



MP + SF 2026

DC Challenge Collectives

An exploration into the future
of work, learning, and
Georgetown University's
Capitol Campus

Georgetown University faces crises

In 2026, Georgetown University finds itself at a pivotal moment in its long history. Under pressure from federal attacks, declines in public trust, a rapidly changing workforce, and massive disruption brought on by the artificial intelligence revolution, the university must both maintain its operations and innovate towards a future university model. This future model must find ways to navigate three concurrent waves of disruptions and harness them with intentional innovations.

- 1. Artificial Intelligence is accelerating the need to innovate learning.
- 2. An aging workforce and increasing rate of technosocial change creates the need for porous, open loop learning.¹
- 3. Declining funding & public trust in higher education underscores the need for universities to foster public relationships and deliver public value.³

Our project unites these three waves of innovation to produce a transformative learning model.

First, our model begins with a challenge-based, experiential learning model, developed by the Red House, that innovates learning by developing a distinctive, formative, and high value educational experience.²

Secondly, we incorporate a porous participation structure that can better engage alumni and community members. This ‘lifelong learning’ model could expand enrollment, sustain community relationships, and ultimately serve as a better partner to the workforce.

Thirdly, we aim to rebuild public trust by designing initiatives that respond to local social and economic pressures. These initiatives leverage community partnerships to build the capacity of social services and strengthen the local economy.

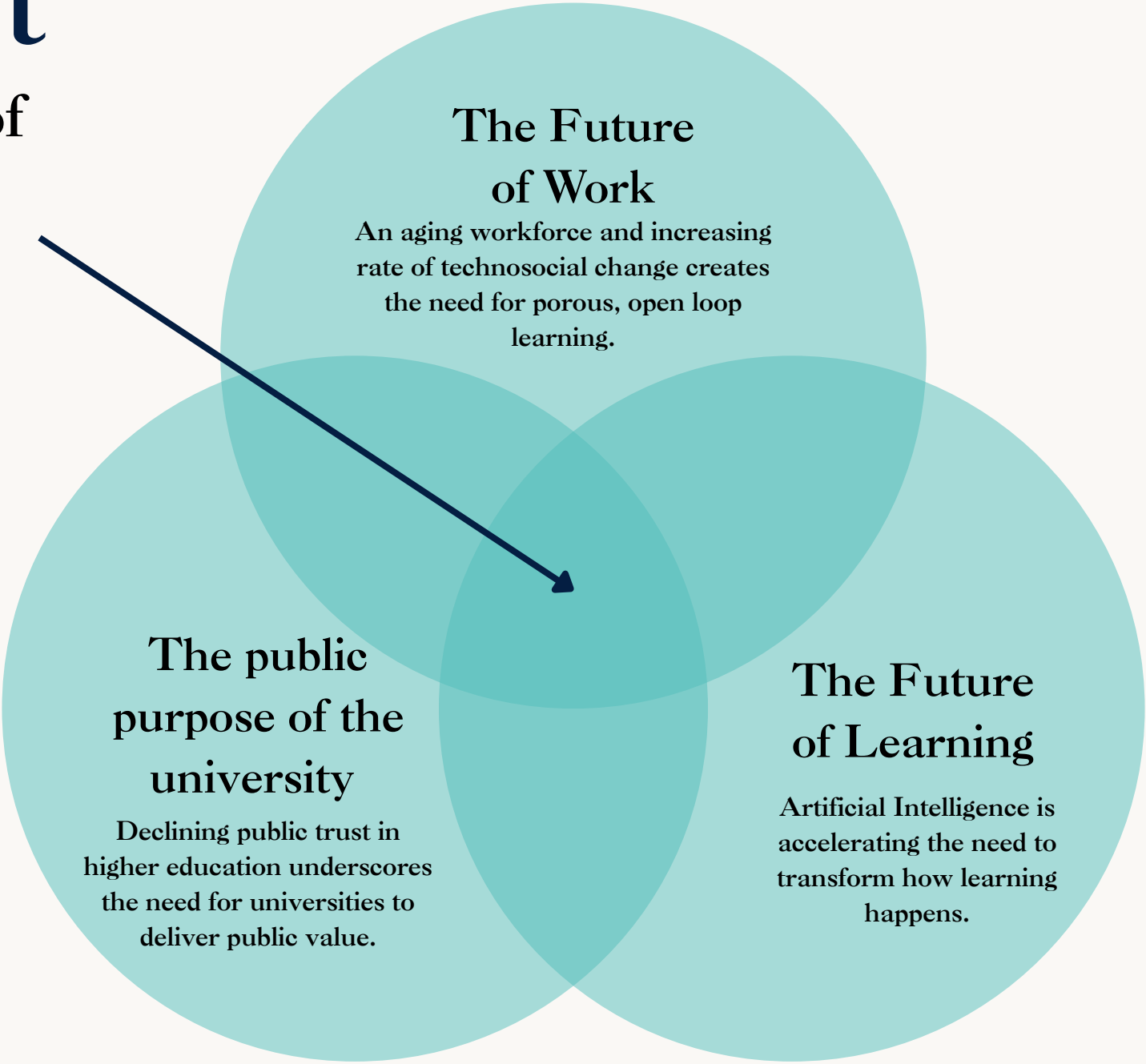
Together, these three features form a unified model we call “DC Challenge Collectives.”

