

**Shifting higher education from a private good to a public process by jointly addressing  
challenges in a place-based community**

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*LDES 5004 University as a Design Problem*

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## Abstract

Since the 1950s, universities have become the primary provider of a private good: the college degree, which enables individuals to advance their careers and increase their earning potential. Recent data on the lifetime earnings of those with a Bachelor's degree indicate that the earning-enhancing function of universities is well-intact, but often comes with complicated ethical costs for those who come from marginalized backgrounds. Furthermore, disparities in earnings and health outcomes between those with versus without a Bachelor's degree indicate that an inter-educational divide has developed. Meanwhile, powerful external forces are pressuring the university model to evolve, including a dire financial situation, structural economic shifts, climate change, and the public mistrust of higher education. To address these complex challenges, universities must reject a narrow identity as degree-providers and instead apply their powers of research, training, and organizing towards transforming the infrastructure that moderates educational opportunities and health outcomes. Arizona State University (ASU) exemplifies how a university can transform from a vehicle of individual mobility to a vehicle of public transformation. Since 2002, ASU has implemented a sweeping array of reforms to address global, regional, and local issues while transforming Arizona's health and education infrastructure.

## H1: Student-as-investor

*Higher education as private, individual advancement*

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**A Vehicle for Individual Advancement:** According to the utilitarian view of higher education, college is a good or service with students as its primary consumers.<sup>1</sup> Higher education enables students to climb into the middle or upper class, with success measured primarily in terms of increased earning potential. The student is conceptualized as a rational investor who exchanges time and debt for higher lifetime earnings.

A "*Just Meritocracy*": In the utilitarian view, the education system is conceived as an impartial place where students can advance solely on the basis of merit. Carnevale describes how equal educational opportunity is a particularly American solution to societal inequities.<sup>2</sup> He describes

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Neem, "[Making Sense of the Higher Ed Debate](#)", *Inside Higher Ed*, (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Carnevale, "[The Merit Myth: How Our Colleges Favor the Rich and Divide America](#)", Center on Education and the Workforce, (*The New Press*, 2020).

it as a way of resolving two competing values of democratic equality and liberal individualism. In this conception, academic achievement is posited as a function of individual talent and effort, which then results in better socioeconomic outcomes. In theory, admissions offices and employers claim that they are impartial judges of merit, but the selection criteria they consider are often skewed in favor of the most advantaged students. In fact, the data on actual enrollment is a clear indication that selective colleges serve by-and-large the most privileged students.<sup>3</sup>

*Access vs. Advantage:* Higher education's contradiction between expressed fairness and actual bias for the most privileged has a long history, as Labaree describes.<sup>4</sup> Colleges are under two opposing pressures: they must strive to provide equal access to all as an engine of a fair meritocracy while also succumbing to demands from the most advantaged stakeholders who aim to preserve educational advantage for a few. Over decades, this resulted in a highly stratified system of higher education, in which the highest amount of advantage is clustered at the top of the system and only accessible to the few (private, selective institutions), while lower levels (community colleges, non-selective state schools) are more accessible but offer less relative advantage. At selective institutions, this contradiction manifests in enrollment data, which shows that they disproportionately serve affluent students while publicizing stories of a small number of admitted high-achieving disadvantaged students as evidence of delivering on an equity agenda.<sup>5</sup>

*Achieving Social Mobility:* However, it must be noted that the theoretical underpinning of college as providing opportunity does, to some extent, stand up to the evidence. According to a 2021 report titled *The College Payoff* by the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW), the return on investment from attending college remains significant.<sup>6</sup> Those with a Bachelor's degree show a 75% increase in lifetime earnings compared to those with only a high school diploma.

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Jack, "[The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students](https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674251656-020)", in *Racism and America*, p. 170-178, (2019), <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674251656-020>.

<https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.4159/9780674239647/html>

<sup>4</sup> David Labaree, "Upstairs Downstairs", *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Jack, *The Privileged Poor*

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Carnevale, Stephen J Rose, and Ban Cheah, "[The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, and Lifetime Earnings](#)", (Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 2011).

Chetty's research shows that some colleges were really good at social mobility. However, during 2000-2011 they stopped admitting as many students who would benefit from social mobility, indicating that potentially life-changing colleges are becoming less accessible to those who would benefit from them the most. (citation needed)

### **Social Mobility is a Wicked Problem**

*A Growing Intereducational Divide:* The benefits of a college degree are extremely pronounced. The CEW findings on higher earnings can be considered in tandem with research from Anne Case & Angus Deaton, whose research shows that the life expectancy for adults has increased for those with a Bachelor's degree and decreased for those without one.<sup>7</sup> The benefits of a college degree are remarkably high, but so are the dangers of not having one. The sharp disparities in earnings and life expectancy between those with versus without a college degree is what they term the "intereducational divide."

In a way, the CEW data and Case & Deaton's research shows that the college system is working as it was originally intended. In the second half of the 20th century, higher education leader Clark Kerr posited the college degree as a gateway to complex knowledge work, better societal outcomes led by a professional managerial class, and higher individual wages.<sup>8</sup> The data signals that this professional managerial class has indeed taken shape, with apparent criteria for membership (a degree) and distinct social outcomes (earnings and life expectancy).

