

## FOREWORD

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*Moving Horizontally* is a timely history of the very recent past, one in which the world of higher education was suddenly and thoroughly challenged to reinvent itself by the rapidly evolving threat of a global pandemic. Its dozen stories reflect diverse vantage points on this moment, and summarize actions undertaken across universities, professional schools, administrative units and centers, and consortia, drawing on experiences at a variety of U.S. public and private institutions, as well as at a handful of institutions in Europe and South Asia. In the telling, we see how this moment underscored both our collective capacity for adaptation, as well as the stubbornness that can inhibit us from realizing the full potential of new ways of teaching and learning. Along the way, this moment has unquestionably invited us to reconsider what we value most when it comes to education and the opportunities it creates for individuals, communities, and nations. We should not be surprised, then, that lasting effects from reflections of this type may take some time to sort themselves out.

Among the questions that remain to be answered are these: what lessons will higher education draw from this experience and this history? How might the remarkably rapid adaptations in our approach to instruction, often achieved in a matter of days or weeks and under the threat of almost unprecedented public health, economic, and social crises, leave a lasting mark on the future of higher education? What, in other words, has Covid-19 taught us about higher education? And what will we do differently as a result?

It is widely recognized that the pandemic has acted as an accelerator of a wide variety of longstanding trends in higher education – some good and related to innovation, others more challenging and related to demographic, economic, and operational pressures. It remains as yet unclear whether the cumulative effects of this moment will, on the whole, push the majority toward greater comfort with innovative educational practices or, conversely, precipitate a kind of reactionary recommitment to the old ways of doing things – among faculty, administrators, students, parents, or the global education community at large. As the essays in this volume suggest, the near-term outcome may be positive, negative, or mixed. Even still, the aspirations

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expressed by these stories of rapid transformation are clear, and they reflect a shared confidence that, in the long-term, the lessons from this moment in history will improve education in important ways, from its quality to its accessibility.

This book focuses on diverse efforts to repurpose what we might, in all fairness, still think of as relatively marginal innovative educational practices (such as technology-enabled delivery models supporting part-time study for working adults via a more articulated and routinized set of course design, instruction, and assessment activities) to suddenly meet the needs of the vast majority of learners at the core – or, in fact, almost all learners, everywhere. This is what is meant by “moving horizontally.”

Scale, in this version, is not defined as increased power in a node of a network (such as a master’s program or MOOC enrolling growing numbers of students) – that would be vertical scale. Here, scale is achieved via a proliferation of nodes across the network (touching all disciplines, program-types, audiences, and services units at once) – that is horizontal scale. It is arguable whether one or the other form of scale is intrinsically more difficult to achieve. But within the context of higher education – that is, its history, traditions, and values – I think we can confidently make the case that while pockets of innovation characterized by vertical scale have not been unwelcome, horizontal scale has been much harder to achieve, no doubt because its effects are far more thoroughgoing and disruptive to the campus community, the traditional organizing paradigm of the university, and even to its identity. What becomes clear through the stories told in the course of this volume is that experience with vertical scale better positions the institution to attempt to realize horizontal scale.

Of course, “scale” itself has no absolute value. It is not a destination with a specific set of coordinates. There is no threshold after which, say, a certain degree program can be said to have achieved scale. The concept of scale represents a way of framing a reflection on an activity’s relative reach, impact, and rate of growth. Scale in the abstract is neither good nor bad. In education, some learning experiences should preferably possess the characteristics of the small-scale, whereas for other audiences in other settings learning experiences may be preferable at the large-scale. Ultimately, seeking greater scale should be in service of overcoming constraints that limit the impact we, as educators, desire to achieve. If we want to bring greater numbers of educational opportunities to the world at low- or no-cost, then MOOCs represent one viable way of achieving that impact, but no one would argue that MOOCs are the best education delivery model in all contexts.

To the extent, then, that we want to promote moving horizontally, we want to be able to show what education goals this is in service of, and we want to be able to show that it can be

achieved while maintaining and even strengthening the core values of the institution. This, in fact, is precisely the rare opportunity that Covid-19 has presented to us.

Much of the educational innovation we can point to today originated at the margins of the university. Whether we want to talk about program innovation, or pricing, or instructional, or assessment, or other forms of innovation, much of this experimentation took root in divisions of continuing and professional education, or in extension schools, or in outreach units. It is common for the buildings housing these divisions, schools, and units to sit – literally – on the margins of campus, not infrequently across the street or even down the road. But in these somewhat distant corners of campus, a great deal of invention has been taking place for decades and decades, while at the center of campus things have often remained largely the same, sometimes for century upon century.

