

# Transcript

[0:01] (music)

**Derek Bruff:** [0:05] This is Leading Lines. I'm Derek Bruff. Back in March of this year, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced colleges and universities to move to remote teaching and learning, faculty and administrators knew what we had to do, move classes online in a hurry. We didn't always know how to do that or how to do that well, but the emergent need was clear.

[0:29] By April, however, as we started to look ahead to the Fall 2020 semester, things got a lot murkier. Without knowing the coming shape of the pandemic, colleges and universities weren't sure how they would continue their educational missions. Would we be fully remote for the fall? Would things be back to normal? Likely we would be somewhere in between, but what might that look like and how might we figure that out?

[0:56] While many of us were trying to puzzle through these questions, Edward Maloney from Georgetown University and Joshua Kim from Dartmouth College started brainstorming answers out loud on Inside Higher Ed. Their book, *Learning Innovation and the Future of Higher Education*, had just come out in February. So they were well primed to think through innovative approaches to the situation facing higher ed.

[1:19] They quickly imagined fifteen different scenarios for what they called a low-density university. One where COVID-19 precautions meant masks and social distancing and quarantines and reduce classroom capacities and remote learning. For many of us in higher ed, those fifteen scenarios were a lifeline in a very turbulent time, bringing clarity and creative thinking to the challenge of mapping out the fall semester.

[1:45] Apparently, Eddie and Josh like writing books together because they quickly took their blog series on the fifteen scenarios they imagined and wrote *The Low-Density University: 15*

*Scenarios for Higher Education* over the summer. Yes, they wrote a book this summer. It was published as an open access ebook by Johns Hopkins Press, the publisher of their previous book in August.

[2:10] Given how influential their 15 scenarios have been to higher education planning and 2020, I wanted to talk with Eddie and Josh now, late in the year, to hear how they thought about their scenarios after seeing what higher education actually did this fall in response to the pandemic.

[2:26] Before we get to that conversation, I should say a bit more about our guests. Edward Maloney is the executive director of the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship and a professor of the practice in the Department of English at Georgetown University. He is also the founding director of the master's degree program in Learning, Design, and Technology at Georgetown. Eddie's Teaching Center has the best acronym, CNDLS or "candles" and a long history of innovation in higher education. See episode 61 of Leading Lines for an interview with Eddie's predecessor as director of CNDLS, Randall Bass.

[3:04] Joshua Kim is a director of online programs and strategy at the Dartmouth College Center for the Advancement of Learning, and also a CNDLS Senior Fellow at Georgetown University. Josh is also the author of the *Learning Innovations* blog at Inside Higher Ed, where he blogs with alarming frequency. Now to our conversation where Josh and Eddie talk about their fifteen scenarios, how they see higher education's response to the pandemic in the current moment and the kinds of strategic choices that lie ahead for colleges and universities. (music)

**Derek:** [3:40] Well, Eddie, Josh, thank you for coming on Leading Lines and chatting with us about this very strange and challenging year that we've had in higher education. Before we talk about that, I want to talk a little bit about you guys. I'm going to ask you a question I've been asking a lot of our guests lately on the podcast. Would you share a time when you realized you wanted to be an educator?

**Edward Maloney:** [4:05] Go ahead, Josh.

**Joshua Kim:** [4:06] Sure. Derek, first, it's great to be with you on the podcast. I've really enjoyed being a colleague of yours for, I don't know, decades now. I don't know how old we are.

**Derek:** [4:18] Something like that.

**Josh:** [4:19] A long time. So this is a lot of fun. Good to see you virtually. I guess I trace it back to when I was a student in school, like primary school, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh grade, middle school. I was not a great student. And the reason I was not a great student is that my hand writing was always just terrible. And they had me in all special classes with special pencils and nothing I could do, no one can make heads or tails of what I wrote.

[4:50] My dad, who's an academic, he got me a computer, a Kaypro computer. You remember those big, luggable fifty-pound computers with a keyboard? And all of a sudden, I was turning in work from the computer very early and I was, turned out I was very good at school. And I've actually never left school because I can't imagine leaving. So I think that sort of got me into both education and educational technology.

**Eddie:** [5:20] Fascinating. So that's a really good question. I don't have an early childhood story about wanting to be an educator. I don't think I did for a long time. I actually, also early on, started to kind of get into computers and very early started to teach people how to use them. So fourteen, fifteen, when they were just kind of hitting the market as possible, personal computers, I was actually helping and tutoring people and that was fun, but I never saw that as a career, thought about that as kind of a direction.

[5:56] I don't think it was until I started graduate school that I and then got into actually teaching writing classes, master's degree in English, PhD in English. So when I had to teach writing classes, I had to get instruction on how to teach. And Syracuse, where I went, had an excellent graduate training program for their writing instructors. It was yearlong, it was weekly conversations, kind of a two-week bootcamp in the beginning, still feels like state-of-the-art in ways that I haven't seen replicated.

