



# Transcript

## Series two, episode five: The future of the campus

### Speaker 1:

I'd say the best thing about being on campus is being able to collaborate with other students.

### Natasha Lokhun:

Traditionally, universities have used their physical and cultural presence to give students the chance to create communities and gain life experiences. But with the great online pivots, how important is the campus?

### Giselle Byrnes:

I think all students, irrespective of their stage and maturity benefit from an on-campus experience.

### Natasha Lokhun:

Are there things about the campus that can't be replicated online?

### Rocky Tuan:

A lot of universities have been around for quite some time. So there's a history, there's a culture. And that you cannot get by watching the monitor.

### Natasha Lokhun:

There's no doubt that higher education has been changed by the pandemic. As we move forward, universities will have to balance a range of issues, such as widening access to quality education, preparing students for the world of work and environmental sustainability. Does this mean that in the future, time on campus will be more limited and perhaps more valuable? I'm Natasha Lokhun. Welcome to The Internationalist podcast from The Association of Commonwealth Universities. My guests are Professor Giselle Byrnes, Provost and Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Massey University, New Zealand and Professor Rocky Tuan, Vice-Chancellor and President of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Before we hear from them, let's find out what students at Massey University think about the pros and cons of studying on campus.

### Speaker 5:

So the benefits are probably the group environment. It's way better than Zoom. You can actually sit down with people doing the same degree as you and have conversations and that kind of human interaction. Location of it, it's very close, especially if you live on the shore, it's nice and convenient, don't have to bus into the city.

### Speaker 6:

Probably using the facilities at uni. Like I don't have a lot of that stuff at home and it provides me with a better environment to study because I get distracted at home.

### Speaker 7:

The best part about being on campus is the social part of it. So studying all different groups and negative is just the parking.

### Speaker 8:

Negative's probably the parking is a bit of an issue.

**Speaker 9:**

For me, it's coming into campus that takes a really long time to travel here.

**Speaker 1:**

I'd say the best thing about being on campus is being able to collaborate with other students. So if you've come up with any mental blocks, you can work through it versus being at home where you kind of have to consult the vast knowledge of the internet, troll through thousands of pages of resources. And maybe not even find the answer. Collaborating with students can also mean distractions with those same students. So it can be hard to stay on task, so it's a double-edged sword, I'd say.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

So for these students, the main benefits of being on campus are being able to socialize and learn with and from their friends. I asked Professor Giselle Byrnes, Provost and Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Massey University to tell me more about their campus and student base.

**Giselle Byrnes:**

Massey University has three physical campuses here in New Zealand and a significant cohort of distance learners. So we have approximately 30,000 students who study with us, both based here in New Zealand and also offshore. Roughly 50% of our students study via distance or now online as we call it. About 15% of our students are international. And we have a very different cohort to the other New Zealand universities in that about 43% of our students are under the age of 25 years, but 57% are over the age of 25 years of age, so are considered to being mature age students. And in addition to that, about 40% of our students are studying full-time but 60% of our students study in part-time mode. So we have a very different student profile to a number of other New Zealand universities.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

The students we heard from at the beginning said that being able to socialize and learn from their peers was the biggest benefit of being on campus. Is this something that you've heard across the board at Massey?

**Giselle Byrnes:**

I think all students irrespective of their stage and maturity benefit from an on-campus experience. And we do know that for a range of subjects and disciplines that are best taught an experiential mode, that that is the best way to learn. We also know that an on-campus experience provides to students the kind of social engagement and interactions that's a critical part of being at university and of learning and of the holistic student experience. And having said that, throughout Massey's history, because we have for about 50 years been a distance provider. We have long been familiar with supporting students who study at distance and we have been and our staff continue to be very experienced in building distance communities, now online communities, to try and replicate that kind of on-campus experience.

So, I think it really differs according to the kind of experience that students are seeking and the kind of reasons why they come to study at university. So a number of our students, particularly those who study in part-time mode, are also in employment at the same time. And they're strategic in terms of their learning objectives and the goals that they have in coming to study at university. So I think it really differs depending on the student and what they are hoping to seek from their experience.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

In episode four, we explored the idea of blended learning as the new normal. Do you think you can replicate the social experience that students talk about, online?

**Giselle Byrnes:**

That's very interesting, isn't it? Because peer-to-peer learning has long been a feature of, I think, a university experience, but particularly here at Massey University, we have really enhanced and

tried to support that peer-to-peer learning experience. So remembering that many of our students are considered mature age students and they come to their learning encounters, whether that's in an online platform or a face-to-face on-campus with experiences to share with others. So that peer-to-peer engagement has always been very important for us, irrespective of the mode. When I reflect on the changes wrought by the last year or so and the pivot to online, I mean, our staff have been actively engaged and encouraging students to develop chat groups and to have that really rich online engagement. So I think in many respects, that's always been a feature of the sort of the on-campus engagement, of the online engagement.

