

RE-IMAGINING HIGHER  
EDUCATION WORLDWIDE  
AFTER COVID-19  
GW University Seminar Fund

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WORKING PAPER

In Fall of 2020 and Spring of 2021, faculty from GSEHD's International Education Program (IEP) hosted a series of three online meetings that were funded by GW's internal Seminar Series grant. The focus of the seminars was on higher education in a post-COVID world. This report, elements of which are currently being adapted for an academic paper, is a summary of the outcome of the three-part series. Although the passage of time since the third seminar ended in April of 2021 has not shown us to be in a post-COVID world yet, this report offers a snapshot in time of how a sample of higher education experts in different parts of the world at the time were responding to the pandemic and thinking about the future of their work.

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## **DEDICATION**

This report is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Sami Basha, President of the American University of Sicily, who died unexpectedly on October 21, 2021 from complications of COVID-19.

## OVERVIEW

### *Topic*

Re-Imagining Higher Education Worldwide After COVID-19

### *Scope*

Three GW-wide seminars on November 16, 2020, February 17, 2021, and April 14, 2021.

### *Background*

The main objectives of this three-part seminar series were to 1) develop an interdisciplinary research agenda to spur high-level thinking about the future of higher education worldwide; 2) comparatively study innovations in HEIs in selected regions of the world; and 3) inform a plan for establishing a new higher institution in the Mediterranean region that the two conveners have been involved with as consultants and for which GW could serve as a founding partner. We addressed these themes at three different levels—global, regional, and local—and each meeting included carefully chosen experts on campus, in the DMV area, and around the world from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds and professional experiences to address the question of higher education’s survival as premised on innovation in the wake of the pandemic. The insights generated from each meeting richly informed the agendas of each subsequent meeting. The three meetings in combination brought together proven best practices for interdisciplinary collaboration with innovations that will promote access to information and free inquiry in the future, and which have begun to change how people around the world approach idea generation.

### *Outcome*

Participation was restricted to invitees, but real-time observation was available to the public via an open Zoom link. Each meeting was recorded and disseminated through University and School web and social media platforms. Each meeting had an average of 150 attendees.

## SEMINAR 1 – GLOBAL: RE-THINKING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A POST PANDEMIC WORLD

The first seminar in this three-part seminar series occurred on November 16, 2020, from 1:00-3:00pm ET. The seminar was hosted by Prof. Long and Prof. Streitwieser who moderated discussion among the 14 invited panelists and facilitated questions from the estimated 185 registrants. The main objective of this first seminar was to foster an energetic dialogue among a group of high-level experts on the global impact of the current COVID-19 crisis on higher education and possible responses by the academy going forward. The seminar had a global and systems focus, although admittedly through an American lens.

Key questions for consideration of the panelists included:

- What changes must higher education make to thrive in a post-pandemic environment?
- How can we promote equity and relevance of higher education worldwide?
- What lessons from the pandemic can we apply to inform the rethinking of surviving existing institutions and also the development of entirely new higher education institutions?

### ***Seminar 1: Overview of Activities***

The seminar began with opening remarks from Prof. Streitwieser who introduced the topics of discussion for the meeting, largely centered around the global impacts of the current COVID-19 crisis on higher education and possible responses from the academy moving forward. He also established the framework from which the panelists would later address these topics. There were then brief remarks by invited keynote speaker, Prof. Noah Sobe of Loyola University, Chicago, on some themes from his personal perspective. This opened the floor for three simultaneous discussions in breakout rooms through the different themes of quality, access, and cost. Attendees could select the thematic breakout room of their choice. Those discussions lasted approximately 40 minutes, at which point panelists and attendees reconvened as a larger group. Prof. Long, Prof. Laura Engel, and Prof. Streitwieser quickly summarized the key takeaways from each small group discussion, which generated responses across groups and stimulated conversation among the group of invited experts. Finally, panelists took questions from the audience for the remaining time before Prof. Long ended the seminar with concluding remarks.

### ***Seminar 1: Summary of Discussion***

Since the COVID-19 pandemic struck visibly at the heart of the United States in mid-March, the tenor of speculations about what the future of higher education may be, both in the United States and in other countries, could well be graphed onto a continuum that would imply at one end speculation about unprecedented changes coming to the Academy and the fear that “hundreds of colleges will perish,” to the other end of the spectrum, where only minor adjustments *may* occur but essentially we will return to accustomed patterns. And yet still other, new analyses are already arguing that much of what was expected has in fact turned out much differently.

Prof. Streitwieser explained how at his own institution, the George Washington University, teaching has been conducted online since the spring and the entire academic year will conclude virtually – a decision that has had obvious difficult financial and personnel consequences. The university is preparing for the post-pandemic world, fully aware that major changes in higher education are afoot, from relatively minor issues like some form of continued virtual learning, to the larger, more urgent need for greater retrospection about how we can continue to better address longstanding educational and income disparities and help our students in the decades ahead adapt to significant societal changes and a potentially even more challenging employment market.

In a wide-ranging review of commentaries that have appeared since this health crisis broke in the U.S., Prof. Streitwieser noted discernible themes have emerged, and these themes have been shared with panelists ahead of time to inform the seminar’s discussion. Prof. Streitwieser identified three main topics as particularly salient: Cost, Quality and Access – the so-called “iron triangle.” This metaphor borrowed from the healthcare industry suggests the three sides cannot all be simultaneously improved. Prof. Streitwieser further explained the premise of this argument, that an improvement in one or two areas ultimately worsens the third. While there is no doubt the pandemic is inspiring innovations in each of these areas, Prof. Streitwieser further inquired, but what are they, and how will they interact with one another?

The floor was then passed to Prof. Sobe of Loyola University, Chicago, who specializes in comparative and international education and the history of education, and also holds the title of Senior Project Officer at UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris on the Futures of Education initiative, although his remarks during the seminar were not representative of UNESCO, but his personal views. Prof. Sobe addressed two major questions in his remarks: first, what it means to be post-pandemic, and second how higher education can and should shape the future.

