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Abstract for speech: Higher education for a digital age

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Global technological advances will have profound consequences for the business model upon which all universities run their operations wherever they may be, some more quickly than others for obvious reasons. Embracing the unprecedented opportunities they offer is the major strategy for addressing the massive demand for higher education in the 21st century. The wonderful thing is we have the means for education for many, many more people; not conventional education for the few (relatively speaking) who can travel the distances to physical sites of learning, more especially universities. That will remain the privilege of the few. But our science, our technology, our imagination and our ingenuity have brought us now to a situation where we have other means. Homer-Dixon in his book *The Upside of Down* remarks on how wonderful it is that while we are living through perilous times, we have also invented this dazzling technology, technology which enables planet-wide collaboration, the harnessing of many minds to difficult issues. Universities have a unique responsibility to exploit the potential of the new technologies and embrace the education opportunities now rendered possible by them and also the networks they have spawned. And we do so in the conscious knowledge that they may well be central to the solution of many of the problems facing us in the 21st century – indeed as James Martin in his book *The Meaning of the 21st Century: A Vital Blueprint for Ensuring Our Future* has reminded us, the very meaning of the 21st century is that we do solve these problems.