And particularly when you've got mature learners, who brings so much richness into the conversations. I think also that in the age of the flipped classroom, which has again, long been a feature of the pedagogy at Massey, where the focus in the class time, whether that's a lab experience or a lecture theatre or a seminar, a tutorial room, that the focus is really on discussion and the acquisition of content happens outside that space. So that engagement and learning through discourse, learning through talking with others, learning from other's experiences, I think has always been a key feature of the educational experience of university. So, there are very good ways in which you can replicate that and indeed enhance it through online and blended modes.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

How can campus-based learning help those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds?

**Giselle Byrnes:**

I think all students come to university from a different place. And so here in New Zealand, we have a very strong commitment to open access to university education. At Massey University, we have very strong values around equity access and excellence and we see those things being absolutely important to us, which is why we have such a diverse cohort. So, people start their learning journey from different places. And I think the responsibility and role of university and of educators, is to ensure that students play to their strengths and that they do achieve the goals that they set themselves to do, that that means that there are differential levels of support that need to be put into place. I think in fact, online and through the online learning platform, you can find highly personalized ways to do that in the same way that you can through an on-campus experience as well.

I mean, I would say also that one of the things that we've seen discussed at length through the pivot to online in the last year or 18 months, has been that in many respects, the on-campus experience has been held up as the sort of gold standard against which we have compared other learning modes. And I think what the current moment and certainly in our context here at Massey University, where we are planning for a blended delivery future, we're saying there are real benefits and virtues in online delivery. The highly personalized nature of it, which we can customize to students' learning needs and that dovetails into and complements with the on-campus traditional experiences.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

And what changes, if any, have you made to your campus to accommodate blended learning?

**Giselle Byrnes:**

Yes, well, blended learning was in many respects, a characteristic of Massey University pre-COVID and that we offered both distance and on-campus learning experiences to students. Throughout 2020, when we virtually for much of the year went sort of 100% online or thereabouts, what it really demonstrated to us was that we can be flexible. We can move at pace, we can be very agile. It also highlighted to us some of the efficiencies that we could actually obtain. So where pre-COVID, we had been teaching courses in a face-to-face mode and teaching those same courses in an online platform. I think throughout 2020, we utilized the opportunity to look at how we could bring those together so that we were actually talking to one learning cohort through two platforms. And it's accelerated that consolidation process.

I mean, we're very keen to see how we can continue to consolidate our academic offer if you like, so that we're not duplicating, we're not replicating. We're being more efficient in terms of supporting staff and their workload and particularly research active staff who teach, so that

they've got sufficient time to conduct their research. So, the blended learning delivery has been both an opportunity for us to really rethink what we do, in terms of the mode of delivery from the teaching perspective, but also from the student perspective. It's an opportunity for us to position as absolutely equivalent in quality, the off-campus online study mode, learning mode, alongside the on-campus face-to-face learning mode. So they're absolutely equivalent in quality and I think that, again, goes back to Massey University's commitment to access and to equity and to excellence. And that's very, very important for us.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

You mentioned giving staff sufficient time to conduct their research. How has that been impacted by the pandemic? What challenges have you had to face?

**Giselle Byrnes:**

So here in New Zealand, I mean, we've been very fortunate in that we had periods of complete lockdown last year, but we are, for all intents and purposes, very much back on campus and in addition in online mode. But that's really because we have the flexibility to do that. Having said that, we know that our researchers across the board, postgraduate researchers and academic researchers, were severely impacted by the events of last year and those events will continue to play out I think over coming years. We know that also women researchers were disproportionately impacted because women have been also carrying a double burden in terms of domestic duties and so on and so forth.

And I think that's been born out by much of the research that has been undertaken on the impact of the pandemic. And finally, I would say that here in New Zealand, many of our researchers rely quite extensively on traveling to other parts of the world, in terms of not just presenting their research but engaging in research opportunities. And because we have been unable to travel, researchers have had to be very creative to find other ways to connect, whether it's online or whether it's accessing materials and audiences remotely. So I think in many respects, the impact on research is not really clear at the moment, but I do think that it's going to have a medium and long term set of consequences.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

And you spoke about research students being unable to travel due to the pandemic. Do you think that your students in general would choose to study in New Zealand rather than studying abroad?

