

Transactional to Transformative:
Resetting the Value of Higher
Education in a Post-COVID,
Skills-Focused World

WICHE Annual Forum
April 4, 2024

Mental Models

from Gardener and Fischmann's "The Real World of College: What Higher Education is and What it Can Be"

Inertial

After high school, one goes to college, but does not think much about reasons for being there, or of taking advantage of various opportunities; nor does one exhibit noteworthy aspirations

Transactional

One goes to college and does what...is required to get a degree and then secure placement in graduate school and/or a job; college is viewed principally, perhaps entirely, as a springboard for future-oriented ambitions.

Exploratory

One goes to college intentionally to take time to learn about diverse fields of study and to try out new activities...to "marinate" in new ideas and perspectives...to interact with and learn from new acquaintances from unfamiliar backgrounds and/or demographics.

Transformational

One goes to college to reflect about, and question, one's own values and beliefs, with the expectation, and often, as well, the aspiration that one may change in fundamental ways.

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Most Companies Say College Isn't Worth It for Their Employees

Published Nov 24, 2023 at 12:05 PM EST

CT INSIDER

NEWS // EDUCATION

College leaders in CT warn of 'devastating' budget cuts: 'We're about to fall off that cliff'

By **Ken Dixon**, Staff writer
Updated April 24, 2023 6:40 p.m.

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Three generations of 'college for all' in the U.S. has left most families looking for alternatives.



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Published Fri, Jun 30 2023 2:10 PM EDT • Updated Fri, Jun 30 2023 4:29 PM EDT

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [m](#)

Ashton Jackson
@ASHTONLINNELL

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THE COLLEGE DEVALUATION CRISIS



MARKET DISRUPTION, DIMINISHING ROI, AND
AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE OF LEARNING

JASON WINGARD

- A new world of work requires new skills
- The bulk of available jobs do not require a degree
- [T]he traditional way of preparing for the world of work [via a traditional college degree] has gone past its sell-by date.
- [L]ifelong learning for continual upskilling... meet[s] market needs and provide[s] individuals with the financial wherewithal and personal fulfillment they seek in a career

New Model of Higher Education



From Wingard's *The College Devaluation Crisis: Market Disruption, Diminishing ROI, and An Alternative Future of Learning*

THE REAL WORLD OF COLLEGE



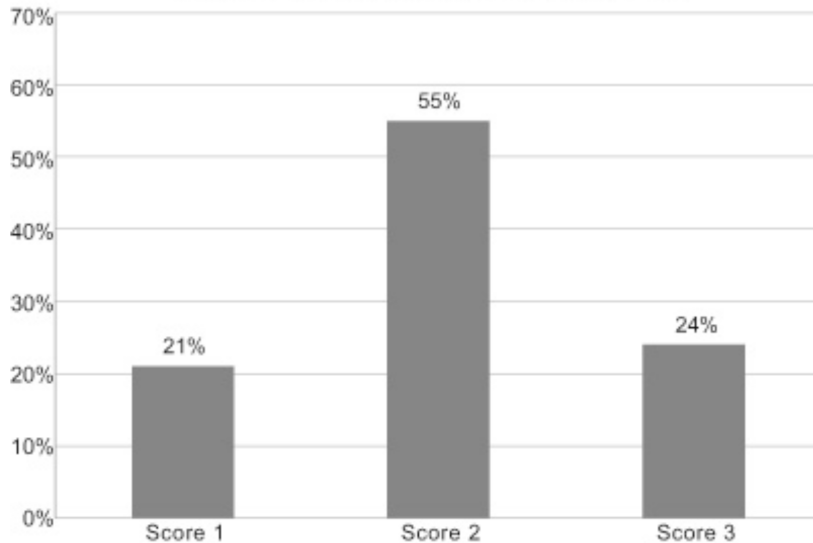
WHAT
HIGHER EDUCATION
IS AND WHAT IT
CAN BE

