

Official Report: Creating a Better Campus Work Culture

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The culture of higher education has drastically changed over the past decade causing new challenges amongst students, staff, and administration. Marcy argues, there are emerging trends to help colleges cope with grappling issues like disengaged students, the Great Resignation, and faculty burnout¹. While issues have arisen in higher education due to specific factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the great resignation of collegiate staff, and technological advances, there are strategies that have been made to help higher education institutions evolve to today's society. Additionally, the purpose of higher education as well as access to higher education has evolved. In order to improve the work culture of higher education campuses, this report will present innovative solutions to current problems in higher education that promote a positive campus work culture.

A current issue that is impacting the work culture of higher education is the great resignation at colleges and universities throughout the nation. Ellis 2021 argues, college staff are exiting the field because they want a better work-life balance, believe to be underpaid, and that their well-being is second to the institution's finances². During and post pandemic, many college faculty were faced with the reality that they could do a majority of their job remotely and at flexible hours. Colleges are now seeking to bring staff back to campus and have faculty work with pre pandemic policies and work schedules. Because higher education institutions are not creating a work culture that is flexible and accommodating to staff, many faculty are choosing to leave the field of higher education and find employment that fits their flexible needs. Ellis (2021) argues that remote work is key when attracting staff in higher education and some institutions like Stanford are choosing to test in-person, hybrid, and remote employment for faculty to

¹ Marcy, B. M. (2023, April 27). The Seven Trends Shaping Smaller Colleges. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-7-trends-shaping-small-colleges>

² Ellis, L. (2021). The Great Disillusionment. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-great-disillusionment>

address employee needs³. Some higher education institutions are addressing the great resignation of faculty, but more colleges and universities should be working with administration in human resources by implementing programs and versatile work arrangements to retain staff. By allowing employees some sort of say in their work arrangements, universities will be creating a culture where employees feel that they can have a healthy work-life balance. Overall, the turnover at universities is a relevant subject in today's society and implementing creative and flexible work options would resolve the issues that faculty are facing when choosing to leave a higher education profession.

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially impacted the campus work culture of many higher education institutions. Bryan Alexander explains that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused colleges to consider reconstructive surgery towards how they operate⁴. During the pandemic most universities went fully online and students and teachers had to work on technological fluency. This change in education has pushed both educators and students to create new ways to learn information. Furthermore, the development in online learning due to COVID-19 will cause problems in higher education institutions that choose not to adjust to the times. The U.S. Government Accountability Office explains that many colleges plan to continue offering online courses because of their benefits in creating personalized learning experiences and providing flexibility for students with responsibilities beyond school⁵. Online courses have allowed for students to be involved in higher education by allowing easier access to information, flexibility, and opportunities. Online degree options have impacted equity for students because it allows for

³ Ellis, L. (2021). 'A Mass Exodus': Inflexible Remote-Work Policies Could Bring Major Staff Turnover. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-mass-exodus-inflexible-remote-work-policies-may-bring-major-staff-turnover-for-colleges>

⁴ Wall Street Journal. (2020, June 13). *How the Pandemic Could Transform Higher Ed* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lo9UxC6dfG4>.

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2022, August 9). *Back to School for College Students Is Shifting From Campuses to Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/blog/back-school-college-students-shifting-campuses-online>

every student to obtain what they need educationally by being included in higher education classes. Ultimately, colleges should continue with the online learning options created as a result of the pandemic in order to create a campus culture of inclusivity and access. In addition to continuing with online learning opportunities, university professors can be creative in implementing new types of technology that emerged during the pandemic. According to Alkhaldi (2020), augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) can be used in the classroom to demonstrate 3D models or concepts and immerse students into historical settings⁶. Technology such as VR could make an experience like a live arts performance or a practice surgery more accessible. Implementing this use of technology could overcome barriers to experiences that students might not get otherwise. Additionally, this would create a campus culture of accessibility, inclusivity, and diversity. Therefore, this development in technology is drastically changing educational opportunities and learning possibilities in the education world today, and the technology used in teaching during the pandemic will most likely be used in years to come while continuing to evolve.

