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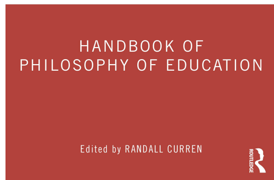

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TOWARD A POST-PANDEMIC HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Ariel C. Armony and Ann E. Cudd[1]

In early March 2020, in response to the rapidly spreading coronavirus, the University of Pittsburgh decided to upend the normal course of the semester by ending on-campus, in-person teaching and closing our dormitories. We prepared to lockdown all our campus buildings and shutter our research labs within three days. Similar decisions took place at every university, college, and community college in the country. We did not know then, and a year-and-a-half later we still did not know, when and under what conditions we would fully return to our campuses. We were forced to change plans often based on limited information and rapidly changing conditions. But a year into the pandemic we knew that there had been massive losses in terms of life, jobs, financial security, research, and that nothing would ever be the same in higher education.

With a new perspective gleaned from loss and physical distance, we also saw more clearly the things that were utterly erroneous about what we had been doing in higher education prior to the pandemic, as well as how absolutely central education – including higher education – is to modern civic life. Several of the wrongs had been obvious for many years: systemic racism, structural impediments to career advancement for faculty and staff, a weak commitment by universities to invest in the well-being and inclusive economic development of their communities, and unequal access to technology for minorities and other underserved members of the university community, among other injustices. As we muddled through the pandemic and tried to visualize the end of the global disease, we began to see opportunities for change in a new light.

In this chapter, we explore the fundamental tensions that we face in our work as educators and researchers and ask how higher education should transform itself to right the wrongs that we, as leaders and faculty in institutions of higher learning in the United States, have been complicit in and that have been laid bare by the crisis brought about by COVID-19. Attention will be paid to the role of technology, which has acquired a central place in education.

Three Tensions

Above everything else, the loss of lives has been a common denominator of these times. It has touched every single member of our communities, locally and globally. There has been an epidemic of loneliness, anxiety, and mental illness. Staff, particularly front-line workers who kept universities running, endured angst, uncertainty, and job insecurity. Faculty put in enormous, time-consuming, anxiety-ridden efforts to transform their pedagogy with varying degrees of support and success. Jobs became more precarious, and institutional budget cuts were demoralizing. Many colleges and

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universities faced declining enrollments, teetering on the brink of financial collapse. Students complained about having to pay for a lower quality education and some even sued institutions for lower tuition and fees. At the same time, rising costs associated with technology, workplace health protection, and other requirements deepened financial hardship and uncertainty.

Trust in leadership flagged. Presidents and provosts were retiring, resigning, or being fired in much greater numbers than before the pandemic. Public trust in educational institutions, already slumping prior to the pandemic, continued a downward trend. According to a 2021 Pew Research Center survey, 57% of adults in the United States believed that colleges and universities had a positive effect on the country's situation, a 12-point decrease compared to 2015 (Van Green 2021). Public perception of colleges and universities as detached from society deepened as many Americans believed that institutions of higher education were worried only about revenues and were sacrificing the health of students, faculty, and the communities they resided in to preserve their own financial well-being. Forty percent of interviewees in a 2021 survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Bipartisan Policy Center expressed doubts about the real value of a college degree (Burt 2021). A survey of US college and university presidents revealed that 82% of leaders in higher education agreed that most Americans do not have "an accurate view of the purpose of higher education in general" and 73% of those interviewed stated that this view has been shaped by a perception that the institutions' priorities – for instance, investment in amenities to attract students – are misplaced (Inside Higher Ed 2021).

In these difficult times, we have learned – by necessity and through painful experiences – some important lessons that are shaping the future of higher education. There is increasing realization that gender, racial, and other disparities are systemic in the way we have configured the academic enterprise and how we conduct research. Universities now face the monumental task of dismantling long-standing structures that impose an unfair burden on minorities that hinder their careers and professional success.

The pandemic also exposed serious vulnerabilities in our risk, health, and safety infrastructures. Many universities were slow to react to the key signs of the COVID-19 pandemic, a disease exacerbated by globalized transportation and the unparalleled mobility of people around the world. Important gaps in coordination and communication slowed down decision making in the onset of the pandemic.

Still, we learned that institutions of higher education, as they were forced to react for their own survival, showed a high level of resilience, flexibility, and creativity. Many colleges and universities exhibited a moral commitment to protect vulnerable employees and students, expanding their efforts to keep people safe and preserve their jobs even when they could not do any useful work during lockdown. Institutions created funding mechanisms to support graduate students, international students, and others in need. Faculty demonstrated that they could pivot rapidly and completely to remote teaching. The demand to confront a new reality in the workplace sparked a groundbreaking debate on the competencies that students needed to advance "a human-centered agenda for the future of work, with increasing investments in people's capabilities, in the institutions of work … and in decent and sustainable work" (Dede 2020: 11).