Before discussing the meaning of living in a post-pandemic world, Prof. Sobe urged the panel to first reflect on our actions leading up to this moment. While the education sector has proved to be far more adaptable and flexible than others in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of scenario exercises in futures studies included global health pandemic components, yet, on the whole, the world of higher education was still largely unprepared for a crisis they had predicted to be forthcoming for decades. From this observation, Prof. Sobe remarked it is correct to assume that while education experts may have been successful in generating fairly accurate foresight, significant improvements are required from higher education institutions in establishing anticipatory measures to prepare for these projected disruptions. However, Prof. Sobe noted that the real risk of entering a post-pandemic world is that our predictions of future global disruptions will be replaced by an overwhelming sense that we now understand the scale of disruptions that can occur. Despite experiencing how drastically the world can change overnight through the COVID-19 pandemic, Prof. Sobe warned that we still do not have a realistic grasp on future potential disruptions, and part of anticipating the future is recognizing that it is “fundamentally unknowable and open.” All education futures conversations need

to begin including a wide range of potential disruptions – cloning and mass climate migration were several examples listed by Prof. Sobe as potential future challenges to the status quo of higher education. Despite the doomsday tone that is often brought about when discussing these possible future scenarios, Prof. Sobe encouraged the panel to avoid being locked into strictly dystopic or utopic mentalities when facing the uncertainty of the future and how higher education will be shaped by it, but instead, to approach the post-pandemic world with the mindset that future disruptions can create avenues and opportunities for innovative change that can actually improve current systems.

In moving on to his second question regarding how higher education can and should shape the future, Prof. Sobe expressed his frustration at the frequency in which education is positioned in futuring studies and literature as something that needs to react and adjust according to what happens in the future, rather than education playing an active role in creating and influencing what happens in the future. Instead of casting education in a reactive role, Prof. Sobe stressed the importance of remembering education's power to influence the future of the world, and challenged the panel to shift from considering how higher education will respond to future events to how it will tip the balance in the direction of our collective choosing. Higher education needs to respond to an enormous number of trends brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic that impact cost, quality, and access, but Prof. Sobe encouraged the panel to think about solutions to the structural issues that have been highlighted by trends from the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the severity of inequalities present in higher education, with first generation college students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds having their academic careers disproportionately altered or ended by the health crisis. Upon the recognition of these trends, Prof. Sobe stated "conversations about higher education in the future also need to be conversations about higher education *for* the future," and how we can work to create a better and more equitable future for education. A final framework Prof. Sobe presented before opening the conversation is the importance of recognizing the plurality of the future, and that multiple futures need to be democratically and locally envisioned, proposed and chosen in order to avoid accepting single future visions created by one part of the world and imposed on others. With this, Prof. Sobe concluded his remarks by calling on the panel to frame the remainder of the seminar's discussion as not just a reactive conversation, but one that seeks to determine the many ways in which higher education can play an active role in shaping a future it wishes to see.

After the three simultaneous breakout room conversations took place – each focusing on an assigned theme of either quality, cost, or access – seminar participants reconvened in the main room where selected speakers shared the key takeaways and highlights of their group's discussions. Prof. Engel began by providing an overview of her group's discussion on quality in higher education, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, by first reporting the different dimensions of quality suggested by the panel. It was difficult for the group to settle on a single definition of quality or narrow it to certain aspects of higher education, but Prof. Engel listed several contributing factors to quality that were discussed, such as how students are engaged and their level of engagement, as well as the professional learning opportunities provided to faculty in order to make the transition from face-to-face instruction to virtual learning platforms. In addition to noting the varying degrees of success regarding how well

faculty has been prepared to operate on these online platforms, Prof. Engel also highlighted the group's discussion on women scholars who have been affected by "pandemic parenting," and the possible ripple effects of halted knowledge production by women scholars, and how the decrease in the level of engagement between students and women faculty members during the pandemic may have affected the quality of higher education institutions. Despite panelists predicting negative repercussions for the quality of higher education due to pandemic related budget constraints that have limited resources and cut administrative staff, the panel also expressed the resilience they have seen among those working in higher education, and a renewed commitment to address issues of quality, access, and equity.

Prof. Long shared the major takeaways from his group's discussion on cost by first addressing the clear impact international student enrollment – or more precisely, the lack thereof during the pandemic – has had on the budgets of higher education institutions, as this is often a major source of revenue for universities. Predictions based on recent data from IIE on international student enrollment have been made regarding the long term financial implications of low international enrollment on universities, although Prof. Long noted that this is only the case for certain types of institutions, and not all are impacted in the same way. This conversation thread was supplemented with an awareness that virtual learning may provide the opportunity to lower enrollment costs, although this idea is closely intertwined with the other discussion topics of quality and access, and is not currently at the forefront of many conversations occurring in the sphere of higher education.

Lastly, Prof. Streitwieser presented his group's major discussion takeaways which focused on access – the final point in the iron triangle. Preliminary comments suggested that this health crisis has forced higher education institutions to pay more attention to the way in which they invest their money, and to address the systemic nature of problems plaguing much of higher education around the question of access – specifically seen in the wide disparities regarding internet access for students who have been forced to learn from home during the pandemic. Mental health was also mentioned in relation to access, as Prof. Streitwieser explained how many students depend on the community, resources, and various support systems provided by the university and experienced drastic impacts on their mental health when it was taken away. Dr. Wright's commentary was also mentioned, as he raised the question of access to what? And prompted further examination on the type of curriculum that is typically taught in universities and who it is taught by and for. These questions and the transitional moment resulting from the crisis begets greater introspection into what work universities should continue to do in a post-pandemic world, and what should be changed.

Dr. Ferreyra expanded on the provided summaries of quality, access, and cost focused discussions, by cautioning against blanket solutions to any of these issues. She argued that while many conversations about higher education in a pandemic and post-pandemic world have centered around the shift from in-person instruction to virtual learning, it is not so much a matter of how we teach, but a matter of what we teach. As ongoing changes in the labor market and economy have been accelerated by the pandemic, Dr. Ferreyra stressed the importance of higher education institutions adapting to fit the

needs required by the current workforce, which will look different country to country based on local and cultural contexts.

This opened the floor for a question-and-answer styled discussion, and through this type of conversation the main themes that emerged were: will the COVID-19 pandemic initiate any significant changes in the ways higher education institutions operate? And if so, what changes should be made? There was a wide range of responses to these topics, as Dr. Philip Altbach, Research Professor and Founding Director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, stated his belief that the COVID-19 crisis was overall bad news for higher education globally, and predicted that the economic fallout from the pandemic will be so severe that instead of seeing an increased generation of innovative ideas and practices from this unprecedented time, we will experience a constraint on thinking as universities and other higher education institutions try to respond to the aftermath of the pandemic instead. Dr. David Paris seconded Dr. Altbach, as he reiterated the idea that as soon as people and higher education institutions can return to normal, they will rush to be there. He explained that unless there is a real incentive or consequence to make significant structural changes to the university, administrators will move from the pandemic problem straight to the financial problem they are sure to face in the coming years. Dr. Robin Helms, Assistant Vice President of Learning Engagement on the American Council on Education, took a more nuanced approach in saying that while the pandemic has revealed how profoundly higher education institutions can be set in their ways, it has also forced them to undergo some soul searching. She further explained the health crisis has provided an opportune moment for higher education institutions to recommit to their mission and the population of students they serve, by finding better ways to be more responsive to them.

