands in contrast with that of college faculty. At no time have the gaps — in race, in gender, in socioeconomic status, in religiosity, in age — between professors and the students they teach have been so great, notes Steven Mintz, a professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin and a former director of the university's Institute for Transformational Learning. As a result, classrooms could become more contentious

> **Gen Z will demand that colleges confront and attack the wide and persistent equity gaps in access, retention, and college completion.**

places, and professors will need to work to ensure that a variety of viewpoints are heard, he says.

Gen Z will demand that colleges confront and attack the wide and persistent equity gaps in access, retention, and college com-

pletion. The pandemic has sparked a shift away from high-stakes tests, like the SAT, which often reinforced inequities. Having seen that it is still possible to admit a qual-

> ## TAKEAWAY
> Gen Z students support diversity and are themselves diverse. They expect higher education to respond to societal shifts and to make online learning more equitable.

ified class without such tests, colleges will feel pressure to turn permanently away from their use.

As Covid-19 prompts colleges to rethink the delivery of courses, there is an opportunity to consider how poorly some courses serve underrepresented and first-generation students. Especially in the sciences, large introductory lecture courses — often lacking tools to help at-risk students — can act as gatekeepers, keeping students out of certain academic programs, says Joshua Kim, director of online programs and strategy at Dartmouth College. As a result, there's a gap between what such students say they want to study and their eventual majors. As colleges consider their pedagogical approach, they may be able to take the time to reengineer such courses to better serve students.

**Parents matter, but the days of the helicopter parent are over.**

Another seeming fixture of higher education that could be shunted aside by Gen Z: the helicopter parent.

Gen Z students have a different relationship with their parents than did their millennial predecessors. Millennials' baby-boomer parents tended to be interventionist and involved in their children's decision-making. Some called professors to advocate for higher grades, or inserted themselves into roommate disputes. The parents of the current crop of students, most

of whom are members of Gen X, are, by contrast, typically more hands-off and more willing to let their children succeed or fail on their own.

That doesn't mean parents don't matter in their children's education. In fact, Gen Z is marked by an exceptionally close relationship between parents and children. Seven in 10 members of Gen Z name their parents as their No. 1 role models. They turn to them for advice, seeking them out for guidance on money, careers, and dating. As a result, parents' perspective carries a great deal of weight for them, even if it isn't as overt and as readily apparent to college leaders.

Jean Twenge, a generational expert who is a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, says Gen Zers are more dependent on their parents, and for a longer time, than previous generations were. The pandemic could extend the transition to adulthood, as children delay college, put off moving out, or return to live and study in their parents' basements. "The whole life cycle," says Twenge, "is just slowing down."

**Colleges will pay greater attention to student mental health.**

With lives that play out across Instagram, TikTok, and other social-media platforms, Gen Zers would seem to be well-positioned to wait out a pandemic that confined most Americans to their homes. But teenagers and young adults struggled without physical connection.

A survey in the spring by the American College Health Association and the Healthy Minds Network found that 40 percent of students, on 14 campuses, reported symptoms of depression. More than a quarter said anxiety or mental distress had disrupted their studies and affected their academic performance.

For some students, a growing awareness of racial injustice led to heightened feelings of anger and unease.

If Covid-19 hit Gen Z hard, it was because young Americans already were struggling with mental health, experts say. Two-thirds of current students report experiencing "overwhelming" anxiety at least once during their time at college, and for many it's probably not an isolated episode, says Joy Him-

mel, a former health-center director at Penn State at Altoona and a member of the American College Health Association's Covid-19 task force.

> **Thirty-seven percent of Gen Zers report fair or poor mental health, compared with just 15 percent of millennials. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death in Generation Z.**

In recent years, rates of depression and self-harm have soared among teens. Thirty-seven percent of Gen Zers report fair or poor mental health, compared with just 15 percent of millennials. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death in Generation Z.

The early onset of mental-health problems is troubling because the earlier in life the first depressive episode emerges, the more likely it is to persist, says Twenge, who wrote *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy — and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood.* She pins Gen Z's struggles, in large part, on their virtual lives. With their heavy usage of smartphones and social media in lieu of face-to-face connection, today's adolescents and twenty-somethings absorb a heavily curated and often idealized sense of others' lives. These "skewed views" can lead to a sense of isolation and a fear of not measuring up, Twenge says.

At the same time, the relative anonymity of the internet exposes Gen Z to others' criticism and disapproval, which can damage their self-esteem and confidence.

Alecia Sundsmo, director of counseling and psychological services at Cornell University, says the coronavirus comes at a particularly vulnerable time, developmentally, for high-school and college students. If the pandemic is prolonged, she warns, "we

could also see lasting impacts on their resilience as adults.”

Covid-19 will strain colleges' ability to meet Gen Z's mental-health needs. Budgets for campus mental-health services have increased in recent years, Himmel says, but even so, demand has outpaced capacity. During the pandemic, 60 percent of students reported having difficulty accessing needed mental-health services. And for the 2020-21 academic year, nearly half of all colleges expect their student health and counseling budgets to be cut.

Still, in a American Council on Education survey in 2019, eight in 10 college presidents said student mental health was a growing campuswide priority. Expect that commitment to continue.

**TAKEAWAY**

Colleges will need to be agile to respond to students' growing mental-health needs, and may rely more on telehealth, peer counseling, and treating "the whole person."

A lasting legacy of Covid-19 will be wider adoption of telehealth. With many campuses likely to be closed into the fall or beyond, colleges have turned to virtual counseling, helping break down barriers for both patients and clinicians to remote therapy and identifying platforms that comply with privacy laws.

"College mental-health services will probably be changed forever by the acceptance of virtual platforms," Himmel says.

Colleges could rely more on digital triage, using one-on-one or face-to-face counseling for the most-at-risk cases, while expanding joint therapy sessions and wellness groups, both online and in-person. John J. King, vice president for student life at Roger Williams University, says additional group counseling and peer-support groups could extend the college health center's reach, allowing it to serve students who "want to work on stuff," not just those who are in an immediate mental-health crisis. "We want to be proactive, like working on maintaining your vehicle rather than waiting for it to break down."

Timothy Marchell, director of Cornell's Skorton Center for Health Initiatives, says student mental-health issues shouldn't be dealt with in a vacuum. Mental distress is often tied to physical well-being, so doctors and other health-care providers need to treat the whole person. Professors, staff members, even other students have a role to play in a comprehensive, campuswide approach to student mental health, he says, as mentors, problem-solvers, and good listeners.

There are signs that this is already happening — during the pandemic, students reported feeling high levels of support from campus administrators and especially from faculty members, the ACHA-Healthy Minds Network survey found. Joshua Kim, of Dartmouth, says Covid-19 has given professors greater awareness of and sympathy for the challenges their students face. "We have seen into the lives of our students," he says.

# Disadvantaged Students

## By ANTHONY ABRAHAM JACK

**Anthony Abraham Jack** is the author of *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students* and an assistant professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Jack is a first-generation college student and loves to knit.

COVID-19 is an unerring mirror reflecting back upon America its true self. It reveals not new truths but rather old ones: that our society is depressingly unequal, deeply divided. Too often, however, higher-education officials and scholars pay too little attention to how structural inequalities like segregation and poverty directly influence students' college experiences. To think about the future of higher education, to the days when Covid-19 is in our rearview mirrors, we must first contend with these entrenched inequities that we struggled to deal with when times seemed good. Covid-19 exacerbated social ills; it did not create them.

Conversations about the economic consequences of Covid-19 are everywhere. Higher education is not exempt. Which colleges will fare this storm? Should colleges tap into their endowments more? Which institutions must reopen their campuses in the fall? Who can afford not to? How will financial-aid allocation change? Surveying its members, the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators found in June 2020 that offices across the country are preparing for both a spike in applications for financial aid and an increase in the number of students who qualify for significant aid.

These are all terribly important questions that deserve serious thought. But we must not lose sight of the extra-financial realities that students will contend with as we all move forward. Moreover, we must account for the disproportionate toll the virus and its social sequelae have taken on various marginalized groups, including the economically disadvantaged and racial and ethnic minorities, let alone those who find themselves at the intersection. For colleges to grapple with these realities now means not only having contingencies in place for the near future, but also the possibility of crafting more comprehensive and inclusive plans to guide everyday operations for decades to come.
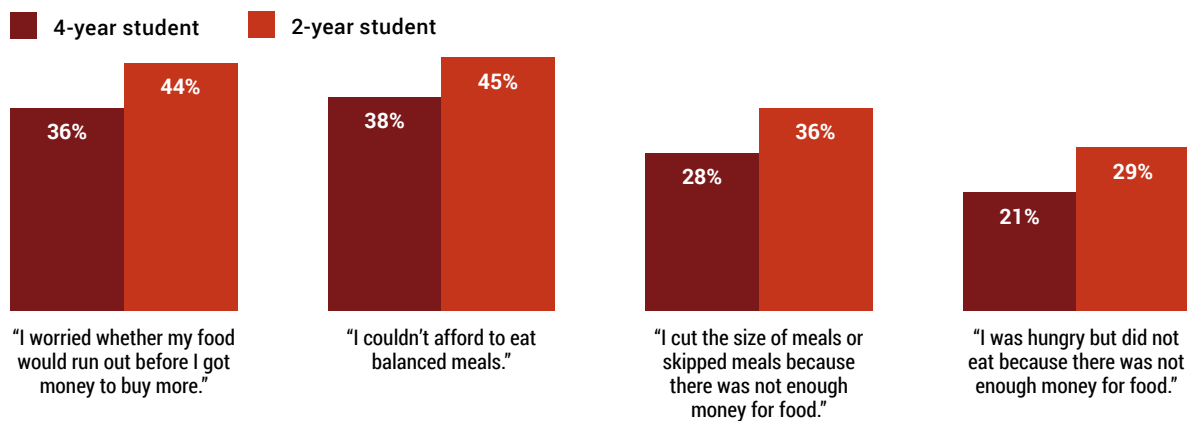
## TAKEAWAY

Colleges that send out tone-deaf messages asking students to stay home must recognize that not all students have access to safe housing and adequate food supplies.

