The Pandemic Pedagogy Research Symposium
Plenary Panel: The Potential & Promise of Education as a Transformative Experience

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Matthew Rascoff:

Our second question that I wanted to pose for our panelists as they come back in is: "How did you use data and evidence to uncover what was working and what needed to change in your strategy?"

And why don't we leave this as an open question with no fixed order for who wants to respond to it because I'm not sure if everybody is in here yet. I'm not going to call on anybody in a fixed order. But, any of our panelists, do you want to address this question of data iteration and flexibility in response to what you were seeing was working and what was not?

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Dr. Rebecca Stein, Executive Director, Penn's Online Learning Initiative:

Matthew, I'm happy to go first, thank you. So I actually have a two-part answer. So the first part is really using tools that we already had in place before the pandemic. We've had experience with online degree programs for a while and in our online degree programs we do have structures for regular surveys of students. So what we did in many cases was take surveys and roll them out to a broader community of students to get a really quick feedback from students' experience within a specific class. So that was one strategy that we used. And it helped us uncover technical issues or timing issues or inconsistencies and fix them very quickly so that within a class there was iteration and improvement.

The second part is an institutional wide survey. So the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis conducted a survey towards the end of the fall semester across all the student body, both undergraduate and graduate students. And our Center for Teaching and Learning worked with them on the survey design. And I was really, really impressed with the thoughtfulness of the design process. In that they created a survey where they asked students to reflect on both the course that they found the most successful in the remote environment and then separately on the course in which they found the least success. And they asked in each case for the students to reflect on what components were used and then drill down a little bit about what made those components either more and less successful.

And it was interesting to see both things that came up across this space and separately in the best courses in the workforces. So I think some of this will not be surprising. Any sort of instructional designer listening will not be surprised that students found that a well-organized learning management system of course was really effective and helped them learn. So students reflected that the most effective course had a well-structured canvas site with very clear

deadlines and assignments and all those things that allow students to reduce the cognitive load and focus more really on the intellectual engagement. But it was also interesting that certain components came up in both the worst course and the best course.

So for example, one of the strategies that we suggested that faculty implement in the online space is frequent low stakes assignments. We know that is something that works for the regular online students and we sort of assumed, okay, this is going to work for our residential students too in this online space. And turns out that for many of them this was not a good practice. The students found the small stake assignments really burdensome as there were too many due dates, too many things to hand in, too many assignments. They did appreciate those small stake assignments that then rolled into a big assignment. So they appreciated the scaffolding but they didn't appreciate the extensive hand holding.

All these practices, things that we learned in the surveys, we then reflected on and it helped us implement the suggestions and advice that we gave to the faculty as they were thinking of the next semester which was the spring semester. And we did this in two ways, both from the central offices and the way that we messaged our resources on the web and in workshops through our Center for Teaching and Learning, but also informally. I'm sure many of you have the same experience that our faculty mostly listen to other faculty and they mostly listen to other faculty in their own department and within their own discipline. It was really a challenge for us but the way we did this is to send these messages to the undergraduate chairs and ask the undergraduate chairs to then create a discussion within their departments to convey this message. And I have a little bit of experience with this as my spouse is a faculty member here at Penn, so I can always go back and check whether or not he gets consistent messaging. And it seemed to work at least for the economics department.

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Dr. John Mitchell, Professor of Computer Science, Stanford University:

What I've done now since I'm back in the department is focus on my department, the faculty in my field, and how we teach in computer science which is about 20 of the total course units at Stanford. So we're a fairly large operation relative to other departments. So I decided very early on that probably the best thing I could do for my colleagues this year was pay attention to how teaching was working and then help everyone. So we started working with a math big man, a phd student in gsms education. We did a quarterly set of interviews with faculty asking them what worked, what they've tried in their course, and tried to chart out the different platforms, tools, techniques and things that different people have used and set up discussions and someone to try to share that. And I think people have been unusually receptive as everyone I think has noticed different input. And I think the things that came out through that are really this focus on student empathy, trying to pay attention to how students are doing in their classes in various ways, asynchronous versus synchronous. That issue came up and people have experimented with that in different ways trying to scaffold the student experience. You know what, the way we normally teach we just kind of say stuff to students and they figure out how to learn it we don't know how they work together and all that but now that they're cast to the winds

