

# Trends in University Education

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**H**igher education institutions are being forced to rethink their role in society and the manner in which they teach, research, and how they define learning. In the past few years, it is becoming clear that while disruptions such as online education have proved valuable, universities still play a large role in providing structure, foundations and credibility. Educators around the world are innovating and changing to meet the challenges of the 21st century and adapt to the new demands and needs of their stakeholders, ranging from governments to donors, from students to research funding institutions. In the context of students, there has been rapid evolution in the thinking of universities and three trends, in particular, stand out that are growing all over the world.

The first is the hyper-focus on students and scholars as the centre of the university. The days were universities often treated students as "empty vessels" needing to be filled with knowledge as mass production is going out. Now they are being treated not only as fellow scholars but their individual needs, wants, and desires are being catered to by next level curriculum design and customised in terms of their personal journeys, learning needs, and desired goals in life. Instead of being extensions of schools where all the students in a particular "batch" or "subject" take the same classes with a revolving set of teachers, the schedule and content of each individual student are different. Institutions are redoing their academic systems from the ground up to accommodate this growing trend. It is enabling individual scholars to expand the depth and breadth of their knowledge and experience with few artificially imposed restrictions on their time and choice of courses.

The second is a focus on long term out-

comes. While many old universities have larger than life names, people are discovering that the outcome for their students speak louder than any brand that might give immediate but temporary successes. The obsession with immediate campus placements and salary levels are moving to a deeper understanding of how great education results in a longer lifetime of achievement, success and even happiness compared to short-term monetary values. Further, as evidence-based hiring becomes more prevalent, the quality of education and commitment of students is recognised more than the brand of the university or college. These outcomes are forcing professors in the classrooms to ensure their content and teaching manner creates long term results. Students and their parents are now looking at a lifetime of value, not only their first pay check or first job.

The last is an urgent focus on professor training. It used to be the moment you received a PhD suddenly that magical moment you become able to teach. Even at the top-ranked colleges around the world, the in-classroom experience for students was never given a priority. The morbid joke was that students were just so grateful to be there that the teachers did not have to put in much effort or need much training. This is no longer acceptable. Universities and students are demanding professors get training in classroom pedagogy and learn how to create classroom experiences that reflect the level and quality of education they claim they deliver. Better professors and a focus on the classroom experience results in more engaged students, better learning for everyone, and more individual focused delivery of education. Institutions are now requiring teaching faculty to attend continuous development programs and in many cases, get a crash course in classroom experience and management before being allowed to teach.



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Universities will continue to play a pivotal role in our societies. The great ones will continually evolve to meet the needs and realities of the 21st century. However, this evolution needs to be firmly supported by society and all parts of the government. Unfortunately, while there are excellent policies in place for innovation and expanded models of providing education including the latest one released by the government, it seems many of the related government departments have not got the message that they need to be supportive rather than extractive or restrictive. These trends, however, while driving up the quality of education will also drive up the cost as they are implemented. Industry leaders and parents need to recognise the need for these changes and support institutions morally and monetarily that lead and adopt such practices. Excellent trends can only be converted to firm and long-term sustainable changes if they are supported and enabled by an eco-system that values progress and is pragmatic rather than ideological.