

Statement Paper

By Hussain Lootah

Northern Arizona University| Educational Leadership

CCHE 690 Master's Seminar

Dr. Maureen King

April 28, 2023

Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 there has been a deep decline in morale amongst the faculty and staff of our institution. There could be many reasons for the decline in morale around campus. The trajectory of higher education has been changing since before the 2020 pandemic, and the pandemic seemed to take the accelerate the rate of these changes and it seems that the impact of these changes is affecting college campuses all over the country. In our institution specifically, it can be felt by the faculty and staff all the way down to the student population. In this dissertation, I will examine the possible causes and solutions to reverse the issues that can be reversed as well as, find ways that our institution can adapt to some of the irreversible changes that have occurred post pandemic so that we may improve the campus culture of this institution.

The most significant problems that we are facing seem to be among the faculty members. There has been a feeling of uncertainty withing the faculty and staff. The institution has been experiencing higher resignation rates, and less motivated faculty.

Uncertainty is the first issue that comes to mind when it comes to observing such a “great resignation” among the faculty. Higher education institutions are businesses, and the customers of such institutions are students. Tuition is a large part of funding for colleges and universities and if students are not enrolling, tuition is not being collected which means that institutions are losing money. The reason for this is because enrollment in higher education has declined by nearly 1.3 million students since the spring of 2020 (Selingo, 2022).

According to the 2022 COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility and Progress Report, higher education experienced a total two-year loss of 296,200 transfer students, or 13.5 percent (nearly 200,000 fewer, or -9.1%, in year 1 and an additional -97,200, or -4.9%, in year. (National Student Clearing House, 2022) The Covid-19 pandemic exposed challenges for higher ed's financial stability and workforce that had been accumulating for years. (Selingo, 2022).

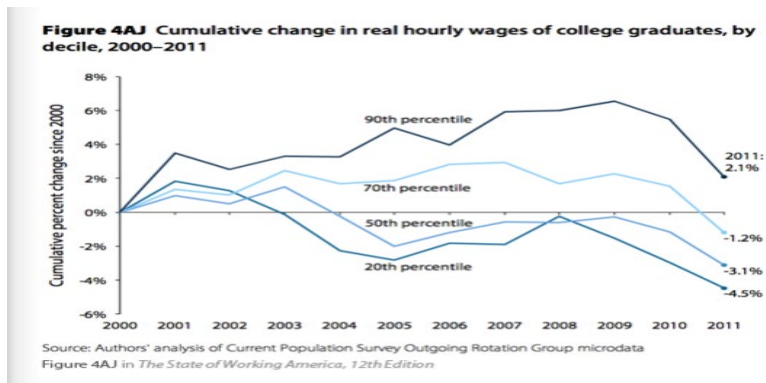
How Students View the Value of Education

Additionally, there has been a large number of students who are beginning to question the value of a traditional education. It's not that people think a post-secondary education isn't necessary, rather the question they're increasingly asking is whether a traditional, residential college is the right pathway after high school or if taking time off or earning a two-year degree first or getting a technical education is a better route (Selingo, 2022). Education costs are constantly rising.

Over the years, the cost of a college education in the U.S. has been steadily increasing. In the past 30 years, average tuition and fees were lowest at public two-year colleges, moderate at public four-year institutions, and highest at nonprofit four-year colleges. (Bouchrika, 2023) Many students who graduate with bachelor's degrees do not find themselves making their desired or expected income. In 2022, median annual pay was \$52,000 for Americans with a bachelor's degree, according to data released by the New York Federal Reserve Friday (Tanzi, 2023). That's a 7.4% decline in inflation-adjusted terms the steepest plunge since 2004, erasing nearly all of the pandemic-era gains. (Tanzi, 2023) While secondary-degree holders are still paid more, those who didn't attend college are catching up. Americans with only a high school diploma made 93% of what recent graduates with a bachelor's degree in the bottom quarter of wages made. The ratio is up from 79% in 2021, and it's back at the levels seen in 2019 when

tight labor markets were boosting pay at the lower end of the spectrum. (Tanzi, 2023) These are very startling numbers. It is certainly understandable that students are beginning to seek alternatives to traditional four-year degrees.

As previously mentioned, this is a trend that began well before the pandemic. According to the graph below,



“The 10-year decline in wages for most college graduates, (figure 4. AJ)” (Mishel, 2012)

As you can see, the 90th down to the 20th percentile of income has significantly declined from 2000 to 2011. This has been an ongoing trend. After reviewing the data and the information stated above, it is now clear why students are thinking about taking other paths to post-secondary education, which is causing enrollment rates to decline, which is causing a decline in revenue for the institution. These factors are possibly causing uncertainty within the institution, which has a negative impact on our staff, faculty, and it is also causing stress on the leadership of the institution.