[6:32] And I really became fascinated by that process. And then when I walked into the classroom for the first time, I was terrible. I was, I bombed so bad. I had a fifty-five-minute class and it was done in twenty minutes with the syllabus that they had handed to me and I didn't know what to do. And then I had a basically a two-one load that year. So I had to walk from that class to my next class, that started at like 1:10 or something. And so in the half-hour that I let them go and felt miserable, I had to figure out what I was going to do in the second class, which was exactly the same class. And I had the exact same syllabus and that one actually went well.

[7:12] And so I kind of became really interested in that process of thinking about teaching and what it meant to improve and how you actually thought about and reflected on that practice. And so in that sense, it's sort of evolved not only into wanting to be an educator, but also wanting to help people think about their teaching and learning pretty much at the same time.

**Derek:** [7:31] Yeah, yeah. I had some moments like that too. I was a grad fellow at the Center for Teaching here at Vanderbilt when I was in my PhD program. And I had this moment where I had learned enough about teaching to realize how many things I was doing badly. I had been kind of blissfully ignorant my first couple of years teaching calculus. And then I realized I had these kind of new lenses to look at what my students were doing. And I realized, man, I have a lot to learn here. So I empathize with those moments.

**Eddie:** [8:01] It's a fun ride.

**Derek:** [8:03] Yeah, it is, it is, but it's nice to know that teaching and learning, we can improve, we can change, we can adapt. And maybe I'll use that as a not so clever segue to the current situation. Now you guys, you two wrote a book this year, which I want to ask you more about that in a bit. That seems like a hard year to write a book. But tell us about *The Low-Density University*. Tell us about this project and kind of how it came to be because it's a pretty unusual writing project, as far as I can tell.

**Josh:** [8:36] Eddie, go ahead.

**Eddie:** [8:39] You always begin the story of the origin. So I'm going to try to correct you. So I'm feeling like I'm out of my element here. The, so when we were, *The Low-Density University* began as a series of articles for Inside Higher Education. We found ourselves in the spring, like everybody, trying to figure out what was going on. And not only how we were getting everybody off the beach onto the boats to do the important work of moving into a remote environment in the spring, but also starting to realize this was not going to end in the summer, it was not going to end in the fall and we needed to start thinking about what the fall, especially, was going to look like.

[9:17] We were doing a lot of that preparation at Georgetown. Josh and I were talking every day. We were writing and we kind of realized that there was a moment where we could start

to contribute to the conversation about what people should be thinking about for the universities and colleges in the fall, how they were going to start paying attention to the teaching and learning practices that will be, that would be important in the fall, assuming they had a few months to actually think about these things, unlike the spring where we were just all moving as quickly as possible, trying not to be perfect, just trying to get this semester to be possible, to finish the semester in a way that was meaningful.

[9:55] And so we sat down and we started to map out some ways in which we thought the universities, colleges and universities across the country might adapt to the fall semester, what that might look like from structural changes to classroom changes, to things that faculty would be thinking about. And really started to kind of lay out a list of things that seemed like possible scenarios, possible ways of thinking about the fall could be.

[10:22] We started with probably a half dozen. And as you start to think about different kinds of scenarios, multiple possibilities come up. We came up with a number that we were happy to settle on and kind of bookend, but it was also the case that we knew that that was just a set of building blocks. And in most schools were going to be combining some of those or throwing a bunch of those out the window. But usefully, throwing them out the window because they thought about them. They put them into their internal conversations and said, you know, that's just not going to work here. And let's move on to these others. And so in that sense, it was really just about trying to be helpful. Josh, what do you think?

**Josh:** [11:00] Yeah. And so Derek, you have a lot of experience doing applied scholarship, where what you're doing during the day, you're trying to think about that through a scholarly lens and then write that so academics and practitioners and peers can utilize that writing. So you're in that boat and you know how challenging it is often to do both at once, to kind of do your day job of doing the work and then to write it all out.

[11:30] I look back of when Eddie and I were writing the fifteen scenarios, free Inside Higher Ed. And those were the most insane times ever for higher education. We were all just in the middle of more work than we've ever had trying to make these transitions. So it was quite an intense time. I think it was rewarding that we were able to rework those pieces for Inside Higher Ed into this digital book for Hopkins. We'd worked with Hopkins Press for our first book and they were willing to put it all together. We worked and rewrote it some so it was more generalizable, not just to the fall, but overall. And they were willing to put that out as a no cost digital book. And it's done extraordinarily well on their project muse platform.

There's been great interest so that, it was a writing project that seemed to work out really well.

**Derek:** [12:29] Yeah. Yeah. Well, and I know I mean, I caught wind of some of our vice provosts talking about the fifteen scenarios as they were working through their plans for the fall. And I'm sure that happened in a lot of other institutions as well. Because I do think, you know, we were in this moment where we were trying to figure out what are some of the possibilities. And when someone lays out a menu with, you know, detailed descriptions and pros and cons and kind of principles to think through. I think that's super helpful.

[13:00] And you're right, that kind of writing is hard to do because you're having to do the work and then also articulate it in a way that other people can learn from. So I was very impressed at your ability to kind of do both of those things at the same time. Can you talk through a couple of the scenarios? Maybe one that was widely adopted this fall and maybe one that was less widely adopted?

