Journal of
Higher Education Policy
and
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

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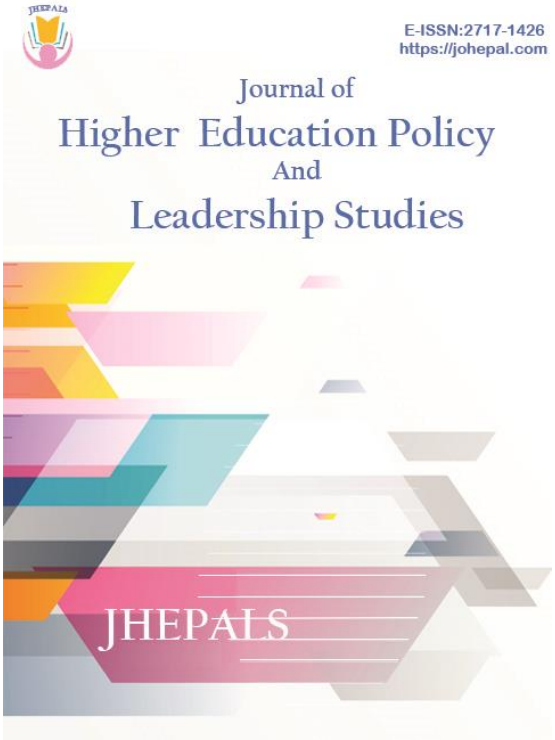

Fit for Purpose -- Leading Universities in the Knowledge Economy: An Interview with Prof. Lynn Bosetti

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Interview Questions Submitted	Interview Responses Received	Published Online
2022/08/15	**2022/09/15**	**2022/09/30**

Cite interview as:

Bosetti, L. (2022). Fit for purpose – Leading universities in the knowledge economy: An interview with Lynn Bosetti. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *3*(3), 133-145. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.52547/johepal.3.3.133

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[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.3.3.133]

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Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 3 Issue: 3
pp. 133-145
DOI:
10.52547/johepal.3.3.133

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Prof. Lynn Bosetti is an internationally recognized researcher and thought leader in leadership in higher education. In her research and practice she is committed to deepening the scope and capacity of universities to make education viable and accessible for wider communities, including Indigenous peoples and marginalized groups. She has been a Visiting Fellow at University of Cambridge, University of Glasgow, and The Centre for the Study of Higher Education at Melbourne University. She has held a variety of senior leadership positions including Dean of Education at La Trobe University in Australia, and Dean of Education at University of British Columbia in Canada. Her research focuses on school choice and middle-class anxiety, university leadership in the new economy, and on incivility and the emotional labor of leaders in higher education in Canada and Australia. Prof. Lynn Bosetti is currently professor of education and leadership studies at University of British Columbia, Canada.

https://education.ok.ubc.ca/about/contact/lynn-bosetti/

Keywords: Higher Education; Leadership; Knowledge Economy; Neoliberalism; Universities

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Interview

It is an honor and privilege for us to host **Prof. Lynn Bosetti** as a globally renowned scholar and higher education leader whose research, books, talks, interviews, and notes are extensively cited and acknowledged throughout the world with a research/ professional focus on *Leadership in Higher Education, Critical Policy Studies, Change Management, Emotional Labour* and *School Choice*.

We are sure that **Prof. Bosetti**'s insightful, illuminating and critical responses to the following questions will be of interest to a broad audience of international researchers, students, policymakers, and leaders in Higher Education.

Question #1

How do you define a leading university in the context of the internationalization of higher education?

Answer:

To understand leadership in the context of the internationalization of higher education is to first understand the dynamic landscape of the highly competitive and stratified global higher education market. Since the early 1980s the role and mission of the university in society has been challenged by globalization, the demands of the knowledge economy, the commodification of knowledge and the introduction of new approaches to public management, often referred to as corporatization or "new managerialism." This turn is associated with the rise of neoliberalism and the New Right, introduced by Thatcher in the UK and Regan in the US, and the dominance of the political economy of capitalism, which has fast become norm for the Western world. For the university, this is characterized by the shift from professional to executive power, and financial reform that links the allocation of resources to achievement of defined measures of performance, productivity and excellence (Radice, 2013).

