

# Embracing change topic for 9 BC3 administrators

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(Burlington, Vt.) The mission of community colleges won't change in the next 13 years, but the missionary, impelled by economic and societal forces, may have to do so, according to a common thread among presenters in "Staying Tethered Amid Disruption," theme of a Strategic Horizons Network colloquium attended by nine Butler County Community College administrators.

To commandeer proliferating massive open online courses, some free, others offered at rates lower than those charged by bricks-and-mortar institutions; to prepare to train a workforce for the 50 percent of middle-skill jobs that do not exist but will by 2030; and to attract and educate citizens who will be living longer, more healthfully and more productively, community colleges must become paragons of resilience and stewards of reversing a trend of risk-aversion prevalent in the United States since the 1960s, according to presenters.

And community colleges must do so as the nation, its states and localities will continue to face financial distress such as stagnant tax bases, overspending and unfunded liabilities – economic crises exacerbated by over-regulation of job-producing small businesses, presenter Roger Selbert said.

"A reset is coming," he told an audience that included BC3 administrators Dr. Nick Neupauer, president; Dr. Case Willoughby, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management; Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation Inc.; Dr. Christian Ola, dean of business; Ann McCandless, dean of educational technology; Matt Kovac, dean of STEM; Patricia Annear, dean of nursing and allied health; Stephen Joseph, interim dean of humanities and social sciences; and William Foley, interim coordinator of communications.

Selbert predicts a period of "trials and tribulations."

Added presenter Ryan Polly: "Resilient organizations are made of resilient people. The essence of resilience for an organization is an ability to fail elegantly."

"Higher education," presenter Nina Huntemann said, "needs to change in a way that is not currently in all systems."

## Massive open online courses: The end of college professors?

Huntemann is director of academic partnerships at edX, an "online learning destination and MOOC provider, offering high-quality courses from the world's best universities and institutions to learners everywhere," according to its website.

It is the only major MOOC provider to still offer graded assignments free, Dhawal Shah wrote in April 2017. Students need pay only if they want to earn a certificate. Other popular MOOC providers include Coursera, Future Learn and Udacity – which partner not with institutions of higher education but with tech companies, according to Shah, founder and CEO of Class Central, which is described as “a free directory of online university courses that helps users track and find MOOCs.”

Udacity creates its own courses, taught sometimes by partner tech companies.

A nonprofit formed by Harvard and MIT in 2012, edX has 59 members – global schools, nonprofits, corporations and international organizations – 11 million global learners and offers 1,500 online courses, Huntemann said. Course enrollments have topped 40 million. Its students’ average age is 28, Huntemann said, and most hold a bachelor’s degree.

Like other MOOC providers, edX is characterized by its courses being on-demand – “Most online engagement occurs between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m.,” Huntemann said; connected -- “It is social, peer-recommended and global,” personalized – “Experiential, fun and self-directed,” mobile -- “Enabling learning-on-the-go,” and flexible – “Anytime. Anywhere.”

Sustained expansion of MOOCs could by 2030 lead to the extinction of college professors and instructors, Huntemann said, citing Thomas Frey, senior futurist at the DaVinci Institute, a Colorado think tank that focuses on technology. Teacherless education could be facilitated by coaches, course designers and learning camps, Huntemann said.

The speed with which higher education is changing is what resonated most, BC3’s Ola said.

“While academia in the past has been viewed as less aggressive in implementing change, every speaker made it clear that sitting back and waiting to change would yield really bad results for any institution,” Ola said. “As a businessperson at heart, this has kind of been my personal mantra anyway, so I am confident moving forward that we can lead the change rather than deal with the change. It’s a different mindset, but one that I think we are prepared for here at BC3.”

Current problems with the educational system are that it is too costly, too time-intensive, not scalable – unable to accommodate an increasing amount of work, or failing to realize its potential to be enlarged to accommodate that growth – and inflexible, Huntemann said. The educational system needs to confront and personalize the same disruptive approaches that have seen Uber challenge taxis, Netflix challenge theaters and Airbnb challenge hotels.

Higher education is one of three major systems, along with housing and health care, that is out of balance, according to Selbert, principal of Growth Strategies Group, and an expert in U.S. trends. Higher education is unaffordable, under government control and command, and when “things can’t go on, they stop.”