In the first section, we develop the reasoning behind our project with the Three Horizons model. Then, we explain its features. Finally, we map the model onto what already exists and propose the next steps to make this vision a reality.

The university must transform to thrive.

Our project

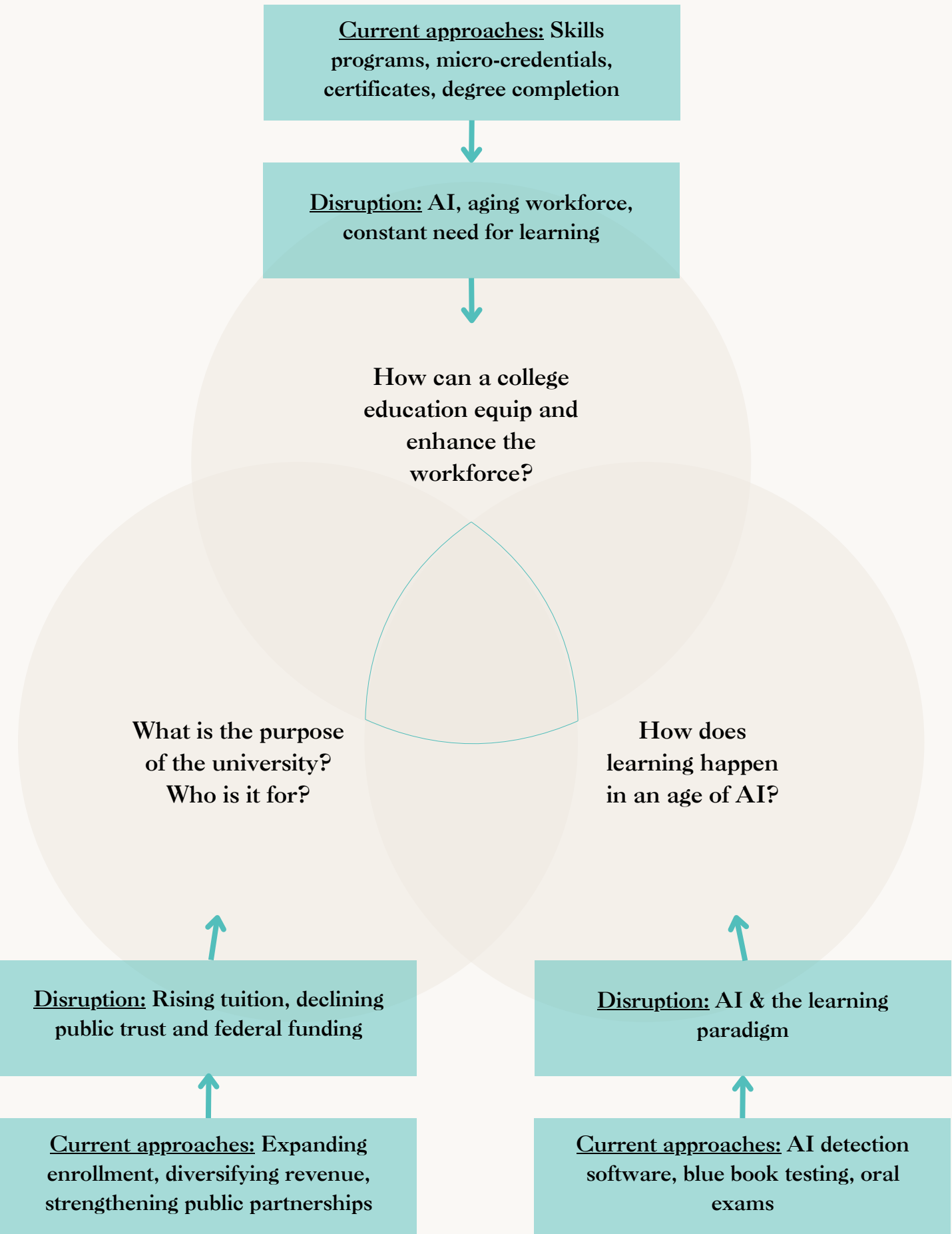
sits at the intersection of three emergent fields.



Designing within these fields enables our model to thrive in the current waves of disruption.