we have to be in the in the process of helping them connect and setting up things like homework parties and so on. And then issues around assessment that I mentioned before. So I don't know what we're going to do with all the data and information we've collected. It's been kind of seat of the pants or our best effort because you know the world is changing. But I think to Matthew's comments at the beginning, something unusual has happened here and the more we kind of keep track of what's happened, you know the more we'll be able to learn from that.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Thank you, John. And for those who are coming in late I just wanted to refresh, the question which was: "How did you use data and evidence to uncover what was working and what needed to change in your pandemic response?" So do any of our panelists want to jump into this question of data and how they used it to respond as part of their response?

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Dr. Kim Manturuk, Associate Director of Research, Evaluation & Development, Duke University:

I'll add a quick point. So much like our previous speakers we use a lot of survey data from our faculty. So we found pretty early on, after a couple months, that our faculty got tired of people asking how they were doing. And so we found that our survey response rates really started to taper off and so we had to get creative about how we use data. So we started looking at what kind of data we can get where we don't have to ask someone a question. So our Sakai team started looking at what data comes out of the LMS and how we can use that data to figure out what faculty are touching, what are they doing, where are they running into problems. So some of those administrative and technical data that came out of our platforms themselves were able to inform the types of places where we could make more interventions. So we ended up designing some really simple Sakai templates for our faculty to use because we found that they were getting really hung up trying to do things like designing lesson structures and building out weekly schedules. So moving beyond survey data and trying to get creative in terms of looking at the data, that's coming out of the places our faculty are interacting where we don't have to then go and ask them to take yet another survey. That was something that was really helpful for us.

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Dr. Katherine Stanton, Director, McGraw Center for Teaching & Learning at Princeton:

We also utilized other forms of collecting feedback and impressions and insights from faculty. Given our relatively small scale as an institution we were able to do so through our visits to department meetings and our frequent participation in other faculty committees. So they became in a sense our focus groups. So in addition to the formal surveying structures, we also

relied on those structures, the structures of faculty committees and the structures of departmental meetings to inform our work.

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Dr. Caitlin Hayward, Associate Director of Research & Development, Center for Academic Innovation at University of Michigan:

Yes, survey fatigue has certainly been extremely real in this moment and yet we all want to understand and make sure that we're doing what we can to listen and take care of the people around us, right? And so that source has been invaluable and yet fraught as we move forward with it. So the piece that I want to layer in is that the data that I'm most excited about is the data that's ahead of us because so much of this moment has been transformative and asking people to do really different pedagogies than they've ever experienced before, engaging in thoughtful online teaching. And when I've observed instructors try to take on a new pedagogy in the past it seems to take about three times of running a course in a new way for them to really get comfortable and feel like they have a foundation that they can iterate from and change and adapt and do with confidence. And so we haven't even gotten to them being able to do that part. And then we have the components of what just a phenomenally different thing it is for students to be expected to learn in these moments. So instructors are changing everything, and they're engaging in high-stakes learning and students are faced with just unprecedented concerns with the pandemic and overdue and essential societal change happening around them. So, those components mean that I want us to have taken so much away from the data that we've collected. And I want us to come back to a moment where some of those factors start to decrease in their intensity and emotional valence and we're able to really reassess which components of what we've learned about online learning are working for whom and when and in what context.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Thank you Cait. That actually takes us beautifully as a segue into our last question which is: "What are the two to three most promising aspects of your institution's response that you wish to carry forward into the post-pandemic era?" So moving from the past into the future and thinking like Cait about well maybe there's some empowerment that we've given our faculty, maybe there are some future projects that will come out of this. I've used the term kind of like the mass experiment in faculty professional development more than an actual online learning experience because this wasn't online learning as we wish to design it in most cases, but it was a mass experiment in faculty development. And I think that with that comes great opportunities. So let's open this one up to the full panel and I just encourage our participants to use the chat to add your own comments and responses to this question. I'll be very interested. And I'm going to try to pick out some of them and get responses from our panelists. So who would like to go first with this question about the two or three most promising kinds of post-pandemic future potential?

