Private businesses might create these new learning organizations, or governments, or philanthropists. Andrew Carnegie had the right idea a century ago when he built thousands of local libraries around the world. The Carnegie libraries made sense given the state of the art in educational information technology then: the printed book. Local communities were obligated to invest in the buildings in the form of land and ongoing operating support from public sources. They were also required to make them free for anyone to use.

The world needs the twenty-first-century equivalent of Carnegie libraries—beautiful, peaceful places where knowledge lives and grows and spreads. Places supported and beloved by local communities, open to everyone, that offer people all of the educational opportunities technology will make possible.

A great learning experience at such a scale might seem impossible in view of the colleges we’ve all experienced in our culture and lives. But gigantic universities are a relatively new, mid-twentieth-century phenomenon. A lot of people learned a great deal in the entire sweep of human history that preceded them. The logic of the hybrid university is comprehensive and self-contained, everything and everyone you need inside the campus walls. The higher-learning places of the future will be portals as much as meeting places, connected to the global University of Everywhere beyond.

Nearly 150 years ago, Charles Eliot became the most influential college president in American history by asking a question that still weighs on the minds of parents today: “What can I do with my boy?”

For a long time, the answer has been obvious: Make sure he graduates from high school, gets accepted into a good college, and can pay the tuition bills. That was true for my generation, and my father’s, and his parents’ before. The path to higher education has long been one of the great comforts of the middle class. It left little confusion about what it meant to succeed as a parent. As the economy changed and many blue-collar jobs disappeared, the prevalence of that thinking expanded. As late as 1982, only 57 percent of parents thought their children would go to college. By 2010 it was 92 percent.

This is why the rising cost of higher education has struck such a deep chord of anxiety. People have been told that their children’s futures and their success as parents are absolutely dependent on higher education. Yet the price of fulfilling that obligation has grown further and further out of reach.

In one way, the disruptive effects of information technology offer possible salvation. As digital learning environments become more sophisticated
and open credentialing systems replace the traditional college degree, the upward trajectory of college tuition over time will flatten and start to descend. "Enough to put my kids through college" will cease to be cultural shorthand for "a mind-bogglingly large amount of money." People will start to think of higher education as a particularly sophisticated kind of information service instead of membership dues in a country club. What they're willing to pay will change accordingly.

But the savings in money will have a price in complication. The established college system outsources a great deal of hard work and responsibility to traditional educational organizations, regulatory systems, and broad cultural habits. Especially for middle- and upper-income families, there is zero ambiguity about what college is, which colleges are best, when students should go, and how to get there. The messages that popular culture sends about college and the financial subsidies provided by the government all point toward ivy-covered walls. If that maddeningly expensive yet highly understandable system fractures, where should students turn? Who should parents trust? What should everyone do?

While the answer depends a lot on individual circumstances, here are the four most important decisions to keep in mind when you think about the University of Everywhere.

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

The hybrid university will not disappear tomorrow. The process of disruption will take years, and the aftermath will include institutions descended from existing colleges and a constellation of new higher learning organizations, some physical and some purely virtual. Which means that young people fast approaching the end of high school are still going to have to decide whether to attend a traditional college or venture into new arenas. Here's what everyone involved should keep in mind:

Hybrid universities have been ripping off parents and students for decades by shortchanging undergraduate learning. Students are being left to the whims of professors who haven't been trained to teach and aren't accountable for helping students learn. Colleges are not challenging students to work hard and think critically and creatively. All available evidence suggests undergraduates simply aren't learning very much, even as they are being charged ever larger amounts of money and becoming increasingly burdened with debt.

Don't let this happen to you. Some institutions still have authentic educational programs like the MIT General Institute Requirements. The University of Chicago is still colored by Robert Maynard Hutchins's thwarted dreams, requiring undergraduates to study the humanities and liberal arts. It's a lot of work, and the university lacks a social scene centered on booze and big-time sports (Hutchins eliminated the football team in 1939), leading students to wear T-shirts calling the U of C "Where Fun Comes to Die." This is a good sign. Colleges give nineteen-year-olds too many reasons to have fun and not enough to study consistently and thoughtfully.

Of course, most students aren't going to MIT or Chicago. But there are hundreds of programs and departments at all manner of colleges and universities, large and small, public and private, elite and less selective, that have made deliberate choices about what students should learn. This clarity of purpose is the single most important quality a program can have. Choose a college with a coherent sense of what it's trying to accomplish on behalf of students. This quality is rarer than you may imagine.

