Covid’s Educational Legacy: What Became Endemic After the Pandemic

Key Themes

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The seventh Yale School of Management Higher Education Leadership Summit, led by Yale Professor Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, was held virtually on January 26, 2022.

Summit attendees strongly disagree, with 98% believing it is easier to achieve financial success with a college degree than without.

Congressman Ro Khanna shared the following data: during Covid, the peak unemployment rate for college graduates was about 8%, for those who didn’t have a college degree it was 17%, and for those without a high school diploma it was 21%. Looking back at the Great Recession, peak unemployment for those with a college degree was 5.3%, for those without a college degree it was 11%, and for those without a high school degree, unemployment was 17%.

Khanna argued that it is essential to celebrate education and to push back against the anti-intellectualism in America.

“The reality is the more education, the better your shot in a 21st-century economy. The doesn’t mean everyone needs a four-year degree; there can be other options for getting postsecondary education, but we should celebrate more education.”

— Ro Khanna, US Congress, State of California - 17th District

Higher education is innovating by creating and leveraging partnerships.

A central theme of this Summit was how Covid has amplified the need and accelerated the demand for partnerships. These include partnerships between educational institutions and between higher education and business.

Partnerships between Institutions

Multiple examples were shared of institutions working together. A few examples include:

• A 13-entity partnership focused on sustainable food, funded with a grant from the NSF. Among the participants are American University and the University of Albany. Sylvia Burwell, president of American University, stated, “We need to differentiate, do the pieces, and recognize that there is value to each of the pieces. We are not all going to be everything, but we can join together in partnership.”
Ted Mitchell, president of the American Council on Education, which represents more than 6,000 colleges and universities, said, “Covid has brought on a new era of collaboration. We’ve moved from a world in which best practices might be imitated from time to time from institution to institution to a sense of collaboration, where people are actually taking on problems and challenges together. That is yielding not only more creative solutions to problems, but more durable ones.”

**Partnerships with Industry**

The announcement by Intel of its plan to make an enormous investment in building a chip manufacturing site in Ohio, which will create thousands of good jobs in the “Silicon Heartland,” was met with tremendous enthusiasm by college and university presidents. Just as higher-ed institutions have partnered with Intel in other parts of the country, institutions in the Midwest are excited to partner with Intel for STEM jobs, manufacturing jobs, and a host of other needs.

- **A partnership focused on climate solutions**, led by Stony Brook University. This is a consortium involving other academic partners, such as Yale, and community groups. This group is a finalist to become an international hub in New York City, focused on climate change with equity and justice at the heart of the solution.

- **Partnerships in Massachusetts, focused on multiple areas.** Several institutions in Massachusetts have partnered and worked together on subjects including Covid response, pathogen readiness, and a green high-performance computing center. In addition, the presidents of Wellesley College and Boston University are working with the Boston Chamber of Commerce on the diversity of the workforce and on how Boston-area educational institutions can be the engine of the region’s future workforce.

Importantly, the wide range of jobs that are needed at Intel and in other high tech companies are not just STEM jobs. Companies need accountants, project managers, and individuals with a wide range of skills—which are the types of competencies developed through a liberal arts education. Also, the demand for future jobs in the Silicon Heartland and around the country won’t just be filled by new college graduates; it will be necessary to reskill adult learners.

Another example of a partnership between higher education and industry is Quinnipiac University’s partnership with Hartford Healthcare. Quinnipiac President Judy Olian explained that this partnership “is much broader than typical healthcare partnerships . . . it helps us co-create the pipelines of the future and the knowledge of the future.” Recruiting on campus will go beyond just healthcare to include areas such as data analytics, law, communications, logistics, and more.
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In addition to testing for Covid and mandating vaccination, the other major way that higher education has pivoted is adopting and incorporating technology into teaching. Almost all leaders found Zoom to be crucial and most anticipate that Zoom/technology will remain important going forward. But leaders acknowledge that students are growing tired of virtual instruction and that the lack of continuous in-person instruction damages the student experience.

Jason Wingard, 12th President, Temple University

Partnerships with Community Colleges

A key partnership that is often overlooked is the need for partnerships between four-year institutions and community colleges. Joe Bertolino, president of Southern Connecticut State University, said that more than 50% of his institution’s students come from community colleges. He encouraged all college and university presidents to engage with community colleges.

