Is the American University in Crisis?
The Future of the University of North Georgia

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"Big changes are coming, and old attitudes and business models are set to collapse as new ones arise. Few who will be affected by the changes ahead are aware of what's coming. If our goal is education for as many students as possible, as affordable as possible, then the end of the university as we know it is not to fear. It's something to celebrate."[1]

So what is this crisis? Who sees it as a crisis—the students, their parents, our governments, citizens, those of us who have spent our lives in universities and see them as a public good? Will a new era of creative destruction lead to a "university of the future," re-affirm the traditional university or develop a new hybrid model? In the next few minutes we will probe this topic to provide a context for considering how the University of North Georgia is positioned to survive and even thrive in the face of such a proposed crisis.

A few years ago, I came upon this provocative statement:[2]

"Universities have become nothing more than very expensive coffee shops. Much of what they provide can be replicated in other places, or on-line, or through new platforms."

This statement suggests that the only value of the university is to provide a social environment for young people, and that what else the university offers can be provided in other ways. Such an interpretation has been made even more explicit by a series of predictions about the future of our universities:

- A workshop facilitator stated that "today's universities will become nonviable in 10-15 years."[3]
- Peter Drucker told *Forbes,* at the end of the twentieth Century, that the traditional university model is dead and that big university campuses will be dead in 30 years.[4]
- Others have suggested that:

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[1] Harden N: The end of the university as we know it. The American Interest. http://the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?buffer>share=74e54&piece=1352
[2] Going Global,2012
[3] Chaloux B: Emerging trends in online learning: Great challenges (and great opportunities!), SUS Strategic Planning Committee Workshop, December 17, 2012.
[4] In Brody WR: College goes global. Foreign Affairs, March/April, 2007, pp.122-133.

- "the bottom 25 percent of colleges will disappear or merge in the next 25 years,"[5]
- "the middle of the pack, traditional colleges will lose out to nimbler, cheaper, competitors offering degrees with flexible time-lines, lower cost, in a hybrid format or fully on-line,"[6] such that only 600 traditional colleges will survive in the next few decades.

Presence at an institution is no longer essential.[7]

The predictions attack the traditional, bricks and mortar university and seemingly favor the classrooms in the sky—the virtual universities—an outcome of today's technology revolution.

While we stoically defend the value of what our universities offer, we also need to take seriously that the once held awe for our universities has been replaced by disdain over the limited access, "absurd" price and excessive student debt—one in five households owe student loans—and an "irrelevant curriculum" that fails to produce the skills employers expect. Eighty percent of adults surveyed in a poll by *TIME* magazine and the Carnegie Corporation of New York said that education at many colleges is not worth what students pay for it.

And, our own governments—from the president to federal and the state governments—have also been highly vocal in criticizing higher education, devising assessment schemes, price caps and tuition controls, and proposing penalties if costs are not reduced.

But, something must also be right about our universities. They have survived fundamentally unchanged for over a thousand years and countries all over the globe are replicating them on their own soil. Nonetheless, even the universities are "restless." Never in my lifetime in higher education has there been as much discussion about change and our future as there has been in these last several years in response to forces that are affecting higher education:

Globalization has changed how nations envision and support economic development in the world's competitive landscape; how businesses seek talent, services and products across borders; how geopolitical power is redefined and knowledge is redistributed; how citizens perceive and expand their own opportunities and how universities refocus their efforts to embrace competition and collaboration in order to prepare our students for an ever-changing world.

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[5] Clayton Christensen, Harvard Business School and The Institute for Disruptive Innovation
[6] Selingo J: Colleges can still save themselves. Here's how. The Chronicle of Higher Education, Dec. 6, 2013, p.A72.
[7] Andrew Rosen, CEO Kaplan

Higher education is an engine of "prosperity, innovation and social mobility"[8] and is valued both domestically and globally. In 1900, about half a million people worldwide were enrolled in college; the number expanded to 100 million in 2000 and in 2009, 150 million students were enrolled in education beyond high school[9], a number that represents more than one in four college-age young people worldwide.[10] We have a challenge to help.

The **cost of a college education** is high and continually increasing. It is unaffordable for many people in its current configuration. The student loan debt in the U.S. now surpasses the nation's credit card debt. Students are looking for low cost alternatives and technology is one way of meeting this need. Students are enrolling in college for only a few critical courses to gain specific expertise and credentials rather than matriculating in a degree program and taking courses they see as irrelevant.[11]

The **population of college students** has been redefined. The18 year-old recent high school graduate, full-time, resident student is declining but is joined by a significant population of "earn and learn" students,[12] adults returning to complete degrees, to advance in their careers or change to new ones, second career retirees, skill-builders, GED completers, certificate seekers, and part-time distance learners.[13] More students are under-prepared and need "relevant" remedial assistance (basic education and skill training),[14] and the student population has become racially, ethnically, financially and socially more diverse, with roots in every country. And, we cannot forget the advanced student – your ACCEL students – who have significant pre-college credit. The nontraditional student has become the traditional student.

