
‘QUALITY MATTERS’ AND MATTERS OF QUALITY: COVID-19 AND THE TECHNO-RATIONALIZATION OF TEACHING

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While questions surrounding the relationship between education and technology have captured the attention of philosophers of education in recent decades, such concerns have assumed new import. Although educational technology had become an increasingly ubiquitous facet of schooling in the years preceding COVID-19, the swift shift to remote instruction rendered necessary by the ongoing pandemic has restructured both P-12 and higher education in ways that are likely to last beyond the current crisis. The rapid proliferation of EdTech infrastructure and usage made possible by the necessity of social distancing has accelerated the adoption of technologies in ways that would likely have not been feasible in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this writing, practices that were previously unthinkable have now become commonplace. Across P-12 and higher education teachers have been providing instruction in multiple formats simultaneously, have been expected to ‘deliver’ content through various modalities at any given time, all while supporting students as they navigate ongoing personal turmoil.

In March of 2020, soon after it became clear that the virus had reached a critical tipping point, schools and universities across the country locked the doors to brick-and-mortar classrooms and shifted instruction online, in many cases over the span of only several days. While issues surrounding access to devices and reliable Internet posed challenges for many communities during the initial disruption—and continues to present barriers for millions of students, both in P-12 and higher education¹—this massive, all-encompassing experiment in online education has opened the gates for educational technology companies to make ideological inroads in ways that risk permanently altering the landscape of schooling.

We might attribute some of these challenges to the ways in which the pandemic was mishandled in the early months of the crisis. Federal, state, and local health responses were piecemeal, and many P-12 schools and universities expected educators to bounce between modes of instruction based on local

¹ See, for example, Moriah Balingit, “‘A National Crisis:’ As Coronavirus Forces Many Schools Online this Fall, Millions of Disconnected Students are Being Left Behind,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/a-national-crisis-as-coronavirus-forces-many-schools-online-this-fall-millions-of-disconnected-students-are-being-left-behind/2020/08/16/458b04e6-d7f8-11ea-9c3b-dfc394c03988_story.html and Dan Levin, “No Home, No Wi-Fi: Pandemic Adds to Strain on Poor College Students,” *The New York Times*, October 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/12/us/covid-poor-college-students.html>.

positivity rates rather than create sustainable, long-term plans for instruction. At the university level, the neoliberal paradigm of education has compelled faculty to prioritize the student consumer experience which has exacerbated nearly ubiquitous feelings of burnout.

The politics of school closures and the early mishandling of the crisis lie outside the scope of this paper. What is relevant to the current discussion, however, is the question of when, if ever, these expectations of faculty will expire. While the ongoing rollout of COVID-19 vaccines presents the possibility of a return to normalcy in the coming year, the long-term effects of the pandemic on our paradigm of higher education remain unclear. Put differently, now that colleges and universities have experimented with large-scale remote and hybrid forms of instruction, it may be difficult to “un-ring the bell” and fully return to the pre-pandemic paradigm, which was not itself without problems. Nonetheless, I am concerned with the ways in which the ongoing and evolving COVID-19 crisis—by necessitating various iterations of remote instruction—will accelerate the neoliberal, techno-rationalization of schooling, and particularly, the university.² Specifically, I see the mechanisms of EdTech as advancing neoliberal conceptions of schooling by facilitating standardized forms of instruction that align university teaching more closely to market values of consumer satisfaction, predictability, and scalability rather than with democratic values that we might historically associate with higher education. As higher education scrambles to navigate the pandemic while remaining financially viable, philosophical, pedagogical, and ethical questions are often jettisoned in favor of economic considerations. While, generally speaking, faculty were permitted leeway immediately following the disruption of moving to fully remote instruction, as plans take shape for the post-pandemic university, there is a risk that many institutions will see this as an opportunity to further implement measures of standardization, accountability, and control that will accelerate the techno-rationalization of teaching. To ground my argument, I examine the proliferation of Quality Matters (QM), an educational “quality assurance organization,” that has gained traction in recent years by helping institutions to “deliver” on their “online promise” by attaining a Quality Matters Certification by developing a series of highly standardized courses.³ In this way, QM capitulates to neoliberal logic by advancing the idea that higher education ought to be oriented toward tidy, predictable consumer experiences, rather than around opportunities for criticality, diversity, or productive discomfort. As such, I argue that initiatives such as QM must be understood as part of the techno-rationalization of higher education and suggest that such programs warrant attentive scrutiny as plans take shape for post-pandemic university.

