Beyond "Innovation": Lessons for Making Change in Higher Educational Institutions

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Facing Crisis and Change in Higher Education

Colleges and universities are facing multiple challenges from a variety of directions simultaneously. There are pressures from increasing costs, decreasing public funding, technological disruptions, political intrusions, shifting demographic bases, increasing concerns about equity and accessibility, changing employment demands, and growing popular skepticism of the value of higher education as a whole (e.g., Alexander, 2020; Blumenstyk, 2014). The fallout of the pandemic has only inflamed many of these issues, resulting, for some, in potentially existential threats. Already many institutions—including many smaller institutions serving regional populations—have closed, and the trend is only growing

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(Lederman, 2021). Indeed, *Inside Higher Ed* recently ran a webinar called "Closing a College Wisely," indicating the prevalence of this phenomenon.

What should institutions do in the face of these threats? Different institutions will require different strategies. Some institutions, namely, those that are elite and wealthy, will likely be able to stay their courses. Others, however, will need to consider changes at a variety of levels if they are to survive. For example, new populations of student applicants might need to be found; new academic programs created; new technologies incorporated for remote learning; partnerships sought and/or new sources of funding found; or curricula remodeled to focus on industry specific demands (e.g., tech-driven STEM education). However, just what changes an institution should consider, and how it should make those changes effectively, are not easy questions. The worst way to begin making change is by implementing new features—cosmetic "innovations"—without even asking these questions in the first place.

Here the lessons from innovative institutions can help. Colleges and universities need not resemble the institutions featured in this book in terms of size, curricular focus, or ethos to glean lessons about how to undertake institutional change effectively. Indeed, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, meaningful innovation is not (solely) the result of copying from elsewhere but from growing from the inside. It is by providing space for experimentation in service to deep institutional commitments that robust, inspiring, and insightful innovations are created, adapted, and refined. While the innovative approaches of the institutions featured in this book largely reflect a commitment to shared progressive values, the lessons are more broadly applicable to other institutions. In this chapter, we step back to look for the larger lessons from these experimental programs that can benefit institutions across higher education.

Innovation is not a benefit in and of itself. Not all colleges and universities need to aspire to have an innovative identity. Nonetheless, we argue that higher education benefits from innovative institutions. Innovative institutions, like those featured in this book, help grow new ideas, provide lived examples of institutional change, and ensure a wider range of educational opportunities for students. Their insights and experiences are especially important in times of widespread higher educational disruption.

The rest of this chapter provides lessons from innovative institutions that we hope will help those facing the need to make institutional change. In particular, we begin by describing several "headwinds" embedded in higher education that make institutional innovation difficult. Then we

describe how effective innovation is tied to institutional culture. After considering how other institutional factors such as leadership and size tie in to questions of innovation, we conclude by examining previous periods of significant change in higher education and what it means for the legacies of colleges and universities.

We love higher education and the opportunities it provides students. We want colleges and universities to be adaptable, long-lasting, and continually beneficial to humanity. When change is needed or desired, we want institutions to be able to go beyond cosmetic "innovations" in service to fundamental values at the heart of education. We hope that the hard-won lessons and perspectives we share can help contribute to a robust and prosperous future for higher education.

Headwinds to Innovation

As an industry, higher education is known to be conservative and slow to change. This is reflected by the fact that most modern colleges and universities' models were developed in the late 1800s, based heavily on older models still—the German research university of the 1700s, and the monastic colleges of medieval Europe (Hofstadter, 1963). Indeed, despite massive technological changes over the past 40 years, many colleges and universities look strikingly similar to what they looked nearly like a century ago. Even online teaching and learning tend to primarily replicate what has been done in the in-person classroom.

The slow-to-change nature of most colleges and universities can be explained by examining certain structural challenges embedded in higher education. In particular, we draw attention here to three significant headwinds to innovation in higher education: an overemphasis of prestige, an overfixation on specialization, and an underexposure to methods for collective work outside of traditional committee work and meetings.

