

Transcription for

EP. 36: THE FALL ENROLLMENT PICTURE AND PERIL FOR POST-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

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THE KEY INSIDE HIGHER ED

EP. 36: THE FALL ENROLLMENT PICTURE AND PERIL FOR POST-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

DOUG LEDERMAN

DOUG SHAPIRO

JUANA SÁNCHEZ

39:49

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DOUG LEDERMAN: Welcome to The Key, Inside Higher Ed's podcast for news, analysis, and insights. I'm Doug Lederman, Inside Higher Ed's editor and cofounder. This is my first episode of The Key, trying to fill the big shoes vacated by Paul Fain, who conceived The Key and hosted its first 35 episodes. My colleagues and I deeply appreciate that and all of Paul's many other contributions after nearly a decade at Inside Higher Ed and we wish him well in his next phase. I will probably take me a little time to figure whether and how The Key might change going forward. And to some extent that decision will be influenced by what's going on in the world around us, but I'm eager to hear your ideas and suggestions about what you're most interested in exploring--themes, topics, speakers, formats. Please reach out to me at [doug.lederman@insidehighered.com](mailto:doug.lederman@insidehighered.com), via LinkedIn or on Twitter, where you can find me @dougledIHE. I'm looking forward to traveling this road with you.

So about today's podcast... When I was thinking about how to kick off this new string of episodes, I wanted to choose a topic that would be broadly relevant to those who care about higher education and that was timely without being momentary. As soon as I framed it that way, the answer became pretty obvious to me. Digging into the clear evidence that we've seen in recent months that the pandemic and the recession have disproportionately disrupted the educational plans of certain groups of disadvantaged young people, and concerns that the ill-timed crisis may have blunted what appeared pre-COVID to be long overdue and at least modest progress in improving equitable access to higher education.

In our first conversation to follow, Doug Shapiro of the National Student Clearinghouse discusses his organization's closely watched reports about fall enrollment data, which many people in and around higher education awaited and consumed like economists anticipate the Labor Department's monthly jobs report. Doug drew special attention to the disproportionate number of graduates of high schools in low-income or heavily minority areas who did not continue on to college last fall, and the challenge that might lie ahead in trying to quote "reclaim those students" as he put it.

DOUG SHAPIRO: The lower-income students, I feel that they've most certainly lost a very important window of opportunity, because, as we said, they're on the wrong side of the digital divide. It's not a choice. They're caring for children or family members, or simply need to work more to support their families. Those aren't choices and I don't see those imperatives changing anytime soon.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Then we were joined by Juana Sanchez, a senior associate at HCM Strategists to share her concerns about the particularly vulnerable status of continuing students, particularly transfer and adult students.

JUANA SANCHEZ: As more students are really thrown off course, as they get off path, they're going to now be students that we need to think about as stopped-out students, as prospective transfer students, and we probably need to have a more robust set of tools in our tool kit to really effectively engage these returning adult students. So I think those will be strategies that we need to develop and deploy not just in the spring term, but probably for many terms to come in the years ahead.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Now on to today's episode and these engaging conversations. Hope you enjoy them.

So our first interview this week is with Doug Shapiro, who is Vice President for Research at the National Student Clearinghouse and Executive Director of the Clearinghouse's Research Center. The Clearinghouse began publishing enrollment data on roughly a monthly basis for the first time this fall, and those reports were eagerly anticipated and then devoured by many people in the higher ed ecosystem--campus leaders who were anxious about how their own numbers compared to the national picture, and policy makers and advocates for students wondering if some early indicators like drop-offs in the number of students filling out the federal student aid form would result in actual enrollment declines, particularly for disadvantaged students or shifts in where students enrolled. So welcome to The Key, Doug, and Happy New Year.

DOUG SHAPIRO: Thanks, Doug, and it's great to be able to talk with you about our work.

DOUG LEDERMAN: I wondered if you'd start by looking back at the collective reports that you issued through the fall. I think they started in maybe late September or maybe early October, and briefly laying out a few of the higher level conclusions for us, and then we can dive into some of the details.

DOUG SHAPIRO: Sure. Well, so the biggest headline, the top finding right off the bat was just historically large declines in the number of undergraduate students enrolled in college generally. But even more significantly, more severe drops in the number of freshman first-year students, 13 percent fewer freshmen on campus. And even worse at community colleges, which have been throughout our findings in the fall the most hard hit institution types. Over 20 percent fewer freshmen at community colleges this fall, which was more than twice the declines at the four-year schools.