Historically, the main justification for maintaining thousands of course options and giving undergraduates nearly unlimited choice in selecting their courses was to give young people opportunities to explore various intellectual territories during their formative years. This was always self-serving: It justified the employment of large numbers of autonomous scholars focused on research instead of teaching. With the advent of the University of Everywhere and tens of thousands of rich, well-designed college courses available to anyone, anywhere, for almost nothing, the laissez-faire elective system makes no sense at all. Students and parents should be
paying tuition at colleges that are willing to work for it by making undergraduate learning their number one priority and acting accordingly. Don’t pay huge amounts of money for services that the Internet will give you for free.

For an example of the kind of college you should be choosing, look to the land of 10,000 lakes. In 2006 the state of Minnesota decided to create a new public university in Rochester, home of the world-renowned Mayo Clinic. Instead of spending billions of dollars to build another hybrid university, the University of Minnesota Rochester rented cheap space in an abandoned food court in a mall located two blocks from the Mayo Clinic and renovated it into offices and classrooms. It leased a few floors in nearby apartment buildings for students to live in, and memberships at the YMCA for exercise and recreation. It re-created the room in the traditional campus library where students like to sit in comfortable chairs and connect to the Internet with their tablets and laptop computers, and left out the other 95 percent of the building, including the books.

Instead of hundreds of degrees programs, the university offered exactly two: a bachelor of science in health sciences and a bachelor of science in health professions. Instead of choosing from among a phone book full of electives, students take a defined curriculum for the first two years. The professors charged with teaching chemistry, biology, statistics, philosophy, and creative writing coordinate their courses on a week-by-week basis so the various concepts interlock and reinforce one another. There are no lecture halls: When I visited, the classrooms I saw held thirty people at most. Yet the whole enterprise is amazingly inexpensive. UMR is able to provide a first-class education at the standard Minnesota public university tuition of $13,000 plus a fraction of what the state spends subsidizing traditional institutions.

I asked many of the UMR students, nearly all of whom came from Minnesota, if they had regrets about attending a college without fraternity houses or football games or rows of taverns offering drink specials on Wednesday nights. Traditional universities complain that they need expensive amenities to compete for today’s entitled, hedonistic students. But the UMR students seemed perfectly happy. They have parties and extra-curricular activities, including something called “boot hockey,” which involves boots instead of skates and brooms instead of sticks. But mostly they’re busy working. When I asked them how much time they spent working on academics outside of class, the typical answer was thirty to thirty-five hours per week. According to the nonprofit National Survey of Student Engagement, only 6 percent of freshmen at the biggest, most prestigious research universities work that hard. Eighteen-year-olds are highly sensitive to expectations and organizational culture. If you give them a lot of work and commensurate support, they’ll do it. If you give them little work, a lot of free time, and an elaborate social infrastructure centered on alcohol consumption, they’ll react accordingly.

The UMR educational design is commonsensical and entirely impossible in a hybrid university structured around departmental autonomy and academic freedom. It was built a lot like the Minerva Project, because both organizations are what you get if you start a college in the twenty-first century and make logical choices about what structures and practices will help students learn at a reasonable cost. People don’t build new American hybrid universities anymore because they’re too expensive. They also don’t make any sense.

Be wary of traditional colleges and universities that aren’t moving quickly and creatively to use technology as an integral part of undergraduate teaching. The standard administrative response to IT has been to let individual professors decide how, or if, to use powerful new teaching tools. Given how long academic careers can be, that means that some classes might be several generations away from reaching the high-tech world we know today. That’s not nearly fast enough. This doesn’t mean you’ll be limited to colleges and universities with a technical orientation. For example, Davidson College, a small liberal arts institution in North
Carolina, has a long tradition of high academic standards, has a strong commitment to the humanities, and was one of the first liberal arts colleges to join edX.

For hundreds of years, students have expected the college degrees they’ve earned—and paid large amounts of money for—to still mean something decades after they graduate. That’s less likely if the college goes out of business because it didn’t adapt to the changing economics of higher education. Colleges that act as if the Internet is just another fad that can be waited out or absorbed into an essentially unchanged organizational model are going to disappear in the long run. No student or parent should let their money and hard work disappear with them.