Case & Deaton's research reveals two troublesome realities: earnings and life expectancy has increased for those with college degrees, while earnings and life expectancy have actually declined for those without a college degree.

*Debt & Lower Ed:* When public funding for higher education dried up as the Cold War ended, the higher future earnings became a justification for students to take on debt. This debt model enabled higher education, which had swelled on public funds, to remain afloat financially. Students would essentially borrow against their future earnings to finance their education, and receive a return on investment in their future jobs.

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Case and Angus Deaton, [\*Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism\*](#), (Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Chad Wellmon, "[The Crushing Contradictions of the American University](#)," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2021).

Unfortunately, the debt model, overlaid upon the highly stratified model, has created a system where benefits are concentrated at the top and risks are concentrated at the bottom, affecting the most vulnerable. Predatory lending practices combined with high dropout rates at low-tier institutions often leaves low-income students with a high amount of debt and no degree or high paying job to help shoulder that debt.<sup>9</sup>

*Ethical Costs of Mobility:* On the higher end of the system, for the talented low-income minority student who is able to enter a selective school and succeed, this achievement comes with insidious effects. On the one hand, they can access higher paying jobs and a more powerful and wealthy social network. On the other hand, as Morton describes, these financial gains come with serious ethical and relational costs: weakened ties to home, cultural dislocation, and pressure to assimilate to elite norms.<sup>10</sup>

*Place and the Left Behind:* Even when individuals succeed in achieving social mobility through college, this does not address societal inequities. In fact, it might even worsen them. To achieve mobility, talented individuals are often required to leave their under-resourced neighborhoods to pursue opportunities that are located elsewhere, resulting in brain drain. Chetty's work emphasizes the fact that one's likelihood of college attainment and securing a higher earnings varies greatly as a function of one's ZIP code growing up. This implies that where one is born continues to structure educational and economic chance.<sup>11</sup> Poorer neighborhoods remain disadvantaged, and the dominant paradigm treats the few success stories from these locales as proof of fairness while leaving the broader structural conditions intact.

In order to address the shortcomings of the current conception of higher education as a private good, universities must adopt an ultimate concern for the common good. Rather than focusing on advancing individuals, colleges must seek to improve the health and flourishing of their neighborhood, city, and region. Adopting such a goal will fundamentally change how universities operate.

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<sup>9</sup> Tressie McMillan Cottom, "[The Coded Language of For-Profit Colleges](#)", (*The Atlantic*, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Morton, *Moving Up Without Losing Your Way*, (Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren, "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility I: Childhood Exposure Effects", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 133(3): 1107-162, (2018).

### H3: University-as-investor in students and community

*Higher education as place-based collective healing.*

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**Value Creation for Communities:** Higher education, recast as a public good, measures success not by individual outcomes such as graduation rates and post-graduate earnings, but rather by the wellbeing of surrounding neighborhoods and students' communities. This alternative, H3 University would be concerned with addressing the needs of the community by listening to citizens, analyzing and defining problems, and allocating resources, policies, and personnel to address those problems. In this conception, the *university* becomes the investor in students and the community, shifting risk and responsibility away from individual students. In a 2014 ASHE report, Tami Moore uses the term "Community-University" to describe universities that adopt this new paradigm of education as a public good.<sup>12</sup>

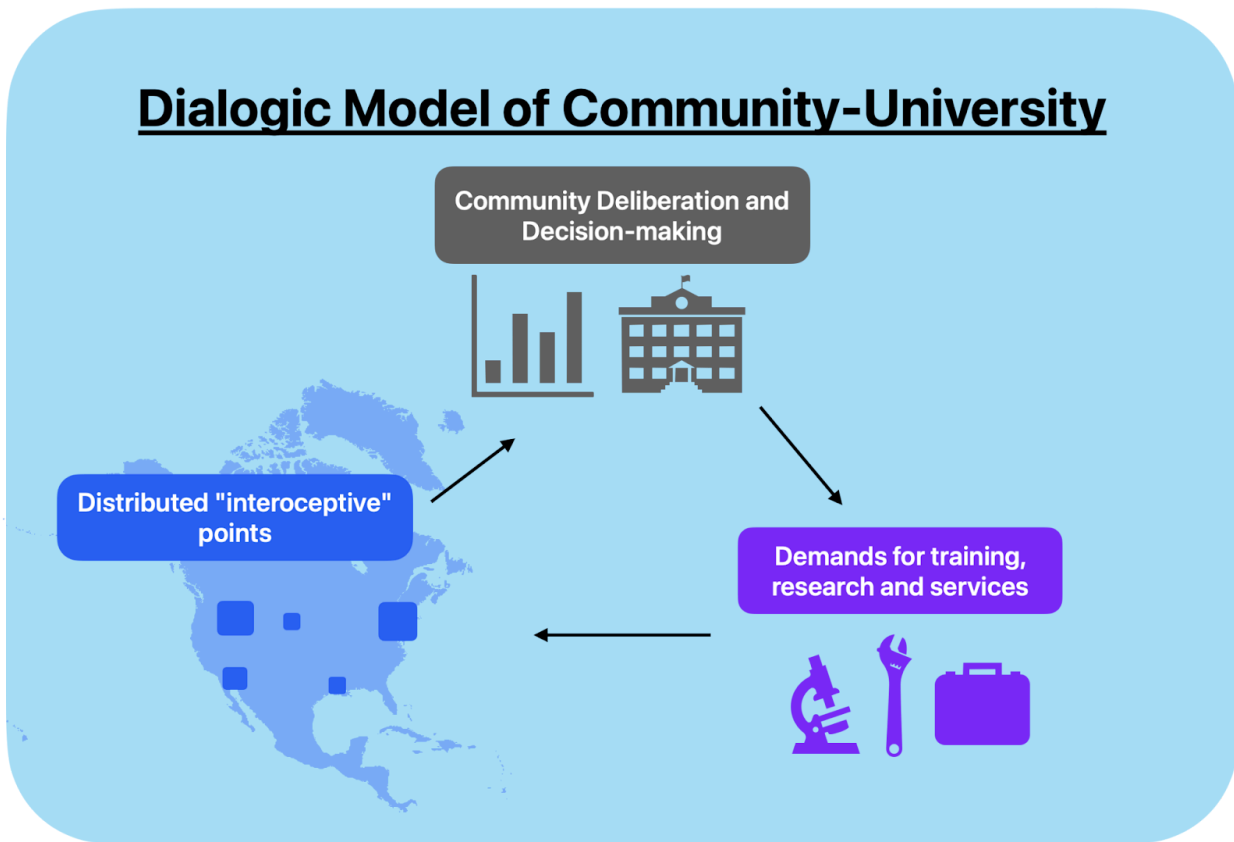
Four key features of the Community-University would allow it to perform better to the wicked problems identified above:

