

Higher Education

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Opening music

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Your'e listening to Tilting the Earth's Praxis, a weekly discussion of important issues that impact civil society. With host Salvatore Alaimo.

Salvatore Alaimo

Hello and welcome to this week's episode of Tilting the Earth's Praxis. Our topic is higher education. Liz McMillen is the executive editor of Chronicle Intelligence at the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. She brings more than 30 years of experience covering higher education, previously serving as the editor of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* between 2011 and 2018. She's also served as a reporter covering faculty issues and was editor of the *Chronicle Review*. Liz received her bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and was a recipient of the Knight Wallace Journalism Fellowship at the University of Michigan. Welcome, Liz.

Liz McMillen

Thanks very much for having me.

Salvatore Alaimo

Kasey Stevens is a Grand Valley State University alum. He is currently the Associate Dean of Integrative Learning at Hope College, which is in Holland, Michigan. He's also the Director of the Phelps Scholars Program there at Hope. He got his master's degree in adult and higher education from Grand Valley State University. Welcome, Kasey.

Kasey Stevens

Thank you, Sal. Good to be with you.

Salvatore Alaimo

And last, we have Ashley Nickels, Associate Professor at Kent State University. She teaches in the School of Peace and Conflict Studies. She's been the author and coauthor of multiple award-winning books, including *Power, Participation and Protests in Flint, Michigan*. She's the chair of the Public Administration Theory Network and co-leader of the Growing Democracy Project and Growing Democracy Lab. And she also has her own podcast. She's the co-host of the Growing Democracy Podcast. Ashley got her Ph.D. in public affairs from Rutgers University, Camden, and she got her MPA degree here at Grand Valley State University. Welcome, Ashley.

Ashley Nickels

Thank you so much for having me. It's good to see you.

Salvatore Alaimo

Glad to have all of you. So higher education. Can we get a current state of affairs? Liz, what's going on? You know, I brought some headlines with me, and I can share some of them. But before I do that, can you give us an idea of what you see as the highlights and lowlights of what's going on in higher ed today?

Liz McMillen

Sure. I'm happy to. And just to start, I want to say that, you know, higher education in this in this country is a very diverse set of institutions. And sometimes it's very hard to make generalizations about all kinds of colleges. So let me just start with that, because your institution is very different from the community college down the road, which is very different from the flagship or the elite private in your state. So having said that, right now many colleges are seeing some challenges to their enrollment. Some students right now are saying that they don't think that necessarily it's worth it. It's worth the cost to go to college. This is a trend that has been accelerating since and during the pandemic and is likely to get worse in the next few years, because during the Great Recession of 2008, the birthrate in this country really declined. And so, we're now seeing that there are fewer traditional age students who are available and willing and interested to go to college to pay for college. Again, college, we're talking about potentially four year programs, two year programs. But in general. Right. One of the biggest changes that we're seeing is how men are increasingly young men are increasingly not choosing to go to college. So, at many campuses, you'll see more women enrolled than men. That's something that a lot of colleges are very concerned about. So, when you have those kind of enrollment trends and you are an institution that's really dependent on tuition revenue, you're going to be really struggling. So, there have been lots of calls about, gee, you know, half the colleges in this country are going to be closing. Clayton Christensen very, very famously mentioned that, made that prediction about a decade ago, but that, that's not happening. But still, colleges are struggling financially and they're looking for ways to contain costs and looking for things like affiliations, partnerships, mergers. I think we're going to see more of that. Related to the broader enrollment trends, though, and I kind of alluded to it is the question about the value of the degree. And this is something that has been happening over the last, I'd say ten, 15 years as college costs have really risen. A lot of families, a lot of students are not convinced that a degree is worth, let's say, at a private institution, you know, 50 to \$100000. And that's probably in the mid-range. There's plenty more that cost more than that. So, there's also, I would say a kind of political polarization around higher education so that if you were to do a poll of Democrats, a majority of them would continue to see the value in the college degree. Whereas if you ask Republicans, they are going to be more questioning and more skeptical. I think they're, they're concerns not just about cost, but about a perceived political bias, a leftist bias on campuses. So unfortunately, in some states, higher education colleges have become a kind of wedge issue. We're seeing that happening in Florida. We're seeing that happen in Texas and some other states. And then I would just say the last thing I would mention is that we're coming out of a really difficult pandemic period where professors have had to really go above and beyond to adapt to this hybrid learning situation. Sometimes doing classes online,

