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# Today's threats prove to be tomorrow's promise: Higher education in 2027

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## HIGHER EDUCATION 25 years

### In the Future . . .

**BY GRETCHEN M. BATAILLE**  
Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs  
University of North Carolina

In twenty-five years the children born this year will have been out of high school for seven years. More of them will have college educations, more will have advanced degrees, and they will have studied subjects that we can't even identify today. Genomics and biotechnology will have transformed our world, our lives and occupations, and our health. If we are wise, during the next twenty-five years we will have continued to demand that students study philosophy, ethics, literature, and the arts. To do any less will make it impossible for the next generation to know how to use the power of science and technology. I want for my grandchildren a world that is humane and at peace. That condition can only be achieved by the common understandings of the human condition, which derive from the liberal arts. I want also the health, safety, and comfort that can be achieved by science and technology. Every generation has feared the unbridled power of new technologies and sciences, whether the printing press or DNA, and every generation has proved it understands the delicate balance. I expect that the next generation will be no different. ■

### A View to the Future-- Higher Education in 2027: National Traditions Challenged by Global Processes

**BY JUSSI VÄLIMAA**  
Head of Higher Education Research Team  
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Globalization processes have challenged the traditional roles of nation states. This has had impact on the understandings of higher education, which lies at the core of national policies especially in Europe. Higher education contin-

ues to be important for the development of societies. For this reason it has remained one of the areas controlled by nation states even though their boundaries have been blurred by regional and global agencies. Higher education continues to be understood as a 'national good', even though in some parts of the globe it is understood more as a private than a public good. Differences are caused by and related to traditions of higher education. These various traditions and cultural understandings also make it difficult to define higher education degrees or research outcomes only as commercial products even though the boundaries between business and academic worlds are blurred and some virtual universities have made big profits. Students and faculty remain, however, real persons and not virtual ghosts. In short, the main functions of higher education have not changed radically since the Middle Ages. Higher education is continuously responsible for the production and spreading of knowledge. In 2027, it remains one of the most important institutions in socializing new generations to society. ■

### Today's Threats Prove to be Tomorrow's Promise: Higher Education in 2027

**BY THEODORE KOWALSKI**  
Kuntz Professor, Educational  
Administration  
University of Dayton

The effects of technology on the instructional mission of this nation's colleges and universities have been both positive and negative. While an estimated two million students, many of whom would not have had access to higher education a few decades ago, are already engaged in distance learning, this gain has been paralleled by a proliferation of inferior, profit-driven institutions and degree programs. Some observers already have predicted the demise of the modern university claiming that a small number of independent, entrepreneurial scholars and an army of low-paid adjunct instructors using the Web and cable television will replace regular faculties in the next few decades. The obituaries for the traditional university, however, are premature.

Rather than being destroyed, reputable institutions are likely to be strengthened by the current threats they face. This is likely for at least three reasons:

1. Some well-respected universities already have proven that it is possible to

broaden the doors to academe without sacrificing quality and standards. Over the next 25 years, state and most respected private institutions will develop courses and degree programs melding accessibility and rigor to serve nontraditional students. At many of these schools, enrollment in non-campus programs will be larger than enrollment in campus programs.

2. Predictions about the future of higher education typically ignore or grossly underestimate the value of faculty research and service. The prospect of eliminating traditional faculties will finally force elected officials to weigh the total contributions of higher education to society objectively. When they do this, they will discover that the research and service missions cannot be duplicated without excessive increases in public expenditures. At this point, these officials will become protective of the modern university.

3. Prior to the 1970s, professional, regional, and state accrediting associations effectively protected society from diploma mills. Since then, litigation (or the threat of litigation) has attenuated the power and authority of these agencies. As the pendulum continues to swing toward deregulation, both Congress and state legislatures are likely to revamp laws giving accrediting agencies greater authority. As this occurs, profit-seeking companies that offer degrees based on a combination of independent learning and low-cost distance learning will suffer.

In summary, I believe that a combination of effective leadership from university administrators and governmental regulations will not only curb but also reverse the current trend toward deregulating education in this country. Compromises will be made to balance accessibility and academic rigor. Hence, traditional universities will be forced to serve an increasing number of off-campus students; questionable for-profit institutions will be forced either to build a reputable faculty and meet tougher accreditation standards or to cease operations. Consequently, the modern university will emerge from this turmoil more accessible, more flexible, and more dedicated to serving society. ■

### A State Perspective on the Future of Higher Education

**BY MARIO MARTINEZ**  
Assistant Professor  
New Mexico State University

In order to forecast the future of higher education, we must first assess what has happened

**Continued on Page Three**

in the past, what is predicted to happen in the present, and what is going to happen in the future. The future is unpredictable, but we do know a few things. Forecasts indicate that most states will see real increases in the 18 and over population, much attributed to increases in minority populations. This means increased demand for postsecondary education.