1. *Place-based, responsive infrastructure:* Addresses underlying geographic disparities.
2. *Deweyan educational framework:* Mitigates intereducational 'class' divergence.
3. *Nested "units" of individual, family, and community:* Addresses ethical costs of mobility.
4. *Public investment to create public value:* Shift financial risk away from individuals, ROI is for the community.

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<sup>12</sup> Tami Moore, *Community-University Engagement: a Process for Building Democratic Communities* : ASHE Higher Education Report, 40:2, (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014).

## 1. Place-based, Responsive Infrastructure



In order to align itself with a community-oriented mission, the university would need to alter its physical infrastructure and operational frameworks. It would construct various “interceptive points” which are university-owned and operated community centers that are located throughout the locality which would bring together community and university members. Each community center acts as a “learning hub” that is built thematically and geographically around a particular issue. For example, if there were 3 learning hubs in DC, one could be located in Downtown DC and be focused on Urban Planning and Public Policy. Another learning hub could be located somewhere along the Potomac and consider Water Systems and Ecological Resources, and a third could be located in Georgetown and address Generational Wealth and Institution Building.

These learning hubs are called “interceptive points” because they are built around a concept known as “interoception” which is the process by which humans are able to sense internally what is happening within their bodies. The classic interoceptive capability is the ability to sense one’s own heartbeat, and this ability is associated with a heightened capacity to know when one

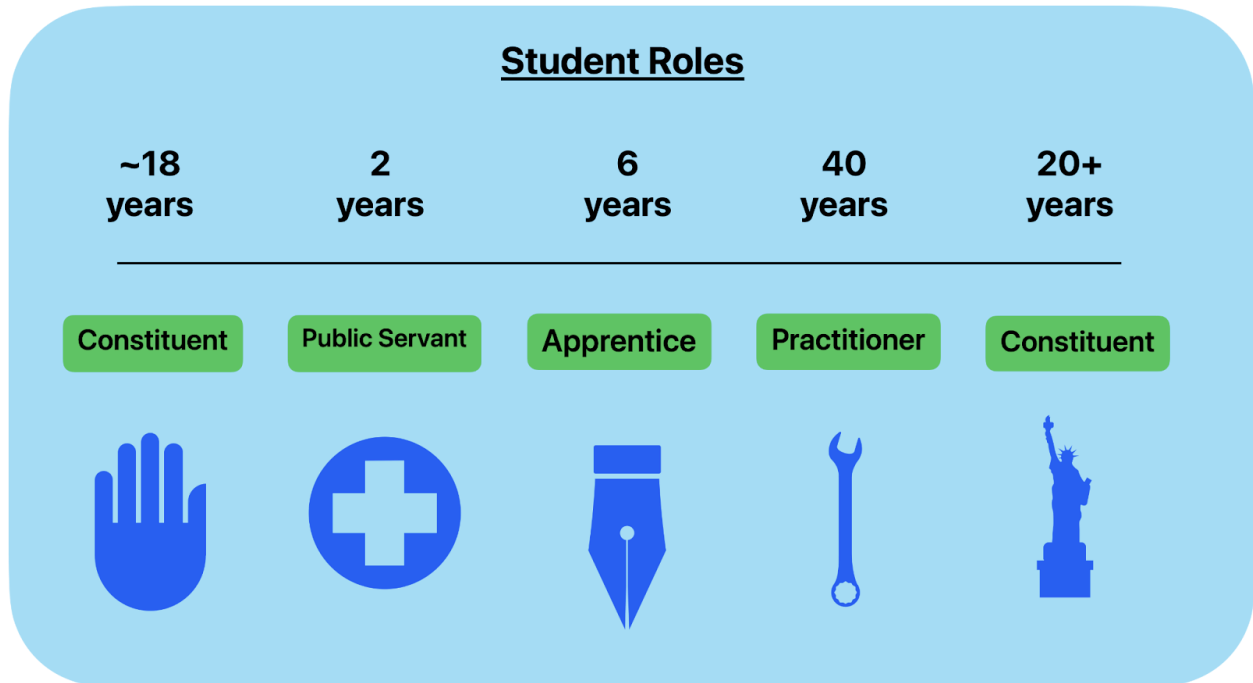
is anxious and subsequently respond consciously with a treatment that can calm them down from that anxious state (i.e. a physical ritual or verbal affirmation). In the context of the community-university relationship, the interoceptive learning hubs are where the dialogue between the two entities takes place, and where the fusion of both is the most pronounced. From these interoceptive points comes the identification of issues to be met with new training programs, resources, or research. The university leans into its role as a convener and a facilitator in response to those calls, connecting the community with the proper personnel and resources from within and beyond the university.<sup>13</sup> It is from these dispersed community-university headquarters that the students practice as public servants, apprentices, and eventually, practitioners.