**Eddie:** [13:23] Yeah, so we bookended the scenarios with kind of coming back to campus fully in normal mode or at least a new normal, what that new normal would look like with PPE and social distancing and so on, on one end and then on the other end, kind of fully remote. And then a lot of the scenarios that we were mapping out were kind of between those, those bookends. And I think in some sense, those bookends have played out. You have a bunch of campuses that brought students back in a kind of fully remote or a fully on-campus mode. Some instruction either fully remote or hybrid or in person.

[13:59] And then you have a large number of campuses that just had to go fully remote. They couldn't kind of manage bringing students back in any sort of capacity. So in that sense, oddly, I think the bookends served probably as the markers and the most campuses seem to choose one of those with some, I think some of the pieces in the middle probably playing out where you have a lot of what's happening in a kind of hybrid campuses where you have students back on campus and instruction happening in person. You still have a lot of remote students. And so the HyFlex mode is being kind of managed across a lot of campuses. In many respects, the HyFlex mode was probably the most obvious for a lot of folks in the ones, the one that everyone wanted to talk about and think about and employ.

[14:47] And as we tried to make clear, also the hardest one to do, and at least for faculty members, and certainly the one that is most challenging for students to feel present in. And

so that one became a kind of a lightning rod for a lot of folks to really kind of focus in on like that's what we need to do. And then we were trying to figure out how we help people understand that's a significantly difficult thing to do, to manage, to juggle both from a technical perspective, but really from a teaching perspective.

[15:15] I have a graduate program that I've been directing for now a number of years and we do HyFlex in that program. And it's hard, hard on the faculty, hard on the students, but a lot of schools are doing it now and it's trial by fire and they're kind of figuring a lot of that out.

**Derek:** [15:34] And just for clarity, since terminology has gotten a little fuzzy this year, when you say HyFlex, what elements of instruction are you referring to?

**Eddie:** [15:40] Yeah, that's a great question. So the term as it's kind of coined by, by Beatty, is really thinking about flexibility for students to choose which modality they want to be in, in any given class, whether they want to be in person or they want to be remote. And the classroom is set up in such a way that allows for that flexibility. Given the conditions of the pandemic, the flexibility probably is not in the student's hands, but more so in the institutional hands in trying to figure out how do we distribute students either remote or in-person based on social distancing, based on where students happen to be located and so on.

[16:15] But the idea, the fundamental idea, is that you're teaching in a classroom synchronously to students who are present in the classroom and students who are remote at the same time. And you have technology, hopefully, to try to manage the students who are both remote and who are in person at the same time. And so the dynamic is complicated because you're teaching to two different audiences at the same time.

**Josh:** [16:40] So Derek, to kind of add on to Eddie's answer, I'm reflecting on the conversations that we had, that we've had, as Eddie and I were researching, this narrows, and we talked to a bunch of peers. One of the big things that came out in our conversations is you talked a lot about concerns with equity and we certainly had that mirrored in conversations we talk with, with other people who were responsible for helping with academic continuity. It was very clear that you could do a lot of things, but you really had to think about students who had the most challenges, who might have technology challenges or family challenges.

[17:23] And that part of the goal with remote learning and academic continuity, and *The Low-Density University*, is making the experience as positive for all learners, in a very difficult situation. And, you know, it's interesting to me that I think our community really put equity first. I'm not sure if we succeeded in having that language really be diffused and disseminated to all academic leaders and decision makers, as they went forward.

[17:56] There's sort of an allergy of talking about when things, they're not working. We're a lot more comfortable talking about when things don't work. But we don't have to kind of worry about, you know, students' pain, or I guess we do have to worry, but, you know, our concern is really learning. So it's interesting how much influence we are able to have in terms of the focus on equity.

**Derek:** [18:18] Yeah. Well, and again, I think I found myself referring to some of your work because it was maybe politically helpful for me to point to someone outside of my university context who could say these are some of the pros and cons, right? Like yes, hybrid, HyFlex has these advantages. But it's also going to be really challenging for these reasons. And I think, you know, I think a lot of campuses did figure that out. Yeah.

[18:49] So I'm wondering, I do think Eddie, as you say, a lot of campuses went kind of leaned into fully remote or leaned into a kind of in-residence model that involved some elements of remote and some elements of HyFlex. You guys also talked about some kind of, I want to play on the low-density part, right? Or have you found campuses that have decided to bring back some students, but not other students or select students? I haven't heard as much about that in kind of my circles. I'm curious if that, if those scenarios, if you saw them playing out this fall as well.

**Eddie:** [19:24] I think we're actually both examples of that. Both Dartmouth and Georgetown have different populations of students back, Georgetown, a much smaller number of students. We have about 500 on campus. And then we have anywhere from 1500 to 2000 who are in the DC area. All of the students are learning remotely right now. We have a couple of pilots for hybrid, right now on campus, but for the most part it's remote instruction.

