Shaping the Future of Learning:
Higher and Postsecondary Education Strategy Workbook

KnowledgeWorks

Shaping the Future of Learning

Exponential advances in digital technologies are quickly ushering in a new era where our economy, institutions and societal structures may look dramatically different than they do today. The ways people work, teach, live and learn are also changing as part of this era shift. Educators must consider how their practices today will shape the future of learning tomorrow – and what roles students and communities might have in shaping that future.

KnowledgeWorks' most recent ten-year forecast, *Forecast 4.0: Education in the Era of Partners in Code*, explores many possible futures in which people have new uses for and new relationships with machines that are increasingly wearable, connected and smart. These futures illustrate how both the world for which we prepare learners and the approaches that colleges, universities and other postsecondary learning providers use might change.

These futures won't wait for us to be ready. We need to plan now to ensure that we're ready to help learners navigate a complex and rapidly changing landscape. By being proactive about what the students of tomorrow will need, postsecondary institutions can better serve today's students too.

This workbook, designed for leaders and innovators in postsecondary and higher education, can help you consider the opportunities on the horizon for learning, begin to identify ways to take advantage of

emerging trends and make bold choices to lead the way toward a future of learning that serves all learners and society well. Read, share and interact with this workbook to uncover:

- Five **opportunities to lead** the future of learning as we look ahead ten years.

- Strategies for **taking action** to address critical areas of change.

- Examples of **work being done today** by innovators in postsecondary education.

- Key questions to help you consider how you and others might **respond to opportunities** and challenges on the horizon.

Opportunities to Lead the Future of Learning

In the spring of 2016, KnowledgeWorks convened more than 60 education stakeholders in workshops exploring K-12 school-based education, informal and community learning organizations such as libraries and museums, and postsecondary and higher education. Over the course of two days, workshop participants reflected on the challenges and opportunities facing their education sector, drawing on their own experiences and ideas raised by KnowledgeWorks' ten-year forecast, *The Future of Learning: Education in an Era of Partners in Code*.

In responding to these areas of opportunity, postsecondary and higher education leaders and innovators have the chance to broaden and diversify learning experiences, to consider new business models, to collaborate within and beyond the sector and to explore far-reaching questions about the purpose and outcomes of higher education. Working closely to create alignment and open lines of communication with K-12 will be equally critical to ensure that high school graduates are college-ready. In both regards, if we are to raise the country's low certification and college graduation rates and prepare graduates for a complex and rapidly changing world, we must adapt.

For the full range of insights from these workshops, see *Shaping the Future of Learning: A Strategy Guide*.

Critical Areas of Opportunity

Five critical areas of opportunity were drawn from workshop participants' insights:

360 Degree Learners:
How can we **educate the whole person** and enable lifelong learning that supports academic and social-emotional growth?

The Whole, and the Sum of Its Parts:
How can we **personalize learning in community**, reorienting education around learners while strengthening society?