In many respects, we now are better equipped to ask questions that can guide a serious conversation about the future of higher education. On one hand, we ought to rethink higher education when considering technology, costs, and maximization of access. On the other hand, we must reorient debates on how universities should train students for the future of work and to be effective and engaged citizens, and how our institutions can lessen inequalities on campus and in communities. This agenda requires crafting a new vision that redefines the proposed value of higher education.

These challenges point to three fundamental tensions that map out the landscape of higher education in the 21st century. One is a tension between embracing competition and elite education for the most talented against creating more equality through emphasizing access to education – meritocracy

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versus democratization of education. A second tension is between free speech for all to openly debate and express their views with the opposing view that universities must provide safe spaces, where minorities are protected from the insults and threats from majority students and faculty and where they can enjoy their culture as dominant. A third tension is between the university as an ivory tower with its own separate norms and values versus the university as a shared social institution for the common good. This tension also speaks about the university as a place-based institution committed to its local community and the university as a global enterprise that extends its reach beyond national borders.

These tensions share some common elements, which involve questions about lifelong learning, the relationship between universities and employers, and the role of institutions of higher education beyond their campuses. The promises and perils of technology is also a theme that permeates all three tensions in ways that were not so evident prior to the pandemic. These tensions expose deep fault lines that require concerted actions not only from administrators, but also from faculty, students, staff, and members of the communities that are home to our institutions. These tensions and, to an important extent the contradictions embedded in these tensions, cannot be resolved by simply choosing a single alternative. The challenge is to find new, creative, unconventional ways to capitalize on the innovative power of higher education.

Elite Education and Equality through Access

Higher education is an ecosystem with several levels of access and opportunity. These levels have been rigidly separated in the past. At the lowest, entry level there are two-year community colleges easily accessible by virtually anyone who can pay the low fee for a course or a term. In the middle, regional and state colleges and universities that teach masses of students in four-year degree programs, accessible by students who took a college prep curriculum in high school and who can afford tuition that roughly equates to buying a nice car over four years, as well as room and board. At the top are the elite research universities that are selective and allow only elite students, often the most affluent and White, to enter, but are frequently made affordable with scholarships for the low-income students who are selected. For the most part, these latter types of institutions have been designed with a traditional age range, 18–24-year-old students, in mind. While the higher education ecosystem has expanded somewhat with for-profit colleges and online programs, these have almost exclusively been marketed towards non-traditionally aged, adult learners or learners who did not have the credentials to access a traditional four-year institution.

The rapid adoption of technology as was needed by the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed a new ecosystem of higher learning with the potential to expand and diversify. Because of the newfound capacity for online education, even traditional campuses can expand geographically, as students choose to study remotely around the world and faculty likewise can choose to teach and collaborate with colleagues from distant locations. The growth of online education can make college much more accessible in response to growing demand, the allure of increased revenue, and the ever-increasing ability to automate and scale aspects of teaching. This transformation can create greater access to elite education, which will open many doors of opportunity for learners of all ages and abilities.

Today's marketplace requires significant investments on the part of universities to incorporate advances in AI, virtual reality, robotics, learning analytics, digital badging, and blockchain. While technology may offer the ability to automate and scale aspects of teaching – expanding access to education by reducing costs while maintaining instructional quality – there are still some key limitations.

First, designing digital material and training professors to effectively deliver it is costly, and many institutions are not able to adequately do either. Richer colleges and universities may be able to take advantage of blended teaching and thus incorporate innovative pedagogical approaches in tandem with digital tools and platforms, while maintaining traditional courses and supporting in person interactions between professors and students. This hybrid approach can more effectively use class

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time and help prepare students for engagement and participation, but financially it may be unavailable to institutions with scant resources. Few of the institutions already at a high market risk have the capital required to finance the investment in an online teaching modality. As a result, technology could be helping to increase existing gaps in higher education, rather than the opposite, reinforcing a "winner's market" in which wealthy institutions get wealthier and large institutions get larger, specifically four-year public and four-year private non-for-profit colleges and universities, while two-year community colleges and four-year private for-profit institutions suffer significant losses in enrollment (Kim 2018; Zemsky et al. 2020).

