

VITAL INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS AND POLICYMAKERS

REINVENTING LIFELONG LEARNING

The Coming Renaissance
Of Continuing Education
And Community Outreach

EDWARD LOUIS ABEYTA, PHD



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Of Continuing Education
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Foreword

By Executive Vice Chancellor Elizabeth Simmons, UC San Diego

Profound shifts in the landscape of public higher education are challenging us to rethink our approach to continuing education.

Our university, UC San Diego, once had a traditional view of University Extension as an outward-facing, auxiliary enterprise, fundamentally distinct from the university's academic core. Over a forty-year history of operating in this mode, our University Extension became successful and visible, boasting deep community networks and providing demonstrable impact.

However, UC San Diego has come to see that a connected, collaborative vision of extended studies' role within the university can render it an even more valuable and powerful partner in pursuing the institution's mission.

As universities strive to serve the nation's shifting needs, we must move beyond models solely based on traditional student populations and conventional pathways into higher education. Yet making the change is a daunting task.

The author, Edward Abeyta, PhD, an associate dean with our Division of Extended Studies, suggests this is a fixable problem. Ed likes to say we need to focus on “twinkle-to-wrinkle solutions,” including everyone from preschoolers to senior citizens in the mix.

Over the past five years, Ed and his colleagues have worked with campus partners to first evolve and then enact a new vision for Extension, dovetailed with our view of the role of the modern public research university as being student-centered, research-focused, and service-oriented, with a strong emphasis on multidirectional community engagement.

Anyone aspiring to elevate their university’s continuing education and community-serving roles will find something of direct interest and value in this volume. The approaches discussed here reflect pragmatic programs that have been field tested, evaluated, and refined on campus and throughout our region.

As always, Ed’s infectious enthusiasm, his decades of experience, and his dedication to connecting members of historically marginalized communities to career-relevant educational opportunities come through clearly. We at UC San Diego count ourselves very lucky to have him on our leadership team.

Elizabeth H. Simmons

Executive Vice Chancellor

Distinguished Professor of Physics

University of California (UC) San Diego

March 2024

The Coming Renaissance Of Higher Education

This is a renaissance moment for higher education. We educators are on the cusp of a season of opportunity that the world has not seen in a long time.

Historians, business leaders, and our own experience would suggest that we're entering into an era like the Renaissance.

The choice is a stark one of fantastic opportunity and significant risk. A coming disruption of higher education has already begun.

After every major world event—usually tragic—like the bubonic plague or World War II—there was a rebirth: a time of incredible innovation, creativity, and an economic boon.

Here is what happens during a renaissance. People are put into a circumstance both out of their control and far beyond what they could have possibly imagined. Everything changes rapidly and with little warning. Our existence has been threatened in each of the historic events that have led to a renaissance.

Disruption This Way Comes

To paraphrase the science fiction author Ray Bradbury, something disruptive this way comes. During the pandemic, we faced our own mortality. We lost loved ones. And we knew life would not be the same as it was during the former times.

Looking back in history to previous former times, though the bubonic plague was grim, there was an unseen benefit. The plague helped create the conditions necessary for the greatest post-pandemic recovery of all time—the global Renaissance.

Priorities changed, and new business models emerged. Necessity inspired a whole new level of innovation and creativity. Higher education certainly had an upheaval.

The Renaissance became known for its art, music, and architecture. The period is commonly associated with Michelangelo's painting of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and his majestic statue, *David*, Gutenberg's printing press, and Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.

The Renaissance laid the foundation for the very fabric of our modern society. As feudalism died along with the plague, individual contributors took its place. Merchants and commerce, banking, property investments, and advances in science propelled people forward.

A common misperception is that higher education was watching from the sidelines. Paul F. Grendler, an emeritus professor in the history department at the University of Toronto, corrects that assumption.

A persistent view holds that Renaissance universities were conservative homes of outmoded knowledge... Nothing could be further from the truth. Universities across Europe played extraordinarily significant roles in the Renaissance and the

*Reformation. They hosted innovative research in many fields and changed forever European religion and society.*⁵

This was a moment in time when people had to reinvent, including higher education. They had to try new things. They had to do what had never been done before.

The crisis was the catalyst for dramatic change, creativity, and the birth of many new and lasting innovations.