The past is also important. States have historically demonstrated inconsistent fiscal commitment to higher education. In addition, several national surveys indicate policy makers believe higher education tries to play by its own rules. Right or wrong, such perceptions affect what and how much we are able to do.

Presently, we, as professionals, need to take action to help shape our profession's future. We must launch efforts to understand policy makers' priorities. Policy makers are, for example, interested in higher education's economic impact. We must integrate those interests into our research and service activity, balancing such activity with other academic ideals. We should not compromise ourselves, but we cannot move forward without a productive relationship with the state. If we do not do this, the future of higher education is predictable: private revenues will continue to gain importance in public institutions, student loans will rise, and deference to efficiency will win out over such cherished values as knowledge production. Higher education will change over the next 25 years, but will higher education scholars be a part of the conversation that accompanies that change? ■

## The Industry of Higher Education in 25 Years

BY RICHARD C. RICHARDSON JR.  
Professor of Higher Education  
New York University

State governments will increasingly define priorities for P-20 education. System designs and fiscal policies will translate these priorities into measurable indices that will be used to assess institutional contributions. Colleges and universities will be expected to improve on indicators sensitive to their approved missions. Odd-ball systems that have evolved largely in response to institutional interests will receive close scrutiny. Those that cost more than systems achieving comparable outcomes will be restructured to promote greater accountability and collaboration as well as to reduce wasteful competition.

States will regulate less and steer more by structuring quasi-markets. Institutional auton-

omy will be understood as the freedom to decide how best to address state priorities. Institutions will design strategies for achieving defined outcomes and will be held accountable for producing results. Independent institutions will be a part of state plans for meeting needs and will be eligible for incentives and infrastructure support similar to those now provided to the public sector. Vouchers could cause this change in far less than 25 years.

Fiscal policies will reward institutions based on their contributions to state goals. Operating support will focus on completion as well as participation and retention. Need-based and merit assistance will remain a key strategy for steering. The ratio between the two will be fine-tuned to ensure that equal opportunity and comparable outcomes remain critical objectives. States will rely on system-wide initiatives in such areas as distance education, student preparation, and teacher education. All of these trends are currently evident in pacesetter states. They will be the norm in less than 25 years. ■

## Higher Education in 25 Years: Much of the Same

BY DAVID W. BRENEMAN  
Dean of the Curry School of Education  
University of Virginia

Higher education is a mature, thoroughly built-out industry today, operating in a market with growing demand. Its internal governance and management is inherently conservative, and thus will not be a force for significant change. Therefore, barring sharp external changes, one would predict that the system in 25 years will be very similar to what it is today.

What might those external changes be? State governments may continue to disinvest, in which case the system will become less regulated and more private in nature. Distance learning via technology will surely increase, but if current trends continue, electronic learning will not displace most campus-based activity. The for-profit movement might intensify, but current trends suggest that such institutions will have a marginal effect at best. In

short, currently foreseeable external trends do not show much promise for radical change. To my clouded crystal ball, it will take some development not currently visible for the system to be changed significantly from its present course. ■

## Higher Education in Twenty-five Years

BY GARY S. KRAHENBUHL  
Senior Vice President & Deputy Provost  
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In thinking about what higher education might be like in twenty-five years, it is probably important to separate what is imaginable from what is beyond the imagination. Breakthroughs from the marriage of biology and information technology will alter human existence in ways that are unpredictable and probably beyond the imagination. If one can assume that changes emerging from the decoding and control of genetic material do not alter the need for learning or the manner in which it is acquired, then one can consider what might be imaginable.

Our campuses will be more diverse because there will be no majority in America. The level of social embeddedness of our universities will have increased, both in terms of the student experience and areas of inquiry. University research will be focused more exclusively on complex societal problems ranging from the sustainability of the planet as a habitable place in a world with burgeoning populations; to security in a world of perpetual menace plagued by violence; to economic uncertainty in a world mostly poor, but with deeply resented islands of affluence. A campus-based experience may continue to be the preferred way to earn a baccalaureate degree, but distance-learning alternatives convenient in time and place will enjoy growing popularity with a greater portion of the undergraduate population.

These predictions violate the prognosticator's vow: if one predicts an event the date should not be revealed, if one specifies a date the event should not be indicated. Let's hope no one looks back at this prediction in 2027. ■

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