Confronting the Overemphasis of Prestige

In the business world, there is a wide variety of institutional types, organizational structures, and practices. Higher education, however, tends to have institutions that more reflect each other than distinguish themselves from each other. Why is this? The thesis of historian Michael Pak's "Competition and Reform in Higher Education" article sheds light on this question:

> One of the founding premises regarding competition—as to why it is beneficial to the customers—is that it leads to a greater variety of services offered by producers. Yet, this has not been true in higher education. In countries where universities have been allowed to compete freely, the predominant pattern has been a tendency toward institutional convergence, not institutional diversity or service differentiation. In such systems, it has been generally the case that the more universities compete, the more they imitate one another and become indistinguishable in the range of services they offer. (Pak, 2013, p. 280)

Pak's explanation for this trend of institutional convergence is based on the fact that, in higher education, the principle of competition is based on prestige. Citing Veblen (1918), he argues that all the competition between institutions in higher education for faculty, students, and resources is ultimately aimed at improving stature:

> It is in terms of prestige, in other words, that the final score-keeping is done in higher education. The tendencies Veblen observed have become only more pronounced with time. In the United States, the success of a university is now measured, more than ever, in terms of how it ranks in influential evaluation reports like those published by the U.S. News and World Report. (Pak, 2013, p. 280)

Pak's argument is compelling. Given that colleges and universities are typically evaluated on the basis of reputation and rankings, what incentive do institutions have for trying new things? Those at the top of the rankings have little reason to alter what they are already doing; those trying to climb the rankings are doing so on the basis of standards set by those institutions at the top. Pak's article discusses how new institutions in international settings are overlooking questions of how best to adapt to local contexts, and instead aiming to replicate top-ranking institutions. Perhaps the recent trend of programs pulling out of U.S. News and World Report's rankings (Diep, 2022) suggests new opportunities for institutions to free themselves from the tyranny of the prestige mindset.

What might it look like for colleges and universities to free themselves from the primacy of pursuing prestige? An often overlooked sector of higher education, American community colleges, provides a clue. Since community colleges are developed to serve particular regions and populations, they often reflect characteristics befitting their localities rather than each other: for example, their sizes, programs offered, campuses, and

integration of faculty and staff with local industries and professions. As community colleges still remain fundamentally tied to the educational norms of four-year institutions where many of their students transfer, they reflect many of the "convergent" features shared across institutions. However, because their *telos* is based on service to local populations and not strictly on rankings, we see a natural diversity arise across their institutional forms.

As the example of community colleges suggests, innovation is tied to purpose. To the extent that higher educational institutions—particularly those featuring four-year undergraduate programs—remain fundamentally committed to rankings and reputation, their "innovations" will only reflect changes validated by those rankings. If, instead, institutions can articulate deeper commitments that transcend rankings, a higher educational ecosystem of broader and better educational opportunities for a diverse range of students is possible. The institutions featured in this book demonstrate that innovation naturally arises when deep commitments are given space for experimentation. The best thing institutions can do to innovate meaningfully is to provide committed groups of students, staff, and faculty the opportunity to participate in discovering alternative or experimental approaches to education in service to commitments to learning.

Transcending Specialization

Another limitation to innovation in higher education is the value placed on specialization above other forms of professional and institutional identity. For individual faculty members, for example, specialization is the currency of the academic career. The prestige of an individual academic largely comes down to their disciplinary specialty, and their contributions to that field. Specialization is certainly valuable in the production of knowledge, and is enriching to the scholar. (We both love our specialized disciplinary research.) Specialization does not, however, place sufficient attention on the learning process of students, nor train one to be effective in undertaking broader institutional innovation.

Innovating on an institutional level requires skills that are not typically connected to a traditional academic training, for example: the contemplation of deep questions of education and institutional mission; reflection on educational practices and pedagogy; teamwork with stakeholders far removed from one's base of expertise; willingness to try on new approaches

that one might be initially skeptical about or resistant to; taking pride in shared rather than individual successes. These skills can certainly be developed by any academic, but they need to be incentivized. Otherwise, it is easy for the traditional academic, who builds a reputation on the basis of individual specialization, to become overly invested in the infrastructure at the foundation of their individual specialization—departments, faculty ranks, physical resources, financial structures—making them inherently conservative toward preserving that infrastructure. In other words, innovation may potentially be seen as a threat to an academic who has built a career as a disciplinary specialist.