² See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

³ See Quality Matters, “Helping You Deliver on Your Online Promise,” <https://www.qualitymatters.org/>

NEOLIBERALISM, EDTECH, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The ongoing economic rationalization of the university has been widely documented.⁴ As Adrianna Kezar, Tom DePaola, and Daniel T. Scott note, “[f]or at least two decades, scholars and commentators have been sounding the alarm around the threat of neoliberal restructuring, exhorting all who will listen to consider what stands to be lost when corporate higher education takes over.”⁵ Indeed, austerity and accountability policies strain universities and all in their employ as they continue to grapple with decreased enrollment and shrinking resources. Even before the pandemic, technology had been key to facilitating many of these neoliberal reforms. For example, the use of technology to expand the consumer base of higher education has been a strategy since at least the proliferation of massive open online courses (MOOCs) in the early 2000s.⁶ As universities strive to increase enrollment through appeals to convenience, faculty have in recent years been encouraged and, in many cases, financially incentivized to move courses to hybrid or fully online formats.⁷ The trouble here is that as aspects of teaching move into digital spaces, they become increasingly vulnerable to institutional mechanisms of standardization, control, capture, and commodification. A key outgrowth of such trends is the grooming of faculty into adopting highly standardized modes of instruction. As Herbert Marcuse warned as early as 1941 in his essay “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology:”

Technology, as a mode of production, as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterize the

⁴ See, for example, Adrianna Kezar, Tom DePaola, and Daniel T. Scott, *The Gig Academy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019); Gabriel Keehn, Morgan Anderson, & Deron Boyles, “Neoliberalism, Technology, and the University: Max Weber’s Concept of Rationalization as a Critique of Online Classes in Higher Education,” in *Contemporary Philosophical Proposals for the University*, eds. Aaron Stoller & Eli Kramer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 47-66; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (1976; repr. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011); Kenneth Saltman, “The Austerity School: Grit, Character, and the Privatization of Public Education,” *Symploke* 22, no. 1-2 (2014): 41-57.

⁵ Kezar et al., *The Gig Academy*, 13.

⁶ For a discussion of MOOCs and the neoliberal university see Robert A. Rhoads, Maria Sayil Camacho, Brit Toven-Lindsey, and Jennifer Berdan Lozano, “The Massive Open Online Movement, xMOOCs, and Faculty Labor,” *The Review of Higher Education* 38, no. 3 (2015): 397-424.

⁷ See, for example, Mark Liberman, “Overcoming Faculty Resistance—Or Not,” *Inside HigherEd*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2018/03/14/experts-offer-advice-convincing-faculty-members-teach-online-or>; “Online Learning at Public Universities: Recruiting, Orienting, and Supporting Online Faculty,” *American Association of State Colleges and Universities* (2019), <https://www.aascu.org/CorporatePartnership/LearningHouse/OnlineLearning.pdf>.

machine age is thus at the same time a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination.⁸

In other words, for Marcuse, the logics of technical efficiency become a hegemonic rationality that encompasses all aspects of life and social relations.⁹ These “mechanics of conformity,” for Marcuse, undermine the individual’s autonomy and ability to confront the logics of capitalism, becoming what he would later call a “one-dimensional man.”¹⁰ Thus, as technology is increasingly utilized to standardize instruction in the neoliberal university, the intellectual and pedagogical autonomy of faculty—as well as faculty’s ability to resist such initiatives—are eroded. While it is typically best to avoid anachronistic modes of analysis, Marcuse’s writing in the early half of the twentieth century presents an interesting twist on contemporary theorizing surrounding the relationship between the individual and neoliberalism. Hyper-individualism is frequently cited as an ontological antecedent to neoliberal relations that obscure our ability to collectively resist oppressive capitalist conditions. Here, Marcuse suggests that it is precisely the *erosion of individuality* through technological efficiency that undermines the critical rationality that is productive of dissent and autonomy. As I discuss in further detail in what follows, we might understand technology and technologically-mediated forms of instruction as central mechanisms through which neoliberal rationalization, standardization, and the remaking of teaching is made possible. Highly standardized modes of instruction and the pedagogies of efficiency that are encouraged through the hardware and software of EdTech work to eliminate faculty’s creative pedagogic autonomy. For example, as discussed in what follows, initiatives such as QM that are facilitated by the mechanisms of EdTech such as Learning Management Systems groom faculty into adopting standardized modes of instruction that adhere to market conceptions of education. In this way, the potential for faculty members to exert creative control over features such as assessment, course design, or

⁸ Herbert Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” in *Technology, War, and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume One*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 1998), 41.