*The Interoceptive Process (Feedback Loops):* This cyclical, dialogic process between the community and university, consisting of the needs identification from the community, then the analysis and mobilization coordinated in partnership with the university, is the primary cycle of the H3 Community-University. The evaluation tools of this cycle lie at the nexus of the community-university partnership. A collection of community and university members lead the evaluation process of the partnership, analyzing the effectiveness of the various projects. This process must be participatory and owned by community members, and it must involve a deliberative process through which community members come together to identify shared priorities. This process is a practice of democracy as much as it is an educational program. Completing this process regularly will help generate a community identity and the fusion of horizons between the community and university and the members of both. Of course, this process would be messy, require immense trade-offs, and challenge everyone's communication skills, but it would be instrumental for the nourishing of democracy and the creation of a shared definition of home.

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<sup>13</sup> Moore, "Community as Place," *Community-University Engagement* (2014).

## 2. Deweyan Educational Framework



At a Community-University, disciplines and academic content would shift dramatically. To draw on John Dewey and Jane Addams, the curriculum would consider lived experiences and local problems as central subject matter, interpreted through rigorous liberal arts tools<sup>14</sup>. This is in stark contrast to the traditional model of curriculum that privileges academic canons accepted by experts. The key skills students would cultivate are Deweyan “fusion of horizons,” in which students would come to understand that they have shared stakes and shared futures with those around them, regardless of difference, and “aesthetic judgment,” which is the ability to understand the circumstances that influence one’s beliefs and accept the limitations of their viewpoint. Internalizing this understanding allows them to practice intellectual humility and be able to adopt other people’s perspectives.

*Evolving student roles throughout lifetime:* Consistent with Dewey’s pedagogy, the university would break down its walls and lessen the distinction between the class and the broader community. The student experience would reflect this melded world of education and society. To do so, it would remove the 4-year student identity and encourage a lifelong engagement with the

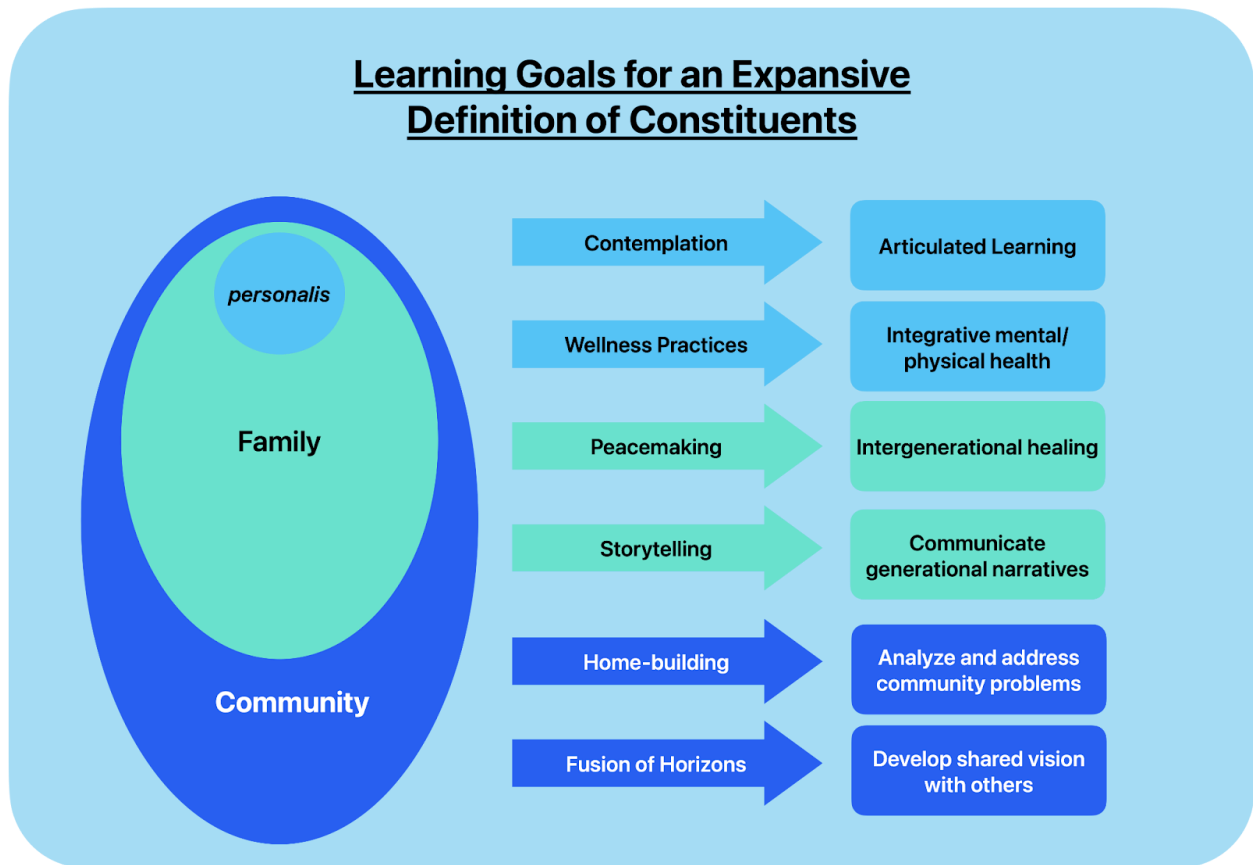
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<sup>14</sup> Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, John Puckett, Matthew Hartley, Rita Hodges, Francis E. Johnston, and Joann Weeks, *Knowledge for Social Change: Bacon, Dewey, and the Revolutionary Transformation of Research Universities in the Twenty-First Century*, (Temple University Press, 2017).