sometimes doing classes in person. And I think, you know, what we hear is just how exhausted the professoriate is, not just the professoriate, but all of the student affairs folks and anybody who's working the front lines with mental health issues or some of the security, food security, how housing issues that students have today. So, you know, there's just a lot of exhaustion among faculty members. And they also talk about how they're seeing a level of disengagement from their students that they just have never seen before. We've written quite a bit about that. And it's it's puzzling. But, you know, it's not entirely clear what's going on there, but it's definitely something that a lot of professors are saying. My students are just not engaged. Engaged the way I'm used to seeing them. They seem pretty tired. Maybe, you know, two years of potential social isolation has just made it difficult for the students to make that adjustment. So those are some of the big picture issues. So sort of enrollment issues, value questions and sort of political viewpoints and just, you know, what's happening in the classroom.

Salvatore Alaimo

So, I want to build off your point about the value, because this show on this show, we connect each of our topics to their role in this ideal of civil society, society that enables people to reach their full potential and flourish as human beings and productive citizens. So, I'm going to pivot now to Kasey and Ashley. As an administrator, Kasey, as a professor, Ashley, how do you frame the value of a college education? What's your perspective?

Kasey Stevens

Yeah. Thanks for that, Sal. When I think about the value of higher education, one of the first things that I think about is I think the parallel to that word is its relevance and its transferability. And how does it improve not only the lives of the student and where they're going and what they'll be doing, but the lives of the communities that they're living in, the people who are around them. And so, if we can find a way to make that transparent to them at the onset, but also applicable and I mean applicable apply practice in the moment, I think that we can deliver some communication around it. It's value in the moment. Now that does address the issue of cost and access as, as a factor. I think that's an obviously a very important issue that we need to include as one when we're discussing value. And so, there's a number of other variables that that come to mind around funding, around funding models, around the way that we ensure equitable access to different, different groups. But if we can if we can, in my opinion. Approach both of those, the applicability, the relevance and a true kind of transferability of what somebody is doing on campus, in the classroom, in their community, to the work that they will to the work that they'll do, but also to the lives that they'll live and lead. I think that's one way that we can go about addressing the issue of value.

Ashley Nickels

I see what you did here. I literally like the, the link. So, I'm in the classroom and one of the things that I do with my students and I've been teaching since 2008 and I actually started teaching at Grand Valley, and I think core to everything that I've learned has been to talk with students that they're here not to be cogs in a machine like we're not here to deliver, kind of a, a specific skill that can immediately be applied and maybe in

some spaces that is 100% it. I'm in the social sciences. I'm in the School of Peace and Conflict studies. I've taught in political science and urban studies and public affairs. And for me, it's really that the value of higher education is deep, engaged, learning the skills of inquiry and creativity and. Having the space to think about the, the broader implications and the histories of ideas. And I say all of that, right? That's really wonky and probably very like Ph.D., Ashley. But, I say all that because the way that it translated into the classroom is that I'm going to provide concepts that I want you to know. I'm going to provide you skills that I want you to learn, and then I want you to understand why those concepts and why those skills are important in the community. So that might be through community engaged research, It might be through a community engaged learning. It might be through small group dialog. It might be through practicing the skills of kind of empathetic listening. Right now, I think all of those things translate far beyond a professional base into the broader civic life. And to me, that's one of the kind of core elements that I try to bring into whatever class I'm teaching, whether that's, you know, nonprofit governance or conflict management that, you know, there are skills to learn, there are concepts to engage with, and there are histories of these ideas. And that knowing those translates far beyond this classroom into all spaces of life. And so I love how I can kind of come last and build on the insights so that the two other guests.

Salvatore Alaimo

Well, we're going to continue to build off what you just said to Ashley. So I'm going to throw this out to all three of you. What would you say to a person if we were sitting around the table having coffee and this person followed Ashley with the following comments? Hey, that sounds great, but haven't we done a disservice by commercializing higher education and turning the student into a consumer? Have we overreached with STEM to the neglect of the liberal education have the overreach with professionalization to the neglect of the liberal education? Shouldn't we be blending these things? Have we done a disservice to students, including U.S. presidents, from both parties that have said that college education is narrowly basically the means to a job or career leaving out what the ancient Greeks talked about in terms of the quest for the good life? So, what would the three of you in no particular order, how would you respond to somebody if they said that to you?

