Learning across Lifestages: Impact across Generations & Communities

Executive Summary

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Agenda

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Michael B. Alexander, 9th President, Lasell University
Anne Doyle, President, Lasell Village
James Firman, President & CEO, National Council on Aging

COMMENTS
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Lawrence Schovanec, 17th President, Texas Tech University
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Robert M. Zemsky, Professor and Chair, The Learning Alliance for Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania
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Lawrence S. Bacow, 29th President, Harvard University
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Katherine Fleming, Provost, New York University
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Gregory D. Hess, 16th President, Wabash College
Heather K. Gerken, Dean and Sol & Lillian Goldman Professor of Law, Yale Law School
Judy D. Olian, 9th President, Quinnipiac University
Pericles Lewis, Vice President and Vice Provost for Global Strategy, Yale University

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Life Stage & Leadership Voice

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Meredith Rosenberg, Digital Education and EdTech Practice, Russell Reynolds Associates
Richard Jacob, Associate VP for Federal and State Relations, Office of Federal and State Relations

Legend in Leadership Award: Lawrence Bacow, 29th President, Harvard University

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Market Life Stages & Finding New Constituencies

Overview
Higher education leaders acknowledge that traditional financial models are in trouble and schools need to explore new student markets to serve. These pressures are motivating institutional leaders to rethink and redesign the traditional undergraduate experience and to focus on opportunities to upskill mid-career individuals while providing lifelong learning to older individuals. Focusing on adult learners and providing new types of offerings—such as intergenerational education or online learning—can be new sources of students and revenues.

Context
Academic leaders discussed business model challenges and examined segments that represent potential growth opportunities.

Key Themes
Institutions’ financial models are in trouble, requiring new sources of revenue.
In discussing why they agreed to become college and university presidents in such a challenging atmosphere, the participants at this Summit were inspired by the general mission of higher education and by the specific missions of their institutions. These missions include providing educational opportunities for distinct groups such as women, providing access to education for underserved students, or improving social justice, to name just a few missions.

However, while inspired by their institutions’ missions, participants are acutely aware of the challenging realities of today’s higher education marketplace. The majority of participants believe their school’s financial model is in trouble and their school needs to explore new student markets. One president even stated, “There are too many colleges doing the same things.”

Survey Question | Yes | No
--- | --- | ---
I believe our school’s financial model is in trouble | 57% | 43% |
Our school needs to explore new student markets to serve | 80% | 20% |

Academic leaders see the need to target distinct student segments.
The major segments discussed were traditional college-age students, mid-career workers, and older individuals. There are challenges and opportunities in serving each group.

Traditional College-Age Students
Participants noted that high dropout rates after the freshman year are a major factor contributing to disappointing completion rates. Reasons cited include barriers such as cost, inadequate financial aid, and a perception that what is being taught isn’t relevant. Several participants characterized the current generation of students as very different from previous generations, yet much of what is taught and how it is taught remains largely unchanged. The result is that many students aren’t engaged and choose to leave college.

Participants discussed several actions required for this group:
- In a world where students may change jobs and careers more than a dozen times, institutions need to rethink the knowledge and skills that graduates will need to be successful in the years ahead. Several institutions are engaged in planning exercises to redefine the college experience.
- Greater attention must be devoted to students’ time outside of the classroom, as this represents the majority of time on campus. It is not enough to rethink the curriculum; it is necessary to reexamine the entire college experience.
- In particular, major public institutions with multiple branches and large student enrollments need to fundamentally reinvent themselves.
Participants also described the ongoing need to improve access to higher education for underrepresented groups, such as individuals whose parents didn’t go to college, African Americans, Latinos, and low-income individuals. And, changes are needed in financial aid (though this topic was not discussed in depth). Despite these challenges, there are examples of institutions with distinct, compelling missions—such as preparing future women leaders—that are experiencing a surge in applications.

**Mid-Career Workers**

There are tens of millions of individuals ages 25 to 65 who need upskilling and retooling. One participant cited a statistic of 80 million adults from 25 to 65 who lack any degree and 50 million individuals with an associate degree but without a bachelor’s degree. In today’s rapidly changing workplace, these individuals need to retool.