And on top of that, within each institution type, almost without exception we found that Black and indigenous and Hispanic students were faring worse than white and Asian peers, particularly when we compared the changes this year, and we were looking throughout at year over year changes in the same school enrollments, the changes this year compared to the year-over-year changes from last year, which we kind of characterized as, well, this is the pre-pandemic underlying demographic trend. And we saw, for example, that Hispanic students, their enrollments have been increasing year over year. The demographics are pretty clear on that. So even though the Hispanic declines this year were nominally less large, when you compared them to the increases from the prior trend, they were almost more dramatic, the reversal. And so the inequitable impacts of the pandemic and the recession and the economic crisis on higher education generally is really one of the most concerning findings.

DOUG LEDERMAN: And that's part of why we're talking to you. That concern has come up in a lot of conversations I've had recently with presidents and others, and our reporters are having, where they're really focused on it seems to me, and I don't want to overstate this, but there had been some progress, I think, and some it's pure demographics, but some of it is also I think an awareness among higher education institutions about the demands, putting aside the pressure from last summer's Black Lives Matter protests and other things, but some positive momentum in terms of greater access to higher education for underrepresented groups. And, again, don't overstate the progress, but there had been some of that. Is that a concern you have that there has been a blockage or a reversal?

DOUG SHAPIRO: Well, absolutely. And, you know, I think if anything, the crisis has heightened these concerns and it's been a very important part of our efforts to try and pick that apart and show as much as we could how the facts were different for different groups of students and students from different schools.

We saw a lot of this in particular in our high school data, so when we looked at not just first-year students generally but first-year students coming directly from high school, there we saw particularly large gaps in the numbers of students who were coming from low-income high schools and high-minority high schools, truly staggering effects. And, you know, again there were declines across the board, even from higher-income high schools, far fewer students were becoming college freshmen this fall. But in some cases, the difference was by a factor of two the declines being steeper for students coming from low-income, high-minority, and urban high schools. And that just kind of mirrors the effect of what we saw on the college side, that many of those students would have gone to community colleges and the fact they didn't show up means basically there were over half a million fewer students enrolled in community colleges this fall than in fall 2019. It's really truly frightening when I think about what that could mean for the future of this country.

DOUG LEDERMAN: We'll come back to transfer in a second, which you've also focused on. So that's actually one question you personally answered, but it sounds like the high school data, you have at least the kinds of high schools they come from. Is that your primary way of getting a socio-economic income? In other words, at the college level I'm guessing you don't necessarily have great data to be able to quantify that.

DOUG SHAPIRO: That's right. For the most part, we don't have any data coming from the colleges that relates to student incomes or even financial aid status. There are some colleges who participate in a newer data collection called the Post-Secondary Data Partnership we've just started this year, where we are collecting information about family income and financial aid. But generally, we only have that by way of high schools, and even there, it's not student-level data, it's high-school level information that can say, this student came from a low-income high school.

DOUG LEDERMAN: I guess the reason I went there is moving from the what, you know, what we've been talking about the data, what the data show, to some sense of the why. And obviously, this is probably limits on how far you can go in really answering these questions, but in terms of understanding this, the question about whether it is primarily socio-economic income or if there are other factors that are driving these phenomena that we're talking about. And so I'm curious sort of when you think about the why's... You probably get asked and probably not have as many answers as we all might like, but what's

your sense of kind of, in terms of explaining particularly the disproportionate impact, is it the fact that the students were having to take on extra work and get extra jobs? It is more likely that they had family responsibilities? What's your sense to the extent you can gauge it of the why?

DOUG SHAPIRO: Yeah. It's interesting, because one of the surprises of what we found was that so many of the expectations of, particularly community colleges, that they would see more students coming in because of this standard recession effect that we've seen over and over again. And the fact that we say declines at all ages... We saw declines, large declines in the number of kind of adult students who had previously enrolled, stopped out, and in recent years, more and more of those students have actually been returning to college. We call them returning students. In 2019 there was an 8 percent increase in the number of students returning from stop-outs enrolling in college, and this year, you know, there was a 17 percent decrease, so again, a complete reversal of whatever gains we've had in higher education of being able to bring back some of these stopped-out, some college no-degree students.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Which is obviously been a major priority because that's seen as a ready pool of students at a time when the demographic cliff is coming.

