This week:

- I tell you about a new effort to rethink undergraduate education.
- I share *Chronicle* resources on preparing for a new semester.
An Emphasis on Equity

More than 20 years ago, an influential group known as the Boyer Commission released a report on the future of undergraduate education at research universities. Its 10 recommendations were cutting edge in 1998 but have since become mainstream, if still challenging to do well. They include an emphasis on interdisciplinary education; creating a freshman-year curriculum that is based on inquiry, not memorization; developing students’ ability to communicate; and using information technology creatively.

But, of course, a lot has changed in the past two decades. Technology, for one, is profoundly different. And more concern for equity and inclusivity has shifted the thinking around classroom culture. So it’s perhaps no surprise that the commission’s mission was due for a refresh. This month the Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (formerly known as the Reinvention Collaborative) announced the creation of the Boyer 2040 Commission, which will be co-chaired by Barbara R. Snyder, president of the Association of American Universities, and Peter McPherson, president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

I spoke recently with Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, a special adviser to the provost at Boston University and an ex-officio member of the commission, about some of the issues the group will be considering.

I asked Loizeaux what she considered some of the more profound changes in and around higher education since the first commission met, and she pointed to several things. Each of these will very likely shape a new set of recommendations, due out next year.
• **Advances in learning science.** Neuroscience has taught us a great deal about effective ways to teach, including how to structure lessons so that students are more likely to remember what they learn. How can undergraduate education be designed so that this deeper learning occurs?

• **Advances in technology.** Smartphones and social media were uncommon two decades ago. Now they are omnipresent. How does technology affect how we relate to each other, including as teachers and learners? Similarly, online education, which accelerated during the pandemic, opens up opportunities for more-flexible and -equitable learning. How should universities incorporate online teaching into undergraduate education?

• **Greater awareness of nontraditional students.** Universities are increasingly aware that people are lifelong learners. Higher education has to be designed for more than just the traditional 18- to 22-year-old. What will that mean for how professors think about their roles in students’ lives, and what kinds of academic programming universities should offer?

**Another big shift: increased concerns about equity** are at the forefront of any conversation about undergraduate education these days, a trend accelerated by the pandemic. Many professors, particularly those at highly competitive research universities, may still hew to the idea that college classes are designed to weed out the underprepared. But, says Loizeaux, the commission will push to change that narrative. She notes that the new commission will be designing a “2040 Blueprint for Excellence and Equity in Undergraduate Education at U.S. Research Universities,” which does not present excellence and equity as trade-offs.

“We had huge conversations about this,” she said. “Although equity should be considered an automatic part of excellence, we felt we should call it out.”

To that end, the commission will look at who benefits from the high-impact practices many universities have added to undergraduate education, such as
internships, research opportunities and study abroad. Often, lower-income and first-generation college students are left on the sidelines.

“We will be thinking through how you make it possible to participate,” Loizeaux said. “And how you communicate with students about the importance of participating.” To that end, one area the commission will be looking at is academic advising.

Finally, I asked Loizeaux to describe the barriers higher education faces in improving undergraduate education. No surprise: Economic challenges top the list. Particularly within the larger ecosystem of a research university, does undergraduate education get sufficient attention?

Another challenge is the reward structure for teaching, something the original commission highlighted in 1998. Faculty members who care deeply about teaching still say that it gets short shrift compared with research obligations, and Loizeaux agrees it remains a problem. While research and attention to graduate students may continue to take priority, she asks, “how much is left over for undergraduates, and how much does the university value the time that faculty will need to put into undergraduate education to make it excellent?”

Finally, she returns to the weed-out culture still so prominent in many disciplines. What will it take for professors to develop a better understanding of the students they teach, a generation that is far more diverse — in every way — than those who came before them? “It’s going to require a change in faculty understanding of the students they teach,” she said, “for equity to come to the surface.”

Do you work at a research university? If so, what changes would you like to see in undergraduate education on your campus? And what innovations are you most excited about? Write to me at beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com, and I may share
some of your ideas in a future newsletter.

**Expert Advice**

Do you know about our free advice guides? They are written by teaching experts and offer concrete advice and resources about many of the key elements of good teaching, from how to create a thoughtful syllabus to how to be an engaging instructor.

[How to Create a Syllabus](#), by Kevin Gannon

[How to Teach a Good First Day of Class](#), by James M. Lang

[How to Make Your Teaching More Engaging](#), by Sarah Rose Cavanagh

[How to Hold a Better Class Discussion](#), by Jay Howard

[How to Make Your Teaching More Inclusive](#), by Viji Sathy and Kelly A. Hogan

[How to Be a Better Online Teacher](#), by Flower Darby

**A Webinar on Supporting Learning**

Just a few months ago, it seemed like this fall semester would be about helping students regroup after more than a year of living and learning through the pandemic. It now seems clear that Covid-19 will have a more direct impact on the semester than that, as colleges adjust their safety protocols to the reality of the Delta variant — and the limitations imposed by some states’ leaders. How, then, should instructors run their courses to navigate this next leg of pandemic teaching? Beckie will moderate a panel with three teaching experts to discuss these challenges and take your questions, on August 25. [Register here](#).
Thanks for reading *Teaching*. If you have suggestions or ideas, please feel free to email us at beckie.supiano@chronicle.com or beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com.

— Beth

Learn more about our *Teaching* newsletter, including how to contact us, at the [Teaching newsletter archive page](https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/teaching/2021-08-11?utm_source=...).

**Beth McMurtrie**

Beth McMurtrie is a senior writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, where she writes about the future of learning and technology’s influence on teaching. In addition to her reported stories, she helps write the weekly Teaching newsletter about what works in and around the classroom. Email her at beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com, and follow her on Twitter [@bethmcmurtrie](https://twitter.com/bethmcmurtrie).