During Covid, institutions adapted through testing and technology.

With a goal of keeping students, faculty, and staff safe, many institutional leaders pivoted quickly to adopt strategies involving extensive Covid testing. After a vaccine became available, a majority of institutions mandated vaccination. While approaches varied by geography and based on whether an institution was public or private, most institutions have achieved high rates of vaccination.

However, as Covid becomes endemic, a majority of Summit participants (59%) agree that the current Covid containment regime is becoming inappropriate.
Benefits of Technology

Summit participants—almost all of whom use Zoom—commended Zoom for enabling continued delivery of education during the Covid crisis. Educational leaders see enormous potential benefits from technology in education, including the ability to increase access to education, modernize education, and personalize the educational experience so each person can learn different things at different speeds.

Astrid Tuminez, president of Utah Valley University, who previously worked at Microsoft, said that academia has been a laggard in the adoption and use of technology. She has created a position of vice president of digital transformation at her institution—and she encouraged educational leaders to understand and embrace technology, which she characterized as “an incredible leveling tool” for society.

Drawbacks of Technology

However, even Zoom CEO Eric Yuan acknowledged, “It cannot replace the in-classroom experience.” Summit participants identified several drawbacks associated with technology. These include:

- **Lack of faculty expertise.** Faculty are often not comfortable or knowledgeable in using technology as part of the educational experience. More training is needed along with more creativity in using technology.

- **Lack of student interaction.** A common theme was that remote learning inhibits interaction among students. Summit participants want Zoom and other technology providers to focus on improving the interaction among learners.

- **Lack of relationships and intimacy.** Not only is it difficult for students using technology to interact via Zoom, but the use of technology diminishes the value of the college experience, where a great deal of learning and growth take place outside of the classroom. Several college presidents made the argument for the value of the experience at a small, intimate liberal arts college, which could be eroded by technology.

- **Social isolation.** With lack of interaction and intimacy comes isolation. While some information can be learned through use of technology, many learners are at risk of being isolated when learning alone, remotely. A particular at-risk group is young men, many of whom are increasingly isolated and may or may not be participating in education. Technology alone is not a solution and may be exacerbating the damage that is occurring.

- **Disadvantaging underprivileged students.** When asked if remote instruction disadvantages students from underprivileged backgrounds, 82% of Summit participants agreed that it does.

- **Consolidation of power.** NYU Professor Scott Galloway said that typically when digitization or innovation comes to an industry, there is a consolidation of power. He sees this occurring as the top 100 schools are gaining power and other institutions are feeling a strain. This power, says Galloway, gives the top institutions the ability to increase prices without increasing access or value.

Two other massive problems on campuses: increased hate speech and lack of diversity.

Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, termed hate “a corrosive force that doesn’t just erode communities, it can undermine our whole society.” He cited statistics showing a 13% increase in hate crimes in 2020 and a 32% increase in crimes against people based on race or ethnicity.

The topic of hate speech and hate crimes is relevant for educational leaders because college campuses are “crucibles for society.” Clearly, campuses are a place to have robust debates, but Greenblatt argued that “even good discussions deserve guardrails.” In light of the increase in hate speech on college campuses and in society, Greenblatt called on college and university leaders to demand that conversations are based in facts and to act as leaders in weeding out hate speech.
“I would just implore you to use your bully pulpits, lead by example, with a kind of clear, consistent, cogent calling-out of hate that this moment demands.”
— Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO & National Director, Anti-Defamation League

Another problem demanding the attention of college and university presidents is the lack of diversity and equity in higher education. A recent study by McKinsey found lack of student, faculty, and staff diversity on many campuses and little or no progress over the past decade. Even though diversity has gotten more attention in recent years, the progress has been inadequate. And, the focus has mainly been on student representation, with little attention to faculty and staff or research and scholarship. Much more progress is needed to accelerate diversity and equity.

College and university presidents are taking actions to address problems of cost and isolation.

The presidents of Colgate, Colby, and Bates described initiatives at their institutions to make college more affordable for students from lower and middle-income families. Colgate, for example, has a “no loan initiative” where it is replacing student loans with grants in financial aid packages for students from families with incomes between $80,000 and $130,000. This is increasing access for a group of students who have lacked it.

