

***The Abundant University: Remaking Higher Education for a Digital World*, by M. D. Smith**

Reviewed by Grace Kaletski-Maisel

In *The Abundant University*, by Michael Smith explores the opportunities and challenges of utilizing technological innovation to disrupt higher education. He argues that the current scarcity-based model of higher education can be dismantled in a way that holds the potential to increase equity and inclusivity. Drawing heavily on metaphors with the disruption in the entertainment industry during the 2010s, Smith illustrates how higher education's scarce resources will be made abundant through technology.

This book is rooted in the concept that the current higher education system reinforces socioeconomic inequities. Using data to make his case, Smith demonstrates how higher-income families send their children to pursue degrees at elite universities that help them access high-paying jobs. Likewise, children from families with fewer resources face more hurdles in pursuing a degree that will likely lead to the same jobs. After providing a brief history lesson showing how the higher education system evolved into its current *broken*

state, Smith elaborates on the processes elite universities enact to maintain their status by reinforcing scarcity in admissions, instruction, and credentialing. These institutions maintain the status quo by keeping admission rates low, relying on cost-effective instructional strategies rather than student-centered, and sending a "signal" to employers that their graduates come with a valuable skillset.

Technology holds the potential to help higher education move from this current scarcity-based model to one that is rooted in abundance. While academia has dipped its toes in this idea—such as by offering MOOCs or utilizing scalable strategies to meet demand in online learning—Smith argues that the industry has thus far resisted the structural change that it needs to be transformed by abundance. In locating this resistance, Smith points to faculty who may be suspicious of digital learning and perhaps feel threatened by this change. He unpacks their objections, suggesting a disconnect between faculty values and student priorities, which are often focused first and foremost

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on earning the credentials they need to land a good job.

In the face of this resistance, what path forward can lead towards the promise of abundance? Smith looks to the entertainment industry and the technological disruption it faced in the 2010s to draw parallels with a potential future in higher education. While previous decades saw the same few companies control the market through scarcity in content creation, distribution, and consumption, new technologies presented opportunities to make these processes abundant. Entertainment executives were initially in denial and resistant to change. By the end of the decade, streaming media had largely overshadowed cable, and the likes of Netflix and YouTube superseded traditional companies. If higher education does not also find a way to adapt to a world of technology and abundance, its hand may be forced. Some employers are beginning to recognize that a fancy degree does not always mean an employee is competent. They are also starting to diversify the strategies used to identify strong candidates or even introduce their credentialing systems during the hiring process.

Smith's argument can be commended throughout the book for its student-centered approach. He does not waver from the potential of abundance to enhance student success and dismantle the inequalities that stand in the way of that success. In the final chapter, he provides examples of real people who were enabled to make a positive impact thanks to online education. He urges for a new mission of higher education that would "create opportunities for as many students as possible to discover and develop their unique talents so they

can use those talents to make a difference in the world."

Although Smith proposes to remake *higher education*, the book is centered around the scarcity created by what Smith calls *elite universities*. The meaning of this phrase is not explicitly defined, but many of his points are tailored to Ivy League institutions and their ilk. They may only apply more to state universities, community colleges, or private institutions with a regional reputation. His message could be enhanced by discussing how such colleges and universities may be less reliant on scarcity than *elite* institutions and already adopt measures that embrace abundance, such as increasing enrollment, investing in online learning, or aligning academic programs with employer needs.

The Abundant University is a robust, accessible read for higher education professionals from any background who endorse a student-centered vision of higher education. It can serve as a cautionary tale for those with a more conservative view of the industry and a call to action for those who seek to dismantle structural inequities and work towards a more equitable and sustainable future of higher education.

In summary, the current model of higher education thrives because it has made its resources scarce. This is bad for most students, but technology holds the potential to make these resources abundant. Some faculty and administrators may resist this change, but higher education must embrace digital change and align itself with student needs and goals to continue thriving.

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