TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE ON COVID-19 AND HIGHER EDUCATION

CALIE PAPERS #7

:CALIE

SWEDEN-USA PROJECT FOR
COLLABORATION, ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP
& INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

CALIE Project Partners
Sweden

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Purpose[1]

This report describes the experiences of university leaders participating in the CALIE project's Transatlantic Dialogue on COVID-19 and Universities. The following pages summarize the discussions that took place on October 19, 2020. It also aims to serve as a point of departure for future discussions about the roles and responsibilities of university leaders during times of crisis and turbulence as well as ways for universities to adapt in order to continue to meet their mission.

Introduction and Background

CALIE Project

The need for universities to respond to pressing societal challenges and so-called 'wicked problems' is obvious. Rapidly changing societies, economies and labor markets put increasing demands on individuals to continuously develop their skills and knowledge.

In order to strengthen the capacity for higher education and research to respond to the long-term challenges facing higher education, the university leadership of four Swedish universities—Lund University, University of Gothenburg, Stockholm University and Uppsala University—have joined together to explore the topics of academic leadership and renewal of education in the collaborative project CALIE: the Sweden-USA Project for Collaboration, Academic Leadership and Innovation in Higher Education.

Through joint workshops and seminars with Stanford University, University of California at Berkeley and University of Washington, they share experiences, best practices and strategies in order to learn innovative ways to improve the quality of education and develop tools, methods and inspiration needed to re-conceptualize ways for further development. Another goal is to inspire change both at the participating and other institutions. In addition, the project seeks to inform policy on a national level in Sweden and to develop a platform for further academic collaboration.

Transatlantic Dialogue on COVID-19 and Universities

University leaders worldwide have been faced with similar challenges during the global pandemic of 2020: securing the health and safety of their students and staff; maintaining academic quality and integrity; and planning for the next academic year with little to no data to aid in the decision-making process. On October 19, 2020, academic leaders from Sweden and the US shared experiences from the past year as well as leveraged the expertise of CALIE
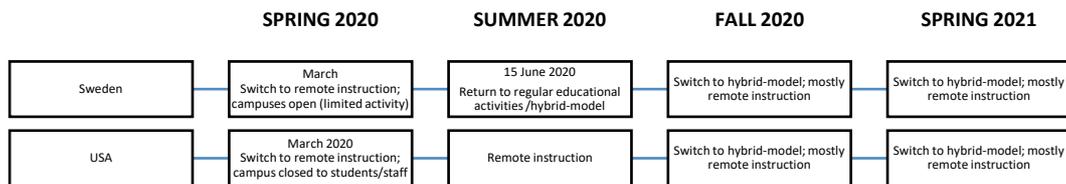
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[1] The content of this paper reflects discussions that took place in 2020. New developments and actions in 2021 related to COVID-19 are not included.

platform to explore the long-term impact of the pandemic on university education and operations.

Maintaining Educational Quality and Integrity during Uncertain Times: Educational and Leadership Challenges

During the global pandemic of 2020, university leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have been faced with similar challenges: transforming campus-based education into remote studies or hybrid models while maintaining program quality, as well as ensuring students' and staff's wellbeing. The Transatlantic Dialogue presented an opportunity for academic leaders from Sweden and the USA to share experiences from the past year as well as to leverage the expertise of CALIE platform to explore the long-term impact of the pandemic on university education and operations.

Evolution of a Global Pandemic & University Education (Dec 2020)

	SPRING 2020	SUMMER 2020	FALL 2020	SPRING 2021
Sweden	March Switch to remote instruction; campuses open (limited activity)	15 June 2020 Return to regular educational activities /hybrid-model	Switch to hybrid-model; mostly remote instruction	Switch to hybrid-model; mostly remote instruction
USA	March 2020 Switch to remote instruction; campus closed to students/staff	Remote instruction	Switch to hybrid-model; mostly remote instruction	Switch to hybrid-model; mostly remote instruction

Sweden

On March 17, 2020, the Swedish Government recommended that universities and other higher education institutions switch to remote education as of March 18th due to the coronavirus pandemic. By that time, the virus was spreading through the Swedish society, and had done so since late February, mostly in city areas. From then on, and throughout the spring semester, teaching at Swedish universities was conducted remotely, primarily using the Zoom-platform.