It is not necessary for academics to abandon disciplinary specialization, as it is—of course—the lifeblood of the profession. To the extent that identification with a disciplinary specialization becomes one's *sole* form of professional identity, however, is the extent to which one remains solely committed to the structures and practices that propagate work in their particular academic discipline. We have found that if academic faculty are able to see themselves beyond just a singular professional identity (identifying with a discipline)—say as part of an interdisciplinary team, as an advocate for new pedagogical approaches, or as a participant in a new initiative—new opportunities become possible. That is, if faculty are challenged with other questions of purpose—for example, about the impact of their classes on different populations of students, about the role of their discipline in grappling with larger and more entangled questions, about the communications they can make to other professionals beyond their academic colleagues, or about their role in establishing a larger institutional culture of inquiry—their disciplinary specializations become platforms from which they can engage in larger innovative questions and projects. What kinds of different structures and practices naturally emerge when these questions are tolerated and incentivized? Having seen this play out successfully at institutions featured in this volume, we are aware of the increased professional enrichment and satisfaction possible for those up to the challenge.

Diversifying Collective Work Practices

The traditional unit for undertaking institutional work in most colleges and universities is the committee. Committees play important and valuable roles in any institution, and the matured and effective practices of well-run committees produce excellent work. This is especially true for

high stakes decision-making involving the standards of an institution—committees help ensure that hiring, promotion, dismissal, policy implementations and reviews, and disciplinary actions are taken with the utmost care in stewardship to the institution.

When it comes to innovation, however, committees *by themselves* are not an optimal format for undertaking change. Committees serve primarily as arenas for discussion, not experimentation. As is understood in the field of design, when it comes to creating new ideas, two phases are needed: a phase of divergence, when new ideas are considered, tolerated and tried, and a subsequent phase of convergence, where the best of those ideas is decided upon as the shared way forward (see, e.g., Interaction Design Foundation, 2020). Committee practices mostly facilitate the latter—the phase of convergence in making decisions. The committee dynamic, however, can be detrimental to the divergent phase. For instance, we have seen committees where new ideas for pedagogical approaches, classes, or curricular reorganization have been dismissed out of hand based on nothing more than untested opinion. Innovations rarely work seamlessly the first time they are tried, and effective innovators reflect a willingness or instinct to try out the ideas nonetheless, prioritizing the learning and further development they can gain from the experience. It is, for this reason, therefore important to counterbalance the work of committees in undertaking innovative work with separate arenas for the initial divergent work of brainstorming and experimentation.

At the institutional level, effective innovation can result from a variety of practices, including whole-scale adoption of new models (whereby faculty and students have to adjust to the features of that model), through pilot projects (whereby smaller groups of faculty and students have permission to try out new approaches without trade-off consequences), and shared design thinking-style activities (such as the co-design years of Olin College of Engineering and Fulbright University Vietnam, for example). We have seen, for example, an effective institutional practice where faculty are not allowed to vote on a new idea until a group has had the opportunity to pilot the idea, and report back on findings from their actual experience. Whether or not the project gets adopted, the faculty gain insights and new learning from the experiment.

The point is that innovation requires divergent arenas for experimentation as much as it requires committees for ultimate decision-making. The former is not typically part of traditional academic culture, but is necessary for those institutions wanting to consider effective innovation seriously.

Given these aforementioned headwinds, how can institutions successfully innovate? We turn to the lessons from small, experimental institutions, who have much to share with the rest of higher education.

Facilitating Institutional Experimentation

The colleges featured in this book share some features (small sizes, interdisciplinarity, self-directed curricula) and differ on others (scheduling formats, curricular structures and emphases, and target recruitment populations). They all share, however, a driven and playful institutional ethos, founded on a mission centered on student learning, practices and structures that facilitate experimentation in service to the mission, and cultures that value learning and discovery of new and effective ways of fulfilling their missions. In other words, these institutions have been built not just as a set of innovations (as a noun) but to value innovation (as a verb) as critical to a culture of inquiry in service to student learning. They have gone beyond what Vinsel and Russell (2020) call "innovation-speak"—the jargon of technological innovation that has permeated Silicon Valley, but harbors little actual depth and understanding—and demonstrated what "actual innovation" can look like in higher education.

An important lesson from this book is that colleges and universities seeking to innovate on an institutional level should understand the importance of the culture that is needed at its base. Innovation, in our experience, has not been effective as a top-down initiative; rather, it has been most effective when it has been allowed to develop as the result of turning faculty, staff, and students loose to experiment in service to improving the learning that takes place at the institution. For schools aiming to innovate, more important than determining if the schedule should run on the block plan or not, or if the curriculum should offer traditional majors or not, they ought to provide opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to experiment and take risks—even modest ones. The best innovations are those that let staff, faculty, and students glean new insights about education from their experience tinkering with traditional approaches. The institutions that best foster innovation are those that tolerate tensions and risks intrinsic in education that let faculty and students discover the value of learning through direct experience.