Liz McMillen

I'll jump in on the consumer question. I think when college costs were far more manageable and when a family could afford to pay for college, especially at public institutions, you didn't have the kind of conversation about consumerism and students as consumers as you do today. And when college education, you know, the most expensive private education is costing nearly \$100,000 a year. Yeah, you're going to get those questions. And I you know, it's understandable given the trend lines with tuition and the costs of, of doing a four year degree. So, you know, unless we do something about how to pay for college, I think that conversation is going to continue. And I, I find it understandable.

Ashley Nickels

Can I jump in, too? Because I think in the classroom, one of the things that I do right, and I have these conversations at the Thanksgiving dinner table, right. What's the value of your job? Actually, I don't get it. Right. So we have these conversations for sure. But with students who are already there. Right. Who recognize. Right. Kind of this obsession with professionalization, they see it, right? I'm in this classroom to get a job. How am I going to use this degree to get a job? All of those pieces, I think, are important. And I think being able to talk about it, one of the things I do in my classes is talk about, okay, so if. If you are viewed as the customer or the consumer, then you also have power. So, let's reframe this from kind of a from a from a kind of social theory lens, right. And kind of a civil society lens and say, okay, so if you're a consumer, then you also have power. You have power to shape what this education looks like. You have power to push back when legislation potentially threatens the value of the education that you're getting. Right. And so doing some of that work to say let's reframe that in the kind of this commercialization, professionalization and reframing around the power that you have as students. And, you know, I have the privilege in the classes that I teach then to talk about what those skills look like and, and reframing their role in those spaces. Because I you know, I would completely agree with Liz that the systems work against that. My role in the classroom is to try and undo some of it.

Salvatore Alaimo

How about you, Kasey? What do you make of all this?

Kasey Stevens

Yeah. I think, you know, we. I'm at an institution right now who is I think has a significant kind of endeavor in front of us of, of trying to become tuition free through a program that our, our president, a vision that our president has, has initiated and implemented. And, what's interesting to me and I've heard him, our president, refer to this as well, is there are several institutions across the country right now, many who could become tuition free today if they wanted to be, right. Like they have the endowments, they have the resources to become as accessible as they would like to be to any student who is qualified to meet their, their standards of learning and engagement on campus. And why they don't I don't have all the answers to that. But I do know that one of the reasons we endeavor toward that is because we, we recognize that conversation at the dinner table. Right. Is the cost of this worth? The, the value that it's going to bring and that it's going to add. And I think, Liz, you you're, I think you're, you're right to say I think that's a fair question. And I think we need to reckon with the fairness of that question. And in my anecdotal estimation, we've spent a long time saying, yeah, but it is, and that's not a good enough answer when people have to write checks at the end of the day. And so trying to address it, I think is, is one of the first things that we can do. I'm proud of my organization and what we're trying to do to address that. And I agree with with Ashley as well that I think that the next step is with our students to invite them into and to challenge them as well, to have some agency, to have some agency in, in regards to their power and their influence on campus, not only to shape their learning, but also to shape the community that they're part of, to shape the community that they're part of on campus. Right. That they have knowledge that they can bring, that they are this is not I would love for us to move away from a banking system and a banking model of

learning. Right. Like, I'm not just here to make deposits as somebody who teaches and is somebody who is also part of the student development side of the world, I kind of I have my feet in both toes, which means I have more meetings maybe than some average folks. But it also means that I have the chance to see what that formation looks like on both sides in both kind of programs of the college, speaking of student formation and in the academic program and in all of that to say. When it comes to asking, is this worth it? Is it more than just professional training? I've seen the answer to that question as, yes, absolutely, Yes. And, and the reasons for that are I've seen the way that students have a transformed perspective of how they can view their neighbor and understand their neighbor, how they understand the implications of history and the present day on the decisions that they're making and their ability to be inquisitive and curious and to think critically, not only in kind of these esoteric, you know, kind of highfalutin, pointy headed academic ideas about what it means maybe to belong to each other and to be connected to each other, but to do good work. Right. I want engineers who can think critically, and I want nurses who can be empathic, and I want accountants who can do more than read numbers, but who can also understand the values of the decisions that they're making. Right. And I think I think we all do on both sides of the political line. I think that's why every single one of us wants in, the more that we can create the spaces for learning for that to happen, I think the more successful and this is this is taking it bigger. But I really do believe the more successful a democracy that will be right. I believe that the more flourishing of a society that will have at large.