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Dr. John Mitchell, Professor of Computer Science, Stanford University:

I think you're right, next year is going to be just as interesting as this year so I'd encourage everyone to kind of think in that way. I haven't heard a lot of discussion of what students are going to be like when they come back to campus. I would imagine if I sat at home in my parent's basement for a year I'd be pretty happy to see my friends. And so, I feel like we should plan for the campus experience to be something different, a lot of big parties, a lot of social events. Leave time for students to connect with each other. And so on. So I think we're going to be in a transition year and to think of things that way. I also think in some ways the move to online teaching and learning has been sort of procedural and kind of routine whereas all of the social justice and racial justice issues that are on campus are not so simple and really deeply cultural. And so leave time for that. But I mean, if I was going to pick one thing that I think is most important it's faculty and instructors paying attention to students and whether their teaching process is successful. Because once you try to pay attention to whether your pedagogy is successful then then all manner of good things can follow. So I feel like that's the most important thing to stress.

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Dr. Rebecca Stein, Executive Director, Penn's Online Learning Initiative :

Yeah, I want to build on John's answer because John again reminds us about this holistic approach to students. And I just want to remind us that the same thing is true about faculty and about staff and that the next year is the year where we really should care for each other. We put good practices in place I believe this year and always asking people how they are and understanding that their work comes in a context of their lives, and in the context of our culture, and the context of where we live. I really hope that we don't forget that as we go back and then when we go back to normal we don't go back to things as they were. I won't say it now but I do want us to have time to talk about what we didn't get right and what we still have to work on.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Thank you. Maybe we can do another round of this. Maybe one of the Kate's would like to step in Kate S. or Cait H. And thinking about the post-pandemic future, what does it look like at your institutions and what are you dreaming of, what are you thinking?

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Dr. Katherine Stanton, Director, McGraw Center for Teaching & Learning at Princeton:

I'll say in response to what Rebecca has just raised that I think we and our faculty have new insight into the fullness and complexity of our students lives, have new awareness of the varying

living and learning conditions that our students operate in or work from. And I think that many of our faculty are newly aware of the support structures and campus services that are essential to successful teaching. And here I'm thinking about the availability of quiet study spaces or the ability to have access to library reserves, or other archival materials. Those are simply two examples. But I do think we have a kind of new alertness, a new awareness to the complexity of our students' lives and their experiences. I mentioned earlier that some of the ways that I think Princeton got it right was by providing support really at the intersection of policy and pedagogy for new course structures and for the adoption of new digital tools. I'll also say something else I'll add to that and this is really more of an administrative perspective, but we've really thought in a new and newly integrated way about the support we need to provide to faculty for technology use. So members of my team in the teaching and learning center and members of our instructional technology team, or our instructional support services teams, are working together to think about how to provide faculty with technology and how to prepare faculty to use that technology. I'm very hopeful members of my team can bring to those questions a kind of pedagogical lens. And I'll finish by saying I also hope that one of the things we take with us is new approaches to funding teaching innovation. We are fortunate to be able to do at Princeton but thinking about ways that we might recognize how teaching innovation happens among entire teams. This might be entire teams of faculty but also graduate students and department administrators. In other words, recognizing that teaching innovation is not only necessarily an individual's effort but might actually reflect a team's work.

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Matthew Rascoff:

That's a hugely important point. And you know it brings in this set of institutional questions which will be the conditions for the possibility of realizing this post-pandemic future. First we need to kind of pay attention to what they are and have a vision for them but enacting them is going to require exactly what you described Kate. So I'm very glad you brought that into the conversation. I hope you know that it becomes part of the planning process, it becomes part of the strategy if not now, when for our institutions to take this work seriously and to think about all the different components that are required in order to build something successful that is human and technological for learning.