Elastic Structures:
How can we **create flexible approaches to learning and coordination** that respond to learners' needs?
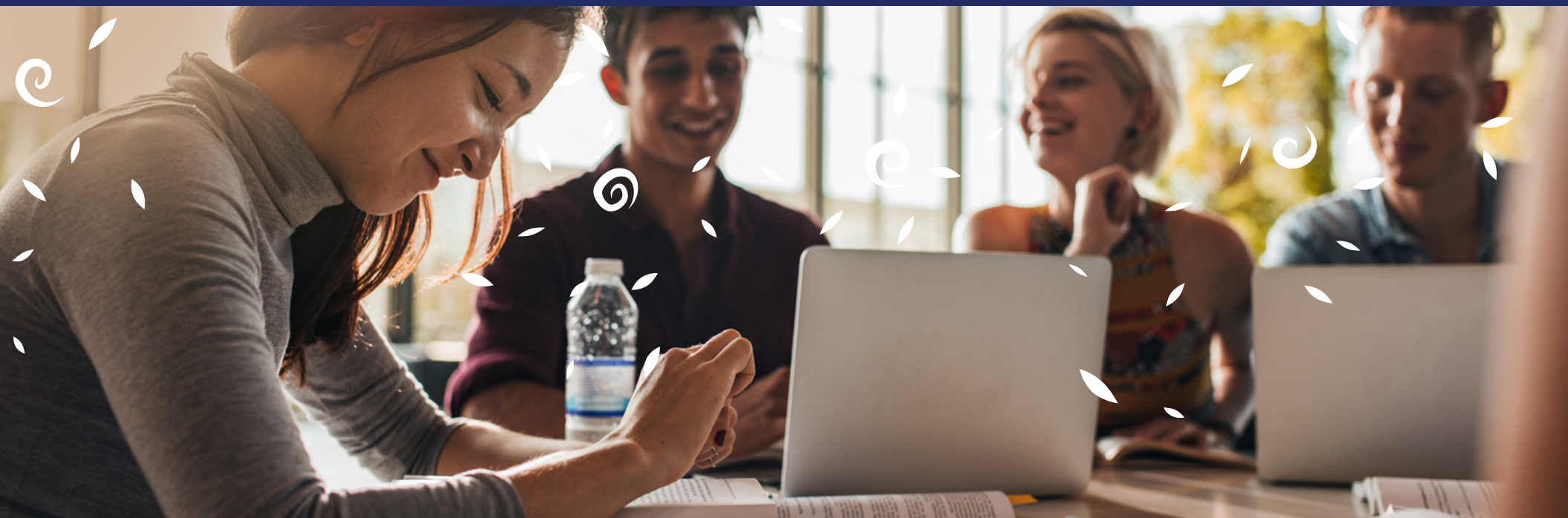
Innovation with Intent:
How can we **ground systems change in equity**, including and supporting underserved learners?

The New A+:
How can we **renegotiate definitions of success**, examining what education systems aim to achieve and who gets to say?

This workbook is designed to invite you into the conversation and dig a little deeper into what these critical areas of opportunity could mean for learning ten years from now. In addition to sharing clear guidelines for how the work you do today has the potential to make an impact on the future, it highlights the experiences of several workshop participants and other higher education leaders – including their perspectives on these areas of opportunity and their efforts to influence change toward the future of learning in their current day-to-day work.

As you explore these opportunities for yourself, keep in mind that every organization has different goals, needs and available resources. As such, some strategies might seem more appropriate than others and the tactics that work in service of those strategies will vary. You might also identify additional or different ways of responding to the opportunities explored here.

Many of the education leaders who participated in our workshops found that giving themselves the space to think about the future led them to the realizations that taking even small steps today can have large impacts and that considering the future of education is essential to doing their best work today.

Now, we invite you to do the same.

Looking Ahead to 2025

The Future of Learning:
Education in the Era of Partners in Code

Can you imagine what living, working, and learning might look like in 2025 and beyond? *The Future of Learning: Education in the Era of Partners in Code* explores five major societal shifts that we invite you to consider:

Current notions of college and career readiness will be challenged as artificial intelligence and machine learning displace or change many middle-class jobs and more full-time jobs get broken down into discrete tasks. In face of these trends, what will it mean to be career-ready, and what will the role of education be?

People Consumers increasingly expect customized experiences, including how they work, where they shop, and where and when they choose to learn. As students and their families seek out educational approaches and careers that fit their values, interests and lifestyles, how will established approaches to education and funding need to adapt?