Second, the expansion of access through educational technology does not guarantee the democratization of high-quality education. Institutions of higher education continue to struggle with determining how meritocratic or egalitarian access to education should be. The global demand for creative workers with advanced cognitive competencies to process information and symbols has increased the competition among universities to attract the most talented from around the globe. The transformation of the work environment drives corporations to focus on acquiring, developing, and retaining creative workers, and universities are major sources of such talent. As such, they are expected not only to provide their graduates with the set of competencies required to join a "new creative class," but also to devise strategies to cluster innovation and create an ecosystem that attracts the best doers and thinkers from around the world (Haskel & Westlake 2017; Anderson et al. 2015; Florida 2006).

The ensuing competition has resulted in an increasingly selective process and less equitable access to higher education as those coming from higher income brackets typically have greater access to the educational resources that prepare and position them as a part of this aspiring creative class. A report in 2017 found that, in the U.S., "children whose parents are in the top 1% of the income distribution are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy League college than those whose parents are in the bottom income quintile" (Chetty et al. 2017). Moreover, while in 1992 "there were 20 colleges that admitted fewer than one-third of applicants … today there are 75 to 80. There were two colleges that admitted fewer than 20%, and today that number is closer to 40" (Jaschik 2021).

This runs counter to the stated aims of universities to expand educational access to include minorities and underserved populations, not only to attract talent but also to train and produce talent from those with varied backgrounds, providing mobility for individuals from lower income brackets. For instance, while the percentage of immigrant-origin students enrolled in US institutions of higher education represented nearly 30% in 2018, a ten-point increase from 2000, "they are likely to face barriers and limits on resources that many other students do not" (Jordan 2020; see Batalova & Feldblum 2020). The tension between the democratization of an elite education through increased access to instruction and the need to preserve rigor, high quality and continuous innovation is central to the future of higher education (Hughes 2021). If diversity is celebrated as an important goal, the competition for top talent will often frustrate this aim. It is also important to consider that "access alone is not enough for fostering inclusion and generating mobility," as Anthony A. Jack argued (2019: 22). Lower-income students may be given access to elite institutions, but policies and practices at these institutions often fail them – these are the new "privileged poor" in US higher education (Jack 2019).

Third, institutions must address questions regarding the equitable use of technology for different groups, how technology may reinforce unequal opportunities, how technology will impact disadvantaged groups of the campus community, and how this reflects the institution's view on the role of technology in society more broadly. Technologies are not neutral instruments, not just in terms of their use and impact, but also because of their very design (Papendieck 2018). While educational technologies are adopted as tools to fulfil goals that advance social goods, such as expanding access to education, adopters need to understand that such technologies "black-box sociopolitical assumptions and agendas, and smuggle dominant ways of knowing, understanding the world into classrooms" (Latour 1987, as cited in Papendieck 2018). Contrary to the "techno-idealistic" assumption that technology necessarily improves society – for instance, by democratizing education – technology

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may in fact exclude and marginalize disadvantaged groups, by deepening existing inequalities and mechanisms of oppression as well as by creating new inequities and reinforcing and/or reproducing existing power structures (Papendieck 2018). "Even where discrimination is not intended," the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights argues, "indirect discrimination can result from using innocuous and genuinely relevant criteria that also operate as proxies for race and ethnicity." Furthermore, "the use of and reliance on predictive models that incorporate historical data – data often reflecting discriminatory biases and inaccurate profiling – including in contexts such as law enforcement, national security and immigration" reproduce patterns of discrimination and exclusion (OHCHR 2020).

As institutions address the tension between elite education and expanded access, they must engage in new conversations around the potential of technologies to advance goals of equity and social justice. This is a potentially transformative agenda. Institutions of higher education can influence how technology is designed, how it interacts with society, and what impact it has on marginalized communities and other vulnerable groups. Also, expanded access to digital knowledge can empower university students to support their community, facilitating the positioning of underserved populations in the dynamics of the technological phenomenon as agents of change and not only as spectators, through practices of digital solidarity. These practices can involve digital literacy initiatives and the development of applications, programs, and software based on diverse worldviews and cultural heritages.

The adoption of technology to expand access to education does not have to be shaped by the dichotomy elitism/democratization if colleges and universities acknowledge the embedded inequities of the exclusionary design of digital products and virtual environments. Institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to reinvent the interactions that we create with technology, advancing a new paradigm that recognizes and values the range of human experience and backgrounds (Jeffrey & Jimenez 2021). As the labor market demand for diversely-skilled workers grows, technology-enhanced learning should be implemented equitably to benefit all – beginning with the most marginalized and excluded populations. An inclusive agenda can leverage technology to personalize education, enhance college readiness, and create pathways for retraining and new skill acquisition, thereby narrowing socio-economic, gender, ethnic, racial, and other achievement gaps.