The majority of all students taking part in an ongoing mobility interrupted their mobility period. Some students went home and continued their exchange remotely.

Many campuses were still open, to support students who remained on/near campus. This was mostly possible because there was no general lockdown in Sweden and most parts of society were still functioning, although with greatly reduced mobility of the citizens. Some universities, however, decided to close their campus to students, not least in Stockholm, which was the center of the pandemic during the spring. Most universities, however, kept research facilities open during this period.

On 29 May, the Government announced that universities and other higher education institutions could plan to return to more regular educational activities as of 15 June 2020. However, due to the Swedish Public Health Agency's rules, as well as other general guidelines and recommendations to reduce the spread of infection, few, if any, universities planned for a full re-opening for the fall semester.

Today, all CALIE partners in Sweden continue with a hybrid model, with mostly remote education. Most universities stick to a 50-person limit. Therefore, today, we can see that all larger lectures are given through Zoom and that universities have prioritized certain student groups for in-person activities, e.g. 1st year student, last year students, international students, and lab-based courses.

Staff are generally allowed to work on campus, but the national guideline for everyone in society is to work from home if possible, which is what we see within the higher education sector in Sweden.

USA

Unlike their counterparts in Sweden, CALIE participants from the US reported abrupt closures to their campuses in March 2020, moving overnight to an all-remote education model, cancelling all in-person activities, such as athletics, as well as evacuating campus. This rapid shift, however, was felt differently among the US-based dialogue participants.

For UW, for example, situated at the epicenter of the pandemic in the USA, the shift was difficult, but manageable in part due to the academic calendar. The university, which uses a quarter system, first switched to remote education during the last 20% of the winter quarter and then used the break between the winter and spring quarters to better prepare for the rest of the academic year. In contrast, UC Berkeley leaders felt "somewhat prepared" given the precedent set by recent wildfires and the campus-wide instructional resiliency plans that were developed in 2019. Prior experience with drafting and implementing swift changes during an emergency proved to be quite useful in terms of pivoting operations, assessing the needs of the campus community, and communicating across various constituencies. For Stanford, the shift came in the middle of final exam week, which added to the difficulties mentioned by the other US participants, as did the context in which the pandemic took hold: social unrest and upcoming presidential election.

Today, remote education is still in place except for certain populations where web-based teaching is next to impossible (e.g., ensemble music, hands-on lab-based courses, etc.) or where in-person classes are absolutely necessary (e.g., international students must be enrolled in at least one, in-person course in order to be granted or maintain their student visa). Students have to some extent returned to campus at all three universities but under modified circumstances depending on the campus. UW residence halls, for example, are only half full to meet pandemic-related guidelines while allowing some students back on campus. Some in-

person classes are held, but they are re-arranged to keep in compliance with social distancing regulations.

All three US universities also expressed the need for their campuses to keep research facilities as open as possible throughout the pandemic; however, they acknowledged that a number of factors played a role in how to prioritize which facilities must stay open (e.g., presence of live test subjects, local public health requirements, criteria from external funders, etc.).

Educational challenges

With little time to prepare for massive changes on campus, university leaders from both countries were challenged as they sought to address a number of highly complex challenges as they transitioned to a new campus norm.

All participating universities from both sides of the Atlantic have been, and continue to be, built on campus-based teaching. Of the Swedish universities, only around 5-10 % of their pre-corona education consisted of remote education. This essentially shifted overnight to 100% remote teaching. An additional complication was that this was right at the middle of the spring semester, in an exam period, much like the situation at Stanford.

The transition from onsite examinations to remote digital examinations proved to be a more difficult challenge than remote teaching for the Swedish universities, due to a lack of experience in designing digital exams. It has also led to a considerable increase in the number of students reported for disciplinary offences, i.e. cheating.

Additionally, while Swedish universities have had a general increase in the number of applicants to the universities, and have received increased governmental funding for higher education, the economic effect of the pandemic for US universities has been severe. Recent figures show that international students in the USA dropped by 43% in the fall of 2020.[2] Both US and Swedish universities reported declines in the international student enrollment, although not as dramatic as expected. For Stanford, an additional challenge is that the many deferred admissions from the spring need to be added to the normal admissions of the fall semester, which means an additional 400 students.