### ATTENDING TO BASIC NEEDS

Notifications from college deans and presidents in March 2020 asking students to "stay home after spring break" highlighted institutional blind spots. These often tone-deaf messages assumed that all students leave campus for recesses. Yet, as I documented in *The Privileged Poor,* that is simply not the case. Students from economically disadvantaged families often stay on campus during breaks because they cannot afford to leave. Despite institutional commitments to recruit lower-income students, their campuses remove or limit access to food and other resources during recesses, prompting them to adopt drastic measures to combat food insecurity. I met Michelle (a pseudonym), a lower-income, first-genera-

## Percent of Students Dealing with Food Insecurity by Type of Institution

A significant percentage of students experience food insecurity, especially at 2-year colleges.

- 4-year student
- 2-year student

| | "I worried whether my food would run out before I got money to buy more." | "I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." | "I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food." | "I was hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food." |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4-year student | 36% | 38% | 28% | 21% |
| 2-year student | 44% | 45% | 36% | 29% |

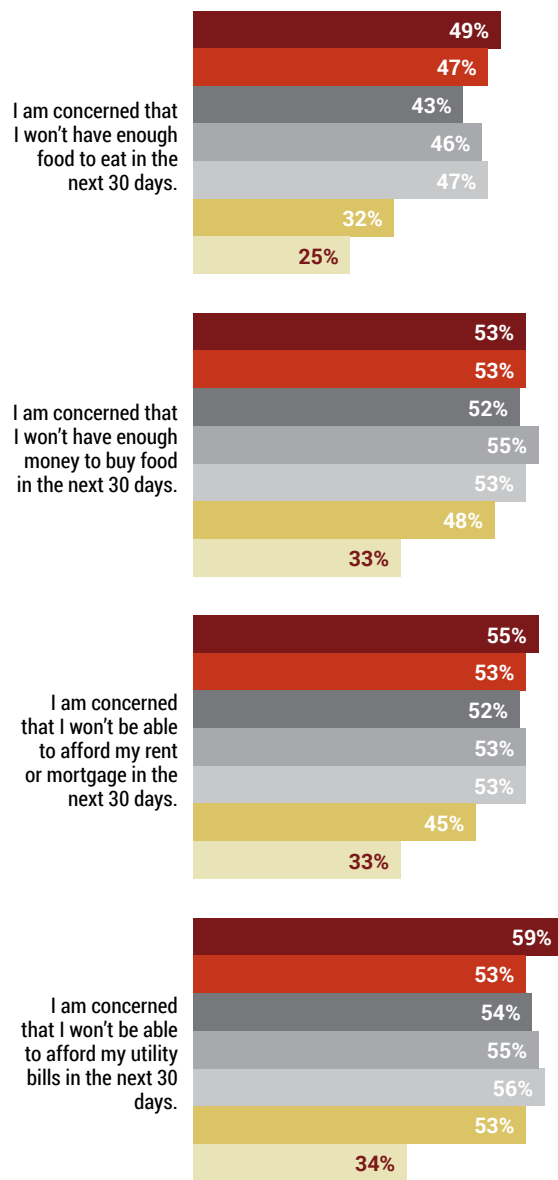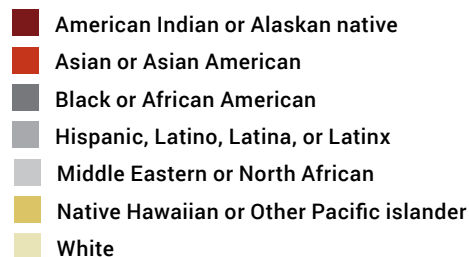Source: The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

tion college student from New York, during her junior year. She shared how she experienced bouts of homelessness all her life. Coming to college did not end that. As she noted, "We already have unstable home circumstances. It's hard to support yourself if you don't have the money to feed yourself." She sought out local soup kitchens to make ends meet during closures.

This hardship is, of course, not limited to students from poor families. I pose a question to every college dean and president I meet regarding recess closures: How do you support students who do not have a home to go to or who know that home and harm are synonymous? Some offer examples of new initiatives to keep select residential halls open and offer academic programming or community-building events during break. Just as many, however, revealed that they were unaware that their campus closed down during break after I shared their own policy with them. Many disadvantaged students find themselves navigating this gap in coverage alone.

The number of undergraduates from the foster-care system is nontrivial. Western Michigan University's Fostering Success program is dedicated to supporting foster-care youth and serves roughly 125 students a year. The California State University and University of California systems report roughly 5,000 students who were in foster care. Some queer students must be different versions of themselves at home for fear of abuse, emotional or physical. We have seen reports of spikes of domestic violence against women during quarantine. College sometimes is a release from such hostile circumstances.

For many of our students, college is where their basic needs are met. Food and housing insecurity have gained greater attention in the past few years, but they are problems that have plagued students across all levels of higher education for decades. The rates are highest at our community colleges, but they are not absent at elite universities. No matter what institution students attend, the reality is the same: If a student cannot eat, if they have no place to sleep, they cannot learn like their peers whose lives are free from such debilitating distractions.

## Student Food and Housing Insecurities, by Race/Ethnicity

- American Indian or Alaskan native
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific islander
- White

**I am concerned that I won't have enough food to eat in the next 30 days.**
- American Indian or Alaskan native: 49%
- Asian or Asian American: 47%
- Black or African American: 43%
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx: 46%
- Middle Eastern or North African: 47%
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific islander: 32%
- White: 25%

**I am concerned that I won't have enough money to buy food in the next 30 days.**
- American Indian or Alaskan native: 53%
- Asian or Asian American: 53%
- Black or African American: 52%
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx: 55%
- Middle Eastern or North African: 53%
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific islander: 48%
- White: 33%

**I am concerned that I won't be able to afford my rent or mortgage in the next 30 days.**
- American Indian or Alaskan native: 55%
- Asian or Asian American: 53%
- Black or African American: 52%
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx: 53%
- Middle Eastern or North African: 53%
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific islander: 45%
- White: 33%

**I am concerned that I won't be able to afford my utility bills in the next 30 days.**
- American Indian or Alaskan native: 59%
- Asian or Asian American: 53%
- Black or African American: 54%
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx: 55%
- Middle Eastern or North African: 56%
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific islander: 53%
- White: 34%

Source: Ithaka S+R, "Student Experiences During the Pandemic Pivot," (2020).

Such realities call for expanding our understanding of what it means to meet students' demonstrated need, especially at colleges rolling out diversity efforts to recruit more lower-income undergraduates. We must think beyond financial aid and the cost of attendance to account for the price that students pay to come to college. Cerritos College, a community college in California, offers a lesson here. It built The Village, the first residential complex committed to housing homeless students in the state. Expanding efforts to provide students steady access to food is equally important. In 2018, the University of California at Berkeley established a basic-needs manager and center to support students who struggle financially. Bunker Hill Community College develops partnerships with community agents like food banks and pantries and connects students with social services so they can access resources offered by state and federal agencies. Initiatives like these are examples of efforts to provide a safety net for those striving to earn a college degree.

### THE ROLE OF STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

In addition to providing basic needs, colleges are also workplaces for students. And lower-income students disproportionally work more than their peers. Moreover, their earnings are often earmarked for expenses away from campus. Students help pay water and other utility bills back home. They make sure that parents and siblings have access to food and medicine, even if it means sometimes going without themselves. Joshua, who traveled from the South to New England for college, shared that coming to college meant new responsibilities to his family.

## Covid-19 exacerbated social ills; it did not create them.

ly. He explained, "My mother didn't give me any money. As a matter of fact, my parents 'borrowed' money from me. We were strug-

gling." Students like Joshua often fill the gaps between what their families have and what landlords and bill collectors demand. Given this added pressure to work, it is important for colleges to think critically about student employment, being more intentional about

> ### TAKEAWAY
> Colleges should make an effort to offer marginalized students high-impact work-study opportunities that provide social capital, rather than steer them to menial jobs that deepen socioeconomic divisions.

connecting students with high-impact opportunities where students accumulate social capital and don't just receive a paycheck.

In doing so, it is important to pay attention to the social dynamics jobs create on campus. While they provide hourly wages, certain jobs can create divides between those who have to work and those who do not, a reality that is amplified by race. I documented in *The Privileged Poor* how one university created a customer-service relationship between students as it incentivized lower-income students to clean the bathrooms of their wealthy peers by offering higher pay and more flexible hours than all other on-campus jobs. Black and Latinx students, seeing that the majority of those working were also Black and Latinx, felt that the university intentionally funneled students of color into cleaning a predominately white campus, alluding to the novel *The Help* to underscore their point.

Other colleges do the same with student-security positions for policing campus parties or by having students bus discarded trays of their peers in the cafeterias. On a webinar for the Urban Institute, David Thomas, president of Morehouse College, stated that the college would not hire contract workers as part of their Covid-19 response. Instead, they would have federal

work-study students assist with testing and social-norms enforcement when the campus reopens, effectively placing them on the front lines of the university's Covid-19 response. Within institutions built on engaging the life of the mind, aligning work-study positions to do the same will further this mission, benefiting students now and later in their college careers.