Salvatore Alaimo

So, Liz, you set the stage earlier with all of the issues and challenges for higher ed, and Ashley in Kasey painting this picture of what the value of a higher education should be, can be and is often. But, I'm sensing there's a tension between these two things. How do these institutions address these challenges in society while maintaining their core value proposition and enabling and making, making sure that students get a quality learning experience in the way that Ashley and Kasey just described?

Liz McMillen

Well, I think there's been a general critique of a lot of college administrators that they haven't been bold enough and strong enough in asserting exactly the kind of arguments that that Kasey and Ashley have just been and been saying that there is all kinds of tremendous value to a college education and it's not just a professional utility that will get you the job, but it's it will do that. It will do that. And in an ideal world, it will get you that. But it's going to give you a whole set of other advantages, not just to you as an individual, but to the community. You know, one of the interesting things that we did some reporting on, which is based on some incredible research by two Princeton researchers is how much college education is actually now correlated with a better and longer lifespan. I mean, there there actually public health benefits to going to college and getting your degree. So, you know, there's a whole array of very tangible benefits that the college experience provides folks. And it's unfortunately, the conversation has because of costs gone very, very much into, you know, the will it get me the job. Right.

The other thing I wanted to say about costs that's unfortunate is that there's so much confusion about what people will actually pay to go to college. Very few people actually pay what's known as the sticker price. So it's just, you know, if Hope College could come up with a program to make their programs and education free, well, that's, that's pretty clear. In most cases, it takes a lot of skill to decipher this. The financial aid or the, you know, the forms that you're going to get back from the college telling you exactly what you're going to pay. So that confusion doesn't help matters either. That's just a bit of a side note I wanted to just throw in about when we talk about costs and students, that doesn't that's not a very good helpful thing either.

Salvatore Alaimo

So just building off of that, I'll throw this out there to all three of you. Is part of the issues or the problems and addressing these challenges that higher ed administrators have a different set of incentives and rewards than faculty.

Liz McMillen

And responsibilities.

Salvatore Alaimo

And responsibilities. So how do we fix that? Because if one group is calling the shots and managing the money and their incentives and rewards are around enrollment and tuition revenue. By the way, two things that most faculty really have no problem with. I think we would all say those are good things, but faculty seem a little bit more invested. I don't mean to generalize here in the learning experience of the students. So, if we have two different sets of incentive rewards, what do we do about that?

Ashley Nickels

I don't have a direct response to that, but maybe it builds and responds to with this earlier comment. One of the things that I observe in the spaces that I'm in and is. I mean, this is historical, right? The disconnect between universities, colleges and communities. Right here is a group of people who do the things over here. And here's a group of people who do the things over here. And universities often have wielded their power, and they have power in ways that communities don't always see, as see as valuable to them. Right. So as someone who studies community and economic development, civic engagement, participatory democracy. Universities have tended to wield their power in ways that many people view as problematic. So, you layer that with cost of education. You layer that with access and kind of this kind of unwieldy administrative burdens that come with going to college. It's not a surprise that some people are like, No, that's not for me. That's for you. All right. It's an othering way of being like, no, that that's for a different group of people. And it's not for me. And I think one mechanism, because I have a harder time engaging in the cost discussion, right? I am an academic. I'm in the classroom. I do think I have different incentives. One of the spaces that I can that I navigate in my own I mean, I'm a now a tenured associate professor, so I have a little bit more power in the space is building meaningful relationships with community. And that is time intensive. That is not easy. And the incentives within the institution are often, in my perspective, often lip service, right?

We want community engage learning and it's not always followed through from kind of a structure and standpoint. So, I think that there are these multiple layers that people are often even within higher ed working against each other. Right. And I think that adds to the conversation too, around how do we get on the same page on expressing the value of higher ed and also kind of creating structures that incentivize. Reduce costs, incentivize deep, engage the learning with community, not for community, not on behalf of community, but genuinely with community, so that we can break down some of those kind of barriers.