Free Speech and Safe Spaces

A second tension speaks about one of the most contentious dimensions in higher education, namely, the tension between the university as a place where free speech for all is secured and, at the same time, where under-represented groups are safeguarded from threats, harm, and aggression and have their own spaces where they can express their own shared culture. This tension has become compounded by the recent eruption of racial conflicts and a drastic loss of trust in our government, political and social divisions, and a poisonous climate of incivility, xenophobia, and toxic masculinity.

It has been argued that the tension between free speech and protection of minorities can be resolved by making campuses "safe enough" for members of the university community to feel empowered to leave their comfort zones and hear viewpoints they did not anticipate hearing (Roth 2019). This requires creating a place "where students know that, if they espouse unpopular views, they will not be attacked, that there will be no reprisals" and where it is possible "to explore difference, to have one's ways of thinking tested – not just protected" (Roth 2019: 103, 124).

Colleges and universities have taken increasingly activist approaches to eradicating expressions of discrimination and hate – in large part because of changing demographics and a much stronger demand from minority students for university leadership to address the issue (Nossel 2018; Cudd 2019). College students support free speech on their campuses, while they think that the rights and concerns of minorities against speech deemed threatening should not be ignored. A 2020 poll by Gallup found that

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"close to 7 in 10 college students (68%) regard citizens' free speech rights as being 'extremely important' to democracy. Nearly the same percentage (69%) believe an inclusive society that is welcoming to diverse groups is 'extremely important.'" Students do not support curbing controversial speech as "nearly three-quarters believe colleges should not be able to restrict expression of political views that are upsetting or offensive to certain groups" (Gallup 2021). Still, there is significant support for actions that foster a strong sense of belonging. As Gallup's 2020 survey showed, "78% of college students favor colleges providing safe spaces, or areas of campus that are designed to be free from threatening actions, ideas or conversations" (Gallup 2021).

Studies on the synergies between diversity and innovation stress the imperative to create an environment where minority views can be expressed and given due consideration. Otherwise, diversity may lead to lower levels of cohesiveness, trust, and communication. If group members do not feel psychologically safe to express their viewpoints, or if conflict is poorly managed, creativity is often hampered, and innovative outcomes are less likely to emerge (Bassett-Jones 2005; Phillips et al. 2014; Kurtzberg 2005; Post et al. 2009; Paulus & Dzindolet 2008). In higher education, synergies between diversity and innovation benefit students in numerous ways, including engaging them in higher forms of cognitive learning such as critical thinking and problem-solving, deepening their conceptual competencies, and providing opportunities to learn from dynamic creative processes (Sharif 2019). In particular, the process of creativity is nurtured by environments that involve "diversity, openness, mutual respect, and communication" (Glăveanu & Clapp 2018: 54). On one hand, the diversity of cultural experiences nurtures creativity "by diversifying the range of experiences possible for both self and others" (54). On the other hand, a creativity that acknowledges people and their context requires understanding one's own positionality within a system, making an honest conversation about issues of power an essential one whenever alterity and diversity are also being discussed (Glăveanu & Clapp 2018).

Some have argued that university campuses should be treated as "unregulated markets" of ideas. However, an unregulated market approach tolerates injury and insult, and it is likely to harm historically marginalized and vulnerable groups (Roth 2019: 99). In recent years, university campuses have been important battlegrounds in the contentious debate over whether to allow all sorts of speech, even if the espoused views counter university aims of inclusion and diversity.[2] The ACLU (2021), for instance, has adopted the position that "speech that deeply offends our morality or is hostile to our way of life warrants the same constitutional protection as other speech because the right of free speech is indivisible" and "historically, restrictions on speech have proven at best ineffective, and at worst counter-productive, in the fight against bigotry." The ACLU's position does not neglect the interests of groups that have been historically vulnerable, but it emphasizes the importance of placing power in the hands of "those seeking to question or dismantle existing power structures" rather than in the hands of "authority figures – the government or a college administration" (ACLU 2021).

