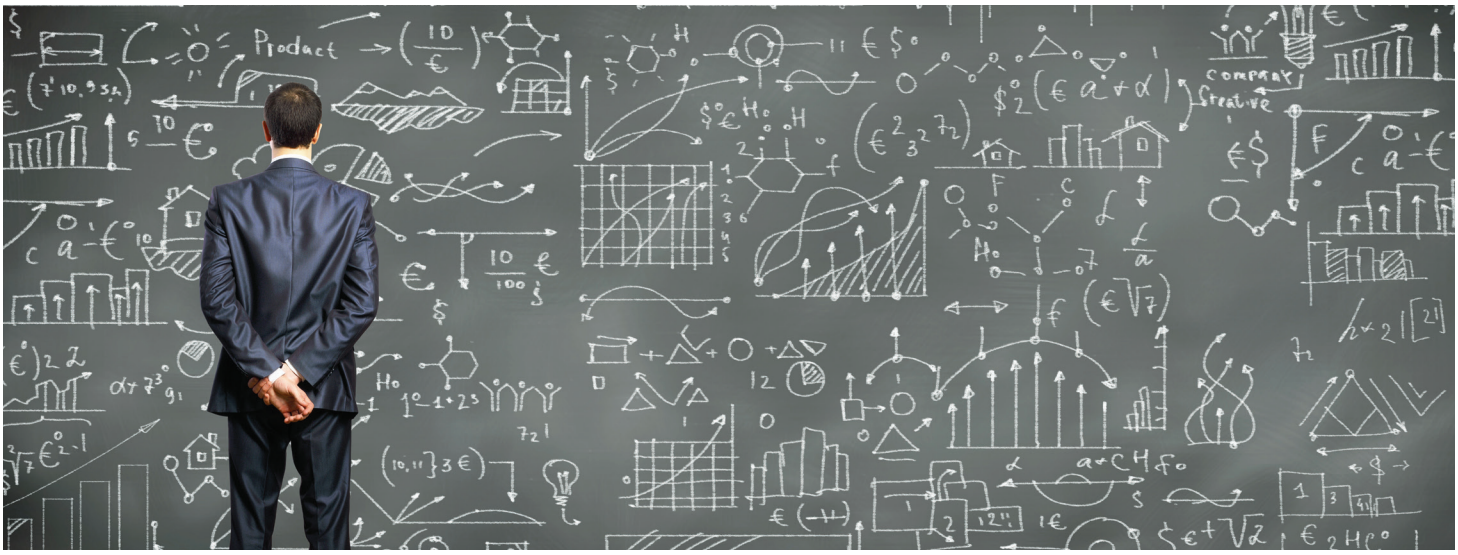
# Global Agenda Council on the Future of Universities 2012-2014

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE STATE OF THE WORLD



## Understanding/Context

Higher education and research face the pressure of globalization, competition and commercialization. The rising cost of higher education in the Western world, combined with increasing strains in the job market and a poor economic environment, contribute to these pressures. According to CourseSmart, an e-textbook provider, tuition in the United States has increased 1120% since 1978. It is no surprise, therefore, that the recent boom in massive open online courses (MOOCs) has occupied debates and newspaper columns over the past 12 months. Directly or indirectly, the boom in MOOCs is putting higher education on the spot, along with the larger research sector. The speed at which change will happen has yet to be determined, but there is agreement that change will be deep, and that the universities which will be able to turn their challenges into opportunities will thrive.

## Shaping the Agenda

The Global Agenda Council on the Future of Universities has identified three broad challenges and opportunities:

1. The roles of technology and online education, which are testing the entire learning and teaching model
2. The evolving roles of research and knowledge creation, which are under pressure from technology, funding and governance issues, new players and other factors, and which may no longer only be the prerogative of universities
3. The challenge of the values of the university and the social contract it holds with society in a world that is more global

To date, the Council has focused on technology and online education in response to the surge in MOOCs. Faculty, presidents and senior university administrators, the public sector, and business and media leaders have contributed to the debate through sessions at World Economic Forum meetings, as well as through blog posts by individual Council Members discussing topics such as "imagining the universities of the future" and "challenges for research universities". The Council also contributed to the World Economic Forum Education Brainstorm Workshop, a roundtable discussion between senior university representatives held in November 2012 in New York. It aimed to find new ways to transform the education ecosystem, to identify key challenges and find new forms of collaboration. Based on these inputs, the Council has produced a detailed outline of the main areas and questions, and a survey supporting a conceptual mapping of universities as related to the Network of Global Agenda Councils' topics and clusters.

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Going forward, the group will focus on knowledge creation and research and on values. The Council will produce a high-level report on the three priority areas, to set the agenda by challenging universities as they rethink their role and by raising engagement in the future of higher education and research.

## Contact Information

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