However, individuals face multiple barriers including time (since many are working full-time jobs), childcare, and affordability. One expert on this segment commented, “Working adults want convenience.”

For higher education, upskilling mid-career workers represents a tremendous opportunity. “Adult learners can be a cash cow,” offered a former president.

But, the education to provide the required skills differs from traditional college education. This education can take the form of certificates and badges and can often be delivered online. While online learning lacks the communal aspects of traditional education, it addresses the convenience challenges and can be effective at skill development.

“We need programs short of degrees, like badges and certificates.”

Several participants mentioned the idea of partnerships, between employers and community colleges as well as between community colleges and four-year institutions.

Already, at more than 40% of the institutions represented at the Summit, adult learners comprise more than 5% of the student body. Still, participants see an enormous unmet need and huge growth opportunity among adult learners.

Our school already serves adult learners of what % of student body?

1. 10% or more
2. 6 – 10%
3. 5%
4. Less than 5%
5. None

**Older Individuals**

There are 70 million individuals ages 55 to 75, many of whom are healthy and active, and will live another 20 to 40 years. However, these individuals and society are unprepared for these long lifespans. One participant commented that the idea isn’t necessarily lifelong learning; it is long life learning—readying individuals to live long, vibrant lives.

One innovative idea is Lasell Village. This is a senior living community that is part of Lasell University, in Newton, Massachusetts. Senior residents take 450 hours of courses each year. This has created an intergenerational campus, with students ranging from 18 to 100 years old. Younger students enjoy interacting with older, more experienced students. The older students are energized by the college environment.

For Lasell, the model involves having senior residents purchase units on campus and pay an annual fee. This model is generating millions of dollars in additional revenue from the school’s real estate and services. Other institutions have considered similar models but may not have the same real estate or intergenerational culture.
A criticism is that Lasell’s model is limited to affluent seniors and is not broadly applicable. Solutions to extend similar models to less affluent populations could involve community colleges but would require support from policymakers. Yet at this time, policymakers have shown little interest in supporting lifelong or intergenerational learning. When policymakers focus on education it tends to be K-12, traditional higher education, or workforce development.

Participants see opportunities to learn from educational offerings in the United Kingdom. This includes the Open University, which provides easy access to older learners, and U3A (the University of the Third Age). U3A’s aim is the education and stimulation of retired members of the community, particularly those in their “third age” of life, with teaching often involving retired professors.

Some policymakers recognize the importance of higher education, yet some opportunities within higher ed are not yet priorities.

Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont sees higher education as one of Connecticut’s strengths in creating a highly skilled workforce that is attractive to attract and retain employers.

He has created a workforce council composed of higher education and employers. This council is looking at unfilled jobs in the state and developing strategies to create a talent pipeline to fill these positions. The governor is also focused on creating greater dialog and collaboration between public and private institutions.

Governor Lamont also realizes that the talent pipeline begins in K-12. He has secured increased investment in K-12 education and is focusing on increasing the quality and diversity of teachers. The Yale School of Management is playing a role with a significant contribution aimed at equipping educational leaders with greater business skills and the capabilities to scale educational successes.
Institutional Life Stages & Governance Challenges

Overview
Higher education institutions face multiple challenges, which if not addressed can become full-fledged existential crises. These include governance challenges, extreme financial challenges, enrollment challenges, and more.

Courageous leaders who believe in the missions of these institutions are running into the fire to articulate new visions, refocus the strategy, improve the governance and transparency, raise money, and fundamentally transform institutions to survive and thrive well into the future.

Context
In a series of case studies, leaders who are confronting crises described the challenges their schools face and what they are doing to rescue their institutions.

Key Themes

**Hampshire College: Governance Crisis**
Hampshire College experienced a structural deficit, which led to the decision not to admit a new class in 2019, despite the college being primarily tuition driven. While such a crisis doesn’t arise overnight, previous presidents and alumni were unaware of Hampshire’s issues. There was a lack of transparency and the issues were being masked.