The complex relationship between learning and belonging lies at the heart of the tension between free speech and safe spaces. This relationship also matters as we seek to understand the experience of belonging in virtual learning environments, an important theme for further research. Higher education aims to develop "self-awareness, subtlety of thought, and openness to the possibility of learning from others" (Roth 2019: 8). However, if efforts are limited to highlighting the values of diversity and inclusion – mostly through rhetorical devices – the tension between learning and belonging cannot be properly addressed and we will fail to advance the mission of our institutions (Roth 2019). This points to the imperative of dismantling structures that sustain racial and other inequities in higher education. Addressing the question of belonging demands, for instance, an antiracist agenda. This is an agenda that requires identifying "racial inequity in all its intersections and manifestations" (in particular, policies causing racial injustice), dismantling assimilationist ideas, untying "the idea of a culture from the idea of behavior," and cultivating difference while

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underscoring the fact that "racial groups are equals in all the ways they are different" (Kendi 2019: 17–18, 28, 31, 95, 231).

An antiracist project in higher education should decolonize both the pedagogical and curricular framework that dominates most institutions of higher education in the United States. The necessary decolonization of knowledge is a daunting task because it requires action at the theoretical, epistemological, analytical, and methodological levels (de Sousa Santos 2021). This is an endeavor that requires identifying and dismantling "theories gleaned from European subjects masquerading as universal theories" (Kendi 2019: 167). It involves the "identification, reconstruction and validation" of knowledges deemed to be "non-scientific" that have been vital in struggles against colonialism and domination (de Sousa Santos 2021: 251). It is impossible to conceive the creation of safe spaces at colleges and universities, where encounters with diversities are effectively encouraged and protected, if the notion of "civilization" continues to define dominant paradigms and cultural difference is subject to long-established cognitive hierarchies (Roth 2019; Kendi 2019).

Eurocentric knowledge continues to underpin our cognitive hierarchies. The construction of Western "expertise" was intertwined with the colonial enterprise, which extracted local knowledge (for example, adopting indigenous agricultural practices) while asserting both intellectual and political domination. "The claim to invention, like the claim to discovery in the patent charters of colonial conquest, is the justification for the takeover of market systems and economic systems through globalized patent regimes," Vanda Shiva argued (2008: 274). The extraction and patenting of local people's traditional knowledge in drug development, agriculture, and other fields is well known. Therefore, decolonizing Western science involves questioning its colonial nature (such as the exploitation of cultures through the forceful and/or illicit appropriation of local knowledge), its patriarchal character (the devaluation of women's life and work), and the global mercantilization of labor and nature (de Sousa Santos 2021; see Deb Roy 2017, 2018).

Colleges and universities have nurtured spaces of intercultural dialogue not dominated by Eurocentric knowledge systems (de Sousa Santos 2021: 258). Programs on Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Indigenous Studies, Women's Studies, and Ethnic Studies founded in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s played a fundamental role in "the struggles for the recognition of cultural diversity." These struggles have "gradually destabilized epistemological and monocultural hegemony through the introduction of new problems and new types of epistemological approaches" (de Sousa Santos 2021: 251). Still, the efforts to advance cognitive justice face multiple obstacles from hidebound disciplinary traditions (de Sousa Santos 2021: 267, 282; Visvanathan 2021).

Another dimension of an antiracist project geared toward resolving the tension between free speech and safe spaces should prioritize the creation of culturally integrated spaces. Such spaces should emphasize the equality of difference and champion difference across diverse groups. This approach fuses, as Kendi (2019) proposes, "desegregation with a form of integration and racial solidarity" (180). Attaining new modes of solidarity is important to creating intersectional coalitions. Calls for general solidarity, however, cannot ignore nor diminish the concerns, interests, and demands of different diversities under the pretext that moving away from "narrow identities" of race and gender, for example, is beneficial for marginalized groups (Roth 2019: 108). Indeed, antiracism calls for both intersectional solidarity and group-specific recognition by demanding concerted efforts to eliminate "not only the hierarchy of races but of race-genders," as well as ethnic racism and other forms of systemic exclusion and discrimination (Kendi 2019: 63–64, 188–189).

Addressing social justice also involves several aspects related to technology, including digital equity, accessibility for students with disabilities, and targeted efforts to leverage educational technology to meet the needs of underprivileged students (see, for instance, Brown 2020). Attention must also be given to the expansion of surveillance capacity to respond to security breaches, and how it can impair the creation of safe spaces in colleges and universities. Also, because of the pandemic, "new tracking and surveillance technologies have flooded the campus securitization market,

including access control systems that create 'a digital record of who accessed a space on a specific day or time' and 'robots and drones [that] … can provide live video and bidirectional audio'" (Watkins 2020). How these technologies may be used disproportionally against minority groups is a rising concern. Members of these groups "are those most likely to be surveilled and stopped by campus officers," so the introduction of additional methods of control – prompted by the enforcement of "a host of new social distancing-related offenses," for example – is likely to negatively impact the creation of safe spaces on university campuses (Watkins 2020).[3]