## THE RACIALIZATION OF DISADVANTAGE

In addition to addressing the material deficits that place students along different trajectories once they arrive on campus, accounting for and addressing the socio-emotional consequences of this global pandemic is paramount. Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, noted that "So long as race confers privileges outside of school, it is hard to imagine it does not do the same within schools." Race also denies privileges, blocking access to equitable social supports, making it harder to function. We are still living with the legacy of Jim Crow, redlining, blockbusting, and exclusionary loan practices that denied Black borrowers access to mortgages and consequently safer, better-resourced neighborhoods and schools. When students come to college, they do not step out of the reach of racist policies or poverty's cold shadow, somehow magically made whole by admission letters. The cumulative effects of racism and inequality weigh heavily on them. What we are seeing now is an amplification of past inequalities that will shape youths' prospects for mobility.
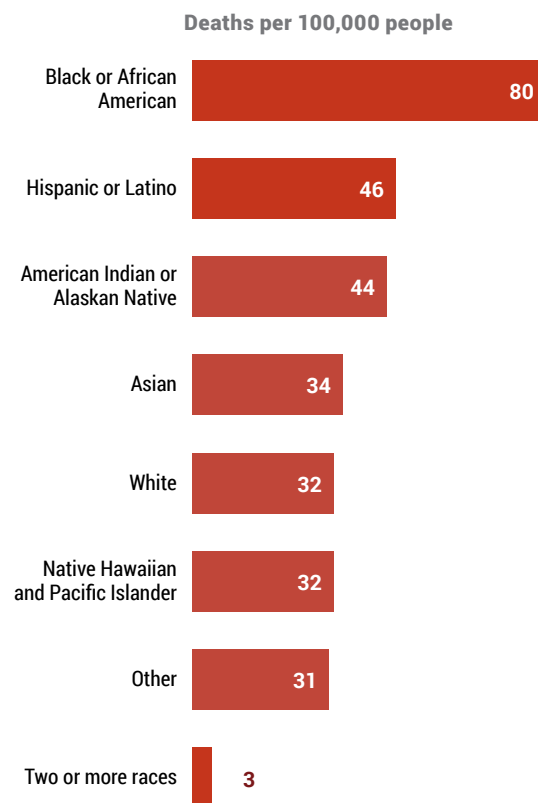
From dense cities to small towns, Black and Latinx communities are disproportionately bearing the weight of Covid-19. *The New York Times* reported that "Latino and African American residents of the United States have been three times as likely to become infected as their white neighbors." Even in states with smaller Black and Latinx populations, the uneven exposure repeats itself. Despite only being roughly 10 percent of the population, Latinx residents in North Carolina make up 41 percent of the positive Covid-19 cases. Similarly, Covid-19 is spreading at alarming rates in Native Amer-

ican communities; although they make up just over 10 percent of the population in New Mexico, Native Americans account for more than 50 percent of the Covid-19 related deaths. Moreover, among those who contract the virus, we see further racial disparities. The Brookings Institution reported that "Black people are dying from Covid at roughly the same rate as white people more than a decade older." The culprit for these disparities is not the virus alone, but rather the long-term consequences of restrictive covenants aimed to keep resources in white neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals.

Yet a pandemic is not the only thing dis-

## Covid Deaths by Race or Ethnicty

By mid-August 2020, over 30,000 Black lives had been lost to Covid-19. Nationwide, Black people are dying at 2.4 times the rate of white people.

**Deaths per 100,000 people**

| Race or Ethnicity | Deaths per 100,000 |
| --- | --- |
| Black or African American | 80 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 46 |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 44 |
| Asian | 34 |
| White | 32 |
| Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander | 32 |
| Other | 31 |
| Two or more races | 3 |

Source: :The Covid Racial Data Tracker, a collaboration between *The Atlantic*'s Covid Tracking Project and the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research.

proportionately handicapping marginalized groups. We are witnessing a callous disregard for life on multiple fronts. The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Quesha Hardy, and countless others at the hands of police, or those who believe their whiteness gives them power to police others, show how racism is as debilitating and persistent as the virus raging through America.

## TAKEAWAY

Black and and Latinx students face more disruptions related to death during college than their white peers, a reality amplified by Covid-19 and the national wave of protests over racial violence. These students need access to mental-health services that reflect an understanding of how inequality impacts well-being.

Black, Latinx, and Native American students are dealing with death in their families, communities, and networks in ways that other groups are not. From natural causes to those facilitated by social policy, death was already too often a companion for college-bound students of color compared to their classmates. The sociologist Camille Charles of the University of Pennsylvania and her colleagues showed how Black and Latinx students face more disruptions related to death during their college careers than their white peers, and the disparity is even larger for those from lower-income families. These experiences undermine academic performance and undercut socio-emotional well-being. Covid-19 is amplifying this reality to new levels.

Helping all students through the angst and fear that they are grappling with is paramount. But it is imperative to be ready to help Black, Latinx, and Native American youth through the acute trauma they and their families are enduring. Not just for the

upcoming academic year but for years to come. The heightened racialization of disadvantage, one that deepens societal divides and attacks mental health, does not stop at the college gates.

A renewed investment in mental-health support on college campuses is needed. But we must be intentional in how we do so. Taylor Stewart, a doctoral student at Boston College, advocated for universities to diversify their mental-health clinicians as a first step. Such efforts, she argues, must be followed by targeted training in specific topics of racial inequality for all counselors and the creation of racial-violence-prevention offices and protocols to institutionalize such support.

I agree with that framework. Cluster hires change the count of Black and Latinx employees and faculty on campus but not necessarily the culture or the competency of the offices. Without actual investment in the support that counselors can provide, these offices will not reach their full potential. It is not the job of only Black and Latinx employees to take care of Black and Latinx students. Mental-health offices that are collectively more knowledgeable of structural inequalities — and how they are worsened by race — are better able to serve a wider swath of students and serve those students better. Reading groups and department discussions are a start, but they must go beyond memoirs and grapple with research on the policies and practices that reproduce the very inequalities that they are helping students work through.

The way in which we prepare for students has been fundamentally changed. The recovery from Covid-19 will be longer, and, in some ways, more complicated than living through it. There has been much to say about the "new normal." The problem that I have with this term, or at least how it has been employed, is that it lacks imagination and agency. We have to set the new normal, one that both acknowledges, learns from, and addresses the entrenched inequalities that made the previous configuration of society and higher education so unequal.

# Business Models

## By RICK STAISLOFF

As a young chief financial officer, I once spent the better part of a year working to understand and share the key metrics behind my college's business model. I looked at margins by academic program, how much managing administrative managers were doing, and faculty productivity, all with an eye toward strengthening our financial position and allowing for reinvestment in new mission and student-success initiatives.

While the college did embrace some needed change, the words that stay with me years later came from a faculty member who pulled me aside and noted that she thought it would be better to "burn the institution to the ground than adopt some kind of business mindset." Thus began my journey of working with and within colleges to transfer knowledge and build capacity around aligning mission with the business model — an intersection that is essential if institutions are to thrive.

**Rick Staisloff** is founder and senior partner of rpk GROUP, a consulting firm that helps colleges, universities, and other nonprofit entities with their growth and reallocation strategies. Staisloff developed his expertise in finance and higher education during two decades of leadership positions in the higher-education sector.

That experience comes back to me as I consider the potential way forward for higher education. Of course, many hundreds of thousands of words have been written since March about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education. Most of those words have focused on colleges' immediate response to the crisis and, more recently, the likely scenarios for fall 2020. While it is understandable that higher education must deal with the "now," it will soon be time to lift our collective heads and consider the future. Things will very likely not be the same, and perhaps they shouldn't be.

How will the intersection between an institution's mission and its business model change over the next decade? And what does that mean for the decisions that are made in the coming months and years? Those changes are coming, whether by choice or by force — leaving higher-education leaders with a determining question: Does our future vision lead us toward the grounded hope of a strategic and sustainable business model, aligned with our institutional mission? Failing to address or even acknowledge that question will undoubtedly lead an institution to an uncertain future, characterized by reactive decision-making, instability, and fear.

Questions concerning the sustainability of higher education's business model are

## Covid-19, for all its unwelcome and tragic effects, may provide the necessary push to a more sustainable future.

certainly not new, nor are they unique to the pandemic. In fact, virtually all of the challenges facing higher education today were present before Covid-19 hit.

Higher education was already deeply into and accelerating the shift toward remote learning. Experimentation with remote work options, however limited, was underway. As of 2019, enrollments had declined

for eight consecutive years, including decreasing numbers of international students. The coming enrollment cliff for traditional-age college students has already been well documented. Public funding for higher education had made only an anemic recovery from the Great Recession, with states making up only about two-thirds of the total decline in higher-education funding during that downturn. And the value proposition for a college degree was in question.

What has changed since Covid-19 is the urgency that higher education must now bring to addressing these longstanding challenges. John Kotter, in a 1995 *Harvard Business Review* article, "Leading Change," cites a lack of urgency as the top reason that transformation efforts fail. Covid-19, for all its unwelcome and tragic effects, may provide the necessary push to a more sustainable future.

Of course, there has been urgency in higher education's past, and with it came hope for change. History teaches us, however, that for the most part those hopes were not realized. One need only look back to that 2008 recession to see a time when higher education's business model was under financial pressure. Indeed, higher education saw a decline of public funding per full-time-equivalent student of almost 25 percent from 2008 to 2012. That decline, however, never led to hard choices about how to provide high-quality learning at lower cost, as institutions largely offset state and local funding declines with significant increases in tuition and fees. Most

higher-education institutions actually increased spending per student.

