



What if higher education was no longer about the number of years but the quality of years? ^P

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Higher Paths

UNCERTAINTIES

Collaboration, Values

MEGATREND ^(Most significant)

Future Humanity

TRENDS

Community-Based Solutions
Cross-Sectoral Partnerships
Future of Purpose & Work
Mobilising Innovation
Transforming Education

TECHNOLOGIES

Digital Communities
Digital Realities

SECTORS IMPACTED

All Sectors

KEYWORDS

Analytical Thinking
Critical Thinking
Learning
Real-World Challenges
Universities

Within Reach

Transitional

Visionary

Higher education shifts to personalised and practical learning, prioritising critical thinking and real-world problem-solving. This shapes lifelong learners, with success measured through demonstrated competencies rather than fixed time periods.

^P This opportunity, together with other education-related opportunities in the 2022, 2023 and 2024 editions of The Global 50, represents one of many models for transforming education to support future growth, prosperity and well-being.





WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

In 2024,

222 million


students were enrolled in university programs, more than **double the 100 million enrolled in 2000.**



From centres of learning to global institutions, universities evolved in the 11th century¹²⁷¹ for knowledge, critical thinking, innovation, and societal progress. In 2024, 222 million students were enrolled in university programmes, more than double the 100 million enrolled in 2000.¹²⁷² However, while enrolment has increased, especially in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, maintaining quality remains a challenge.¹²⁷³

Organisations are increasingly interested in hiring people with analytical thinking and creativity skills. According to the World Economic Forum, cognitive skills topped the list of those deemed to be of greatest importance for workers in 2023.¹²⁷⁴ Analytical thinking is considered to be a core skill by more companies than any other skill, making up, on average, 9.1% of the core skills reported by companies.¹²⁷⁵ Creative thinking comes second, as businesses believe demand for creative thinking will grow faster in the next five years – by 73% – than demand for analytical thinking.¹²⁷⁶ A five-year study of 93,743 students suggested that higher education institutions should embed authentic, hands-on learning and real-life projects into curricula.¹²⁷⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how students want to learn, with students showing diverse preferences for learning modes. Out of four learning mode preferences, 52% of students preferred traditional in-person learning and 51% least preferred online live learning.¹²⁷⁸ Before COVID-19, less than 1% of students used a computer to study for more than 10 hours per week.¹²⁷⁹ However, following COVID-19, most students use digital learning tools for between three and four hours per day.¹²⁸⁰



Demand for creative thinking will grow

73%

faster than demand for analytical thinking over the next five years