WENDY FISCHMAN
AND
HOWARD GARDNER

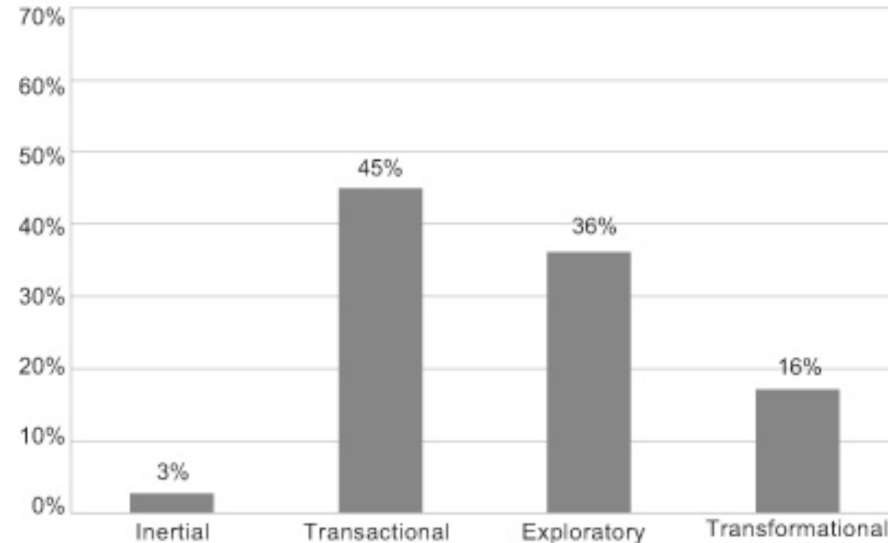
- “[D]enotes the ability to attend, analyze, reflect, connect, and communicate on issues of importance and interest.”
- [T]hinking one would reasonably expect of a graduate of an institution of higher education – a form of education that is not focused on one area of expertise and an education that is not meant solely to prepare students for specific careers and jobs” (84).

“Specifically, we find that students with high HEDCAP (score of 3) are more likely to be transformational and exploratory; while students with low HEDCAP (score of 1) are more likely to be transactional or inertial. Furthermore, we also find a significant difference in HEDCAP scores between students with an exploratory mental model and those with a transformational mental model. The implication: students with a transformational mental model are most likely—compared to students with the other mental models—to display high HEDCAP (score of 3)” (141).

Percent of students with each HEDCAP score



Percent of students with each mental model



Primary Questions:

How do we create campus experiences, atmospheres, and expectations that foster a transformational approach to higher education?

How do we foster an appreciation of that approach among our various stakeholders (faculty, parents, trustees, legislature, public), but most importantly among our students?

Gardner and Fishman's Recommendations:

- **Clearly defined, empowered, and meaningful educational mission** that is understood and has currency across your institution. A mission statement that encapsulates that mission and has at its center “the importance of teaching and learning, broadly construed” (236).
- **Onboard students to that mission** with a goal of helping them understand what they can achieve if they approach their experience with a “transformational” mindset – then **reinforce this throughout their time at the university.**
- **Avoid “projectitis”** – project and programmatic sprawl that doesn't serve the mission of the institution and leads to becoming “**everything to everyone,**” which equates with becoming “**nothing to anyone.**”

Primary Questions:

How do we create campus experiences, atmospheres, and expectations that foster a transformational approach to higher education?

How do we foster an appreciation of that approach among our various stakeholders (faculty, parents, trustees, legislature, public), but most importantly among our students?

What elements at your colleges and universities do you feel are contributing to fostering a more transformative than transactional approach to education – or conversely, what elements do you feel might be encouraging a transactional approach that could be altered to encourage a shift in that mental model?