Other panelists had a more opportunistic outlook and focused their answers on how higher education institutions should change post-pandemic. Dr. Dawn Whitehead, Vice President of the Office of Global Citizenship for Campus, Community, and Careers at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, suggested that this could be the moment where we finally develop inclusive global learning for students now that we recognize this type of learning is not limited to those with international mobility. In response to Dr. Whitehead's argument that global learning can and should be accessible for all students, Dr. Dwayne Wright, Visiting Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration at the George Washington University and the Interim Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives, emphasized that while we can think globally, we cannot afford to stop thinking about what is happening locally. Dr. Wright elaborated on this sentiment by explaining how the COVID-19 pandemic has given us an opportunity to pause and reflect on what systems and ideas we are exporting into the world, as he argued many barriers to knowledge have been created in the U.S. and American higher education institutions have begun edging into the "credentialing business" and moving away from the education business. In a later response, Dr. Wright asserted that there are many different ways to answer this health crisis, and other countries, particularly in the Global South, should not necessarily try to reproduce westernized approaches, but instead should draw on their own contextual and cultural knowledge to address the current challenges to higher education.



In addition to many participants' responses that tried to negotiate a balance between global versus local, Dr. Danette Howard, Senior Vice President and Chief Policy Officer of the Lumina Foundation, provided a specific way that higher education institutions should use the opportunities for change created by the pandemic. She suggested that institutions should rethink their business models, so they are designed in such a way that they actually support students who do not complete their academic degree. Rather than finding a new student to enroll and take the place of the student who was unable to finish, a new approach needs to be taken on how to support adults with college credit but no degree in reengaging in higher education that is relevant to them and will aid them in the labor market.

The seminar's conversation returned to discussing positive opportunities for change within the world of higher education at its conclusion, as additional ways were discussed regarding how higher education may be presented as a solution to the problems that we are now facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic rather than simply seen as another casualty of it.

### ***Key Findings***

- **The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the *quality* of higher education institutions.** Due to pandemic related budget constraints among higher education institutions that have limited student resources, decreased professional learning opportunities for faculty members, and cut administrative staff, the quality of higher education is currently at risk.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has affected *access* to higher education institutions.** The pandemic has exposed the severity of inequalities present in higher education, with first generation college students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds having their academic careers disproportionately altered or ended by the health crisis. The digital divide has also widened since distance and virtual learning has taken the place of in person education.
- **Despite years of forecasting and scenario exercises that included components of a future health pandemic, higher education institutions were still largely unprepared for a crisis they had predicted to be forthcoming for decades.** Significant improvements are required from higher education institutions in establishing anticipatory measures to prepare for these projected disruptions.

### ***Notable Recommendations***

- **Discussions about higher education *in the future* also need to be discussions about higher education *for the future*.** Conversations about higher education in a post-pandemic world need to take less of a reactive stance, and rather, engage in conversations on how higher education can play an active role in shaping a future that is locally envisioned and democratically chosen.
- **Discussions about the future require a recognition of the plurality of the future, and that multiple futures need to be envisioned and collectively chosen in order to avoid accepting single future visions created by one part of the world and imposed on others.** There are many different ways to respond to the current health crisis, and other countries, particularly those in

the Global South, should not necessarily try to reproduce Westernized approaches, but instead, should draw on their own contextual and cultural knowledge to address the current challenges to higher education.

- **Educational leaders and scholars should avoid being locked into strictly dystopic or utopic mentalities when facing the uncertainty of the future and how higher education will be shaped by it.** Instead, there is a need to approach the post-pandemic world with the mindset that future disruptions can create avenues and opportunities for innovative change which may improve current systems.

## SEMINAR 2 – REGIONAL: SPOTLIGHT ON INNOVATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

The second seminar in this three-part seminar series occurred on February 17, 2021, from 9:00-10:00am ET, and considered pandemic-inspired innovations from the perspective of institutions in several different regions of the world. The seminar was hosted by Prof. Long and Prof. Streitwieser, who both moderated discussion among the two featured speakers: Dr. Bruce Ferguson, President of the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, and Dr. Nirmala Rao, Vice Chancellor of the Asian University for Women. The seminar's hosts also facilitated questions from the estimated 150 attendees from over 20 different countries. The main objective of this second seminar was to engage chief executive officers in exploring how the pandemic has impacted their institutions' approaches to both internationalization and local responsiveness.

Key questions for consideration of the featured speakers included:

- How can internationalization of higher education help institutions respond to the unique challenges of their regions?
- To what extent has the pandemic changed institutions' approaches to internationalization?
- What can institutional leaders do to better leverage internationalization for local benefit?

### ***Seminar 2: Overview of Activities***

The seminar began with Prof. Long's introductions of the two featured speakers, who are both chief executives of innovative institutions: Bruce Ferguson of the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani and Nirmala Rao of the Asian University for Women. He also provided a brief comparison of the two countries where the institutions are located. After Prof. Long's opening remarks, Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Rao both provided information on their institutions, their approaches to internationalization, and how those approaches have been affected by the pandemic. The seminar then proceeded to a lightly moderated conversation before taking questions from the audience. Prof. Streitwieser concluded the seminar with a summary of the conversation, and reminders for the third and final seminar in the series.

### ***Seminar 2: Summary of Discussion***

Why these two regions and why these two institutions? The seminar began with Prof. Long posing these questions, as he noted the two featured speakers might even be asking themselves how they coincide with each other. After all, Iraq and Bangladesh are clearly quite different, with a particularly striking contrast in size. Bangladesh, the eighth most populous country in the world, has four times as many people and fits them into a space a third of the size of Iraq. Their economies, too, suggest an odd pairing, with Iraq's oil-based economy struggling and Bangladesh's more diversified one soaring. The pandemic offers yet another dissimilarity, with cases surging in Iraq and subsiding in Bangladesh.