New leadership has sought to improve Hampshire’s governance, its transparency, and its financial issues. Alumni were engaged, which helped raise more than $12 million, most of which went to the operating budget. The makeup of the board was changed to have fewer alums and parents, who are often inflexible, and to have more outsiders, who have fewer biases. Hampshire College has admitted a full class for 2020 and is on its way to recovering.

**Bennett College: Funding Crisis**
Bennett College’s mission is to prepare young women of color to lead with purpose, integrity, and a strong sense of self-worth. Yet as recently as a year ago, Bennett’s future was in serious jeopardy. Everything was broken, Bennett was hemorrhaging money, and it was unclear if Bennett would survive.

An ambitious, aggressive fundraising drive resulted in around 16,000 donors contributing millions of dollars. However, while this fundraising success allowed Bennett to survive, there wasn’t a plan in place for what’s next. Suzanne Walsh, as Bennett’s new president, has identified four areas to focus on and fix: 1) enrollment management; 2) the business and finances; 3) crumbling facilities; and 4) the IT infrastructure. A year ago, some members of Bennett’s board were interested in Bennett merging. However, at the time, the accreditors would have opposed any merger. While Bennett is not currently actively looking to merge with another institution, all options must be considered.

**Colby College: Enrollment Crisis**
Colby College is a small school in a remote location in Maine. Historically, most of Colby’s students came from New England high schools. But as the number of graduates from these feeder schools declined, Colby was facing a looming enrollment crisis.

To address this crisis, Colby acted boldly in broadening its geographic recruiting focus and significantly increasing its investment in attracting high-quality students. As a result, in a relatively short period of time, Colby increased its number of applications from around 5,000 per year to roughly 15,000. The geographic diversity increased – with California and Texas now accounting for large numbers of students – as did the ethnic diversity and the quality of students. Colby has subsequently improved its rankings, which will further help increase the number and quality of applicants.

Colby is better preparing students through enhanced research opportunities and internships, and has raised millions of dollars in investment for the community of Waterville, Maine to modernize and increase the attractiveness of the city. This confluence of factors has mitigated enrollment concerns.

**Benedict College: Financial Crisis**
When Roslyn Clark Artis became president of Benedict College in 2017, the school was in a terrible situation. Benedict College, an HBCU in Columbia, South Carolina, has a vision of providing transformative learning experiences to a diverse student body. Benedict offers courses in areas such as STEM, business, engineering, computer science, and cybersecurity.
Participants reflected on these crises and others they have experienced to offer valuable lessons.

These lessons include:

- **Have a willingness to change.** Often, when institutions reach a crisis, it is because of organizational inertia and unwillingness to change. A crisis necessitates change.

- **Get the right leadership.** There are leaders—including several at this Summit—who embrace and thrive in a crisis. They see a crisis as an opportunity to transform an institution. Emerging from a crisis with a positive outcome requires an optimistic, visionary leader who can assess the root causes of a crisis and lead the change that is required.

- **Assess the composition of the board.** Typically, crises don’t occur overnight; they are years in the making and have been ignored by the board. This is often because boards are packed with insiders who hold on to longstanding traditions and are reluctant to change. Driving change requires a board with different skill sets and a willingness to enact change.

- **Be bold.** Surviving a crisis and thriving usually requires a clear strategy and bold action. This boldness can include choosing a new leader, embarking on a new strategy, investing and allocating resources differently, and changing how the institution recruits students.

- **Engage all stakeholders.** This includes alumni, faculty, students, the community, and potential partners.

“**Institutions have to be willing to change when they react to a crisis . . . and they need the board to support change.**"
Learning across Lifestages: Impact across Generations & Communities

Life Stages of Community Tolerance & Appreciation

Overview
Increasing debates on campuses about free speech, civil rights, students’ emotional safety, curricula, and institutional legacies raise difficult questions about tolerance. There are no easy answers. Campus leaders are listening to all stakeholders and making decisions based on their institution’s values, culture, and philosophy. Institutions are also acting proactively by prioritizing initiatives to create more inclusive, welcoming communities for all students.