university and civic society. Before they even enter college, all students would be **constituents** of their local colleges, which would play key roles in shaping their communities and high schools. After high school, they would become **public servants** for 6 months to 2 years, helping address issues in the community and build relationships with community members. This would provide a great level of context for them to understand what the world needs, how they fit into the surrounding community, and how the economy functions. Thirdly, they would become **apprentices**, enrolling into the university and becoming students of their peers, their professors, and community members. They would identify shared issues along with their peers, identify community members and professors who seek to address those same issues, and engage in a dual approach of research and practice. They would assist on active projects, taking on various levels of responsibility according to the discretion of their partners and their own interests. This apprenticeship identity would take up the bulk of their traditional, explicit enrollment at the university.

In order to graduate, they would need to express a level of mastery after their apprenticeships and take a leadership role in a project, by themselves, with peers, and/or with professors and community partners. They would demonstrate this mastery and be evaluated by their collaborators, with extra weight given to both senior practitioners and those who were impacted by the project. It would be expected for students to fail at least once, and that would be recognized as a normal process. They would iterate, learn how to improve, and eventually achieve recognition as a **practitioner**, at which point they would graduate. They would move fluidly around the university and the community as a practitioner, and would eventually train apprentices themselves, aid in research projects, or put in resource or personnel calls to the university, which would then adapt to try to meet this expressed need. At any point in their careers, the practitioner could repeat the process anew, changing careers as they wish. When they eventually stop working, they would return to their role as **constituent**, a role they never really left.

### 3. Multiple nested “units” address ethical costs of mobility



At the H3 Community-University, student consideration goes beyond the individual and encompasses three different units of the human experience. The first unit is a holistic consideration of one’s personhood, as defined by the Latin phrase *personalis*. The second unit is the family, or, to encompass a more broad range of experiences, the “clan” one is born into. The third unit is the community, or the collection of families and clans that inhabit the same place and possess some amount of ownership and responsibility over the health and wellbeing of the place itself.

*Individual Cura Personalis:* When thinking about individual students, the H3 University goes beyond a consideration of their academic performance or their future earning potential. Instead, the H3 University adopts a *cura personalis* approach, an integrative approach to mental and physical health, professional development, and the personal flourishing of students. This could be seen through practices such as contemplation and reflection, and made explicit through the practice of “articulated learning” or the expression of what one has learned after an experience

and the accompanying reflective process.<sup>15</sup> The Jesuit practices of contemplation are useful tools for this process, as they help generate a sense of coherence between someone's practical and theoretical experiences, through the act of knowing oneself and expressing a personal narrative.

*Family Peacemaking:* The second process, on the level of family/clan, is a participatory process that positions the student as a continuation of a generational narrative, and it may be called "peacemaking and storytelling." Researching one's family history and analyzing the forces that have resulted in one's current social position is one example of how this process would manifest on the level of the student. This process would elevate the family itself, and the student would be encouraged to continue their engagement with their family to consider what generational narratives have guided their family to the position they find themselves in currently. The family would then be encouraged to engage in the practices of peacemaking, addressing generational traumas and familial rifts—a process which, today, mainly happens for individuals during mental therapy sessions.

