Reshaping Global Education Design For Social Impact And A Skills-Based Economy

What does learning for the future look like and what radical transformation is required?

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There has been a longstanding belief that global higher education has a significant role to play in creating new economies in developing and emerging markets which can result in a broad-based social impact on individuals and society as a whole. No one can underestimate our institutions of higher learning's role and responsibility as a foundational driver of social mobility. It provides individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and credentials to access better job opportunities, higher wages, and a better quality of life. This, in turn, helps break the cycle of poverty and promotes economic growth.

Affordable, accessible higher education can be a powerful tool to reduce inequality in society and opportunities for individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds to access education and improve the wellbeing of educated contributors that fuel global economies. Additionally, higher education can help promote social cohesion, as people from diverse backgrounds come together to learn and grow and prepare to solve the world's most pressing problems. In a diverse, interconnected digital world, there has been no better time than now to reshape our academic institutions toward a new mandate. Overall, education has a profound social impact that extends far beyond the individual level. It can help promote social mobility, reduce inequality, increase civic engagement, promote cultural understanding, and improve health outcomes.

But how can global higher education reshape, redesign and restructure to meet the changing and diverse demographic needs of the *new majority learner*[1]? New Majority Learners are defined as, but not limited to, the learners;

- Who live in emerging markets nations who cannot afford the cost of a traditional four year degree
- Who has a degree but needs new credentials to qualify for higher earnings
- Who has enrolled in a higher ed program at 22 years of age
- Who can only attend college part-time (due to life or financial circumstances)
- who is the first one in their family to attend a college or university
- Who are low-income, living in poverty, unhoused, or experiencing basic needs (housing, food) insecurity
- Who works part- or full-time
- Who are adult learner degree completers
- Who are currently employed and seeking new, upwardly mobile career opportunities
- Who are financially independent for financial aid purposes
- Who can only attend college part-time (due to life or financial circumstances)
- Who speaks English as a second language (is an ESL learner
- Who is an immigrant to the US, or the child of immigrant parents/caregivers

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[1] Education Design Lab https://eddesignlab.org/newmajoritylearners/

To meet the needs of learners who have the highest potential to contribute to global economic development through social and economic ability, universities must adapt their academic mission, strategy, and delivery methods. But what founding ideology should our global institutions of higher education adopt as a catalyst for change? Look no further than the World Economic Forum (WEC) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), critical to achieving sustainable development globally. Colleges and universities can contribute to these goals in several ways, including:

1. *Providing quality, affordable education:* Colleges and universities can contribute to the WEC SDG goals by providing quality education to students, particularly in areas where access to education is limited. This can involve developing new, competency-based programs, uniquely designed to address the needs of learners in broad geographic regions at lower costs and higher scale. In particular, institutions should create, and design programs that meet the demands of regional high, in-demand job roles unique to the demands of regional labor markets.
2. *Promoting lifelong learning:* Colleges and universities can also promote lifelong learning by offering stackable, micro-credential education programs and certifications that help people develop new skills and stay up-to-date with the latest developments in their fields. This can be particularly valuable in industries that are rapidly evolving or where technological advancements are changing the way work is done.
3. *Fostering innovation and entrepreneurship:* Colleges and universities can contribute to the World Economic Forum's SDG goals by fostering innovation and entrepreneurship among students and faculty. This can involve supporting research and development efforts, promoting collaboration between industry and academia, and providing resources and mentorship to promote real-world competencies in critical in-demand areas of need.
4. *Promoting global citizenship:* Colleges and universities can promote global citizenship by encouraging students to engage with different cultures and perspectives. This can help students develop a greater appreciation for diversity and develop the skills needed to work effectively in a globalized world.
5. *Advocating for policy change:* Colleges and universities can advocate for policy change that supports the achievement of the WEC education SDG goals. This can include lobbying for increased government funding for education, advocating for policies that promote access to education for marginalized communities, and promoting policies that support lifelong learning.