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Dr. Caitlin Hayward, Associate Director of Research & Development, Center for Academic Innovation at University of Michigan:

Yeah, so first I want to reiterate my fellow panelists' points about the opportunity we've had to reflect on the unique experience that is residential education. We've missed so many things and I'm really excited for us to both be able to re-engage with that and and have a new value of what that means and what that holds for learning and community while starting to bring in some of these new technologies and senses of questioning around what good teaching can look like. Because maybe those large lecture courses actually enable more voice equity if they're done in

a digital space and people are empowered to speak up because they can take care and how they're gonna frame something. And so students who are facing english as a second language, or feeling isolated. And what would typically be a physical classroom that was reminding them of where they do and don't fit might create more avenues for deep learning and engagement. So I'm really excited for that part of the juxtaposition. And then the other thing that I just wanted to add in this moment is I hope one of the things that we bring forward is this blurring of institutional boundaries and opportunities to learn more from each other and hear about what's worked and what hasn't. There have been such cool moments in the last particular year where I haven't had to just have a lab meeting with people who can walk the 10 minutes across campus to join me in a physical location. I've been able to pull in people from across the world and have conversations across the world and have conversations and learn and I think that has been truly inspiring and I express deep gratitude to particularly Duke for making this happen today and I hope that this is part of what we keep going forward.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Wonderful point, Cait. And, yes, thank you. I credit Kim Manturuk and I'm going to call on her next to round out our comments here for having the idea for this whole symposium. So 700 people signed up for this. There was obviously a collective need for this kind of coming to terms and understanding of what just happened to us and planning for the future. So Kim, why don't you maybe say something about the Carry the Innovation Forward effort at Duke which I think is a wonderful example for other institutions to think about.

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Dr. Kim Manturuk, Associate Director of Research, Evaluation & Development, Duke University:

Great. Thank you all. I want to really reiterate what many of the panelists have already said about how the pandemic has been written and kind of the way that we've tried to teach during the pandemic has really heightened our sense of empathy and understanding of what people are going through. And I just want to give one quick example because I think it's important as we go forward to be intentional in continuing to do that. And not only Cait mentioned the idea of bringing people from all different places to where we are talking about teaching and learning, but I think we also need to take ourselves and put ourselves into diverse places where teaching and learning is happening.

So I mentioned at the top of the session that our group did some online office hours, at 1 point 7 days a week. One of the things that was incredible was that we didn't just assign our teaching consultants to those office hours, we had everyone who was involved with our organization, all the way up to our vice provost in those office hours hearing what faculty were trying to deal with. And that created such a culture of empathy within our organization. That has continued to benefit us and is something that I really hope we continue going forward.

And so I want to wrap up by mentioning what Matthew talked about. Duke has launched what we're calling the Carry the Innovation Forward Program. And it is a partial grant program and partial kind of partnership with our faculty where we ask them to bring us what they want to keep doing going forward. What were some of the experiments that really worked for you? What were the communities that you built that nourished you and helped you teach through this pandemic? And how can we incorporate the best of those into what we teach in the coming year? We ended up receiving applications from far more people than we expected (kind of like how this symposium was much bigger than we expected) and we're now partnering with university or with faculty members in all different schools across the university to develop what we hope will be the new teaching innovations for the next year. So in our program we just identified the partners that we'll be working with over the coming year and that's something that we also hope to continue doing going forward.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Thank you Kim. So let's move to some of the audience participation. I see a comment from Evangeline which I think is quite reflective of some of the themes that I've seen in the chat. And her comment is: "Post-pandemic is it time for higher ed to take a more complex and sophisticated look at not just pedagogy but who our students are, how mobile they are, how diverse they are?" And there is another comment about disabled students and what is Zoom going to become a new accommodation for students who need that? Maybe our panelists want to speak to this. It's not specifically in the pedagogy space but how our students show up and who they are does inform our pedagogy. Test optional, completely transformed who applied to college this year. That's going to change what happens on campus in the future. So to any of our panelists who want to reflect on this kind of question about who's there, and who gets to participate, and what implications it might have for teaching and learning.