Context
Summit participants shared several real-world incidents on their campuses that challenged the concept of tolerance and that forced institutions to make and communicate difficult decisions. Participants described their experiences and lessons learned.

Key Themes
Institutions have different practices in making decisions about curricula.
A decision by Yale to cancel a popular introductory art history course resulted in significant criticism in the media. The rationale for the decision was that it focused primarily on European art but was not a broad introduction to art from across the globe. An administrator from Yale explained that decisions about courses reside with the faculty members in each department, as these faculty members are the experts on which classes should be taught. This administrator noted that around the same time the Biology Department changed its curriculum, but no mention was made in the media.

Other participants offered comments including:
- Some individuals see Yale’s curriculum as community property and feel that the right to criticize decisions is part of a cultural argument, even if they have no relationship with the school.
- Perhaps the class should have been continued but the title of the class changed to indicate it was an introduction to European art, not all art. A simple title change may have prevented this controversy.
- Often at smaller institutions there is more institutional involvement in curricular decisions, with deans, presidents, and even boards playing some role in the decision process.
- While faculty may be the experts in the field, they don’t necessarily understand or appreciate how decisions will be viewed by various stakeholders, such as the media, students, alumni, or others in the field. Therefore, perhaps it is not wise to give departments sole discretion of decisions about which courses to offer.

As participants discussed the processes at their institutions for adding, removing, or changing courses, there was a lack of clear and consistent guidelines or criteria for making such decisions. These decisions are relatively ad hoc based on each institution’s values, character, and culture.

Freedom of speech and civil rights are difficult, hot-button issues on campuses.
Several presidents described difficult decisions related to balancing freedom of speech with the need to provide safe environments for students.
- On one campus, a conservative faculty member started an organization and encouraged students to form a similar organization. Some students of color opposed the recognition of this organization as they said it caused them to feel unsafe. Ultimately, the student government opposed the creation of this organization. The president of this institution lamented, “Everyone is trying to make things about race and culture.”

Other leaders acknowledged similar issues on their campuses. On the one hand they want to allow free and open speech. But at the same time, free speech is not unlimited and academic leaders want to create an environment where students feel safe and feel a sense of belonging.

“This generation [of students] feel strongly about freedom of speech, but it is not absolute and should be restricted if it harms others.”

Joanne Berger-Sweeney, 22nd President, Trinity College
Many institutions are being forced to confront past decisions in a new environment.

After protests about Woodrow Wilson’s name on its School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton undertook a review, produced a report on Wilson’s legacy, and developed plans to enhance diversity on campus. The trustees decided not to change the school’s name, despite complaints about the former president’s segregationist views. However, the process undertaken has produced greater transparency in recognizing Wilson’s failings and shortcomings, has resulted in changing the names of some buildings, and produced other changes to improve diversity and inclusion, such as prominently displaying photographs of diverse alumni and professors who have worked at Princeton.

Even among rabbis, Jewish leaders, and Jewish college presidents there are strong disagreements. For example, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which is often critical of President Trump and the Administration, supports this executive order, believing it provides a tool for institutions to address attacks on Jews. Meanwhile, two Jewish college presidents disagreed. One argued the ADL is being duped and that supporting this executive order is not good for Jews. While participants agreed on the need to decrease anti-Semitism on campus, there was disagreement on whether federal policies can play any meaningful role in doing so.

Institutions are undertaking initiatives to create more inclusive, welcoming campuses.

Several presidents described efforts to create inclusive, welcoming environments. One example is the Human Library, being implemented at both University of Albany and Fairfield University. The Human Library aims to break down barriers and form a stronger community by helping people understand the unique life experiences of others.

Bowling Green State University has also been embroiled in controversy. BGSU had a theater on campus named for Lillian Gish, an actress who had lived somewhat nearby. Gish had starred in the 1915 film Birth of a Nation, which has racist images and glorifies the KKK. After complaints by students about naming the theater for Gish, a group of campus leaders reviewed the naming decision and decided to strip Gish’s name. (Another, less prominent site was named for Gish and her sister). The discussion on campus was memorialized and the process will be used to guide other topics.