H2 Disruptions

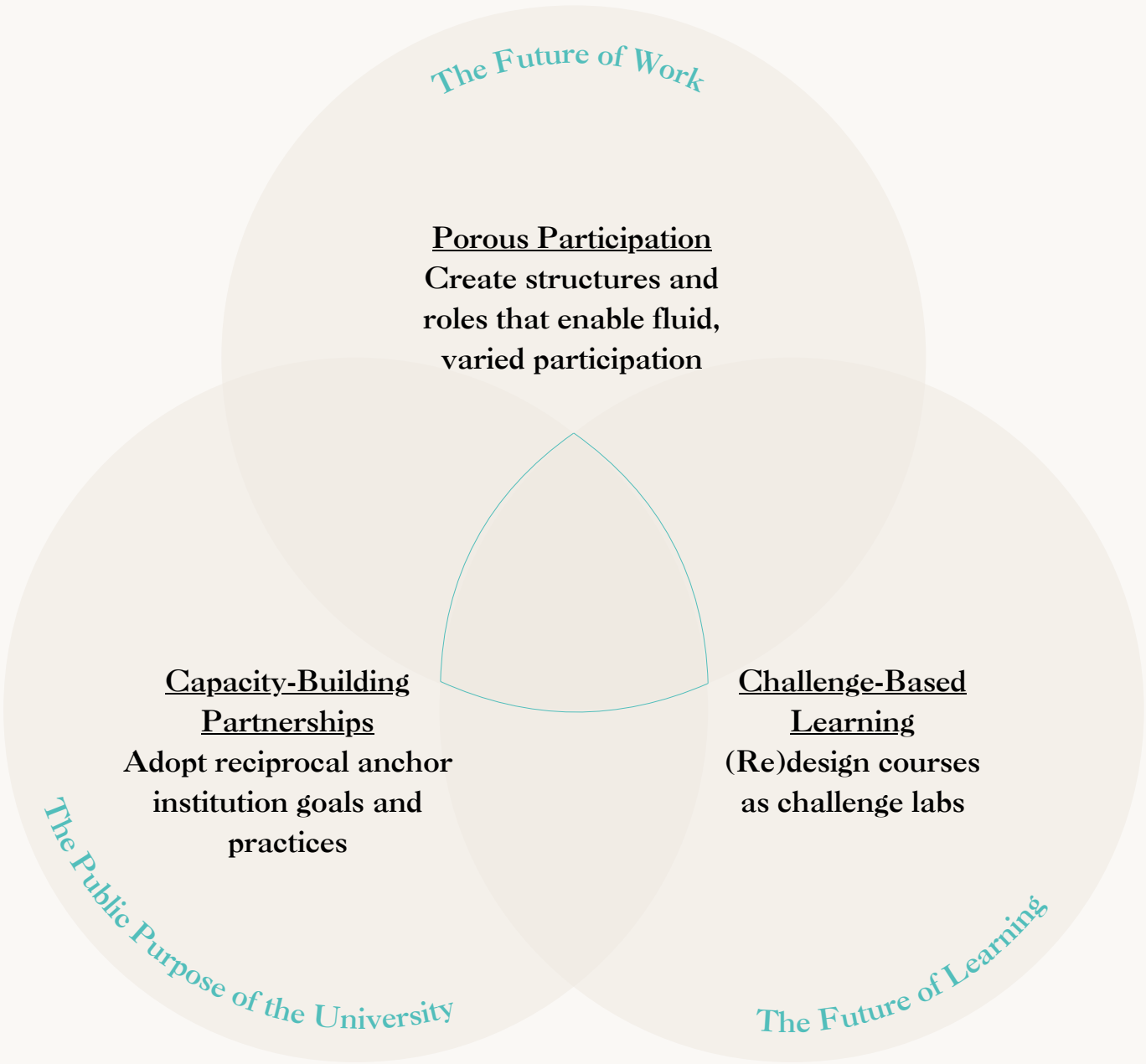
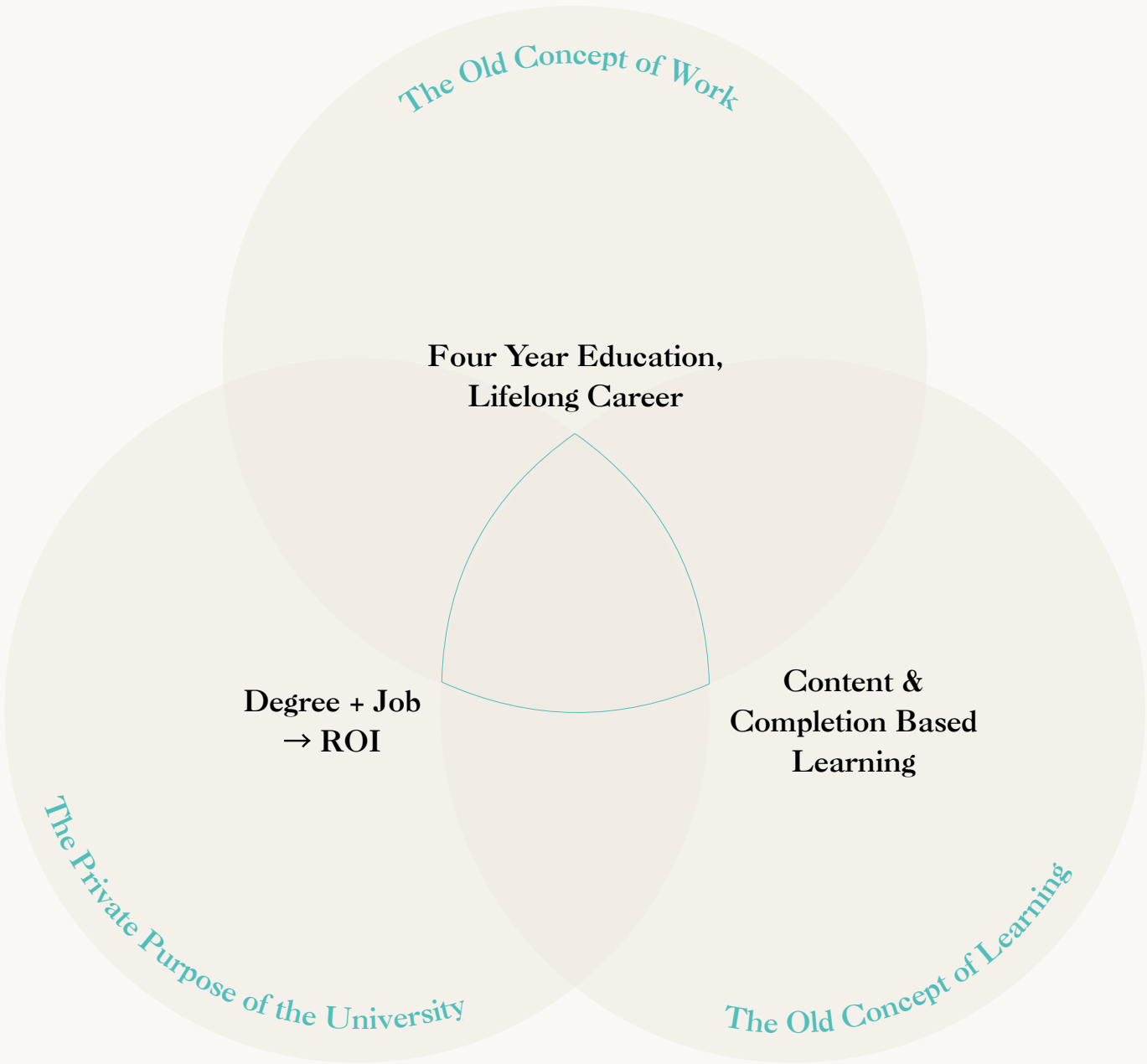
The university's core operating model is being challenged from three directions at once. Each disruption exposes the limits of how Georgetown currently responds — and each reveals a transformative question. →