[19:49] But we brought back students who had various housing insecurity or food insecurities or challenging home circumstances that would have made it very difficult for them to stay and learn from those spaces. And so there was a kind of application process for students to, to apply to be back on campus. But Dartmouth has a much more structured approach, I think,



is that right, Josh?

**Josh:** [20:10] Yeah, at Dartmouth, it's been fascinating. So we've brought back about half of our undergraduates and many of the graduate students. I think the difference here is we're out in the country. Hanover's a town of ten-thousand people. We're a small college in a college town. We're not in an urban area or hard up against a big urban area so the caseload is very low, the spread is very low. And for, for very, for lots of reasons, schools outside of urban areas have had real challenges. You know, people want to move to cities. That's where the jobs are. That's where the excitement is.

[20:54] This has been an example of where being out in a rural area has been extraordinarily helpful. And, you know, we have lots of small liberal arts colleges out in rural areas. What's been amazing is the students here are so happy, they're so happy to be back. And I think Eddie maybe anticipated this more than I did. I sort of thought, well, you kind of need, you need both. You need to be back and have the classroom experience and all the sports, and maybe that's, and all the cultural stuff.

[21:27] I think that's probably true, that's the best, but students to be able to live together and do what they can do and then do most of their learning still remotely there. You know, it's not perfect, but it's much better for them than having to do everything from, from home. And that was somewhat of a surprise to me.

**Eddie:** [21:46] I think separating the idea of instruction from residence is really important right now. And a lot of schools are having trouble making that separation conceptually that, well, of course we're going to bring them back to campus. We need to have everything in place for them to learn on campus. And that just doesn't have to be the case. I think there are, there are so many advantages to that sense of what a residential institution brings to students, offers to students in terms of formation and enculturation and so on. That the learning, it can be done in a variety of different ways and in many respects better.

**Derek:** [22:20] And I've noticed that, well, this has shown up in our conversations on campus. And I had started to notice, hearing reports from faculty, that our students, first of all, at the start of the semester our students were very excited to be back on campus. And we have about 90% of our undergraduates on campus this fall. So only about 10% opted for remote learning. We are in a big city and so it's been more kind of a challenging situation in terms of health and safety.

[22:47] But we also instituted mandatory weekly COVID testing for all of our in-residence students. And so when you're running six or seven-thousand tests a week, it does give you some options to kind of keep things under control. And up until the last couple of weeks, our numbers were holding very small and very steady. And so all that to say though, I do think I heard a lot of reports of students who were very excited to be back and to be back in the classroom early in the semester.

[23:12] But now the consensus seems to be that students are still happy to be on campus, but if it's a HyFlex or a hybrid classroom, they're going to often take the Zoom option and not actually come to class. And I tossed this out on Twitter and apparently a lot of other campuses are experiencing this as well. And so I'm wondering, I mean, one reaction to that, that I've heard from some faculty is ok, it's time for attendance policies. If you're on campus, you need to come to class. I'm curious what your thoughts are on that as we now have this opportunity again, like we did in the, in the summer to kind of think through what is the next semester going to look like and how are we going to handle these challenges? What are your thoughts on, on that dynamic of kind of where students want to be?

**Josh:** [23:55] So I'll start here and it will be interesting what Eddie has to say. It's always fascinating because we spend so much time together, but it's always interesting. So my thoughts on this are that it comes down to both resources and philosophy, that one of the things that absolutely driven me crazy about higher ed's approach during COVID, is the growth of these Zoom classes. You take your residential and you Zoom it and call it a class. And I've certainly seen this. I have kids in grad school and college. And I see that's the approach.

[24:39] Where someone like me, who's been working in online education now for a couple of decades. That's the last thing you ever want to do. What you want to do is design your class like you would an online class no matter how you deliver it, online or face to face. So that is design with learning outcomes and a lot of asynchronous work and the synchronous work. If it's there, it's more, it's not didactic, it's more discussion. You record the lectures and then it's very flexible.

[25:09] And we know that that's the right way to do it. But it also takes an enormous amount of resources of faculty working closely with instructional designers and building up courses. So I hope we go in that direction. These kind of students sitting in for two hours doing Zoom classes, I hope we call that bad and try not to do that is our standard

going forward.

**Eddie:** [25:37] Yeah. I don't know that I would disagree with that. I think about might be the, you know, not always the case. I think we're seeing that we have a lot of instructors who are doing a really good job trying to manage and figure out what happens in the classroom in this kind of space. They're adapting to the environment. We spent a lot of time over the summer teaching faculty at least some principles to think about, even though we couldn't do exactly what Josh is saying, which is impossible to do with 2300 faculty members across, you know, 3500 or whatever number of courses we have.

[26:10] But what we could do is try to help people think about some ways in which they could adapt. Even just that idea that they should adapt what they were doing it in a face-to-face classroom, to an online environment that they shouldn't think about it. The language I've been using us as a translation, they should think about it as an adaptation that this is really about taking advantage of and recognizing the challenges of an online space. And so going into it with an assumption that this different modality is going to require different teaching practice.