Digitalization

Digitalization presents significant opportunities for quality, content and accessibility, but the swiftness of the switch to remote education due to the pandemic posed some serious challenges for universities.

One of the main challenges has been to transform campus-based education into remote studies or hybrid models while maintaining program quality and without compromising pedagogical

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[2] IIE (Julie Baer and Mirka Martel): Fall 2020 International Student Enrollment Snapshot. November 2020: https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fall-International-Enrollments-Snapshot-Reports

quality. Participants admitted that the transition went more smoothly than expected, however, Stanford, for example, highlighted that enthusiasm for the new modes of teaching and learning was limited among both staff and students. After an initial period of speed-learning of all the digital tools required, for teachers and students alike, UC Berkeley put together a course on digital tools for faculty to be effective teachers. They also developed a plan to deliver over 30 large gateway courses and critical path classes in an online format as part of the "Semester in the Cloud" program designed to provide an enhanced learning experience for freshmen and international students. Designated as part of a subset of courses that have a "high-impact" on student learning, the Semester in the Cloud courses will be ready for remote offerings in future semesters.

All participants agreed that the increased demand for sustainable, solid, and secure technical solutions for remote education and digital examination will outlast the pandemic and that they plan to strategically increase the use of the hybrid and blended teaching models. In this context, (equal) access to such technical solutions is essential. To address the digital divide, UC Berkeley increased their supply of loan equipment (laptops and wi-fi spots) and at Stanford, many local internet service providers (ISP) are providing discounted, free, or low-cost access that may work for you at your off-campus place of residence during Spring Quarter.

Another issue in the context of remote education is to ensure students' and staff's wellbeing. Although students seem to manage their studies, and are comfortable using the digital tools, surveys indicate that it comes at a cost. Many students are having a hard time studying from home, with little social interaction and lack of motivating activities (see *Mental Health* section below).

The role of universities during the pandemic
The pandemic has also put the spotlight on the role of universities and their contribution to society in times of crisis. The US participants gave accounts of how universities were asked to help in the acute situation that occurred. At UC Berkeley, the recent Nobel Laureate in Chemistry turned her lab into a testing center for the campus and surrounding communities. UW was part of early efforts to train people to do contact tracing and partnered with local hospitals, as well as dedicating its virology labs to COVID-19 related efforts. These examples illustrate how universities contribute to society not only by educating future practitioners, but also by lending their resources and expertise to the broader community.

Leadership Challenges
Aside from their concerns for research and education, university leaders were also expected to make decisions about operational issues with little to no data available to them.

Organizational Structure & Operations
One major challenge for university leaders from both countries was dealing with their institution's culture and organizational model. Most participants described their universities as

highly decentralized, which they admitted caused some challenges during the abrupt transition to remote education. With a culture anchored in autonomy and trust, university leaders found it difficult at times to adopt and implement a speedy decision-making approach during the pandemic. In the US, for example, the challenge came in the form of enforcing top-down instructions, which were sometimes coming from local and state governments. In Sweden, university leadership do not have a strong tradition of giving radical, top-down instructions, yet, in this moment, departments and researchers were looking to their leaders to offer 'real-time' guidance, solutions and resources.

Additionally, there were operational challenges which needed to be addressed. In the USA, university staff worked exclusively from home. In Sweden, staff could work from home, but some opted to remain on campus. Like in the USA, this created new constellations of working, which required new ways of doing one's job and by way of new technologies. Globally, there was a halt to all unnecessary travel and mass cancelation of business travel, including attending conferences.

The spring term was conducted almost exclusively online in both countries, however, the summer and fall terms allowed for limited, but necessary, in-person activities. Planning for these select, in-person activities required a new strategy for dealing with university density and modifying processes to adhere to government recommendations.

