

## Participant Observers Report Out from Day Two Discussion Break Out Groups

**Theme:** “The Future of Education: Functional vs. Liberal Arts”

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**Matthew Cahn:** So our breakout group, like the other groups, we're looking at this question of how we balance functional skills with the liberal arts. And I'm not going to be able to summarize everything because it was a pretty free flowing conversation with lots of things coming up. But this is how it made sense to me.

The conversation started with a discussion of the challenges that we face. And so let me talk about a couple of those challenges. One, of course, following Dr. Nass' comments earlier today is the obvious challenge of technology and how technology is changing the way that we think in changing the way our students think. One of the subsidiary comments that came up was that the technology problem wasn't itself a problem merely of the technology but also of the political and monetary implications of mitigating some of those conventional technology issues.

A second challenge that was commented on was that the mixed messages that we get as faculty, as department chairs, and so forth. So, one of those is the soft pressure to pursue MOOCs. Nobody is saying we must develop MOOCs but we frequently are being presented with different models of MOOCs and there's clearly a suggestion that it might be a direction that we might go. We actually are hearing a pretty hard mandate coming from the legislature about MOOCs. That's something out there as well, so that kind of floats behind the conversation. The mixed messages, we are being mandated to develop online courses but there are minimal resources to support things like captioning. So ADA compliance, of course, we all embrace, that's mandatory. We are moving online in some areas but there is still a conflict of whether or not we have the resources to do what we know that we need to do and that which we want to do.

And finally, there's a sense amongst--certainly among the folks I talked to, and myself included, that we're waiting for the other shoe to drop. We don't have a clear sense of what the future is going to bring and that future may be tomorrow, next week, next month. We don't know what it is and so we wonder what the continuing mandates are going to be. These mixed messages just leave us with questions.

There are some specific conflicts which go beyond sort of those traditional challenges and those are, as the group identified, the following. The expressed conflict between applied skills and liberal arts, obviously, that's what the whole day is addressing. Conflicts between bureaucratic constraints and intellectual obligations, so we are, in many ways, public intellectuals operating in a vast state bureaucracy. There are conflicts about when and how we schedule classes, online versus face-to-face, large versus small, lecture versus discussion, and so forth. And then, of course,

there's these questions to whether these conflicts are healthy conflicts that engender meaningful conversation or whether they are all out wars. And depending on the context, they may be one or the other or both simultaneously. So at the faculty level, we have these issues and we try to work them out and sometimes, it's more--the conversation is more assertive than the other times. And so we struggle with that.

Ultimately, the conversation moved in the direction of solutions considering these challenges and these conflicts and these issues and problems which we all know about, what might we do to mitigate. And so, of course, one of those things is that we already know that there are high-impact learning practices, teaching practices, that can help to reduce some of these conflicts, things like engaging students in student research, collaboration, writing the sort of typical types of high-impact practices, which in many context, we know about but we don't use. So certainly, the extent to which we can embrace those more, the less some of those challenges will be in the way.

Better assessment, we discuss the role of assessment on campus, the changing role of assessment, the perhaps slow but still improving context with which we find assessment. And we concluded that with better assessment comes better measures. As we revise our assessment processes, we can develop better measures and those better measures will lead us to better interventions, and those better interventions ideally will allow us to improve learning outcomes and so forth.

Additional things that the group decided, not decided, but identified as being appropriate and necessary. Support for interdisciplinary classes. We know that an institution that is divided by college and within colleges, divided by department, it's very hard to embrace an interdisciplinary approach. But we know that interdisciplinary classes and interdisciplinary approaches can be very useful. So, finding ways to support that is something that will be helpful.

Encouraging a collaborative ethic among faculty: Faculty, as we know in an institution like Cal State, are overworked in many ways and we often feel like we don't have the energy to work in a collaborative manner because that takes a lot of time and it may take away from things that we know we already need to do. So finding a way to incentivize collaboration, to encourage collaboration, and to change the culture back toward collaboration will be something that we thought would be helpful.

Flexible space, we know that there's not enough space on campus to do what we do every day. That said, to the extent we can use space flexibly and to the extent that we acquire new space, that we build up space in flexible manner, we will have greater success. So when we talk about flexible space, specifically space that can support collaboration and small group learning in addition to being used in larger context as well. So this room, for example, perhaps not being the model of flexible space, has some of those old style mechanisms for enlarging the space or reducing it and so on. So in different context, we could do different kinds of things. And certainly, to the extent that we have some classes which inevitably are going to be quite large, Title 5 comes to mind in my college. We need to remember and relearn how to facilitate peer learning, peer discussion, active learning projects, and so forth in the context of a large class. So just as an example, as in most of your experiences, when I was in graduate school, we had large lectures and we had discussion breakouts. This campus, as we know, was designed specifically to preclude large lectures but we've overcome that and now we have large lectures. But in most cases, we don't have the related small group discussion that goes with it. It's as if we forgot that that was an important component and we want to encourage relearning that. That's all I've got.