[26:39] And then to try to adjust as you go and rather importantly adjust as you go. Which is in some sense one of the differences between what happens in a traditional online course that's highly designed upfront. Those are more similar in many respects to an in-person class or off into an in-person class. Where the metaphor that I think about as you're on the shore and you just kind of push the boat and you let it steer itself for the rest of its journey. That's your syllabus. You've sort of set it out on a path and you just let it go.

[27:11] But really right now what you have to do is you have to continually adapt. You have to continually adjust to see where your students are. You have to constantly be asking them about their challenges and understand where they are so that you can continue to think about do I, is this too much right now? Do I need to pull back? Can I add more here? It's like a, it's a recipe in progress. And if you can see it in that way, you can actually do a little bit more interesting work than often you do in an online course that's kind of a fully designed, fully developed course, high media high structure, but rather rigid in that sense.

[27:42] And so there's an opportunity here to think about that. I think as we move into the spring, what do you do to continue to get faculty to think about how they adapt their work into this environment? This is not to say that all faculty are doing that across the country like I

think what Josh has experienced and what he's articulating is probably more prevalent than not. Faculty are still doing the same thing. They're trying to think about how, what they were doing in the, in their face-to-face classes across the country, just needs to be now kind of translated to this, this Zoom environment. But if we can change that mindset and we can start to get people to think about this as a dynamic process, I think we can actually have some really, really good classes. And I'm seeing that at Georgetown. We have a lot of faculty who've adapted to that or adopted, that mindset of it, of adaptation. And they're, the students are responsive and responding to it and recognizing that the faculty are really giving their all to make this dynamic and engaging experience.

**Derek:** [28:39] So I do want to come back to kind of the faculty choice here because I had some good thoughts about that. But in terms of the kind of scenarios that you laid out, as you look back over this fall semester as we head into the spring, are there any scenarios that, or choices that colleges and universities made that weren't on your list that turned out to be important? Or are there things that you might add to the list for the spring now that we have a few months under our belt?

**Josh:** [29:09] So one thing that we didn't talk about, I think, and it's all kind of a blur in COVID time and the election. And I have to say that I'm very influenced being a parent, watching my kids navigate remote education and on-campus remote education as students. So it all kind of blends together. But I don't think we talk much about what might happen is that classes would run as they normally did, but just translate one to one to Zoom that everything be synchronous and that there'd be much less asynchronous and much less things and discussion boards recorded that it's all kind of, you know, if you meet three hours on Zoom, the class meets three hours on Zoom.

[29:55] I, you know, thinking back, it would have been maybe nice to head that off somehow and have people not confuse what online learning, online learning's not Zoom synchronous learning. They're different. We tried to distinguish between remote learning and online learning. But I think nowadays you're hearing that confounded some that you hear, oh, we've done online learning through Zoom, we can keep doing that. And part of my role being director of online programs and strategy is to, is to make that transition to say, ok, we did this with remote learning for academic continuity, but if you're designing an online program it is, as Eddie talked about, very resource intensive, highly designed. Not that, so I guess I wish we had maybe talked more about that. Eddie, what do you think?

**Eddie:** [30:47] Yeah, it's interesting. I mean we did try to help people think about that sense of adaptation versus translation and the work that was required. But I think you're right, Josh, I don't think we necessarily outlined the kind of the low-hanging fruit of the lowest hanging fruit, which is just to walk into the classroom virtually and teach exactly how you taught in the previous semesters. And I think in part, the reason for that is we were trying to acknowledge that that's what was happening in the spring. That was really where we were and we were trying to map out a set of possibilities for moving away from that for the fall.

[31:34] Like if the spring was this thing. And we all know it was a challenge and we all know, you know, it was seat of our pants. We need to do better in the fall. We all knew that as well. It wasn't that we thought the spring was the model that we should identify. So maybe I think we just took that too much for granted. I think we did a little bit of marking it, but maybe, maybe not enough. I think that's a really good point.

[32:02] The others, partly to answer your question, Derek, is that I think we kind of came to this as we were writing out the scenarios and the detail, is that people were just going to mix and match these in different kinds of ways that these weren't really isolated scenarios. But, like Notre Dame, for example, started early and has kind of, most of their students back on campus. They're doing hybrid, they're doing in person, and they're doing remote, but they've got a whole smorgasbord of different kinds of options for their students and for their faculties when their faculty were remote.

[32:39] And I think that's exactly right. I mean it's more of a cafeteria menu than a fine dining menu. People aren't sitting down with prefix and saying these are your choices and, you know, pick these three options and go for it. But rather, how do you combine them in the context that you're in? And so we tried to gesture toward that. We didn't start there, though. We didn't start by saying, this is exactly what we intend by this and therefore, you should think about it in these contexts. As we put the book together, we tried to emphasize that I think more.

**Derek:** [33:10] Yeah, yeah. I do feel like that smorgasbord analogy makes a lot of sense, right? Like Notre Dame, I hear lots of places that are taking different elements and making different choices for different students or different programs or different contexts. I want to circle back to Josh's comment about the kind of class by Zoom. And I do think, I agree. I think a lot of us in teaching centers and technology centers were really clear back in March and April that what we were doing at that point was emergency remote teaching. And we can do a lot

better in the fall.