The traditional core mission of the university as a vehicle for social mobility, the preparation of young people for responsible civic and economic engagement and fostering the social and economic prosperity of the nation is threatened by this narrow economically driven value system. Governments are preoccupied with university efficiency and accountability for return on investment of public funds, the provision of marketable skills for employability, widened access to higher education, research output, and forging alliances with business and industry (Bosetti & Walker, 2010).

World university rankings drive political decisions regarding funding universities and resource allocation within the university. Achieving a "world class" ranking signals prestige in the global market and the ability to attract funding and support from alumni, business, industry and government, the opportunity to invest abundant resources in outstanding facilities for research and teaching, and the reputation to recruit elite-star academics and

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the most academically capable students. Institutional branding is a core component of intuitional strategy that defines their niche in the global and regional higher education market.

The impact of the marketization of higher education is the creation of a multi-tiered, stratified system of higher education. Less prestigious universities are left to cater to broadening access for non-traditional, low income, first generation and minoritized students. They tend to be regional, largely undergraduate, comprehensive universities. They are student- centered and teaching focused in their mission and responsiveness to the needs of the regional community and labor market. Research intensive institutions with robust graduate programs become the realm of academic elite.

In countries such as the US, there is a wide range of post-secondary institutions from which students can choose. The few private, Ivey League institutions are the gold standard to which institutes of higher education aspire. Hazelhorn (2007) reports the majority of the top 100 internationally ranked universities have adopted key aspects of the American research university model with an orientation towards Western cultural values in both academic work and university management, as well as euro-centric epistemic dominance. Some countries, such as China, have invested in selected few universities which aspire to world-class status (Lumby & Foskett, 2016) creating a highly competitive system with limited access for students.

What does this mean for Leadership?

The values and practices that have governed traditional university systems are not sufficient to respond to the externally imposed demands of the knowledge economy. They place high value on collegial forms of governance and academic authority, protection from external interference, and dedication to the pursuit, preservation and dissemination of disciplinary knowledge. Universities must diversify to broaden access to higher education, partner with business and industry, develop and apply knew knowledge to achieve public benefit, and balance basic research with applied research to address policy needs of society (Coldrake, 1999).

World rankings (e.g., QS World University Ranking, Times Higher Education World University Rankings and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)) provide clear criteria upon which universities are assessed and inform institutional strategy and resource allocation. Leaders pay attention to the academic reputation of their institution and their discipline (faculty/department). This is determined by research output measured by individual faculty citations and publications, grant income, international outlook (proportion of international faculty and students), teaching reputation (faculty to student ratio, student satisfaction, credentials of staff and doctoral to undergraduate program offerings) and employer reputations. At an institutional level, leaders must attend to the health and viability of their organizational unit (i.e., faculty or department). Viability is dependent upon income generation through student enrollment, satisfaction and employment—indicating a continued demand for programs and reputation of graduates. Leaders have their eye on

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their performance dashboards, and performance measures determine competitive funding allocation from the university and grant funding from government.

In this context, leaders have developed business and political acumen to understand how to position their institution or organizational unit within the higher education market in their region and nation. Climbing international rankings is always an aspiration; however, understanding the role and mission of the university in the local or regional context is critical to serving both the public (civic dimension) and private (employability of graduates) responsibility of the university. A stratified/diversified system of higher education can have its advantages: one being providing metrics for becoming the best in a particular category, the other being motivation to differentiate as a response to emerging needs of the labor market and widening access for students not served by elite universities.

This system also has disadvantages. International rankings and competition create an open market for the academic elite and wealthy who can afford the tuition, creating a bifurcated system of higher education. For developing nations this can be a brain drain of the nation's most capable, where they are lured by the prestige of attending top ranked universities and the credentials to work in international contexts

Not all institutions can be ranked in the top 100, nor should that be the aspiration for all universities and colleges. The idea that higher education and hard work can lead to upward mobility and better quality of life is a fundamental tenant of the dream of the middle class and increasingly, the aspiration of diverse groups in society (e.g., immigrant, low-income, minoritized people). Universities have a social and moral responsibility to contribute to the development of their nation by providing educational programs for people in their region and applied research to solve complex societal problems. This may include specifically catering to diverse groups, including immigrant, low income and minoritized people. Not all of these institutions are research intensive or show up in world university rankings. Nonetheless, they have an important role in preparing students for the workplace and contributing to the social and economic development of the region.

