



Bay View Analytics

Research Brief:

Looking Ahead to 2028:

# Faculty Speculations about the Future of Higher Education

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## Research Brief

# Looking Ahead to 2028: Faculty Speculations about the Future of Higher Education

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## Introduction

The first few years of the 2020s have been characterized by major global events: the COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented climate disasters, increasing political polarization, and the rise of artificial intelligence. These events have all had an impact on higher education and the faculty experience, within a relatively short time frame. To better understand this impact, this study investigated faculty perceptions of the near future, their feelings of preparedness (especially if they expect continued change), and gauge their feelings of optimism or pessimism about what the future might bring.

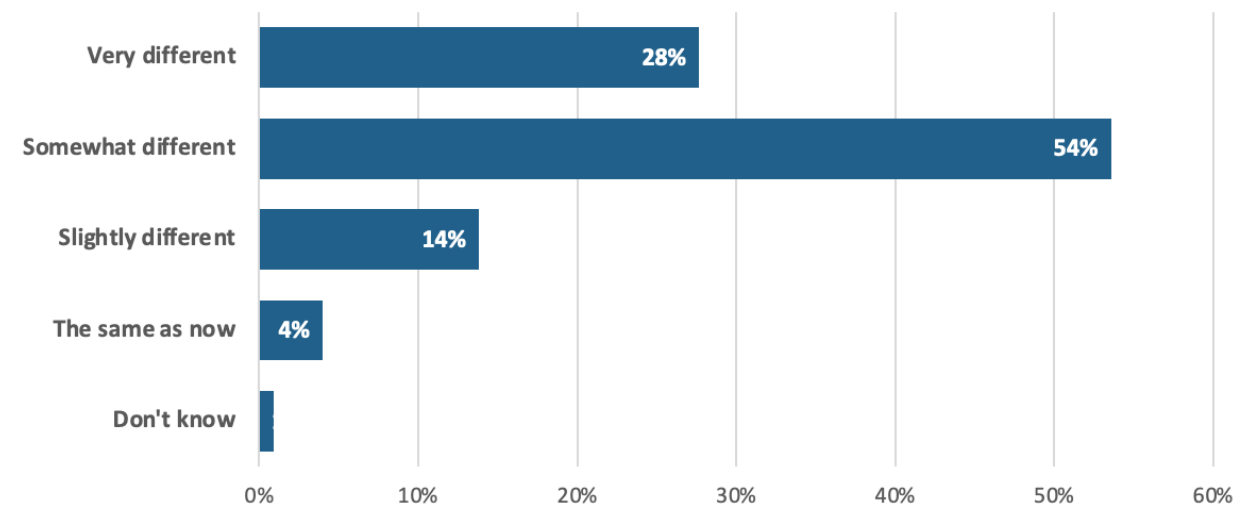
Participants included 224 faculty from institutions across the USA. The sample included faculty across all disciplines, and was designed to represent all U.S. higher education teaching faculty, defined as teaching at least one course during the current term. The respondents came from 44 states, 2- and 4-year institutions, public and private institutions, and institutions with less than 1,000 enrollments to those with over 20,000.

Overall, the findings show that most faculty expect higher education in 2028 to be different from the present state. Most respondents also feel prepared for coming change, at least to some extent. Over one-half of faculty reported feelings of pessimism toward the overall future of higher education; however, when asked about their personal future in higher education, feelings of optimism were higher.