New, flexible approaches to organizing work and making decisions are changing the future of work, reshaping economic approaches
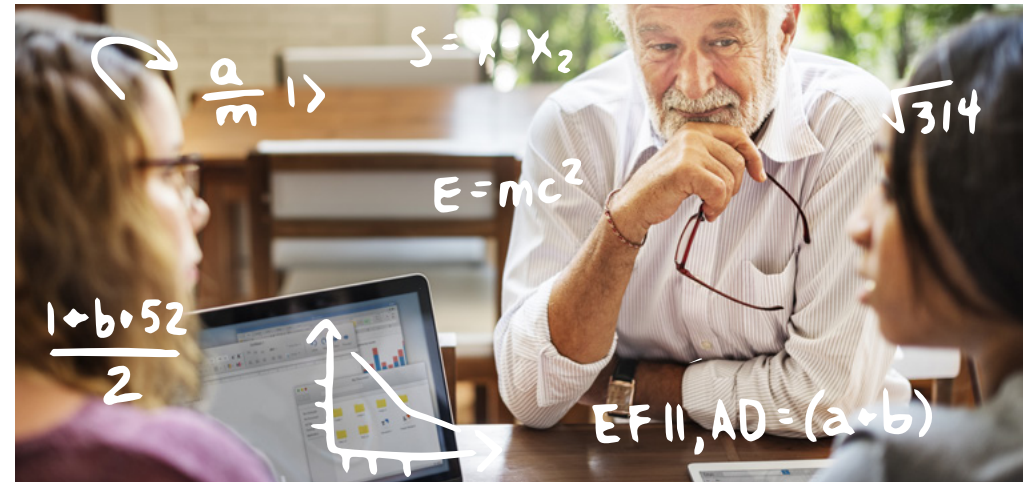
and creating a culture of greater transparency. These approaches could do the same for education institutions. What if postsecondary and higher education were more fluid, relying less on traditional institutional structures and more on network- and relationship-based structures focused on learners' needs, interests and goals?

Individuals increasingly aspire to optimize themselves and their performance and will have more tools available to do so. The spread of wearable devices and technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, paired with a deeper cultural understanding of the importance of social-emotional health and development, could lead to a greater individualization of education. Could these

tools and practices, along with more individual student data, help postsecondary and higher education institutions create more responsive learning experiences?

The changes will keep coming. With the coming changes in work, disruptions to local economies, increased environmental volatility and new challenges that impact individuals and communities, current funding sources could become unstable and new educational needs could emerge. As they work to respond to both individuals' needs and the needs of the communities they serve,

postsecondary and higher education institutions will have new opportunities and will also face new demands. Where might there be opportunities to personalize learning, partner across sectors to create solutions, cultivate students' understanding of their own impact and build resilience in the face of turbulence?

To dig deeper, download
The Future of Learning:
Education in the Era of Partners in Code

DOWNLOAD

Educating
the Whole Person

Future Need

Today, despite the growth in adult postsecondary and higher education enrollment, society generally imagines a "college student" as an 18- to 26-year-old engaged in academic pursuit. But this definition can be limiting as we move toward a future in which more and more students seek flexible, meaningful learning experiences that may not fit within traditional institutional offerings and as we place increasing value on social-emotional development and interest-based learning. Academics are just one piece of the puzzle. A successful student is one who feels safe, comfortable and ready to learn. Meeting the needs of every student will require learning experiences that emphasize many aspects of development across every life stage, connected through interpersonal relationships and supported by technology.

Strategies for Today

Redefine Career Readiness

Given the changing nature of work and the current skills gap among graduates, attributes such as "adaptable," "collaborative" and "self-driven" are likely to be better signs of readiness than what is reflected on traditional transcripts or the job-specific skills that have been attracting increasing attention. Consider ways of collaborating with community, business and industry partners to provide learners the opportunity to develop key social-emotional competencies alongside academic and professional skills.

Expand Support for Non-traditional Students

As more and more people seek postsecondary qualifications and weave in and out of higher education to keep up with the changing nature of work, higher education leaders can develop new programs, services, and supports that align with the needs of adult learners and learners from traditionally underserved backgrounds.