And there was little to celebrate in terms of productivity, as the cost per student completion also increased. Those results serve as a reminder of the entrenched support for rescuing the current business model, no matter how unsustainable it might be.
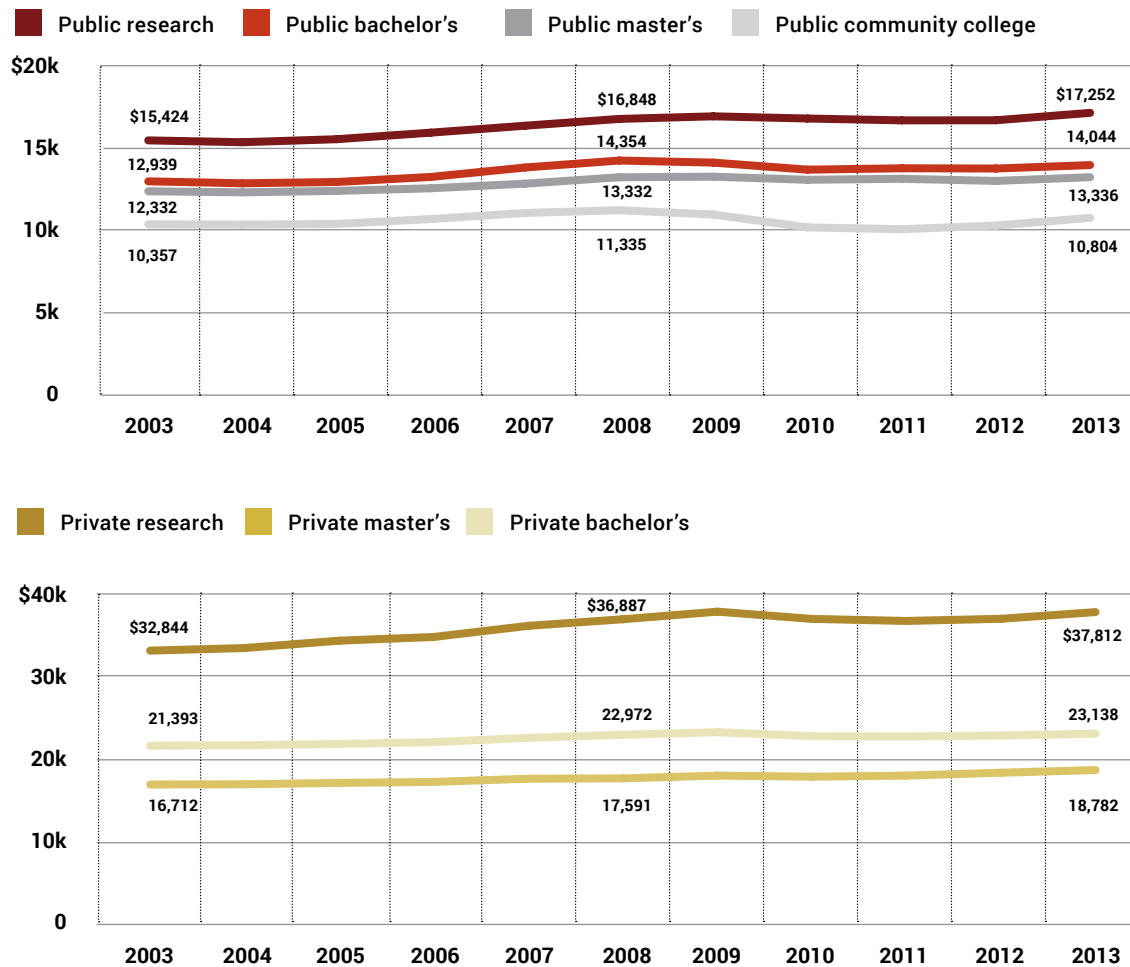
As with the Great Recession, it seems inevitable that public funding for higher education will decline once again. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research and policy institute, estimates that state-budget shortfalls will have reached almost 10 percent in the fiscal year ending June 30 in most states, and about 25 percent in the 2021 fiscal year. Those shortfalls will force states to protect primary and secondary education, health, and public-safety priorities, leading to reductions in higher-education support.

Unlike 2008, colleges won't be able to shift costs onto their students with higher tuition pricing. Moreover, the spending adjustments that colleges made at the fiscal margins in 2008 will be insufficient this time to close gaping budget holes. As

## Change in Per-Student Spending After the Great Recession

Despite increased financial pressures, most higher-education institutions increased spending per student after 2008.

Public research ■ Public bachelor's ■ Public master's ■ Public community college



Private research ■ Private master's ■ Private bachelor's



Source: Delta Cost Project IPEDS Database 1987-2013 (11-year matched set).

## Change in Spending Per Completion After the Great Recession

Many higher-education institutions increased spending per completion after the Great Recession.

| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public research | $70,770 | $71,830 | $73,830 | $75,190 | $75,640 | $75,830 |
| Public master's | $56,120 | $55,780 | $57,140 | $57,700 | $57,390 | $56,020 |
| Public bachelor's | $51,310 | $52,090 | $52,540 | $52,220 | $51,030 | $50,280 |
| Public community colleges | $40,370 | $38,940 | $37,720 | $36,750 | $35,790 | $35,210 |
| Private research | $134,170 | $136,210 | $138,040 | $141,110 | $141,680 | $141,980 |
| Private master's | $59,510 | $60,540 | $60,940 | $62,260 | $62,690 | $61,130 |
| Private bachelor's | $108,600 | $109,590 | $111,860 | $114,630 | $117,050 | $116,820 |

Source: rpk GROUP analysis of IPEDS 2012-2017 (six-year matched set). Data shown in 2017 dollars.

shown in the chart on p. 41, changes in spending largely affected administrative expenses, such as institutional support and operations and maintenance of facilities. What wasn't addressed were the academic expenses at the heart of institutional mission.

To achieve a more sustainable business model, higher education will need to first become more externally focused. What are students and employers asking colleges to do for them? And what return on investment do local, state, and federal governments need to see? That assessment of demand and the "job to be done"

> **A sustainable future for higher education must include a reduction in the cost of providing high-quality learning.**

will help higher education determine what to protect, what to expand, and what it can stop doing.

Internally, institutions will need to change academic portfolios and learning models, streamline administrative structures, connect resources to strategy, and shift to data-informed decision-making approaches. Over all, higher education will need to get more from the significant resources it already has.

Here are the eight key areas in which colleges will need to make changes to become sustainable for the long term.

### ACADEMIC EFFICIENCIES AND PRODUCTIVITY

Given that academic spending accounts for as much as 50 percent of total institutional expenses, and given the historic reluctance to address opportunities for greater efficiency and productivity, a sustainable future for higher education must include a reduction in the cost of providing high-quality learning.

Significant savings can be realized while maintaining quality simply by making data-informed decisions around how and when learning takes place. That includes paying attention to the total number of course offerings in a semester or term, the number of sections of-

fered, the mode of delivery (face to face, online, or hybrid), and the mix of faculty teaching (getting more students in front of full-time faculty members and generating savings from budgets for adjuncts). Research conducted by rpk GROUP, the

**TAKEAWAY**

To develop a more sustainable business model, colleges need to evaluate academic programs on the basis of demand, yield, student retention, and margin.

consulting firm I lead, consistently shows that one-third of seats in the average section are empty. Driving greater academic efficiency can generate savings for reinvestment in faculty professional development, program creation, and student-success initiatives.

Obtaining greater academic efficiency requires more than just data, however-

er. Colleges will have to invest in capacity-building for faculty and academic leadership. That includes the creation of a framework to move from data to analysis to decision-making. Institutions can begin by selecting key metrics to focus on. Those metrics often include section size (how many students, on average, are in a section), section fill rates (how many students *could* be in a section compared with the number who *are* in a section), and faculty throughput (how many student credit hours each faculty member teaches). Once these data are available, academic leadership can engage questions such as: What are these data telling us about institutional efficiency? What levers do we control to improve it? What is the action plan that the college can create to lead to a better result? The efficiency-and-productivity framework allows academic leadership to address critical questions about maintaining academic quality while creating a more sustainable business model. The work focused on efficiency and productivity can be woven into a continuing consideration of program and department success and connected to institutional strategy and mission.

## Change in Spending by Sector, Fiscal Years 2008-2012

Administrative expenses, rather than academic ones, were primarily affected.

|  | Public | | | | Private | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | **Research** | **Master's** | **Bachelor's** | **Community Colleges** | **Research** | **Master's** | **Bachelor's** |
| **Instruction** | 1% | 0% | 0% | -9% | 1% | 4% | -1% |
| **Student services** | 7% | 5% | 1% | -6% | 7% | 10% | 4% |
| **Academic support** | 2% | 0% | -2% | -9% | 3% | 3% | -2% |
| **Institutional support** | -3% | -2% | -1% | -9% | -3% | 1% | -3% |
| **Research** | 7% | — | — | — | 5% | — | — |
| **Operations & maintenance** | -18% | -20% | -23% | -18% | -11% | -7% | -8% |
| **Education-related spending** | -1% | -2% | -4% | -9% | 0% | 5% | 0% |

Source: Delta Cost Project. 2016, "Trends in College Spending 2003-2013"

### ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO

The success of efforts toward academic efficiency and productivity can provide momentum toward a review of the academic portfolio — how individual programs add up to a greater and more sustainable whole. In general, higher education has fallen in love with a "more is more" strategy. That has led to the proliferation of programs with-

> In general, higher education has fallen in love with a "more is more" strategy.

out regard to student demand or the financial margin generated by each program. To achieve higher performance, all colleges will need to evaluate programs on the basis of demand (how many students indicate they want this program?), yield (do they enroll?), student success (to what extent do students stay and graduate?), and margin (does this program cover its direct and indirect costs, or generate any net revenue?).

That program-review framework can then support leadership's resource-allocation decisions about what to expand, what to restructure, and what to sunset. The result is likely to be a more streamlined collection of programs that better fit institutional mission and student demand, while leading to a more sustainable business model. Given that two-thirds of students, on average, at a given institution are in 12 or fewer programs, the opportunity to generate cost savings with an academic-portfolio approach is great.

Gaining efficiencies and productivity and creating a more robust academic portfolio will, of course, require deep engagement with the faculty. Barbara Bichelmeyer, provost and executive vice chancellor at the University of Kansas, notes a key question about that engagement in a recent rpk GROUP interview: "How do we bring faculty along to understand the finance picture? And that mission has to drive money now,

and not money driving mission, because we will only sink ourselves into a bigger hole if all we do is think about money, money, money, and forget mission."

Engaging faculty members around the business model must begin with a commitment to greater transparency regarding where the money comes from at the institution, and where it goes. Is the connection of resources to mission and strategy evident? If not, why? That transparency can then support the shift to greater accountability — are resources resulting in greater achievement of mission and student success? And what must change to maximize the use of those resources?

### MORE COST-EFFECTIVE AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING MODELS

While there have been some bright spots around innovation in learning delivery, higher education's learning model has not evolved toward greater flexibility and a better connection to student needs. A more sustainable future will need to include a recognition of student learning versus seat time — measuring what students have learned, not just the time and effort spent learning. How might that impact the business model? rpk GROUP's research on new learning models, like competency-based education, shows that they can achieve better student success while reducing the cost of delivery.