**Giselle Byrnes:**

Quite possibly. I mean, there's always been something of a rite of passage for students who are seeking to travel abroad, whether they're undergraduate or postgraduate students. I think all students are going to think very hard about how far they travel and what the attendant risks might be in making those kinds of decisions. And parents as decision-makers and family members, are going to be quite strong influences on that as well. I mean, here in New Zealand, even domestically, we have a tradition of students traveling around the country. The students tend not to be highly place based as they are in some other countries. I suspect that we might see students even domestically, staying a little bit closer to home.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

So perhaps as a result of the pandemic, we'll see fewer students from New Zealand at universities in other parts of the world. Massey University has considerable experience of online learning. Around half of their students study at distance. I asked my next guest Professor Rocky Tuan, vice chancellor and president of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, if he thought that universities would function digitally first and as a physical space second, in the future.

**Rocky Tuan:**

I would say that tradition is still going to come first. I think the university, which is an institution of at least 1,000 years old, if not older, has its place, the importance has evolved. I think universities have now picked up and rightfully sold the duty of being the place where adolescents grow up to be adults. Okay. This is a very critical stage biologically and physiologically and mentally and physically, right? So you're talking about 18, 22. I think one of the most important thing is that is

probably the highest concentration a young person will see of people of about the same age, about the same biological changes, somewhat similar in terms of desire of what to become when this time is over. So for all of those things, you need a concentration. Digital concentration is good but insufficient. If all you do is watch things on a monitor, yes, you may get a lot of knowledge about something but you're missing the other things.

And that other thing needs a physical presence. So I think you need both, for sure, because you never know what's going to happen. Another variant may show up, all right? And so we need to be prepared. But on the other hand, I would say, if we go totally digital, I think certainly the 18 to 22 year olds will suffer. A lot of universities have been around for quite some time. So there's a history, there's a culture. That, you cannot replicate. You go to Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, the moment you go there, you look at King's College, your brain starts to operate a little bit differently and that, you cannot get by watching the monitor.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

So this sense of chemistry and also this sense of culture, then is really rooted in having a physical campus and having people physically present on the campus. Having said that, when it comes to campus-based learning, what should we get rid of and what should we keep?

**Rocky Tuan:**

I think you do have to do a cost benefit analysis. So I would say, for courses or activities that are less dependent on an immersive experience, like these very large lecture course with 1,000 students, everybody's known by some number or where they sit, the interaction is minimal, right? It's just like watching a movie. Those things cost a lot of money because you need the very large hall. Building that large hall alone already costs a lot of money. Okay, you may be able to amortize it, but still, you put a lot of money in the beginning to build this large hall. So I would say, we need to think twice about building these very large spaces to keep 1,000 people, particularly now with social distancing, maybe you need the twice the size in order to hold 1,000 people.

So I think those things, we need to think very carefully. They can be divided into sessions in smaller spaces or digitized. There are things that cannot be gotten rid of, or you can't do chemistry on 2D, so it doesn't work that way. So I think those things you have to keep, other important facilities like dormitories and residence halls, I mean, again, people have to live in real space, so you can't get rid of those. Hospitals, we have a medical school, very large medical school. And so we actually just finished building a very important smart hospital and that serves the university and the community. So that belongs to the university but we can't get rid of that, right? That's very important. I think we do have to do a very careful cost benefit analysis.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

And just thinking about the distinction that you drew there between different kinds of courses, do you think that there's a risk of creating, I guess, a tiered system of experience given what you said about the value of face-to-face engagement?

**Rocky Tuan:**

Yeah. Unfortunately, it's probably happening too much during this immediate post-pandemic. I hope it's post pandemic. I hope that the pandemic goes away now, keep my fingers crossed. Yes, there have been activities and academic courses that have been compromised. I think that's probably the best word to describe it. And we hear from students, for sure. I think education has evolved from Confucius and Plato and Socrates to what we have right now, which is a lot of is digital. And with lots of accessories, special effects will come very soon if not already. And so I do believe that we have changed.

Okay. Now if we do this, will there be courses or activities that will be compromised? Yes and no. The no is actually increasing in size. Many things, I think certainly can be done well. Now, with that, however, we need to have observed that there are inequities in the world. There are folks, there are families who have no IT or minimal IT capability. And so if everything is dependent on good bandwidth and high speed internet, well, those who are say, socioeconomically underprivileged, they will be unfairly deprived. So I think we need to pay attention to that. And for us, who are running universities, this is our job. We have to make sure that no one is left behind.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

And picking up on that idea, lots of universities have an express commitment to widening access to higher education for groups who, as you say, are socially disadvantaged, what is the role of campus versus online learning, when it comes to widening access?

