

How Must We Evolve to Remain Relevant to the Student of Tomorrow?

Ask any college or university what they're doing to create the student experience of tomorrow, and they will rattle off the same experiential or high-impact practices: active learning, internships, undergraduate research, service learning, and the like. In the near term, higher ed leaders are focused on scaling these efforts to improve learning, persistence, and career outcomes.


But for longer-term sustainability and relevance, the question for the president and cabinet is what's next: How does an institution truly differentiate, when everyone's strategic plans and marketing materials tout the exact same practices? And, perhaps most important, our economies (regional, national, global) are undergoing rapid shifts—how does higher education catch up?


Drivers of Change—Work and Citizenship


EAB Research Question: How Far, How Fast Will the Following Factors Impact the Ways Higher Education Serves Future Undergraduates?


Seeking Bold Visions


What Ideas from the Frontier Should Each Institution Pursue (or Not)?


- 1** **Employer expectations at the entry level continue to rise, with new graduates competing with those who have several years of work experience.** Day 1 entry-level requirements grow as organizations do (even) more with (even) less, and some worry that entry-level jobs are especially susceptible to the gig economy (and automation).



Truly integrated academic and career experience across four years leads to 2–3 years of continuous experience gained during college, advancing skills in a field
- 2** **Twenty-first-century organizations mimic the structure of the Internet: flatter, team-based multitasking.** By contrast, higher education in the last century was aligned with the workplace of the past, when even the professions followed an assembly-line model of hierarchies and more systematic tasks.



Students required to experience different pedagogies for different purposes, i.e., lectures to model sustained thinking, online courses for user-generated knowledge, active learning for team-based work
- 3** **Our current model—a four-year education all at once (perhaps a master's degree a few years later) to prepare for a stable career—is outdated.** The pace of change in every industry continues to accelerate; we live in a work-for-hire world, and retirement age will only extend further into the future.



Lifelong learning membership allows for continuous network of alumni, faculty, students, and professionals to access and contribute content
- 4** **To what extent will automation impact jobs? No matter where one stands on the debate of AI's impact, every organization is now a data and technology organization.** No job or industry will be immune.



Data, analytics, and technological skills are core skills integrated throughout the curriculum and expected of every graduate, irrespective of major
- 5** **Employers remain hungry for traditional arts and letters skills, such as empathy, communication, cross-cultural competency, and synthetic thinking.** However, public criticism of “useless” disciplines grows—sometimes rightly, as these more universal professional skills aren't necessarily taught, even in disciplines where they could be at the center.


Employer partnerships in less conventional areas (e.g., not technical writing, but the power of narrative in business and finance); entire curriculum integrates technical and social skills
- 6** **“We're all entrepreneurs (or intrapreneurs) now”—no matter the discipline or career path, an innovation mind-set is now critical to professional success.** Furthermore, many worry that the United States is losing its innovation foothold.


No student graduates without developing entrepreneurial thinking, inside or outside the classroom
- 7** **Different skills are needed to solve the “wicked problems” of our time (no clear answer; countless, interdisciplinary causes).** Students not only need interdisciplinary expertise but also the ability to solve problems requiring extended attention over time, likely beyond a typical course.


Problem-based learning foundation of a multiyear, cohort-based experience, rather than simply a few courses or capstone
- 8** **The university's role in cultivating a citizenry—many worry that the Bowling Alone-era changes to the social fabric have only gotten worse, complicated by today's deep political divides.** The university's role in the public sphere has never been more fraught—but perhaps also never more important.


Today's culture wars and other challenging current debates used as way to educate students in the history of civic discourse
- 9** **In a global economy, many local economies are struggling, and economic activity is increasingly concentrated in a handful of large cities.** What role can colleges and universities play in addressing labor and job shortages, retaining and attracting businesses, and connecting their region to global networks of value creation?


Universities assume elevated leadership role in defining what region should become, along with convening and coordinating relevant partners
- 10** **Despite clear lifetime value of a college degree, many rising student groups may be less willing to take the near-term risk—low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented groups often have immediate financial or personal family commitments, are susceptible to media skepticism of college ROI, and/or can access many emerging high-pay roles attainable through quick technical training.**


New models take into account some students cannot take breaks from earning—bachelor's-level apprenticeships, on- and off-ramps, ISAs