Residential students have greater demands for amenities, technology, more self-serve options, and service. The off-campus, working and part-time students do not require campus amenities and activities, but desire convenience in place and flexibility in time to complete their studies. They need efficiency in education. The community colleges, for-profit colleges and virtual universities successfully meet these needs and present a competitive challenge to the residential universities.

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[8] Stengel R: Reinventing College, TIME, October 29, 2012, pp. 33-41.
[9] UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) data.
[10] Andrew Sullivan's blog.
[11] Small E: College students are bypassing degrees on purpose. HigherEd,News, March 25, 2014.
[12] 35-40 percent of college students need to work and 75 percent of them are working and have rigid time schedules that need to be accommodated.
[13] The college of 2020: Students. The Chronicle Research Services, 2009, p.48.
[14] Mangan K: Job training programs make remediation relevant. The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 18, 1014, p.A8.

Teaching, Learning and the Curriculum. The world of learning has been transformed and the tools for learning are changing traditional models and methods, assumptions and relationships. The process of learning trumps the transmission of content which so quickly becomes obsolete, irrelevant or wrong.

> "Students need to be disturbed—fascinated and thrilled by   what they learn. They need to gain the tools to make sense of a complicated world and they need to be immersed for part of their lives in an environment that treats intellectual inquiry—not demonstrating competence—as the highest goal."
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> Joann N. Neem, 2013[15]

> "We should judge teaching not by the amount of knowledge it passes on, but by the enduring excitement it generates."
>
> Gary Gutting (2013), Notre Dame Endowed Chair in Philosophy

Educating and entertaining students go hand-in-hand. The short attention span of students emphasizes the need for "active learning classrooms" and experiential activities that enhance a career. The Generation Z Students who were born into a digit world[16] will demand an education on their terms: technology-based, customized/ personalized, with options that cater to their strengths, provide remedial assistance, and assign college credit for work and life experiences. They would like to design their own curriculum and learn according to their own style.[17] Technology and experiential practices integrate students into the educational process and they become both teachers and learners.

The curriculum is and will be created on campus, as it has always been, but technology can bring together the best expertise in any field through on-line courses that can be accessed anywhere…and at a reasonable cost.

Business and employers are more engaged in higher education and have a greater say in the need to strengthen the connection between higher education and a job or a career. What was once a cultural divide between vocational preparation and academic educational programs has come closer together and the combination is appealing to students and employers.

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[15] Neem JN: Experience Matters: Why competency-based education will not replace seat time, Liberal Education, Fall 2013, Vol. 99, No. 4

[16] Brown N: Meet Generation Z: Forget everything you learned about Millennials. http://socialmediaweek.org/author/nbrown/

[17] The college of 2020: Students, Chronicle Research Services, http://research.chronicle.com, June, 2009, pp. 2-53.

A survey of business leaders found that more than 60 percent of employers had difficulty in filling positions with employees who have the "the right knowledge and skills." A mismatch between the preparation of our students and the qualifications for available positions has been estimated to leave two million high skill jobs for college grads unfilled.[18] Employers are looking for individuals who are not only prepared in their disciplines, but also have some knowledge of global, financial and environmental awareness, ICT skills, critical, innovative, creative and strategic thinking, a sense of entrepreneurship, intercultural understanding and appreciation, and the ability to work in groups as well as to take the lead,[19] and they are investing $485B annually in training—a cost that outstrips the investment in education.

Moreover, students, themselves are investing in special courses and programs offered by for-profit companies to improve the business skills they did not get with a college degree.[20] Can UNG incorporate these suggestions into the curriculum, and/or offer special skill-related programs and provide a graduate who does not need to retool once she leaves the academic environment for the world of work? Have universities become "job shops" catering to the immediate workforce rather than preparing students with an education for life?

And should—or could—the university consider a **new definition of faculty**, to capitalize on talent and life experiences, and add professionals such as businessmen, public servants, military personnel as well? Many adjunct and part-time faculty hold their primary positions in another profession but also serve the university as instructors, clinicians etc. They, too, can be subject matter experts.

Timing of Education. The current time scale for a college education doesn't work for students who are part-time and desire to be anytime students. Time is expense and there is a push for accelerated learning strategies. Competency-based learning[21] eliminates seat time and allows students the freedom to progress—rapidly or slowly—until they master the material.[22] Adaptive learning uses data-driven information to design coursework that allows a student to progress at his/her appropriate level and pace; three year options favor advanced students, and modular and accelerated courses to be completed short term speed up the education timeline. The important outcome is learning, not

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[18] Spence M: The impact of globalization on incomes and employment. Foreign Affairs 90:July, Aug, 2011, pp. 28-41.