[33:44] But I think some faculty and students just got used to it, right? It's not that kind of that model of just taking your in-person class and putting it right on Zoom as is. It's not that that's a better model, it's that we got used to living with it. And so it feels like it's working more than it actually is in some ways.

**Eddie:** [34:03] Yeah, no, I think that that's true. There are other challenges we're confronting right now. I mean, related to the other end of the spectrum. We have faculty who are doing a really good job, adapting they're seeing this as a different space, so they're kind of moving away from that classroom as Zoom only. So they're doing asynchronous. They're still assigning homework. They're still having synchronous classes. They're seeing this as an opportunity, I think really to, to challenge their teaching practice. So they're doing more active learning and when students have five active learning classes, it's exhausting, it's overwhelming.

[34:43] Our students are feeling like this is way, way too much work. And then there's the overhead costs of just being online and remote, right? It's exhausting in and of itself. So if you consider that like a 15-20 percent overhead cost of just tired and exhaustion and then you have five classes now that are not phoning it in, in the way that some of them might have been phoning it in prior. Phoning it in is maybe it's probably wrong. But if you're going in and you're lecturing every day, your students have an expectation of a kind of pace, right? It's not high-intensity teaching and learning. It's, you know, it's, it's a little bit of a slower jog. And now you got five classes that are high-intensity. They're active learning and our students are feeling it.

[35:26] And then you add the pandemic and you add the election and you add, you know, everything that's going on in their lives. And our students are overwhelmed. Our faculty are overwhelmed right now. And we're definitely feeling all of that, so the trial by or the class by Zoom and that sort of sense of, you know this is the way to teach, definitely was a problem. But interestingly, I'm seeing the problem of too much success too, in terms of getting people to think about how to do more active learning in this kind of space.

[35:57] And it's a difficult balance to find, which is why in my mind, it's a constant adaptation. And you're, as a faculty member, you're not just adapting your class to the pace that you expect, but you have to start adapting your class to the entire curriculum and seeing whether

or not, hey, am I asking what feels reasonable to me, but may not be reasonable in this context for all my students to do.

**Derek:** [36:21] I'd been excited by the faculty who have learned new approaches, who have learned new tools. Vanderbilt was a campus that had very little online teaching before the pandemic. And we went from, you know, dozens of faculty with teaching experience online, to all of them. And so it's been a bit of a culture change. And we're working on a new blog series at our Center for Teaching blog called, I think we're calling it "Never Going Back," like elements of what they've learned this fall that they will continue to use in their teaching going forward.

[36:54] And I guess I do want to ask you guys to project out a little bit, maybe past the spring semester, if we look a few years out, assuming the pandemic is under control and things can go back to some form of normalcy. We call our podcast Leading Lines, and we talk about the future of educational technology. And I'd like to say that we don't want to predict it so much as shape it. So given what you've seen and experienced this year, what would you want for the educational technology landscape at colleges and universities two, three, four years out after the, the post pandemic?

**Josh:** [37:29] So I guess I'll start here. And Eddie and I are now talking about all of this a great deal because we're thinking about our next book. We've caught the bugs and we're trying to figure out.

**Derek:** [37:44] Well, now you can do one a year. So just keep them coming. (laughs)

**Eddie:** [37:47] Josh wants two a year, I think.

**Josh:** [37:53] I think what Eddie and I think about what we would want going forward. We often come back to the same things which really have nothing to do with technology. It's that the teaching during the pandemic and teaching and learning during the pandemic is clarifying in a lot of ways. What we've learned and what we've known as people who are learning people, but now it's really clear is what matters is the relationship with the educator and the learner and developing that, that relationship and that kind of carrying that, that happens within a class.

[38:32] And what matters is learners actually taking active parts in constructing their own

education and being a partner with the faculty in figuring this out and us going together as partners in that work. In some ways, this crazy time we've lived in when all rules were thrown out, lots of faculty and students were able to renegotiate that relationship and try to do things in a different way, which has been really wonderful and beautiful to see. So as we come back, I really hope, but I think Eddie and I hope that that stays, that we have a different way of learning together and that we're all kind of invested in that. Eddie, how would you articulate that?

**Eddie:** [39:18] Yeah, I think that's a great answer. Completely agree. I think one of the most gratifying things in this really difficult moment is to hear from faculty in a variety of forums just how much what they're doing now and what they've been learning and how they've been thinking about their teaching will impact their teaching going forward. We run a forum every other week, which we did every week, in fact, throughout the spring and summer and now it's every other week in the fall with our main campus executive faculty group on instructional continuity. And so it's a faculty forum.

[39:56] We get anywhere from 50 to 300 faculty who show up and they come in on Friday afternoon at 4:30 to just sit and talk about teaching and think about what they've been doing. And sometimes we have faculty who are talking and sometimes it's us and sometimes it's kind of just an open conversation. And to hear from faculty who have just become advocates. And both they're really happy with the work that they've been doing with, with CNDLS, with our center and with my colleagues, but also just for the ones who don't even mention that, just to sort of hear them talk about teaching and active learning.