This is perhaps the distinguishing feature of the colleges discussed in this volume: when institutions make their missions not statements but inquiries, and allow themselves the freedom to explore tensions embedded

in the complex and mysterious process of education, they make unexpected and important discoveries. It is this willingness not to avoid those tensions, but embrace them, that facilitates meaningful innovation. We mentioned in the introduction a variety of unavoidable tensions intrinsic to higher education: breadth versus depth, exploration versus specialization, traditional versus progressive approaches, elitism versus access, employability versus personal development, to name a few. Innovation benefits from allowing these tensions to come alive as arenas for inquiry, rather than as rhetoric to be left for marketing materials. This requires institutional courage to be willing to suspend "answers" for the sake of asking questions.

This book has provided many examples of what this process can look like practically. The example of the University of Montana Western (chapter "Innovative Scheduling: The Intensive Delivery of Higher Education"), for example, illustrates how the institutional shift to an intensive block plan schedule in 2005 has led to a variety of ways that class formats have been experimented with in service to this institutional shift, inside of a commitment to better student learning. The author recounts his own experience in adapting his classes and learning from the results. As a further example, following students' experiences through intentionally mentorship-based programs (chapter "The Role of Mentoring in Innovative Progressive Institutions") shows how incentivizing faculty to adopt and embrace mentorship inside of programmatic structures significantly benefits students. These approaches have been able to develop and produce effective outcomes in their institutions because those undertaking the approaches are willing to try them out, learn from them, and adapt them as part of their own professional expressions. A change to a block plan or mentorship-focused academic program cannot be successful unless the institutional culture is ready and willing to try it out and learn from it.

The need for innovation is becoming an inescapable reality for many of today's higher educational institutions. The rapidly changing world demands that colleges and universities adapt to the situations and needs of today's students. Whether or not institutions can embrace calls to innovate proactively and productively, rather than reactively and shallowly, requires a spirit of experimental risk-taking and commitment to reflection. The perspectives and experiences shared in the chapters of this book provide insight into what such journeys can look like, what perils they entail, and what new perspectives become available.

Leading a Process of Change

"Yes, but how can *I* do it?"

We realize that, when we share our experiences and perspectives about institutional innovation, a common response from many readers is a pessimistic view that such approaches would not be desirable or possible at their home institutions. This speaks to one of the hardest aspects of undertaking institutional innovation: how to launch and lead it effectively.

Innovation can push an institution into uncharted waters, and the subsequent uncertainty can be triggering to constituencies across the organization. When innovation is needed, it should always be linked to the *telos* of the institution, so that its need is a clear reflection of fundamental institutional values and commitments. Even then, a typical response to a new initiative is to project shared fears onto leaders, seeking clear answers and directives. The role of leaders in this situation is not to attempt to answer everyone's questions about what is the right or wrong thing to do, but to keep everyone focused on collectively facing the questions at the heart of the need or desire to innovate. For example, "How can we better serve today's students whose career prospects are so in flux?" "How can we better prepare students to address complex problems with others in a globalized world?" "How do we attract new students to our programs given dwindling enrolments?"

A useful framework for leading in the context of organizational change is Ronald Heifetz's "Adaptive Leadership" (Heifetz, 1998). Heifetz distinguishes between two kinds of challenges that organizations face: technical problems and adaptive challenges. Technical problems are those that certainly may be challenging or complex, but require a solution that is already developed and well-understood. For example, drafting a budget proposal or implementing a new learning management system may not necessarily be easy tasks, but there is a way to do them that is known and trainable. When facing technical problems in an organization, a leader's job is to help facilitate individuals in learning and implementing the known solution.

In contrast, an adaptive challenge is a problem for which a solution is not yet known, and the sources of the problem may not even be clear. An example might be an institution facing dwindling enrollments. What are the causes, and what are the interventions? Different marketing? Budget cuts? New programs? Heifetz says that leadership through adaptive challenges is not about providing directives (as the correct interventions are

either not clear or may be interpreted not to address the full range of stakeholder concerns), and instead requires keeping everyone facing the problem, experimenting in service to finding solutions, and learning together from those experiments. The mistake many leaders make, according to Heifetz, is attempting to treat adaptive challenges as technical problems.