Redefining Higher Education in A Post COVID Global Landscape

The global pandemic has forever changed the design and delivery shift to alternative learning environments for remote learning. It is being described by many as the great accelerator, demanding a rapid pivot to new means and methods of massive labor market learning opportunities. It is accelerating changes that, under normal circumstances would have taken decades to accomplish, will now need to take place in a matter of just years. Much of this pivot will require the successful transformation of the nature of work, and how employment, learning, and talent development will work together to fuel forward momentum for economic development. With the new institutional mission for higher education to deliver solutions for the 60-year degree, the shift that had been underway for many decades is now accelerating with exponential demand for learning, knowledge, and skills in the global economy. It's now

a double-edged sword; providing career-relevant undergraduate degrees for first-time job seekers and corporations requiring rapid upskilling and new knowledge for their employees. The consequences of failure will ripple through the economy and global economic development and recovery for decades. The reconciliation of this crisis is deeply embedded in the ability of global post-secondary education to design and execute new methods to allow much larger numbers of people to obtain the knowledge and skills they need to participate in this changing global economy. But how we deliver post-secondary education hasn't changed in form and function for 300 years. Universities are barely able to do what's necessary to graduate a qualified workforce let alone begin the transformation needed to serve highly specialized education as a benefit for employees. On the demand side, there is growing friction between employer human capital management education needs, and the one-dimensional solutions provided to corporate America by universities from the supply side. The supply-demand equation is grossly out of balance. The need to reshape and redefine higher education has become increasingly urgent in recent years due to several factors.

Firstly, if you walked into a traditional classroom today, anywhere in the world it wouldn't look smell, or feel much different than it did 40 years ago. The traditional model of higher education, which emphasizes classroom-based learning and a fixed curriculum, is not adequate to prepare students for the rapidly changing demands of the modern workforce. As new technologies emerge and industries evolve, there is a growing need for students to develop flexible, interdisciplinary skill sets that can be applied to a variety of fields.

Secondly, the cost of higher education has become increasingly prohibitive for many students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. In America alone, we have raised tuition rates by 1400 percent. In the last 40 years colleges have raised tuition prices faster than health care, consumer goods, and commodities. Think of another product that charges over $100,000 to get it to 90 points of gross margin other than a pharmaceutical for rare cancer. There is no premium brand product in the world, not Ferrari, not Apple, or Tiffany that have these extraordinary margins for a product that largely hasn't changed in five decades.[2] This has led to concerns about the accessibility and equity of higher education and calls for new models that can provide high-quality education at a lower cost.

Thirdly, advances in adaptive, competency-based, and AI-based learning have opened up profound new possibilities for delivering education, with an emphasis on synchronous, blended, and personalized learning models. These approaches are beginning to prove successful in academic achievement and job-ready college graduates. These new models are vastly more flexible and cost-effective than traditional classroom-based learning and are reaching a more diverse wider audience of demographically diverse learners globally. To address these challenges, there is an urgent call for broad-based reforms in higher education. These include, but may not be limited to:

- Rethink traditional "semester cycles" offering new methods for flexible learner cadence aligned to the realities of learner schedules.

[2] Excerpted from CNN interview with Scott Galloway interview NYU Stern School of Business

- Greater emphasis on experiential learning, such as internships, co-op programs, and project-based learning, to provide students with real-world experience and prepare them for the workforce.
- Increased focus on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary education, to help students develop the flexible, adaptable skill sets needed for a rapidly changing job market.
- Devise more effective methods of aligning credentials to the workforce–one that is far better positioned to give any learner, regardless of starting point or physical location, an educational foundation for lifelong success
- Greater use of advanced technologies to design and deliver education that aligns with high, in-demand, job skills/roles including digital teaching and learning credential programs, blended learning models, and career-aligned curricula which can provide more flexible and cost-effective options for students.
- Increased emphasis on affordability and accessibility, including reforms to financial aid and tuition pricing models, to ensure that higher education is accessible to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

The New Urgency for A Skills Based Design For Higher Learning

Overall, there is a growing recognition that higher education must adapt to the changing needs of students and the workforce, and embrace new models of teaching and learning to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education that prepares them for success in the 21st century.