The Impact on the Institutions Faculty and Staff

Due to the uncertainties and rapidly changing environment of higher education institutions, faculty and staff performance has shifted in a negative direction and the staff and faculty employment dropping. Bureau of Labor Statistics data do show a decline in

postsecondary instructor employment between May 2020 and May 2021 (1,369,930 versus 1,340,560, respectively) (Flaherty, 2022) According to Inside Higher Ed's 2022 Survey of College and University Chief Academic Officers, 19 percent of provosts say faculty members are leaving at significantly higher rates than in the past. Sixty percent say they are leaving at somewhat higher rates. (The percentages were larger for questions about staff turnover.) (Flaherty, 2022). This phenomenon of "great resignation" within higher education is impacting the faculty and staff that are not leaving because they feel overwhelmed.

When employees feel overwhelmed, overworked, and underpaid this is where the issue of quiet quitting occurs. Quiet quitting is when employees no longer put any extra effort into their roles. They only perform their core duties and the bare minimum to keep their jobs. This becomes a problem because the creativity, innovation and effort that is exuded when a professor truly feels happy and is engaged in their work, it produces a more superior experience for the class and that creates a demand for that course. Imagine if the entire faculty still had the motivation to put maximum effort into their courses. The quality of education (product of the institution) that would be delivered to the student (the consumer of the institution) would be beneficial in many ways. A workforce that is willing to go beyond the call of duty is a critical competitive advantage. (Klotz & Bolino, 2022) lack of opportunity for advancement was just as impactful as insufficient pay on decisions to quit in the past year.² (Hawes & Reynolds, 2022)

Proposing a Solution

In order to reverse these negative impacts, I propose that we implement practices that would allow us to run the institution more like a business and give our faculty more autonomy and creative freedom to design their courses, as long as there is no state or federal compliance violation within the material they want to teach. The institution also needs to implement state of

the art technologies and offer more programs than only the typical traditional programs of the traditional college or university. Disruptive educational innovation replaces existing methodologies and modes of knowledge transmission by opening new alternatives for learning. It also introduces new advances in education systems through information and communication technologies. (Morales, Moreno, & Rojas, 2021) This educational disruption considers both the student and the professor as engines of learning to promote an open curriculum enabled by new digital education (Morales, Moreno, & Rojas, 2021)

The impact of the pandemic will bring an era of radical technological transformation, with accelerated digitalization to the worldwide higher education system (Morales, Moreno, & Rojas, 2021).

Professors do have some degree of autonomy over their courses already, but now that the campus environment has changed so much due to the pandemic and classes are being taught remotely now. The professors who still choose to engage with onsite classroom courses should be able to promote or market their classes if they wish, in order to gain student interest. This would also give the professors a sense of ownership over their course. The same opportunity should be afforded to the faculty who choose to teach remotely. Additionally, more classes should be available as mixed use online or on campus. What I mean by this is classes that are on campus should give students the option to go to the lecture hall and sit in on the class or log in remotely to attend. By giving students the option, enrollment rates would increase.

The rationale for this method is because there are many students who would like to take a class during a certain term, but they cannot because perhaps that class is only online and the student prefers to learn in person, alternatively, there are students who have schedules that

prevent them from on campus courses. By developing this mixed-use method, when and where it can be applicable.

Providing more options for the students would increase enrollment rates. Increasing enrollment rates would provide more certainty as the institution would begin to thrive again. This would also be achieved by converting the campus environment to meet the needs of the post pandemic society by allowing more virtual alternatives and providing technological tools that will be necessary to successfully achieve this goal. The challenges that may arise from this endeavor may be funding technological conversion. However, the payoff would be increased enrollment rates, higher graduation rates which would result in higher revenues from tuition and more state funding opportunities. As of the 2020 fiscal year, 41 states have adopted performance-based funding policies for higher education opportunities. (Whitford, 2015)

Implementing these changes are unique because the institution would become a state of the art world class center of higher education, attracting a diverse range of students with all of the unique programs and course design along with a new wave of faculty ready to showcase their talents and partner with the institution as educators instead of only clocking in, assigning the same traditional courses, assignments or exams with rigid on-campus or online choices that might not suit all students. This plan will most certainly usher this institution into the new wave or higher education.

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