This is the lurid temptation that many leaders of colleges and universities face when considering questions of innovation. What technical solutions have others adopted that we can simply implement? Alas, such technical solutions may not resolve the underlying adaptive challenges. This is precisely our warning that effective innovation does not come down to piecemeal implementation of new features, but by going beyond such cosmetic "innovations" to do the difficult and reflective work of collectively experimenting in service to an institutional mission. Leading innovation is as much a problem of managing human emotions as it is of practical execution. When anxieties flare, the leader's job is to return focus to the collective challenge and reinforce the collective commitment to the institutional mission. Being a leader of an institution undertaking innovation requires the courage to acknowledge and celebrate what is gained from a collective inquiry into an adaptive challenge.

This volume provides several examples where leaders were able to help guide institutional innovation and change through adaptive challenges. The case of New College in the University of Alabama (chapter "Innovating as an Embedded Program at a Larger State University: New College in Three Pivotal Moments") shows how many individuals were able to keep a mission alive amidst institutional disruption, working with various stakeholders to ensure New College's legacy persevered through a process of restructuring. El Colegio Chicano Del Pueblo (chapter "*El Colegio Chicano Del Pueblo*: Decolonizing Education and the Search for Self-Determination") illustrates how individuals were able to launch a new program, built on a long-standing tradition of Chicano/a/x educational activism, by leaning into the trend of online education that spiked during the Covid-19 pandemic. The case of Bennington College's varying approaches to faculty development (chapter "Agility or Stability: Can a School Have Both in Faculty Hiring?") shows how leadership can be distributed to different units in the institution to adapt their approaches to fit their unique circumstances and priorities. And the case of Quest University's closure (chapter "When Innovative Institutions Fail: Quest University, Partnerships, Financial Sustainability") provides difficult

lessons as to why bold leadership may be needed in early moments to avoid later institutional peril. These cases illustrate the type of leadership needed for institutions in flux—leadership that must challenge communities to experiment and change, while simultaneously holding the community together by bringing attention to shared commitments. Adaptive leadership will look differently at different institutions, taking into account the various academic and financial structures, the culture of the school, and the ways in which various groups, such as students, faculty, and staff inhabit it.

Can Innovation Scale?

One of the common features of most of the schools in this volume is that they are small. Small sizes certainly make it easier for institutions to be nimble, and for individuals in the institutions to share common understandings of and buy-in to particular innovative educational approaches. But as higher education is made up of institutions of a range of sizes, what do perspectives and lessons from small programs lend to the rest of higher education, particularly those institutions that are older and/or embedded in established traditions?

First, innovation is always a blending of the new with the old. As we have argued, effective innovation does not start with programmatic adjustments, but instead turns to questions and commitments at the heart of an institution's purpose. As those questions and commitments are explored, experimented with, re-articulated, and more deeply understood, new approaches grafted onto important traditions naturally emerge. (This is seen, for example, in how most of the colleges featured in this book have unique models, but still remain committed to the long-standing tradition of the liberal arts.) For effective innovation to take place in an institution, therefore, it becomes a matter of creating spaces where this kind of experimentation and questioning can be tolerated and encouraged.

This kind of questioning and experimentation can happen at any scale in an institution—in a classroom, between a few colleagues, in a department, in a school, or across a campus as a whole. Indeed, both New College Alabama (chapter "Innovating as an Embedded Program at a Larger State University: New College in Three Pivotal Moments") and the Johnston Center at the University of Redlands (chapter "After Eden: The Civic and Social Potential of Innovative Higher Education") provide examples of programs grown inside of larger institutions, and El Colegio

Chicano Del Pueblo (chapter "*El Colegio Chicano Del Pueblo*: Decolonizing Education and the Search for Self-Determination") shows how ideas incubated at institutions elsewhere can be adapted to serve particular student populations across institutions. It is not about declaring a need for innovation as much as it is empowering individuals to take up questions with some space to try new things in response.

For innovation to take hold in institutions, faculty need to be given questions and the subsequent permission to explore answers with others beyond their academic research collaborations. In other words, faculty need to be able to find both personal and professional success in undertaking innovative ventures with colleagues, staff, and students. It is possible to do this at small scales in larger institutions if the larger institutional structure and culture can be tolerant of the non-standardization of work practices this requires. Indeed, it is our suspicion that innovation in higher education is much more common than is realized, but that innovators end up feeling like they have to swim upstream, and are siloed from one another as not to be aware of each other's undertakings. It was this contention that partly inspired this book, in an effort to more publicly share innovative programs and connect innovators in a larger network within higher education.