GOING TO COLLEGE

Four years can seem like a long time if you’re young, but it is actually a brief interval when it comes to learning what you need to become an enlightened person and productive citizen. Once a student enrolls in a college, be it a small liberal arts college or a large state university, the most important decision she can make is how to spend that precious time. Some people know who they want to be at an early age, and for them the path toward medical school or the scholarship of medieval history is well defined. But for most students, college is a time to come to understand how to learn and develop, in Newman’s phrase, “a union and concert of the intellectual powers.”

The best way to do this is to stick to the classics: arts and sciences. While Arum and Roksa’s Academically Adrift made headlines for finding low average levels of learning among college students, the study also found important distinctions between academic majors. The data they collected indicated a strong correlation between how hard students were asked to work and how much they learned, which is consistent with everything we know about neuroscience and cognitive psychology. The most challenging and rewarding programs were in the traditional liberal arts, such as philosophy, history, and literature, along with science, math, and engineering. The least work and least learning happened in programs like business and education, which are two of the most popular majors among American college students today.

The reliable, mechanistic old college system has allowed a large number of people born into middle- and upper-middle-class circumstances to comfortably ride along established pathways to prosperity without having to work especially hard. As the higher-education system opens up to many more people, this will change. Elite college admissions will become increasingly less game-able. The number of students who can live on the MIT campus is limited. For every additional Mongolian genius who gets admitted, that’s one fewer spot for the smart-but-not-brilliant young man whose parents spent a lot of money getting him into the right private high school. Instead of waiting for 35,000 students to apply and picking among them by reading stacks of paper, elite schools like MIT, Princeton, and Stanford will electronically search among tens of millions of potential students worldwide. A critical mass of high schools will allow students to make evidence of their learning machine-discoverable, and more people will build up portfolios of digital badges and other credentials online to attract the attention of universities around the world.

The millions of students who faithfully make their way through less selective colleges earning generic degrees in business, education, political science, psychology, and so on will also be at risk. Those degrees have granted permanent and exclusive access to graduate-level education and desired professions, not because the credentials themselves are particularly meaningful, but because they are more meaningful than anything else that is universally accepted and, in a narrow way, understood. When the value of the generic bachelor’s degree fades, students’ lack of learning will be exposed. Most of them will be left with little but debt and lost time.

The message for all students should be: Put down the bong and get to work, because the number of curious, eager-to-learn peers around the
world with the means and ambition to get a great college education is about to increase a thousandfold.

**PAYING FOR COLLEGE**

Most of the future is hard to time. No one can predict at this point exactly when the weight of large numbers will knock the hybrid university off its foundations. The political and regulatory protections surrounding the hybrid university are functions of politics, which always oscillate on the edges of luck, personality, the business cycle, and majority coalition building. Potentially world-changing education technology companies can rise or fall based on a few semirandom changes in the venture capital environment, the labor market, or the ins and outs of acquisition and IPO.

All of which means that now is not the time to cash in your 529 college savings plan and buy a sports car. Even in the new landscape of higher education, students will still have to pay rent somewhere. More important, higher learning in the future will take place over a much longer time period than we commonly think of today. As the world’s labor market becomes more demanding and traditional college degrees are replaced by open credentials, people won’t be able to complete their formal education in their early or midtwenties. They’ll need to keep experiencing—and in some circumstances paying for—education.

A good rule of thumb is this: Spend your hard-earned money to pay for your or your child’s education, not someone else’s ambitions. There are a small number of colleges and universities—probably fewer than fifty in the United States, total—that are of such exalted reputation and proximity to power that their name alone on a degree is worth the price of tuition. Don’t finance some other college’s dreams of joining that club. Focus your limited resources on high-quality educational programs that enlighten your children and prepare them for careers, not a comfortably undemanding extended adolescence.

Remember, too, that colleges have absolutely no conscience when they are encouraging students and parents to borrow large sums of money for tuition. Living at a public university and learning in the University of Everywhere are cost-effective ways of finding yourself when you’re twenty. Borrow money only for an education that will yield enough of a return in the job market to allow you to pay your loans back.

**PREPARING FOR COLLEGE**

For parents with younger children or no children yet, the University of Everywhere will be more fully realized and thus less familiar. These parents should start rearranging their thinking about college right away. It will be very important for their children to be able to thrive in the new digital learning environments. Given how much time young people already like to spend staring at glowing rectangular screens, this can seem like a terrifying prospect for parents who’ve grown up in and succeeded at traditional colleges and universities. While these changes may be daunting, remember that (a) much of the time that kids currently spend in front of screens can be repurposed for more productive use (see, for example, *Grand Theft Auto V*), and (b) digital learning environments don’t require students to spend all of their time staring at computers. The better technology gets, the more true this will be.