What are the characteristics (missions, functions, process, …) of "good governance" in a leading university in the coming decades?

Governance is the process and practices through which the university organizes itself to achieve its mandate. It lays out the distribution of legitimate authority to influence and enact politics and decisions. It defines who has power, who is in charge, and who is responsible. Its primary role is to set the direction of the institution, the deployment of resources, and overseeing the health of the organization (Trower, 2010).

Shared or collegial governance has been the hallmark of how universities are governed. Central to this approach is the meaningful involvement of academic staff and other stakeholders (e.g., staff, students and members of the public) in deliberations and decisions that contribute to effective institutional governance. Collegial governance, meaning governance by the collegium of scholars, is a mechanism that prevents non-academics, such as corporate or state organizations, to drive the academic mission of the university.

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Typically, senior academic leaders such as deans and vice-presidents are appointed from the professorial ranks. As accomplished scholars they have an understanding of the complexity of academic matters and the unique culture and traditions of academia.

Some universities operate on a bicameral (or two chamber) system of governance. Typically, this includes a Board of Governors, which is a non-collegial body comprised of appointed experts in business and finance who are responsible for long ranging planning, sustainability and business affairs of the university. The second body is the Academic Governance Council, a collegial body, subject to the authority of the Board of Governors, that is responsible for the academic affairs of the university.

There is increasing criticism of the limitations of the current governance structure of universities. The collegial model of governance is not agile enough to respond to the volatility of the global economy and a highly competitive higher education market. It is argued that while high performing boards and senates can steer the university to achieve its mission and mitigate financial and other risks, this requires a shift in board composition, mindset and focus. One Australian-based organizational consulting firm that provides advice on restructuring university governance, calls for Board of Governors to operate with more strategic/commercial knowledge, to focus on performance outcomes and take calculated risks through targeted investments to grow the reputation and financial sustainability of the institution. They encourage Boards to adopt entrepreneurial approaches to testing and rolling out new tech systems to enhance operational efficiency and disrupt established ways of working. Boards need a shift in mindset (e.g. business minded with an eye to the bottom line) and to recruit members who can provide the right mix of capability needed (professional experience) and diversity of perspectives (age, gender, background, sector of the community) to ensure the viability and future of the university (Rowe & Ashkanasy, 2022).

The best strategic plans, processes and structures, however, can only be realized in practice and that requires a shift in organizational culture, compliance and incentives. There is considerable resistance among academics to corporate approaches to governance and the appointment of non-academics to leadership positions. This approach threatens academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and collegial forms of decision-making about academic matters that inform their professional identity and work.

Good governance involves attending to the core mission of the university that includes attention to its moral and social responsibility to be guardians of democracy and civic good, to promote inclusive environments and widened access to higher education. Corporate managerialism narrows the focus of the university on economic imperatives such as competition, revenue generation, branding and institutional ranking. The Board of Governors and the Academic Governance Council need to work with care and due diligence to develop new approaches to governance based on the basic principles of corporate governance: accountability, transparency, fairness and risk management and to ensure the preservation of core values of the university.

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Learning from the experience of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus, who ruled for 45 years, Festina Lente— Make haste, slowly. The fastest way to get something done is to do it right the first time.

Question #2

Based on your lived experience of administrative position in academia, what is the relationship/correlation between leadership in higher education and leadership in other organizations? (Either similarities or differences).

Answer:

I have been in academe for over 30 years, and in an administrative role for almost half of my career. In the past two decades I have witnessed a significant change in higher education that has coincided with the rise of a neoliberal reform agenda in education (i.e., managerialism, performativity and competition), and the corporatization of the administration and governance of higher education. While this is more pronounced in countries such as Australia and the UK, it has impacted higher education internationally, and significantly in the Global North.

The shift is driven primarily by the rise of a dominant political ideology that embraces capitalism and the free market, consumerism and choice, accountability, and a decline in public support for education. The protected walls of the ivory tower of the university are being penetrated by corporate interests through appointed membership on the Board of Governors, philanthropic contributions for endowed professorships, new buildings and named schools, privatization of services, and commercialization of scientific discoveries and licensing of intellectual property.