There is, of course, the challenge of innovating when many structures in higher education are standardized, and require conformity to certain formats and standards, particularly through accreditation. It is quite possible, however, to innovate in service to established educational outcomes if there is flexibility given to how those outcomes might be satisfied. Indeed, chapter "When Innovative Institutions Fail: Quest University, Partnerships, Financial Sustainability" describes how the institutions featured in this book consider questions of assessment and accreditation, pushing themselves to clarify their own outcomes and maintain alignment with the larger standards across higher education, but still be experimental. Putting focus on the "why" rather than just the "what" can allow innovators to try new approaches while still meeting shared standards.

A New Era of Higher Educational Reform?

We do not claim to have all the answers about how institutions can effectively innovate. We nevertheless believe that there should be some subset of schools that intentionally pursue innovation at a deeply institutional level. The reason is that this helps make higher education more resilient as

a whole. We have seen how ideas born from the institutions featured in this book—including grading alternatives, interdisciplinary approaches, active and experiential self-driven learning programs—have made inroads into and benefitted the larger world of higher education. By serving as greenhouses for new ideas, innovative institutions develop approaches that reveal new pathways for educational growth, can be transplanted elsewhere, and enhance the overall landscape of higher education. Whereas these impacts have largely been subtle and indirect, it might now be important to contemplate the lessons from innovative institutions more explicitly, given that American higher education is potentially entering a significant period of disruption and reform that has not been seen for a long time.

The last truly significant overhaul of American higher education can trace its origins to an article entitled "The New Education," appearing in *The Atlantic*. The author, Charles Eliot, who went on to become the president of Harvard University, made the case that American colleges were failing to prepare young people for the world they were entering. In the article, he speaks of the need to create an education that is modernized and practical, that helps prepare students for careers and civic engagement. In the years that followed, there were indeed significant reforms across higher education, resulting in features that are now standard in colleges and universities: general education requirements, research departments, majors and minors, admissions exams, and the modern system of grades. The world of higher education was remade (Davidson, 2017). This revolution, however, was made for a world that has come and gone. Eliot's essay—signifying the launch of the most recent wave of comprehensive American higher education reform—was published in 1869 (Eliot, 1869).

There have been periods since the publication of Eliot's article that have seen higher educational reform sprout up in pockets. This volume discusses many colleges that came about in those periods, namely the Dewey-inspired experiential and self-directed programs of the late 1920s and early 1930s (e.g., Bennington College, Black Mountain College, Marlboro College), and the student-empowered and open programs of the late 1960s and early 1970s (e.g., Hampshire College, New College Alabama, The Johnston Center at the University of Redlands, Prescott College). However, higher education as a whole has not since seen a revolution on the scale of the one that occurred from the 1860s through the

1920s, as Eliot's Harvard helped lead the way to what we consider to be the modern American university.

While the modern model of the American university has had an extraordinary run, it may not be the model for the future. As Cathy Davidson notes in her 2017 book *The New Education* (of the same name as Charles Eliot's 1869 essay):

> Just as Eliot and others wholly remade the Puritan college, so too do we need to redesign higher education systemically and systematically, from the classroom to the board of trustees, from the fundamentals of how we teach and learn to how we measure outcomes, select, credential, and accredit in the this hyperconnected, precarious time. Students today need so-called soft skills, including strategies, methods, and tactics for successful communication and collaboration. These are necessary to navigate a world in flux, where they cannot count on continuing for any length of time in the job or even the field for which they were originally trained. (Davidson, 2017, p. 8)

Left hanging by Davidson's charge, however, is the question of how higher educational institutions can achieve this needed reform successfully. How can they create genuinely new approaches while at the same time preserving their depth and most important traditions? How do they innovate so as to preserve the true potential of higher education that may otherwise be lost to the trendy and commercial approaches of technologization, micro-credentialing, and singularly STEM-focused training?

We may be entering a new era of reform in higher education. To brace for and embrace this era productively and in service to future students, effective innovation is key. We hope that the lessons born out of the experiences of institutions featured in this book—lessons about innovating in service to deep commitments; developing institutional cultures that empower and learn from experimentation; building and incentivizing institutional tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, and tensions; and celebrating the unique ways in which discoveries blossom into new institutional structures and practices, lasting beyond even those institutions themselves—help higher education step into a bright and thriving future that stewards over and enriches human progress going forward.

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