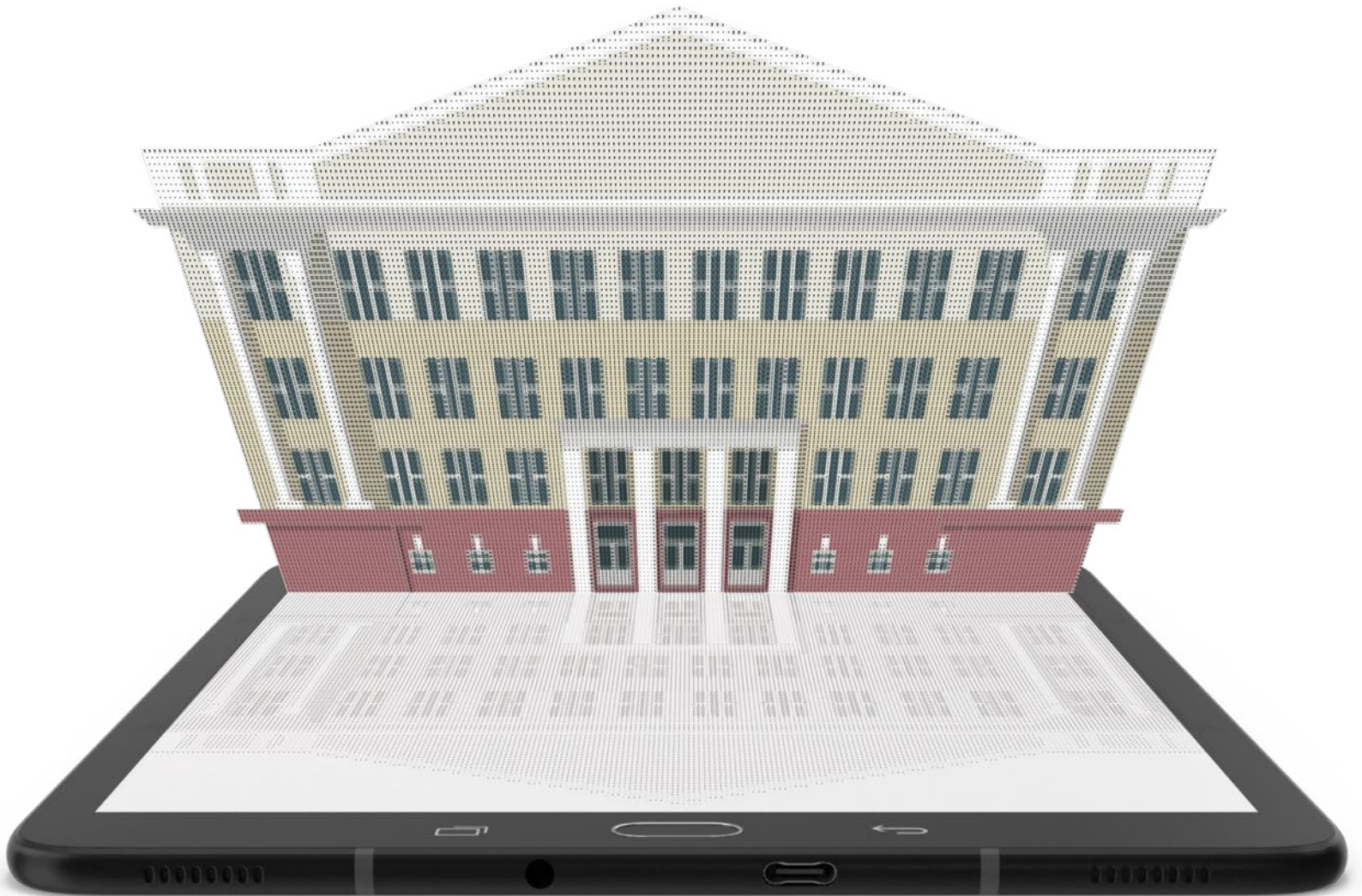


# Challenges That Are Transforming HIGHER EDUCATION



A conversation with **Geoffrey Garrett**

ROSA PAULINA LÓPEZ

## «Business leaders are being held more accountable for more things by more people than ever before»

**A** well-respected commentator on global business and economics, Dr. Geoffrey Garrett is an expert in world politics, business, and the global economy who has earned great renown among major media organizations worldwide.

Dr. Garrett is the current Dean of the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business, and he also serves as Professor of Management and Organization. Earlier in his career, he held academic appointments at Oxford, Stanford, and Yale universities. In his native Australia, Dr. Garrett was dean of the business schools at both The University of Sydney and UNSW, and he was the founding CEO of the United States Studies Centre. Dean Garrett is also a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences, a Member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a winner of the Foreign Policy Association Medal and the Advance Global Australian Award.

On his first foreign visit since becoming Dean of Marshall School of Business, Dr. Garrett had a conversation with *istmo* to talk about how recent world events are transforming the world of higher education.