Historically, higher lesrning institutions have been designed around *educating for knowledge* vs. *educating for skills*. Educating for skills is an approach to learning that focuses on developing practical skills and competencies that are relevant to a particular profession or industry. The goal of educating for skills is to provide students with the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes they need to be successful in their chosen careers. There are many ways that educators can approach educating for skills, but some common strategies include:

1. *Project-based learning:* This approach involves having students work on real-world projects that require them to apply their skills and knowledge to solve a problem or create a product.
2. *Work-based learning:* A system that involves providing students with opportunities to work in a real-world setting, such as an internship or apprenticeship so that they can gain hands-on experience and develop their skills.
3. Competency-based education: New methods that involve breaking down skills and knowledge into specific competencies or learning objectives, and then providing students with opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of each one.
4. Collaborative learning: A design which involves having students work in groups or teams to solve problems or complete projects, which helps to develop their teamwork and communication skills.

Overall, educating for skills is an important approach to learning that can help students develop the practical skills and competencies they need to succeed in their chosen careers. By providing students with opportunities to apply their skills in real-world settings, educators can help to prepare them for the challenges and opportunities they will face in the workforce.

New Mandates for Higher Education Restructuring

Access to quality education in emerging markets can be a challenge due to a variety of factors such as lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to technology. Institutions are now in an environment of change where decisive and timely action needs to be taken to reform academic mission and vision. To accomplish this objective, a starting point needs to take into consideration, at minimum, the following;

1. Build and improve infrastructure: Building and improving school infrastructure for a hybrid learning experience, such as onsite and online digital classrooms, remote learning libraries, and computer labs, and supporting broadband access to support a conducive environment for learning.
2. Support faculty: Faculty play a critical role in providing quality education. Providing teachers with training and support can help them develop the skills needed to deliver quality education.
3. Address cultural and social barriers: Cultural and social factors such as gender, religion, and socio-economic status can limit access to education for certain groups of students. Addressing these barriers can help ensure that all students have access to quality education.
4. Foster public-private partnerships: Collaboration between the public and private sectors can help leverage resources and expertise to improve access to quality education.

The call for a Next-Generation University Platform: *A Case Study-Nexford University*

The world's population is growing, but it is in Africa where this challenge is particularly acute. The continent is a place that is becoming home to more children than any other place on earth. With a total population of 1.4 billion, 77% of the population is below the age of 35.[3] Africa's population will double by 2050. By 2050, Nigeria alone is forecast to have 400 million people- it will overtake the United States as the world's third-most-populous country. The starkness of this fact illustrates the degree to which demography will shape Africa's future. Nigeria's growth is part of an extraordinary population surge across the continent. In Africa, the average age is 19 years old, and rapidly getting younger. The continent is growing so quickly that by halfway through this century, it will be home to one billion children. By 2050, two in every five children in the world will be born in African nations. The growth rates of young populations are not limited to Africa. Similarly, In India with a growing population of 1.4 billion, the average age is 29. With these global regions becoming global centers contributing to the world's new developing economies, younger populations with higher learning credentials will be needed to support global economic growth.

[3] World Economic Forum: *The children's continent: keeping up with Africa's growth.* Jan 13, 2020

So how will new systems be created to address the profound gap in higher learning to educate these rapidly growing populations?

Two profound problems face the higher education sector globally, and especially in these developing nations; affordability and relevance. Nexford has been successfully addressing these challenges with targeted curricula designed to deliver a 100% online, and uniquely designed for the competency gaps among young populations that specifically address employer needs. Through a competency-based tech-enabled platform Nexford designs bachelor' and master's degree programs with stackable skills courses offered that directly address both affordability and relevance gaps by providing learners with the right skills to gain access to remote global career opportunities using a flexible monthly subscription model.