[40:34] And so the concepts that we've been talking about for twenty years are now really part of their conversation. They're part of their discourse in ways that I think are just incredibly gratifying. So in addition to, I think that partnership that Josh is talking about, that sense that reflection on teaching, actively thinking about teaching, actively thinking about practice for a lot of our faculty is now going to be part of their muscle memory. It's now going to be something that they're going to be willing to recognize is necessary and important, do better in the classroom. Whether that's in-person or hybrid or online. And that they will, they will take a lot of those lessons, those challenges, just like where I started with that failed class.

[41:17] And the thing that was miserable about it for me that launched me on a journey. I think a lot of our faculty are going to have those moments that are going to launch their kind



of teaching in a different kind of direction, even if they've been teaching for twenty, thirty years. These are those moments that become, I think in its truest sense, this comes inflection points and allow our faculty, allow everyone to kind of move forward in different direction.

**Derek:** [41:42] Yeah, I've been saying that by some measures, my teaching center did about ten years worth of work in four months this summer, if you look at head counts and such. But I think there's maybe also ten years worth of cultural change that happened in about four months in how our communities think about teaching and learning. And that's really exciting.

**Josh:** [42:02] So Derek, how would you answer that question that you asked us?

**Derek:** [42:07] I think that both our faculty and our students, some of this is coming from the Vanderbilt contexts where we don't have a history of online education, right? Our School of Nursing has been doing it really well for a couple of decades. But outside of that, you know, our experience and our branding is very much about the residential experience. But I think there's now the possibility that we can play with that idea a little bit.

[42:32] I think about, I don't know, twenty years ago I heard that Kalamazoo College in Michigan would send I think it's all of their juniors go study abroad. I don't know if this is still true or not. But I thought about what does that mean for a campus if an eighth of your student population is off campus every semester, right? Like it changes housing, it changes class dynamics and curriculum. And I feel like that we have an opportunity now to rethink some of the assumptions that we've made about what an undergraduate college experience has to look like.

[43:07] And I may sound out of step with a lot of higher education, when I say that. I think Vanderbilt and some of our more selective colleges and universities that have prided themselves on the residential experience have been able to avoid some of the conversations about how online education is changing higher ed. And there are plenty of campuses that have moved to very different models a couple of decades ago.

[43:33] I find it exciting though to have faculty thinking creatively about how many doors this might open. And I think some of our students are starting to think creatively about that too. And so I think that's kind of exciting for me. I'm spit balling. But what if Vanderbilt could enroll another couple of 1000 students because we had a more kind of creative approach to

online education? Right now we're kind of limited by the beds that we have on campus. And so the residential education is certainly a valuable experience, but I just, I see some potential for playing with that and experimenting more than we have allowed ourselves to experiment with in the past.

**Eddie:** [44:12] That's great.

**Derek:** [44:13] Yeah. Well, you guys are both teaching center people, as am I. And I'm curious, what role do you see for teaching centers going forward, given what we've experienced this year, given some of this cultural change around teaching and learning?

**Eddie:** [44:33] Josh has promoted everybody, I think, recently, so we're all waiting for the checks. (laughs)

**Josh:** [44:40] Yeah, aren't you guys running the places by now? (jokingly)

**Derek:** [44:44] Are you referring to Josh's recent column about why teaching center directors should be made provosts?

**Eddie:** [44:49] Exactly, exactly. So one of the things I've been talking to Josh about, I think there's kind of an analogy here to IT departments in the mid-nineties. If you were around in the mid 90's and you sort of watched IT departments kind of evolve and grow into what they mostly become and there had been kind of some stages of IT departments over the years, but in the mid-nineties, with the internet in particular now becoming a thing across college campuses, IT departments had to centralize a lot of dispersed resources across universities. They had to really start to think about what the purpose of an IT department might be beyond managing just administrative systems which had been kind of its primary focus in for a long time.

[45:34] So you had the rise of academic systems in ways that became necessary at institutions. And now they're kind of fundamental to an institution. You can't have a college, a university without a really robust IT department to support everything from what happens at the faculty level, at the student level, the classroom level, and the institutional level. And my sense is that we're at a moment where a lot of colleges and universities are going to realize that that's an, that's a necessary or there's a similar necessity for teaching and learning. You could go back to libraries and say a similar analogy with libraries. You go back to student

affairs programs and make a similar analogy to student affairs programs and so on.

[46:15] But that there's a shift here and a recognition that as Josh was saying earlier, this work has to be done in partnership. This work is difficult. This work requires support in that if we're going to continue to evolve in a variety of different directions that involve multiple modalities of teaching and learning, we have to have the support to do that on campuses. And that is going to require a different kind of investment. And so like IT departments, we're going to have to start to think about what those look like.