> ### TAKEAWAY
> By reducing the layers of management and giving managers broader control, colleges can provide more-responsive decision-making and significant savings to reinvest in student success and activities crucial to their missions.

Hopes are high for similar approaches, such as the Lumina Foundation's support for All Learning Counts models, which capitalize on learners' existing capabilities and cre-

ate stronger pathways to further education. That, in turn, can move adults into jobs more quickly, increase advancement opportunities once on the job, and support learners' continuing education.

Higher education's required investment in remote learning should also support a more sustainable business model, allowing institutions to tap into new markets and scale their offerings at lower cost. Investments in remote learning should generate savings by eliminating the need to add to college's physical space and supporting more flexible space creation.

### ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

While great untapped possibilities exist on the academic side of the house, administrative structures in higher education will not be immune to change in the decade ahead. Colleges will need to look carefully at their organizational structure to determine how to create more-streamlined workflows and reduce costs. Spans-and-layers analysis (how many direct reports does a manager have, and how many layers does it take to get to a decision?) shows that institutions have significant numbers of managers who are not doing much managing.

Industry best practice suggests a span of six to seven for expertise-based functions, and of 11 to 13 for task-based functions. rpk GROUP's research shows typical spans at institutions are closer to three to four. Over time, complexity creeps into institutions, and layers accumulate, increasing the distance between institutional leadership and the front line. As a result, costs increase while ideas and decisions stop flowing smoothly up and down and across the institution. By reducing the layers of management and providing a larger span of control to the managers remaining, colleges can provide more-responsive decision-making, better alignment of resources with strategy, and significant cost savings for reinvestment in mission and student success.

### A RETHINKING OF SPACE

One particular impact from the post Covid-19 push toward more and high-er-quality remote learning will very likely be a rethinking of space on campuses. Consistent with the "get more for what you have" theme, sustainable institutions will seek to create efficiencies in space use. Currently, colleges that rpk GROUP have studied have

<div style="background-color:#c0392b; color:white; padding:1em;">

### TAKEAWAY

As colleges become less space-dependent, they should invest in more flexible reuses of classrooms, offices, and other existing spaces to generate higher net revenue.

</div>

classroom spaces that sit empty one-third of the time. How might institutions take fuller advantage of that fixed-cost investment in space to generate more activity and net revenue? How might we shift from offering classes when institutions want to teach toward the times when students want to learn?

While using classroom space will be important, doing so addresses only 5 percent of space on campus. How might a parallel movement toward remote work free up even larger amounts of space — devoted to offices — for creative reuse? Recaptured office space could be used for student services and for revenue-generating learning activities and auxiliary services.

Institutions will need to be more aware of the return on investment from their space decisions. If ever more robust options for online learning are put into place, for example, will institutions need to continue to invest in large lecture halls? Maria Anguiano, senior vice president for strategy at Arizona State University, recently commented in an rpk GROUP interview, "Do we need to build any more 900-person lecture halls that cost millions of dollars? Is the experience online really that different from sitting in the classroom in the 50th row trying to figure out whether you can see the professor?" Over all, sustainable institutions over the coming decade will become less space-dependent

### RESOURCE-ALLOCATION MODELS

Sixty percent of the models for resource allocation in use today are incremental, relying on historic resource distribution to create a balanced budget annually. For institutions to thrive, they will need to better connect resources to sustainable strategies. That does not require a movement toward full responsibility-centered-management models with decentralized decision-making and responsibility for resource generation (though those models are often appropriate at larger, more complex institutions).

Rather, the new models will rely on increased transparency and accountability, with success for cost centers clearly defined and cost-center leaders held responsible for achieving those successes. This more outcome-focused approach might include enrollment and student-success targets, specific revenue generation from research and philanthropy, and overall net-revenue generation. Resources will be reallocated more freely across the institution as needs arise and attempted initiatives may fail. Institutions that adopt more-flexible labor models, hiring and developing faculty and staff members who can work across multiple disciplines and functions, will be rewarded with an ability to adapt as market demands shift over time.

### BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

All institutions have data. Few institutions put data to use in ways that have an impact on decision-making. Successful institutions over the coming decade will put structures in place that support the move to a data-informed culture. What might that culture look like? First, less time will be spent getting the data and more on determining what the data mean. Second, organizational structures will be in place that do more than create a factbook and conduct annual surveys. Institutional-research offices will become places of business intelligence, understanding trends externally and the connection to data inter-

nally. Business-decision support groups will be created to serve as internal consultants for identifying and achieving strategic goals and obtaining greater efficiency and productivity. Third, institutions will continuously invest in capacity-building broadly and deeply, so that data inform decision-making at the level of senior leadership, directors, deans, and chairs.

### NO MORE DO-IT-ALONE BEHAVIOR

Institutions have long asserted uniqueness that is hard to demonstrate. That is certainly the case when it comes to administrative services. As more work occurs remotely, separate institutions will have greater opportunity to create consortia to deliver back-office administrative services, including payroll, billing, and procurement. State systems will be even better positioned to leverage their "systemness" and enhance shared services.

> Successful institutions over the coming decade will put structures in place that support the move to a data-informed culture.

Those models already exist in places like the Claremont Colleges, which formed a legal entity to deliver administrative support across seven campuses — five undergraduate and two graduate — for more than 6,000 students. The Claremont Colleges Services provides more than 30 shared operations including student services, the library, employee health and retirement benefits, payroll, campus safety, and information technology.

### MOVING FROM OPTIMIZATION TOWARD A NEW SUSTAINABLE MODEL

The shift to a more sustainable business model in higher education will not

and will invest in more flexible and adaptable reuse of existing space to generate higher net revenue.

occur quickly. It has taken the pressure of Covid-19 to force higher education toward needed change. Early steps are more likely

> ## Higher education is no longer simply being asked to change. Change will be forced on it, and not just from the impact of Covid-19.

to include an optimization of current models, creating efficiencies in the delivery of high-quality learning and services, and building capacity in the institutional use of data. Over time, colleges can use their cost savings and capacity to reinvest in a new, shared vision, one in which mission, student success, and a sustainable business model are no longer seen as three separate things.

To achieve success, colleges and their leadership might consider a short-term (90 days), midterm (six months), and long-term approach (one year) to more-sustainable models. In the short term, they can focus on creating efficiencies in their academic portfolios and administrative services. Those efforts would allow them to reallocate people, time, and money from existing resources to right-size the budget. Then they can reinvest in the development of new, high-demand/high-yield/high-net-revenue programs and student-success initiatives with a demonstrated return on investment, as well as capacity-building across faculty and staff.

Midterm, sustainability can be enhanced by creating more-robust business intelligence, which informs decision-making, and support structures that keep change-management approaches moving forward.

The longer-term strategies can be put in place around reshaping the academic portfolio, implementing new learning models, adopting resource-allocation approaches, creating shared services and consortia, and adapting facilities.

Higher education is no longer simply being asked to change. Change will be forced on it, and not just from the impact of Covid-19. Accumulated decades of inattention to costs and the lack of return on investment for students, colleges, and states have revealed the unsustainability of the business model. The opportunities for transformation are significant, however, and the approaches outlined here create a

> ### TAKEAWAY
> Successful colleges will put structures in place to develop a data-informed culture that supports decision-making.

road map to a sustainable model, if leaders are willing to act.

Laura Casamento, president of Utica College, summed up the opportunity in a recent interview with rpk GROUP. "I don't like to give Covid-19 too much credit," she said, "but the fact of the matter is, it's moved higher education from constantly saying we've got to do X, Y, and Z to actually doing X, Y, and Z."

# Enrollment

## By CORNELL B. LESANE II

**Cornell B. LeSane II** is vice president for enrollment and dean of admissions at Allegheny College. Previously he served in a progression of leadership roles at Carnegie Mellon University, including associate director of admissions. LeSane has served on the boards of several professional associations throughout the years.

THOUSANDS OF colleges abruptly closed. Quarantines. Widespread business closures. Soaring unemployment. Political and civil unrest. Thus far, 2020 has been quite surreal.

The coronavirus pandemic has turned the world of higher education upside-down and shaken it by its ankles. Even before the pandemic, of course, many colleges were already facing a variety of obstacles: budget shortfalls, declining enrollment, changing demographics, subpar graduation rates, increasing discount rates, to name a few. The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic has compounded those problems.

It will take years for many institutions to recover, if they can at all. Though the pandemic will not last indefinitely, its impact on higher education just may.

Impending demographic shifts will lead to a 15-percent decline in the number of traditional-age, college-going students by 2026, according to the economist Nathan Grawe. Likewise, a decrease in the number of white students and of families making more than $100,000 and an uptick in first-generation and Latinx populations, along with greater questioning of the return on investment of a college degree, all will have significant impacts on higher education. Those changes, combined with byproducts of the pandemic, will pose several challenges to higher education.

The pandemic has highlighted long-established disparities in a variety of sectors. When comparing the educational and learning environments of urban and rural secondary schools to affluent suburban schools, the contrast is striking. And many private schools are in a whole other league. Because K-12 is the cornerstone on which any level of success in higher education depends, it is crucial to invest heavily in its ability to prepare all students for the next level. Otherwise, inequities in our society, including those in higher education, will only continue to grow. Enrollment managers will need to be mindful of the added economic uncertainties that families may be dealing with and adjust accordingly in terms of financial modeling. In addition, they should consider other methods of introducing students to the campus community, recognizing that some will very likely have an even greater challenge visiting in person.

### A CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER ISN'T ENOUGH

While it is important for colleges to enroll a diverse class in every respect, it will become even more pivotal to have similar representation among faculty and staff members if institutions aspire to be truly successful. Some colleges have already begun to diversify the student body to resemble the world, but for many colleges, the rest of the campus community does not reflect the same. Gone are the days where an institution can labor under the belief that hiring a chief diversity officer satisfactorily concludes the hiring mission. Based on the national conversation, not making diversity a high priority at all levels amounts to a wasted opportunity. To bring about meaningful change, the kind that really transforms, conversations and processes must not only be had but also aptly put into effect.