Emulate the Gap Year

In order to attract and retain learners who increasingly expect their experiences to engage them fully and authentically and to meet their needs, postsecondary and higher education institutions can reframe their offerings to be more experiential. New media such as augmented and virtual reality have the potential to help extend learning experiences, create new forms of engagement and cultivate a learning lifestyle.

Happening Now

Brian Bridges

Brian Bridges is the Vice President of Research and Member Engagement at the United Negro College Fund.

"There's a growing population of non-traditional students and with them, the need for non-traditional approaches. Many students bring a whole host of circumstances that influence the way that they operate, how much money they borrow, their ability to take classes at certain times or to stay enrolled continuously, their time to graduation. There is a whole range of things that future delivery methods will have to take into consideration for higher education to remain viable: a student's family situation, their work, their living situations, as well as their academic preparation. We need to think about the student holistically.

Funders are supporting researchers in investigating how a variety of personal issues affect a student's ability to persist and graduate — especially students who are non-traditional or low-income. Their finances, their ability to navigate financial aid, their academic preparation, their family circumstances, whether or not they have a car to commute to school — all of these factors, and more, play a role in their success. We need to examine outcomes beyond retention, such as credential completion, skills attainment and grades. Once we understand more about the impact these personal issues have, we can make policy recommendations, especially for how aid is delivered, and to whom.

Because I work with institutions that have fewer resources, mission-driven institutions that enroll students who need the most supports, there's a sense of urgency in getting this message across. If you don't understand the needs of the future, and as a result find yourself obsolete, it's not just the institution that suffers. The students in the communities you serve will suffer more."

Educating the Whole Person
It's Your Turn

Ask yourself... what are you doing today?

How do you currently support non-traditional or traditionally underserved students?

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In what ways do you currently seek to engage students in relevant and authentic ways?

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In what ways do you support the social-emotional growth and well-being of students?

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How are you currently collaborating with community, business and industry partners to help students prepare for their careers?

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It's Your Turn

Ask yourself and others... What could we do differently in the future?

How might we improve student support, especially for non-traditional or traditionally underserved students?

How might we enable more widespread interest-based learning on campus and within our local, regional and global communities?

How might we extend our support for students' social-emotional growth and well-being?

How might we better leverage community, business, or industry support and resources to help students prepare for their careers or meet other needs?

How might we better align what students are learning with what they will need to know and be able to do to thrive in an uncertain future workforce?

Future Need

Optimal learning happens when students feel engaged, empowered and in control of their own educations. Personalized learning can help support these aims by allowing students to accelerate or take additional time based on their level of mastery and by enabling students to co-create their learning experiences to align with their interests and reflect their learning styles. Despite its focus on meeting individual needs in support of rigorous learning objectives, personalized learning does not mean learning alone, and it doesn't eliminate the need to consider the world to which learners belong. Learning can be both personalized and community-oriented – helping to strengthen the community while providing students with relevant, interest-driven learning experiences that help prepare them for life beyond graduation.

Strategies for Today

Learn from personalized activities outside education

It can be easy to equate personalized learning with individualized learning. To ensure that personalized learning is also social and community-oriented, higher education leaders can look to how people pursue their interests in a social context. For example, playing video games or online shopping can now be connected, social activities. Consider how these examples could inform new kinds of learning experiences and structures.

Put content knowledge into context

For students to navigate the communities that will help them pursue their learning goals, they need to be able to talk about and call upon relevant subject matter with ease. Instead of treating content knowledge as either outmoded in the age of Google or as the end goal, postsecondary and higher education leaders can make the aim of knowledge attainment full and active participation in expert communities and networks.

Encourage divergent thinking

Part of the postsecondary and higher education experience involves engaging in divergent thinking, or stretching beyond one's comfort zone and engaging with those whose experiences and perspectives might be vastly different from our own. Students have a tremendous opportunity to develop critical thinking, self-expression and agency, and institutions can benefit from their perspectives. Working to establish trust and inclusion while encouraging divergent thinking can help higher education institutions foster connected communities.

