



# What it takes to become 'radically student-centered'

A conversation with  
higher education experts

20/20  
VISION



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As the coronavirus pandemic continues to disrupt higher education, many leaders are facing momentous decisions about how to best serve their institutions and drive lasting change that puts students first.

On October 13, 2020, three experts in higher education leadership spoke with Ellucian President and CEO Laura K. Ipsen about their hopes and concerns during a panel discussion at Ellucian Live Online. During this thoughtful conversation, led by Ellucian SVP of Strategy and Operations Melissa King, each panelist spoke to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for all of higher education. (Comments have been edited for clarity and length.)

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CREATING PROFOUND AND LASTING CHANGE

FEATURING:

**Laura K. Ipsen**

President and CEO, Ellucian

**Susan Whealler Johnston**

CEO, National Organization of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO)

**Ted Mitchell**

President, American Council on Education (ACE)

**Liz Murphy**

CEO and Chairman of the Board, CampusWorks



# Technology's role in student support

## Changing models and new tools for services and counseling



“Helping institutions track student engagement—attendance and office hours, logging onto lectures, joining discussion groups—that information is critical. On the other side, there needs to be receptors—professionals at the institution who are keeping track and noticing. That kind of **data collection and response is going to become critical**. We’re learning a ton about what learning-at-a-distance means for low-income, first-generation, mostly minority students, and the data that we’re collecting has really been a game-changer for that.”

**TED MITCHELL**, PRESIDENT, ACE



“Mental health was a huge concern and challenge prior to COVID. Then we had COVID and a move to video-based counseling. I can’t tell you the number of presidents who have told me, ‘We’re never going back to face-to-face—**now we can help more students with the same staff, and more students show up because the stigma is gone.**’ So, what a happy byproduct of what we’re experiencing, and I think a tremendous illustration of how we have to turn the way we think about these things totally on end to address the needs of the student.”

**LIZ MURPHY**, CEO AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, CAMPUSWORKS



“It’s one of the leading issues in higher education that I know presidents and others have spent a lot of worry time on. But [video counseling] does **raise the question of connectivity** for a lot of students. Rural or urban, it doesn’t matter—that is not always an easy threshold to pass through. So, we really have to work on that in order for students to get access not just to mental health offerings, but to their educational offerings as well.”

**SUSAN WHEELER JOHNSTON**, CEO, NACUBO



“Every day we think about how we can help institutions save resources in multiple ways to invest in people-to-people—because **it’s not always all about online technology or courses**, but actually having a chat with a human being. We’ve got to focus on more resources going to communities that need it the most.”

**LAURA K. IPSEN**, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ELLUCIAN





# An urgent call for greater access

Addressing the needs of underserved populations



**“The needs of a specific population—whether for internet, computers, student support, financial aid, or academic support—all of that has been magnified by the current crisis.**

If we are going to look farther ahead, we need to look farther ahead with that learning firmly in mind.”

**LIZ MURPHY**, CEO AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, CAMPUSWORKS



**“Our students are challenged to really determine: can they spend time and money on education now,**

when for so many of them—particularly those who were underserved before—they’re worried because the jobs that helped to fund their education have gone away as the economy reformulates itself?”

**TED MITCHELL**, PRESIDENT, ACE



**“When you look at the numbers for the last two decades, 36 million Americans took courses but never got a degree.**

**So we as technologists are saying, ‘How do we use technology to better serve people?’**

We’ve got to all play our roles to make those opportunities continue.”

**LAURA K. IPSEN**, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ELLUCIAN



**“The opportunity to save costs, to keep the cost of attending college as low as possible, is one of the things that we ought to pursue as part of the transformation coming out of COVID.** If we can have some positive effect on the cost of education, that would be a great benefit to the students we hope to serve.”

**SUSAN WHEELER JOHNSTON**, CEO, NACUBO





# The future of institutional collaboration

## Reimagining student-centered consortia



**“There’s an opportunity for sharing resources in an online environment in ways that are not as clear in an in-person environment.** That waiting line at the health center is going to disappear if the college’s support systems are combined with five other institutions. This is an unparalleled opportunity for new forms of institutional collaboration that make services more effective and more efficient.”