Funding

One of the largest sources of concern for the US participants lay with the financial crisis the higher education sector faces as a result of lower domestic and international student enrollment and the pending government funding cuts, which, to some extent, result from a redistribution of public funding to COVID-19 related initiatives. UW gave an example of how a ban on elective surgeries due to COVID-19 has impacted the 4 university hospitals as these procedures make up a major portion of their operating budgets. Other examples included a huge financial deficit due to the canceling of university athletics, empty residence halls and even empty parking lots. These financial deficits not only impact the ability to provide services to the university community, but at the core, impact job security for those working in these sectors. All US participants related to these examples and felt the immense financial pressure.

The situation in Sweden looked very different. Higher education is tuition-free for all residents and universities are funded primarily through public funding. Although the pandemic hit Sweden hard, one of the government's responses was to increase public spending for research and education. Put simply, this additional resource created more student places at Swedish universities.

Mental Health and Inequities

The mental health of both students and staff was identified as a concern for all participating institutions. All participants agreed that there needs to be a new level of mindfulness of the

additional challenges and burdens that came with the digitalization of teaching and learning, in combination with isolation that came with social distancing recommendations. Inequities in access to digital knowledge and technology/equipment have, in the USA for example, also added pressure to already existing inequities in the student population.

For teaching staff in both countries, the new reality puts additional strain on staff who are already overworked. The need to adapt or create new curriculum has been a huge challenge for all, especially for those who needed additional support to upgrade their knowledge of the new tools and technologies required for this new mode of teaching.

The shift to working from home was, on average, observed as impacting women more negatively than men in the US. The reason probably being that women were taking on the burden of working from home while also caring for their children who were at home due to the transition to remote education for school aged children. The burden of caregiving worldwide has historically fallen on women, but in Sweden, the pandemic may not have exacerbated this issue to the same extent as in the US as daycares, primary and middle schools were not closed. Therefore, parents did not have to choose between work or caring for/teaching small children at home. Only high school and university students in Sweden transitioned to remote education. A simple but serious result of this has already been noted by UW, which has seen a decrease in research output of women during the pandemic.

Research

The gender gap related to care work was not the only challenge discussed by the participants. As described above, UW noted that male researchers had published more than their female counterparts during the pandemic. The question is how to deal with these systemic effects long-term. All agreed that gaps between groups based on gender, class, or ethnicity, due to the pandemic must be monitored closely and addressed to counteract long-term effects.

A more visible challenge university leadership faced related to keeping the research enterprise alive despite lock-down and (semi)-closed campuses. Adhering to these measures means having to prioritize which activities/labs to keep open. In Sweden, this has played out somewhat differently as campuses and labs have been kept open.

In Sweden, some research funding calls have been cancelled, but other funding opportunities focused on meeting the challenges of the pandemic have opened. At Berkeley, they have seen changes in research collaborations and research fields, e.g. telemedicine and an expanded interest in virus research. This may trigger a need to adapt research infrastructures accordingly. The US participants reported that funding agencies have extended deadlines for the reporting of projects. While this is a positive thing, it also means having to pay salaries for a longer time without additional funding.

Lastly, Berkeley highlighted the importance of addressing the big international aspects of the pandemic, such as protectionism and xenophobia. Isolationism, nationalism, and protectionism pose a threat to a free research environment.

Initial responses to the Covid-19 pandemic – concluding remarks

During the spring, all participating institutions operated under similar circumstances – implementing remote education for all. However, the approaches in Sweden and the USA were different; while universities in the US used rules and regulations to implement the changes, Swedish institutions applied the Swedish model with recommendations and appeals to individual responsibility.

All dialogue participants agreed that the shift was indeed abrupt, facing universities with unprecedented challenges. The participants agreed that many of the challenges were the same on both sides of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, the context in which the challenges occurred made them more accentuated in the US (e.g., complete lock-down, strained economic situation, social unrest, etc.) versus in Sweden (e.g., increase in funding from government, no lock-down, etc.). Participants also concluded that the shift went surprisingly well considering its scope and abrupt character. Although the spring was mainly characterized by the challenges of the pandemic, all participants agreed that it pushed forward the digitalization of higher education and that the higher education sector has responded to this rapid shift with hard work and creativity. While historically characterized as slow to change, this time universities have reacted quickly and with innovative, pragmatic responses.

