



Higher Education 3.0

SUMMARY: Traditional educational models are under pressure as trends in work, technology, and student expectations—along with the disruptions of COVID-19—create needs for new curricula, modes of instruction, and funding models. Higher education is facing new threats of disintermediation by online education and alternative credentialing systems. Enrollment could be increased and diversified by new approaches to admissions and student debt.

Forecasts

- Higher education is facing uncertainty over the future of state funding, student enrollments, and the role of distance learning, among other ambiguities. The purpose of higher education will be an ongoing matter of debate, as will the value of college as a social institution versus an arena for professional training.
- Bifurcation among fields of study—between those degrees requiring access to campus facilities and those that are earnable from anywhere—may grow.
- Faculties will gain freedom to combine virtual and live curricula, enabling asynchronous scheduling among other benefits. Students in hybrid programs might be able to complete degrees more quickly.
- The movement to address systemic racism will drive transformative shifts in higher education, affecting leadership, hiring, admissions, curricula, programs, and accountability structures, and external relations.

Key Uncertainties

Levels of public funding for research

The evolution of models for hybrid online and on-campus learning

Public policy on education debt and debt forgiveness

Who holds the power to credential

Enactment of federal tuition-subsidy proposals

Financial return on college educations



Higher Education 3.0



Supporting Trends

- **Colleges and universities under pressure.** Enrollment at U.S. colleges has been flat or falling; by one measure, enrollment peaked in 2010 and has fallen every year since, dropping fastest at for-profit colleges and community colleges.
- **Learning online.** Online learning was growing before the pandemic but is now projected to grow from \$144 billion in 2019 to \$374 billion by 2026. According to KPMG, 90 percent of companies use online learning, including at least 40 percent of the Fortune 500.
- **New ideas for student debt.** Innovative ideas for reducing student loan debt are proliferating, from outright forgiveness to capping school fees to allowing graduates to pay a percentage of their gross earnings for 10 years in lieu of tuition.
- **Microlearning.** Microlearning is projected to grow at a 14 percent CAGR from 2021 to 2026, driven by growth in mobile and freelance workforces, the effectiveness of self-paced interactive learning, and growing demand for skills-based training.
- **Community college opportunities.** Student debt concerns, skepticism about for profit colleges, and government programs for free or subsidized tuition are making community colleges increasingly attractive to students.
- **Educational rise of women.** In 2019, after years of earning more college degrees, women edged out men as the majority of the U.S. college-educated workforce.
- **Proliferation of credentials.** The number and types of credentials beyond traditional academic degrees are rising.

Related Drivers of Change

- Dismantling Systemic Racism
- Empowered Women
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Re-working Career Pathways (archived)

Notable Data Points

TEACHING ONLINE

A 2019 poll found that the share of faculty members who have taught an **online course rose from 30% in 2013.**

Source: Inside Higher Ed.

ONLINE PREFERRED

In 2020, 41% of college-level students surveyed said their **online learning experience was better than that of classroom instruction.**

Source: EducationData.org.

MASSIVE EDUCATION DEBT

In 2019, about 43 million American adults held **\$1.5 trillion in federal student loan debt** and another \$119 billion in loans from private lenders.

Source: The MeasureOne Private Student Loan Report.

Higher Education 3.0



Strategic Insights

- How well higher education funding recovers from the financial trauma of the pandemic will determine how deeply associations that serve higher education are affected, with potentially protracted impacts for membership, research funding, journal subscriptions, and conference attendance.
- Addressing systemic racism became a strategic priority for U.S. higher education in 2020 and will remain a transformative force. Associations that serve educational institutions can support their members by acting as thought leaders and clearinghouses for effective practices.
- Alternative credentialing, microlearning, and other direct-to-learner digital education give associations a growing opportunity to play a role as trainers and educators.
- Associations may increasingly need to look beyond university programs as an entry point for recruiting new members. Membership qualifications may need updating to reflect the evolving educational landscape.
- Associations could play a driving role in reshaping higher education. Pressure to reform curricula to better reflect the needs of the workforce, employers, and an association's field could potentially catalyze reforms and overcome structural resistance to change.
- A growing number of students will not follow a four-year education path into careers. New academic pathways need to be created to serve the needs of these learners. Associations could meet these needs as part of their continuing education programs if academia does not.

Timing

- **Stage:** Growing, as forces challenging higher education accelerate.
- **Speed:** Medium to rapid, spurred by large cultural movements and the pandemic.

Potential Alternative Futures

- **Education as infrastructure.** Public funding of higher education is renewed to foster the breakthroughs and innovations that fuel new industries.
- **Autodidact credentialing.** Some prestige schools start accrediting microlearning and other self-teaching formats, providing more legitimacy to nonacademic education.
- **Closing the education tax loophole.** Schools with billion-dollar endowments find it increasingly challenging to defend their status as tax-free nonprofits.

Higher Education 3.0



Take Action

- **Move fast when universities move slow.** Associations have greater flexibility to address emerging issues and competencies, try new learning formats, and partner with different types of organizations as education providers.
- **Become the credentialing source that employers trust.** Define essential competencies and assess whether new institutions, online courses, and innovative approaches adequately prepare students. This may require updating unnecessarily rigid requirements about years of education completed and how learning experiences are sequenced.
- **Help prospective students navigate their education options.** If you accredit educational institutions, help students discern where they will find quality education. Some associations may want to disclose non-accreditation or actively combat low-quality programs. Associations can illustrate potential career pathways and provide advice on how and where to acquire necessary competencies.
- **Partner with new education providers.** Collaborate with universities, academics, and corporations offering virtual education. Many tech companies are eager to build in emergent skill areas.
- **Defend investments in academic research.** More associations will prioritize advocating for government, corporate, and foundation research funding. Association foundations may step up to organize and underwrite basic research for their field.
- **Learn from online innovators.** The pandemic has fast-tracked the growth of online learning and experimentation. Learn from emerging best practices that include collaborative learning and effective curation of digital knowledge resources. Some associations and think tanks choose to call their education programs “universities” to establish a brand for substantive content and learning experiences.

Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms alone or in combination: *remote learning, hybrid education, mega-universities, MOOC, digital education, edX, Coursera, Udemy, certification, credentials, pandemic and higher education, tuition subsidies.*

Who Will Be Affected

Most vulnerable to disruption and cost-cutting are professional associations and scientific and technical societies with many academic and student members. Online university and other entrepreneurial offerings may compete with professional development programs. Credentialing organizations will have to decide which programs to certify as qualified education sources among this growing array of options. Efforts to acknowledge and address systemic racism will permeate how higher education interacts with other institutions.

About ASAE ForesightWorks

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- Regularly updated action briefs;
- Tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- Guidance in performing environmental scans;
- Opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight in their associations and to lead their organizations confidently into the future.

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