Happening Now

Linda Schott

Linda Schott is the President of Southern Oregon University.

" Instead of having a system that sorts people according to their ability to get a grade the first time around, we need to focus on helping all students achieve mastery. Less than 35 percent of people have a Bachelor's degree, and we need more. The challenge is truly to believe that all people can learn. If all people can learn, how do we teach them differently? How can we ensure that they've actually mastered something, as opposed to just getting the passing grade? I recently heard from a student in a statistics class that they were offered extra credit for bringing in baby pictures. We don't want people passing because they brought in pictures of themselves as babies, but because they really understand concepts and can use them to solve problems in the real world.

We also need to reconsider the preparation that our educators get. In most graduate programs, we still want to hire people with terminal degrees, and those kinds of programs tend to be focused on proving that you can generate creative, original knowledge. That tends to take people further and further into specialization in their discipline, as opposed to a general, interdisciplinary understanding. We get faculty who are very steeped in their discipline and who value the depth of content knowledge that they've developed. What they have not had is any training in pedagogy. They don't understand different ways of teaching, and they haven't taken any education psychology classes. In K-12, at least most teachers have had to take courses in curriculum and instruction, in pedagogy, and they know about working with students with disabilities. University faculty rarely get that training before they are hired. They've been rewarded up until that point for being good biologists or historians or musicians, and now we're asking them to think about how to teach people, some who don't have any interest in something they're passionate about.

Higher education has to be about more, about helping students clarify their desires for their own lives. "

It's Your Turn

Ask yourself... what are you doing today?

In what ways does your institution personalize learning today?

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How are you working with K-12 stakeholders to ease the transition for students from high school to postsecondary and higher education?

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How are you currently involving students in institutional decision-making?

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How do you help students understand that what they are learning will enable them to be active members of the communities to which they aspire to belong?

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How are you working to foster a community of trust and inclusion while also encouraging divergent thinking?

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It's Your Turn

Ask yourself and others... What could we do differently in the future?

How might we refine or diversify our offerings to meet the needs of more learners or to better meet the needs of our existing students?

How might we strengthen students' exposure to multiple perspectives and divergent points of view while also cultivating a safe and inclusive community?

How might postsecondary and higher education institutions make the real-world application of content knowledge and access to expert communities and networks a core part of students' learning experiences?

How might we strengthen students' involvement in institutional decision making or find other ways to bring divergent thinking into those processes?

Creating Flexible Approaches to Learning

Future Need

Long-established institutional cultures and practices, as well as policies regulating postsecondary and higher education, can be barriers to meaningful change. But new technologies, organizational structures and cultural practices can open the way to new approaches of coordinating and supporting learning. They can also provide greater transparency and the means to collect and implement feedback quickly, not only addressing today's constraints, but also building more responsive organizations and networks for the future. A willingness to be flexible and adapt to meet the changing needs of students ensures that the pursuit of higher education remains desired and relevant.

Strategies for Today

Help people work in new ways

Postsecondary and higher education faculty and staff are likely to find their roles changing as learning structures diversify and students demand more customization. Higher education leaders can support institutional change by finding ways to encourage risk-taking and by providing employee incentives that align with new directions.

Take it a step at a time

Pushing for comprehensive change before your institution is ready can have the opposite effect. Instead, look for footholds for change by fostering innovation in specific contexts. Emerging departments or programs can be effective settings for exploring new processes and customs. Building bridges between new approaches and traditional ones (for example, translating new forms of experiential learning into credit hours or adapting admissions processes to account for variations in K-12 transcripts) can also make changes easier to accept.
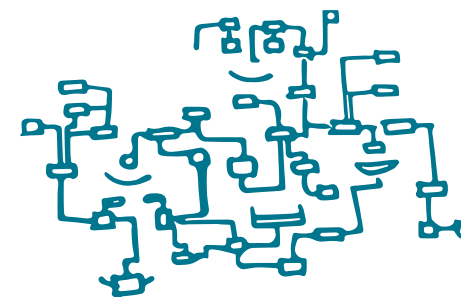
Become a network

To adapt to student demands for customization and respond to the changing external landscape, postsecondary and higher education institutions can use network-based structures to provide students access to the right experiences and connect them with faculty and mentors. For example, institutions could serve as hubs connecting students with community learning experiences. Networks could also enable new revenue streams and business models and deepen interconnections with other higher education institutions.