DOUG SHAPIRO: Absolutely. So what that tells me in terms of the why is, first of all, this is absolutely not a typical recession in any way, shape, or form. Unemployment has been through the roof. We don't see any evidence that unemployed adults are coming to college the way they have in the past. Now it's still early in the recession and maybe that will start to happen in this term, the current term. But I think there's so much more going on right now. I mean, it's not just about the job market, it's not just about affordability of college.

You know, I think the challenges of income inequality and social justice absolutely play a role, because we started to see that even in the summer term. Last summer's enrollments, far fewer Black and Hispanics enrolling in college over the summer sessions. It's challenges about the digital divide. I mean, one of the reasons that I think community colleges have been hit so hard is that their students don't have access to internet and...

DOUG LEDERMAN: And safe places to study, yeah...

DOUG SHAPIRO: And on top of that, the community colleges themselves, many of the courses and programs that they offer are very difficult to offer online. We saw really steep declines, very surprisingly

in some cases, in students enrolled in kind of vocational, technical, really hands-on programs like criminal justice and fire fighting. And I think that many of these students, you know, it goes back to really basic needs. I mean, they're doubling up on low-wage jobs just...

DOUG LEDERMAN: Extra shifts...

DOUG SHAPIRO:... to feed their families and pay their rent. And college is just not possible.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Some of the questions you raised suggest that there may not be an immediate turnaround even when people feel safe because of the pandemic, and maybe people start hiring again to some extent. But we're quite a ways away from that. We do know that people who don't enroll right away, there are differences in the extent and the degree to which they tend to enroll eventually and how long it takes. And I guess that's again some of the people I've talked to have been worried that some of these people who are choosing not to enroll, there's a fear they may be not necessarily lost forever, but won't just delay for a semester necessarily. And so obviously, people are going to be watching your first reports about the winter and spring enrollments when they start coming. But do you have any kind of sense about sort of what we should be looking for besides that obvious in terms of how momentary the fall numbers were. How are you think about what's sort of immediately ahead and over the next year or so?

DOUG SHAPIRO: Well, I think the biggest concern in the freshmen, the first-year students, and I think it's really important that we kind of separate out what I increasingly see very different phenomena. The higher-income students that are opting to take gap years this fall, typically from very highly selective colleges, because they just prefer an on-campus experience or whatever.

DOUG LEDERMAN: They'll be just fine.

DOUG SHAPIRO: They'll be just fine, exactly. [CROSSTALK]

DOUG LEDERMAN: No concern, they'll come back next fall or whatever. [CROSSTALK]

DOUG SHAPIRO: They'll be back as soon as the pandemic is under control and it's safe to come back. The lower-income students, I feel that they've most certainly lost a very important window of opportunity, because, as we said, they're on the wrong side of the digital divide. It's not a choice. They're caring for children or family members, or simply need to work more to support their families. Those aren't choices and I don't see those imperatives changing anytime soon. I mean, you know, if anything, the pandemic is much worse than it was in the fall or even in September or August. And, you know, the additional stimulus money is already too late even if it starts arriving next week for people to kind of turn their lives around and decide they can suddenly enroll in college.

And the other thing is that, you know, when I think more specifically about students who are just coming from high school, the disadvantaged students are often the ones who benefit the most from the kind of focused and structured guidance and assistance from the high school environment, advisers who reach out, check in, keep them on track, demonstrate that they have high expectations, those sorts of things. The longer students are away from that supportive high school environment, the greater the risk that, you know, life happens and college doesn't.

DOUG LEDERMAN: We're talking with Doug Shapiro, Executive Director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. The last couple of questions, what can be done? If you're thinking about the various players on this landscape, obviously, colleges, the schools, local community groups, national organizations that care about this stuff. Are there strategies, practices, and advice that you can offer, that people should at least be contemplating?

DOUG SHAPIRO: That kind of personal outreach on the part of advisers and access organizations and high schools is going to be vital. You know, we've never really confronted the challenge of having to go back a year and recoup losses. I mean, it's one thing to say, yeah, we can do more and better for this year's high school graduates, right, the ones who are going to be finishing in June 2021.

But to have to find and reconnect with last year's high school graduates who didn't make it to college is really a monumental undertaking. And I think, you know, I hate to lay everything on the high schools. They're way underresourced to begin with even to deal with one class at a time. The colleges are certainly going to be very motivated because they need to recover some of their enrollment losses, and yet, how do they go about finding these students, the ones who weren't on the radar in the fall? So I think in some cases, they'll have to really turn to their kind of feeder high schools, particularly schools that are focused on some of these more disadvantaged students. The high schools certainly know who they are, who these students are. And if there's ways that they can partner with those schools and say let us help you reach out to these students who kind of fell off the cliff last fall and can we reclaim them.