For many families, the financial toll of the pandemic has been monumental. Students, too, have lost jobs, with which many had planned to help pay college expenses. Covid-19 has affected all income levels, but the impact on low-income students threatens to widen the achievement

## TAKEAWAY

Colleges themselves must reflect the diversity of their future students, and merely hiring a chief diversity officer won't cut it.

gap even more, which should be concerning for everyone. Financial issues are forcing some students to either delay enrollment or forgo it altogether. Now more than ever, it is crucial for colleges that can assist those students to do so. Though many colleges use their resources to truly help those in need, some simply must do better to support students' financial needs and overall well-being.

### THE CASE FOR HYBRID LEARNING

When colleges were forced to shut down in the spring, the new reality provided a glimpse into the potential future of online education. The pros and cons of virtual instruction were on full display. Many students still want to be fully immersed in a traditional residential college atmosphere. Nonetheless, even with the impromptu transition, some students enjoyed their online experience. With that said, many col-

leges have had time to fine-tune their online programs, the success of which could prompt even more students to consider remote learning in the future.

Colleges should continue to promote the residential experience — there is truly no comparison — while also examining how to use technology to enhance both in-person and remote instruction. Coupling traditional classes with online learning can offer students more flexibility. As colleges explore new revenue sources, this is certainly something to consider in the short term, since colleges will be dealing with density concerns on campuses for at least another year. However, as we look ahead, the residential experience will be as important as ever, particularly with the amount of time students spend looking at screens.

While many believe that more students will attend colleges closer to home, that is not a given. After spending months of additional "quality" time with parents, some students may be even more keen on

moving farther away. We can understand not only why students are excited about the prospect of leaving to go to college, but also, just as important — and kids

### TAKEAWAY

Traditional colleges should continue to tout the residential experience while also improving online instruction. A blended approach gives students more options and may help boost enrollment.

may not want to hear this — why many parents may be ready for them to attend in-person classes.

Colleges can take advantage of this time

## Predicted Demand for College by Segment and Selectivity

**Elite**
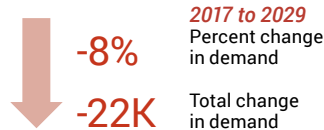*Top 50 research universities, Top 50 liberal-arts colleges (USNWR rankings)*

**↑ +8%**    *2017 to 2029* Percent change in demand

**+12K**    Total change in demand

| Timespan | % Change in Demand |
|---|---|
| 2019 to 2023 | 3% |
| 2024 to 2026 | 2% |
| 2027 to 2029 | -5% |

**Continued strong demand for elite colleges. Some may struggle to shape a diverse class as demographics shift.**

**National**
*Top 50-100 research universities, Top 50-100 liberal-arts colleges (USNWR rankings)*

**↓ -8%**    *2017 to 2029* Percent change in demand

**-22K**    Total change in demand

| Timespan | % Change in Demand |
|---|---|
| 2019 to 2023 | 1% |
| 2024 to 2026 | 2% |
| 2027 to 2029 | -11% |

**Aggregate gains among elite colleges could offset projected losses at national colleges who capture "spillover" demand.**

**Regional**
*Research universities and liberal-arts colleges ranked outside of Top 100 (USNWR rankings)*

**↓ -11%**    *2017 to 2029* Percent change in demand

**-152K**    Total change in demand
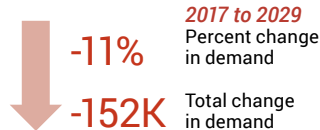
| Timespan | % Change in Demand |
|---|---|
| 2019 to 2023 | 0% |
| 2024 to 2026 | 2% |
| 2027 to 2029 | -12% |

**Most subject to demographic volatility as core student population is least likely to travel and most skeptical of college value proposition.**

Sources: Grawe, Nathan D., *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education,* 2017; EAB analysis.

Graphic provided courtesy of EAB

of change to explore ideas that have been discussed for years. Regional colleges can attempt to expand their orbit by seeking out students who are ready to put some serious miles between home and college. But colleges should also concentrate on students who, amid the pandemic, may be hesitant to leap far. The expected demographic shifts are uneven across regions.

The situation necessitates that colleges, many of which are heavily reliant on tuition, address longtime challenges with a sense of urgency: access, equity, rising tuition, the perceived value of a degree. Institutions that exhibit a high level of adaptability and decisiveness will have greater long-term success as they wade through the aftermath of the pandemic.

### EASING TRANSFER IS CRUCIAL

Colleges must be serious in figuring out how to best serve students in the context of both continuing and unforeseen adversities. Amid rising costs and uncertainty of how the forthcoming year will play out, we are seeing, at least in the short term, a number of families turning to community colleges. For four-year institutions without clear pathways to degrees for transfer students, that will increase pressure to expedite those conversations. Many institutions have not yet realized the benefits of transfer students or have not committed the proper time or resources to embrace this population. Four-year colleges will have to ensure that transfer procedures are as uncomplicated as possible. We are already witnessing a heightened level of competition among colleges, so they should be maximizing students' options during this time, not limiting them.

While many virtual recruitment events were drawing higher attendance than anticipated before the shutdown, a large percentage of our incoming classes had already visited in person or connected with someone on campus. The same may not hold true for future classes (gulp), and students may not be as understanding, given the expectation that colleges have had ample time to figure things out. For a lot of students, it is the residential college experience they are seeking. It is difficult to replicate that environment exclusively through virtual visits.

Depending on the progression of the pandemic, traditional on-campus recruitment practices may prove infeasible for some time. On the plus side, virtual programming has provided opportunities for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as from other countries, who cannot always visit the campus. That is a silver lining of the emerging trends, and I do not anticipate colleges moving away from these offerings but instead reinforcing them.

### RECRUITING INTERNATIONALLY

When discussing any type of future for higher education, it is imperative to include international students in the conversation. They enrich the campus environment culturally, socially, and economically. As a result of restrictive government policies, including immigration bans, many international students have felt increasingly unwelcome in the United States, causing some to consider attending college elsewhere. Though reversed, the recent attempt to prevent international students from remaining in the United States if classes were exclusively online may have been the final insult.
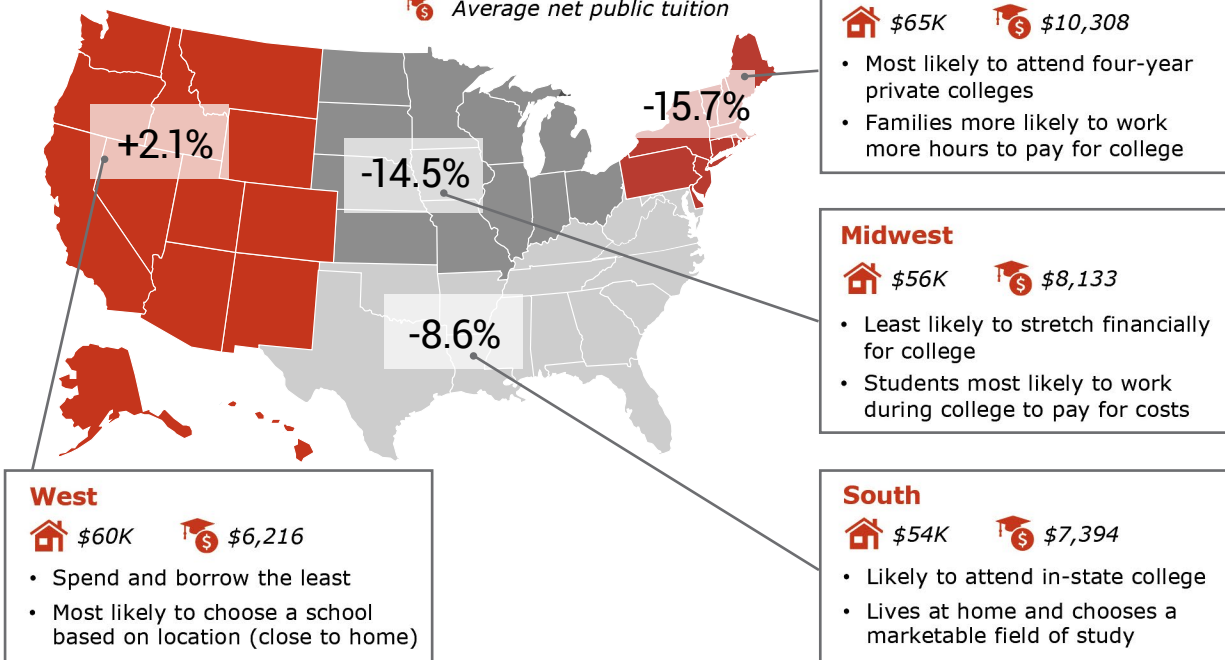
Those factors as well as the fear of prevalence of Covid-19 cases in the United States may result in some students' preferring to enroll in other countries, and in American institutions' opening international branch campuses. The American Council on Education estimates that international enrollment in the United States. will decline 25 percent in the next academic year. Because

## Regional Attitudes Pose Further Challenge

### Demographic Change is Uneven Across Regions
*(Projected Change, 2017-2029)*

🏠 *Median household income*
🎓$ *Average net public tuition*

**Northeast**
🏠 *$65K*   🎓$ *$10,308*
- Most likely to attend four-year private colleges
- Families more likely to work more hours to pay for college

-15.7%

+2.1%

-14.5%

-8.6%

**Midwest**
🏠 *$56K*   🎓$ *$8,133*
- Least likely to stretch financially for college
- Students most likely to work during college to pay for costs

**West**
🏠 *$60K*   🎓$ *$6,216*
- Spend and borrow the least
- Most likely to choose a school based on location (close to home)

**South**
🏠 *$54K*   🎓$ *$7,394*
- Likely to attend in-state college
- Lives at home and chooses a marketable field of study

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); Sallie Mae, *How America Pays for College,* 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey (ACS); EAB analysis.