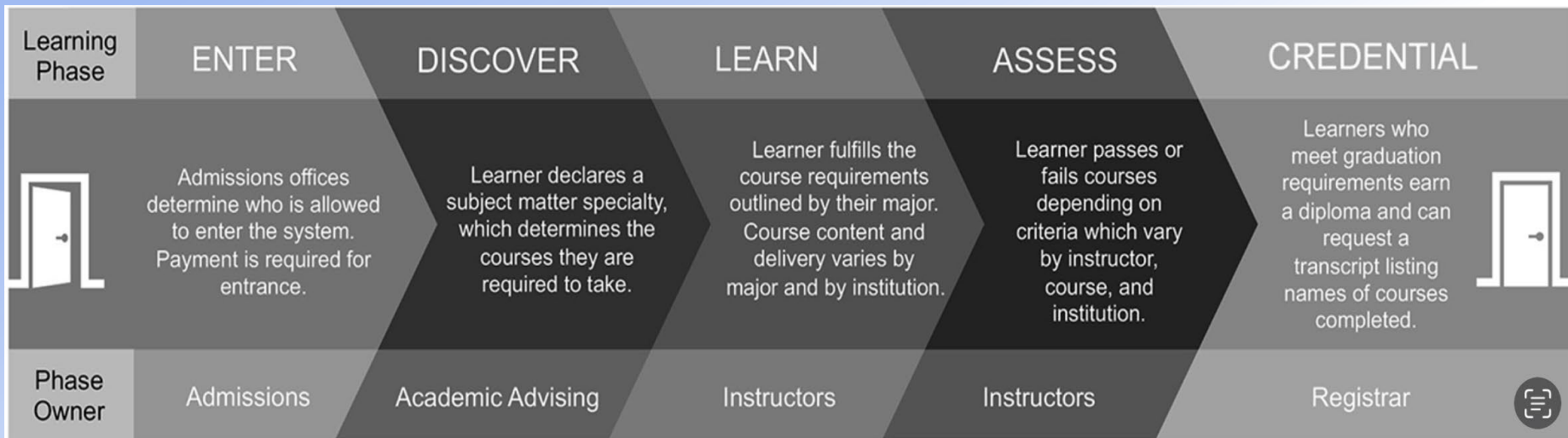
Thank You!

Dr. Adam Bradford
Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs
Idaho State University
adambradford@isu.edu
208.282.4024

Thank You!

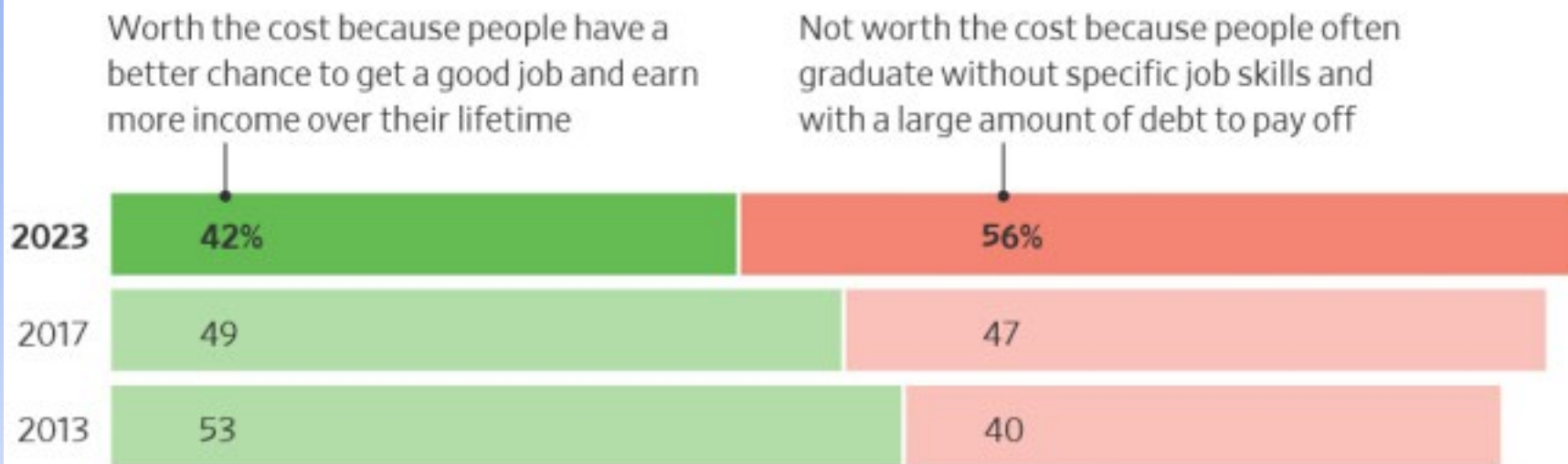
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Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs
Idaho State University
adambradford@isu.edu
208.282.4024