**Adam Swenson:** All right, well, I don't have anything nearly as comprehensive as what Matt reported. Our group addressed the long list of complex questions that were given to us to discuss; our discussion jumped back and forth between them. So let me just try to summarize one theme of our discussion in a way that hopefully is accurate or at least reasonably reflects what we talked about.

So first off, in these discussions there's a tendency to elide the humanities with a liberal arts education. So sometimes when we say 'liberal arts education', we mean something like a good GE program, where people are taking classes in a lot of different areas and getting a broad view of the sciences, the social sciences, and everything else. But then other times, especially when we talked about the value of having a liberal arts education, the implied focus turns towards the humanities. And I'm totally happy for the humanities or philosophy to be at the center of everything.

[laughter] I mean, yeah, I am, but--I was trying to think of something clever but, you know. [laughter] But that's not exactly right because the promotion of what we care about in the liberal arts or as, a liberal arts teaching institution has to involve a lot of collaboration amongst departments. That entails a range of the bureaucratic and administrative challenges. But it also entails finding ways to integrate the specific skills of individual faculty members and disciplines within the contours of classes and curricula that have multiple aims.

So here's one example that came up. I teach ethics and I would hope that other people in other classes, in other colleges, and all areas of the curriculum, discuss ethical issues when they arise in their particular subject matter. But there's a reason why they hired me. I've had a lot of training in teaching and thinking about ethical issues; poorly done ethics education can be extremely counterproductive. So that doesn't mean that when we spread out the material that AAC&U speaker identified as essential to well-educated person, we're obviating people who are specialists in, say, ethics or helping people learn to take other perspectives. But it does mean that we need to have some sort of support linkages between groups, between different kinds of classes. And so, maybe some sorts of administrative and curricular reforms or changes which allow groups of GE classes from different areas to be brought together. I don't know enough about the Paths project, but maybe something like that which allows faculty to bring both their specific skills and specific content knowledge together around particular topics can be a valuable way of promoting a liberal arts education.

So those were some of the things I think that were broadly endorsed by my group. I'm kind of looking somebody in my group to nod, no one's nodding so I guess--oh, no, a big nod, OK, thank you, Sheila. So that's the rough contours of some of what we talked about. I hope that was relatively accurate since now I'm on the record.

**Melanie Williams:** My group was Leigh Bradberry, Diana Wynter, and Drake Langford. And we started with the idea of talking about--of the many things we've discussed here today, what are the implications for teaching. And we had many of the same discussions that sounds like Matt's group had so I don't want to repeat a lot of that, but honestly, we could have been parallel groups.

We did talk about functionality and comparing it with the liberal arts in talking about how coming up with these skills that were viewed as so important by employers: Critical thinking, problem solving, communication skills, group skills, and all the rest of it. Those--that doesn't have to be an either/or. They can happen in the same classes. There's--what it seemed to draw us to do is to come up with cross collaboration with creating more high-impact practices in the classroom. But ironically, all of that takes incentive--it takes incentives and it takes support from the university. There's a great management article called "The Folly of Hoping for A While Rewarding B." We hope for creativity, cross collaboration, high-impact practices, but those aren't the things we reward. We reward people who teach three units in their department in a large lecture hall and don't do anything different than they've ever done. So we need to rethink the reward scheme so that we can honestly reward the behavior we're hoping for. The way it works now often is the most creative and ambitious and hardworking faculty in an odd kind of way or sort of penalize because they take on more work and it's more trouble and there's really not support in the university a support structure.

If we want to have more high-impact activities especially to support large lecture halls, forgetting that people in those research institutions have TAs, we need to come up with some sort of support where that can happen so the students get more feedback on their writing, on their group activities, or whatever is going to--capstone, whatever it is.

We talked about managing technology and how to use it as a support in managing usage and then our discussion simple devolved into best practices and we shared ideas we had for having more feedback on student writing and group work and managing technology so that students took responsibility for their focus in the classroom and how well that had worked. So that was our group.

**Joyce Feucht-Haviar:** We had two people in one group, so I won't repeat the group. Just kind of being a participant-observer across yesterday and today, a couple of things came to mind for me.

One is, we probably don't spend that much time--as much time as we should--talking about the educational enterprise in our various configurations. Most people tell me their departmental meetings don't usually talk about curricu-

lum or pedagogy, or they're not viewed as creative venues of open discussion. There probably aren't that many opportunities for people -- even on the many committees that people sit on -- to say, "*Are we talking about the core work of the institution? Are we actually driving forward new ideas and new ways to do things? Are we surfacing those things that we want to change?*" It seems like most people talk about the fact that those meetings are procedural and for approvals and various sorts of things.

We're talking about the world of work in which entrepreneurship, innovation change over time. We're preparing people to go out into that world. And we are a group of highly educated individuals who are in that same side of the arena where change and evolution are probably a big issue for the future. And as we do talk about these issues, most people, at least as I was observing, had plenty of ideas about what we might do about them.