Parents of young children should keep in mind that their pride and joy will be competing and collaborating with other students around the world, the generation born out of the great rise of the global middle class. Most of the new entrants will be more likely than American students to adapt to the new digital learning environments, because they won’t have access to the rich schools and colleges that Americans enjoy. The
University of Everywhere will be their best and probably their only option. These will offer life-changing opportunities for students to engage with people from other cultures and simultaneously grow into the global learning communities that will increasingly define large parts of higher education and the world of work beyond.

It will also be crucial for students to accumulate discoverable evidence of learning. Whether it’s Mozilla Open Badges or Accreditable cert or something else that hasn’t been invented yet, the future will require people to gather, organize, and control information about what they learn, in order to build their educational identities. Trusting economically obsolete organizations with your educational credentials is a risk nobody should take—today or tomorrow.

More broadly, the future of education involves substantially more academic work. This reality is easy to miss in the hazy utopian thinking that often surrounds promises of technological progress. Technology will make education better, but not easier. Students working in personalized learning environments will experience less of the frustration that comes from incompetent, homogenous educational design. But they also will have fewer opportunities to float along a river of mediocrity and low expectations. They will be less able to rely on the inherited privilege of being born into the right family and social class to move ahead. Rational education will be unforgiving in many ways. The academic standards that emerge from global learning communities will rise to the achievement of the most capable and dedicated students in the world. There won’t be any room to hide or slack off.

There is not now and there never will be a substitute for the deliberate practice necessary to gain real expertise. The higher-learning organizations of the future will give students the right kinds of hard work to do, and they will recognize that work by awarding credible evidence of accomplishment. But they won’t do students’ work for them. What parents can do is to help their children build the intellectual and emotional tools they will need for these demanding and rewarding tasks.

And what about existing colleges, with all their glories and flaws? In the long run they will rise or fall based on their ability to decide what they’re good at and create an economic model that supports the cost of doing exactly that, and nothing else.

The hybrid university was specifically designed and exquisitely refined as a mechanism for avoiding such difficult choices. The whole point of it was to lash together three very different purposes in a way that concealed the contradictions and subsidies between them. As the historian Laurence Veysey said, the university thrived on ignorance, shielded by a hypnotic mode of ritual idealism, with each group refraining from too rude or brutal an unmasking of the rest. We are headed for a time of brutal unmasking.

Institutions that are primarily built to perpetuate the ruling class will persist (assuming there are no larger revolutions). The human instinct to divide into social classes organized around power, money, and exclusivity will not be disrupted by information technology. It will help to have enormous amounts of financial and social capital. Harvard is building a doomsday machine for somebody—just not itself.

Research will continue to be research, and the logic of scholarly academic freedom holds. Whether those scholars need to live and work in the same physical place—and whether they’ll be able to afford to have careers as scholars—will depend a lot on the disciplines. If chemists still need to stand in front of benches and manipulate expensive machines, then they will congregate in something like a “research institution.” Since learning to be a chemist involves lab time, chemistry education, particularly at the graduate level, will happen there, too. The same is true for the fine and performing arts and other hands-on fields.

It’s less clear why poets and historians need to be organized in departments on campuses, particularly when the disciplines have become ever more divided and specialized. Walk down the hall of a humanities department on a college campus today and what you’ll find is a lot of offices that
are closed or empty because the people who technically occupy them are working alone or with their laptops somewhere else, on topics so specialized that they have little or nothing to do with the interests of their fellow professors and students. Information technology has already changed scholarship, strengthening connections within the Invisible College of academics who are ultimately loyal and accountable to their peers, not their institutions.

Nor do research institutions necessarily need undergraduates. Universities like to make a show of undergraduate involvement with basic research while alleging that it's vital for professors to be on the cutting edge of their fields in order to effectively teach lower-division courses. This is 95 percent bunk, another myth furiously told and retold in order to paper over the structural illogic of the hybrid university. As William James said of the PhD holder: "His moral, social and personal characteristics may utterly disqualify him for success in the classroom; and of these characteristics his doctor's examination is unable to take any account whatever."

There will be exceptions, as there should be. It's a good idea for MIT to have both undergraduates and world-class research facilities in the same place, because of the culture and mission of the institution. But if that's the standard, many existing research universities won't meet it.