⁹ Some scholars, particularly those writing in the tradition of autonomist Marxism, have leveraged critique against this type of technological determinism that was characteristic of thinkers in the Frankfurt School. For such a critique see Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 38-61.

¹⁰ See Douglas Kellner, “Introduction: Technology, War, and Fascism: Marcuse in the 1940s” in Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War, and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume One*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 1998), 5 and Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideological of Advanced Industrial Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1991).

instructional materials is increasingly eroded. Here, Marcuse’s understanding of technology as a form of domination can be seen in such trends in higher education. As Graham Slater and C. Bradford Griggs put the point, “neoliberal schooling is at its core an ontological struggle over subjectivity—our understandings of ourselves, our relationship to others, and the social, political, and ecological contexts in which we are cast—and thus it must be countered on equally profound theoretical and political grounds.”¹¹ Such points underscore what is at stake for faculty in the post-pandemic university. In what follows, I turn to Quality Matters to explore the ways in which QM supports the technologicalization of the university.

QUALITY MATTERS, AND MATTERS OF QUALITY & PEDAGOGY

Quality Matters as it exists today grew out of a project through MarylandOnline, a “voluntary consortium of community colleges and universities in Maryland” about twenty years ago.¹² At the time, this network of educators was working on the front lines of the emerging trend of online, distance education and were concerned about developing best practices in the field of remote instruction. In 2003, MarylandOnline received a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), allowing for the development of QM from 2003–2006. According to Kay Shattuck, one of the architects of QM, this grant laid the groundwork for MarylandOnline to “develop a sharable, replicable, scalable program for quality assurances of online course design.”¹³ QM offers institutions paid memberships to have online courses developed to become QM-certified, as well as offers institutions the ability to have entire programs certified for quality. According to the QM website, “[p]aid membership provides access to a secure system that includes review tools for guiding the process and achieving quality assurance goals. Coupled with the appropriate Rubric Standards, our unique, expert peer review system uses collaboration and targeted feedback to assess quality.”¹⁴ QM has consistently expanded its influence over the last several decades with the rise in online course offerings across higher education. Indeed, in 2010, Shattuck reported that more than 365 subscribing institutions were affiliated with QM. Just a decade later, QM has over 1,300 member institutions and has certified over 10,000 courses.¹⁵

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, QM has continued to rise in popularity as colleges and universities seek ways to provide students with educative online learning experiences. While we can—and should—have

¹¹ Graham B. Slater and C. Bradford Griggs, “Standardization and Subjection: An Autonomist Critique of Neoliberal School Reform,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, no. 5 (2015): 439.

¹² Kay Shattuck, “MarylandOnline Celebrating on 20 Productive Years!,” *American Journal of Distance Education* 33, no. 1 (2019): 151.

¹³ Shattuck, “MarylandOnline,” 151.

¹⁴ www.qualitymatters.org/.

¹⁵ www.qualitymatters.org/.

normative debates about the role of online instruction in higher education, the idea that universities want these online experiences to be of high quality is not at issue. Rather, the issue is twofold: First, QM functions as both a mechanism of rhetorical and ideological control by setting the parameters for what “quality” pedagogy looks like. Secondly, as more aspects of coursework move online or are hybridized in the post-pandemic university, there is a risk that more aspects of pedagogy will fall under the parameters of initiatives such as QM that utilize neoliberal logics to standardize instruction. Put differently, it matters how quality is defined, by whom, and to what end. In what follows, I explore some of the key issues with QM as a program for assessing course quality, as well as discuss the potential long-term implications of such initiatives on the future of higher education.