At the time of these discussions, plans for 2021 (spring and summer[3] terms) had not yet been decided, but most participants hinted towards continuing with a hybrid model.

Long-term Impact for the Renewal of Education and Academic Leadership – Challenges and Opportunities

The educational systems and funding models in the USA and Sweden are very different. Moreover, the context in which the pandemic has played out – with social unrest and wildfires in the US and relative stability in Sweden – has clearly impacted the approaches taken in the two countries. However, several experiences are shared across the Atlantic, and the analysis of long-term consequences has many similarities. The consequences of the pandemic are far-reaching, and the changes universities have experienced will likely continue in some form even once the pandemic has passed. Almost a year into the global Covid-19 pandemic the

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[3] Stanford is adapting its academic calendar and including more course offerings during the summer term (2021).

experiences so far begs questions of the most far-reaching consequences of the pandemic for higher education and how these affect the education of the future.

The future of universities

The paradigm shift underway has had an immense impact and begs the more philosophical question: What defines a university? Is it a physical meeting place? If not – or not necessarily – how do we create a sense of belonging and identity in the virtual space? What rethinking, redefining, and redesigning of the campus, buildings and classrooms do we need to do? How do we attract students if we no longer offer campus education? If we facilitate more flexibility and individuality in the path to a degree – if students can, for example, assemble credits from a variety of institutions and experiences – what does it mean for traditional programs? How do we remain attentive to staff and students' well-being when there is no longer a guarantee of social interaction?

The global pandemic has resulted in a great loss related to campus culture and the overall student experience. The start of the new academic year (fall 2020) ushers in a new cohort of students who will belong to a university but have not yet been to campus. In particular, this loss of the sense of belonging and identity affiliated with one's campus can lead to big challenges for US universities who depend largely on their alumni network for financial donations and other contributions, like internship opportunities at their companies, research connections with industry, etc.

Another potential side-effect of the move to the digital sphere is the effect on academic dialogue and the critical exchange of ideas, which are a key part of our core values and mission. How can these values be protected? And **will the link** between research and education be affected when the two activities are separated physically? If so, how do we re-integrate research and education in meaningful, accessible ways for students and staff alike?

Educating for the future – new models of education

As indicated above, all participants agreed that universities will continue to see an increase in the use of the hybrid and blended teaching models. Stanford and Berkeley raised the important questions of how to keep the best parts of what has been learnt, how to identify what parts of the student experience is key, and what is most effectively taught on campus and remotely respectively. This new era ushes in a renewed focus on learner-centered pedagogies and highlights the question of what we best use time on campus for.

Increased digitalization, however, brings both challenges and opportunities, as well as additional learning perspectives. The US participants underlined that some elements of remote and hybrid education models will certainly remain, perhaps in the shape of virtual exchange, guest speakers, and co-taught classes from all over the world. This in turn, begs for a rethinking of the educational model, including how to rethink buildings and other physical spaces on

campus for the new reality. In this regard, the important role of sports was also mentioned as a challenge.

When it comes to the content of the education on offer, UW underlined the importance of preparing the workforce for the long run rather than thinking narrowly (vocationally oriented). The jobs of tomorrow are not known now, and universities need to provide students with skills to continue to learn and apply critical thinking. Universities need to provide a robust in-house experience and give them basic data literacy language and social media skills. They also need to be more creative in contact with industry, develop bundles of specialization, and provide opportunities for re-credentials to prepare them for many transitions during their lifetime. The Swedish participants foresee a similar need and an inevitable increase in lifelong learning, with students from all phases of life and all parts of the world returning to campus or turning to remote higher education institution to fill skills gaps.

Another opportunity for traditional brick and mortar campuses will be the ability for outreach to targeted populations through preparatory courses prior to admission or the start of one's first year of undergraduate studies. This is something Stanford alluded to would be necessary to think of as its brand to date has not been one associated with online education in the past.

Finally, the digital shift will also require capacity building for both technical and teaching staff, as well as for students. UC Berkeley underlined that Covid-19 will change how they deal with human resources. In their experience, staff had previously been reluctant to working remotely, but there has been a noticeable shift since the start of the pandemic as staff have discovered the benefits of such a work environment—namely an increase in productivity. This has not only been a learning experience for all involved but is starting to reveal a slight cultural shift as well.