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Dr. Kim Manturuk, Associate Director of Research, Evaluation & Development, Duke University:

I'll jump in with a quick response to you Matthew. So I think the pandemic has given us an opportunity to rethink how we've approached accommodations and I don't think it's necessarily on us to define what students need in terms of accommodations. That's information that needs to come from our students. We've traditionally thought about student accommodation needs in a pretty narrow way. And it's been what we define as being something that needs accommodating and the pandemic has really shown us that students are experiencing all sorts of things outside of the classroom that make it more or less difficult for them to learn. And so I think we really are going to broaden what we think about when we think about accommodations because really our end goal at the end of the day is for students to be able to learn in a state in which they are most able to learn and that's going to look very different for different student populations. So I do think that the use of Zoom is an excellent example. We saw so many students who would come to us and say that they just loved being able to go back and watch recordings later

and those aren't students who would be traditionally classified as students who need accommodations. But it simply was the way that they wanted to be learning. And so kind of moving beyond disability as a criteria for needing accommodations and starting to think about how do we accommodate learning across the spectrum in all different situations might be something that will come out of this.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Thank you.I want to get through a bunch of these questions so i'm going to try to move quickly. There is a question from Zakaria. Cait H. maybe you can answer this one: "Were there any practices to ensure providing equitable learning experiences? I'm referring to culturally responsive design and teaching in a virtual setting." Cait H. you mentioned something about voice in classrooms and equity of voice. Is that something specific you had in mind and can you answer Zakaria's question?

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Dr. Caitlin Hayward, Associate Director of Research & Development, Center for Academic Innovation at University of Michigan:

Yeah absolutely. So on voice equity I'll say that I've seen some research from Michigan that has identified that pre-pandemic, students who were working via google docs showed more diversity and who were speaking up as opposed to in-person observations of teamwork experiences. And so there's just a glimmer of insight that and I think much anecdotal experience over the pandemic, I don't have the data right at hand, that speaks to the potential for changing voices in digital environments. And then one thing I hesitate around the word to ensure, but I will say that one initiative that I've been working on in collaboration with our foundational course initiative on campus has been course equity reports. Looking at longitudinal data from course grade outcomes and progression in degrees to sense how students are performing. When we understand the lens of underrepresented minority students students who are first-generation college students and low-income students and framing those in understanding those as barriers to some of the college experiences. And then looking at great outcomes across that index and seeing some pretty stark outcome differences. And then identifying courses that were experiencing those most severely. And the pandemic created this opportunity for us to reach out directly to instructors and engage in conversations with the courses that were experiencing the most severe instances of that. We haven't fixed it, it's a long term problem. And one of the most fascinating pieces of it to me was that the instructors we reached out to were repeatedly people who were able to give me pages of efforts that they had engaged in to try to address these sorts of things. Already they knew and they were working on it. They cared deeply about their students. And we're already looking for ways to be flexible and equitable and still we have a lot of work to do in that space. So I absolutely love this work. It's been some of the most impactful for me personally over the last year. I feel honored to work with the Foundational Course

Initiative which Deb has been kind enough to link in the chat and just want to acknowledge how much effort we have ahead of us to truly make good on this.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Thank you, Cait. I'm loving the resources that folks are sharing in the chat. Please continue to do that. I'm going to ask one last question and we'll close things out today. But I think you know publishing whatever blog post or whatever research you've done at your campus, it can really help us build that cross-institutional community and that is what this symposium is all about, that Cait H. was talking about before. I do think it has been so powerful. And so, you know, empowering many of our institutions that can borrow ideas and resources from one another and we can think about this as a place where we can collaborate and not compete in higher education. So maybe to close us out as our last question I'll ask one of our panelists who's not responded to one of these questions yet. I'll leave this one open. This is from Rebecca Peterson at Tufts: "For some of our graduate programs there's an express preference from students and faculty to do more online for specific courses particularly seminar style courses and courses related to field work so this might complement the large course, the equity of voice participation. And I just came from a department meeting where faculty expressed that Zoom can actually be more intimate. So are we going to have more fully online programs, Zoom or asynchronous whatever comes out of this? Do you see that as a potential outcome of this?" Rebecca maybe you can get us started or Kate S. or someone who has not responded to a question. John if you want to jump in there.

