



# The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out

*Clayton M. Christensen, Henry J. Eyring*

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The Innovative University illustrates how higher education can respond to the forces of disruptive innovation, and offers a nuanced and hopeful analysis of where the traditional university and its traditions have come from and how it needs to change for the future. Through an examination of Harvard and BYU-Idaho as well as other stories of innovation in higher education, Clayton Christensen and Henry Eyring decipher how universities can find innovative, less costly ways of performing their uniquely valuable functions.

- Offers new ways forward to deal with curriculum, faculty issues, enrollment, retention, graduation rates, campus facility usage, and a host of other urgent issues in higher education
- Discusses a strategic model to ensure economic vitality at the traditional university
- Contains novel insights into the kind of change that is necessary to move institutions of higher education forward in innovative ways

This book uncovers how the traditional university survives by breaking with tradition, but thrives by building on what it's done best.

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## Q&A with the Authors

### Why did you write *The Innovative University*?

Given our combined expertise in the study of business innovation and working within the university setting, we decided to write *The Innovative University* to share some ideas about what innovation could make possible in higher education. We wanted to show how new strategies, many of them driven by online technology, make it possible to serve more students at lower cost while also increasing quality and improving the learning experience--something we saw in practice within our own university homes. Since then, the world has moved into a major economic downturn. Slow economic growth, high government and household debt, rising college tuition, declining graduation rates, and growing competition from the rapidly growing for-profit higher education sector combined to create a renewed sense of urgency for our message. We could see how the same online learning technologies that can benefit traditional institutions can also disrupt them. So, our message became cautiously optimistic. Online learning, we believe, will either disrupt traditional universities and colleges or create opportunities for them to serve more students and lead the country to greater prosperity. It depends on whether they cling to a model that has changed little in the past 150 years or embrace learning innovations made possible by new technology.

### What forces are threatening traditional universities, and why does preserving them matter?

Traditional universities are an indispensable cornerstone of society and culture. The college experience is transformative for so many people, and it is an experience people cannot get elsewhere.

But while we can't afford to lose the traditional college experience, we also can't afford to support it on its current trajectory. In their race to constantly make themselves bigger and better, colleges and university have steadily driven up cost. They've lost focus on their once-modest missions and are now unsustainably

overstretched and overcommitted. The economic downturn is exposing them, as seen by the increasing number of students who are jumping ship to alternative forms of higher education like community colleges, for-profit universities, technical institutes and online degree programs.

We assert that colleges and universities must break with tradition and find innovative, less costly ways of performing their uniquely valuable functions, allowing them to once again become responsive to the needs of learners.

### **Why do you advocate for colleges and universities to embrace online education?**

Online technology makes a college or university vastly more attractive to a wide subset of students. It gives many people a second chance at learning – i.e. those who cannot afford a traditional college education, those who do not have the flexibility to take part in a full plate of coursework, and late bloomers or dropouts who have fallen behind and now have the chance to catch up.

But online learning doesn't just offer cheaper education for the masses. It improves the student learning experience across the spectrum by allowing remedial to elite students to learn at their own pace and on their own timetable. Students can receive a fully customized education adapted to their own individual learning style, something that even the world's best one-on-one tutor would have trouble systematically emulating. Students also benefit from a full array of choices about where, when, what and how they learn. And they can access the best teachers and information faster, connect with more global networks, and all in all consume a much more attractive produce. In addition, online learning is a cost-saver to the university, which saves on the expense of building and managing a brick-and-mortar facility.

Combine the lower cost of delivery with the lower cost of attendance, and it's clear that online learning is a major cost advantage. Therefore, we urge traditional colleges and universities to adopt these technologies.

### **What do the histories of Harvard and BYU-Idaho show us about the future of higher education?**

The stories of the development, evolution and continuing innovation of Harvard and BYU-Idaho show that universities can prosper if they are very thoughtful about what they choose to do. Harvard has always made choices to ensure that it serves the students and communities it promises to serve at very high quality, and because it has the necessary resources, its model is sustainable. It isn't an imitator. BYU-Idaho is similar. Although it has much more limited resources, BYU-Idaho has decided which constituencies it wants to serve and how to capably serve them, ultimately succeeding at providing higher quality education at lower cost. The overarching message for university leaders is that you can and must change your university "DNA." You can and must make clear choices and innovate.

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