

The Future of the Tertiary Education Sector: Scenarios for a Learning Society Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (2003)

Tertiary education is defined as community college and university. Full report at:
http://www.simul-conf.com/oecd_japan/documents/Future_of_universities.pdf

The OECD was formed in 1960 and now has [30 member countries](#) (including the U.S.) that share a commitment to democratic government and the market economy. With active relationships with some [70 other countries](#), [NGOs and civil society](#) , it has a global reach. Best known for its publications and its [statistics](#), its work covers economic and social issues from [macroeconomics](#), to [trade](#), [education](#), [development](#) and [science and innovation](#).

Scenarios about Higher Education (using Europe as the source) to stimulate thinking about the future of American Higher Education. These are the specific scenarios. The full report is 31 pages and has driving forces and background material leading up to the scenarios.

The six variables selected for constructing the six scenarios are: 1) the type of population covered by tertiary education, as well as correlated variables; 2) the nature of funding (predominantly public, mixed, predominantly private); 3) the integration of missions offered; 4) the international dimension of the system, 5) the homogeneity of status of faculty and institutions, and 6) the degree of take-up of e-learning. A matrix of issues vs scenario is in the full report.

The six scenarios are:

Scenario 1: Tradition

Universities are mostly like today, catering to a relatively small share of the youth population for the purposes of job selection credentials. Universities pursue both teaching and research, as now, without excessive dependence or involvement with the private sector. Governments continue, in most OECD countries, to play a prominent role in funding, regulating and managing universities. Within a public accountability and equity framework there is little scope for profit-generating initiatives and the international dimension of the university “market” is modest. Lifelong and e-learning both develop largely outside of the university sphere.

Scenario 2: Entrepreneurial universities

Selective institutions cater largely to young people in their initial preparation for life. The key difference with the previous scenario is the strength of market forces in the sense that universities (public or private) can respond with greater autonomy to a variety of funding sources. There is a more mixed public-private funding model, with university resources coming from a wide variety of sources. Along with the returns to the intellectual property rights that it secures, research is seen as very important and lucrative activity. However, in this scenario universities take a market-oriented approach to operations without losing basic academic values. Given the prestige and income accorded to research the teaching side remains quite elitist. As for lifelong learning it occurs within a university setting but in teaching only institutions with lower status. The three missions of the university – teaching, research and community service – are well balanced, although there is greater differentiation across institutions due to enhanced autonomy and greater responsiveness. Commercial approaches to international markets and e-learning are important. University resources as well as wages and prestige of academic staff improve. Links to the local economy are strong.

Scenario 3: Free market

Market forces are the main drivers of this scenario with a private tertiary sector regulated by private companies as far as quality assurance and accreditation are concerned and mostly funded through market mechanisms. Market forces give rise to institutions that become specialised by function (teaching, research), field (business, humanities, etc.), audience (young students, part-time students, distance education, adult education, lifelong learning) while business firms grant degrees to their employees for their corporate training. Hierarchy between

those very diverse institutions becomes very strong, with the apparition of a global super-elite, and more polarisation in the status of faculty. With the widening of student choice there is greater competition for students and tuition revenue comes to represent a more important share of overall income. Technology is widely used in teaching methods. The international dimension of the market becomes important. And, since the majority of students and their parents are not interested in research, refusing to bear the costs, research moves out to public research centres and corporate R&D divisions. What research remains in universities becomes even more elitist while teaching to mass markets leads to greater standardisation and the patenting of curricula and teaching methods. Research becomes more demand-driven, specialised and secures important returns through intellectual property rights.

Scenario 4: Lifelong learning and open education

Universities are marked by universal access for all ages and much less research. The knowledge economy has flourished and higher education becomes a source for recurrent professional development financed by companies, individuals seeking recognised skill upgrading, and states. In an ageing society, more elderly people enrol for nonprofessional reasons. Universities become more learner- and demand-oriented, more teaching oriented, with short courses, more distance learning, and more e-learning. Governments or independent accrediting bodies are responsible for quality assurance and accreditation. Most research is done outside of the higher education system, with the best researchers moving to private companies, specialised institutes or the few remaining elite universities. Corporations and corporate universities have a large influence. Integration with the applied side of learning might go so far that all university education would follow the professional school model. Responsiveness to market forces is high in this scenario and there is considerable business oriented investment in e-learning.

Scenario 5: Global network of institutions

Post-secondary studies become demand- and mostly market-driven. The two main innovations are 1) that learners define their own course of study from across all available courses throughout the global post-secondary education network and design themselves their degrees; 2) that higher education institutions partner increasingly, including with industry. E-learning develops strongly in this scenario, as well as other means of education. The training content becomes more standardised and possibly embedded in technology and media (e.g. modular learning objects or edutainment through partnerships with game industry). The provision of and market for lifelong learning becomes very large, especially as education takes a multiplicity of new forms. Most research is carried out outside the higher education system, and faculty in mostly teaching institutions becomes less qualified than today but use more sophisticated teaching techniques. There is a strong polarisation in the status of academic, with academic superstars and developers of “learning tools” getting high status whereas the average teaching staff becomes less qualified and gets lower status. Programmes and courses matter more than institutions. Intellectual property rights for substance as well as for teaching methods give high returns to their owners.

Scenario 6: Diversity of recognised learning

In this scenario, the formal tertiary education sector disappears. People learn throughout their life, at work, at home, for personal and professional motivations, more and more by themselves and by sharing their expertise with other people interested in the same field. Professional education requiring hands-on practice, like surgery, etc., is transmitted within businesses through an apprenticeship system or thanks to new sophisticated electronic devices. Technology is an enabler for the diffusion of information. People learn as much and possibly more than today but in a different way: learning takes the model of “open source” education, mostly free and non commercial, involving a lot of partnerships between individuals and institutions of all sorts. Global networking is thus important and goes beyond institutions. Knowledge and experience acquired in all life situations are acknowledged through formal assessments of credentials carried out by specialised assessment bodies. But given its pervasiveness, knowledge is less of a determinant for a career or in the stratification of society. While research becomes less specialised in fields requiring little money, like humanities or mathematics, a large share of research requiring high investments takes place in public research centres and in corporate R&D divisions.