



POST-COVID-19,
REIMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION

BY AMIT PATEL
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ABSTRACT

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has caused a bevy of necessity-based changes to ripple through higher education. Colleges and universities have adapted to the challenges that COVID-19 has presented, and as students, professors and administrators begin to adapt to a new normal on campus, it's clear that some of the pandemic-related trends are here to stay. In this white paper, we interviewed a variety of stakeholders in order to get their insights on the future of higher education. What we found was as interesting as it was instructional. We believe that COVID-19 has created a wealth of opportunities for colleges and universities to grow and transform in the post-pandemic future, and we're excited to share these with you.

“The privilege of a university education is a great one; the more widely it is extended the better for any country.”

Winston Churchill



INTRODUCTION

In 2019, college and university classes were utterly saturated with students, and enrollment at degree-granting post-secondary institutions was just [7 percent less](#) than its all-time 2010 peak of 21 million students. However, in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions to higher education.¹ Educators, much like everyone else, found themselves scrambling. In a very short period of time, campuses were closed, social activities were curtailed and university life as we knew it ceased to be.

After two difficult years of living in a global pandemic, we've come to understand that COVID-19 is not going away. Many students are back on campus and everyone from parents to administrators are desperate for a return to normalcy. However, it is a "new normal" that colleges and universities must now navigate, and just like the coronavirus itself, the changes that have occurred at institutions of higher learning are not going away anytime soon.



"The biggest impact on higher education as a result of COVID is the delivery modality which has now replaced the former need to have a professor standing at the front of a classroom. The question for me will be is it going to satisfy students, particularly in some professional areas, or will they be accepting of this significant and health-related change?"

If the universities find that this is going to be a long-lasting and permanent change, one of the things that is absolutely critical is that their instructors must be effective deliverers of information regardless of whether these are in virtual, hybrid, or face-to-face settings.

Students expect high-quality training and instruction from their professors and should be able to indicate that what they receive meets that expectation regardless of the way they are receiving it. I think some of the main objections may come from those students in programs where it is critical that they have hands-on experience or that they interact with their professors, whether these be lab courses or demonstrations that require the ability to receive accurate and effective feedback for improvement."

**Dr. Valerie Rutledge, Dean of the College of Health,
Education and Professional Studies at the University
of Tennessee at Chattanooga**



¹ For this article, we interviewed a wide variety of students, teachers and administrators to get their insights on the effects of COVID-19 on higher education in the U.S. For the broad purposes of this article, we use higher education and post-secondary education to refer to colleges (community colleges, technical schools and liberal arts colleges) and universities (public and private institutions that offer both undergraduate and graduate programs).

COLLEGE GOES ONLINE

In the fall of 2019, [19.6 million students enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S.](#) Of those students, 63 percent (12.3 million) took no distance learning courses. The remaining 37 percent (7.3 million students) attended at least one distance learning class, and 17.6 percent (2.4 million students) exclusively took distance learning classes.

In the spring of 2020, [more than 1,300 colleges and universities in all 50 states](#) canceled in-person classes or shifted to online-only instruction. While online classes proved to be a lifeline for some, it proved to be a hurdle for others. According to the [Economic Policy Institute](#), “Research regarding online learning and teaching shows that they are effective only if students have consistent access to the internet and computers and if teachers have received targeted training and supports for online instruction.”



“I think that moving classes online was the single best preventative measure that could have been taken to keep students safe in the beginning of the pandemic. Having online options ended up giving students and faculty a degree of flexibility that had great value. As Curriculum Chair, I was able to leverage that flexibility to create six new online course offerings.

Everyone has different learning styles. For some, online learning works great and for some it doesn't. However, the technology just gets better all the time, and it will continue to get easier to use.”

**Dr. David S. Leigh, Professor of Geography
at the University of Georgia**



While many students and professors enjoyed going online and would prefer to stay there at least part of the time going forward, there were certain college experiences that simply could not be replicated during online learning.

Students who had looked forward to study abroad programs found that their programs were cut short or canceled altogether. Data released from the U.S. Department of State and the Institute of International Education showed that there was a 53% drop in students studying abroad during the 2019 to 2020 academic year, which included the summer of 2020.