**TED MITCHELL, PRESIDENT, ACE**



“Remember how in a 20-mile radius, we used to have hospitals that did everything? But now, this hospital specializes in cardiac, this hospital specializes in trauma? Courageous leaders and boards are saying, ‘We really need to look at what is at our core, and look at the students we’re serving in our region, and **all of us together serve all those needs—not individually, but as a network or a system of institutions** that come together to make that happen.’”

**LIZ MURPHY, CEO AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, CAMPUSWORKS**



“I think we’ll see this more and more, so **we need to do the right thing to free up resources for institutions to shine**—whether that’s the best nursing program, the best neuroscience program, the best agriculture program—because that’s really the true identity and the value that students will find.”

**LAURA K. IPSEN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ELLUCIAN**



**“We’ve had consortia for a long time, but this is more radical and student-focused; it is paying attention to what students really need** and how can we best deliver it so that we’re not spending a ton of dollars at every institution to offer what every other institution is offering, but rather figuring out what’s our core and radically embracing it to support the student need.”

**SUSAN WHEELER JOHNSTON, CEO, NACUBO**





# A new perspective

## What the crisis has revealed about today's students



“Fifty years from now, if they write a book called *The Great Transformation in Higher Education*, it will be about that two-week-going-online moment that broke the back of time and space. And **if we really listen to students, we will stay disassociated from time and space**—not altogether, but time and space together will be just one component of a robust higher education system. Students are raising the bar for us, and if we're going to be student-centered, we've got to tend to that.”

**TED MITCHELL**, PRESIDENT, ACE



“**Leaders really want to be courageous enough to let go of what we thought students wanted.** We carry with us into higher education management what our last experiences were, and as we all get older, the gap between those experiences and what the students of today really want gets bigger and bigger. So we're carrying along with us a lot of baggage and expense that we can repurpose to what students are saying would be incredibly powerful for them, that would really open access for them.”

**LIZ MURPHY**, CEO AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, CAMPUSWORKS



“The need for transformation is critical; the time is now. During the Great Recession, there was a coming-together of ‘It's time for change, it's time for transformation.’ My concern following the Great Recession was that we didn't change enough, and my hope is that this event, as horrible as it is, does really serve as a catalyst for widespread change. **We need to be radically student-centered going forward** and change a lot of the things that we do and the ways that we think and the way we think of ourselves even as a business to make it much more student-focused.”

**SUSAN WHEELER JOHNSTON**, CEO, NACUBO



“**The institutions that make those bold decisions are going to move forward**, and others may be more challenged because they're waiting to go back to the way things were. We're working to build that future as enablers of what higher ed goals really will be.”

**LAURA K. IPSEN**, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ELLUCIAN





# A time for bold action

## Creating profound and lasting change



“If higher education is liberated and it liberates itself to become a problem solver—but also has the support that it needs from accreditors and the Department of Education to move more fully into this role of problem-solver and value-adder for the country—I think that higher education can really add so much. **Lifting up the entire enterprise is critical for us.**”

**SUSAN WHEALLER JOHNSTON**, CEO, NACUBO



“Funding is taking a big hit, but that can’t be the excuse for why we don’t innovate—it has to be the impetus for us making radical change to end up with the transformation that we need. And **that means being really hard-nosed about what we’re not going to invest in**, because this other thing is way more important.”

**LIZ MURPHY**, CEO AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, CAMPUSWORKS



“The increased capacity of technology and COVID have helped **institutions see their students in ways that they haven’t been able to before**. That’s what really is the heart of the matter for me—for all of us—and it’s what gives me hope.”

**TED MITCHELL**, PRESIDENT, ACE



“We all have to have 20/20 vision around the data. The technology is there to enable that—to figure out, how do we create true student well-being? How do we get those pathways friction-free? How do we make sure that we see what to stop doing so that institutions can save precious dollars to focus on the most important things? **We’ve been amazed at the bravery of so many institutions** who have started building that future.”

**LAURA K. IPSEN**, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ELLUCIAN



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