H1 Learning Model⁴

private, static, and single-purpose

The dominant paradigm of higher education was designed to help transition the population into the workforce for an industrializing nation. The key features that were once strengths enabling industrialization are now shortcomings failing to meet modern-day challenges and lagging behind the modern economy.⁵

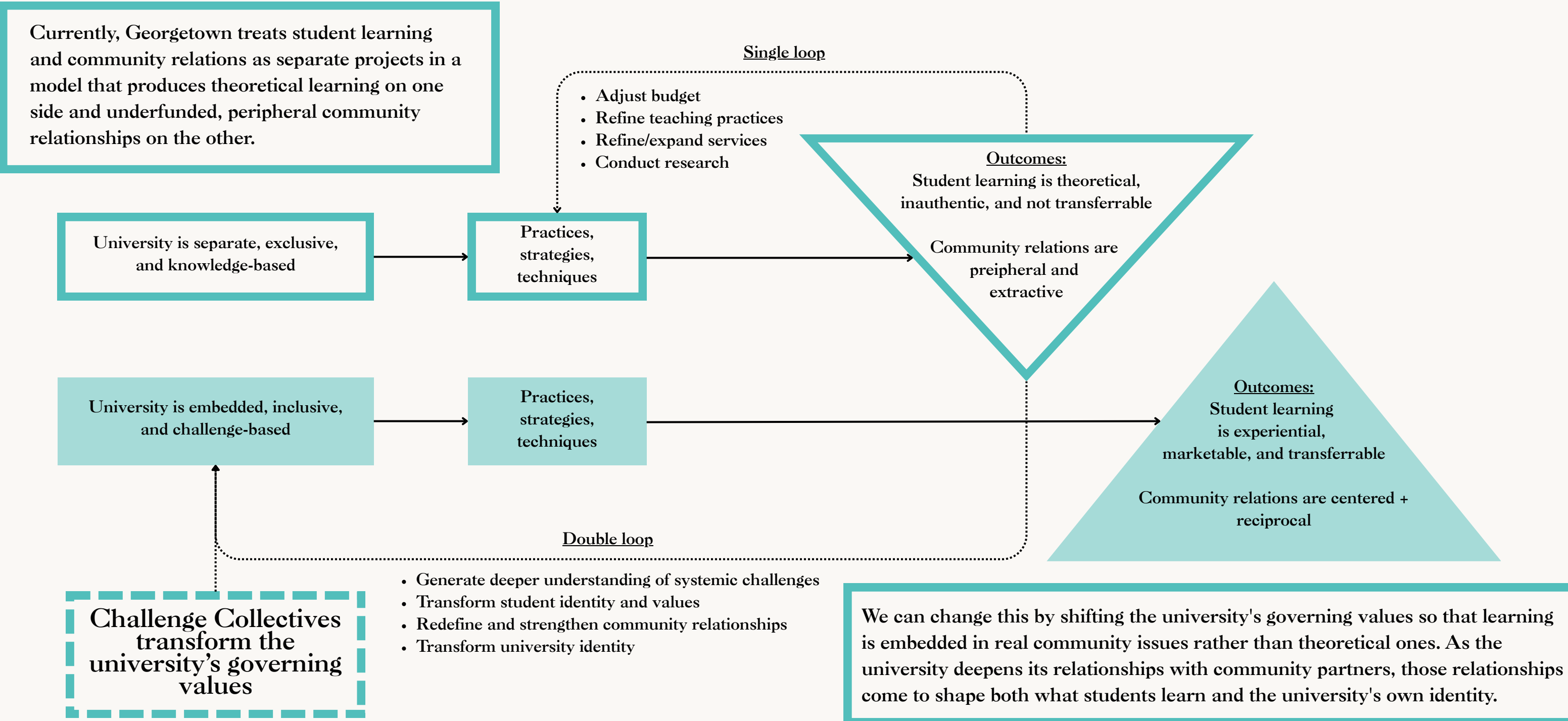


H3 Learning Model

embedded, porous, and challenge-based

An emerging university paradigm that better responds to the challenges and systems of the modern world must fundamentally transform some of the core features of the dominant paradigm. These features are more adapted to the future of work, the future of learning, and the public purpose of the university.

