

The Future Product-Offering of Higher Education: Technical Mentorship and Professional Development

You're surely reading plenty of submissions, so I'll be as brief as possible.

The content of a college education is becoming increasingly available to the public through open source resources and online PDFs of popular textbooks. Today, if I showed up to apply for any STEM job without a college degree, I would not be taken seriously. In 20 years, my generation will be hiring young adults into their first corporate roles. And many of us will be more prone to take the self-starter over the university graduate if they demonstrate to us that they learned just as much as or more than their university peers without paying for tuition and fees. That is, unless university education in 2040 distinguishes itself from public access resources.

This issue will only continue to evolve as industries become exponentially more complex. That being said, we need to rethink the value proposition of our universities. University Education in 2040 will need to distinguish itself from public access resources accessible via a Google or YouTube search. Universities ought to lead this change in their core product offering, rather than react to the open source environment. There are two opportunities universities are uniquely set up to provide students that you cannot similarly attain from YouTube or co-op experiences alone.

My recommendations for the symposium to consider as growing roles of the university, in the interest of furthering transformational learning in postsecondary institutions across the nation, are as follows:

1. First, to facilitate more industry mentorship relationships for students sooner. To effectively introduce this increase university-sponsored mentorship, we need buy-in from university leadership and strong well-maintained alumni databases throughout which students may conduct outreach. These mentor-mentee relationships may perhaps be best achieved through having more industry-based team projects integrated into university curriculum as a meaningful way for students to meet industry contacts and be exposed to the industry challenges that will soon be theirs to address. Universities are uniquely positioned to broker mentorship relationships through their alumni base, such that students may have exposure to early mentorship from those who have industry career lifestyles that STEM students believe they want.
2. Second, to develop more cohort-based engineering leadership development programs. To increase the availability of leadership development programs like these, we need policy makers and private donors to prioritize providing grants for such programming. You don't learn by doing, but rather by reflecting on what you have done, who you are, and what drives you.

We must educate students for the world they are preparing to enter, and invest our funding/time to build out new needed non-degree programming to augment our strong engineering educations. I look forward to analyzing the data surrounding this collection of thoughts in the interest of most effectively contributing to an informed discussion on this and other topics of the conference's and our future's interest.