Graphic provided courtesy of EAB

---

some institutions have enrolled large numbers of international students, this is clearly of major concern, for both cultural and financial reasons. For those colleges that have invested in branch campuses abroad, they will probably — and understandably — push some international students to those campuses. That is a good option in the short term, at least, for colleges to hold on to those students. But their U.S. campuses will certainly miss that global presence.

Most colleges without international campuses will have to adapt and find other ways of enticing international students. Similarly, those colleges that have turned to only one or two countries to recruit international students will have to widen their international efforts. Either way, as we consider the potential decline in international students, such changes will increase the level of competition not only for international students but also for domestic students.

> **Based on the national conversation, not making diversity a high priority at all levels amounts to a wasted opportunity.**

### BEWARE OF GIMMICKS

In this climate, efforts to decrease summer melt will become more vital. Admissions offices will no longer have as much time to regroup and plan for the next cy-

cle; instead some will have to continue to engage and recruit students at high levels during this period. As institutions edge closer to the demographic cliff, and some reach survival mode, they will begin employing more-competitive tactics. Add an already shaky market and the pandemic, and college recruitment will undoubtedly become a hypercompetitive environment.

Be on the lookout for a deluge of gimmicks aimed at enticing not only prospective students but also deposited and enrolled students. We may see a tactics stemming from what we observed last year: incentives such as guaranteed parking spaces, autographed books, early move-in, and sweepstakes-style giveaways for rooms, books, and scholarships. With all that in mind, I am confident the majority of enrollment leaders will continue upholding a level of integrity and ethical behavior.

A survey done in July by SimpsonScarborough, a higher-education research and marketing agency, found that upwards of 40 percent of college freshmen who had planned to attend a four-year college may not enroll this fall. Art & Science Group, a consulting firm that works with colleges, conducted a student poll in April showing 12 percent of students who had paid an enrollment deposit decided not to enroll full time at a four-year college this fall. Back in the spring, many students were hopeful and expected the number of Covid-19 cases to decline. Instead we have seen the opposite.

Notwithstanding the outreach from colleges over the summer to limit summer melt, many colleges, including my own, are experiencing a record number of deferrals. Many colleges will still be counting students on move-in day, with final numbers potentially shifting even after students arrive on campus. The fear is that once reality sets in for some students — that their colleges' guidelines for physical distancing, face coverings, and limited "gatherings" are real expectations — some will decide to return home early.

Similarly, two scenarios can play out in the spring of 2021. If colleges perform well this fall, students who chose to defer for the entire year could decide to enroll in the spring. Or, if things go poorly, students who chose to defer until spring may decide to defer for the whole year. In addition, colleges could witness an increase in leaves of absence for the spring, or even worse, students looking to transfer.

> ## TAKEAWAY
>
> In a hypercompetitive enrollment environment, some colleges may engage in "gimmicks" to entice not only prospective students, but also those who are committed to or already attending other institutions.

### REMOVING TRADITIONAL BARRIERS

Colleges will have to adapt based on what works for them. For some, tried-and-true recruitment efforts will continue to be effective, while other colleges will have to adjust. In figuring out how to proceed during and after the pandemic, some institutions will realize that traditional barriers must be removed, opening their applicant pools to a more varied group of students.

One example is the test-optional movement. If there was ever a time to signal to students that standardized tests are not the be-all and end-all, this is it. At the very least, we should be communicating to students that they do not need to take those tests now. I believe many more enrollment leaders and colleges will realize what institutions that adopted test-optional policies years ago concluded: Most do not need tests to make admission decisions.

### NOT ALL COLLEGES WILL SURVIVE

Though it is painful to say, even with concerted effort, a number of colleges will simply not survive the pandemic. Some will face financial shortfalls, closures, mergers, and severe enrollment declines. While I do not envision many colleges shutting their doors during the pandemic, the long-term budget ramifications could mark the even-

tual end for some. The pandemic has also damaged even top-ranked institutions in numerous ways, including financially. However, they have a budgetary cushion that most others just do not have.

Despite there being many excellent institutions that offer great value and have long-established success, colleges with name-brand recognition could become even more in demand. That is unfortunate, because there are so many gems out there (and I work at one). Some institutions will now have to work that much harder not only to build name recognition but also to enroll and retain students.

Now and in the future, as colleges devise their plans of action, it is critical to be aware of the human toll of this pandemic. Across the country, some staff members have been

### TAKEAWAY

Some colleges simply won't survive the pandemic, while others will face financial shortfalls, mergers, and severe enrollment declines.

able to hunker down in safe environments with few worries, while others have been adversely affected in the workplace and at home. Along with health and financial concerns, some people have been putting in more hours than ever before while working remotely and balancing home life. It is essential to be attentive to how our colleagues are faring and to provide as much support

as possible. College leaders must recognize the personal and professional challenges that members of the campus community

> Despite seismic financial consequences, many colleges can certainly rebound. We cannot limit our ideas to the confines of complacency.

may continue to face for some time. A simple act of asking individuals how they are doing goes a long way.

The past few months have provoked a great deal of reflection. Those in higher education are among those who have been reflecting and regrouping. If we are guided by the fundamental belief that students are the main priority and college is intended to be a public good, we can bring about a more creative, viable, and accessible era of higher education. Despite seismic financial consequences, many colleges can certainly rebound. We cannot limit our ideas to the confines of complacency.

Be intentional with your strategic vision. As a mentor used to say, "We have to find new ways to do old jobs." That rings truer today than ever before. If colleges act with urgency, deliberation, and a sense of wonder, most can navigate these tumultuous times. I wish each and every champion of education all the best during this winding journey.

# Community Colleges

## By KAREN A. STOUT

**Karen A. Stout** has served as president and chief executive officer of Achieving the Dream since 2015, leading the nation's largest movement to improve success for all students, especially low-income students and students of color. A frequent speaker and writer, Stout focuses on topics related to the transformation of the community college. She is president emerita of Montgomery County Community College, in Pennsylvania.

Facing Covid-19, the impending financial consequences of the pandemic, and the imperative to center racial equity in our student-success efforts and confront systemic racism in colleges' own structures, the future of higher education seems somewhat murky. It is as if the certainties of centuries — or at least the past few decades — were being shattered.

This triple tsunami will certainly have major and lasting effects on community colleges, a vital part of the higher-education sector, and even more so during the pandemic as more students may enroll there. But its most notable impact is to lay bare, and exacerbate, many of the most pressing challenges facing community colleges, including inequity in student outcomes and colleges' role in perpetuating these inequities.

Will our community colleges look different in the future? Yes. And that transformation is already well underway, as seen in recent efforts to:

- introduce and examine how to effectively deliver holistic student supports;

- focus on engaging and culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive teaching practices;

- reinvent developmental education by focusing on completion of gateway courses;

- eliminate placement testing and introduce multiple measures or self-guided placement;

- shift learning materials from expensive, one-size-fits-all textbooks to high-quality open-source, adaptable content;

- link civic learning to community development;

- leverage emerging technologies to adapt learning and design new supports.

Current events will, of necessity, accelerate the scale of those efforts.

Long known for their versatility, agility, and responsiveness, community colleges will develop a new model for the future by continuing to focus on the students and communities we serve. To meet their needs, we need to return to our most strategic differentiator and biggest asset — the localness of our colleges, which has been underleveraged, especially in the past decade.

Early in the 2008 recession, community colleges rapidly responded to local needs to heighten work-force skills and build pathways to jobs. But over the past decade, while still focusing on student success and completion, community colleges started to respond to financial pressures like the rest of higher education, becoming dependent on revenue from auxiliary enterprises and chasing students with amenities and services that did more to bolster the bottom line than meet real needs. Too often, insti-

tutions went beyond their localness and their missions, investing in programs and perks that have proven difficult to sustain.

Now, while our students and communities are under tremendous pressure, it's clear that our localness is our strength. Our best community colleges take the form of their local communities while shaping the communities they serve. There is mutual

## TAKEAWAY
The most successful community colleges understand their localness, and have made their communities' social, economic, and cultural success a central part of their mission.

growth in how community colleges have learned from and responded to the needs of their communities and how communities have made those colleges central to their social, economic, and cultural success.

### LEARNING FROM THE PANDEMIC

Times of crisis help us understand the need to move more quickly in certain directions. From our experience with the Covid-19 pandemic, several things are becoming clear.

- Our students are more vulnerable than we ever imagined. We need to understand their stories and intersectionality to respond effectively. In the past, we have too often looked at underserved students monolithically, but effective strategies for engaging these students will require us to look more closely at commonalities and differences, centering on race and spanning demographic categories such as low-income, first-generation, working parents, and gender.

- Faculty resilience and innovation abound. I have heard story after story, particularly in the months since col-

leges quickly pivoted to put instruction online, about how faculty members led the way, rolling up their sleeves, adapting and strengthening their teaching to meet the needs of students. We must strengthen supports and sustain our faculty members, especially with the call to move the redesign of teaching and learning into the heart of our student-success work.

- Institutions have responded rapidly to the changing environment. While other sectors of higher education debated how to reopen in August, many community colleges made quick decisions about which courses and programs would go fully online and which would be offered in limited, face-to-face sections. For example, Northern Virginia Community College is offering classes with lower student-success rates, like mathematics, in small, socially distanced, face-to-face sections, while most courses remain online.

- Colleges with strategic intentions for distance learning pre-Covid were able to transition faster and more smoothly. That was especially true of institutions that had robust faculty-support systems and clear expectations for scaled use of their learning-management systems.