Moving from H1 to H3 through double loop learning⁶



Georgetown's DC Challenge Collectives

An H3 Vision

Building on Georgetown's Challenge Lab Network

Our proposed model unites our three-pronged approach. Any initiative that incorporates these three characteristics is a DC challenge collective.

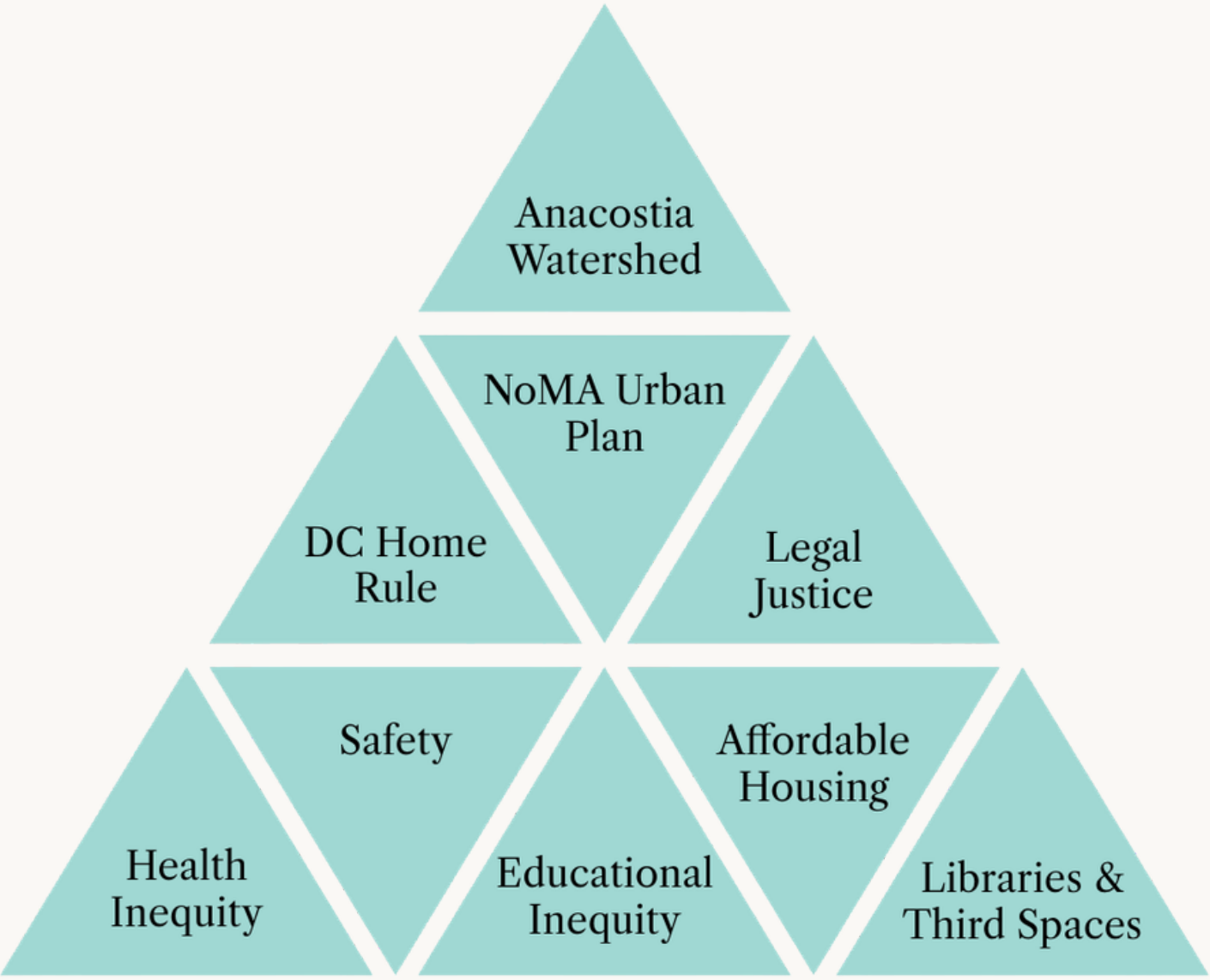
1. **Challenge-Based:** Grounded in DC Challenges for authentic learning experience (GU Challenge Labs)
2. **Capacity Building:** Partners with DC organizations to strengthen local systems and supplement social services (LEAPS)⁷
3. **Porous:** These experiences can and should be open to those who are interested in the challenge, and could be open to alumni and community members with experience working on or living the challenge (Stanford Open Loop University).

DC Challenge Collectives

Are collaborative learning + R&D communities built around DC challenges. Learning takes place around the real world manifestations of the challenge, which is collectively defined by the community of practice, who build real solutions together. A sample of possible challenges are displayed in the graphic on the right.