Traditional Model of Higher Education



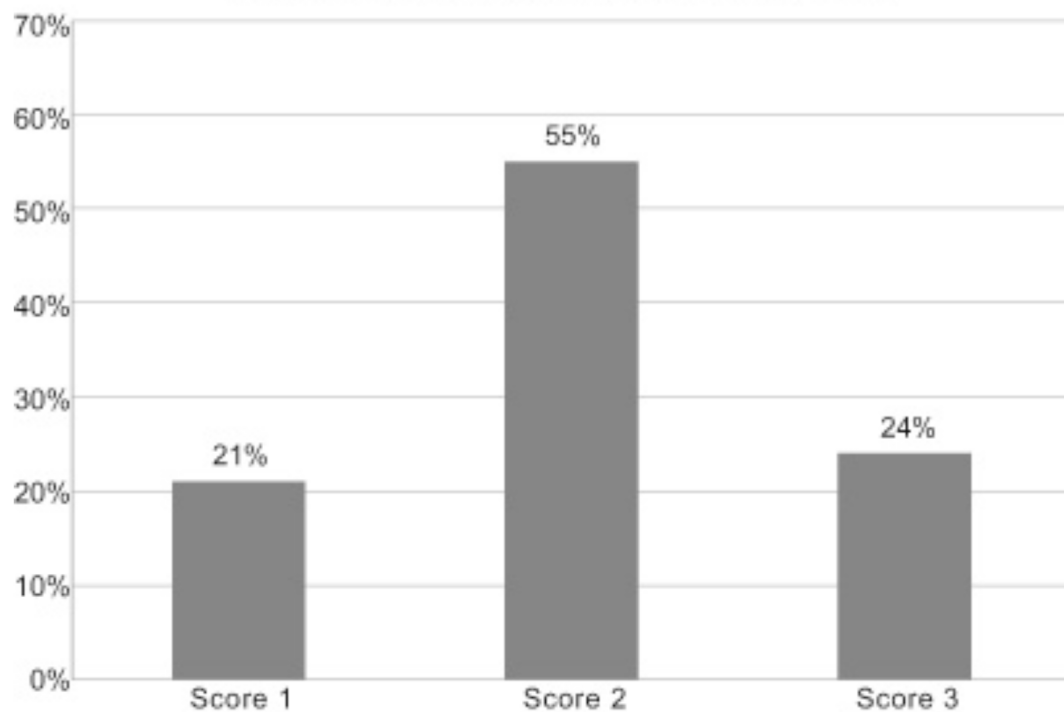
From Wingard's *The College Devaluation Crisis: Market Disruption, Dimishing ROI, and An Alternative Future of Learning*

When it comes to getting a four-year college degree, which of the following statements comes closer to your point of view? A four-year college education is...