The pandemic makes our mission urgent and clear. Our success will rest on our ability to support learning for a range of students in our communities; to influence and connect public-sector supports to student needs; to give voice to the need for emergency child care; to advocate for universal broadband and internet access; and to educate our citizens in life skills such as resilience and adaptability as well as use of technology.
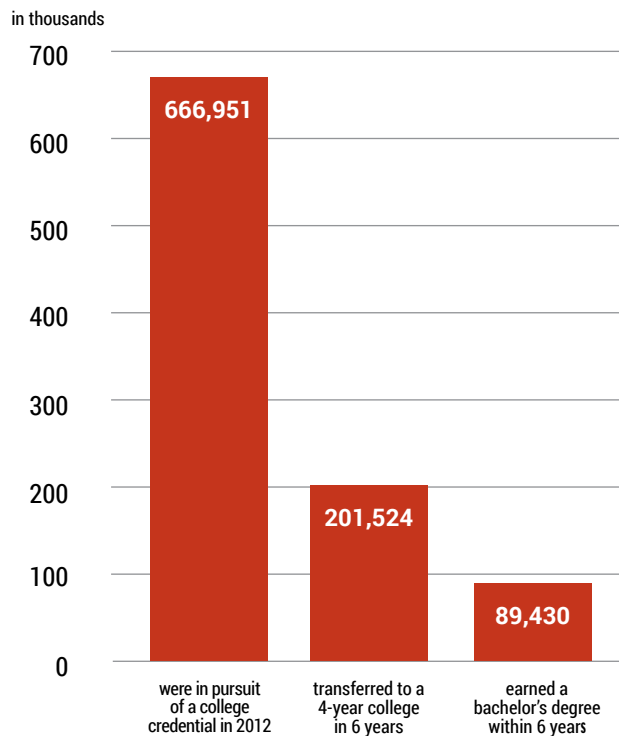
### LEVERAGING LOCALNESS

Securing the future requires that the sector return our focus to the students and communities we serve. The next steps for transformation will require:

- Using a bold new access agenda that reaches vulnerable citizens who are ignored in current strategic plans for enrollment and who lack a clear pathway to enter postsecondary education and earn a credential.

- Reaching vulnerable and disconnected citizens by forming deeper partnerships with elementary and secondary schools and districts; with social-service, transportation, health, and criminal-justice providers; and with county agencies that support the most vulnerable in our communities.

- Reimagining connections with local employers of all sizes and designing programs with labor-market value across all types of certifications and degrees — all

## THE LEAKY PIPELINE

Too few students transfer to a 4-year college, and too few of those who do graduate in six years.

**Number of first-time degree-seeking community-college entrants in fall of 2012**

in thousands

| | Number |
|---|---|
| were in pursuit of a college credential in 2012 | 666,951 |
| transferred to a 4-year college in 6 years | 201,524 |
| earned a bachelor's degree within 6 years | 89,430 |

Source: "Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor's Degrees," Community College Research Center, Aspen Institute, 2016

tied together to match the life cycle of learning for local residents.

- Rethinking our student-success goals to include not just transfer-out outcomes but also bachelor's-degree outcomes as well as gains in earnings, health and well-being, and civic contributions.

- Centering our influence in the community and leading efforts to design more-equitable communities within the areas we serve.

- Leveraging local funding through College Promise programs, which provide free tuition, and other approaches to restore the focus on affordability that was lost during the Great Recession, when funding cuts forced tuition increases.

Even in leveraging their localness, community colleges will need to have a deeper understanding of regional distinctions between their missions and those of neighboring community colleges. They need the will to partner in creating a seamless array of supports to build a region's educational strength while also serving a specific county or service area.

We will see changes in the form and funding of community colleges, changes already underway but now accelerated and made more urgent by the pandemic. For example, there will be:

- More "planned integrations" of academic programs and student services, bringing with them intentional design focused on the student experience. That is occurring in Dallas and other communities and states, turning multiple community colleges into a single institution. In many cases, students were swirling across community colleges, not earning enough credits to graduate and often getting lost in the transfer bureaucracy. Community colleges also will be challenged to re-examine growth models around satellite-campus expansion. (More of those centers will close.)

- New financing models that finally recognize that our funding model, theoretically an equal triad of state, local, and tuition dollars, has not existed for decades, because of enrollment declines and decreases in state and local funding. Community colleges, like all of higher education, have had to rely increasingly on tuition, putting them in the untenable position of becoming less open in order to stay open. Today, some institutions are better positioned than others to pursue new funding models, leading to more groups of "have" and "have not" community colleges. What is needed is a new funding framework for a new era. While the College Promise movement, which provides free tuition, is leading the way in linking student access to support, we also need to address the issue of sustained funding, including deeper investments in teaching, student support, and innovation. It's time for a national study, like the Truman Commission of 1946, to examine the future of community colleges.

- A reassertion of the importance of place. While our current situation has accelerated the need for more robust online learning and student-support services, physical location will remain important despite predictions that proximity does not require a campus. That is par-

ticularly important for community colleges that function as hubs for lifelong learning and local-talent development. A student may get an associate degree and go on to complete a baccalaureate

degree but then return to the community college to gain additional certifications to advance or change careers. Just as important, community colleges will increasingly serve as hubs for academic support, economic, and social services, where local organizations and government agencies provide food and housing, transportation and child care, and job counseling.

• Tutoring, advising, and financial-aid support delivered as a package service available to students wherever they are and whenever they need it. Digital-learning strategies that employ open educational resources and adaptive technologies will provide affordable, relevant, and engaging learning opportunities for all students. New approaches to scheduling and coursework will reduce the time to earn credentials through experiential learning, competency-based education, badging, and microcredentials. These changes will improve student success by helping us understand where students lose traction in mastering key content and microcompetencies and suggesting new ways to nudge and motivate students toward success.

## BUILDING CAPACITY FOR TRANSFORMATION

To be able to navigate in a sharply different environment, community colleges will need to intensify efforts to strengthen the systems needed for student-centered institutional change. That requires visionary leadership, robust use of data and technology, a commitment to equity, and a deep and continued focus on teaching. We must empower faculty members to lead changes in pedagogy, to engage in advising in new ways, and to better align course and program student-learning outcomes.

In our work at Achieving the Dream, a national network of community colleges focused on student success, we have found that colleges with the strongest results:

• Place an unrelenting focus on building strong fundamentals;

• Adopt an organizing framework for student-success efforts, such as guided pathways, and ensure its adaptation to their context and culture;

• Identify a lever for change — for example, advising redesign or faculty development around culturally responsive pedagogy;

• Move with a sense of urgency and pace.

### TAKEAWAY

Faculty members must be empowered to improve teaching and advising, to build coherent program sequences, and to rethink ways to measure student success.

The pandemic is forcing change on the entire higher-education sector. For community colleges, the future will see college completion as one goal among many, including those for work, graduate earnings, and measures of satisfaction and well-being. The institutions that emerge will embody a new access agenda that reaches deeper into our communities to open new pathways into and through our colleges for our most vulnerable learners. It will embrace the localness that differentiates community colleges from other types of institutions.

College leaders will no longer have to focus on transforming their institutions and instead will work to transform the entire community. A key goal will be creating equitable outcomes in learning and credential attainment that build a strong talent pipeline and set the foundation for equitable communities. The new institutions will demonstrate what it means to be community-based and student-centered, and to have a culture of teaching and learning in which faculty leadership, engagement, and respect are fully realized.

Thoughts on the Next Normal for Technology and Higher Education

Dear Readers,

At HP we've been passionate advocates for the importance of education. Our goal has always been improving the learning and economic outcomes when innovative technology combines effectively with great education. We believe this merger of "Ed with Tech" will expand, to the benefit of industry, economic, and cultural growth. The current pandemic, while hastening certain industry retractions, will also drive faster growth of specific industries and work-force skills. While it is difficult to navigate these rapidly evolving challenges, deciding where we should be aligning resources must be part of planning discussions.

The training of our current and future work force and entrepreneurs with most-valued skills is a key issue. We're wrestling with how much development and investment will be required to train American workers for where jobs and skills will be most in demand. What follows is our best thoughts on what we know today about this crucial matter.

- Eliminations or shrinkage of certain industries, especially ride-sharing, transportation, travel and tourism, in-person sports and entertainment, traditional retail, restaurants, and bars, may have long recoveries ahead or may never recover. For example, by the time consumers are ready to return to ride-share services in larger numbers, will driverless-car technology have eliminated the need for contract drivers who depended on that income?

- Unemployment rate growing. The OECD currently estimates the US Q4 unemployment rate at 16.9 percent because of impacts to the hardest-hit industries. When combined with the risks of governments' printing money to keep economies from dropping off a cliff, this could cause major instability to the economy. Pressures on community and technical colleges to be ready to train and retrain workers will be strong, and those colleges may find difficulty in building or expanding programs in those technical areas.

- Political and budgetary headwinds will be many and varied. We must lobby hard, especially for continued and expanded investments focused on skilling and re-skilling programs for our community- and technical-college systems.

- Growth in industry 4.0 and the requisite skills will be in even higher demand. We see fundamental technologies like XR (eXtended Reality), artificial intelligence/machine learning, and microfluidics coupling with automation to disrupt certain industries. Here are a couple of examples:
  - Additive manufacturing, leveraging microfluidics, will allow for rapid growth in localized manufacturing of polymer, plastic, and metal products and be deployed in empty shopping centers.
  - AI and machine learning are already driving demand for data scientists and analysts, in addition to Python software designers and mathematicians to write complex algorithms and software programs to integrate into service, product, and decision-making processes.
  - Virtual- and augmented-reality solutions have already become standard in complex product designs like aircraft and automotive, and are growing for use in situational learning, in which a live training environment is impractical. These methods can be used in learn-from-home and work-from-home environments.

While it's tempting to focus only on today and difficult not to be myopic, we have to put attention and analysis into the future. That said, we're encouraged by the interest in these topics, from every area of the higher-education system. We'd love to connect with the innovative educators through LinkedIn and hope to hear from and see you all soon!

Sincerely,

Mike Belcher
Director of EdTech Innovation North America
HP, Inc.

From breaking news to key insights to real-world advice, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is dedicated to serving academic leaders and professionals. Our newsletters, subscriptions, special reports, and exclusive data projects provide a comprehensive view of the latest trends and critical issues affecting academe. For more than 50 years, higher-education professionals from around the world have trusted *The Chronicle's* in-depth reporting and analysis to understand their world and make informed decisions.

# THE CHRONICLE
# OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

**THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION**®

1255 Twenty-Third Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

202 466 1000 | Chronicle.com