Accessibility, equity, and civic responsibility

The transition to remote education puts further strain on, and highlights the need to, address the already existent digital divide. Universities need to be mindful of the additional challenges and burdens these changes (e.g., digitalization, working remotely, etc.) may put on certain students. They need to address these challenges head-on to maintain – and even improve – diversity in and accessibility to higher education for all. For some students, remote education provides access to opportunities they did not previously enjoy and can open new opportunities for lifelong learning. For others, a lack of digital literacy and/or access to the necessary technologies must be considered. In Sweden, keeping campuses open was a strategic decision to maintain and promote equality as libraries for example can be used as equalizers when the home environment cannot provide a good study environment. In Sweden, the student unions play an important role, and emphasize the importance of keeping the campus open.

The context in which the pandemic has played out is very different in the US and Sweden, which was highlighted by the fact that the US participants emphasized that it is near impossible to separate pandemic consequences from social unrest consequences. Isolationism, nationalism, and protectionism also pose a threat to a free research environment. The Swedish participants,

on the other hand, concluded that the relative stability and consensus in Sweden has limited the necessity to consider non-pandemic factors in decision making; however, Swedish universities still believe they will face the same challenge as their US counterparts i.e. that of educating students for future challenges. And Sweden is not immune to tendencies of social upheaval.

In these times of increased polarization and uncertainty, how do we bring students together and encourage greater civic responsibility? How can we build that into curriculum?

International Collaboration

The pandemic and its ensuing transformations have highlighted the need for continued, and accelerated, internationalization. Internationalization and collaboration are more important as universities work to prevent isolation in the virtual world. Rather, internationalization will have to adapt and take on new appearance in the future. An increase in virtual student mobility could provide a welcomed complement to physical mobility. Virtual mobility can reach groups under-represented in traditional mobility. In-person networking, which has traditionally led to new cooperation, will have to be re-thought. Universities will need to find ways to re-create meaningful networking opportunities in the virtual world as well as to ensure capacity-building activities in other countries continue, so as not to further increase the digital divide.

There is a need to reinforce international cooperation in research and education in order to provide high-quality and flexible educational offerings. In that regard, international networks and joint ventures are more important than ever.

The long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – concluding remarks

The pandemic has indeed posed, and continues to pose, huge challenges for higher education institutions, and its leaders, many of them with long-term effects. However, it is also a window of opportunities for continued renewal of education and research. Thinking innovatively and adopting new strategies across campus has allowed research and education to reach new student groups as well as the broader university community.

The mass digitalization of education has unleashed endless possibilities for student learning. One major potential benefit which has yet to be realized on such a scale is internationalization of the curriculum, which would allow all students to benefit from intercultural learning opportunities versus the current trend worldwide where very few students study abroad.

Mass unemployment and the changing nature in how to develop one's career is another force which universities will have to address. How will they rise to the challenge of accommodating higher numbers of students? How will universities (re)educate non-traditional students who will return to campuses for upskilling?

These are just a few of the grand challenges that today's university leaders predict will be at the heart of every university's vision if they hope to remain relevant.

Concluding Remarks

This year marks a new era for university leaders both in Sweden and in the USA.

In Sweden, university leaders were occupied with maintaining academic quality, managing student and staff mental health. In the USA, university leaders were tasked not only with concerns related to academic and research, but they also struggled with other grand challenges like an uncertain financial situation, social unrest, and the upcoming US presidential election.

But through it all, the abrupt change of course in March seems to have gone well.

The capacity to address a global crisis has been tested. Working closely together is a thing that has worked well both internally at universities and externally (nationally and internationally). The need for new types of collaboration within and between universities is now clearer than ever and this realization can, in part, be contributed to, and is incentivized by, the global pandemic.

Education and research will need to be adapted to local, national, and global needs, including being able to handle an increasingly complex world and societal challenges. Universities therefore need to become more universal and international. For universities to remain relevant to society – both in education and research, internationalization of higher education will not diminish in importance, but rather, become even more essential in the post-COVID world.