**Horizon Report Suggests Change Is Here to Stay; No Return to 'Normal'**

Research

**2022 Educause Horizon Report Suggests Change Is Here to Stay; No Return to 'Normal'**

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If the COVID-19 pandemic has been a time of unprecedented change in higher education — characterized by rapid pivots to remote work and learning and an explosion in the use of technology across the institution — the future is about reframing those changes into long-term realities, according to the [2022 Educause Horizon Report Teaching and Learning Edition](https://library.educause.edu/resources/2022/4/2022-educause-horizon-report-teaching-and-learning-edition), released this week. Colleges and universities are shifting their mindsets to "reflect an evolution from short-term 'emergency' or 'reactive' modes of offering education during extraordinary circumstances to making strategic and sustainable investments in a future that will be very much unlike our past," the report suggested.

As a result, many of the trends identified in this year's report are indicative of a general feeling that higher education will never be the same again. "As this year's teaching and learning Horizon panelists gathered to reflect on current trends and the future of higher education, many of their discussions and nominations suggest that change may be here to stay and that there will be no return to 'normal' for many institutions," the report authors shared.

While not all this year's trends are directly attributable to the pandemic, the report linked the following trends to changes that higher education has undergone over the last two years.

**1) Hybrid and online learning.** "The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped our lives around more online and remote modes for living, working, playing, and learning," the report noted. "We've discovered the benefits of being able to do things from 'anywhere,' and our appetite for online and remote options as consumers is likely to persist, at least to some degree." To support these longer-term preferences, institutions are moving from the "emergency remote teaching" models adopted out of necessity during the pandemic to "more sustainable and evidence-based models of hybrid and online teaching and learning." That means institutional leaders will need to focus on developing sound pedagogies, investing in instructional design and faculty development, and ensuring students are able to make the most of new learning environments.

**2) Remote work.**Flexible work arrangements have been a necessity during the pandemic, and now they are "becoming the norm across many industries and a nonnegotiable expectation among staff," the report said. "Institutional leaders are having to rethink important aspects of their culture and operations, such as interpersonal staff and team communications, the use of facilities and on-campus office and desk spaces, and staff and faculty training and support for their device and connectivity needs." Colleges and universities that fail to embrace remote modes of working will risk losing talent to other institutions or industries.

**3) (Re)defining instructional modalities.**"As instructional modalities evolve to meet the needs of our changing world, higher education institutions are building new course models," the report said. For example, hyflex, blended, hybrid, flipped, synchronous, hybrid online and virtual learning are all terms that have proliferated in recent years. But, the report cautioned, the variety of vocabulary has revealed a need for clear, consistent definitions. "Confusion about these terms ultimately lead to additional roadblocks for instructors and students who rely on effective communication about daily operations."

**4) Cost and value of college degrees.** While the high cost of higher education has been a critical issue for many years, the pandemic has put it in sharper relief. "With many students and families around the world experiencing financial hardships either caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the return on investment of the traditional college degree is and will continue to come under closer scrutiny," the report asserted. "Institutional education and business models will be pressed to evolve in ways that lower the cost burdens placed on students and their families; that offer more flexible, modular, and personalized learning experiences and credentials that keep pace with trends in the larger professional development marketplace; or that reflect some combination of these changes."

**5) Financial deficits**. Of course, financial challenges — declining enrollments, inflation, rising costs of living and tuition — have dogged higher education for some time. What's notable here is the impact of COVID relief funding on institutions' financial outlook, and the temporary nature of those funds. "Colleges and universities alone received an infusion of $14 billion through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF), but these dollars are tagged and intended specifically for minimizing the costs and impacts of the pandemic," the report explained. "Institutions using those funds to bring on new staff or to make longer-term investments in technology and infrastructure might find themselves standing at a budgetary cliff in the years ahead as those funds begin to drop off and aren't replaced by infusions of new funds."

**6) Physical campus structures.**Simply put, both remote teaching and the return to campus under stringent health and safety conditions have required a multitude of changes to learning spaces and other campus structures. For example, classrooms have required new hardware to enable hyflex learning, and spaces have been reconfigured for social distancing. "The campus of the future will need to be designed to meet more needs than ever before," the report said.

**7) Political instability driving uncertainty in higher education.** Today's global political climate is characterized by division and conflict, a reality that has been exacerbated by the pandemic, the report noted. "Layered on top of this volatile political foundation, the pandemic has wrought further disruption to our social and economic lives, leaving many of us unsettled and uncertain, not just about the future of higher education but also about the future of our global society."

**8) Decrease in public funding.**"As various public sectors vie for increased government funding now and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, education budgets around the globe may experience significant cuts as those funds are siphoned off to other public needs and/or as public institutions struggle to provide compelling evidence that supports their continued funding," the report said. "The effects of these cuts would be felt across public institutions, from reductions in faculty and staff to fewer course offerings and declines in financial aid and student enrollments."

The full list of 2022 trends identified by the Horizon report, categorized by the social, technological, economic, environmental and political realms, is:

**Social**

* Hybrid and Online Learning
* Skills-Based Learning
* Remote Work

**Technological**

* Learning Analytics and Big Data
* (Re)Defining Instructional Modalities
* Cybersecurity

**Economic**

* Cost and Value of College Degrees
* Digital Economy
* Financial Deficits

**Environmental**

* Physical Campus Structures
* Increase in Sustainable Development Goals
* Planetary Health

**Political**

* Political Instability Driving Uncertainty in Higher Education
* Political Ideology Impacting Pedagogy
* Decrease in Public Funding

The report, which goes into depth on the top trends, technologies and practices for 2022, possible scenarios for postsecondary teaching and learning, and implications for institutions around the globe, is available on the [Educause site](https://library.educause.edu/resources/2022/4/2022-educause-horizon-report-teaching-and-learning-edition).

About the Author

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