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Dr. Rebecca Stein, Executive Director, Penn's Online Learning Initiative :

I'd like us to move away from this dichotomy between online and not online. I know we left a world that was fully immersed in person and we moved to this world that is fully online, but when we go back I think we'll go back to something that's a mix. And going back to again what can we do as an institution and what can we do cross-institution wide. I think it is really breaking the barriers to creating this experience that is hybrid and by hybrid I don't just mean students in person and online but the courses being partly in person and online so that we don't have this dichotomy. So clearly and this means really changing policies, right? This means changing the technologies that we have in the classrooms, that we have physically to accommodate different types of teaching. It means changing the policies of contact hours. It means pressuring the department of education to change their regulations. I think this is going to take us five to ten years but I think it's possible.

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Matthew Rascoff:

Thank you. Do any of our other panelists want to jump in on this question? Well are there more online programs coming now that we've seen emergency remote teaching or should we expect

a backlash? Which I think is also a distinct possibility for people who've seen Zoom and they never want to go into another one again. Just in the Wall Street Journal yesterday the CEO of Zoom was saying he has Zoom fatigue and that seems like a distinct possibility.

Maybe Kate S. or John do you want to jump in on this one and help close us out?

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Dr. John Mitchell, Professor of Computer Science, Stanford University:

Well I mean I have a slightly more idealistic thought which is if you listen to students and what's happened to them this year a couple of things are really prominent. One is they're asking our institutions to recognize DEI in every possible way and I think there's a huge amount of interest in social impact, social justice and other things beyond campus. And I feel that it can be combined with this possibility that we have to use what we've learned this year to offer educational opportunities to more people in more varied ways. And just as a simple example that's incremental, I think many students may want to take an internship, take a semester, take a year, to work in a community for some cause that they believe in. And if they can do that remotely and continue their coursework at the same time, that would serve a number of different goals. So, I would hope that there will be sufficient energy from students. I think this will be the place this comes from first towards the evolution of the university model and what we're aiming for. And the awareness that we've created in the past year will be essential to acting on that.

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Dr. Rebecca Stein, Executive Director, Penn's Online Learning Initiative :

Just to underscore what John has just said I think we're at a moment of thinking in perhaps transformational ways about how wide the reach of our universities might be, about what community education might look like. We might be poised to really consider the ways in which the liberal arts education that we value might be extended far beyond our campuses.

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Matthew Rascoff:

I thank our panelists so much for their wonderful participation today and for bearing with us. And I thank all of our audience members for bearing with us as we moved our whole audience from one big auditorium to another big auditorium and it all happened in just 30 seconds. So thank you Kim and Blythe Tyrone from the Duke team, working behind the scenes to make that happen. And Shawn Miller. And apologies for those who struggled to get in. This was a wonderful discussion. I'm glad it was recorded and it will be posted. And I hope it's the beginning of an ongoing more collaborative approach to addressing these questions. One thing I love about the worlds of teaching and learning is that there are so many opportunities for sharing ideas that cut across institutions and cut across institutional types and this is really one of the areas where we can do open source innovation. We don't need to compete on

who can teach more effectively than anybody else. There's no comparative advantage for institutions. This is one of those areas where we're really all in it together and this panel really demonstrated that. Where you know you have institutions that you know are battling for research funds but are able to collaborate on this question of how to make teaching for the future more effective based on what we've learned in our collective response to the pandemic. And you know out of a pandemic that you know hurt so many people worldwide may come this more collaborative spirit that I hope is one of the things that we can wish for for the future. So thank you to our panelists, thank you to our audience members.