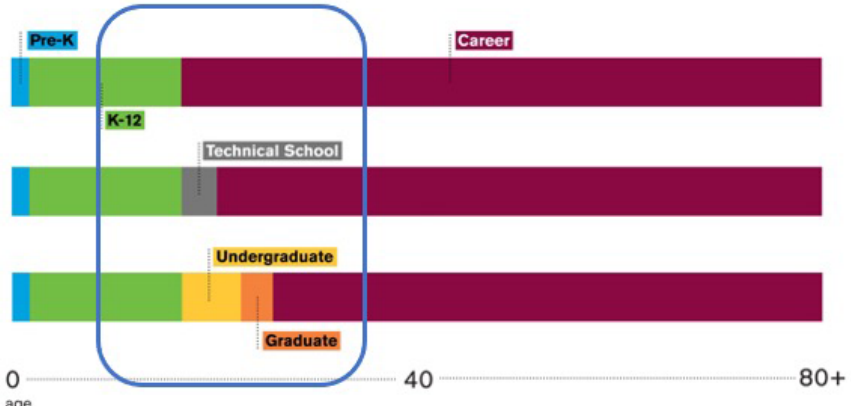
Nexford reassessed what traditional universities offer and the economic inefficiencies of how they operate and removed extraneous burdens that add significant cost in a one-size-fits-all design constraint. Nexford focused on removing elements of traditional education delivery that don't add direct value to learners and their academic At many universities, a large percentage of tuition fees is used to cover time-consuming manual administrative tasks (often significantly more than supports student academics) costs support student academics only a tiny portion of tuition fees support student academics. By taking a tech-enabled approach focused on automating traditional administrative tasks, Nexford significantly reduced operating costs, delivering a learning experience at a significantly lower price point without any sacrifices to quality or learner outcomes. This is particularly pertinent to students' ability to pay for college and student debt. In the United States alone, student debt is expected to reach $2 trillion in 2023. Nexford decided not to rely on the convention or established norms but instead established what it calls the backward design model, asking what both employers and learners were looking for, including where they saw inadequacies and deficiencies in the traditional approach of legacy universities. Nexford also surveyed companies employing over 2.5 million people across the world including Microsoft, IBM, Unilever, and Deloitte to understand what their needs were when hiring college graduates. Nexford built an Artificial Intelligence (AI) model to analyze over 30 million job vacancies to understand the skills employers are looking for intending to bridge the gap between learners and employers– ensuring that the most sought-after skills are included in Nexford's curricula.

Nexford is building a next-generation university designed to what two key stakeholders need – understanding the symbiotic relationship of learners and employers and how it could strengthen their mutually beneficial relationships. Nexford made a strategic design decision for all programs and courses to be fully competency-based, starting with the skills learners need to gain – informed by employer feedback – then reverse-engineered the curriculum to ensure the courses provided those essential skills. This approach helps learners to avoid the shock of entering the workforce and finding that their degree has left them unprepared for a career. A true competency-based program means that learners experience a flexibly-paced, adaptive learning design where learners can progress through course modules at their own pace but are still committed to weekly deadlines and monitored progress measured by authentic and adaptive assessments. With this design, Nexford has been able to obtain American university accreditation as a global university by serving the needs of learners in all 24 time zones. This unique design model also means that learners who are employed have minimal disruption in their work commitments while they progress through their academic program. By developing an open

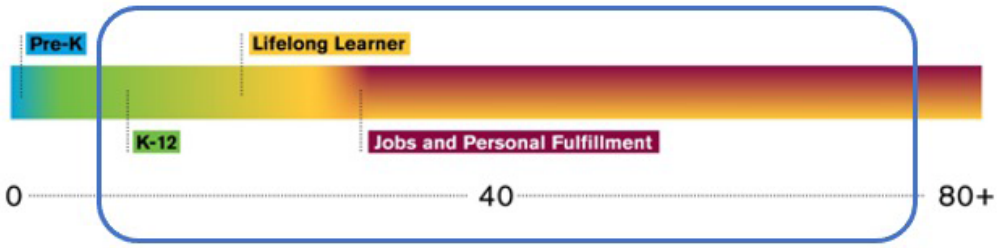
and transparent educational process, Nexford is attempting to address learners' needs in over eighty-five countries around the world from all over the world irrespective of their historical and cultural traditions.