What's likely is that many scholars will continue to work in organizations that are located in the kinds of places where scholars like to live. New York City, with a population of more than eight million, contains only two first-tier research universities, Columbia and NYU. That's the same number as the state of Iowa, population three million. Given that New York City is a global capital of finance and culture with an enviably low crime rate, it could easily house ten times the numbers of organizations that support high-level scholarship.

The city is also a huge potential market for new educational organizations built from the ground up to serve undergraduates. Universities like NYU and George Washington shoved their way into the top tier of contemporary prestige by selling, first and foremost, their locations. As Plato said: "The city educates the man." Indeed, in late 2013, Carnegie Mellon provost Mark Kamlet stood with New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg to announce that a new CMU technology program focused on media and design would be opening in 16,000 square feet of renovated space in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Brooklyn is a thriving hub of intellect, culture, and entrepreneurialism with a population of 2.5 million within the largest city in America. If Brooklyn can have an NBA basketball team, why can't it have new start-up universities, research institutions, and higher-learning organizations? The answer is that it can, and it will.

Who will work at these new and distinct research and educational organizations? The federal government is still working from Vannevar Bush's blueprint for investing in university-based science research. Researchers with external sources of funding will continue to do their work as they always have.

But many scholars receive no such funding. This is particularly true in the humanities, which have shrunk relative to the rest of higher education as the structural economic forces favoring job training and research have altered the proportions of the hybrid university over time. There's no National Institute of Philosophy in Washington, D.C., doling out millions of dollars per year to support the study of Kantian deontology. The tens of thousands of scholars working in fields without external funding are being supported by student tuition, government subsidies, and, in a relatively small number of institutions, endowment earnings. When the hybrid model breaks apart, that money will disappear. Where these scholars will go and how they will support themselves are questions that today have no easy answers.

There is no escaping the fact that the inefficient hybrid university model has served as a shelter and benefactor for important scholarship with no immediate value in the free market or obvious source of external patronage. Ideas that challenge and provoke conventional thinking are, by definition, less likely to garner enthusiastic support in the here and now. As a society, we have chosen colleges and universities as our principal
mechanism for protecting and transmitting our inheritance of civilization to future generations. That the financial cost of this was obscured by hidden subsidies within university budgets was a feature, not a bug; it protected scholarship from vulgar politics and the unforgiving demands of the market. While colleges as we know them today can be passing strange, they also nurture the kinds of odd passions and inspired eccentricities that can be washed over by a tide of lower-cost service. People entering academic fields have long taken the economics of higher education for granted, never asking where, exactly, the money comes from to support the sabbaticals and teaching loads that allow half their time to be spent on research.

That kind of ignorance will be dangerous in the future. The scholarly hierarchy that separates top institutions and departments from others is likely to widen even as the number of tenure-track jobs declines. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the total number of tenured professors in the United States increased modestly over the last two decades, from 234,000 in 1993 to 262,000 in 2011. But those numbers represent a significant decline in tenured professors as a percentage of all professors. As more people graduated from high school, more high school graduates went to college, and a wave of baby boomers’ children reached college age, colleges responded largely by hiring more adjunct faculty, part-time workers who don’t necessarily have PhDs and earn as little as $3,000 per course.

The promise of high-quality digital learning environments is that they will increase the productivity of academic labor. Using technology to help people do more of what they do better is the basic formula for growing human prosperity and reducing economic deprivation. It also causes millions of people to lose their jobs through no fault of their own. By hiring adjuncts, universities kept the ratio of college teachers to students relatively constant while reducing how much college-level teachers were paid. Future learning organizations are going to use fewer people to teach more students. To the extent the tenure tournament continues to exist, it will become even more treacherous and cruel.

Meanwhile, the large majority of students attend colleges whose main job is teaching, not research, including community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and public universities that train few people to become PhDs. These institutions have benefited from the social prestige and financial support afforded to the hybrid university. They have ridden the long wave of increased prices for college and university degrees. But they have also suffered from the fact that the hybrid university on which they were modeled was not designed to succeed at their teaching mission. They were forced by regulation and convention to hire people whose doctor’s examinations took no account of their skill in the classroom.

