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Emerging trends for leaders in the post pandemic era

As the pandemic lingers on and we are all still trying to make sense of how to continue serving our students and our respective societies, as leaders we can learn from what is working, take note of what has failed, improve on what makes sense to do so and seek to reinvent and innovate that which we must as we explore extending the boundaries of what we know. We need to be better of higher quality, responsive, relevant, resilient, innovative and inclusive as we seek to achieve student success and greater welfare and well-being in our societies.

Society and higher education tend to go in cycles but there are some recurrent themes. The pandemic has intensified some themes and provided further challenges on others upon which we have not acted. It has forced us to review everything we were doing and to try to recover in whatever way we can. But we need to be careful enough not to go back to everything as it was. It requires us to reflect profoundly on what needs to be improved, what needs to be changed, what needs to be transformed.

There is no single yardstick or measure through which we can gauge progress and lead progress. Just like the pandemic manifested itself throughout the world, first in one place, then suddenly in another setting, so will we see different speeds and stages of recovery and development. The Association of Governing Boards states that relative to the pandemic and as we reflect on the governance of colleges and universities, we are all confronting three stages: Emergency, Transition and Transformation.

Some institutions are still in the emergency stage, reacting and seeing what can be done to survive. There are others who have managed to cope with the pandemic to a reasonable degree. And then there are those who are already seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. This is the transformation stage. Eventually, we will all need to be in the transformational stage. But let me try to put into perspective what we have learned.

An IAUP Survey published in February 2021 on “Leadership Responses to COVID-19,” covered over 700 responses in more than 80 countries. Most institutional leaders stated that they:

- were somewhat ready to face the pandemic;
- pivoted with pedagogical, technology and health-related measures to provide continuity to educational programs;
- relied on the support of the faculty to migrate to remote distance education;
- were more open to an emerging broader perspective on internationalization (e-mobility, I@ Home, partnerships);
- had been impacted financially, calling into question their short- and long-term sustainability;
- focused on short-term and superficial above long-term and substance; and

- envisioned a future where face-to-face education will increasingly incorporate technology and be accompanied by hybrid and online modes of delivery.

Furthermore, IAUP held its Triennial Conference July 29–31, 2021, with over 400 participants from more than 40 countries via a virtual format but anchored in Mexico City, where some of the recommendations made by the more than 60 speakers include the following for higher education leaders:

- nimbleness;
- bifocal leadership;
- short, accessible, laser focused on skills and workplace;
- intercultural and international;
- academic bank of credit (ABC);
- more personalized programs, more individual learning;
- student mental health, student success;
- seek and develop talent;
- diversity and inclusion as a strength;
- greater connection to community; and
- mission, quality, operational/financial sustainability and strategic.

A more recent study conducted by Scott Jaschik and Doug Lederman identified the following perspectives involving more than 375 leaders from the USA:

- Most presidents are confident that their institution will be financially stable over the next 5–10 years.
- About half of presidents report that their institution has altered employment policies to give employees more flexibility after the pandemic ends.
- Between half and two-thirds of presidents report that their institution has the capacity to meet the mental health needs of any of its stakeholders.
- Most presidents indicate that their institutions implemented beneficial changes during the pandemic, and will keep some of these changes even after the pandemic ends.

During spring of 2022, the International Association of Universities (IAU) published the results of “Higher Education One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic” (<https://www.iau-aiu.net/The-Second-IAU-Global-Survey-Report-on-the-Impact-of-COVID-19>). Among the most important challenges, universities listed:

- decreasing financial means;
- some students cannot benefit from remote teaching and learning;
- research activities are delayed;
- staff is overworked;
- recruitment is slowing down; and
- tendency to further exacerbate preexisting inequalities.

On the other hand, and because of the pandemic, respondents reported:

- enhanced transversal collaboration across institutions;

- extraordinary measures in place to support students in need;
- increase in research collaboration and interdisciplinary research;
- increase in the quality of research collaboration; and
- increases in domestic student enrollments.

Let us not forget that the pandemic has also forced higher education to pay greater attention to the following dimensions:

- Empathy: sensitivity toward our students and their respective families, as well as faculty and staff who have all been affected.
- Solidarity: actions that institutions implemented to support especially students and their families, through greater financial aid and emergency funds.
- Flexibility: being nimble and quick to adjust to the challenges posed by COVID-19.
- Opportunity: responding in a creative and innovative manner.

An institutional experience

CETYS University, a private not-for-profit institution nestled in the north-western corner of Mexico with bustling and intense binational dynamics with California and the USA, was fortunate to have gone through another local crisis in 2010 (an earthquake) that helped us embrace since then the use of technology. As a result of that experience, CETYS has been increasing the use of technology and embedding it into the strategic plan “CETYS 2020.” With that as background and with the help of a Contingency Committee and several Task Forces that were put together to face the pandemic, CETYS was able to quickly adjust and pivot from face-to-face education to remote education in March 2020.

Based on this experience and incorporating periodic and systematic feedback from students and faculty, reviewing the use of technology and supported by faculty openness, the institution launched what we call CETYS Flex 360, which allows us to offer our programs online synchronously and to pivot and change to hybrid solutions when conditions allow us to resume some face-to-face learning. In the process, we have had to address student financial and emotional needs, campus health and safety measures, reprioritize our initiatives, make some financial adjustments to overcome the situation, always putting health and safety of our students and staff first and the continuation of programs second.