Colby has created a tiered pricing model where a student coming from a family with income of $150,000 would only pay $15,000 to attend. As a result of this program and active marketing outreach, Colby has dramatically increased the number of applications received from students of color, resulting in doubling the number of students of color on campus in a short period of time.

“By expanding the top of the funnel, this allowed us to be able to attract students who never would have thought that Colby was accessible to them.”
— David A. Greene, 20th President, Colby College

To combat isolation, Roslyn Artis, president of Benedict College, focused on the importance of leadership presence. In an interview she said, “I think presence matters. I have chosen to spend my career in small private institutions.” Artis expounded on the importance of educational leaders developing one-on-one personal relationships with students.

“Technology does not enhance the personal care and the contact . . . I think there are a certain number of students who simply require a deeper level of engagement . . . I think our institutions have a very special role to play in this ecosystem. Very often, that’s a one-on-one role in the lives of the students that we educate.”
— Roslyn Clark Artis, 14th President, Benedict College

The intimacy and nurturing environment is part of the success of many HBCUs. Tony Allen, president of Delaware State University, noted that HBCUs represent only 3% of all colleges and universities in the country, but produce 25% of all Black graduates. Among the reasons is the supportive environment created by leaders such as Artis, Allen, and Freeman Hrabowski.

In responding to the issue of social isolation among young males, particularly Black males, Chris Howard quoted one of his mentors who said, “Men quite often learn better shoulder to shoulder rather than eye to eye.” The importance of personal intimacy as part of learning must not be forgotten. Howard also commended the experimentation being led by David Thomas, president of Morehouse College, which has launched the Black Men’s Research Institute as well as a program for men who have begun but not completed college.

“We might have to be creative in how we create opportunities for men to be successful and we might have to be old school about it.”
— Christopher B. Howard, 8th President, Robert Morris University
Freeman Hrabowski was recognized as a true legend in higher education, one of the most influential university presidents of our time, and a role model for everyone in education.

Over the past 30 years Freeman Hrabowski has transformed UMBC by more than doubling the graduation rate, building a dynamic, inclusive environment, and educating more students from all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. UMBC has significantly increased the number of Black students in science and engineering who have gone on to earn graduate degrees. Through his work and example, he has changed the landscape of higher education in his region and in the country.

Hrabowski is a visionary leader, a rock star in higher education, and an inspiring educator who genuinely cares about his students, sets incredibly high standards, and gives them the support they need to soar. He has transformed the lives of countless numbers of students.

In accepting this award, Hrabowski said that serving as a university president has not been a job, it has been his life. He, like other educators, believes passionately in the power of education to transform lives and fulfill dreams. He challenged all Summit attendees to keep hope alive and to remember that our words become our actions, our actions become our habits, our habits become our character, and our character becomes our destiny. He ended by reiterating, “Keep hope alive.”
Participants