Kasey Stevens

I, I agree with that. And one of the thoughts that kind of sparked as you were speaking, Ashley, is and this is also in response to your question, Sal, is I think sometimes we really feel and truly believe that these are competing interests. And I, I don't actually think they are. I don't know that this has to be an either or question, but rather, I really do believe that when students have a transformative experience and they go on to live lives of impact that. That creates a really intriguing value pitch, right? That there's something to that that a prospective student in families sees. They see a successful career. They see somebody whose life was transformed. And it's intriguing. And they begin to be interested and to want that. Right. There's also. Right. Like we would we would know that if there's more of an impact in a student's life on campus, they're probably more likely to give as an alum, I would presume. I don't have the data on that, but I would anticipate that that's true. And so. The to me, this this isn't actually an either or question. But, but rather if we can begin as an institution administratively, folks who are doing student affairs where folks are in the academic program. And I also talk about our operations in our physical plant. Right. Like the, the difference that every single one of these corners of campus makes on the community that we live in, where our institution is literally fixed socially, geographically, the student experience, and then also the kind of transcendent qualities that a student takes with them to where they go and where they live and how they operate. The more impactful that we're able to, to be in that way, the more likely that we are to positively affect our ability to operate, functionally speaking, in terms of revenue, right. Now, I don't have any. We're an organization and institutions require revenue to operate and that that's in some ways there's good accountability in that. Right. I want I want our students to expect too much of us, and I want them also to expect much of themselves. Not necessarily in a purely transactional format, but also a transformative one. And I heard a colleague kind of say this a few months ago and it made me laugh. We're now one of the very few may possibly the only kind of industry or system in the world where somebody wants. The more they pay, the kind of the less they want out of it. Right? Like our students, sometimes they, they don't want to they don't always want to have to work hard for that. Right? They want a class that's going to be sometimes a little bit easier. And I get that right. Like, I want to go with the stream sometimes. But the more I think that we can challenge and the more that we can expect out of our students and out of ourselves and out of our community, I really believe that we're going to have more revenue and more, more ability to operate as impactful as we would we would like to.

Liz McMillen

I agree with you, Kasey. I don't think they, the sort of financial imperatives of the institution and the classroom experience have to be at odds at all. I think the best sort of campus experience, all the administrators and all the faculty are rowing in the same direction towards creating a transformative student experience. You know, it doesn't always happen. It's clearly not always the case. But, I think there's really been a sea change in thinking in all parts of the institution about how important the student experience is, how important serving students, helping them get to the finish line, get to the degree has become. And, it's, it's so important because of all the reasons that you've just laid out.

Salvatore Alaimo

So what do we do about that? Do we have a policy that administrators should teach one class a year so they know what it's like to be in the classroom and are connected to the students, too? Do we have a policy that enables more faculty governance and decision making or allows more of the student voice that Ashley was talking about. What, what do we suggest here to make sure that administrators are, are not to the extreme end of the continuum and not just about enrollment, beefing up endowments, beefing up administrative compensation and getting tuition revenue and focusing on this value proposition that all three of you have been talking about today?

Kasey Stevens

This is way too quick of an answer. And so, I'm sure I know that it's idealistic and I know that there's more that that needs to go, go around it. But, we recently had a summit on campus where we had some, some outside speakers come and really speak to the issue of access. And, this kind of vision that our president has that we're fundraising to make a tuition free experience on campus. And so, the summit was oriented around access to higher ed and being innovative. And we have cohorts of students right now who are scholarship recipients through this. This is called Hope Forward This Hope Forward Vision and program at the college. And their voices were centered as part of the transformative impact as a result of the revenue that was benefacted to them that they were able to receive. And I walked out of there and it was amazing to me the number of administrators who said this makes so much more sense.

Right. And that's not to speak lowly of them, but rather they don't always have access to the impact that their decisions are making. Even when they are the most positive impacts. And so, this is way too simple of a solution. But I'm really just practically speaking, I would love for everybody at our institution and every organization to have some form or fashion to see the impact of their decision on students, at least at least once a year at that. That's a very practical answer, that that might not be widely applicable in every situation, but it, it made a big difference. And I really do believe seeing the effect of our work, because we don't always have that in education. Sometimes the effects of our work are aren't visible or tangible or seen until 10 or 15 or 20 years later when somebody is excelling in their career or really impacting the space that they're living in. So, to create some sort of space where we can see it and recognize it in the moment, to really kind of expect that of our of those who are leading our organizations and of ourselves, those who are practicing and teaching and researching. I think it's fundamental.