*Community: Home-building:* The third process, on the community level, is called "home-building and the fusion of horizons." The idea of "home-building" as a social process is proposed by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who underscores the fact that because society has become so diverse, with numerous social groups with tragically intertwined histories, society must be built together in order to create structures that account for the diversity of lived experiences (Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*). Home-building may only occur when people work together on shared issues and build a sense of a common future. The goals that they must face together are wicked problems, as defined by Rittel and Weber. By analyzing complex dilemmas that have real impacts on themselves and those around them at school and in the community, students learn how difficult it is to address wicked problems. But in the process, students are able to develop an explicit understanding of where their problems intersect or even contradict the problems of others, a process which John Dewey called the "fusion of horizons." Ideally, going through this process will equip students and community members to better understand themselves in relation to others, and will be better able to design solutions and make decisions for collective community uplift.

#### **4. Public Investment creates Community Value**

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<sup>15</sup> Moore, "Community as Classroom," *Community-University Engagement*, (2014).

The creation of shared projects and goals would unite industry, government and civic society in an unprecedented way. The clear benefits for all would justify a public investment in the higher education system, akin to the level of funding during the “golden age” of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. In Kerr’s conception of the public benefits of higher education, he stated that training and methodologies of the managerial class would result in a better-run society. In this alternative framing, the benefits of higher education come as a direct function of the university’s core processes: issues are defined by the community itself and addressed directly by researchers and practitioners.

Because of this direct impact on community outcomes, the financial model of the H3 university could become a publicly financed operation with explicit social and financial returns for the community. Public funds could be assembled that would sponsor the training of individuals to address public issues, fill local employment gaps, and address local economic/health concerns. Funds could come from taxes, university budgets, donors, and local corporations.

## H2: Disruptions and Transitions

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Transforming higher education from a private good to a public good cannot happen instantaneously, but various transitions can be put in place to deliberately shift the higher education system. These transitions can harness various adjacent or external transitional forces which are already exerting pressure on the system to change. Among these forces are the student debt crisis, climate change, AI and automation, and popular distrust of public institutions.

**Strained Financial Model: Student Debt Crisis.** The first disruptive force is the student debt crisis and the strained financial model of higher education in the present day. Built out to a large extent when schools were enjoying the “golden era of higher education” with ample public funding, today’s universities now operate under constrained budgets, declining enrollments, and sharp declines in federal funding.

- *Lower tuition (12 - Parameters):* College could find ways to lower tuition, through grants, loans, subsidies, or internal changes that reduce the cost per student.
- *Expand enrollment and diversify enrollment types (12 - Parameters):* Colleges could find efficient ways to expand enrollment, thereby increasing revenue and reducing cost per

student. They may do so by offering online or hybrid enrollments, or offering skills certificates or retraining programs for adult learners.

- *Optimize net tuition revenue (parameters):* Colleges could find ways to increase net tuition revenue by maximizing yield amongst the most wealthy students and international students. They could reduce or maintain the amount of seats in the enrolling class, driving up the scarcity and demand for these seats, enabling them to charge more per student.

**Complex “Glocal” Issues: Climate Change and Built Environment.** Another large disruptive force is the interconnected complexity of global and local issues, termed “glocal” problems. These problems include climate change, urban and rural infrastructure, supply chains and distribution networks, and information and media flows.

These complex, interconnected, “glocal” challenges will require graduates who are experts both in global systems and local manifestations. The following shifts may result in the following:

- *Reduction in on-campus infrastructure (Buffers and stocks):* Colleges could invest in online infrastructure and teaching and reduce the amount of physical assets they have, which may reduce costs and allow for global enrollment.
- *Investments in integrated 3rd spaces accessible to students and locals ():* Investing in public infrastructure in partnership with local and state governments could produce benefits both for colleges and students. It could improve business districts, provide higher tax revenue for cities, and reduce crime and poverty in certain areas, but it may also cause the displacement of low-income residents.
- *More partnerships with local and global organizations ():* to address global and local issues, colleges would partner with a multitude of organizations and help coordinate resources, influence policies, and conduct research.

**Changes in the Workforce: AI and Demographic Trends:** Technological and demographic developments will drastically impact the future composition and requirements of the workforce. A declining population of young people, an increasing population of older people and retirees, increases in immigration and an increase in the percentage of non-white workers and students in education and the economy means that the 21st century American workforce will be dramatically different than it was in the 20th century.

AI and robotics-driven automation has the potential to transform the relevant skills of this workforce. Just as assembly lines and manufacturing techniques transformed the manufacturing economy, and as managerial techniques and organizational structures transformed the knowledge economy, AI has the power to dramatically change decision making structures, business analytics, workflows, and productive capacities. Already, software engineers harnessing AI are experiencing dramatic boosts in productivity and output, as well as graphic designers, email writers, and data scientists. There might be a shrinking amount of human labor required to fill certain industries.

- *Lifelong learning (The structure of material stocks and flows):* Address the learning gaps of all ages at all times, serving as direct and parallel partners to the workforce.
- *Changed goal of higher education:* If automation and AI reduce the amount of jobs available or necessary for humans, colleges could shift their focuses to emphasize social and emotional learning, moral formation, and civic training.
- *Skills-based hiring and eliminating college degree requirement:* Reducing college degree requirements in jobs enables cheaper entry into the workforce and can address hiring difficulties. Job seekers can save money by not pursuing a degree, while employers can pay less to skilled, non-degreed workers.

**Mistrust of Institutions:** Attacks on higher education and a declining public sense of faith in higher education, and concerns at the astronomical ticket prices of tuition from many institutions, have resulted in a sense that demand for college degrees might be decreasing, and that employers and society may begin to lessen the amount that they value the research and training of higher education institutions.