As such, massive open online courses and degrees will grow by leaps and bounds, Selbert said. Community colleges must fill the gaps and open online courses must be part of the structure.

The MOOC presentations resounded the most, BC3's Joseph said.

"They have been in my peripheral vision for a while and I've heard all sorts of predictions about their future," he said. "This presentation was good because it provided a realistic view of them plus offered possibilities for how we as community colleges can partner with the organizations that offer them."

## 2030: Are we ready to train for currently nonexistent jobs?

"The unknown," Huntemann said, "creates corporate, governmental and higher education panic."

According to Huntemann, referencing "Bridge the Gap: Rebuilding American's Middle Skills, Harvard Business School, 2014":

- 69 percent of human resource executives say they have an inability to attract and retain middle-skill talent and that inability frequently affects their firm's performance;
- 53 percent of the open labor market is in middle-skills jobs.

How will higher education skill or upskill vast numbers of people to meet the future? Huntemann asked. Higher education needs to change reskilling or skilling in a way that is not currently in all systems.

"The model going forward is focusing on what colleges and universities can do for the communities they serve," Neupauer said. "While the commonwealth's 14 community colleges benefit Pennsylvania as a whole, they do so by enhancing their local communities. That is very much the case for BC3 – and not just with our main campus in Butler. We enhance the communities in which we have a presence throughout northwestern Pennsylvania."

Huntemann would agree. Colleges, she said, cannot just shove a four-year program at a student and say good luck. That approach does not address students' time and money, and the employers' needs as an increasingly more technical, robotic future awaits.

In response, edX in September 2016 launched 19 MicroMasters programs. Its announcement: "A new category of master's-level online education, originally pioneered by MIT, to bridge the knowledge gap between higher education and the workplace, according to its website. The modular programs, which offer a credential with a pathway to credit, provide high-quality education from top universities to help learners launch or advance their career, or follow a path to an accelerated master's degree.

"A MicroMasters certificate is comparable to a significant portion, in most cases a quarter or a half, of a traditional master's degree, and is a valuable standalone credential that will help learners advance their careers. In addition, it offers a new path to an accelerated graduate degree. Learners who excel in the MicroMasters courses, successfully earning the credential, may then

apply to a full master's program; for those who are accepted – either at the university offering the MicroMasters program or another university that acknowledges the MicroMasters certificate – the digital credential will count as credit toward a portion of the degree, resulting in an accelerated program.”

“We need a porous system, with open walls,” Huntemann said. “Come in when you need it, and share resources.”

EdX's MicroMasters programs are faster “requiring only 25 to 50 percent of the time needed to attain a master's degree,” Huntemann said; they are career-focused, endorsed by employers; flexible, fully online and open admission; affordable, free to learn and cost about \$1,000 to apply for a MicroMasters credential; and represent a pathway to credit.

Enrollment in MOOCs is increasing, Huntemann said, adding that they have a completion rate of 40 to 60 percent. MicroMasters' completion rate is 80 percent.

“We connect the curriculum to employers,” Huntemann said. “We find corporate sponsors. This employer endorses this learning.”

Change is inevitable for any organization, BC3's Kovac said.

“I found it refreshing that organizational resilience can be developed and nurtured by striving to continuously improve,” Kovac said. “Taking calculated risks and learning from the mistakes that occur along the way creates a culture of viewing change as an opportunity not to be feared but rather embraced.”

## Living longer, learning longer, poised to educate and innovate?

Selbert, a business futurist in economic, societal and demographic areas who advocates for decentralization, discussed his rebuttal of two myths regarding the future:

That of Robert Gordon, author of “The Rise and Fall of American Growth,” who suggests that U.S. economic growth may be over, and that, according to Selbert, “The low-hanging fruit of innovation – such as air conditioning and indoor plumbing – has been taken.”

“Nonsense,” Selbert said. The pace of discovery is rising, particularly in pharmaceuticals that have been introduced against heart failure, cancer and Alzheimer's. These discoveries will disrupt and reconfigure advanced societies.

“We will be able to identify organisms at the genetic level and treat not symptoms but causes,” he said.

It will not be about what condition one has, but about what condition one might get and how to prevent it. Senior citizens will become increasingly older, increasingly more active and increasingly more productive, Selbert said.