[MUSIC]

DOUG LEDERMAN: Doug Shapiro, thanks so much for taking the time, and really thoughtful and insightful comments, and I'm sure we will be talking again as we see spring numbers start to crawl out over the next month or two. So thanks again for taking the time, and have a good day.

DOUG SHAPIRO: Well, thank you.

[MUSIC]

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To get another perspective on the fall enrollment data and the disproportionate impact of COVID and the recession on disadvantaged students in higher education, let's turn to Juana Sanchez, senior associate on the postsecondary team at HCM Strategists, the public policy consulting firm. Juana was a first-generation college student and her career so far as focused on increasing postsecondary attainment for students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education. Welcome to The Key, Juana.

JUANA SANCHEZ: Thanks so much for having me, Doug. It's good to be with you.

DOUG LEDERMAN: So you've obviously seen the enrollment data that had captivated a lot of us for good and bad reasons. What were your key take-aways from them and what concerns do they raise for you in your work and as you look at the higher ed landscape?

JUANA SANCHEZ: Well, like many across the country, I have been eagerly watching the enrollment reports come out. I think for so many of us we were trying to read the tea leaves and anticipate what would be the impact of this pandemic and ensuing this recession on student populations and on

enrollment trends. So it was really exciting to be able to better understand what is happening to students through the national data. And I would say that there were a few things that really stood out to me.

First, I think seeing the impact of enrollment at community colleges has really risen to the surface for me, recognizing that across the country community colleges are experiencing a loss of almost half a million students. It does make me wonder who are those students, where are they going. If they are not coming to higher education, you know, what are the reasons for that? But as I think about who traditionally is served by community colleges, it's not lost on me that many times these are adult students, students from low-income communities, students of color for whom higher education access is really dependent on their ability to enroll at their local community college.

One other piece that really stood out to me from the data that I don't think we have much discussion of thus far was the declines that we say in transfer students enrollment. I bring that up here because we continue to think of community colleges as such an important entry and access point, not only to important CT pathways and associate degree pathways, but also as an entry point to the baccalaureate degree. And so as we're seeing transfer enrollment decline by 8 percent, I'm really struck by what that means for social-economic mobility in the future. You know, this short-term kind of immediate impact that we're seeing in fall 2020 enrollment could stand to have much greater consequences in the longer term.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Particularly on the groups of students that you're maybe most focused on, on the continuing students, the adult students, what's your sense of what has waylaid them in either the combination of COVID and the recession from continuing their educational plans?

JUANA SANCHEZ: Yeah, I think about this a lot. You know, I started my career as an academic advisor. I am myself a first-gen college graduate, so I think we really need to try to look a little bit beyond the data and to try to understand the student stories. I was struck by how we think across all institutions we're seeing that Black, Latinx, and indigenous students continue to fare worse than their white and API peers. And so I for one have been looking at student survey data that is coming out of different states, including a survey that the California Student Aid Commission released last summer that is really trying to give us more contours to understand what is going on in students' lives at this moment.

I just think it's important for us to really pause and acknowledge that persons of color, you know, they're really being hardest hit on all sides here. As we think about what has been the impact of COVID, of the

recession, of the sustained and renewed calls for racial justice, we're seeing that this is really taking a toll on students financial wellbeing, on their physical wellbeing, and on their mental health. And this is showing up in some of the survey responses that we're seeing.

So just looking at the California example, the Student Aid Commission there surveyed around 76,000 students statewide. This is both high school seniors and college students who were enrolled in the Spring 2020 term. And what they noticed from the college students is I think really striking here. It tells us a lot about how students are experiencing all of these different stressors on their lives. So first, overwhelmingly, 71 percent of the college student respondents reported that they were losing income, and so their finances were really making it hard to stay enrolled and to also project that they would come back in the fall term.

But when we think about finances, it's not just being able to pay for tuition and books, it's really being able to make ends meet and provide a roof over one's head. Students in that CSAC survey were reporting, about half were reporting that they were experiencing housing instability, needing to change their housing plans. And again, when they were thinking about what all of this meant for their likelihood to return in the fall, many of them were saying it wasn't going to just be about the academics and their ability to pay the tuition bill. So while many did say they didn't think they would return because they had to work more, other also cited needing to be present for family obligations or physically relocate to be closer to home.