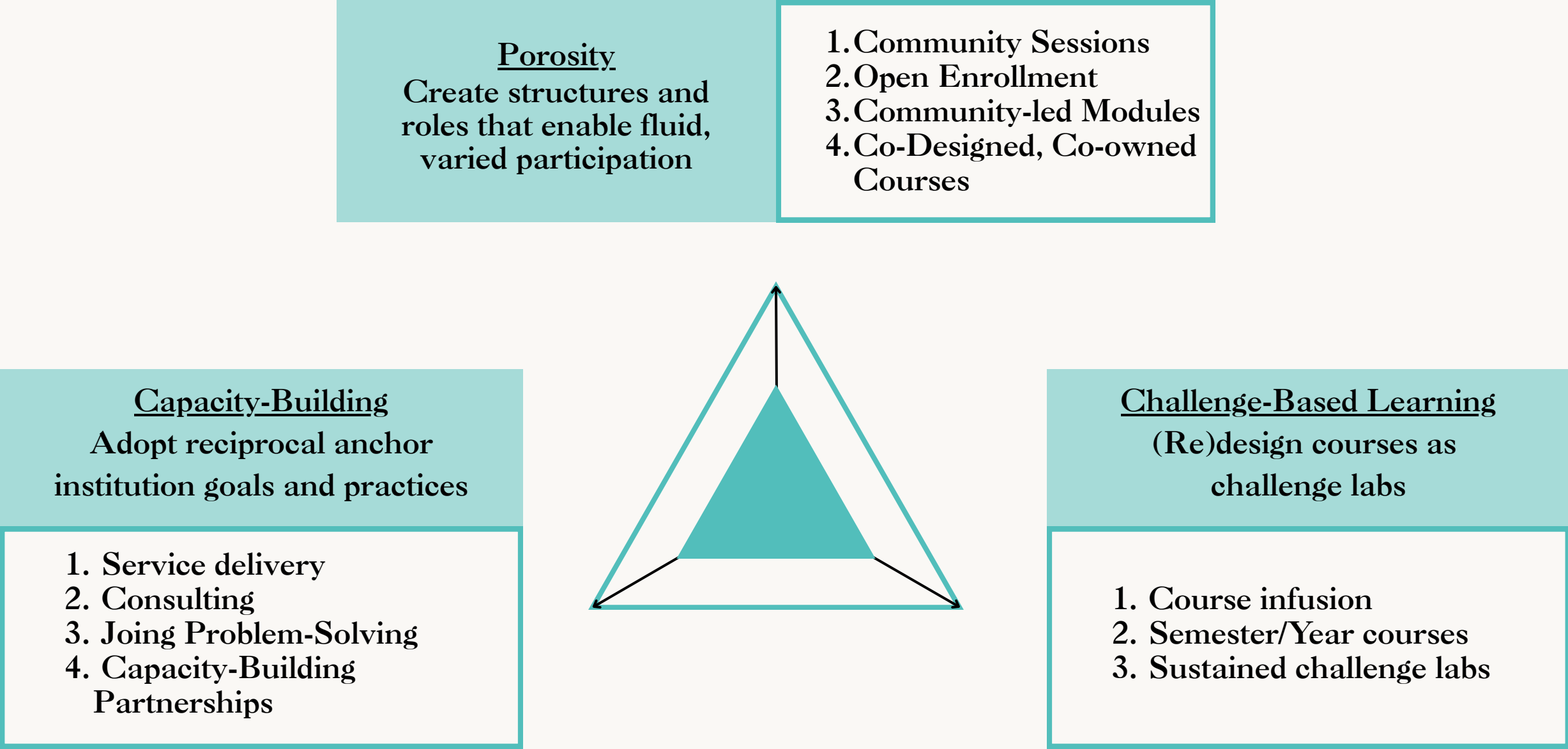
The aim of each collective is to build capacity of local systems through dedicated research, sustained partnerships, and educational initiatives.

Each collective is porous, enabling th fluid participation and dynamic roles for students, DC residents, alumni. Special care is taken to accept individuals who are directly impacted by the challenge.



How to build a challenge collective

Porosity refers to who can join a learning community and how they can participate. A porous learning initiative allows for multiple entry points to diverse learners, including early, mid, or late career professionals.



Capacity-building describes the depth of reciprocity a partnership reaches — not just what Georgetown delivers, but what the partner gains the standing ability to do on their own. A capacity-building partnership is sustained and co-invested.

Challenge-based learning structures a course or program around a real, unresolved problem rather than predetermined content. A challenge-based course is organized around an authentic, community-defined problem that students and partners investigate jointly.

