UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Strategic planning: Review of external data/information
Briefing theme: Hybrid Learning & Working Environments

Background:

- Much has been written from thought leaders and pundits alike about how the pandemic has caused a once-in-a-lifetime disruption to almost all sectors, including post-secondary education. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has not been a change agent so much as an accelerant of trends already well underway. In what some are calling "post-Corona", several real threats and opportunities lie ahead for higher education.

- The following briefing provides a synthesis of these trends that are disrupting post-secondary education that are specific to the hybrid learning and working environments that have become commonplace. This is pertinent for the University of Calgary to consider as we embark on the development of our next strategic plan.

Key Trends Identified:

Students have come to expect a flexible learning experience that takes full advantage of digital-first teaching methods. Moreover, faculty and staff are also demanding flexibility with when and where they work. The role of 'place' is shifting, and our thinking needs to shift with it.

- **Hybrid learning environment can enable 'learn from everywhere' model.** Hybrid learning does not just mean combining a virtual and physical classroom, but allowing for truly immersive and experiential learning, enabling students to apply concepts learned in the classroom out in the real world. Rather than shifting to a "learn from anywhere" approach (providing flexibility), education institutions should move to a "learn from everywhere" approach (providing immersion).[i]

- **Pedagogy moving away from lectures and towards active learning.** Lectures are an efficient way of teaching and an ineffective way of learning. Universities and colleges have been using them for centuries as cost-effective methods for professors to impart their knowledge to students. However, with digital information being ubiquitous and free, it seems ludicrous to pay thousands of dollars to listen to someone giving you information you can find elsewhere at a much cheaper price. Education institutions need to demonstrate effective learning outcomes, and some are starting to embrace teaching methods that rely on the science of learning. This shows that our brains do not learn by listening, and the little information we learn that way is easily forgotten. Real learning relies on principles such as spaced learning, emotional learning, and the application of knowledge. The educational establishment has gradually accepted this method, known as 'fully active learning'.[ii]

- **Mass digital learning.** Courses will be designed to be delivered through technology – 'digital first' – and supplemented by face-to-face, human support. Smart bots for every subject open up the possibility of personalized learning at scale, monitored by advanced learning analytics. And if the student does not have to leave home or work to experience this (unless they wish to), consumer choice really opens up.[iii]

- **Hybrid work environments for faculty and staff.** The pandemic demonstrated that most knowledge workers can do the job from home. This is causing employers as owners and occupiers of real estate to rethink the role of the office.[iv] Most leading-edge companies have announced that flexible, hybrid work will be their primary working model moving forward. These policies are expected to be essential to attracting and retaining talent, and improving employee morale going forward.[v, vi]

Several important considerations flow from this. For example:

- o **Balancing flexibility with valuing in-person social interaction.** The challenge for institutional leaders is to find a balance between allowing greater flexibility for remote work while retaining the most vital face-to-face interactions that make campus life distinctively vibrant for all who work, live and study there.[vii]
- o **Understanding where synchronous collaboration adds value to the work.** In order to implement this there needs to be a strong understanding of what type of work needs to happen collaboratively together, and what type of work can happen independently or asynchronously.
- o **Changing capital requirements.** With the rise in hybrid working environments there becomes less of a need for individual office space and more of a need for collaboration space. The rise of hoteling/hot desks is rapidly changing traditional office dynamics.
- o **Digital fluency for faculty and staff.** Ensuring faculty/staff have the digital fluency to effectively work in a hybrid environment (and for example, effectively engage students) is critical.

[i] El-Azar, D. (2022). Four trends that will shape the future of higher education. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/four-trends-that-will-shape-the-future-of-higher-education/.

[ii] El-Azar, D. (2022). Four trends that will shape the future of higher education. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/four-trends-that-will-shape-the-future-of-higher-education/.

[iii] KPMG (2020). The future of higher education in a disruptive world. Retrieved from https://home.kpmg/ca/en/home/industries/government-public-sector/education/the-future-of-higher-education-in-a-disruptive-world.html.

[iv] McKinsey (2022). Ten lessons from the first two years of COVID-19. Retrieved from https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/ten-lessons-from-the-first-two-years-of-covid-19.

[v] Amoruso, S. & Elliott, B. (2021). Reimagining Higher Education for the Age of Flexible Work. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/06/02/colleges-shouldnt-expect-their-employees-work-same-ways-they-did-pandemic-opinion.

[vi] Ellis, L. (2021). 'A Mass Exodus': Inflexible Remote-Work Policies Could Bring Major Staff Turnover. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-mass-exodus-inflexible-remote-work-policies-may-bring-major-staff-turnover-for-colleges?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in.

[vii] Amoruso, S. & Elliott, B. (2021). Reimagining Higher Education for the Age of Flexible Work. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/06/02/colleges-shouldnt-expect-their-employees-work-same-ways-they-did-pandemic-opinion.