

# The Civic Role of Higher Education in a Changing World

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## Higher Education and other enduring cultural and social institutions are becoming the anchor institutions in their communities

- Change is the only certainty. With technology transforming all of the products and processes we utilize as well as creating and displacing jobs with increasing rapidity, traditional corporations and employers are less and less the anchor institutions in their communities. All forms of human activity are globalizing: invention, commercialization, manufacturing, distribution and markets and thus large scale, vertically integrated companies are rarer and rarer.
- In such a context the more “durable” community institutions often are cultural, religious and educational centers which equip individuals and communities to anticipate, adapt to and manage change.
- This requires reconceptualizing the role of key higher education institutions regardless of type. Reconceptualizing their role in terms of campus-community partnerships that contribute directly to dealing with change in a manner which is participatory, collaborative, inclusive; which enable the co-creation and delivery of useful knowledge and skills across the lifespan.

Higher Education Institutions across the spectrum of Community Colleges to Research Universities play three vital roles in the well being of communities. They are –

- Engines for ECONOMIC renewal and sustainability
- Centers of HUMAN CAPITAL and talent development
- Forums through which CIVIC CAPACITY and community engagement are enhanced

To fulfill these  
roles,  
institutions of  
higher  
education must  
**CHANGE**

- Institutions designed in the post WWII era may no longer represent the constituencies who are in need of education and training, the competencies that are in demand in society and the workplace, the teaching and mentoring expertise that is relevant to contemporary circumstances nor the ideal formatting and timing of educational services.

**Forces of change affecting all forms of work, family and civic life include such things as:**

- The globalization of all forms of production and distribution
- Climate change and all its implications
- Demographic changes vis a vis an aging population, new forms of migration and immigration
- More diverse mix of social ethnic and religious backgrounds than ever in our history
- The erosion of civic and political forums and platforms for regional problem solving.

## Big trends affecting the content of knowledge, work and civic life

- The digitization of everything
- The speed of skill obsolescence
- The growth in self employment and home based businesses
- The explosion in services: healthcare, hospitality, human care industries and domestic support services, global marketing, web commerce, etc.
- The fragmentation and unfiltered proliferation of news and information
- Gated communities and segmented social groups

**These global forces are affecting communities simultaneously with an erosion of public confidence in existing institutions:**

- A growing disparity between those who have benefited from globalization and the “new economy”
- An increasingly divisive public discourse characterized by vast differences in experience/education
- A cultural tendency to favor advanced college education and degrees over other forms of credentialing
- A decreasing public investment in higher education
- Growing employer skepticism about the value of formalized post high school education and training
- A tendency for new forms of philanthropy to be directed towards elite institutions and causes

Our need  
to rethink  
our role

The challenge of the moment for all higher education institutions across America is to **RETHINK** our relevance and value to the society we serve in terms of three major issues.



## The content and constituencies we represent

- We need to clarify who are the learners and what they need to know in order to thrive and adapt
- What are the knowledge spheres they need to master, the hands on skills they need to develop and the forms of documentation they need to verify their value
- Correctly identifying the broad community and civic issues affecting communities today

Revisiting  
the  
significance  
of middle  
skill jobs to  
both  
economic  
and civic well  
being

Recently, in a TEDx talk, I made the case that in addition to a focus on STEM education, which has created national momentum for engineering, science and computer skills, we need a pipeline of people with middle skill competencies, which prepares people for the millions of jobs with salaries and wages in the \$55,000-\$120,000 range, most of which require a different mix of knowledge skills and competencies than public education is producing.

**We need  
HEART as  
well as STEM  
education to  
be a  
competitive  
economy and  
assure good  
jobs for all.  
This means:**

- Hands On
- Engaging
- Applied
- Relevant
- Training

How we organize and finance higher education is based on an old industrial model when we live in an entrepreneurial global economy

- The need for financing models that include public subsidies, fees and tuition, scholarships, paid internships and work study
- The need for approval mechanisms that allow for just in time curriculum development and delivery
- The need for mechanisms that allow for practitioner faculty who come and go and are compensated and respected in the same manner as lifelong tenured instructors
- The need for institutional platforms and resources to engage with community issues

## We must revisit our academic culture and faculty rewards system

- Research universities have over defined faculty culture at every level of higher education
- We are overly instructor-centric when we need networked models of curriculum development teaching and learning.
- We need hybrid models, not distinctions between applied and basic knowledge.
- We need to be able to document skills and competencies at the same time that we help people master fundamental knowledge such as writing, history and math.
- We need to convene and connect across multiple constituencies or multiple civic issues

# Leadership Challenges

- These trends and emerging demands require higher education leaders to engage in new ways with other education institutions and especially with the communities in which they reside.

## Examples of ways to be more agile, responsive and relevant:

- New approaches to student pipeline development (Library NEXT; high school academies, summer residencies)
- Increasing cooperative, apprenticeship, OJT and project learning opportunities
- Bundling academic degrees and skills-based certificates
- Providing just-in-time learning with consortia of specific skill sector employers
- Expanding support for new business models; small business; home based businesses; web based services, i.e. the gig economy, employee owned, cooperative purchasing; novel customer identification and marketing
- Leverage community connections and partner in civic forums and initiatives

In sum, we need new business models as well as consultative curriculum development models in a range of formats across the lifespan in order to help the communities we serve engage change in productive ways.



Thank You

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