But it is precisely because their environments are so different that makes what these institutions share all the more remarkable. Both are young institutions—under two decades old, and have missions to develop leaders through liberal arts learning as well as commitments to educating traditionally under-represented communities, and are located in their country or region’s second cities. Both are unmistakably international in their orientations.

How is it that such similar reforms landed in such different places at roughly the same time? To answer that question, we might look at what Bangladesh and Iraq have in common. They are both parliamentary republics with overwhelmingly Muslim populations and severe refugee crises. On various indices, they have surprisingly similar levels of human development, inequality, and corruption.

When we consider that Iraq and Bangladesh are both situated in the shadow of larger, more powerful countries with complicated geopolitical histories stemming from colonialism – some of these common outcomes become more comprehensible. Indeed, it’s perhaps less surprising to note that both have British-inspired educational systems. But they also have more modern influences, including private higher education systems that educate at least a third of postsecondary students.

When it comes to international education, neither country is much of an inbound destination, especially when compared to neighboring hubs in their broader regions. International branch campuses of major universities from Western countries attract students and media attention to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar and to Hong Kong, South Korea, and Malaysia. Today we turn the spotlight toward institutions that have internationalized in different ways, perhaps even in more consequential ways.

Prof. Long explained that throughout this seminar, the goal is not only to distinguish fads from long-term reforms, but to learn from people and places which are undertaking notable works that might otherwise be overlooked – at least from the perspective of North America. That is why educational leaders and experts from these two regions, these two countries, and these two institutions were invited to speak at the seminar.

The opening comments of Dr. Ferguson’s presentation addressed the geographical position of the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) and how its proximity to Iran’s border and other large neighboring countries has further emphasized to students the importance of building bridges – whether that be from country to country, or across religions, ethnicities, or languages. Dr. Ferguson further explained that the university’s mission is similar to that of many liberal arts intuitions across the world – despite its great dissimilarity among other universities within its own country. The university’s principal objective is to develop the human capital required to build a healthy society, and, at an individual level, to support students in developing critical thinking skills, or, as Dr. Ferguson calls it, skills that foster “analysis based on facts.” The university stands in contrast to other higher education institutions in Iraq as it is the first independent, not for profit university in the country. Additionally, AUIS has distinct differences due to its international qualities and components, which, Dr. Ferguson claimed, prove the university is an international institution.

Dr. Ferguson made his case that the American University of Iraq should be categorized as an international school by drawing on its faculty, student population, curriculum and other relevant details. As he explained, a third of the university's faculty is from the United States, another third is from 16 different countries, and the rest are from Iraq. Despite the variety of backgrounds among faculty members, all can speak and write English at a professional level, and two thirds have U.S. academic degrees. The student population emulates this degree of diversity, as it is the most diverse student body in the Kurdistan region, with roughly 16 to 18 percent of students from outside the region.

Although the student population is largely Kurdish, the university still hosts students from all 19 provinces of Iraq as well as a small percentage of foreign students, such as refugees from Syria. 90 percent of students receive merit-based discounts and/or other financial support, which is provided by the U.S. government, Kurdish regional government, and other private donors. In order to be accepted into the university, students must be able to speak and write in English at an undergraduate level, as all courses at the university are taught in English. Eleven different degrees are offered for students to pursue, with medical lab sciences and business as some of the most popular. The alumni population consists of approximately 1,300 students, and Dr. Ferguson reported that students who graduate from the university typically experience great success when entering the labor market and often receive well-paying jobs in the private sector. Dr. Ferguson then listed a number of extracurricular clubs and activities available to students at the university, such as a gender center, culture and archaeology center, environmental studies program, and a publishing and business program.

In further proving its currently self-proclaimed title as an international school, Dr. Ferguson presented an informational table detailing certain aspects of the university as shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1. International Indices Table**

Index	AUIS Measurement
Faculty from abroad	68 %
Faculty who have studied abroad	65 % hold U.S. degrees
Students from abroad	<5 %
Students who have studied abroad	<5 %
Bilingual students	100 %
Teaching collaborations with foreign universities and scholars	University of Arizona, Stanford University, Princeton University, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Bath Spa University, TIEC
Research collaborations with foreign universities and scholars	University of Exeter, London School of Economics
Non-native language of instruction	Yes (English)
Foreign curriculum	Yes (U.S.)
Foreign pedagogy	Yes (U.S.)
Foreign institutional accreditation	Applied for
Foreign programmatic accreditation	CEA (ESL)
State of art teaching and learning pedagogy	Close to best practices (Zoom, SIS, laboratories)
Nearby international airport	Yes (5 km)
Nearby international border	Yes (Iran, 100 km)

After explaining the information presented in the International Indices Table, Dr. Ferguson revealed in his conclusion that AUIS holds a score of 70 percent on the International Master Index.

The floor was then passed to Dr. Rao to speak about her role as Vice Chancellor of the Asian University for Women, and in doing so, provide details about the university itself. Dr. Rao began her presentation by drawing a comparison with AUIS by stating that the Asian University for Women, established in 2008, distinguishes itself from other higher education institutions in its region - similar to AUIS in its regional distinctness - by being the only all-female liberal arts institution in the area. However, similarities between the two institutions were set aside for a moment, as Dr. Rao explained the unique mission and student population of the university. The Asian University for Women is designed to attract talented women from diverse backgrounds who normally would never have believed attending a university would be a possibility for them.

The overall goal of the university is to recruit women with potential from marginalized communities, provide them with an undergraduate education and degree, and begin to build an international network of female leaders in the region. As mentioned previously, the university actively recruits students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as garment factory workers, refugees from Myanmar, Syria, Palestine,

Yemen, hill tribes of Nagaland, and other conflict-ridden areas and/or marginalized populations. Recruiting refugees and garment workers has presented a variety of different challenges, a major one being the lack of exposure these women have had to English or math. In order to support these students and allow them to pursue a typical four-year undergraduate degree at the university, they created a one year pre-access program titled Pathways for Promise, which serves as a way to provide educational support for students in English, math, and other subjects to prepare them to enter undergraduate level studies. Dr. Rao noted the success of this program, which sees 90 to 95 percent of women enrolled in Pathways to Promise complete the program and enroll in their undergraduate degree program. There are five majors offered within the university's undergraduate degree program, with economics and public health studies the most popular. Dr. Rao expressed her great sense of satisfaction in seeing graduates leave the university to pursue careers in government, research institutions, and the private sector, or to continue their studies by completing PhD programs.