In more recent times, the relevance and value of these innovative units has become clearer to many institutional leaders. As the market for part-time baccalaureate and graduate education, as well as non-credit educational programs, has grown – among alumni and working professionals in regions where these institutions are situated and beyond – the rationale for building a capacity to effectively deliver lifelong learning has become clearer and clearer. As a result, a growing number of universities have been seeking to couple the vertical scale achieved by their innovation units with horizontal scale across the institution to bring the benefits of certain innovative practices closer to the core.

For highly decentralized, top tier universities with a strong commitment to research, this work has not been easy. For some, the work has only begun quite recently but has been rendered more urgent by the pandemic. Indeed, it is still unfolding. Growing numbers of universities are seeking to better understand the full range of innovative practices emerging or maturing in various corners of campus, and so they are conducting inventories of novel course designs, delivery models, technology capabilities, marketing capacity, automated services for students, and many other competencies. They are also segmenting the diverse audiences they serve, by age group, professional aspirations, geography, and more. They are establishing new governance structures to coordinate and oversee the maturation and expansion of these innovative competencies across academic divisions, IT offices, libraries, centers for teaching and learning, and other institutional units, as well as across an increasingly diverse set of partners (including OPMs, consortia, student service providers, and others). And they are seeking to retrofit a shared vision for the expansive pursuit of these innovative practices across the institution to be achieved by moving horizontally.

The lessons highlighted in these essays provide useful roadmaps for achieving this horizontal movement. While the response to the pandemic required institutions to move at a tremendously accelerated pace, no one would argue that this pace was ideal from a design perspective. Surely everyone would have benefited from having more time, in a certain sense. But in another sense, the forced urgency of the pandemic response created a prompt like no other, and it brought vast numbers of faculty and administrators, many of whom had neither taught in a distance delivery context nor worked from home, into an immediate and immersive learning experience of their own that was in itself productive, helping them to see the benefits of innovative delivery models while also providing new insights about the value of traditional approaches to instruction.

To help their colleagues manage this unprecedented transformation, the authors of these essays and their colleagues moved rapidly to create repositories of actionable reference materials and guidebooks, to establish working groups and project teams, to build course templates and provide access to diverse technology tools, to stand up faculty mentoring programs and helpdesk services, to provide train-the-trainer instruction to help with the rapid dissemination of effective instructional practices, and to organize rigorous quality assurance and assessment strategies to ensure that the core educational mission was being met.

The results, assuredly, were nothing less than heroic at institution after institution, given the short time allotted for these efforts. Before the onset of the pandemic, who would have thought this possible? And yet, as many of the essays here readily acknowledge, alongside the numerous successes realized, the authors encountered stubborn challenges: students who were often unhappy with their remote instruction experiences, technologies that were not as easily deployed or scaled as hoped, and certain faculty who took the path of least resistance, offering limited direct engagement with their students. However much has been achieved in moving horizontally since the start of the pandemic, the stories told here – to their credit – do not shy away from underscoring how much ground still remains to be covered.

The process of defamiliarization can be a productive one, even as it inevitably prompts a certain degree of anxiety. In having to transform the way education was delivered so rapidly following the onset of the pandemic, we learned much about what is possible and also about what remains central to our values as educators. Those teaching online for the first time may well have found themselves – as has often been the case – reflecting on their traditional in-person instructional strategies in new and creative ways. But equally, those who have been doing the work of innovating education delivery for years or decades may well have found

themselves reflecting anew on what it is that makes an online a course an effective space for learning.

Unexpected lessons are a natural consequence of experimentation. Thus, the essays in this volume trace an arc from the effort to achieve horizontal movement to reflecting on what it will take to make the effects of that movement lasting and productive. To that end, we as readers and fellow travelers on this same path need to consider what it means to seize an opportunity to deploy innovations at scale. For whose benefit, and to realize whose interests are we moving in this direction? As noted by Gazi, Baker, and Sibley in this volume's closing essay, the pursuit of scale in the context of high quality, accessible education programs is really only beginning – and equitable access to education is a key motivation for pushing in this direction. Though a good deal of progress has been made, much work remains to be done, and the conversations prompted by these essays, and by others being written and published elsewhere, will undoubtedly play a formative role in advancing that work.

The great lesson for higher education to draw from the COVID-19 pandemic may well be one related to the importance of intentionality in designing and delivering educational experiences – that is, student experiences. For each student, for each audience, what scale will best meet the educational goals in that specific context? The opportunity outlined in these essays is for a broad reflection across the higher education community, nationally and globally, on the experience we have gained in undertaking both vertical and horizontal scale, and to draw upon that experience to envision a path forward for higher education informed by a deeper understanding of the most effective and efficient education design and delivery practices to best serve our many diverse student audiences and to provide the best student experience possible.