In order to improve the culture of a campus work environment, the university must define the purpose of the institution. According to Levin, the university is an institution that exists to teach skills, provides access to the highest truths, and changes the larger society for the better⁷. If that is the mission of the university, the department chairs and administrators at universities must find ways to motivate students into pursuing higher education as well as create equity in the recruitment process. There are barriers that will prevent all willing and able students from

⁶ Alkhaldi, N. (2020, September 19). *Evolution of Education: How Interactive Technologies Reshaped Learning*. eLearning Industry. <https://elearningindustry.com/evolution-of-education-how-interactive-technologies-reshaped-learning#:~:text=VR%20And%20AR%20In%20Learning,3D%20models%20of%20these%20concepts>.

⁷ Duke Ethics. (2020, August 10). *Yuval Levin: What is the Purpose of Higher Education?* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8qfe2Dl2vI>.

committing to a higher education institution. According to Minds Matter Colorado, the higher education system is not designed to identify, accept, or support students from low income families⁸. Therefore, there is a diverse population of students who are unable to contribute or shape the common good of different areas because of a lack of access to higher education. As a way of addressing this problem in campus culture, there can be programs created for advisors to target and support low income students. Pink (2010) argues that individuals are intrinsically motivated to complete a task when given the freedom to choose what they work on and have no worries about being financially stable⁹. Therefore, higher education institutions can incorporate creative learning environments that give students choice, while making sure that the cost of college is not inhibiting their learning. The faculty at the admissions and scholarship/financial aid offices can target these students through surveys and provide financial aid as well as advising support. An example of a current institution that supports low-income students is Teach for America. Teach for America strives to solve the education crisis amongst low income students by having certified teachers instruct in areas that are below the poverty line. Teach for America allows for students to defy the odds that they were born into and reach their goals¹⁰. Even though this organization is not geared towards higher education, universities can take ideas from this and implement them into programs that assist low-income students in higher education. Universities should strive to address social issues such as this one because it is relevant as to why students choose not to pursue higher education.

⁸ Minds Matter Colorado. (2019, May 29). *One Reason Lower Income Students Don't Attend College (And What To Do About It)*. <https://www.mindsmatterco.org/one-reason-lower-income-students-dont-attend-college-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

⁹ Pink, Daniel. (2010, April 1). *RSA Animate: Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuFjIc>

¹⁰ *We Are TFA*. (2020). Teach For America. Retrieved from <https://www.teachforamerica.org>

While providing purpose and access is significant in higher education, there are many students who are disengaged in courses. McMurtrie describes the experience of Marley, a biology professor, who did not expect the impact of the pandemic to be so profound on student learning and engagement¹¹. Throughout this professor's experience, she describes a gap in students' motivation and willingness to learn by describing it as if students are waiting for their technology to tell them what to do. University faculty needs to meet these students where they are at by providing a curriculum that challenges and engages them. Surveys and data can be collected in order to determine why student engagement is so low. For example, The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a widely used tool for assessing the quality of undergraduate education¹². Faculty should collect and analyze all data involving student engagement and create strategies that address the students' reasons for disengagement. Overall, this process will follow national trends in higher education and create relevant solutions.

Overall, universities should aspire to create a diverse, inclusive, and positive work culture by addressing current day issues with innovative solutions. Factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the great resignation of collegiate staff, technological advances, and access to higher education have all been relevant problems in higher education. Steven Johnson (2010) argues that creative ideas come from years of returning to an idea and then collaborating with other individuals to evolve these core ideas into greater ideas¹³. Therefore, it may take months or even years of trial and error for universities to implement ways to retain staff, incorporate relevant technology, and provide access to higher education. Universities should not

¹¹ McMurtrie, B. (2022 April 5). A 'Stunning' Level of Student Disconnection: Professors are reporting record numbers of students checked out, stressed out, and unsure of their future. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-stunning-level-of-student-disconnection>

¹² National Survey of Student Engagement. (2010). *Evidence Based Improvement in Higher Education*. <https://nsse.indiana.edu/>

¹³ Johnson, Steven. (2010, September 17). *Where Good Ideas Come From* by Steven Johnson. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NugRZGDpPFU>

wait to begin collecting data and implement strategies that will push towards a better campus work culture for students, faculty, and administrators.

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