Michael B. Alexander, President, Lasell University
Tony Allen, 12th President, Delaware State University
Heidi M. Anderson, 16th President, University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Roslyn Clark Artis, 14th President, Benedict College
Dennis N. Assanis, 28th President, University of Delaware
Lawrence S. Bacow, 29th President, Harvard University
Mark P. Becker, 7th President, Georgia State University
Heidi M. Anderson, 16th President, University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Robert A. Brown, 10th President, Boston University
Ingrid C. Burke, Dean, Yale School of the Environment
Sylvia Burwell, 22nd US Secretary of Health and Human Services; 15th President, American University
Kai Bynum, 109th Head of School, Hopkins School
Lori J. Carrell, Chancellor, University of Minnesota Rochester
Brad Carson, 21st President, The University of Tulsa
Brian W. Casey, 17th President, Colgate University
Ana Mari Cauce, 33rd President, University of Washington
Johnetta B. Cole, 7th President, Spelman College; 14th President, Bennett College
John Comerford, 21st President, Otterbein University
Anne Coyle, Higher Education Practice, Russell Reynolds Associates
Ronald A. Crutcher, 10th President, University of Richmond
Christina R. Cutlip, Senior Managing Director, TIAA
James W. Dean Jr., 20th President, University of New Hampshire
John J. DeGioia, 48th President, Georgetown University
Anne Doyle, President, Lasell Village
Michael Fitts, 15th President, Tulane University
Katherine E. Fleming, Provost, New York University
Carol L. Folt, 12th President, University of Southern California
Scott Galloway, Professor of Marketing, NYU Stern School of Business
Stanley J. Garstka, Professor, Yale School of Management
Patrick Gelsinger, Chief Executive Officer, Intel Corporation
Tamar Gendler, Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences, Yale University
Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO & National Director, Anti-Defamation League
David A. Greene, 20th President, Colby College
Andrew D. Hamilton, 16th President, New York University
Anne F. Harris, 14th President, Grinnell College
Christine Heitz, Associate Partner, McKinsey & Company
Joseph J. Hellbe, 15th President, Lehigh University
Gregory D. Hess, 16th President, Wabash College; President & CEO, IES Abroad
Christopher B. Howard, 8th President, Robert Morris University
Freeman A. Hrabowski III, President, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Robert W. Iuliano, 15th President, Gettysburg College
Paula A. Johnson, 14th President, Wellesley College
Michael Kahn, Chair, Board of Trustees, Grinnell College
Ro Khanna, US Congress, State of California - 17th District; Author, Dignity in a Digital Age
Rakesh Khurana, Dean of Harvard College, Harvard University
Charag Krishnan, Partner, McKinsey & Company
Annie Lamont, Co-Founder & Managing Director, Oak HC/FT
Pericles Lewis, Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives, Yale University
Linda Lorimer, Retired Vice President for Global and Strategic Initiatives, Yale University
Dannel P. Malloy, Chancellor, University of Maine System
Richanne C. Mankey, 19th President, Defiance College
Patricia A. McGuire, 14th President, Trinity Washington University
Mauri D. McInnis, 6th President, Stony Brook University
Liz McMillen, Executive Editor, The Chronicle of Higher Education
Ted Mitchell, President, American Council on Education
Liz Morse, Managing Director, Head of Associations, TIAA
Robert S. Murley, Chairman, Educational Testing Service
Mark R. Nemec, 9th President, Fairfield University
Judy D. Olian, 9th President, Quinnipiac University
Saad B. Omer, Director, Yale Institute for Global Health
Lynn C. Pasquerella, 20th President, Mount Holyoke College; 14th President, AAC&U
Harris Pastides, 28th President, University of South Carolina
John A. Pérez, Board of Regents, University of California
John J. Petillo, President, Sacred Heart University
Duwain Pinder, Partner, McKinsey & Company
Gregory S. Prince Jr., 4th President, Hampshire College
Scott Pulsipher, President, Western Governors University
John Rice, Founder & CEO, Management Leadership for Tomorrow
Christine M. Riordan, 10th President, Adelphi University
Dorothy K. Robinson, Retired General Counsel, Yale University; Board Member, TIAA
Havidan Rodriguez, 20th President, The University at Albany
Rodney K. Rogers, 12th President, Bowling Green State University
Meredith Rosenberg, Digital Education and EdTech, Russell Reynolds Associates
Quinton T. Ross Jr., 15th President, Alabama State University
Michael S. Roth, 16th President, Wesleyan University  
Peter Salovey, 23rd President, Yale University  
Jimmy Sarakatsannis, Partner & Leader, Education Practice NA, McKinsey & Company  
Lawrence Schovanec, 17th President, Texas Tech University  
Paula R. Singer, President, Walden University  
Ava Clayton Spencer, 8th President, Bates College  
Stephen Spinelli Jr., 14th President, Babson College  
G. Gabrielle Starr, 10th President, Pomona College  
Caryl M. Stern, Executive Director, Walton Family Foundation  
David A. Thomas, 12th President, Morehouse College  
Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, 15th President, The George Washington University  
Astrid S. Tuminez, 7th President, Utah Valley University  
Sten H. Vermund, Dean, Yale School of Public Health  
Laura R. Walker, 11th President, Bennington College  
Jennifer Widness, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges  
Jason Wingard, 12th President, Temple University  
Lynn Perry Wooten, 9th President, Simmons University  
Adam C. Wright, President, Dallas Baptist University  
Eric S. Yuan, Founder & CEO, Zoom Video Communications