## A Future that Differs from the Present

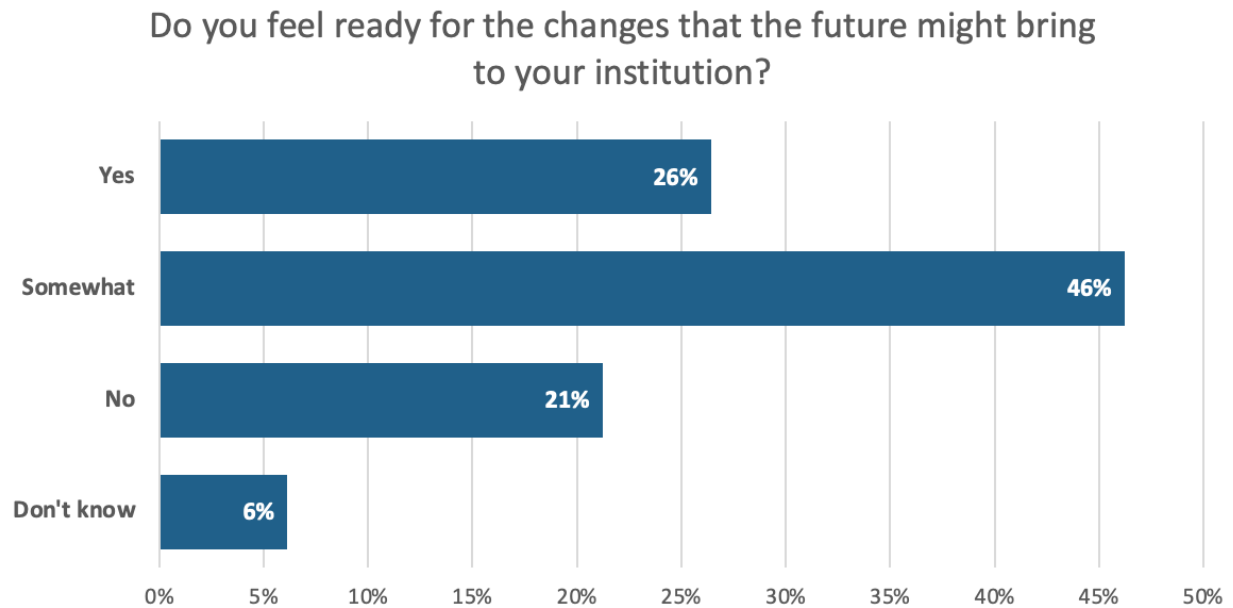
Most faculty expect a shift from the present when they envision the near future of higher education. Very few faculty (4%) reported that they felt the future in five years would be the same as it is now. Of the majority who anticipate a change, 28% imagined a very different future in five years' time, 54% imagine a somewhat different future, and 14% imagine a slightly different future.

How different do you think post-secondary education will be from the present state in 5 years' time?



## Preparedness for the Future

The survey also asked faculty whether they felt ready for the changes that the future might bring to their institution. Roughly three-quarters of faculty reported feeling ready (26%) or somewhat ready (46%) for a different future.



Overall, the findings suggest an inverse relationship between the extent of anticipated change and preparedness with greater anticipated change associated with lower feelings of preparedness. Of the faculty that anticipated a very different future, 27% of respondents felt prepared, 39% said they felt somewhat prepared, and 31% said that they did not feel prepared. Of those who expected a somewhat different future, 23% provided a “yes” response for preparedness, 50% reported feeling somewhat prepared, and 20% responded that they felt unprepared. Faculty who imagined a slightly different future reported feeling the most prepared.

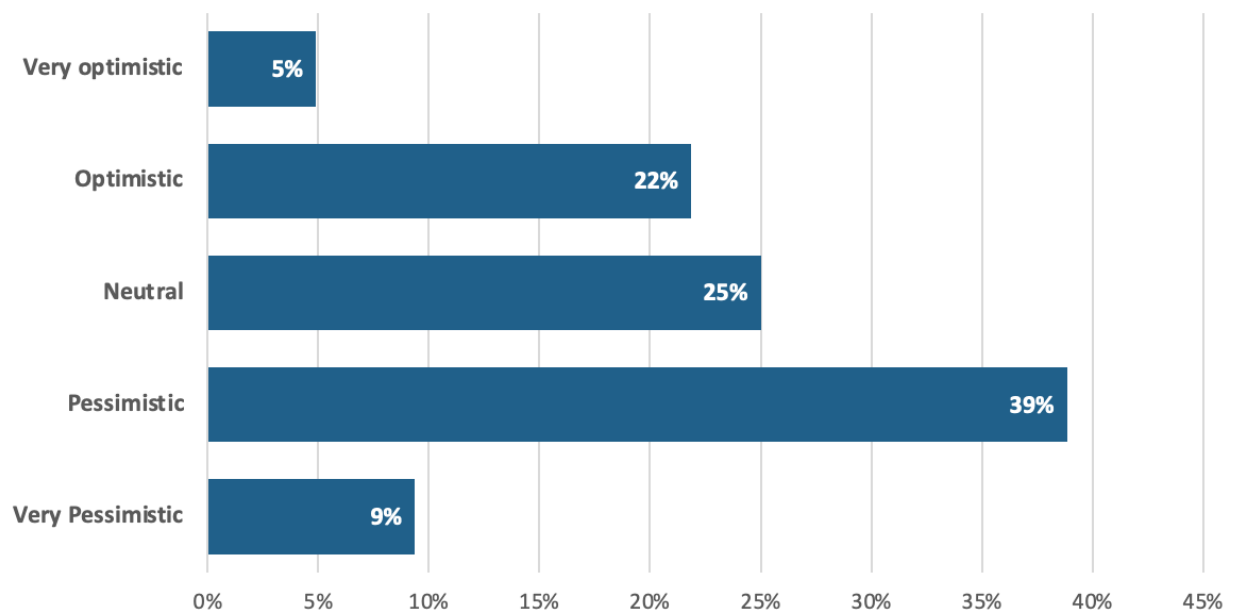
## Feelings of Optimism and Pessimism

The survey asked faculty two questions about their feelings of optimism and pessimism. The first question asked about feelings of optimism or pessimism about the overall future of higher education, and the second asked about faculty feelings about their personal future in higher education.