Despite the grand ambitions and achievements of the university thus far, Dr. Rao revealed that they are operating in a very small space. The university currently consists of just eight buildings, although they have received 140 acres of land from the Bangladeshi government and secured approximately 30 million in funding from the World Bank in order to build a campus that can support a growing student population. However, Dr. Rao stressed that this land grant is the only connection the university has to the government, as it intentionally operates autonomously from it in all other ways.

In speaking on the international aspects of the university, Dr. Rao stated that within the estimated 1,000 students who have graduated from the university and the 1,000 that are currently enrolled, only approximately 40 percent of the students are from Bangladesh, with the rest of the population coming from 19 different countries within Asia and the Middle East. The faculty is also very international, with members from 13 different countries around the world. Furthermore, the funding that sustains the university also draws on international partnerships. Dr. Rao explained that the university is entirely funded by donors, as over 95 percent of students are on a full scholarship with each student's scholarship totaling about \$15,000 USD. Most of the fundraising is completed by the university's foundation in Boston, Massachusetts, as that is where the founder of the university and board of trustees reside. Through the work of the foundation, an international network of donors has been established, which currently sustains the operations of the university. However, Dr. Rao concluded by stating that the university plans to charge students a fee to attend in the future in order to strengthen its long-term sustainability.

In regard to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on each institution, there have been similar issues but to very different degrees. Dr. Ferguson explained AUIS was able to move online within 96 hours of being told the university would have to shut down, crediting the expertise and experience of the faculty with these virtual platforms. Much of the faculty had previous experience teaching online, so while the university has invested in training since its transition to virtual instruction, the faculty worked together in the beginning to make the initial transition. As a result, the transition overall has been quite seamless, Dr. Ferguson noted, as he explained that the balance between online education and in-person education

on campus is likely to shift in upcoming years and become a permanent change for the university. This move towards offering online education options beyond the pandemic is motivated largely by the cost advantages to virtual learning, as well as the ability it provides in being able to reach students in areas they otherwise would not be able to with strictly in-person learning options. Dr. Ferguson cited somewhat frequent power outages for some students depending on where they live as one disadvantage to virtual instruction. However, the university has invested money to resolve issues related to faulty power grids for the affected students.

According to Dr. Rao's description of COVID-19's impact on the Asian University for Women, it encountered somewhat similar challenges to AUIS in regard to transitioning in-person instruction to completely online formats at very short notice. However, due to its diverse student population consisting of foreign students, refugees, and other largely marginalized groups, these same challenges proved to be far greater and most costly for the Asian University for Women. Dr. Rao explained that the university was given a four-day notice to shut down due to the health crisis and suffered serious financial implications as a result of having to pay to repatriate students across 19 different countries. Transportation was also extremely expensive at this time due to cancelled air travel, so the university had to pay for chartered flights – with some students not being delivered back to their home country until six months after the crisis began.

The challenges did not end once the students arrived back to their home countries either, as many were from poor, remote villages or areas of severe conflict, and lacked internet access, laptops, and other required learning materials. The university tried to resolve this issue by sending study packets as well as additional funds to students in order to pay for the internet to access their schoolwork. However, Dr. Rao, similar to Dr. Ferguson, credited her talented faculty members who worked in a collaborative fashion to train each other on virtual teaching platforms and adapt curriculum to distance learning. Although Dr. Rao said COVID-19 presented an opportunity to modernize their infrastructure, a huge investment was made in advancing their virtual platforms, so this came at a very high cost to the university. The university's future in terms of virtual versus in-person learning remains uncertain for the fall 2021 semester, as Bangladesh's health care industry is still buckling under the weight of the pandemic, and vaccinations are not a likely possibility for students in the near future. Dr. Rao expressed her concern in asking students to remain in their home countries, some of which are arguably more dangerous than returning to the university's campus in Bangladesh. Yet she conveyed that returning students to campus still presents many challenges, and if not everyone can return, the university does not currently have the capacity to conduct blending instruction models.

Much of the conversation surrounding pandemic-inspired changes to university learning has been on the form and modality of delivering instruction, however, less attention has been paid to how the change in delivery might change the content itself. Dr. Ferguson said while the medium and message are difficult to separate from each other, he has seen many advantages in regard to content and what students are able to accomplish due to the virtual learning format, citing pop up chats and research conducted in real time as several benefits to online education. Dr. Rao explained that although the Asian



University of Women struggled at the beginning to deliver the same learning content as before, especially certain science lessons without physical access to laboratories, over time they invested in virtual learning platforms and online laboratory programs that has allowed students to conduct their work and learn the same content as they would if they were in-person.

In addition to pandemic related impacts on quality and access to education, Prof. Long also posed a question to the featured speakers about cost, particularly because both universities rely - in varying degrees - on international donor networks to sustain their activities. Dr. Ferguson explained that while it was more difficult to continue forming new partnerships at the beginning of the health crisis, the level of activity has returned to normal over the last few months. He even noted that AUIS has taken a creative stance to its now virtual donor receptions and networking events by mailing informational packets and baklava – a popular Iraqi dessert – in advance for current and potential contributors to enjoy over their Zoom events. Dr. Rao revealed a more severe impact to the university's financial situation, as the Asian University for Women has seen many donors withdraw previous pledges since the health crisis began, which has resulted in noteworthy decreases in overall funding. However, Dr. Rao explained it depends on each country's culture of giving. For example, in countries like Japan that are known for their generosity, they have raised as much money for the university as they typically do in any other time.

The final question Prof. Long posed to the featured speakers was in regard to the insecurity many students face due to ongoing conflicts in surrounding areas and/or their home countries, and how the ongoing health crisis has played a role in that. Dr. Ferguson explained that despite the geographical position of AUIS and its proximity to many conflicts, the Kurdistan Region itself is very secure, and he as well as his faculty and students feel safer there than they would in many other parts of the world. Dr. Rao approached this topic differently, as she has had to send many students back to dangerous areas and situations due to the pandemic. However, Dr. Rao justifies this response by the university due to the failing hospital infrastructure in Bangladesh that has resulted in doctors refusing to treat COVID-19 patients. There is also no means to social distance on campus, so Dr. Rao said there is currently no safe or feasible path to bring unvaccinated students from 19 different countries back to campus. Not permitting students to return to campus is one of the more difficult dilemmas Dr. Rao has had to face during the COVID-19 crisis.