And I think one thing that's also been striking for me to think about is the 15 percent of those college student respondents who said, frankly, that they needed a break. And I think that is particularly troubling for those of us working in higher education to acknowledge the mental health toll that this prolonged period of stress and uncertainty is really, how it's impacting students. And that's something that maybe hasn't been seen as an issue for higher ed institutions, for policy makers to squarely engage with. But I think we need to be realistic in looking at students comprehensive needs if we are going to then support their ability to stay enrolled or to return to higher education.

DOUG LEDERMAN: We've paid a lot of attention to will students feel safer returning to campus because of COVID in the spring versus the fall. I'm not sure that's the right question. That really sounds like, especially for this group of students, the economic questions, while the mental health and other things are hugely important, if the economy hasn't improved, which in general it doesn't seem like it has meaningfully, many of those students may remain sidelined this spring, and it's obviously too early to have any real sense of how different this spring might be. But have you seen anything the suggests to you that there will be a meaningful change come spring? It's hard to see.

JUANA SANCHEZ: I haven't yet seen anything yet that makes me that encouraged that we'll have a different picture this spring. I'm actually thinking a little bit more longer term beyond the spring. What is clear to me from this data is that as more students are really thrown off course, as they get off path, they're going to now be students that we need to think about as stopped-out students, as prospective transfer students, and we probably need to have a more robust set of tools in our tool kit to really effectively engage these returning adult students. And so I think those will be strategies that we need to develop and deploy not just in the spring term but probably for many terms to come in the years ahead.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Definitely. And a lot of your work through the Tackling Transfer Project and other things has focused on sort of the inadequacies of this ecosystem's ability to help students get back on track or continue. And so when you think about what seems like is going to be increased pressure on that because of just volume, more students who either now fall into these stopped-out category or maybe reassessing whether and how they might continue, what are the major elements of that preexisting problem that are most in need of attention, what are the biggest pressure points and problems that need addressing there?

JUANA SANCHEZ: That's a great question, Doug. There are a ton of pressure points, I think. You know, I was reflecting on the conversation between you and Doug Shapiro earlier, and there was this wonderful point raised around the need to have a stronger handoff and greater collaboration and coordination between high schools and colleges and universities to ensure that there is kind of smooth enrollment path for high school graduates to come directly into higher ed. And the same can be said of two-year and four-year institutions, that institutions across segments really need to have more a handoff, they need to have greater coordination to better address student mobility and facilitate students to transfer.

And when I say facilitating transfer, I don't just mean the ability of a student to physically move from one institution to another but to also bring their credits with them, and have those credits be counted toward a degree or program of study. We know from the data before COVID that far too few students, particularly students of color, were succeeding in transferring to begin with, and when they did transfer, they were bringing in more excess credits. So that means that less of their credits were actually being counted by their receiving institutions and being applied to the degree. All of that just translates to more time and money for students.

And that time and money that students are spending is also I think a real problem for all of us. You know, if we think about students financing college through state and financial aid, and they're using their aid money, exhausting their aid eligibility on courses that then they have to go back and repeat,

you know, we're all losing in that situation.

So there are many pressure points that I do think colleges need to be thinking proactively of ways that they can make it easier, not harsher, for students to take their credits with them and have their credits counted. And I will say within that, there are many opportunities. So I think we've had some longstanding challenges with respect to student mobility, credit portability, and credit applicability, but I do think that right now is a prime moment for institutions to be thinking very differently about the status quo, about their approach to business as usual, and to look to each other for some creative ideas on how to lift some of those administrative barriers so that more students are able to transfer and able to reach graduation much more quickly.

DOUG LEDERMAN: So colleges and institutions, two-year, four-year, aren't the only players in this. Obviously there's also a role for state and federal policy makers, again, thinking about sort of strategies or solutions to the moment so we don't get too dark and too overwhelmed by. What are some of the strategies and some of the policy changes that might be enabled or helpful here?

JUANA SANCHEZ: Certainly, it's not all doom and gloom. We know from our work under Tackling Transfer, which is work we do in partnership with Sova and the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, that there is actually a real opportunity for policy makers to play an active role with colleges and universities to improve transfer students' success and to really improve equity within that work.

One thing that we have learned under Tackling Transfer is that it is actually really important for states to make transfer a priority and to set a vision and expectation for efficient and equitable transfer, particularly when you think about the important role that states play in coordinating across higher education segments and institutions. And so we think step one is even just naming transfer as a priority.