But I think by and large, we'll leave this room and not talk about them again for a good long time. I think there needs to be some way in which the institution has a forum that's built-in, that's not just episodic or occasional, because the thing that brings us all together to be here, is the teaching-learning curriculum. That's something that kept coming back to my mind. There's lots of information out there, some very good observations from the speakers. Probably people in the audience would have loved to follow-up on, sit down and talk to this or that person. And it would be crucial to do that to move the enterprise along, but by and large, we won't allow ourselves the time to do that.

And, yes, we're in a large organization, but it can move and have some innovative components as I've observed in other contexts. It is what we make it, because what we choose to do today will change what it is tomorrow. And if we don't choose to change it, it will be the same today as tomorrow.

Another thing that came up as the conversation was concluding in our group and that came to mind for me was the kind of students we educate. We are taking them into a different world. We're saying, "*See this larger picture. See these bigger issues. See this cross-culturally. See a different future for yourself.*" But there is another obligation in that, for many who are first generation in their family, for many who are going to shift their future from what their family enjoys, they will never be able to go home again. And so we are taking the responsibility for changing a life in many ways, separating it from where it came from, and we expect that's a good thing to do. And I suspect it is, too, but it has these other implications.

And most people, as they come and travel with us, don't realize how far we've taken them and how they will not be able to go home again. So I think it's an obligation, if they trust themselves in our hands, that we give them the best we can, and I think most of the conversations over the last two days are about how we do that -- important kinds of considerations.

**Steven Stepanek:** That concludes that set of presentations. Is there anybody in the rest of the audience that would like to contribute to this conversation? Jerry [assumed spelling].

**Jerry Schutte:** I have a couple of takeaways from this symposium and one of them has to do with the last comment. I think that we all agree there's a change in demographic. I think we all agree that we're paying attention to first generation students now more than ever. But part of the dynamic of that is that as we address the issues to students who can never go home again, I'm not sure that's entirely true because that demographic has younger brothers and sisters who have yet to have a role model of a college graduate in their family, who now is going to have one. And I think that dramatically increases the probability that they will become college students.

So I see the dynamic working here where five, 10 years from now, we're not going to have nearly as many first generation, maybe we can start having second, third, from the same family coming in. And I think that's a natural pathway from an immigrant population to a middle class population. It's not new, it's happened many times in the past. But I think it changes the dynamic of what we're doing. So I think we have to pay particular attention to how that dynamic affects what we do going down the road.

And one of the things that I was impressed with was the--Professor Nass' presentation, not so much the nuances of multitasking but how the whole generation of people are looking at the world differently. And I think that that's just

one of the dimensions along which they're looking at the world differently. The nuclear family is going to be a very different animal at the dinner table 10 years from now than it is today for the very reasons you pointed out.

But there's another thing I took away from this and I asked Deborah Humphrey's talk this morning after her talk 'cause I didn't want to monopolize the time for questions. But it's something that's been annoying me for the whole 40 year I've been here and that is when you look at the world of education and its connection to mobility, you're struck by the fact that education income are highly correlated than when you take a microscope to that which really realizes that it's an avenue for mobility from working class to middle class and from lower middle class to upper middle class. But it's rarely a mobility ladder from middle class to new rich or old rich, almost by definition.

And when you focus on the new rich and you see how that will come about and it's coming about exponentially, five years ago, there was a hundred billionaires and now there's something like 5,000 billionaires. You recognize that it's moved not from a manufacturing economy but to a knowledge economy. And the interesting part about the correlate of that to education seems to me is that at the turn of the last century, when the Robber Barons were doing what they were doing, it was essentially a manufacturing world. And consequently, education still had a place to play in the matriculation of people through that manufacturing world right up the CEOs. When you transfer to a knowledge economy, it seems to me there's a disconnect: that education no longer plays a role right up to the sort of CEO level because most of the new economy, the new knowledge economy, is coming out of the creativity of people, not so much their education. And the question I asked Deborah this morning is that, how do you see the difference--or do you see the same difference I see between critical thinking and creativity? Because I think we can teach critical thinking but I'm not so sure we can teach creativity. Because critical thinking is all about dealing with problem solving in the context of what it is, whereas creativity is problem solving in the world of what could be. And we don't deal so much in the world of what could be as much as we deal with the world of what it is.

So the annoying feeling I have after 10,000 students in 40 years is we're creating a very wonderful change of world in terms of the perception of occupational mobility, but we're not fundamentally changing the world of creativity. And whether you want to quote chapter and verse about the five or 10 of people that immediately come to mind like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Larry Page, et cetera, or whether you want to talk about it as a more systemic situation, I'm conflicted over the fact of what our mission should be.

Is it to simply take people and inject them into the world of upward mobility? Or is it to create something more fundamental, to encourage something more fundamental if it can be, in the form of creativity? Now, almost everyone, I would think, would argue that you can't have one unless you start setting the precedent for the other. But I don't know. I talked to an awful lot of people that knew Steven Jobs, and I talked to people that knew Larry Page, and I talked to people that knew Bill Gates and they all tell me that's not where it came from: it didn't come creativity, critical thinking, it came from the creativity of seeing things the way they could be instead of the way they are.

**Steven Stepanek:** That is all the time we have. Thank you everyone.

[applause]

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