**Rocky Tuan:**

Let's spend a little bit of time on that. And with that, I also wanted to indicate students with special education needs. Just imagine someone who is hearing impaired or visually impaired and you making this person do Zoom. We have students like that. And we really work around all of this stuff and try to make sure that this individual is not left behind. So I think campus has that advantage because campus, we have the real person, right? We can really attempt to reach out to that student and make it possible, even with all other things going on, so that the education will continue.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

If we can go back to something you mentioned earlier, which was buildings, in episode one, professor Martin Weller from the Open University in the UK, spoke about how sort of universities appeared to be continually expanding and encroaching further into their local area. You mentioned social distancing and obviously right now there are public health concerns. There's also the climate crisis and sustainability. So is that also a factor in thinking about new buildings and expanding the campus?

**Rocky Tuan:**

Yeah, for sure. Our university, Chinese University of Hong Kong, actually is the co-host of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network chapter in Hong Kong, one of four in this part of Asia. It is possible to build a building that has very, very low carbon footprint. It is doable. It's not easy, but it's doable. We have just tested a brand new kitchen waste processing machine for restaurants inside our campus. Their kitchen waste, which used to be bags and bags and bags and go to landfill, all right, is now dumped into this machine that liquefies the waste. 97% of it and all the spoons and everything, or whatever plastic bags, completely segregated out.

And then the liquid waste can then be used to produce energy, right? As a biofuel. We need to think creatively every time we build a building, solar panel is part of it. So I think it is possible to do this in a very sustainable, in a renewable way. And in fact, CUHK has made 2038 as the target year for zero carbon. Very ambitious. It happens to be our 75th anniversary. If we are able to achieve this, which I think we can, we will be ahead of the curve actually compared to a lot of places in the world.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

What do you think the future looks like for the international student experience? Also things like international branch campuses.

**Rocky Tuan:**

Yeah. I think international experience or global experience is absolutely critical for this generation. And we are tasked, universities are tasked, I think today in the 21st century, to educate the next generation of global citizens. So if they don't have any international experience or exposure, how are they going to be global citizens? It just simply not going to work. So last year, CUHK pushed out this new program called the Virtual Student Exchange Program. Under the Association of Pacific Rim University banner, it's been very successful. We have 26 universities on four continents participating. The program is unique because it has coursework, plus co-curricular cultural immersion experience. No one is flying anywhere, but yet they are able to have this 3,000 mile away experience.

You mentioned this very interesting thing about branch campuses and whatever. That really needs some thinking. A lot of it is dependent on the locale where the branch is located. If duplication is a totally brand new thing for that region, yes, I'm all for it, right? But if the place you're going to already has something more or less the same, don't do it. Just being able to put a brand name on something, I think to me, that's sort of commercial. It's not really academic. On the other hand, if

what you do is unique and better yet, a differentiation from the main campus, now that's worth thinking about. The differentiation product can then take advantage of what the new locale can offer. Now, that is a win-win situation.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

The way you've described how that win-win situation works, again, speaks to the importance of place and the context of the local environment and being aware and alive to that. What will the post-pandemic university need to be?

**Rocky Tuan:**

My guess is that the future university will have a different student population. I described this to people as encore education, right? People who are no longer the 18, 22 year old that I mentioned earlier. And they may be in their forties, fifties, all of either necessity or out of desire. They would like to have learn something new. The way the future is, there will be these students who either are empty nesters or they're undergoing career change. And they would like to go back to university. You will be see them around the campus, in the physical campus. When I was going to university long, long time ago, pinball machines and video machines, those were the things we wanted because you got to have a place that ding, ding, ding, ding, and so on and so forth, right? Well, but these guys who are 40, 50 year old, maybe they have already career and so forth, families and so on, they're now on campus.

What do they want? Do they need a gym? Do they need a pinball machine like I used to want? No, I don't think so. I think they will want less fast food. They have better tastes now but we will have a different group of students. So, universities will have to morph accordingly. They might not have the time to do a four year education. They may want some micro-credentialing, for example. They might just want some certificate. We're talking about real education dished out in a different way or packaged in a different way. So I think we need to all think about this. Not easy, not easy.

**Natasha Lokhun:**

Both my guests today have highlighted how the demographic of students is evolving and that this should influence how campuses change and develop going forward. And while the sense of place and culture is important and will continue to be a significant factor in where students choose to study, the pandemic has shown that effective ways of creating that sense of community online will be increasingly important in the future. I'd like to thank the students at Massey University, Professor Giselle Byrnes, Provost and Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Massey and Professor Rocky Tuan, President and Vice-hancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The Association of Commonwealth Universities is committed to highlighting the issues that influence learning and teaching in our world. In the next and final edition, we'll be reflecting on what we've discussed so far in the series, and we'll be looking ahead to the future, beyond higher education. What's the role of universities in the digital transformation happening across wider society? So please do subscribe to the series, wherever you get your podcasts and like, comment and share the program.

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