[19] Marcus J: Business leaders unimpressed with college grads' skills. The Heckinger Report, April 29, 2014.

[20] Colarusso LM: Students pay extra for business skills they say they haven't learned on campus, Higher Ed,News, July 8, 2014.

[21] For example, the Western Governor's University; Northern Arizona University

[22] Berrett D: College, on your own. The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 18, 2014, p.A19.

how it is obtained.

In another context, we might want to reflect on when education is needed. When is it appreciated? Can there be "just-in-time" educational opportunities to help an individual transition into a new area pre-requisite to a job, or to fulfill a desire to learn something new in passing through the different stages of a life time?

This may be an opportunity to create a long lasting relationship between the students and their university—or perhaps with a new Google-like university—to connect them, their current needs, location and time-scale demands with a menu of opportunities for different kinds of educational experiences—local and outside of the university region, and to broker these relationships. The university could also maintain the various credits and credentials earned. Technology, again, could be at the forefront of various different programs.

Assessment and credentialing have always been the link between education, employment and societal advancement, and the role of universities. New assessment tools and certification programs from other educational venues are becoming more prevalent. Sixty-seven percent of employers surveyed found transcripts either "not useful" or only "somewhat useful" in evaluating the potential of a job applicant and are considering points, badges, certificates and other credentials as pre-requisites for employment.

The **continuum of education** is evident with the boundaries between different levels of education becoming less rigid, especially at the higher levels. Transformation in one sector means that others must adjust accordingly and again, technology is pushing this transformation.

Partnerships used to be an embellishment to some academic programs but are now "core." Partners in government, education, business, the community and public and social service—at home and abroad—are involved with universities in education, research, and as advisors and funders, or all of these. Partnerships are the foundation for the activities in outreach and engagement:
that "aspect of teaching that enables learning beyond the campus walls, the aspect of research that makes what we discover useful beyond the academic community and the aspect of service that directly benefits the public." Universities and colleges capitalize on unique regional opportunities for partnerships and join consortia to expand resources and contain costs.

Technology figures in virtually all of these forces that impinge upon higher education, on the University of North Georgia. It provides access, convenience, release from time constraints, new strategies for teaching, learning and unlimited

discussion, additional components to a curriculum, reduced cost, delivery in variable locations, and instruction by a panoply of faculty. Technology empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning and offers choice.

So, is the "University of the Future" a virtual university or is it the traditional university with virtual locations as elements of it? Is the traditional university really in jeopardy or are there accommodations that recognize and take advantage of the fact that the traditional and the virtual universities serve different but also overlapping needs?

It has been suggested that technology and communications are gateways to the future and bricks and mortar universities are "monuments" to the past, but as we have said, education is not only about delivering content. The on-campus experience offers "close learning," providing the irreplaceable proximity between student and teacher in the classroom and in other activities where the faculty serve as advisors and mentors to the students. Students develop social skills, live and work with peers in a supported environment and explore extra-curricular opportunities such as field studies, internships and research experiences. Education happens through culture. People learn from the reality of living and working together.

Universities are full-service entities—not focused on only one activity but link research, teaching and outreach and engagement activities in the many entanglements they have with a multitude of enterprises—activities that technology alone cannot support. A Gallup poll surveyed 1000 adults[23] to collect their opinions about curricular options, value for money, format for success, tailored instruction, and rigor in grading,[24] finding that on-line education rated lower than the traditional classroom in instruction tailored to the individual, high quality instruction from well-qualified instructors, rigorous testing and "dispensing" a degree that is valued by employers.

And let's be realistic, there are well over 4000 universities and colleges in the U.S. and they continue to add or replace buildings on their campuses. It is, therefore, almost absurd to think that this kind of university will go away.

But it is also undeniable that the current technology and communications revolution is creating an e-future. The digital world is a reality for our BYOD[25] students who desire faster, briefer methods of communication that can result in immediate action, who want more mobile learning…and they want choice. On-

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[23] October, 2013
[24] Carlson S: Online education an also-ran, poll finds. The Chronicle of Higher Education.
[25] BYOD=Bring Your Own Device.

line courses, especially MOOCs, build assessment into the teaching and learning strategy. Class polls and surveys, immediate peer-to-peer feedback on-line provides for continuous improvement and serves to define and refine course content, keeping the information up-to-date and challenging.