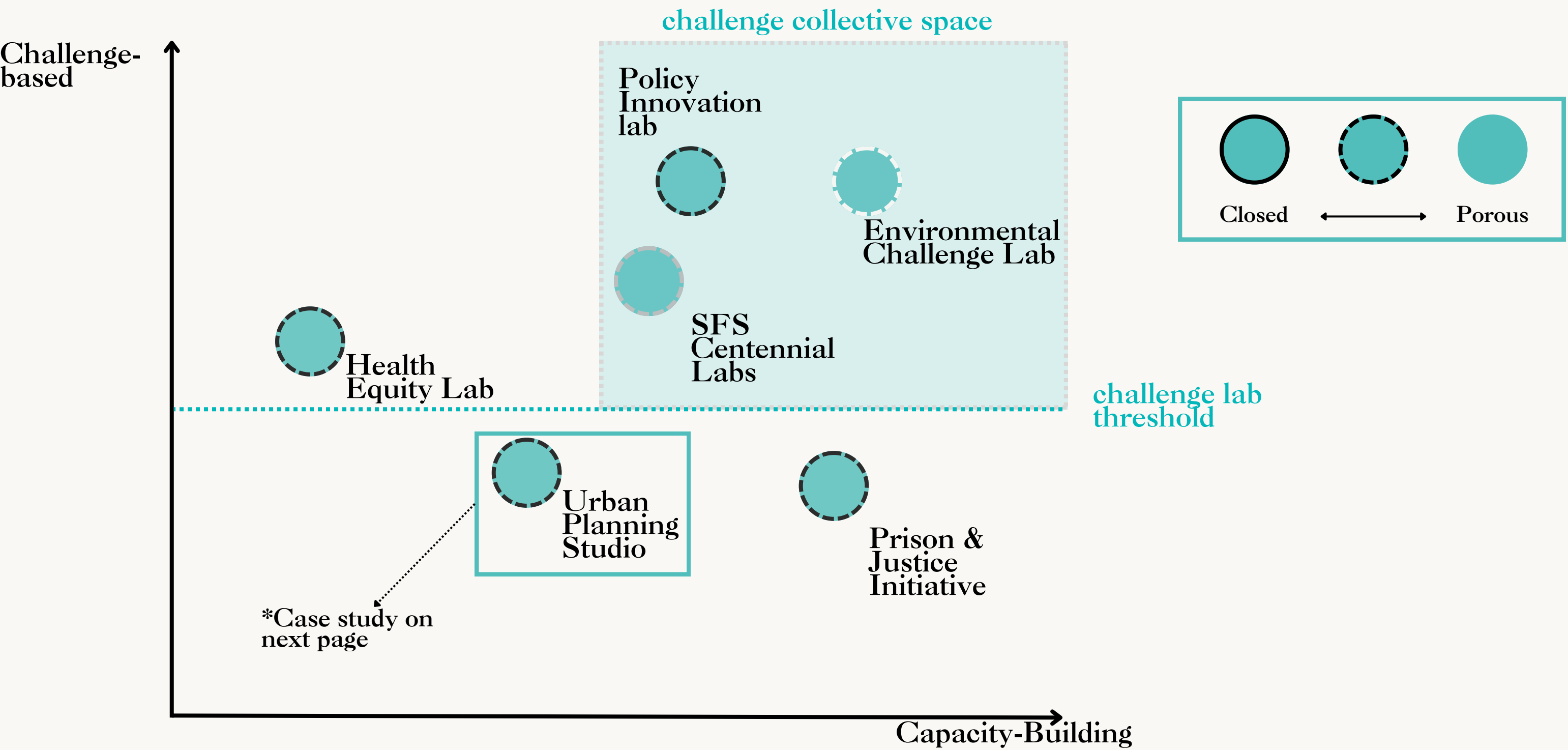
Challenge Collectives at Georgetown

Our ideas exist in the space of place-based, community-based learning initiatives. In the prior section, we described how to build a challenge collective by implementing each of our three features through various specific initiatives. In this section, we produce a map of current Georgetown initiatives, describing where they fall according to our 3 dimensions (challenge-based, capacity-building, and porous).

Then, we take a look at the current place-based initiatives at Georgetown and describe how one, the Urban Planning Studio, has the potential to be a Challenge Collective.

Here's how our
idea maps onto
the current
landscape →

Below is a graph of current place-based initiatives at Georgetown, some of which are explicitly challenge labs.⁸



Case Study: Urban Planning Studio

Porosity: 3/5



Capacity -
Building: 4/5

Challenge-
Based: 4/5

The planning studio is a course in the Master’s in Urban and Regional Planning Program — home to a robust community of practice at Georgetown. The professors are practitioners in DC and are often involved in initiatives around the Capitol Campus. Numerous partnerships exist between personnel in the Urban Planning program, community organizations, government agencies, and local businesses. The most prominent of partnerships includes those with the NoMa and Golden Triangle Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), the numerous faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the area, and the Father McKenna Center which serves the unhoused population across DC.

Students in the Urban Planning Program engage in research projects around Capitol Campus, and are highly aware of the planning decisions being made in the region around the Capitol Campus. Their projects are highly autonomous, as each student identifies challenges and proposes solutions to directly influence the urban development of the region. Furthermore, Georgetown’s presence as an anchor institution with significant capital to purchase land in the area will continue to impact the development of the entire neighborhood.

Our only recommendation for the planning studio is to expand the porosity of the initiative by incorporating more ways for community members to engage in the learning process and jointly define problems together with students. Right now, engagement with community organizations is always initiated by students/faculty, rather than being a true partnership.

Stepping into the meta

So far, our proposal has focused on what we call challenge collectives. We applied our lens of analysis onto the current landscape of place-based initiatives and built on the challenge lab concept to propose a visionary model for the future of Georgetown. However, this project in and of itself is an example of what an LDT Challenge Lab could do for the entire challenge lab ecosystem, and even the entire university.