Other hot-button topics concern Hillel organizations on some campuses as well as whether to support or oppose the recent executive order by the Trump Administration related to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which relates to combatting anti-Semitism on campus.

At Valparaiso University, the Welcome Project is a collection of first-person audio and video stories, with facilitated conversation designed to foster an inclusive, welcoming community.
Life Stages & Leadership Voice

Overview
Higher education leaders face challenges in having knowledgeable, collaborative board members, in dealing with the constant onslaught of noise from external critics, and in creating environments that provide students with adequate emotional safety—though the degree of safety is debatable. At the same time, leaders want to encourage students to participate in activities outside of the classroom that help them grow, while minimizing the various distractions with which students must contend.

Context
The authors of two books about institutional leadership shared their thoughts, prompting a discussion about the difficult roles of college and university presidents.

Key Themes
A better understanding by board members can improve institutions.
Many of the problems at college and universities are business problems, concluded Jim Dean and Deborah Clarke, authors of The Insider’s Guide to Working with Universities. That’s why it makes sense to tap business people as board members. Yet when business people serve on college boards they often become frustrated. Dean and Clarke believe this is due to board members not understanding academia very well, largely because board members are not adequately educated on the inner workings of higher education. Their Insider’s Guide aims to improve board members’ understanding of how higher education really works, resulting in more effective, better functioning boards.

Higher ed leaders must resist the noise and focus on intellectual diversity.
Michael Roth, president of Wesleyan University, believes that the common narrative that students are fragile snowflakes and are social justice warriors is an embarrassing mischaracterization. He believes the pendulum has swung too far in bending over backwards to protect students by creating “safe spaces.” His most recent book, Safe Enough Spaces, encourages creating college environments where students are empowered to engage with criticism and a variety of conflicting ideas.

“‘Our responsibility is to cultivate intellectual diversity.’”

Roth understands the need for some degree of safety but thinks many institutions have gone too far. He wants learning environments to engage and provoke students. He suggests more boldness and rigor, and wants to see students actively participate in the electoral system.

Other higher education leaders reiterated themes from throughout the Summit that the majority of students’ time on campus is not in class and agreed with Roth’s ideas of creating a campus environment that provokes, challenges, and encourages students to engage in activism.

“Give me activism versus apathy.”

Higher ed leaders also agreed on the need to avoid the external noise and daily headlines they face and to shield students from these distractions so they can focus on their college experience. Some commented that the noise and distractions are often greatest for minority and underrepresented students, who need the most assistance in avoiding this pervasive noise.

“Part of our role is to minimize the noise and distractions for kids, particularly unrepresented kids, so they can get as much out of college as possible.”

Michael S. Roth, 16th President, Wesleyan University
Lawrence S. Bacow, 29th President, Harvard University
Peter Salovey, 23rd President, Yale University, Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, Senior Associate Dean, Yale School of Management, and Richard C. Levin, 22nd President, Yale University
Larry Bacow is revered by higher education leaders as a scholar and a true leader. He has had a remarkable career serving as the Chancellor of MIT, the President of Tufts, and now the President of Harvard. He has an amazing breadth and depth of experience and possesses immense knowledge and wisdom. He is regarded as one of the country’s leading advocates for higher education.

President Bacow is admired for his vision, boldness, and inspiration, while also being respected for his values, humility, and generosity. The presenters described Bacow as a mentor, confidant, and trusted friend.

According to Larry Bacow, he didn’t set out to become a university president. He termed himself an “accidental president” who has been blessed to have great mentors, colleagues, and students.

Because higher education is such a challenging environment and because serving as a president can be a lonely job, he is grateful to have a network of other academic leaders with whom he can share and collaborate.

President Bacow sees higher education at an extremely important moment. Yet, despite the challenges and critics, he remains an optimist and a strong believer in higher education. He emphasized that while it is important to listen to critics, academic leaders must remain undeterred in moving forward and continuing the search for truth.
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