A blended approach can bring the traditional and the virtual worlds together. On-line programs including MOOCs have a place in the traditional, residential universities and can work in concert with high impact practices such as service learning, research and capstone project.[26]

Minerva is an example of a for-profit, on-line program that has global attributes, a residential opportunity and a rigorous undergraduate curriculum. Students from several countries will begin their programs in their home countries this fall, and then move together to another country each semester where they will live together and experience cultural events and attributes as they engage in an on-line academic program. The price is less than 50 percent of the tuition of elite U.S. universities. But this kind of experience does not need to occur in a new university. Similar elements can be adapted by bricks and mortar universities[27]

Today's need is not one brand of education because there is not one brand of student. What is needed is a broad spectrum of choices with a range of time scales, engaging a range of instructors, price points, and outcomes and credentials that meet the needs of today's students. The challenge is for our universities, for UNG, to be nimble, innovative, strategic, responsive, accountable, sustainable, relevant, connected and engaged and to incorporate a range of opportunities and strategies that will produce a graduate with a positive economic future who will make significant contributions as a citizen. How flexible and nimble is UNG to accommodate these changes and what is its real and long term relationship with the student?

But wait! As the TV infomercials say. Is there anything really new about this "crisis" or about the response higher education needs to make? Some of you may remember the series of reports of the Kellogg Commission prepared more than 20 years ago on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities and roles of our universities. The specific notion of the "University of the Future" did not surface, but the reports the Commission developed topics suggestive of how to improve our future.

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[26] Selingo J: Innovation in 2014: Welcome to the evolution. The Chronicle of Higher Education, Jan. 17, 2014, A52.
[27] Carey K: An idea too sensible to try, until now. The Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 16, 2012, p. A80.

- <u>The student experience</u> needs to be open, accessible and flexible in a university without walls that has genuine, student-centered learning communities; where students become independent, active learners and engage in research opportunities…where the university addresses the academic and personal development of students in a holistic way.

- <u>Student access</u> is a public policy issue with challenges of price and diversity, with opportunity presented by technology to accommodate and assist new learners, new ways of judging merit and providing course credit, focusing on what students need for success.

- <u>The engaged institution</u> is based upon the concept of sharing and reciprocity. It enriches the student experience by bringing research and engagement into the curriculum and offering practical experiences to put knowledge to work for the community and society.

- <u>A learning society</u> focuses on lifelong learning opportunities that are socially inclusive, views technology as a tool to enrich learning and to tailor instruction to societal, individual and organizational needs. It values regional and global connections, fosters public policy and provides an education to promote individual well-being, benefit corporate productivity, enhance the quality of community life, and security of the nation. A learning society develops conscious connections between knowledge and action, theory and practice.

- <u>A coherent campus culture</u> is the foundation for a healthy learning environment; emphasizing social and moral values. It promotes an institutional culture rather than a fragmented, silo-ized set of cultures. It requires administrative leadership and definition of the nature of acceptable scholarly work.

- <u>A new covenant</u> for learning, discovery and engagement recognizes a new age and different world that promotes civil societies globally and recognizes that the borders of education are less discrete and technology erases boundaries.

I am reminded of the film "Back to the Future….." Not much has changed in the concerns, but much has changed in terms of the economy, globalization and greater access to more powerful technology.

The University of North Georgia is ideally positioned to respond to the goals of the Kellogg Commission Reports of the past and the nearly identical goals for the so-called "University of the Future". You have many avenues for access, various venues and price points for admission, programs that accommodate the non-traditional students, and through your academic and research initiatives you are

extensively linked with the region for purposes of outreach and engagement, economic development and providing assistance.

You are student-centered, globally conscious, stress cross cultural competency and you have created unique partnerships—including—and especially—with the military. Your students have numerous experiential opportunities, notably research, and internships programs and have leadership development as a goal. You understand the importance of seamless transfer programs, connect with K-12 and live the continuum of education. You are committed to student success from all perspectives. Technology provides you with opportunities to add new initiatives and expand existing ones like your engagement with eCORE. Research creates an environment for additional partnerships and teachers innovation and entrepreneurship to expand the student experience and to support regional economic development—growing business and adding jobs.

THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH GEORGIA MAKES A DIFFERENCE—for students, society and broader civic purposes. UNG, like all universities, will need to continually evaluate where to place your focus to balance the needs of the public, demands of the students, requirements of the policymakers, interests of the faculty and academic community with quality, cost and access.[28] And, you are well on your way today with this focus through your efforts in developing a new and truly strategic plan for UNG's future.

Universities exist to equip new generations of human beings for meaningful lives, with and for society. John Sexton, President of NYU, has said: "Universities are only as good as the students they send back into the world. The measure of a university is what the students experience between the day they arrive and leave." I predict the students at the University of North Georgia will have an extraordinary experience and I wish you all a productive and successful new academic year.

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[28] Chaloux B: Emerging trends in online learning: Great challenges (and great opportunities!), SUS Strategic Planning Committee Workshop, December 17, 2012.