Ashley Nickels

I'll echo much of that, right, creating spaces in which people can see the impact of the decisions they're making, creating spaces where people can be in dialog with each other for sure. I'll also say Sal to your point, I think faculty governance is incredibly important, right? It's a it's a, a checks and balance on how decisions are made. I come from an institution. I come from an R1 institution. And, you know, we have a really robust union. And it has been incredibly useful, right, to make sure that faculty voices are heard in decision making. And I think that's a really powerful thing. And I think that is a tool, right? So that those decisions are reflective. I don't think that they can be done in isolation from what Kasey brought up around, you know, meaningful dialog. Right? It can't only be set up to be adversarial, right? It needs to be deliberative. But I'll also add and I just want to put like a little kind of kink in the conversation, too, that around incentives, because we've been talking about the student experience and because I'm a faculty member at an R1 institution, my incentives are a little bit different. My primary role is research, right? And so my primary role is not teaching. And so, my incentives and what I'm on the hook for keeping my job is actually the production of scholarship. And so, you know, I think thinking about the value beyond just the student experience and letting students know that that is a part of higher education, that you are part of knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination around policy change, around what medicine will look like in the future, around what government can look like in the future, around what education can look like in the future. I think that also, I don't want that to get lost in the conversation because I know that I'm in somewhat the anomaly in this space that my incentives are to produce scholarship and less to lesser on teaching.

Ashley Nickels

No, I'm glad you added that because as Liz said earlier, you know, it's higher ed's a big tent. There's a lot of different types of institutions in that tent. And I'm glad you brought in that, you know, your, your particular responsibilities at your institution to kind of broaden the dialog a little bit here. I did promise earlier in our discussion that I brought some headlines. So I'm going to go through some of these quickly, in the name of tough love for higher ed because all of us care:

- *USA Today* – “Guilty of cheating in AI cautionary tale. Plagiarism accusation goes genuinely wrong.”
- This is from *Issues in Science and Technology*. This is Freeman Hrabowski speaking. “If we are simply creating techies who can only work with the technology, we're in big trouble,” which gets at Kasey's comment earlier about what kind of people do we want to interact with.
- From the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Statehouses targeting of diversity and tenure is starting to scare away faculty job candidates.” That's a little alarming.
- From *Inside Higher Education*, “From ending tenure to enshrining it.” That's about the Texas House bill that recently passed to end tenure.
- “Virginia Republicans request higher ed DEI spending study on public colleges” that gets at the politicization that Liz you were referencing earlier.
- “USC graduates sue over online social work program alleging false advertising.”

- And last but not least, Gallup, and The Lumina Foundation, did research of more than 6,000 students that revealed 41% considered stopping their higher education due to emotional stress, mental health and just under 30% of them said it was because of costs.

So, Liz, what do we do about all this and what can we do to return higher education to becoming a public good? Is that even possible? Is the toothpaste out of the tube on that? And is it, it's just what it is? Or can we somehow put it back or put the genie in the bottle, whatever metaphor you like.

Liz McMillen

Well, I think the headlines you just read indicate just how hard that might be. And so you have some real hostility in state houses toward higher education institutions. I don't know how many different headlines you had there, whether it was about tenure or whether it was about D-I efforts, divisive concepts. You know, this has become a political issue. And I'm afraid I fear that it will become an issue in our upcoming presidential election. So, I'm kind of worried that that's that we're a little far along in trying to bring that back into the sphere of a public good. It's become, you know, higher education in some states has become a public enemy, unfortunately. So that's, that's sobering. But that's, that's how I how I see it right now.

Salvatore Alaimo

So I want to close with a question here. Have we and I want to frame we, we is the nation, society, parents. U.S. presidents, Higher ed and higher ed institutions themselves. All of us collectively. Have we done a disservice, or have we done an inadequate job in preparing incoming freshmen so they understand A - what it means to be a college student? B - How does the science of teaching and learning work? C - What should their role be in that? Science of teaching and learning and D - Overall, do they understand that it's not a unilateral relationship, that they've got to step up and participate? Can we do better? Have we done a good enough job? What do you think?