In sum, institutions of higher education can resolve the tension between free speech and safe spaces, but there is a real danger of doing so in ways that segregate and divide if we are not careful and intentional. It is important to promote the institutional mission-centered case for diversity and education in cultural competency, followed by the argument for social justice, in order to build broad support and solidarity. Diversity benefits the knowledge creation and educational missions both by creating more and better ideas and discussions and by equipping students to interact successfully in a global, multicultural world. Education for cultural competency will inevitably involve creating empathy and understanding of difference. This will create allies among the majority and feelings of belonging among minorities. There will still be disagreement and even sometimes hurt feelings, but these are tolerable if one feels that one belongs in an accepting, inclusive environment that values diversity.

Ivory Tower versus Shared Social Institution

Finally, and connected to the resolution of the first two tensions, universities need to be of their communities and not tower above them if they are to lead positive transformative change. Our institutions need to engage and collaborate with the communities in which we live. First, we owe it to them for the support we get as non-profits, a status our institutions receive because we are working toward a common interest, not special interest. Second, this is the way to expand access to education for our local communities. Third, the feeling of belonging to a university community can only be enhanced if the community trusts the university and the university demonstrates accountability to the community. By collaborating with our local communities on questions of interest to them, and providing a space for community-university discussions, our faculty and students will expand the problem-solving and methodological approaches needed to address major challenges with local impact. Engaged scholarship will lead to better science and deeper scholarship about questions that matter, resulting in solutions that improve lives.

Institutions of higher education can play a key role in advancing the common good if they leverage their resources in a strategic manner and engage with the community in mutually beneficial ways. Universities can share resources, align with local economic development agendas through hiring, purchasing, and procurement, and provide the community real opportunities to influence and leverage the work of institutions of higher education. Universities are experimenting with new approaches to the science of learning (Brown, et al. 2014). The use of behavioral variables at the individual level and new inroads in cognitive science have significant potential to serve greater social equity. Universities can collaborate on grand challenges, particularly if they listen to communities, ask the right questions, and build teams endowed with cognitive diversity. Universities have the connections and networks to co-create solutions with their communities and address global imbalances.

Universities have the capacity to play a "place-based" role and help facilitate social justice, but only if they can successfully maximize the benefits of economic investments and opportunities for their communities, to ensure that under-resourced, vulnerable, and underserved populations do not continue to be left behind. The so-called civic university, whose purpose involves making a positive community impact, can act as a driver of more just, equal, and sustainable places (Goddard & Vallance 2013; UPP Foundation 2019). However, the view of the university as a social institution for the common good has been questioned, particularly by those who argue that the rise of the

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university as a corporate structure can create major roadblocks to socially just urban planning and the ability of cities to become places for more equitable economic and social outcomes. This is a major dimension of higher education's future agenda, as cities and their surrounding regions are being reimagined in the context of a post-pandemic era, a generalized crisis of representation, legacies of racism and colonialism, climate change, health disparities, and long-standing challenges in housing, food supply, and other basic needs.

The tension between the civic university and the corporate university involves the role that universities play in their places, for example, in cities impacted by de-industrialization. In the United States, many post-industrial cities have come to rely on their existing educational institutions as key economic drivers. Attracting the start-ups, incubators, and new talent to their cities was needed to help the cities and their surrounding regions to restart their economies following the collapse of their local economies. These cities are now considered crucibles of reinvention and innovation and, as the narrative goes, they have successfully navigated the sunsetting of industrial production and creatively reoriented to intellectual technology, advanced manufacturing, business services, and life science innovations. This is often known as the "eds and meds" model.

However, this narrative has come under heavy criticism considering protracted socioeconomic inequalities across racial and other cleavages in many cities. While universities, especially when situated in higher concentrations, often have a positive economic impact for their region, and even show spillover effects with neighboring regions, their role in advancing social justice – effectively working to promote more equitable growth in their communities – has become a focus of concern (Valero & Van Reenen 2019). For example, a study by Bloomberg CityLab found that "metros with at least one research university have considerably higher levels of income segregation than those with none. And income segregation is roughly 10% higher in metros with a research university that is ranked among the top 100 in the world" (Florida 2018).