The reduction in government funding has forced universities to operate as a business: efficient, cost-cutting, and seeking profit making opportunities to be sustainable. We see this in program rationalization, an increase in hiring sessional (untenured) staff, attention to the student as consumer, an increase in partnerships with business and industry, and the centralization of decision-making. We also see corporate language and values becoming part of the culture of higher education. For example, we have senior executive teams, school business managers, external business and organizational consultants hired to reform the structure and governance of universities, the use of executive search firms to hire faculty and leaders, and new pathways to academic promotion for those without a doctoral degree (i.e., professors of practice), and career administrators who are promoted through their service and leadership (e.g., Faculty Deans without a record of scholarship).

Traditionally, university leaders were hired from the ranks of the professoriate as accomplished scholars. This was to ensure loyalty to the culture and traditions of academe and the professional experience to inform academic matters. More recently, university leaders are appointed from the private sector, valued for their business acumen and ability

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to raise funds. Academics, however, remain skeptical and generally resistance to these forms of governance.

Universities are unique institutions and remarkably resistance to change. Most people become academics because it provides a rarefied environment to pursue their intellectual passion in research, knowledge creation and dissemination, to find a home within their discipline with colleagues around the world, and to help solve complex problems for society. Academics value academic freedom, independent thought and the protection tenure provides to investigate controversial issues. Unlike the corporate world, academics are motivated by the pursuit of knowledge and discovery, rather than year-end bonuses and profit. Academics will move institutions if afforded more freedom, support and opportunity to purse their research passion, teach in their discipline area of expertise and become an internationally recognized star professor. Academics increasingly have little allegiance to their institution, rather find affiliation with their discipline. Despite surveillance and performative measures for compliance to institutional policy and goals, managing academics is more like herding cats and in some cases, lining up lions.

Question #3

From the standpoint of critical policy analysis, what are the main non-academic policies/decisions that have marginalized higher education values and principles?

Answer:

Institutional core values are important because they inform the vision, mission and identity of the institution, provide guidance for conduct and decision-making, and reflects the unique spirit and culture of the institution. The defining core values of the university are open inquiry and the pursuit of truth. The traditional and more fundamental values of the university include academic freedom, institutional autonomy, public engagement and social responsibility to the community. More recently diversity, inclusion and equity receive high attention, as does creativity and innovation.

There are a number of external factors that are having a significant impact on the core values of the university. These are grounded in the decrease in public funding and support for higher education, instability in governments and the global economy, climate change, the commodification of knowledge, and broadening access to a diverse range of students, including those from marginalized groups.

Universities continue to be seen as an engine to drive economic development and social prosperity; however, the emergence of private, for profit post-secondary instructions, credentialling by private and in-house training programs, and rise in student debt creates the impetus for universities to find new ways of doing business and remain financially viable and relevant in society. In summary, the following key favors have marginalized the core values of higher education, and universities in particular:

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1. The creation of a competitive higher education market where institutions compete for research funding, international students, high performance researchers and students, and measured by global university rankings and performance metrics.
2. A highly regulated government funding and accountability framework constrains and intervenes in academic decision making and influences the strategic direction of the university. These conditions create a culture of surveillance, performativity and accountability.
3. The reliance on new forms of technology to make university operations and delivery of programs more efficient, flexible and convenient for management.
4. Partnerships with business and industry to provide infrastructure, fund and commercialize research, and endow research chairs.
5. The marketization of higher education has put increased value on education as a private good. Student- as- customer/consumer are choosing higher education providers that can accommodate their life circumstances, maximize value for their investment and develop positional advantage in securing employment in the global labour market. Student satisfaction and employability are drivers in the transformation of higher education with a shift to focus on workforce development and economic development. (Mintz, 2021).
6. The population of most nations is changing demographically due to factors such as global migration, age, socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and gender of its citizens. Nations are compromised of multiple social identities, and host to variety of political and ideological perspectives. The market for higher education has expanded to include socially and culturally underrepresented groups who challenge higher education to be more inclusive and accessible. Social movements such as Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+ and Indigenous rights contest the epistemic dominance of Anglo euro-centric knowledge systems and call for decolonization of institutional structures, governance and pedagogical practices, along side inclusion of alternative epistemologies.