Following the lead on Nexford's new model for designing and delivering education Institutional Transformation will need to be redesigned in ways that take into consideration education as a lifelong journey- an interconnected continuum for learning. Effectively educating global, broad-based, and diverse learners will require reengineering institutions for a continuous process, not segmented, incremental learning at specific points in a learner's life. Consider how institutions have been traditionally designed juxtaposed against how global education will need to be designed for the future;

Current Education Design



Future Education Design



- Lesson learned- improving access to quality education in emerging markets requires a multi-faceted approach that involves government, organizations, educators, and communities working together to address the challenges that limit access to education.

Courtesy Arizona State University

Design for a Student-Centric Approach

What students want in their education can vary depending on factors such as their age, cultural background, and personal interests. However, many common themes emerge when students are asked about what they want in their education. Major factors in student success, especially in online and hybrid learning experiences include-

- *Relevance:* Students want their education to be relevant to their interests, future goals, and real-world applications. They want to see how what they are learning connects to their lives and how they can use their knowledge and skills to make a difference.
- *Engagement:* Students want their education to be engaging and interesting and in context with their present or future career and their everyday non-academic lives. They want to be challenged and motivated to learn. They resonate with faculty who use a variety of teaching strategies and methods, including technology, to keep them engaged.
- *Support:* Students want to feel supported by their teachers and peers. They appreciate teachers who are approachable, caring, and responsive to their needs. They also value opportunities to work collaboratively with their peers and receive constructive feedback on their work. With advancements in AI, new, innovative support systems can support and connect students in ways that could have never been possible.
- *Flexibility:* Students experience a higher level of achievement and engagement when their education is flexible, including the ability to learn at their own pace, choose their own learning activities, and have control over their learning. They also appreciate flexible schedules that allow them to balance their academic and personal responsibilities.
- Inclusivity: Students want their education to be inclusive and respectful of their diverse backgrounds and experiences. They want to feel safe and welcome in their learning environment and value opportunities to learn about different cultures, perspectives, and worldviews.

Lastly, in a new economy, where technology and automation are increasingly transforming the way we work and live, education outcomes need to focus on developing skills and competencies that prepare students for the future of life and work. Outcomes that are particularly important for a new economy include:

1. Digital literacy: In a new economy, digital literacy is essential for success. Students need to learn how to use digital tools and technologies effectively, including coding, data analysis, and digital communication.
2. Critical thinking and problem-solving: With technology and automation, many routine jobs are becoming automated, and new jobs require problem-solving skills and the ability to analyze information critically. Students need to develop these skills to thrive in a new economy.
3. Creativity and innovation: In new economies, creativity and innovation are highly valued. Students need to develop their creative thinking skills to generate new ideas, products, and services that meet the needs of an ever-changing world.

4. Communication and collaboration: In global emerging markets, the ability to communicate effectively and work collaboratively with others is critical. Students need to develop their communication skills, including digital communication, and learn how to work in diverse teams.
5. Lifelong learning: The pace of change is accelerating, and individuals need to be able to adapt and learn continuously. Students need to develop a growth mindset and a love of learning that will enable them to continue learning throughout their lives.
6. Social and emotional skills: In a new economy, social and emotional and 21st century skills are increasingly important, as individuals need to be able to work with others and adapt to changing environments. Students need to develop skills such as empathy, teamwork, and resilience to succeed in a new economy.

Rethinking new approaches to developing global education delivery must be reshaped to include both human and technological design as a gradual mass migration to digital teaching and learning accelerates. Global education reform requires a close examination of the causality of failure and what tools, structure, and academic design are required for 21st century skills. Higher education will only reform when we take a close look at *what* is being taught and how it relates to real world demand for skills, *when and where* we are effectively delivering education, and to whom we are teaching. The effective transformation will need to take into consideration *how* we redesign the learning experience as we migrate to new methods of digital delivery to prepare millions of students for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and deliver on the ultimate benefit of education - social mobility at scale.