### Optimism-Pessimism about the Overall Future of Higher Education

When asked about the overall future of higher education, 48% of faculty reported feeling pessimistic or very pessimistic, 25% reported neutral feelings, and 27% reported feeling optimistic or very optimistic.

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the overall future of higher education over the next 5 years?

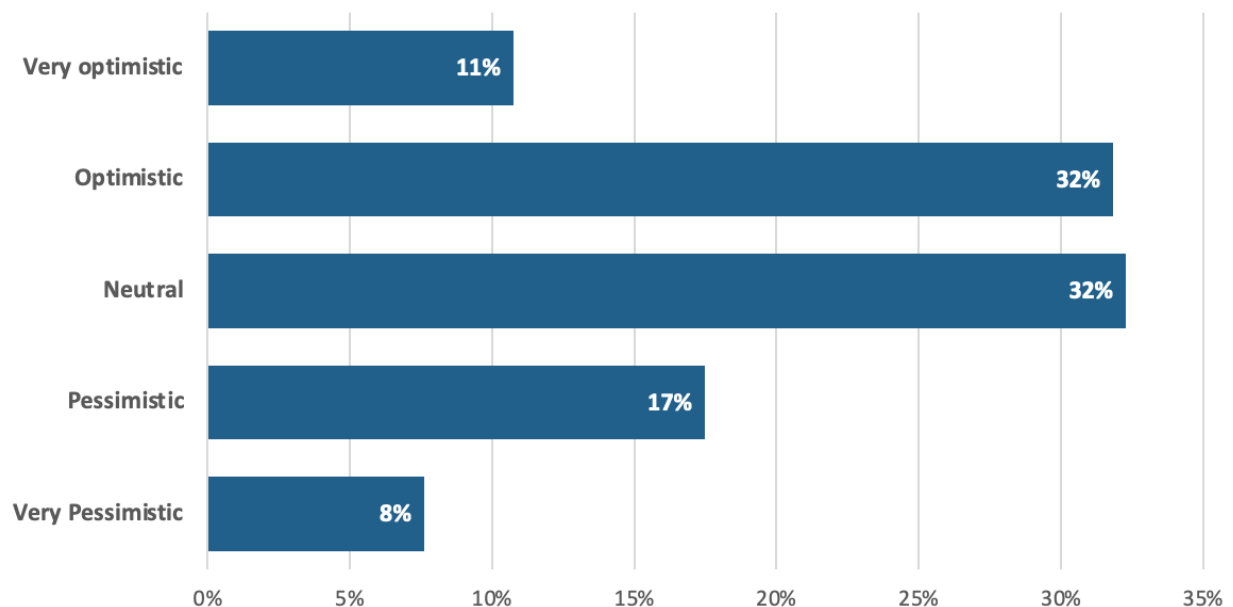


There also appears to be an inverse relationship between the extent of anticipated change and feelings of optimism about the overall future of higher education. Faculty who imagined a very different future were more likely to report feelings of pessimism: 60% of faculty who thought the future would be very different were pessimistic or very pessimistic about the overall future of higher education. On the other hand, faculty who imagined a slightly different future were the most optimistic with 42% reporting feeling optimistic or very optimistic.

## Optimism-Pessimism about Personal Future in Higher Education

Faculty feelings of optimism or pessimism related to their personal future in higher education indicated a greater sense of optimism. Only 25% reported feeling pessimistic or very pessimistic, 32% reported feeling neutral, and 43% said they felt optimistic or very optimistic.

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about your personal future in higher education over the next 5 years?



Perceptions about the extent of future change had less of an impact on faculty feelings of optimism and pessimism toward their personal future in higher education. Although the findings still show an inverse relationship, it's less pronounced than the findings related to the extent of anticipated change and preparedness, or optimism/pessimism about the overall future. Among faculty who imagined a very different future in five years, 42% reported feeling optimistic or very optimistic about their personal future in higher education, 23% reported neutral feelings, and 36% said they felt pessimistic or very pessimistic. Faculty who expected a somewhat different future felt mostly optimistic to some extent (41%), or neutral (38%). Again, faculty who thought the future would only be slightly different had the highest levels of optimism with 55% reporting feeling optimistic or very optimistic, 23% reporting feelings of neutrality, and 23% saying they felt pessimistic or very pessimistic.

## Summary

The vast majority of faculty expect that in five years, higher education will be different from the present, with many anticipating substantial changes. Overall, most faculty feel prepared (to some extent) for these changes. But feelings of preparedness tend to decrease among those who envision greater change. Faculty do not feel overly optimistic about the overall future of higher education, but their feelings of optimism increase when thinking about their personal future within the system.