Happening Now

Ben Blair

Ben Blair is an educator and co-founder of Teachur, an online learning platform that aims to improve instructional design and access to higher education.

"Teachur is a platform that is structured around learning objectives, the very specific intended learning outcomes that a learning pathway is aiming for. The platform is built around the idea that degrees are made up of courses, which are made up of lessons, which are made up of objectives; and those objectives include instructional media and assessment. Some of these things we've created, most of it is curated. When a student completes a lesson or passes a course, Teachur will provide robust documentation that they've not just passed a class, but that they've mastered a specific learning objective.

While our first market for Teachur is students who want to earn a college degree, we want to move quickly into targeting educators to contribute curricula and to be compensated for their contributions. Right now in higher education, there's not a good system for curriculum to evolve – you use a syllabus you found online, or one provided by a colleague or the college department's administration, or maybe you took the course you're teaching when you were in college. Because lessons and courses will be rated on Teachur by students and experts, and there will be a clear correlation between which course materials have led to students' demonstrating mastery rather than just receiving a grade, there will be an incentive for faculty to provide their best materials.

Teachur is inspired by conversations that colleges and universities are beginning to have: we need to be precise and considerate about what students need to master, and how. We're optimized for where things are heading. "

Creating Flexible Approaches to Learning

It's Your Turn

Ask yourself... What are you doing today?

How do you currently incentivize your faculty and staff to take risks and innovate?

Where have you had successes in communicating about institutional change?

What new approaches to organizing or supporting learning have you recently implemented?

In what ways are you using networks or other flexible structures to support learning objectives or reach new markets?

It's Your Turn

Ask yourself and others... What could we do differently in the future?

What new organizational structures or approaches to learning might help us meet our goals?

How might we incentivize and communicate effectively about change?

What new faculty and staff roles might help us advance institutional objectives?

What community organizations and leaders might we include in our broader learning network to ensure high-quality, meaningful learning?

Future Need

Every day, education is called upon to innovate, change and improve. Postsecondary and higher education institutions have fostered countless inventions, discoveries and ideas that have changed the world have. They are also typically well-established institutions that can be slow to change. Even when they might want to change, new is not always better, more equitable or more supportive of learners. Some new approaches could help postsecondary and higher education institutions address persistent problems of equity and access or meet other institutional objectives. When it comes to making institutional or sector-wide change, pursuing diversity, or choosing what new technologies and opportunities to embrace, higher education leaders and innovators can consider what has the potential to address access and opportunity gaps.

Strategies for Today

Use new tools to increase access and completion.

Postsecondary and higher education needs to develop new options tailored to those who are struggling with current approaches. Consider investing in new forms of learner support, clearly demonstrating the value of the experiences that your institution offers and evaluating how your business model could be adapted to serve traditionally underserved learners.
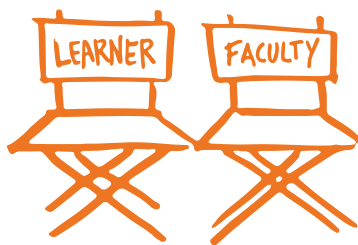
Turn to students for guidance

Students facing large amounts of debt and economic uncertainty are at the center of a debate about the value of a college degree. While many institutions and some national initiatives are working to expand access to postsecondary credentials, not all are grounding their change efforts in what students and communities want and need. Make a seat for current and potential students at the decision-making table.