Critics stress that institutions of higher education have significantly expanded their influence, becoming a powerful actor in urban governance. In major cities across the United States, the university is often the dominant employer, real estate holder, health-care provider, and even agent of policing (Baldwin 2021). In New York, Saint Louis, Phoenix, and other cities, universities have accumulated a significant degree of power, for example, by flouting or rewriting zoning laws (Baldwin 2021; see Day 2021). The physical expansion of universities results in higher housing costs and the displacement of lower-income residents. The investments made in constructing new campuses or expanding their urban footprint (such as Columbia University's Manhattanville campus) have resulted in rising prices and inequalities that force out many of the long term, often poorer, inhabitants from the community, replaced by tech startups and boutique stores catering to young professionals (Kensinger 2018). Critics have also noted that, in many cases, the university's claim to advance a social justice mission is in contradiction to the institution's position vis-à-vis demands by their employees for better working conditions and against austerity programs (Benneworth 2021).

The notion of the civic university speaks to both "a utilitarian ideal of mutually beneficial links between cities and universities" as well as "an ethical ideal of serving the cities in which universities are located and directly responding to the needs of local communities" (Todd et al. 2021: 147). Linking the utilitarian and ethical ideals requires universities to design strategies for engagement that address both the imperatives posed by today's knowledge economy – in which universities serve "as engines of 'smart growth,' driving the urban economy" – and their commitment to extend prosperity and wellbeing to their surrounding communities through access to affordable housing and health care, decent labor conditions, enhancement of energy efficiency systems, and democratization of arts and culture. This is further complicated in the case of global universities that have adopted the "city-as-campus model" in locations around the world where regulatory environments fail to protect the rights of the local, often migrant labor force (Baldwin 2021: 20–23; UPP Foundation 2019; Zilahy & Huisingh 2009).

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Strengthening the connection between universities and their places brings up the question of the tension between the local and global, and whether a university that claims commitment to the needs of its local community and economy can embrace a global agenda, with an emphasis on addressing the demands of international students, devoting resources to public good projects in other countries, and partnering with businesses and other organizations around the world. While it is easy to make the case that universities can leverage their global networks and their capacity to attract global talent for the benefit of local economic development, it is also true that universities in the global North contribute to brain drain, exert a stark domination in the international research community, and often extend their global reach while failing to engage in activities that are locally relevant and responsive to local community and government goals (Branković et al, 2014; Yang 2003).

The benefits of educational technology are not equally distributed, locally and globally. Digital divides in US higher education are primarily driven by economic inequality, reinforcing a vicious cycle in which lesser-resourced colleges and universities struggle to support a digital enhanced learning environment. These are the very institutions serving poorer students, who experience significant obstacles to accessing online education (Alexander 2017). The global digital divide cannot be ignored either. A one-hour Zoom call in Malawi would cost nearly three times the cost in the United States, using mobile data, which represents almost a week's salary in that African country (Wilcox 2021). Universities in the United States and Europe could support public-private partnerships, encourage competition among internet providers, foster open access to the internet, partner to democratize "digital governance," and contribute to teaching digital skills to reduce gaps in access by social status, gender, and income level (Wilcox 2021; OHCHR 2020).

Universities can cooperate with governments and the private sector on initiatives oriented to addressing structural inequities in the digital technology domain, including the expansion of representation of racial, ethnic, and national groups in all aspects of decision-making, research, and knowledge production in the design and use of emerging digital technologies (OHCHR 2020). The magnitude of the global digital divide is especially relevant when we consider, for instance, that the future for Africa in the 21st century is inextricably linked to the continent's technological transformation of higher education, a requirement for inclusive development in a region where 60% of the population is below the age of 25. As Zeleza and Okanda (2021) put it, "The danger of remaining peripheral to the Fourth Industrial Revolution for Africa is not exploitation and marginalisation, but historical irrelevance … becoming a landmass of disposable people." A truly global agenda of cooperation in higher education could not ignore the unprecedented opportunities for transformation that inclusive technological development could bring to the global South. This is part of an agenda that requires new alliances based on democratic access, a new ecology of knowledges, participatory methodologies and evaluation, and the creation of networks that reject cognitive and patriarchal colonialisms and respect differences across ways of knowing.