History provides other examples.

Following World War II, we also experienced a renaissance. Wages were 50 percent higher than they had been five years prior, and unemployment was completely eliminated. Shipyards cut the time it took to build a ship from 365 days to less than a week. The flu vaccine was invented in the '40s, as was the first modern computer.

Roger L. Geiger, the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Education at Pennsylvania State University, chronicles the rebirth of American education following World War II. His books include *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* and *American Higher Education since World War II: A History*.⁶

Geiger notes that American higher education is nearly four centuries old. But in the decades after World War II, as government and social support surged and enrollments exploded, the role of colleges and universities in American society changed dramatically.

Geiger examines this remarkable transformation, taking readers from the G.I. Bill and the postwar expansion of higher education to the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s, including desegregation and coeducation.⁷

The question is: what part will we play? Are we the leaders who will get challenged and replaced, or are we the innovators who will create new business models and drive innovation and creativity?

Calling All Innovators

Continuing education has long embraced the concept of lifelong learning. The premise of lifelong learning is grounded in the idea that learning is an ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons.

Many economists believe lifelong learning is critical to sustaining a competitive and skilled workforce. Although continuing education professionals have traditionally focused on the life stages of adults twenty-five and older, could continuing education be well-positioned to complement secondary education institutions in the twenty-first century?

What does obtaining a degree get you these days in the United States? Is it worth it? How soon does obsolescence kick in on what we learn in college?

Finding answers to these questions leads to a simple yet complicated conclusion. Lifelong learning has never been more important to build the life you want and keep skills and knowledge relevant within and beyond your chosen profession.

Over the past decade, a search for answers has brought me to a place of hope and anticipation. I see a renaissance on the horizon for higher education, one in which a four-year degree is a starting point, but just that. Finding our way along this path will require deep thinking and careful planning.

Reinventing lifelong learning is a major adaptive challenge for educators in the decentralized landscape of the US system of higher education.

Education Approaches A \$3 Trillion Market

According to a 2023 research study from Facts & Factors, the US education market was estimated at \$1.41 trillion in 2021 and was expected to reach \$3.12 trillion by 2025. The US education market was expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 4.21 percent from 2022 to 2030.⁸

Education is the method or mode of learning through particular habits, knowledge, values, skills, and beliefs. It is a key tool for growth and reducing poverty, enhancing health, maintaining peace, acquiring knowledge, and maintaining gender parity. Education in the US is decentralized and based on the federal constitution.

Relevancy: Innovate, Evolve, Or Perish

Charles Darwin reportedly once said, “It is not the biggest, the brightest, or the best that will survive but those who adapt the quickest.”

For colleges and universities, this adaptation tends to occur slowly—some might say “intentionally”—and because of significant pushes from external forces. Fortunately, many institutions have divisions on their campuses that can help create internal pushes for change: their nontraditional divisions. Termed as Continuing Education, Extension, Professional Studies, and more, these divisions serve nontraditional audiences and tend to be on the leading edge of changes in the postsecondary space.

One major priority for nontraditional divisions is relevance in everything they do. From programming to credentials, every single piece of the educational product on offer must align with a stated and demanded need.

This focus on relevance is something most universities would significantly benefit from adopting overall, as clearly indicated by the value of traditional credentials alone. As millions of college students walk across graduation stages, the painful message for many graduates emerges—a college degree does not necessarily equate to workforce readiness. Postsecondary institutions are on notice that workforce relevancy is the key to these graduates' sustained workforce success.

Postsecondary education credentials continue to be under scrutiny by employers who find recent graduates do not have the workforce-readiness skills to make an impact. The disconnect between higher education and industry is not a new phenomenon. In 2013 a Gallup poll, sponsored by the Lumina Foundation, uncovered that only 14 percent of Americans and 11 percent of industry leaders strongly agreed that college graduates have the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in the workplace.⁹ In contrast, another 2013 Gallup poll for Inside Higher Ed indicated that 96 percent of academic officers believed that they were very or somewhat effectively preparing students for the workforce.¹⁰

This incongruence has affected the industry to the point where companies must compete by recruiting skilled talent to fill job openings connected to new projects and initiatives. Today's employers are expecting practical skills, not just theory. Our new graduates must demonstrate their ability to learn and execute but they are not equipped, and they know it. Jaimie Francis and Zac Auter note that only “35 percent of college students say they are prepared for a job, and over half of recent graduates are unemployed or underemployed.”¹¹

Relevant education in context will not happen until business leaders, academic leaders, and policymakers work together to make it so. That's our challenge, and the Gallup/Lumina surveys are our wake-up call.