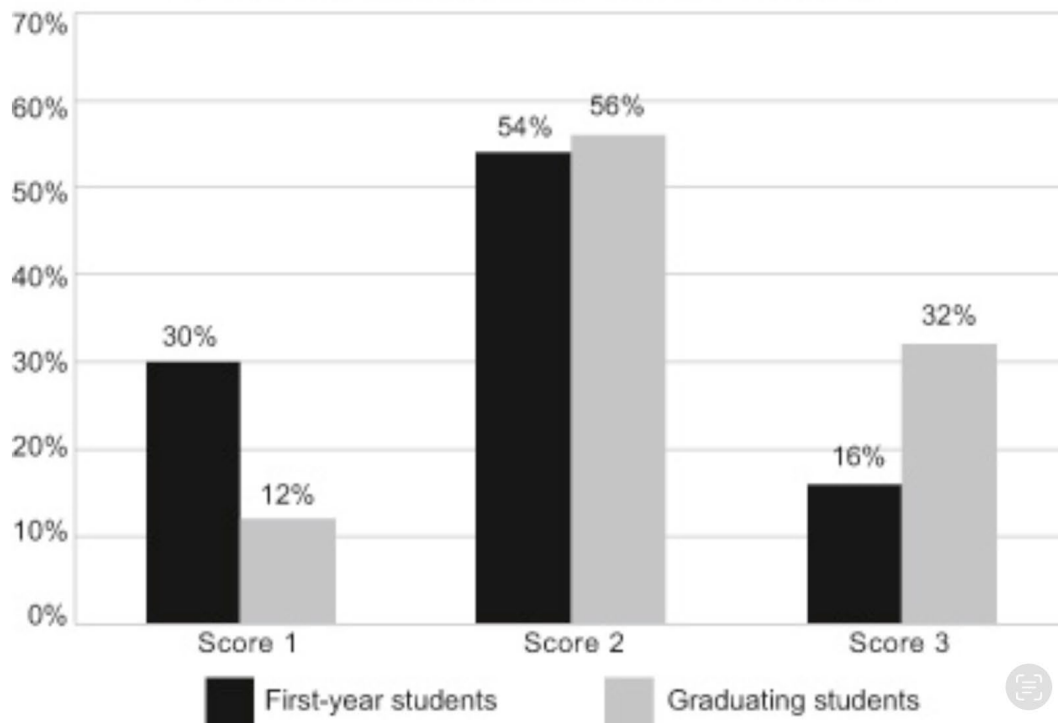


Wall Street Journal—NORC Poll (3/31/23)

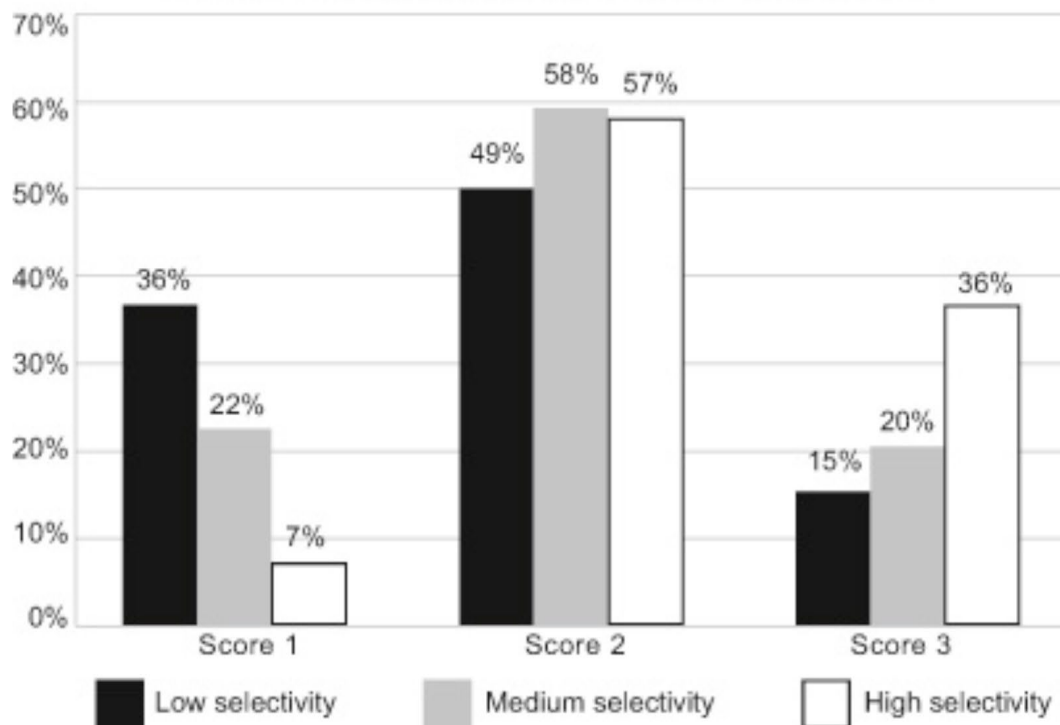
Percent of students with each HEDCAP score