Question #4

How is change management possible in higher education, especially in contexts in which higher education leadership is under the control of non-academic forces (such as market regimes, states, etc.)?

Answer:

The corporatization of university governance and management has shifted much of decision making away from academics into the hands of senior executive teams. Change is driven by economic imperatives to mitigate financial risk and long-term sustainability of the university. Metrics inform strategic planning and are used to create an identity/brand and place within the differentiated and stratified higher education market, both regionally and nationally. Performance dash boards and key performance indicators are used as mechanisms of

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surveillance to monitor the health and viability of programs, organizational units and research output of faculty.

Universities use external organizational management consultants to develop their change strategy and to oversee change processes, particularly when this involves organizational restructuring, program rationalization and staff redundancy. Institutions have developed clear protocol when they engage in a change process to ensure there is no violation of fair work enterprise/contractual agreements and to minimize workplace action that will impede the implementation of change.

University senior executive are fully aware of the significant and lingering impact of organizational culture in the implementation of change. Strategic plans are not blueprints for change, rather aspirational documents that direct change, and need to be revisited and adapted over time. Legendary management consultant Peter Drucker reminds leaders "culture eats strategy for breakfast." What that means for the management of change is the best laid plans will fail without an organizational culture that encourages people to implement it. A healthy culture creates space for stakeholders (faculty, staff and students) to have a voice in the process and see their place in the planned future. Organizational units (faculties and departments) appreciate some degree of freedom to respond creatively and positively to the challenges creating the need for change, and to work collaboratively to respond to the challenges. Members of the academic community want to be consulted, acknowledged and treated with respect and integrity, because in effect, they interpret and implement change.

What should be done so that higher education in underprivileged contexts can enjoy the universal values of higher education while protecting their own values and identities?

Higher education is an important investment of limited public funds in the development of human capital in developing nations. Due to the high cost of higher education and increased competition for very limited seats, the quality and accessibility of higher education falls short of stakeholders' expectations. There are simply not enough places for qualified students to access higher education. Some governments have responded to increased demand by encouraging public-private partnerships (PPPs) and permitting transnational higher education providers to become established in their country. This permits foreign countries (or their agencies) to offer online or correspondence programs, private (unaccredited) colleges to be established, and foreign universities to establish offshore campuses. There are important considerations in creating conditions for expanded access to higher education in developing nations, and regulatory frameworks for foreign, offshore providers.

1. The choice of programs students pursue are not driven by the socio-economic needs of the nation, but the desire to gain the knowledge, skill and qualifications to enable them to get jobs to support their families and increase their life chances of social and economic mobility. Affirmative action by governments can provide incentives for students to study in areas believed to catalyze social and economic development in

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the region (e.g., science, technology, health and agriculture) and to create culturally responsive solutions to complex problems in their society.

2. External service providers of higher education are often insensitive to the national development priorities and social needs of the nation. There is a need for government regulation to ensure students are receiving affordable, culturally relevant, high-quality education to contribute to a highly skilled national labour force.
3. To mitigate cultural imperialism (Anglo, Euro-centric perspectives) through adoption of foreign developed curriculum and pedagogical practices, and to preserve the cultural values, traditions and identity of students, developing nations can consider decolonization and indigenization of higher education institutional practices, pedagogy and curriculum. This means integrating indigenous perspectives, values and cultural understanding in policies and daily practice; positioning indigenous ways of knowing at the core of the institution to inform decisions and governance; and including cultural protocols and practices in the operation and governance of the institution. Adopting critical perspectives in pedagogical practices is important in deconstructing colonial ideologies and privilege of Euro-centric/Western thought and approaches; and honoring local knowledge and practices (Wilson, 2018).

Question #5

What is the future of the labor market for graduates of higher/educational studies and how could the graduates of higher education have a better chance of employment in the knowledge-based economy?

Answer:

The future of the labour market is difficult to predict with any accuracy. The instability of governments, the precarity of the global economy, climate change and the global COVID pandemic have had a profound impact on local economies. We are witnessing mass migration of people from war torn countries, many of whom are highly educated and motivated to find any form of employment, as well as a highly competitive global market for talent. Technology has enabled workers to work from anywhere. The rise of the gig economy provides a level of freedom and flexibility (and precarity) for workers to operate as independent contractors competing for short-term contracts.