In a 2021 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, researcher John Hagel III examined the motivation of workers toward lifelong learning, “We discovered that rather than fear, employees who learned and grew in this way tended to exhibit what we have called the *passion of the explorer*. This passion is a very powerful motivator for learning.”¹²

Where can this passion start? Throughout college, students ought to be able to clearly see their pathway toward gaining both skills and knowledge. And when students graduate, employers should be able to determine what sets of skills and knowledge they bring to the workplace. Achieving both of these will help address the looming confidence gap and build the pipeline of talent necessary for our students and nation to thrive.

At the University of California San Diego (UC San Diego), we're attempting to address the disconnect between academia and industry to promote student success and development by incorporating the following twelve competencies:

- critical thinking and problem-solving
- research ability
- oral, written, and digital communication
- teamwork and cross-cultural collaboration
- understanding global context
- leadership
- professionalism and integrity
- self-reflection

- career development
- digital information fluency
- civic engagement and social responsibility
- innovation and entrepreneurial thinking

These competencies and learning outcomes¹³ were created to align with the:

- American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE Learning Outcomes
- Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education student learning and development outcomes
- WASC Senior College and University Commission core competencies
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies

UC SAN DIEGO COMPETENCIES

Use the **ENGAGED LEARNING TOOLS** to develop the 12 career readiness competencies.

 CAREER DEVELOPMENT	 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	 CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING	 DIGITAL INFORMATION FLUENCY	 INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURIAL THINKING	 LEADERSHIP
 ORAL, WRITTEN & DIGITAL COMMUNICATION	 PROFESSIONALISM & INTEGRITY	 RESEARCH ABILITY	 SELF-REFLECTION	 TEAMWORK & CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION	 UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL CONTEXT



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The UC San Diego Education Initiative Working Group will review these competencies every four years to ensure they remain relevant to industry and key postsecondary agencies, associations, and accrediting agencies.

When students have graduated, employers should be able to determine what sets of skills and knowledge they bring to the workplace. Achieving both of these will help address the looming confidence gap and build the pipeline of talent necessary for our students and nation to thrive. And despite a century of experience with higher education, our system tells us far too little about what a college degree or other postsecondary credential means.

As a result, many postsecondary institutions are exploring a Co-Curricular Record (CCR). A CCR is a method of capturing student achievements in opportunities beyond the classroom, including a brief description of the skills developed on an official record. UC San Diego has developed the Co-Curricular Record to recognize student involvement in:

- research and academic life
- student and campus engagement
- community-based and global learning
- professional and career development

The purpose of the CCR is to demonstrate the value of engaging in opportunities beyond the classroom and to help students reflect on and articulate the competencies and skills they have developed. This approach seeks to provide industry additional insights into a graduate's skills, knowledge, and abilities not visible in a traditional transcript.

As our nation's labor market continues to transform, it's more critical than ever that everyone has access to an education that equips them to thrive in our twenty-first-century economy. Preparing our talent pipeline requires a collaborative effort among leaders in academia, industry, and government to figure out the best ways to identify, reward, and motivate top agile talent while supporting the constant need to learn. Each must both evolve to stay competitive.

The US Department of Labor's Brent Parton noted the necessity of "continual training throughout a person's lifetime—to keep current in a career, to learn how to complement rising levels of automation, and to gain skills for new work." He predicted, "workers will likely consume this lifelong learning in short spurts when they need it, rather than in lengthy blocks of time as they do now when it often takes months or years to complete certificates and degrees."¹⁴

The message is clear: individuals must constantly hone and enhance their skills to remain relevant in the workforce. As a society, we must figure out how to rapidly update workforce skills and competencies on an ongoing basis to remain globally competitive, avoid long periods of high unemployment, and continually evolve our workforce. Adapting to this mindset of continuous learning and relevance is perhaps America's biggest challenge in staying competitive.