Conclusion

The tensions discussed in this essay are tied together by three common elements. One is the new reality of an integrated lifelong learning approach, what has been described as a conversion "from a lifetime career to a lifetime of careers" (Richards 2020: 143). Institutions of higher education are expected to meet the demand for a workforce with constant skill acquisition, reskilling, and upskilling to match the pace of technological advancements and organizational innovations. The new reality of "a lifetime of careers" involves training people how to learn in diverse environments and in multicultural teams. The fourth industrial revolution demands that workers be flexible, adaptable, creative, and have skills in metacognition, collaboration, global mindset, critical thinking, and an awareness of personal and social responsibility, while still being fluent in broader digital competencies (International Labour Organization 2021). This represents a momentous shift from an

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education-centered approach to one focused on learnability, conceived as a process that is continual and not linear. The key goal is to develop "the ability to learn" (Scott 2020; Infosys 2021). Digital environments, which allow learners to upskill at any time or place, and inclusionary institutions, which provide learners the opportunity to learn how to collaborate across and benefit intellectually from diverse perspectives, are integral components of this agenda.

A second element is the framing of a new kind of engagement between higher education and employers. From the employer perspective, higher education has been too slow in responding to the rapidly changing environment in industry. Employers want continuous curriculum development and more skill-focused training for the workplace – more important, they want a stronger voice in shaping curricula, credentials, and pedagogies (Wingard & Farrugia 2020). From the university perspective, there is a strong incentive to bridge the higher education-employer gap to prepare students for career adaptability, especially in the digital economy (Richards 2020). Universities have also the capacity to shape the workplace by training the talent that will innovate and change how industry operates. Still, some argue that there is risk in defining higher education's mission as satisfying the need for technically skilled employees, no matter what these skills are, which could lead to the reduction of democratic deliberation, utilization of remote education to cut personnel costs, and a widespread mercantilization of universities at the expense of the cultivation of civic virtue, particularly a global civic education (de Sousa Santos 2021; Curren & Dorn 2018). There are no doubt two-way pressures between industry and higher education, which are at the core of future engagements between universities and employers.

The third element highlights the importance of moving "beyond campus walls to understand the full impact of universities" and their role as research and innovation powerhouses and key intermediaries between government and corporations (Baldwin 2021: 20–22). Universities have the capacity to influence and transform the urban economy and shape digital technologies and other areas of innovation, which, in turn, can reinforce patterns of racial, ethnic, and gendered inequities within and across nations. On a global scale, the technologies that universities have helped create may displace human labor through automation, contribute to a destabilization of the ecosystems on which human life depends, and deepen geopolitical inequalities by expanding the dominance of technology produced by the Global North (see OHCHR 2020). Addressing questions of access to higher education, inclusivity and belonging, and the university as a fundamental civic actor requires a comprehensive framework that places our institutions within the multiple networks and relationships that define their work, impact, and identity.

There are ways to resolve these tensions, but it will require rethinking the model of the university, that worked well for centuries, but now must adapt to new local, national, and global realities. We are witnessing an ecosystem of higher education that is expanding and diversifying to an enormous degree, and colleges and universities can become engines of social, cognitive, and climate justice, reinventing learning, and embracing innovative academic digital strategies. However, there is a serious risk that the gap between institutions will deepen within and across countries, solidifying an environment where non-research institutions with fewer resources – particularly those serving poorer students – will focus on job training and certification at the expense of "building transferable skills for future career growth and career change" (Alexander 2017; Dede 2020: 3).

The resolution of these tensions also demands that institutions of higher education, not only the elite ones, equip their students with the competencies to interact successfully in a global, multicultural world. Education for cultural competency will inevitably involve producing empathy and understanding of difference. This will create allies among the majority and feelings of belonging among minorities. It will also help colleges and universities to fully accept the moral imperative to educate global citizens, a generation that embraces the idea that global interdependence is unavoidable and that "the imposition of risk on one another" calls for global cooperation under fair terms. As the global pandemic and climate change have underscored, "global problems are largely

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problems whose solution or management requires forms and norms of governance that do not yet exist" (Curren & Dorn 2018: 125, 130). It is vital that those designing new governance frameworks come from a broad spectrum of individuals representing diverse backgrounds and identities. Higher education should emerge as a place where diversity produces the knowledge creation that will support the kind of environment necessary for building a cooperative global community.

Despite many challenges, the present environment offers unique opportunities to collectively design a new future for higher education, working together with our places, locally and globally, to create a better, more inclusive, and just university and through it, a better democracy and civic life.

(Related Chapters: 1, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28.)

Notes

1 We thank Rosa Hassan De Ferrari, Anthony Ocepek, and Rachel Travis for their excellent research assistance.
2 There is an intense debate around "cancel culture," which has extended beyond academic circles. See, for example, Applebaum (2021); Goldberg (2021).
3 Now that institutions have invested in technology that gives them broader access to monitoring their communities, it is unlikely that they will do away with it after the pandemic. Thus, the question of privacy rights and how data can be used in other instances after the pandemic becomes an important consideration.

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