There appears to be no strong correlation between the post-secondary program students pursue, the credentials they acquire and the jobs they eventually occupy. In the global north we see an increase in work-place learning in which employers provide training to upskill employees to meet the requirements of the job. Those with degrees are also seeking additional credentials through intensive short courses to add value to their resume.

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What does this mean for students of higher education who want to enhance their chances for gainful employment after graduation?

For an elite few, graduating from a top ranked, highly selective university adds value to their credential and provides a competitive edge. The institutional brand signals to potential employers that these graduates are knowledgeable, highly skilled, capable individuals. The average acceptance rate for elite universities is around one in four. STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), health and business majors are reported to be the most lucrative fields of study, as opposed to the humanities and social sciences, with graduates enjoying higher earnings after one year of graduation (Carnevale, Cheah & Hanson, 2015).

Despite the ranking or status of the institution, a university degree distinguishes potential employees from non-degree holders, with credentials that indicates they possess the knowledge, skill and capabilities for high skill jobs. One of the roles of the university is to identify, filter and create the best possible future employee.

While it is hard to predict what jobs will be available in the future and which course of study will be most viable, there are steps students can take to enhance their marketability and ways universities can provide support for students. The following are some examples:

1. Opportunities to study at a foreign university for a term. In a globalized knowledge economy, employers value graduates with international experience and education. Learning an additional language, understanding new cultures and developing international professional and social networks broadens opportunities.
2. Internships and co-op programs. This provides relevant work experience within a chosen career, creates opportunity to make professional connections and gain practical, on the job training and experience. Graduates in these programs are more prepared for the reality of the work world.
3. Data informed decisions: Universities have access to a wide range of data (work trends, demographic shifts, external/environmental change factors) to better advise new students to make informed choices in the selection of their program of study and majors.
4. Digital badging of credentials/portfolio of learning. In seeking employment, it is important for graduates to be able to distinguish themselves through their disciplinary knowledge, competence, skills and accomplishments. A traditional university transcript does not reflect non-formal and professional learning accomplishments, or meta-skills at a granular level (Hartnett, 2021). In seeking career opportunities graduate can develop their brand or professional identity through digital portfolios, shining a light on their experience, competencies, skills and specialized knowledge. This is particularly important since graduates are likely to change careers five to seven times during their working life, and qualify for new jobs that do not currently exist. To be" future ready" entails being able to bundle together experience, credentials and skills to fit emerging opportunities, and to upskill through continuous learning.

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5. Government Incentives: In some countries, governments have provided incentives for students to pursue higher education in particular subjects (e.g., STEM, agriculture, health, climate change) that are key to the socio-economic development of the nation. Incentives can be in the form of student loans, scholarships and research funding, as well as grants to universities to develop degree programs in areas of need.
6. Broad-based education. The Director of Georgetown University's Centre on Education and the Workforce argues the best strategy for workplace preparation is to have a mix of two-thirds general education and one-third focus on a specific field of expertise (Basken, 2020). Employers are seeking graduates who can think critically, enquire, appraise, work collaboratively and purposefully, and effectively communicate their ideas. This happens to be the foundations of a traditional liberal arts degree, the essence of which is not to teach that which is particular to any of the professions, but to lay the foundation which is common to all of them (Zakaria,2015). Unfortunately, the current emphasis on job readiness and the economy has diminished the role and significance of the liberal arts and humanities.

What are the solutions? What policies or procedures do you suggest?

In the knowledge-based economy the core mission of higher education is to prepare students with the disciplinary knowledge, digital skills and cognitive and behavioral capabilities to address the needs of workplace. Higher education also has a civic role in preparing students for citizenship, active civic engagement and to be the new generation of leaders who will understand and help solve problems in society.

The funding and support for higher education varies among and within nations. Institutions serve a range of aims and functions in response to the social and economic needs and priorities of their region. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the way universities organize to accommodate teaching and research both on campus and remotely, and has highlighted their important role in public engagement to address the needs of the civil rights of minoritized groups, climate change, conspiracy theories, fake news and the rise in authoritarian forms of government in democratic societies. This signals the need to consider the balance and interactions between social sciences, humanities and the sciences, and the core values and purpose of the university in society in the post-coronavirus future.

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