By applying a learning design and systems thinking approach to numerous issues across the university, the LDT Challenge Lab can function as a *meta challenge lab* that serves as the inquiry and design engine for the entire university, and especially the challenge lab ecosystem.



The LDT
Meta Challenge
Lab →

The LDT Challenge Lab

the ecosystem's inquiry and design engine

The LDT Challenge Lab could grapple with questions and lead design-based research based on the emerging fields of higher education. This lab can also conduct research related to issues that arise from challenge labs themselves.

-  = existing/proposed Challenge Lab
-  = not an official Challenge Lab
-  = DC place-based



Challenges don't stay solved.

LDT's role as a driver of challenge-based learning

Challenges, like housing instability, public safety, AI, climate change, and education access are continuously evolving. Due to the “wickedness” of these problems, a single intervention, no matter how well-designed, will not stand the test of time.⁹ What the challenge landscape requires is not a set of one-time solutions, but an organization that is capable of reevaluating, redesigning, and reimplementing new solutions over time.

This is precisely the function that the LDT challenge lab is positioned to serve. While an individual challenge lab (Environmental, Health Equity, etc.) is designed around a single challenge, the LDT Lab is organized around the *process* other labs use to engage their own challenges. Its role is not to solve any one challenge directly, but to study how each lab's engagement is functioning, and work to redesign the tools, structures, and practices that determine whether a partnership deepens over time or stalls.

Rather than treating design as something that happens once, LDT Lab brings alumni and partners into an ongoing community of practice where unresolved, evolving challenges are worked on continuously.

Because the LDT sits across the whole ecosystem rather than inside any single challenge area, it's positioned to ask the questions no individual lab is structured to ask about itself: Which partnerships are actually deepening in reciprocity over time, and which have plateaued?

The result is that challenges get engaged by an ecosystem that can actually learn from its own successes and failures across labs and across years — rather than by isolated initiatives that each have to rediscover, on their own, what does and doesn't work.

Transforming the university

To conclude, we return to a high level, Three Horizons analysis of our project and how it is a pilot for a visionary model of not just Georgetown University, but all of higher education.

The three characteristics we proposed — capacity-building, porosity, and challenge-based — are significant redesigns of the current model of higher education. On the following page, we describe how to build on this model to create an emergent, H3 model of higher education that goes beyond the industrial era H1 model that shapes the dominant paradigm, with roots from the early 20th century.

This H3 model must respond to the three waves of disruption that are redefining the modern world. The accelerated pace of change of technology, epitomized by the artificial intelligence revolution, has marked a transformation from the knowledge economy to the learning. The capacity to learn and adapt is the most important advantage in today’s world, and this applies to organizations as much as individuals.

The second wave that the H3 model must respond to is the now decades-long transition from a teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm happening across US universities. Student learning is front and center, and the AI revolution has introduced a new layer of complexity that learning professionals must address to guide and scaffold the learning of students.

Lastly, the third wave of change is the relationship that institutions of learning have with the public. Decades of declining public funding and eroding public trust has resulted in an environment where tuition costs are astronomical and the average American questions the value of a college degree. College has also become a political battleground, with conservative citizens showing a high level of doubt in the modern American college. Universities must reverse this tide in order to survive in the long term, and one way to do so is by finding ways to deliver public value directly to citizens. Delayed ROI and decades long research and innovation projects are not enough in an information ecosystem that demands immediate, visible results

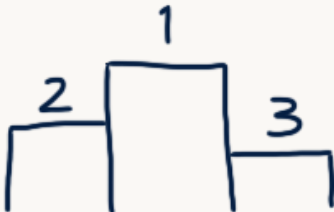
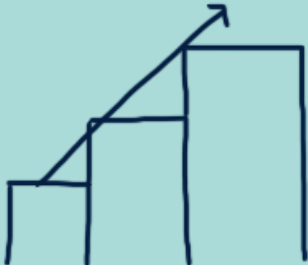
On the next page, we propose a visionary H3 model of the university that is positioned to ride these waves of disruption into a new era of innovation.

The Ecological Model of Higher Education →

The Ecological Model

The below graph is a sketch of what this H3 emerging paradigm of higher education could look like and compares it with the H1 dominant paradigm. The timing column translates well to our concept of porosity. The learning column maps onto a shift to challenge-based, experience-based learning. The next two columns, student value, and strategic goals, describes shifting the purpose and focus of education from a private good focused on rankings and ROI to a public process that engages in capacity-building and collective flourishing. Lastly, the adaptive capacity column describes the universities capacity to change and adapt in response to the changes in the world. The current university model only engages in single loop learning, whereas the H3 university would be able to engage in double loop learning or the adaptive cycle, effectively responding and transforming itself in response to changes in the world.

Together, these shifts produce a university that is well-equipped to harness the emerging waves of disruption and thrive into the 21st century.

	Timing	Learning	Student Value	Strategic Goals	Adaptive Capacity
H1: Elliott + Kerr Model	 four years, fixed	 content + completion	 individual earnings / ROI	 rankings + endowment	 single loop
H3: Ecological Model	 porous, lifelong	 experience + formation	 collective flourishing	 capacity-building	 double loop/adaptive cycle

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