Game Changers

EDUCATION and INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Edited by **DIANA G. OBLINGER**

EDUCAUSE

> **FROM THE EDITOR**
>
> I would like to thank the many people who made this book possible, particularly Gregory Dobbin for managing the project and Karen Mateer for her research.
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> —Diana G. Oblinger

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Foreword

AMONG THE MANY STRENGTHS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, the ones most frequently mentioned are the roles played by its mission that yield value to society and help create the future. Realistically, our institutions may place more emphasis on one element of higher education's mission—research or teaching or outreach—over another; support different types of students; and serve different geographic areas as well as local, regional, or national constituencies. And some focus on the liberal arts, others on sciences and engineering. The strength of American higher education is found in this rich diversity.

Over time, the diversification within higher education has expanded with the creation of new types of institutions such as land-grant universities and community colleges. In recent years, physical campuses have been increasingly augmented by online offerings. The majority of today's students may be labeled as "nontraditional," with no single definition of what that term indicates. Some are adults who have not graduated from high school. Others seek an education but lack confidence and do not have the required foundational skills in English and/or mathematics. Some have no clear path to or through their education. However, the numbers are clear. No matter how well we do today, we must serve more of all types of students—and serve them more effectively—if we are to reach our national goals for education.

This book helps those in higher education explore important questions through ideas that we might incorporate as we prepare for the next generations of students. While we honor our history—remembering that much of the power of higher education is in its tradition of critical inquiry—we must not shy away from questioning some time-honored practices and previously held assumptions. Let us consider:

- Cognitive science and recent research about the human brain are giving us new insights into how students learn. Can we ensure our educational system is flexible, incorporates new approaches in line with the way we learn, and adapts its organizational structures to the needs of the learner rather than constraining the learner's options?

- What new models currently exist and what models can we create that better serve our students as individual learners as well as society as a whole? And can we celebrate the creation of new models that serve unique needs without having qualms about the differences?

- Today we have tools that were virtually unknown a few years ago. Which of these are most promising in the digital world our institutions helped produce? Given these tools, are there foundational competencies that can be mastered through multiple means?

- What can we learn from disruptive change in other sectors? Do we have the leadership that pushes us to think and act differently to achieve our goals?

- If we were to reset or reinvent higher education for the future, what would we continue, discontinue, or change?

The needs of our society are clear. Quality education, broadly available, is an imperative. It is not enough to open the doors to more learners—we must do more to help them achieve the education and preparation they seek and that today's world demands. Currently, our aspirations are greater than our accomplishments. We must ensure we are not overlooking options from which we have previously turned away or that we failed to explore. Higher education fosters creative insights and innovative questioning, and the contributors to this book offer a range of models and a wealth of examples to help us think outside our comfort zone. These models can serve as a starting point for exploring game changers that will strengthen the learning experience for students and the institutions of higher education that serve them, ultimately enriching our society.

We are justifiably proud of our unique and diverse system of higher education. We must also have the humility to know that it can be even better. The game changer we need may depend on how well we expand access and improve attainment through the intelligent use of information technology to enhance learning. Many are looking to our colleges and universities for the answers; their future is up to us.

Molly Corbett Broad