In order to address these declines and remain relevant in the public eye, higher education can implement the following interventions, which would accelerate the H3 university:

- *The length of delays:* 5-year curricular evaluations, done jointly by civic society, industry, and government.
- *Research and Decision-making Process:* Universities then move from studying community needs to co-designing and delivering concrete initiatives in defined geographies (e.g., a “one square mile” commitment). Teaching, research, and operations are aligned with these commitments rather than remaining siloed.

- *Building new Feedback and Governance structures:* Finally, institutions create durable channels—advisory councils, shared governance seats, data-sharing compacts—through which communities can shape priorities and evaluate impact. These feedback structures are key leverage points that enable deeper paradigm change and sustain the shift toward higher education as a public good.
- *Incentives & Positive Feedback Loops:* Publicly Engaged Scholarship and Pedagogy Reward structures and curricula are redesigned so that community-engaged research and community-based courses are central, not peripheral. Over time, these practices habituate faculty, staff, and students to see public work as core to academic excellence.
- *“Culture of encounter” Class:* where students learn to be open and present to people of all backgrounds in their city. Learning to look beyond bubbles.

Harnessing these mounting pressures on higher education in deliberate ways can shift the university towards being a public good. One university models the policies and interventions that can be put in place to drive towards fundamental systemic change.

## H2 Transitions: The ASU Case Study

Completing a fundamental paradigmatic shift from the university as a private good to the Community-University requires a change in institutional structures and processes that have been maintained for centuries. Arizona State University is one example of an institution engaged in such a shift, investing heavily in their surrounding communities, regional economies, and playing an active role in the city’s development.

### **Paradigm Shift: Inclusive Excellence**

The first and most important step in ASU’s transition was to reject the accepted way of pursuing excellence. In Michael Crow’s inaugural speech in 2001, he explained how ASU would reject an exclusive, narrow vision of social mobility. They would reject the practice common amongst colleges to simply try and emulate the Ivy + institutions by lowering their acceptance rates and increasing the research prowess of their institution. Crow rejected the idea of selectivity as the hallmark of excellence, instead emphasizing broad, inclusive success for all. ASU has committed to looking beyond the individual and now considers the entire region’s health, economy, and future. Universities like ASU consider themselves as “national service

universities,” or as “anchor institutions” whose fate is intertwined with that of its city and region.

*Declaring A New Direction:* ASU adopted the ASU Charter in 2002, distilling the direction of the university. It reads:

*“ASU is a comprehensive **public research university**, measured not by whom it excludes, but by **whom it includes** and how they **succeed**; advancing **research and discovery** of public value; assuming **fundamental responsibility** for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the **communities** it serves.”<sup>16</sup>*

This charter grounded ASU’s work in the local region and declared a renewed attention to the state of its communities, which is exactly aligned with the paradigm described in H3. They also adopted nine design principles to help guide their actions:

1. *“Leverage Our Place: ASU embraces its cultural, socioeconomic and physical setting.*
2. *Transform Society: ASU catalyzes social change by being connected to social needs.*
3. *Value Entrepreneurship: ASU uses its knowledge and encourages innovation.*
4. *Conduct Use-Inspired Research: ASU research has purpose and impact.*
5. *Enable Student Success: ASU is committed to the success of each unique student.*
6. *Fuse Intellectual Disciplines: ASU creates knowledge by transcending academic disciplines.*
7. *Be Socially Embedded: ASU connects with communities through mutually beneficial partnerships.*
8. *Engage Globally: ASU engages with people and issues locally, nationally and internationally.*
9. *Practice Principled Innovation: ASU places character and values at the center of decisions and actions.”<sup>17</sup>*

### **ASU Transitions: Leverage Points**

By 2014, it was clear that ASU had made great progress in making their charter a reality. In a 2014 publication on its achievements since 2002, ASU described a wealth of initiatives that showcased their assumption of responsibility in the community and their major contributions to the common good. Universities that wish to emulate ASU’s successful transitions could study

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Crow, “[New American University](#): Toward 2029 and Beyond,” Arizona State University, (2024).

<sup>17</sup> Crow, “New American University” (2024).

how they implemented their design principles. I will highlight a few from the 2014 publication and discuss their effectiveness in terms of leverage points.

### **Leverage Point 12 - Parameters**

*Money for community outreach, volunteer hours, organizations*

The university showed increases in the amount of volunteering that their students conducted, as well as the amount of money they devoted to work that invested in the community or built partnerships. Increasing time and money to community outreach and partnerships are important and easily communicable initiatives that showcase a new area of increased attention.

### **Leverage Point 10 - The structure of stocks and flows and nodes of intersection**

*Multiple entries through partner campuses, community colleges*

ASU built partnerships with several community colleges, creating new pathways to more easily transfer to ASU to save money and consolidate credits. This effectively expands the amount of pathways to get to ASU. They also built partnerships with existing campuses that were tangential to ASU before, creating a stronger, more connected system.

*High school direct enrollment*

ASU partnered with certain Arizona high schools to create direct enrollment into ASU. This increases college attainment and reduces overhead in marketing and recruitment and applications. It also expands ASU's presence in the local community as high schools are important nodes in neighborhoods.