Foster exchange

The changes that are coming to the world of work and higher education are big ones to which many organizations may need to contribute. Higher education leaders can support institutional viability and meet the needs of learners by looking beyond traditional players and being open to nontraditional partners who share your vision. You are also uniquely positioned to share your expertise and experiences with new players.

Happening Now

Shannon Looney

Shannon Looney is the Project Manager in the Office of Urban Initiatives at the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities.

" Education is a great equalizer for every student, and the most successful schools are those who think of equity as something for all seasons. How you approach change, how you structure conversations around programming, how you work with the community – equity must implicitly drive all your efforts.

In the summer of 2016, we invested in design thinking to push the boundaries for universities to think about how they are supporting their students, to empathize with them, to recognize that successful universities find that success reflected in their communities. It was a process of intentional self-discovery, identifying existing practices that could be barriers, or assets, in the pursuit of equity.

The first step, honestly, is preparing yourself to feel a little uncomfortable in the process. Accepting failure. It's a mindset shift, to accept discomfort willingly, but I think there's something amazing that can evolve out of these uncomfortable, unplanned moments, these moments that challenge our traditional way of thinking. "

It's Your Turn

Ask yourself... What are you doing today?

How do your current recruiting and retention practices support and engage traditionally underserved learners?

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When you consider making changes, how do equity and access factor into your decision-making?

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In what ways do you currently gather and use students' perspectives?

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How do you currently exchange ideas and practices with other higher education institutions or community partners?

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It's Your Turn

Ask yourself and others... What Could we do differently in the future?

How might we shift our recruiting and retention practices to improve access and support for traditionally underserved learners?

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How might we look beyond traditional credentials and education experiences to open new opportunities for teaching and learning?

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How might we better gather and use students' perspectives?

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Where might we introduce new processes or approaches that would provide students greater flexibility and adaptability and help us serve a wider range of people?

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Future Need

Today, success is most often measured in the form of scores and rankings determined by people far away from learners. But when the ability to collaborate, to think critically and to be self-aware are becoming increasingly important for the workforce of the future, higher education may find that what they need to deliver has to change – and to challenge fundamental assumptions about what learners truly need from a postsecondary degree. Considering what success looks like, and the role of postsecondary and higher education in supporting and furthering students' success, is critical. This work isn't for educators alone. We must reexamine what we want from education systems and ensure that communities and other stakeholders have a voice in that discussion.

Strategies for Today
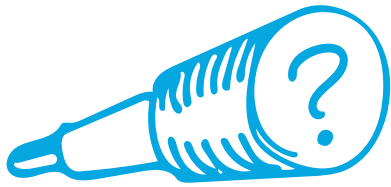
Question purpose

What is the purpose of postsecondary and higher education?" may seem disconnected from today's real pressures and challenges, but a tension between workforce readiness and human development demands that higher education leaders clarify their institutions' value. Leaders who persist in continually evaluating the question and involve a broad range of stakeholders in answering it can find clarity of vision and a gauge for their decisions and efforts.

Step out of the race

The rankings race and the mindset that good education is a scarce resource are both harming higher education. Leaders who define success by prioritizing those whose interests they serve will be well positioned to achieve institutional objectives and to pursue fundamental change when desired. Leaders can also advocate for measures of institutional success that support a broad view of student learning, a wide array of rigorous approaches and acceptance of high-quality alternative credentials.

Broaden your use of data

Data in higher education is most often used to judge students' past academic performance and to demonstrate that institutions are meeting their obligations. Consider using real-time dashboards, data-driven learning pathways and comprehensive data portfolios to demonstrate the value of learning experiences, help students select experiences and support students in monitoring the outcomes that are relevant to them.

Happening Now

Jim Fowler

Jim Fowler is an assistant professor in the Department of Mathematics at the Ohio State University.