Again, as a Californian I think a very recent example in my home state where our governor just released his budget proposal. And in the budget document he named school admission transfer pathways as a priority for the four-year systems in the state, again, signaling that he is paying close attention to transfer student outcomes and that as he's making decisions around where to allocate resources in the state, he wants to see accountability on not just part of two-year institutions but also four-year institutions.

So I think state policy makers in particular have an important role to play signaling and prioritizing

transfer. And then in really supporting it. And how do we support it is an important questions here. Funding it, obviously, I just mentioned, making sure that resources are being allocated to support institutions in undertaking transfer work. Within that, I also think a lot about financial aid and ensuring that transfer students have the same access to state grant aid, particularly need-based aid, as first-time freshmen do.

And I think state policy makers can also be very proactive in thinking about coordinating across other social service agencies and helping students in being able to access the full range of services, whether that's childcare assistance, food access, housing assistance, these are, again, the comprehensive needs that students have and really reflect the full cost of going to college.

And then the last thing I would say that policy makers can also do is helping us better understand student transfer journeys across institutions. And, you know, I was thinking about the data conversation with Doug earlier, and one thing that continues to just be a challenge is to understand transfer across institutions. And so policy makers, I think, have an important role here in providing data so that colleges better understand enrollment patterns, transfer trends, and they need that data to be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, as well as by social-economic status, perhaps using Pell as a proxy, so that they know where to focus and how to come up with targeted strategies for different types of returning adults or transfer students.

DOUG LEDERMAN: So, talking again with Juana Sanchez from HCM Strategists, we posited in the conversation with Doug, and I guess I would as well to you, that there had been, the last couple of years we have seen, I'd be interested in your perspective on the amount of progress that had been made, but on equity and access, racial, socio-economic, etc., as a greater priority again, some of it through external pressure on institutions. And also some I think by increased recognition among particularly sort of the selective institutions that maybe hadn't paid too much attention to it in the past, but in general about the growing need that, the requirement that higher education do a better job bringing the increasingly large population of students, underrepresented students, into the higher ed pipeline. And it seems to me we've made some progress in that pre-COVID. COVID clearly from the data we've just been talking about has blunted that, at least temporarily, and I guess the question I'm wrestling with is how worried are we about a long-term impact on that?

JUANA SANCHEZ: That's a great question, Doug, and I would say that before COVID I was feeling really heartened by, I think, the progress we were seeing across states and institutions, you know, really an increased recognition that our student demographics are changing. And we were seeing declines in many places in the country in traditional high school populations, and so an increased focus on adult

populations. Recognizing that the demographics of our country just is changing such that we really need to understand how to not just recruit but engage and support students of color, and really think about the unique needs and the unique assets that these students bring to college campuses across the country.

And I would say that now after COVID, that optimism is not totally lost. And I say that because I'm seeing that across the country, higher education colleagues are really digging deep and trying to engage on questions around race and racism in this country. They're trying to understand what does the legacy of slavery and racism really mean for communities of color today.

And I think that's prompting a lot of us to take a hard look, and maybe first time look, at long-standing practices and policies that we've had in higher education that for too long we just assumed were neutral. And so we had certain policies on the books, I'm going to point to another one outside of transfer... When I think about development education, you know, remediation, we thought that these were just neutral policies, neutral practices, but in fact the data have showed us time and time again that these types of approaches in higher education actually had a disparate impact by race and ethnicity. And the evidence does not actually support the need for developmental education as traditionally done.

And so I think we are in a moment now where we are engaging in hard but necessary conversations around what has been our role in designing higher ed systems to not be neutral places but to actually be contributing to the racial inequities in our society and our country. And knowing we have a role might feel discomfoting at first, but I think it should also feel empowering, because if we have a role to play in the contributing to the problem, that also means we have a role to play in contributing to the solution.

And so at HCM I am seeing states like Massachusetts for one undertake really systemic looks at their policies and do a policy audit to understand the racial equity impact of their work and find opportunities to improve their work to better serve all Massachusetts students. I'm heartened by that. I think that this is difficult work. It's necessary work, that we have people listening, paying attention, and asking how can I be part of the solution right now. And so I think that should give all of us reason for hope and optimism, even when there are many other things going on in the world that want to encourage us to take turn towards pessimism. I think we actually have a lot to be hopeful for.

[MUSIC]

DOUG LEDERMAN: Okay, well, that's good to try and end on a hopeful note. Thanks, Juana Sanchez, and hope you have a good rest of the day and good start to the new year. Stay well.

JUANA SANCHEZ: Thanks so much. You take good care.

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