Kasey Stevens

You know, I would have to believe that that the answer to that question is as diverse as our population. I. When I was starting my master's in higher education. One of the most formative pieces for me was Jean Anyon's *Hidden Curriculum*. And, knowing that different groups are going to be prepared to learn. And anecdotally speaking, I remember my freshman year of college, my first year, and one of my professors asked me what I thought about a piece in class. They asked the class what we thought, and my response wasn't what I thought my response was. What do you care what I think? You're the expert. I want to know what you think. You teach me, right? You tell me. And, you know, if we have an expectation that this is not unilateral and not even bilateral, but multilateral, that we are co-creating knowledge with one another in that space, including the professor, ensure they hold a higher level of authority and expertise. But, also we bring experience to that as students and community members in the learning sphere. I think the more that we can do that, the better. And now I don't know. I don't know that we're preparing students for that. I'm also not I'm not a K-12 educator, but I can speak to

I even think of this year in particular. And I think seeing the impacts of just the social impact on students ability to learn in a social setting is different than it was years ago. And all of us probably have maybe observed that practically, and we're still kind of on the front edge of the research coming out of the impacts of COVID. But, you know, I've I've said that we need to work it out longer scaffolding at the start as a pedagogical practice, but rather we're laying the foundation. We're pouring the foundation as a pedagogical practice for students first year of learning because they're learning how to do community and they're learning how to learn and they're learning how to learn at this level. And that's, that's just a perhaps a different approach and maybe the one that is needed at that, the level of higher education. But, I do believe if we expect a multilateral learning environment and if we expect that environment to be for the silos to be lowered between students lived experiences and their, their histories and their background or what they're experiencing currently in their lived moment, as well as the silo of the academic program. And for that to be blended. And I do think that we need to teach them what that looks like and how to do that, and particularly if we expect them to do it at any point as a student and if, if that is the expectation of our alumni. If that's part of our mission, then we need to have that as part of what we're what we're teaching and preparing students to do, or we need to have it as part of our admissions standards, one or one or the other. So, but I do see some, some issue there that that certainly needs to be, be resolved and addressed.

Ashley Nickels

Can I add too that I think it's one of the places where I think student affairs professionals have done such a, a much better job than faculty, in part because of our training. Right. Many faculty are not trained in pedagogy. They're not trained in that language of transformation. I have the privilege of having a background in student affairs and have learned so much from that, that literature and that experience of being in student affairs that I brought with me into the classroom. And I and I think in some ways we've done a disservice. You know, the very first class I ever taught was Intro to a Liberal Education, and it was foundationally an entire 15 week class and like, why a liberal education? What's the history of it? What's the practice of it? How do we learn? What's the value beyond profession? Right? And we spent 15 weeks picking apart all these pieces. And I still take those ideas with me into the classrooms that I teach now, even PhD level classes, like why did I build the syllabus the way that I built the syllabus, demystifying the decisions that I made. And I think it's, you know, I think that there is some value there that maybe isn't at the level of making college accessible from a financial perspective. But, you know, we as individuals can, can do some of the work as well to demystify what it is that we're trying to do.

Salvatore Alaimo

Well, I think you hit the, the key term - accessibility. It's not just a financial term. I can pay for something but still not have access to maximizing my experience. Right. So, I think we need to blend those things. Liz, I'm going to let you have the final words here today. So, you've laid out the macro context. You've presented us with the big challenges as well as some of the good things that Higher Ed is doing. Where do we go

from here? What are you seeing in your research, in your work at *The Chronicle*, on the horizon for the future of higher ed, if you could share that with us?

Liz McMillen

Well, that's a really big question. Trying to collect my thoughts on that. I've been, we've been talking so much about AI, and that's a very specific thing that I know a lot of professors are wondering about how that's going to impact the classroom. It will certainly have, it already is that that's a very, very narrow, narrow piece when we think about the future. I guess one of the positive things that I think has come out of the pandemic is, you know, a real focus on teaching and the classroom and effective learning experiences for students, you know, in all kinds of shapes and forms for all kinds of students. I think that's you talked about learning science. I think there is a lot more conversation about, about effective teaching and effective learning. So, I think that's a very heartening development as we as we think broadly about now how to make the college experience as transformative as possible. And there's, there's really interesting research about, about it coming out. So. That's, that's one of the encouraging notes that I would point to as I think about the future.

Salvatore Alaimo

Well, and we're going to stop on that encouraging note, because I want to thank all of the three of you, not just for being on the show, but for what you do to help higher education be a better experience for students and for citizens and for society. Because I think as higher education goes, so does go civil society. Liz McMillen, the executive editor of Chronicle Intelligence, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Kasey Stevens, Associate Dean of Integrative Learning at Hope College, and Ashley Nickels, Associate Professor at Kent State University. Thank you once again for being on our show.

Closing music

WGVU's Jennifer Moss

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Closing music fades.