"Traditionally we give students tasks and they respond with the solution, but I want to produce mathematicians that are generating their own interesting mathematics. Real success means that students are inventing their own problems, questions and projects using the mathematics that they've learned. They're actively discovering. Success to the individual learner probably doesn't just mean getting A's; success has to be tied into how they're identifying themselves with the subject, they're not just doing mathematics — they're becoming a mathematician, contributing to the community and sharing insights.

The challenge in being a professional mathematician is being stuck and figuring out what you can do with the tools at hand. With an assessment, there's presumably a complete answer to come up with. Our learners won't necessarily have unsolved problems, but we can offer problems with answers that take on different forms, or different ways that progress can be made. We want to engage them authentically. We want our most highly integrated learners to take on a more instructional role. With our open calculus textbooks, we put everything on GitHub and students submit requests and edits. Students are contributing to the online resources that make learning possible for their peers.

Learning should be intrinsically rewarding. I've never been of the opinion that academia exists to prepare people to be workers: It exists to prepare people to flourish as humans. "

It's Your Turn

Ask yourself.. what are you doing today?

What do you see as the purpose(s) of higher education?

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What measures do you currently use to indicate and improve student success and institutional effectiveness?

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In what ways are current definitions of success supporting or limiting the learning experiences or credentials that your institution offers?

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How are you currently using data to inform ongoing decision making?

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It's Your Turn

Ask yourself and others... What could we do differently in the future?

How might we define success for our institution?

How might we leverage data to add value to learning and provide students and faculty with more relevant information?

How might we advocate for institutional measures that support that definition?

How might we ensure safe and ethical use of student and institutional data?

Conclusion

Future approaches to learning need to **educate the whole person**, considering not just what students need to acquire a degree, but what they need to be successful and fulfilled people. We must also find ways to **personalize learning in community**, creating opportunities for students to connect and contribute locally and globally – and to show how their activities demonstrate learning. Our **approaches to learning and coordination must be flexible** and adaptable, putting what's best for the students and communities we serve, rather than what is traditional, at the center.

When pursuing change, we must **make equity a chief concern**, ensuring that we adopt new practices and innovations that strive to serve all learners well. And when it comes to defining what success in school looks like, we must consider what we really want students to learn, what we want them to be able to do, and how best to reflect those **new definitions of success**.

For these things to happen, and ultimately for individuals to succeed in a complex and rapidly changing world, today's postsecondary and higher education leaders and innovators need to play a central role in shaping the future of learning. While there is a delicate balance between moving toward a future vision while attending to the day-to-day operations of today's institutions, it can be done, and it can be done by you.

It is imperative that we prepare all learners for the future they will need to navigate and lead. When you begin by articulating your own vision for the future of postsecondary and higher education, revisiting what you are doing today and considering what you must do to support the success of all learners in the future, the work becomes not only possible, but imperative.

Related Resources
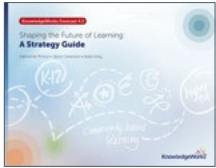
Shaping the Future of Learning:
A Strategy Guide

This resource explores five foundational issues facing education as we look ahead to 2025 and summarizes strategies to help K-12 schools; informal and community-based learning organizations, such as museums and libraries; and higher education institutions create a future that serves all learners well.

DOWNLOAD

The Future of Learning:
Education in the Era of Partners in Code

Over the next decade, our lives will become so inextricably linked with our digital companions that we expect to find ourselves living as partners in code. These changes will open a wide set of possibilities for education that we all can help shape. Order print copies of KnowledgeWorks' fourth comprehensive forecast on the future of learning to explore how five drivers of change might impact people, structures, and society, as well as potential opportunities and challenges on the horizon.

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The Future of Learning:
Redefining Readiness from the Inside Out

This resource explores how readiness for further learning, work and life may be redefined to better prepare students for an uncertain future. By proposing a new foundation for readiness based on core social-emotional skills, it offers education stakeholders a framework for helping all students develop the skills needed to succeed in possible employment landscapes of 2040.

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