[46:42] Are they going to be centralized or are they going to be dispersed? Are they going to be cloud-based or are we going to build all the resources internally? Are we going to, you know, partner, what are those partnerships going to look like? Who are we going to lease things with, and what does it mean to have a lot of that stuff happen internally? And I think you will start to see that play out quite a bit across colleges and universities.

**Josh:** [47:02] I wanted to ask Eddie about this because he's been making this argument to me and I've been trying to figure it out. So Eddie, assuming that's right, all sounds good to me.

**Eddie:** [47:14] Assuming? (jokingly)

**Josh:** [47:15] In this era of scarcity, demographic headwinds are real challenges to the models. Where are institutions going to get the resources and the money to make these sorts of investments? The time you talked about was also a time of rapid growth in higher education that could accommodate those sorts of investments in IT. We're not going to have that sort of growth unless it's a different kind of market. So how are you thinking about getting the money for what you're talking about?

**Eddie:** [47:45] Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, I probably, first I would argue with a time of rapid growth. I think it was a time of rapid cost inflation, but not necessarily time of rapid growth in higher ed. I don't know that we have, we saw significant growth across all of higher ed at that moment or that individual institutional level that, that money was necessarily easily targeted. Every institution I was at was struggling to figure out how you put together an IT department that would actually be functional in that way. There wasn't a new pool of money coming from somewhere that said, hey, now that the internet is in existence, we have to figure out how to spend all this free money that's coming our way.

[48:24] Rather, you had to start to prioritize resources. You had to recognize that it was going to have a particular kind of influence on campus that was necessary. And in fact, it led to a lot of institutions, a reduction in revenue in places that were significant. So I think that the most, one of the more shared examples is that the telephone revenue that would come from dorm telephone services, we start to lose a lot of that when the internet came into being, and when cell phones came into being. IT departments didn't have a lot of the revenue and the resources that they might have had it at some point in time.

[49:01] So I would quibble with that sort of distinction. I think we all had to figure that out and we had to kind of make room for what was now a necessary element of higher ed in the same way that you could probably look at almost any service that institution had at some point to implement an institute, whether that's a gym in health services or counseling services, accommodation services. We all have to kind of figure out how are we going to re-prioritize those, that funding stream, in order to make those things possible. So I think that's a quibble with that sort of construct.

[49:36] But I'd also say that there's also an opportunity here. I think and you're invested in that opportunity. There's and Derek you mentioned earlier, what if we had a couple more thousand students on campus in a way that was allowed for by really rethinking the residential education that would bring in potentially new revenue that would allow for and I think this kind of investment as well and that investment's not going to happen unless you really rethink that dynamic. So there are ways of doing it. And so, you know, when you make me provost, Josh, we'll figure that out.

**Derek:** [50:10] Well, thank you both. I'm going to wrap us up here because we're coming on time. But I hope our listeners have gotten a sense of how well you two work together and how you bounce ideas off of each other. And I know I'm going to be looking for your future writing whatever that is, whatever the book project is or the twelve blog posts Josh writes a week on Inside Higher Ed. Thank you for being on Leading Lines and for sharing your experiences and your perspectives on the current and potential future state of higher education. This has been a really fun conversation today.

**Eddie:** [50:43] Thanks, Derek. It was really great to have that conversation. Josh, it was great to see you.

**Josh:** [50:47] It was great to see you. Thanks, Derek. It's always great to spend time with you.  
(music)

**Derek:** [50:52] That was Edward Maloney, the executive director of the Center for New Designs and Learning and Scholarship at Georgetown University. And Joshua Kim, the director of online programs and strategies at the Dartmouth College Center for the Advancement of Learning. A couple of great teaching centers.

[51:07] Thanks to both Eddie and Josh for taking some time to talk with me for the podcast. As I mentioned at the end of the interview, it was really fun to hear them collaborate out loud. And it gives a sense of why they're writing is so lively and full of interesting ideas.

[51:20] I keep thinking about Eddie's comments that when students have five active learning classes, all with different kinds of assignments and activities, that can be a little overwhelming. We've been conducting focus groups recently, asking students about their experiences with online and hybrid learning this fall. And that's been a recurring theme. Keeping up with classes is just harder this year, for lots of reasons, but some students have pointed to all the asynchronous work they've been asked to do by their instructors as one new challenge. It's particularly hard when those activities feel like busy work, when it's not clear how the activities feed into synchronous sessions or larger, higher stakes assignments.

[52:00] Like Eddie and Josh, I'm also thrilled to see so many faculty and other instructors exploring new pedagogies for student engagement this year. But that can mean expectations for students have changed. This will, I think, take some calibration from both instructors and students in the semesters to come. As I mentioned earlier, Eddie and Josh's book, *The Low-Density University*, is open access, thanks to Johns Hopkins Press. If you'd like to read it or learn more about our guests, see the show notes for a link or two.

[52:29] You can find those show notes as well as past episodes of our podcast by visiting [leadinglinespod.com](https://leadinglinespod.com) Leading Lines is produced by the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching and The Jean and Alexander Heard libraries. This episode was edited by Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes when we publish them. I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening and be safe. (music)