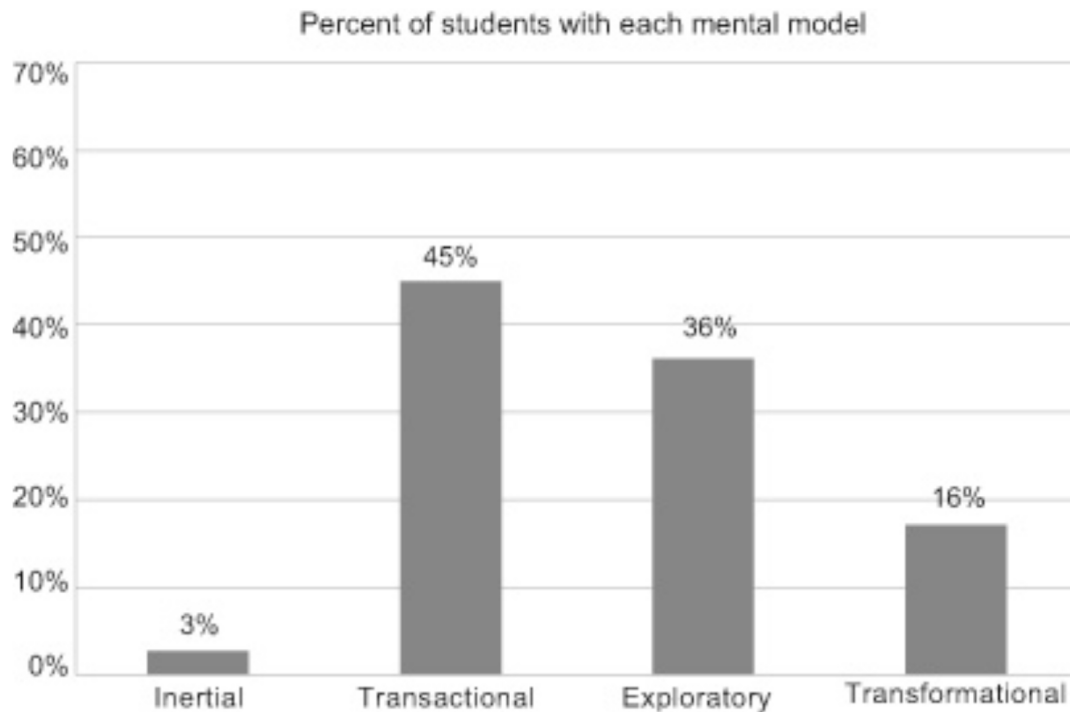


Percent of students with each HEDCAP score over time

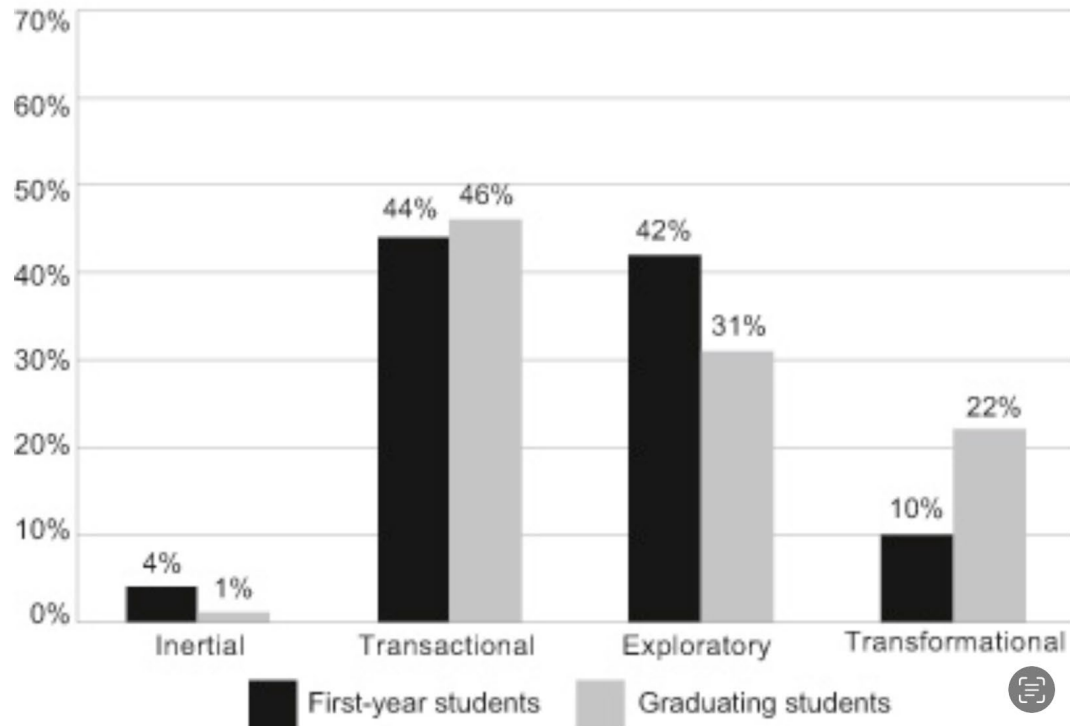


Percent of students with each HEDCAP score by selectivity

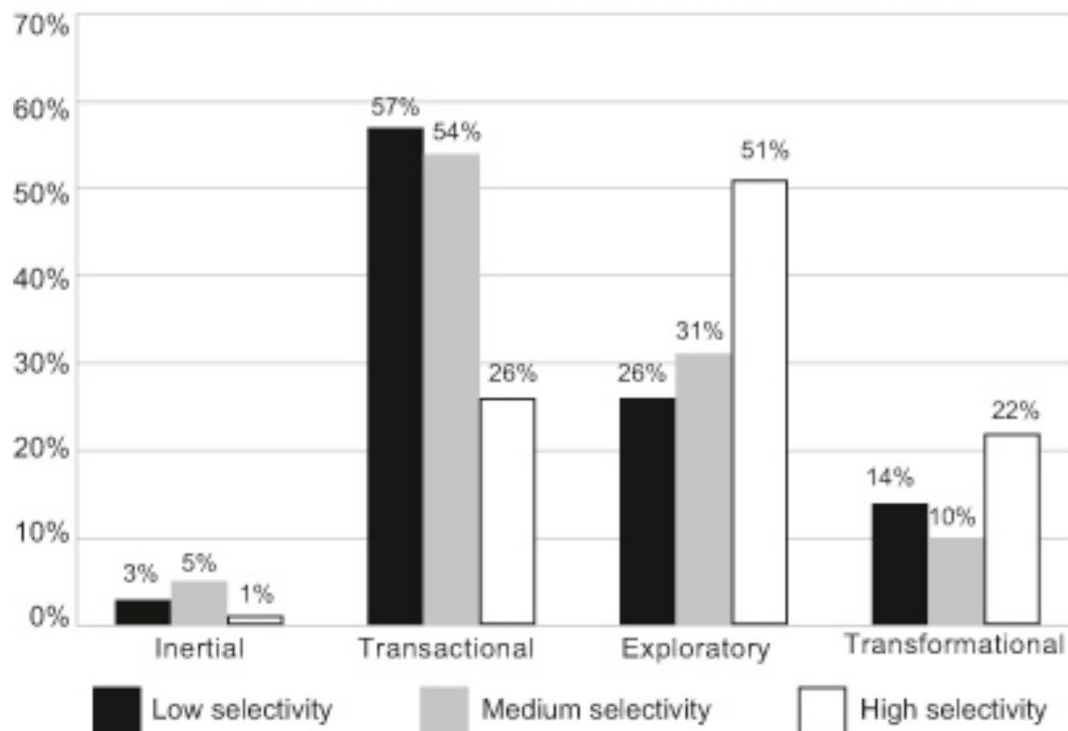




Percent of students with each mental model over time



Percent of students with each mental model by selectivity



Takeaway	Recommendation
<p>The primary goal of nonvocational higher education should be to increase Higher Education Capital for a lifetime.</p>	<p>Develop and model a single, powerful mission statement about the importance of teaching and learning, broadly construed.</p>
<p>The ancillary goal of nonvocational higher education should be alignment within and across constituencies about the meaning of, and the means for, achieving the primary goal.</p>	<p>Clearly communicate the importance of this single mission, with attention to both direct and indirect messaging.</p>
<p>“Projectitis,” the manifestation of mission sprawl and misalignment, is perilous to students, the institution, and the sector of higher education; in this respect, <i>less is more</i>.</p>	<p>Avoid “projectitis” by sculpting programs, projects, and centers that relate to the mission of the institution; drop or radically prune those that are not directly connected to the goals of the institution.</p>