The co-host of the seminar, Prof. Streitwieser, took the floor to ask a final question of the featured speakers that connects to the third seminar in the three-part series. He asked what advice Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Rao had for other campus leaders who want to leverage internationalization to strengthen their institutions, or, in other words, if they were to start from scratch again, would they design anything differently? Dr. Ferguson quickly responded that he admired the Asian University for Women for maintaining a level of independence from the government, especially when the university is trying to act in ways that defy the status quo and wished AUIS would have done more to strengthen their autonomy early on. He also stressed the importance of financial reserves, and recommended spending as much time as possible creating and building an endowment and other capital assets. Dr. Rao answered this question more through the lens of the pandemic, by stating that the health crisis and shown that higher

education institutions are capable of adapting and changing, and the adaptations and changes made due to the pandemic should not be viewed as temporary but should instead continue to be built on as she hopes the university expands its scope for distance learning. Bangladesh still does not have distance learning programs, so Dr. Rao called on countries to capitalize on this opportunity and invest in distance learning in order to reach otherwise impenetrable areas and expand a much wider network of peers and scholars.

In bringing the seminar to a close, Prof. Streitwieser expressed his admiration for these two intuitions that have proved successful in significant adversity by securing funding, accessing marginalized groups of students even during a pandemic, and continuing to provide a quality education in a now virtual format.

### ***Key Findings***

- **Both universities identified advantages and disadvantages when it came to the shift from in-person to virtual learning, although both were able to make this pandemic-inspired transition within less than a week's time.** Common advantages were having the opportunity to advance their online platforms and allow students to complete their work asynchronously. Additionally, both featured speakers expressed plans to include online learning options in the future in order to reach students they would not be able to otherwise. Common disadvantages were inconsistent internet access for all students due to faulty power grids and remote locations, although the Asian University for Women encountered greater struggles with securing access to online learning for all its students.
- **Both universities experienced challenges as well as benefits related to being an international school during their response to the pandemic.** Common benefits were the wide range of backgrounds among faculty members, which allowed for collaborative learning and a swift shift to virtual instruction, as well as the variety of countries and organizations from which the universities receive funding, which sustained finances during the health crisis. Common challenges were organizing the departure and repatriation of students when campuses closed, especially for students whose home is located within a conflict-ridden region.
- **Both universities have seen their missions realized through international partnerships and an international network of donors.** The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, has a number of partnerships with elite universities in the U.K., U.S., and elsewhere, which has allowed them to advance their research capabilities and attract top students in the area. The Asian University for Women relies on an international network of donors that consists of its foundation in Boston, Massachusetts, organizations in Japan, and elsewhere, which sustains its activities and allows the university to provide full scholarships for the majority of its student body.

### ***Notable Recommendations***

- **In leveraging internationalization to strengthen an institution, both featured speakers recommended establishing autonomy from the country's government where the institution**

**resides and establishing funding networks and partnerships elsewhere.** Dr. Ferguson stressed the importance of building financial reserves separate from the government in order to operate in different ways to serve the institute's mission.

- **Adaptations and changes made by higher education institutions due to the pandemic should not be viewed as temporary, but instead should continue to be built on as universities continue to expand their scope for distance learning.** Dr. Rao called on countries to capitalize on this opportunity and invest in distance learning in order to reach otherwise impenetrable areas and expand into a much wider network of peers and scholars.

## SEMINAR 3 – LOCAL: ESTABLISHING THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SICILY AS A LABORATORY FOR INNOVATION

The third and final seminar in this three-part seminar series occurred on April 14, 2021, from 12:00-1:00pm ET, and engaged higher education experts in providing feedback on an effort currently underway to establish an American university in Sicily, Italy. The seminar was hosted by Prof. Long and Prof. Streitwieser, who moderated discussion among the three featured speakers, Dr. Sami Basha, President of the American University of Sicily, Dr. Alan Goodman, President of the Institute of International Education, and Dr. Clara Lovett, President Emerita of Northern Arizona University, as well as facilitated questions from the estimated 125 attendees from over 30 different countries. The main objective of this third seminar was to introduce the American University of Sicily (AUSI) to relevant stakeholders, collect feedback on plans for development from education experts, and apply insights on post-pandemic innovation from prior seminars.

Key questions for consideration of the featured speakers included:

- What could a new university for the Mediterranean look like?
- What lessons should the leaders of that institution consider to optimize their success?

### ***Seminar 3: Overview of Activities***

The seminar began with Prof. Long's introductions of the three featured speakers: Dr. Sami Basha, President of the American University of Sicily, Dr. Alan Goodman, President of the Institute of International Education, and Dr. Clara Lovett, President Emerita of Northern Arizona University. This was followed by a brief commentary on the rise of American-modeled universities abroad. After Prof. Long's opening remarks, Dr. Basha gave a short presentation on the American University of Sicily (AUSI), which Dr. Goodman and Dr. Lovett then responded to with questions and feedback. The seminar then proceeded to a lightly moderated conversation before taking questions from the audience. Prof. Streitwieser concluded the seminar by summarizing the conversation and thanking the featured speakers for taking part.

### ***Seminar 3: Summary of Discussion***

The American University of Sicily project allows us to consider innovation in higher education from multiple angles. We can understand it both as a specific manifestation of a popular international reform and more broadly as a new venture occurring in the wake of much discussion about the future of higher education.

On the one-hand, American-modeled universities have become a global trend. There are more than 80 of them in 55 different countries around the world. Dozens have been established or proposed in the last decade alone. The model is especially prevalent in and around the Mediterranean, where Robert College in Istanbul and the Syrian Protestant College, later known as the American University of Beirut, first

took root over a century and a half ago. Then as now, these approaches to higher education represent reform – a departure from their national or regional higher education laws and norms. To that end, a spotlight on this project offers a glimpse into the rationale for, and application of, innovative higher education structures and practices in a specific location. In other words, why an American University? And why in Sicily?

This third seminar is the finale of a three-part seminar series that explored how the COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting higher education by following a macro-meso-micro progression, or in other words, a global, regional, local progression. In order to bring our discussion to a micro level, the final seminar focuses on a single project – a startup. What lessons from the pandemic can we apply to an institution that does not yet have the constraints of a traditional one? If there is an opportunity to start a university from scratch, what could be done differently?

The project this seminar focused on was the American University of Sicily (AUSI), which is still in the early stages of development and procurement. Dr. Basha, the president of AUSI, gave a short presentation in which he shared the university's mission statement and overall objectives, as well as recent activities he has participated in as part of the development process. Dr. Basha first opened his presentation by stating that AUSI is not a commercial enterprise but is first and foremost an institution committed to higher learning and research. As a private, non-profit university, AUSI will share similar objectives and characteristics to liberal arts education institutions in the U.S. The importance of research was stressed a number of times by Dr. Basha, who believes the best learning happens through research-based activities.