“They will want to return to school,” Selbert said.

Computers, he added in his argument against a predicted dearth in innovation, have been steadily moving from calculations to cognitions.

“They have become extensions of humans,” he said. “Like GPS, they will help us to navigate life, a sort of GPS for life decisions.”

Selbert also dispels a notion by economist Tyler Cowen, author of “Average Is Over: Powering America Beyond the Age of the Great Stagnation,” who predicts that that 15 percent of future populations will be smart enough to take advantage of computers and 85 percent will have nothing to do, or must do something else.

“A recipe for disaster,” Selbert said, adding that Cowen’s forecast is based on two assumptions.

If present trends continue. “They don’t,” Selbert said.

All other things being considered equal. “They never are,” Selbert added.

He cited the invention of the washer and dryer, and that housewives of the 1950s would have nothing to do, that their lives would become “all leisure.”

A loss of jobs, Selbert said, would create a loss of society and of cohesion. Work is not just a financial arrangement, he added.

“It is social,” Selbert said. “It must be saved. Work is more important than the job. Work for everyone and work that is meaningful.”

## Resilient organizations can help reverse trend of risk-aversion

The driving force for a positive future, Selbert said, is “unfettered, disruptive innovation.” Edmund Phelps, author of “Mass Flourishing: How Grassroots Innovation Created Jobs, Challenge and Change,” stresses that individuals and organizations should “dare to try, fail and succeed,” Selbert said. These American traditions will remain true, as they were in the 1820s through the 1960s, when material growth and flourishing were rampant in the country.

What prevents disruptive innovation is the total cost of regulations, which Selbert said is \$2 trillion a year. He advocates for unleashing small businesses and individuals.

Cowen is also the author of “Complacent Class: The Self-Defeating Quest for the American Dream.” Jack Heidel, a University of Nebraska mathematics professor and fiscal responsibility blogger, wrote of Cowen’s book in March 2017 that American society has become much too complacent, self-satisfied in recent years:

- Fewer Americans are moving.
- Segregation (by income, education, social class and race) is increasing.
- Americans have stopped creating. New business creation is down and monopolies are getting stronger.
- Matching (i.e. assortative mating) is on the upswing.
- Calm and safety, above all, is the predominant attitude.

Such societal trends are normal and even desirable in many respects, Cowen writes. But they can lead to stagnation. Eventually needed social change will boil over in uncontrollable ways and America will undergo a “great reset.”

This great reset, according to Cowen’s book, will likely involve major events such as:

- A major fiscal and budgetary crisis.
- The inability of government to adjust to the next global emergency that comes along.
- A rebellion of many less-skilled men.

“The median male wage (adjusted for inflation) was higher in 1969 than it is today,” Cowen writes. “In fact, the take-home pay for typical American workers has been falling since the end of the Great Recession in June 2009. This may in part account for the populism seen in the November election.”

“We are risk-averse. We do not take new jobs, and innovation and job satisfaction are decreasing since the 1960s, when the risk-aversion began,” Selbert said, adding that “There is a difference between forecasting and wish-casting. There is no alternative. Power to the people will follow state and local bankruptcy.”

Forthcoming changes will necessitate a resilient organization comprised of resilient individuals, according to Polly, manager of Talent Strategies for Leadership, Learning and Diversity, University of Vermont Medical Center.

He cautions that 70 percent of change initiatives fail, resulting in a decrease in trust and morale from the workforce.

“Though these statistics are dismal, companies often return to the drawing board only to repeat the same frustrating results,” he says.

Organizations, Polly writes, don’t understand the simple truth:

That building a resilient work force is what reduces resistance to change. The key is understanding that initiatives fail due to misguided focus. The focus needs to be on building a resilient organization, not on teaching people to navigate a change model. By developing readiness for change, an organization can improve productivity, innovation and creativity.

Polly's presentation was "by far the most thought-provoking and meaningful to me," McCandless said. "I feel our entire BC3 staff would benefit from hearing this same speaker with the same message. We are all stressed and under-the-gun more than we ever were. Positivity is hard to come by unless you are truly happy in who you are and what you do. Knowing where you stand in your ability to be resilient helps you to refocus and try to make a necessary change before you are totally burned out."