

## EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

# Thinking about Higher Education

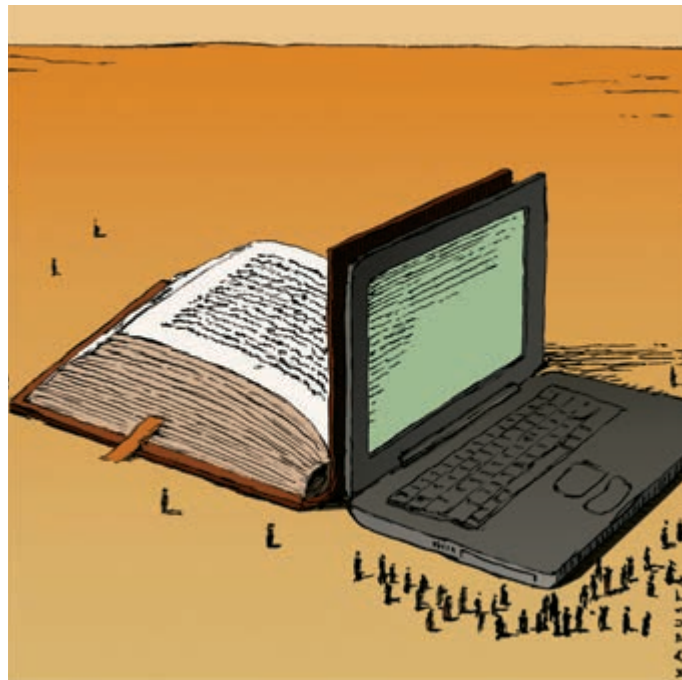
What is new in higher education, with the advent of online learning, MOOCs, or massive open online courses, and more? A lot—and hardly anything at all, says **Andrew Wall**, associate professor at the Warner School of Education. He was recently appointed chair of the school's Educational Leadership Program, and focuses his research in areas such as learning outcomes, state educational finance, and public trust in education.

### What impact do you think technology will have on the affordability of and access to higher education?

I think among a lot of administrators there's a grand fear that there's a huge revolution coming, and that all of a sudden brick-and-mortar institutions are going to disappear, or they're going to be financially threatened. I take a very different viewpoint.

Technology could have a transformative effect on higher education, but it hasn't so far. One could say it's long overdue to have a pedagogical revolution—though I don't think online education is necessarily a pedagogical revolution at all. It's like a chalkboard, a new technology that can be used. Putting videos online is not a transformative moment.

The emergence of technology will have a different impact on different institutions. I do think there are institution types that are potentially threatened by the emergence of technology—but I actually don't think that's Rochester because people who are sending their children here



are people who understand the value of a residential education.

### Do online technologies make education less expensive?

In studies, online education hasn't been less expensive to deliver. There is some new evidence that we're beginning to get some efficiencies from online education. But there's this notion that suddenly we're going to be able to deliver courses to everyone, and they're going to cost a lot less—this has not been the case.

### What about MOOCs?

MOOCs are a whole different beast. I love the ideas of MOOCs, and I've made the suggestion that the federal government should seriously get behind MOOCs and provide direct funding for MOOCs to give free access to education for broad swaths of

society. If you want to talk about a transformative public good, it's a fabulous idea. But we are not in that policy place.

So I'm actually highly skeptical about how MOOCs will become monetized. In the long run, there are going to be parts of MOOCs that we're going to adopt, both as individual institutions and as institutions of higher education. I think that we will probably see an integration of the MOOC idea into conglomerations of institutions or compacts where they offer MOOC-like classes in some ways.

### How will people make choices among so many options?

College choice is not a rational process. This is well documented. When we make these choices, we make them in part upon the feeling about what we also think it's going to do for our lives. Sociologist Robert Nisbet wrote about this: there are certain things that are sacred in society. Learning for the sake of learning

is sacred. I am going to send my kids to a liberal arts institution because I think there is something greater than economic rationality to a college degree.

I think you go to college to become an educated person because it makes your life better. I can't put a price tag on that. But I also don't think that's fully achieved by having classes online.

### Is that choice available to everyone?

No. And we should be trying to provide as many people as we can with a quality education to attain a good standard of life. That's why we need a range of options, which could involve MOOCs, could involve hybrids, could involve community college programs that convert to four-year programs—because if we're going to be competitive globally, we need a large percentage of the population to be well educated.

### What does that mean for traditional liberal arts schools and research universities?

About 45 percent of the people in this country enrolled in higher education are at a community college. We know that 65 percent of all students enrolled right now are nontraditional students. And if you factor together comprehensive state schools, community colleges, and the rising for-profit institutions, that's over 80 percent of all enrollment. The students who enroll in elite higher education are a small percentage. And that subset tends to be white, wealthy, and educated. So there are real questions about how we provide access and equity to the highest quality educational opportunities. That's where our big challenge is.

—Kathleen McGarvey

Online education has the potential to change higher education—but it hasn't altered much so far.