*Public-oriented clinics and hospitals ASU Health Services NP*

ASU Health Services NP is available to campus members and anyone in the community, providing a key touchpoint for quality healthcare services in the region.

*ASU Preparatory Academy, American Dream Academy*

By founding a high-performing charter school ASU Preparatory Academy, ASU contributes to higher educational outcomes in high school, which leads to better attainment at the college level as well.

The American Dream Academy provides resources and training for parents from low-income areas to better enhance the educational outcomes of their children. This involves parents into the educational success project and addresses structural disparities in cultural capital.

### **Leverage Point 7 - Positive Feedback Loops**

#### *Awards and Designations for Community Involvement*

The many awards, recognitions, and invitations that ASU has received in its pursuit of community service and engagement are positive feedback loops. Examples include the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the Changemaker Campus Consortium, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Community Engagement classification, and the Clinton Global Initiative University network. Maintaining these honors becomes a goal, and the university has incentives to maintain that recognition.

#### *Teaching teachers*

ASU students participate heavily in Teach for America and other local teacher training programs, which creates higher quality teaching in the region. Better teaching leads to better educational outcomes at all levels in the educational system, which eventually leads to better quality students and graduates at ASU.

### **Leverage Point 6 - The Structure of Information Flows**

#### *State of Arizona Reports*

This report published by ASU's Department of Community and Municipal Relations highlights issues in the region. It also provides key insights on how outcomes vary by ethnicity. This report is available to local organizations, policymakers, and the general public and provides insights on problem areas, growth, and change.

#### *Arizona Indicators*

In a partnership with several local and state agencies, ASU has created a website with "easy-to-understand visuals" showcasing trends in healthcare, employment, education and other key metrics in the region.

### **Leverage Point 5 - The rules of the system (incentives, punishments, constraints)**

*Publicly engaged scholarship and research centers built around present issues in the community*

ASU has created many research centers that partner directly with industries or address local issues in the environment, energy, or innovation. Many of the research grants it has been awarded are directly due to their embeddedness in public issues, such as the \$15 million grant it received from the US Department of Energy for the Algae Testbed Public-Private Partnership. ASU also received \$20 million from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency to research national security issues related to climate change.

ASU has also launched numerous research centers geared around local and global issues, many of them receiving large monetary awards from governments and foundations for their research.

#### **Leverage Point 4 - The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure**

*Department of Community and Municipal Relations*

ASU established the department of community and municipal relations to manage the school's partnerships with the local organizations, as well as local, state and federal governments. This department helps facilitate partnerships and alleviates the administrative burdens of doing so for each of ASU's various departments and centers. This enables ASU to handle more partnerships and makes those partnerships more effective. It has also contributed to the creation of the State of Arizona reports, published in tandem with the state government.

#### **Leverage Point 3 - The goals of the system**

*Inclusive excellence, promote the common good*

The rejection of exclusivity and the championing of inclusive excellence that was signified during Michael Crow's inauguration speech succinctly communicates the new goal of ASU. Hand-in-hand with that goal of broad student success is the assumption of responsibility for the local community. Claiming a duty to preserve and promote the common good becomes a new defining direction for the school that has driven many of the changes expounded above.

#### **Leverage Point 2 - The paradigm**

*Collectivism, new mission statement/charter*

The goal and the shifts described above flow from a new paradigm which views ASU as a part of the community in which it is located, rather than a separate force. Out of this fundamentally

integrated and place-based point of view, ASU defines itself as a publicly accountable enterprise, and a key champion of the common good in its immediate locale.

ASU epitomizes the types of changes necessary to transition higher education from a private good to a public institution, anchored in the region and delivering a variety of different goods and services to the region and its constituents. The success of this transition began with new leadership who ushered in a large-scale paradigmatic shift, and it was bolstered by intentional structural changes and programmatic initiatives that allowed that paradigm to take shape. Other institutions of higher education can learn greatly from the success of ASU's model and implement similar changes.

## Conclusion

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Higher education has been defined by several distinct eras—each characterized by shifting sources of funding and a changing sense of public purpose. The model of education championed by Clark Kerr posited college as a way of upgrading the workforce for the expanding knowledge economy. This would enhance individual earning potential and lead to a better-managed society. Earnings data for college graduates show that the first intended outcome of this vision has largely come to fruition, but has also resulted in several unintended consequences. As public funding for education has evaporated, higher education has become seen primarily as a private good, justifying gargantuan student loan debt. Climate change, automation, and the mistrust of public institutions have compounded upon the already-strained financial model of higher education, creating multiple crises. To emerge from these crises, higher education must evolve to expand a bold vision of its public purpose.

Universities must invest in their communities, directing their research, learning, and partnering powers to identify and address the problems that affect their local communities. Universities must implement a new feedback loop—an iterative, interoceptive process that is grounded and fueled by local constituents who have a fluid and dynamic relationship within the university and the broader community. Constituents must become defined more broadly as whole, embodied persons with spiritual and mental health, who form part of family units, which combine together to create a community. Arizona State University has epitomized these changes under the leadership of Michael Crow since 2002, and their efforts show the various levels of interventions that universities may implement to actualize a bold, broad public purpose.