Numerous experts have discussed the impact of COVID-19 on internationalization, which is a priority and one of the cornerstones of CETYS 2020. Although the pandemic has affected the physical mobility portion of internationalization, by and large, what we currently observe from a global perspective is that it is not likely to decrease but rather increase in the future. Not only will student and faculty mobility return when conditions allow and as it is now increasingly the case, but because of the pandemic institutions have expressed the importance of partnerships developing e-mobility and internationalization at home, on a go forward basis. At CETYS, we turned a typical face-to-face summer session, into a virtual summer session with 18 countries represented. As a result, we are now intensifying the use of e-mobility and internationalization at home. This should help our goal of having 100% of future graduates with an international experience.

From university to glocal multiversity

As we eventually head into the post pandemic era, we will likely be moving from what we call and acknowledge as University to what leaders such as Clark Kerr (The Uses of the University; Harvard University Press, 1963) from the University of California System back in the 1960s and more recently David Garza from the Tecnológico de Monterrey System refer to

as the Multiversity. And when accounting for the challenges and opportunities arising out of the pandemic, we are likely to broaden the term to increasingly refer to the glocal multiversity. What this means is that we are likely to face:

- *Multiple learners.* More and more colleges and universities are likely to address students beyond the traditional 18- to 24-year-old cohorts, with an increasing number working while they study, corporations seeking strategic partnerships and other seeking lifelong learning opportunities.
- *Multiple modes of delivery.* Although there were already institutions implementing and/or experimenting with the use of technology for teaching and learning purposes, the pandemic dramatically forced all institutions to engage in emergency remote education with seriously adjusting and implementing changes and innovations. As several surveys have already pointed out, institutions anticipate that they are likely to reaffirm face-to-face models but increasingly include hybrid and online modes of delivery.
- *Multidisciplinary.* There is growing evidence that academic programs are less likely to continue as silos and involve several disciplines. That is the wave of the future for a growing number of fields.
- *Multiple roles.* Universities are being called upon to go beyond only teaching or research and to pursue both as well as a greater connection to their respective communities and challenges.
- *Local relevance and global outreach.* As NAFTA was emerging in the early 1990s, the Toronto Globe and Mail referred to the importance of local relevance but to not lose sight of how global outreach could impact local to compete with an inflow of foreign competition as well as to develop the capacity to export and compete in global markets. The pandemic has heightened the need for greater awareness of this interconnectivity and duality.

Whether one remains within the conventionally and broadly understood university or if we decide to migrate to the notion of glocal multiversity, what we need to stress is that leaders ought not to wait until the environment is better. Now is the time to begin to reflect and try to transform, whether your institution happens to be in the emergency stage or transition.

The focus of International Association of University Presidents

As an organization for and by university leaders, the IAUP has focused for the 2021–2024 period on “Recovery and Transformation: Innovation and Inclusion.” Much of what leaders were already facing before the pandemic has only intensified. As ALL higher education institutions pivoted from serious doubts about the use of technology and online education to shift to emergency remote education very abruptly, it has been clear that colleges and universities do have the capacity to change and/or innovate.

Whether or not the changes or adjustments are temporary or permanent is contingent upon the specific institution, level of maturity in terms of digital transformation, openness and preparedness of the faculty and the institutional culture. While there was already a call for diversity and inclusion, now it is not only about responding to the challenge but considering it as a strength for those who do so moving forward. With respect to sustainability, because of the pandemic there has been a renewed interest and with the recent UNESCO World Higher Education Conference held in Barcelona, Spain, and a call for ALL institutions to engage in the implementation of the UN Sustainability Development Goals.

As colleges and university leaders seek to migrate from a reactively responsive mode to a more proactive stance with respect to what lies ahead in the future, IAUP will promote an agenda that sensitizes leaders about and enhances their capacity to face opportunities and

challenges in the post pandemic era. This will include prevailing and emerging best practices; regional meetings in Latin America, the Middle East/Northern Africa, Asia and Europe; special focus surveys; webinars on key topics such as student mental health; and more innovative approaches to mobility initiatives such as the student exchange bank and the borderless professors, as well as the identification and nurturing of talent through the Seminar on Leadership Development for New Presidents and Emerging Leaders.

Moving forward. University leaders should reflect on what things were working fine despite the pandemic, what is because of the pandemic and which things were we doing at all. The pandemic is forcing us to say: Now it is part of the challenge of higher education.

Tom Friedman (renowned columnist for *The New York Times*) pointed out that during the pandemic people have communicated, collaborated and competed in more places, in more ways with more people, across more countries than ever before. More recently at the American Council on Education Annual Meeting held in March of 2022 in San Diego, Friedman stressed that now and in the future because of the speed of change we will always need to be reviewing what has worked in the past and what appear to be opportunities for improvement, whether you call it change or innovation. That constant state of reflecting, questioning and experimenting is also referred to as a state of beta. And as we migrate toward this state of beta, it is important to note that although we value intelligence quotient (IQ), it will be the passion quotient plus the curiosity quotient that will always be greater than the IQ. In other words, Passion + Curiosity is greater than only Intelligence.

Let us take note and learn from this as we move forward.

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Further readings

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