The geographical location of AUSI will also play a major role in shaping the goals, activities, and focus of the university. Sicily has played a major historic role in the Mediterranean region, as it has served as the main bridge that connects the east to the west. The historical significance of Sicily and the university's strategic positioning in the world will be capitalized on by faculty and students, by centering studies and research around the Mediterranean region and how the university can contribute peace and progress in order to benefit the local community and surrounding area. As a result, Dr. Basha hopes AUSI will be seen as a key resource for Sicily and the Mediterranean region as a whole, as he plans to bring people with broad and diverse perspectives together and create a space where they can collaboratively develop concrete solutions to real world problems. In this way, AUSI seeks to emulate the style and philosophy of U.S. inspired liberal arts education, but with a focus on the Mediterranean region.

While Dr. Basha is clear these are the foundational values in which he plans to build the university on, as mentioned previously, AUSI is still in the very early stages of development and can essentially be categorized as a startup hoping to gain enough traction in order to be realized. Despite pursuing the idea of this university without receiving any preliminary grants, Dr. Basha listed the many ways in which he and his team have already begun to engage the academic and local community and receive support in their development of the university. To list several of the more significant accomplishments thus far in the AUSI development process: the university was established in 2018 as a non-profit, and an advisory

board was created a year later. Through collaborative efforts among the board and other educational experts, a design was created for the structure including its institutes and centers. Despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Basha and his board hosted several online conferences in 2020 that involved over 80 international universities and 45 different countries in higher education activities. The board also conducted a feasibility study later that year. While Dr. Basha acknowledges the many challenges of building a university from scratch with no grants, he believes in the mission and rationale of the university and is eager to defend it.

Dr. Goodman applauded the success Dr. Basha has experienced so far in starting AUSI from the ground up and stated that the Institute of International Education (IIE) welcomes these kinds of projects as they would like to see even higher numbers than the current 80 American universities in 55 different countries. As the U.K. and Italy are currently tied for first place as the most population destination for study abroad students from the U.S., institutions like AUSI and the innovative vision it brings for the future can help push Italy to the top as the number one destination for American study abroad students. Dr. Goodman gave his enthusiastic approval for AUSI's focus on serving communities, guiding research, and benefiting local societies, and reaffirmed his support for the development of such a university.

Dr. Lovett introduced a different lens through which to view the development of this type of university in Italy – soft power. The term “soft power” was coined by Joseph Nye and refers to the type of power that involves shaping the activities and preferences of other foreign states through perceived attractiveness or appeal. As explained by Dr. Lovett, the establishment of American-styled undergraduate education in foreign countries has proved an effective way to enhance and expand U.S. influence abroad, and there has been an increase in these types of institutes since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The range of these higher education intuitions has become much broader, and now encompasses traditional types as well as newcomers that are for-project enterprises. Dr. Lovett also questioned some of the claims made by Dr. Basha in his presentation, such as his focus on AUSI being a university defined by innovation. Dr. Lovett asked how AUSI will be a leader in innovation in the sphere of higher education, and what an American-styled institution in an Italian context brings to the fields of higher education and innovation.

Dr. Basha responded by saying that while a great deal has changed in the world in the last 300 years, the university as an institution has not. Most countries in the Mediterranean region currently find themselves in a political, economic, and social transitional period, and this will pose direct and indirect challenges to higher education and future initiatives. AUSI will present itself as an alternative to the traditional higher education model typically seen in Italy, which Dr. Basha described as a model that focuses too much on instruction-centered learning and not enough on student-centered learning and research production.

The university will be innovative by engaging in current and pressing global topics, such as immigration, which has had a huge impact on the Mediterranean region and is projected to increase. Dr. Basha explained he has already taken steps to engage the Sicilian diaspora community and to utilize their

expertise on the region in order to move it in the direction of progress and peace. Dr. Goodman expressed his support for this effort, as he explained the post-pandemic international student will look for meaningful educational opportunities, and engagement with the diaspora community at the beginning stages of development will serve as a critical resource in creating meaningful opportunities for post-pandemic students of the future.

As for the enquiries regarding why AUSI will take an American-styled educational approach despite its location in Sicily, Dr. Basha argued that it is not an exact replica of the American model but will borrow components of its learning philosophy and research practice in order to create a more diverse and flexible academic environment – something he views as currently lacking in the region. However, Dr. Lovett continued to caution Dr. Bashi in identifying his university as an American-styled institute, as she explained there is great potential for future misunderstanding and confusion over what AUSI might stand for and its underlying objectives due to the activities of other institutes that operate under the American label. Dr. Bashi pushed back on this notion and rebutted with a cautionary note of his own that if we continue to uphold stigmas about certain countries or regions, then collaborative learning will be brought to a standstill. He continued by reaffirming that AUSI will invent its own education model that is inspired by the American model, as he strongly admires the academic experience supported by U.S. universities. As for whether or not tuition fees will also be modeled after current enrollment costs for American universities in the U.S. is yet to be seen, as Dr. Basha said it is a high-level decision that has not yet been settled upon by his advisory board.

Many aspirational messages centered around courage, innovation, and collaboration were conveyed throughout the discussion, and educational leaders and scholars in the field will be interested to see how AUSI adopts the liberal arts educational model from the U.S. and contextualizes it to address the desires and needs of the Mediterranean region. Prof. Streitwieser concluded the seminar by thanking the featured guests for their participation on the panel, and for providing invigorating discussion on the many aspects that must be considered when developing an international university.

### ***Key Findings***

- **American-modeled universities have become a global trend.** There are more than 80 of them in 55 different countries around the world.
- **The U.K. and Italy are currently tied for first place as the most popular destination for study abroad students from the United States.** Institutions like AUSI and the innovative vision it brings for the future may help push Italy to the top as the number one destination for American study abroad students.
- **The post-pandemic international student is predicted to seek more meaningful educational opportunities abroad once international travel is again permitted.** Higher education institutions that engage with topics like immigration, climate change, and diaspora communities will become popular options for post-pandemic students of the future seeking meaningful opportunities.

- **The establishment of American styled undergraduate education in foreign countries has become an effective way for the U.S. to enhance and expand its influence abroad.** The range of these types of higher education intuitions has grown much broader over the last few decades, and now encompasses traditional institutes as well as newcomers that operate as for-profit enterprises.