Foto: Wharton School

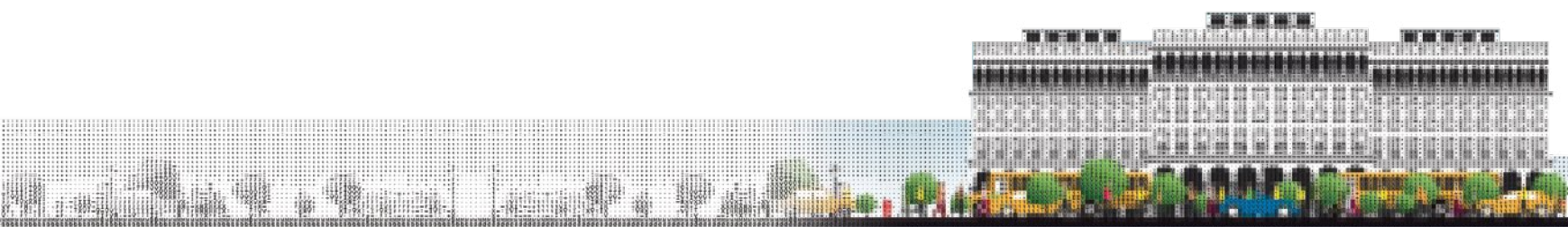
Dr. Geoffrey Garrett, current Dean of the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business.

### ACCELERATING EXISTING TRENDS

Dean Garrett once highlighted at least three features of the world events that have marked the past two and a half years. First, the speed at which events are taking place. Second, the sheer unpredictability of the events arising around the present circumstances. And third, the lack of coherence around the facts surrounding major world events. Although none of these features can be described as unprecedented, the way they have combined in the past two years has certainly led

us into an extremely rapid succession of major decisions, with leaders making more major decisions in the past few months than in the last decade.

In higher education, these circumstances have brought to the fore the increasing relevance of online and hybrid education models, even raising difficult questions about the future of higher education. We thus asked Dean Garrett what he thought about the future of higher education, and particularly of business education. His answer raised a simple but illuminating insight:



«I think the pandemic accelerated trends that were already there,» he said, emphasizing the fact that we are responding with tools that we had been exploring to a certain extent for the past few decades. But «everything that had been kind of hypothetical became very real in the pandemic.»

#### A FORMER DICHOTOMY

For example, he mentioned that, in the actual implementation of higher education programs, «we used to think of this dichotomy [where] there was online, and there was on campus [education],» but «now we understand that it is actually a continuum, and we'll just use technology more.» The notion of hybrid will thus become more and more relevant in the future. «We were experimenting with all that stuff pre-pandemic,» he stressed, «so I actually think that this hybrid world is an improvement on where we were before the pandemic.»

Indeed, students can now routinely watch lectures on their phones in their own time and at their own speed, further paving the way for innovative education strategies like the so-called flipped classroom model. In the case of Marshall Business School's approach to business education, Dr. Garrett commented: «In our undergraduate degree, a lot of our core finance and economics lectures now are online because we want the in-class time to be interactive, problem-solving, not just passively listening to lectures.»

That does not mean, however, that online models will soon supersede in-person education. According to Dr. Garrett, higher education institutions should still take full advantage of on-campus learning to develop interaction among participants and build cohorts. «That is where the magic happens,» he emphasized. Dean Garrett believes that we should take full advantage of the efficiency and convenience gains that come with online models while keeping in mind that there is always «something about the shared energy between us» that is going to be different online. That is why he claims that the key word for the future is not necessarily «online» but «hybrid.»

#### OPPORTUNITY PLUS RESPONSIBILITY

But there is another important ingredient that has increasingly come to supplement business

education, and which has been seriously challenged in the past two years – international experiences for students. For the past two years, the pandemic has led to a suspension of international experiences for students, at least as far as they involve in-person interaction. «It actually breaks my heart,» said Dr. Garrett, «that we have now had three years when we haven't been able to do short-term international immersion experiences for our students.»

Under Marshall's undergraduate program, 75-80% of students typically get a meaningful international experience in their first year. «International immersion programs can make all the difference for students—future business leaders—who often experience firsthand how geopolitical dynamics can shape the business world and vice versa. It's a powerful form of cultural diplomacy that pays great dividends for both students and the countries they represent.»

But the circumstances around the pandemic and other global affairs have created incredible

**«That we have now had three years when we haven't been able to do short-term international immersion experiences for our students»**

dilemmas not only for business schools but also for business leaders. «Business leaders,» noted Dr. Garrett, «are being held more accountable for more things by more people than ever before,» creating a combination of opportunity plus responsibility. «The Russia-Ukraine conflict and subsequent sanctions is one case in point of how business intertwines with world events.» As Dean Garrett explained, «the fact that Russia was more integrated into the global economy, obviously, made sanctions possible, but it has created incredible dilemmas for companies. If you have got a hundred Starbucks in Russia, can you really turn those off overnight? And should you turn them off overnight? Because we know that the sanctions are going to adversely affect average Russians as well. Maybe it just exemplifies this opportunity-responsibility dichotomy that I think is there for all business leaders today. During these challenging times, we need business leaders with an understanding of and sensitivity to global affairs.» And that certainly includes leaders in higher education. </>



The interviewer is professor at the Managerial Information and Control Department at IPADE Business School.



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