In one sense, that makes them most vulnerable to competition from new organizations built around high-quality digital learning environments. They don’t have some other purpose or revenue source to fall back on. Colleges that continue trying to compete with elite institutions by charging the same tuition and building the same luxury facilities are in for a hard fall. A growing number of schools have already reached this point, struggling to stay solvent from year to year as they raise tuition and curtail financial aid. If they don’t evolve, new technology-driven competition will push them over the brink of dissolution.

But in another sense, teaching colleges have a built-in advantage: They’re in the growth market of human learning. The people who work there teach because they want to, not because they’re forced to as a condition of conducting the research they actually care about. Liberal arts colleges in particular have stayed small and focused on education. Some of them are really good at it. There are also tens of thousands of great instructors in the nation’s community colleges who know far more about teaching than the typical tenured scholar at a large research university, and they are eager to adapt whatever technological tools that can help their students learn.

For these institutions and educators, the key to survival will be putting the weight of large numbers in their favor. Some of those numbers are the same that fuel the dreams of venture
capitalists and entrepreneurs. Many of the billions of people about to join the global middle class assume that America has the best colleges and universities in the world. Rather than run out the string on a broken business model for another five or ten years, U.S. colleges should start thinking in terms of smaller amounts of money multiplied by much larger amounts of people. Institutions worried about diluting the exclusivity of their “brand” should ask themselves whether they are truly among the small group of colleges in the business of serving the ruling class—and whether they truly want to be.

But the most important large number working in favor of both existing colleges and all of the new higher-education organizations to come is time, specifically lifetimes, during which people always need to learn.

Of all the reasons that liberal education got the short end of the stick during the great late-nineteenth-century shakeout and continued to be subordinated to job training and research throughout the twentieth century, the most important may be a simple lack of time. You can train someone to start a career as a Web developer in nine weeks. You can prepare someone for a legal career in a couple of years. Getting a legitimate PhD in a tough research field can take nearly a decade. But liberal education? If you take its meaning at all seriously, liberal education is the work of a lifetime.

The people who best understand this work in the oldest continuously operating learning institutions in the world, those that far predate even the most ancient European universities: organized religions. To contend against those giants, the passion and pride of man, you don’t teach people some things and then set them loose at age twenty-one, confident that your work is done. You bring them back every week, in a community of learners, for the rest of their lives. To apprehend the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and shades, its great points and its little—that’s not a goal to accomplish. It’s a state of being toward which to always strive.

The current higher-education business model consists of charging students and their parents a great deal of money for a short amount of time and then maintaining an ongoing relationship based on youthful nostalgia, tribal loyalty, professional sports entertainment, and occasional begging for donations. The more complicated the world becomes, the more that intelligent machines usurp traditional human roles, the more people need to learn throughout their lives. The more people escape the isolation of poverty, the more they want to learn throughout their lives.

To prosper, colleges need to become more like cathedrals. They need to build beautiful places, real and virtual, that learners return to throughout their lives. They need to create authentic human communities and form relationships with people based on the never-ending project of learning. They need to do it in ways that are affordable and meaningful for large numbers of people. The idea of “applying to” and “graduating from” colleges won’t make as much sense in the future. People will join colleges and other learning organizations for as long or as little time as they need.

Large numbers of learners make this possible. When you talk to professors teaching MOOCs, none of them say they’re doing it to make a lot of money or advance their careers. Instead, they’re thrilled by the prospect of reaching tens of thousands of people all over the world who want to learn, of seeing how their ideas resonate in different cultural contexts, of experimenting in ways that were never possible before the advent of technology. Colleges that look beyond the crumbling, ivy-choked confines of the hybrid university will find a world of possibility for anyone who is genuinely committed to helping people learn.

For nearly all of recorded history, the great gift of higher education has been locked away from the vast majority of people. It still is today. That happened in part because knowledge is power and societies that control people through enforced ignorance have no place for open institutions of learning. But it mostly happened because the structures of higher education were limited by available technology. Writing gave people a way to leave their intricate neural patterns for others to absorb. The printing press allowed those patterns to be replicated and distributed at manageable
expense. Each advancement reinforced the logic of the university as a rare place: masters and students and books, surrounded by walls that protected the knowledge within.

Now we are grappling with new technologies that break that logic apart. The costs of this transition will be more than made up for by the sheer number of people who will, for the first time, be able to realize the gifts of personhood that are their human right. Many of those who have lived and learned in colleges as we know them cherish their memories and institutions. But the way we know them is not the only way they can be. Our lifetimes will see the birth of a better, higher learning.

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