***Notable Recommendations***

- **Foreign universities that label themselves as American institutions should proceed with caution,** as there is great potential for misunderstanding and confusion over what the institute stands for and its underlying objectives, due to activities of other institutes that operate under the American label.



## COMMON THEMES AMONG THE THREE-PART SEMINAR SERIES:

### RE-IMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION WORLDWIDE AFTER COVID-19

The three-part webinar series “Re-Imagining Higher Education Worldwide After COVID-19” aimed to address the theme of education in a post-pandemic world at three different levels – global, regional, and local. By viewing this topic through three different lenses, many common themes emerged, three of which drew clear connections between each seminar, thereby proving the benefit of considering these topics on a macro, meso, and micro level.

The first key theme that emerged from the three seminars is that ***the COVID-19 pandemic has had a far greater impact on vulnerable and marginalized populations, as well as other groups that have been historically and/or are economically disadvantaged.*** In the first seminar, we heard how the pandemic exposed the severity of inequalities present in higher education, with first generation college students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds having their academic careers disproportionately altered or ended by the impacts of the health crisis. This effect COVID-19 has had on access to higher education has only widened the digital divide since distance and virtual learning has taken the place of face-to-face education. The effects on schooling have been felt worldwide as we witnessed what was essentially an overnight switch to virtual instruction. The first seminar in this series touched on the widespread impact that has had on the most vulnerable groups of students.

In seminar two, we had the chance to take a more focused and regional approach to this issue by hearing firsthand how students from some of the most marginalized communities have had their education impacted by the pandemic. Dr. Rao, president of the Asian University for Women, spoke about the many challenges her students have faced in trying to continue to pursue their higher education careers, largely due to the diversity of the student population, which consists of foreign students from conflict ridden areas, refugees, and students from poverty-stricken families who previously worked in garment factories. Not only was the process of returning students back to their homes once the crisis began extremely costly and challenging, but the problems with continuing their education only truly started once they arrived home, as many were from poor, remote villages or areas of severe conflict, and lacked internet access, laptops, and other required learning materials. The university tried to resolve this issue by sending physical study packets as well as additional funds to students in order to pay for internet to access their school work, but this type of patchwork response and the status of the students has made it very difficult for many of them to continue their studies.

This example stood in great contrast with the other university presented at this seminar, the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, as the president, Dr. Ferguson, conveyed a relatively smooth transition to online teaching for his university, and few problems related to students continuing their education from a distance. The stark difference in the impacts and outcomes between the two universities is because students from AUIS have greater access to resources in general, from the university and at home, that allow them to be able to continue their education. The comparison of these two universities’

experiences in responding to the effects of the pandemic on their student populations and institutions speaks volumes to the vast inequalities at play that were revealed by the pandemic, and shows how students from disadvantaged backgrounds – despite defying the odds and studying at a university – have felt the greatest shocks from the pandemic, and are now struggling to receive an education once again.

The second major theme connecting all three seminars to each other was the idea that ***the COVID-19 crisis has forced global learning to happen locally, and this is a practice that institutions should continue to implement post-pandemic.*** In discussions regarding how higher education institutions should change post-pandemic in the first seminar, Dr. Whitehead suggested that this could be the moment where we finally develop inclusive global learning for students now that we recognize this type of learning is not limited to those with global mobility. There are many ways to engage students in global learning locally by drawing on the culture, history, and current events that are taking place in one's backyard and making connections to the global impact and relevance all of these things have. With the advance in technology in educational spaces, it has become even easier to collaborate with others from a distance, which opens the door for a whole new way of interacting with other people and places from around the world.

We also saw global learning happening locally in the second seminar when both Dr. Rao and Dr. Ferguson spoke about their two respective universities operating as international institutions. Both universities had a diverse student body and faculty, as well as many languages, cultures and backgrounds being brought together in one educational space. The global and international aspect of the university made it attractive to many students and arguably provided a great deal more opportunities for innovative and critical learning. The benefits and appeal of an international university is what inspired the idea for the American University of Sicily, the case study of focus for the third seminar, which approached these themes from a micro level. Dr. Basha, the president of AUSI, spoke on the historical significance of Sicily and how the university's strategic positioning in the world will be capitalized on by faculty and students, by centering studies and research around the Mediterranean region. Dr. Basha plans to bring people with broad and diverse perspectives together and create a space where they can collaboratively develop concrete solutions to real world problems – or, in other words, make global learning happen locally.

From the meso, macro, and micro level, all featured speakers involved in the seminar discussions – particularly the heads of international universities, operational or start up – agreed one lesson that can be learned from the pandemic is that we can and should design global learning in a different way moving forward, by drawing on local resources to make it more relevant and accessible to all students.

The third and final prevailing theme across all three seminars was an overwhelming consensus on this statement: ***despite predicting and anticipating an imminent global health crisis for the many decades, the world of higher education was completely unprepared for the arrival of COVID-19 and was forced to react.*** This is how the majority of language about education in the future is structured – these events

will happen, and education will need to react and adapt. However, a message that kept appearing in each of the seminars was that instead of being cast in a reactive role, educational leaders need to begin deciding how higher education is going to shape the future rather than be shaped by it. In the first seminar, there was a call to action from Dr. Sobe who stressed the importance of remembering education's power to influence the future of the world, and who challenged the panel to shift from considering how higher education will respond to future events to how it will tip the balance in the direction of our collective choosing. Many structural issues have been revealed by the pandemic, so higher education needs to begin thinking about solutions for the future and how it will be a part of having them realized.

The second seminar showcased a higher education institution, the Asian University for Women, that has already answered this call, and is taking steps to make visible in the world what it wishes to see. The design and mission of this university is clear: seek out women from underprivileged, marginalized groups and help them receive a university education in order to ultimately build an international network of women leaders in the region. The founders of the university and its staff recognized current issues in higher education surrounding inequality, conflict, and immigration, and are trying to shape the future into one that is more equitable, stable, and peaceful by acting intentionally in its recruitment of students and the educational experiences and opportunities it delivers. This mentality of viewing and using higher education as a solution to current issues followed into the third seminar, where Dr. Basha explained his dream of building a university from scratch because he has seen a need for an innovative and diverse higher education institution in his area, and would like to fulfill it.

As showcased in the three-part webinar series on Re-Imagining Higher Education Worldwide After COVID-19, the call for education to begin acting on the offensive rather than the defensive is already being answered, and the pandemic has inspired many educational leaders to engage in conversations on how higher education can play an active role in shaping a future that is locally envisioned and democratically chosen.

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