“If it is incontrovertible that the value of the college degree is in decline and that a new world of work requires new skills – and it is the contention of this book that both statements are true – then it is equally certain that a fresh method of teaching and learning those skills is essential. How will the workers in this emerging reality obtain the expertise and capabilities – technical, interpersonal, cognitive – on which their futures and the progress of society as a whole will depend? The bulk of available jobs do not require a degree in order to obtain gainful employment, but they do require certain requisite skills. And for those professional services roles where standards are required or a degree facilitates advancement to the executive ranks, a more dynamic base of skills and competencies is needed to align with contemporary labor demands....[T]he traditional model of education – the four-year college leading to a bachelor’s degree – is no longer sufficient to achieve that goal. We probe the weaknesses of the model and appraise its strengths, often two sides of a single coin, to affirm the thesis of this book – namely, that the traditional way of preparing for the world of work has gone past its sell-by date. And we propose a new and fundamentally different model for achieving the shared goal of both learners and the employers in the new world of work: lifelong learning for continual upskilling to meet market needs and provide individuals with the financial wherewithal and personal fulfillment they seek in a career” (46-47).

Following a extensive longitudinal study across multiple institutions and their student populations seeking to understand what might allow students to increase in HEDCAP and what kind of value doing so might have for them, the authors assert that “It is our firm belief that those who have attained, consolidated, and can continue to draw upon Higher Education Capital will not only possess a capacity that proves useful across the occupational landscape – in securing positions, in advancing to more responsible niches, in working comfortably with others in an organization. In addition, we believe that this cognitive ensemble should add to quality of life ‘off the job; – be that time with family, in friendship groups, in hobbies, or even – as conveyed by this chapter’s opening anecdote – in one’s travels and chance encounters throughout one’s life. At present, though we hold it firmly, this conviction remains a promissory note for a positive case on the value of a liberal arts education....[higher education] is generally (and appropriately) considered a major way to achieve various kinds of capital. These include economic or financial capital...cultural capital...and social capital....[However,] the kind of capital we are interested in is ‘capital of the mind’ – the capital that is best, and perhaps only, acquired through careful study across a variety of disciplines calling for a range of performances, and through formal and informal conversation across the day and into the evening with others who are involved in the same general enterprise” (117-118). Interestingly, “students who view college as an opportunity to learn about various disciplines, meet and engage with different people, ‘try out’ a variety of activities, and ‘try on’ values, belief, and identities that have not previously been considered, are more likely to have high Higher Education Capital than those students who view college as an opportunity to build a resume, secure internships and jobs, and interact with others for the purpose of networking. Put succinctly, how one thinks about college seems to affect how much one gains from one’s college experience” (121). And the students who ultimately find their way to see college as a transformational experience have higher HEDCAP scores than others.

Students with greater increases in their Higher Education Capital were those that, regardless of their approach when they entered college, came to see their reason for being there as having an explorational or transformational experience as described above. Given this info, the key questions that emerge are “Should the college experience (especially if remote) focus on the transactional benefits of a degree? Or should college confirm or reconfirm the core mission of transforming the minds of students? Put bluntly, is the principal purpose of college about earning or learning?” (167). Ultimately, Fischmann and Gardener assert that their data suggests that “institutions of higher education should help students explore unfamiliar (as well as familiar) scholar discipline and ways of conceptualization; interact with those who are different in one or another significant respect; discover personal strengths and weaknesses; and gain independence, both in terms of living on one’s own, and in formulating and cogently articulating points of view and perspectives based on accumulating knowledge and experience” (167).