

Indiana University Bicentennial Provocations: Conversations Towards a Bold University in the 21st Century September 26-27, 2019

Conference Background

The Bicentennial Steering Committee Report, which was approved in May 2016, called for the IU Office of the Bicentennial to organize a select number of symposia focusing on topics that showcase Indiana University's unique strengths. One of these symposia is focused on the future of higher education from an IU perspective. This symposium is scheduled for September 26-27, 2019 and will be part of the 200 Festival which will serve as the first marquee event for Indiana University's Bicentennial celebratory year.

To further develop the concept for this symposium, the Office of the Bicentennial asked Dr. Heather Akou, Dr. Eric Bain-Selbo, Dr. Suzanne Godby Ingalsbe, Dr. Colin Johnson, and Dr. Eileen Julien to serve as a program development committee.

Program Concept

"Provocations: A Bold New Century in Higher Education"

As an elite, public research university with a constellation of regional campuses, Indiana University is known for its innumerable professional schools, its wealth of interdisciplinary programs, excellence in research in arts, humanities, and the sciences, its reputation as the world's most prolific teacher of languages, and exceptional strides in digitalization and international exchange. Though distinct, IU is also deeply embedded in the larger context of higher education.

While historically, education in the United States has been closely linked to the "American Dream," changes in demographics and finances have led to serious challenges over the last few decades. As Indiana University celebrates two centuries of existence, what will the coming century bring? What are the legacies and opportunities that matter?

This symposium is being planned as a series of provocative conversations that will bring many different types of leaders into dialogue with one another, such as scholars of higher education, administrators, leaders of student and faculty councils from around the state, and high-level campus staff, alumni, lawmakers, lobbyists and journalists, to explore both the extraordinary benefits of higher education and the deep challenges that lie ahead. The committee is inviting speakers from different positions to give short, provocative talks of five to ten minutes, followed by questions,

exchange and debate. These are conversations that we want to have about the system of higher education, but for which we rarely make time.

Why "Provocations"? The program committee seeks to invite *provocative* speakers who will deliver us from our comfort zones for a frank and earnest exchange about goals and ambitions, possibilities and limits around three major topics:

1. Our Universities, Ourselves: Institutions and Identities
2. Colleges and Universities: Institutions of Investment, Debt, and Indebtedness
3. The Civic University: Democracy, Community, and Governance

We do not intend for our guest speakers to deliver prepared lectures. Rather, we invite these guest *provocateurs* to challenge our thinking and spark dialogue with interlocutors and audience members. The planning committee members will co-host and facilitate three sessions related to the topics below. Shared meals and reception time will give participants additional opportunities for networking and conversation.

Our Universities, Ourselves: Institutions and Identities

In the United States, institutions of higher education have diverse origins and now include colonial colleges, land-grant colleges, German-style research universities, liberal arts colleges, professional schools, religious colleges, gender-specific colleges, tribal colleges, historically-black colleges and universities, regional universities, community colleges, and others. In the post-World War II period, higher education in all its variety was an important vehicle for significant socio-economic change in the United States. It was the means by which millions of Americans improved their life prospects and those of their families. In many ways, it was a great leveler or equalizer that helped to fuel incredible economic growth and more broadly distribute the riches of the country. In short, amid the vast diversity of institutions, the identity of higher education was bound up with the idea of the American Dream, and was instrumental for many people in their efforts to achieve it.

This symposium topic aims to encourage discussion and debate about identities—higher education in general, individual institutions, students, faculty, and broader publics. What are the functions of the research university, the regional university, the liberal arts college, and the community college in the twenty-first century? What do we think their functions will be in a hundred years' time? What does it mean to "internationalize" a university, and what is the relation between internationalization, globalization, evolving technologies and the legacy of American cultural and academic hegemony during the post-war era?

Colleges and Universities: Institutions of Investment, Debt, and Indebtedness

Institutions of higher education operate in complex webs of debt and indebtedness, overlapping layers of financial liabilities and moral obligations that stretch across generations. Postsecondary education is commonly evaluated in terms of cost and value and viewed as an investment of money and time. In the United States those calculations have shifted dramatically since the second half of the twentieth century, when the expansion of state universities and public funding for college students (such as Pell grants and the GI bill) made higher education more accessible and affordable than ever before. These programs facilitated, among other benefits, gains by an increasingly diverse student population including growing numbers of women and minorities. This golden era of higher education was also a period during which the federal government poured notable amounts of money into research initiatives through NASA, the CDC, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Much of the work sponsored by these agencies occurred in universities, both public and private. These investments in education have dwindled or disappeared over the last two decades, however, as many of these programs have been defunded. As a result, financial debt is a mushrooming and frightening reality for today's students, many of whom will spend a decade or more paying off student loans.

American colleges and universities are built on other debts as well. Today's faculty, staff, and students are indebted to those scholars, supporters, and stewards of institutional resources who preceded us. We owe historical debts to the original inhabitants of the land where our institutions now stand and to the workers, many exploited, whose labor made possible the structures where we carry out our endeavors. Increasingly, academic life also seems to entail feelings of exhaustion, depletion, and being perpetually behind; feelings of owing somebody something, perhaps something more or better than one's limited resources allow one to provide. Energies and attentions are spread too thin, and we are exhorted to do more with less while keeping everything in healthy balance.

And yet, for all this, the colleges and universities of today educate more students, facilitate path-breaking research in more areas of scholarly inquiry, and attend to a broader array of needs of their various constituencies than ever before. Clearly, somewhere along the line, somebody got something right. Somebody's investments—of time, of intellectual energy, of thoughtful foresight, of money—have paid off. Considering debt, investment, and indebtedness can help us think more clearly about intergenerational relationships and group dynamics; what we owe others and how we fulfill those obligations; what governments and institutions owe their constituencies; and how those entities can most appropriately serve the people. What can we do to redress past wrongs and honor past investments? What legacies have we inherited, and what bequests do we want to leave behind



for the benefit of those of follow us? And what sustainable and cost-effective models will most successfully allow us to achieve these goals?

The Civic University: Democracy, Community, and Governance

Debates regarding institutional governance in higher education are often framed as discussions about the proper apportionment of authority and responsibility between faculty and administrators. At their core, however, these conversations are really about the civic culture of the modern university. What is the current state of “shared governance” as a characteristic of American colleges and universities, and who, precisely, are the appropriate participants in that enterprise? What role have students played, or should they play, in democratizing higher education, and what function do colleges and universities play, or should they play, in cultivating an appreciation for democratic values in students?

In short, higher education today is exacerbating inequality by contributing to disparities of income and wealth across United States. Should higher education embrace again its more egalitarian heritage (at least the relatively more recent one), and, if so, how can it do that?

Similarly, how are institutions of higher learning engaging relatively new challenges such as accommodations for disabilities, Title IX, LGBTQ advocacy, and recruitment of foreign students? How must higher education change in order to best serve the changing identity of the American population—one that in this century will no longer be majority white? What role should colleges and universities that are not historically “minority-serving” play in trying to address persistent forms of social, cultural and economic inequality? What do real access and equity look like, and what do we need to do to achieve it? In short, how can higher education best serve 21st century American pluralism?

How do we build a university community that feels vibrant, welcoming and fair, and how can the university forge meaningful connections to the various communities in which it is embedded?

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