The most salient issue with “Quality Matters” is that it discursively and ideologically grooms faculty into adopting a highly standardized approach to instruction. By positioning educational “quality” as an *a priori* given, and aligning this vision of quality with neoliberal values of consumer satisfaction and product consistency, QM forecloses possibilities for faculty to exert creative and pedagogic control while framing teaching that is resistant to standardization as not being of high quality. The Higher Education Rubric used by Quality Matters to assess course quality follows a highly prescribed, instrumental approach to instruction that prioritizes measurable learning outcomes over authentic inquiry.¹⁶ For example, the rubric notes that “course learning objectives” must “describe outcomes that are measurable.” Here, the reduction of education to a series of discrete outcomes—in tandem with the prioritizing of only that which is measurable—discourages both students and faculty from embracing and valuing the less tidy, more holistic aspects of teaching and learning. A course that receives an overall score of 85 percent of the possible points on the Higher Education Rubric is eligible for QM certification at participating universities. What is most troubling about the Higher Education Rubric is that, according to QM, online as well as blended and hybrid forms of instruction might be eligible for QM certification. While QM does not currently assess the face-to-face components of blended learning, courses with up to 75 percent face-to-face meetings could have QM applied to the online portion of the course.¹⁷ In the post-pandemic university, the reach of such initiatives has the potential to expand greatly as hybrid and blended coursework increase in popularity.

Additionally, drawing on the work of Denise Chalmers and Shannon Johnston, Kay Shattuck notes in her preface to *Assuring Quality in Online*

¹⁶ See Quality Matters, *Higher Education Rubric, Sixth Edition*, April 10, 2021, <https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/QM-Higher-Ed-Sixth-Edition-Specific-Review-Standards-Accessible.pdf>.

¹⁷ See Quality Matters, “To Which Course Formats Can QM Rubrics be Applied?” April, 10, 2021, <https://www.qualitymatters.org/qm-membership/faqs/course-format-chart>.

Education: Practices and Processes at the Teaching, Resource, and Program Levels, that “quality in education is about excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation...Those dimensions capture outcomes, continuous processes, the many types of consumers of education, financial accountability, and acquisition and application of knowledge.”¹⁸ Furthermore, QM frames educational quality around the production of data that can be captured through technologically-mediated forms of instruction. As Sebastián Díaz, Wallace Boston, Melissa Layne, and Phil Ice argue:

Some may argue that in some instances the personalized face-to-face feedback students receive in a traditional classroom is of much higher quality than that received through an online LMS...For those concerned with quality, however, what is important here is that the LMS actually creates tangible, electronic record of these interactions, thus allowing researchers to more easily analyze the data on a larger scale.¹⁹

Here, the Quality Matters paradigm reduces education to the production of data points that are captured utilizing Learning Management Systems (LMS)—another phrase that ought to give educators pause. In other words, quality and value become conflated with quantifiable and measurable. As more courses come online—a trend that is increasing in a time of budgetary crises and enrollment concerns—it becomes sensible under neoliberal logic to standardize the delivery of courses as a way to improve the quality of the product for consumers. Under this logic, as Ernst D. Thoutenhoofd puts it, “both the idea and the practice of learning risk becoming data products.”²⁰

The role that Learning Management Systems play in facilitating this sort of standardization and data-fication is concerning. Particularly in the wake of COVID-19, nearly all faculty are now encouraged—or effectively required—to utilize an LMS for some portion of their courses. However, platforms such as Blackboard or 2U are structured around certain principles that foreclose possibilities for critical pedagogies. For example, many LMS require faculty to attach points to assignments as a default setting, which makes possibilities for encouraging students to think critically about points and assessments more difficult. Providing students feedback on assignments is rendered more

¹⁸ Kay Shattuck, “Preface,” in *Assuring Quality in Online Education: Practices and Processes at the Teaching, Resource, and Program Levels*, ed. Kay Shattuck (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2014), xv.

¹⁹ Sebastián Díaz, Wallace Boston, Melissa Layne, and Phil Ice, “Using Principles of Knowledge Management for Educational Quality Assurance,” in *Assuring Quality in Online Education: Practices and Processes at the Teaching, Resource, and Program Levels*, ed. Kay Shattuck (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2014), 217.

²⁰ Ernst D. Thoutenhoofd, “The Datafication of Learning: Data Technologies as Reflection Issue in the System of Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 37, no. 1 (2017): 434.

impersonal; rather than marking a paper and handing it back to a student which can more closely resemble a dialogue, the instructor submits comments into what feels like a digital void. Rather than sit thoughtfully with students’ ideas, the LMS interface encourages the instructor to proceed efficiently to the next assignment, often with large arrow buttons that call out to be clicked. In these digital spaces, authentic dialogue is often cheapened by asynchronous posting, where performing for the instructor and “getting credit” takes priority over a humane exchange of ideas that promote deeper understandings. Rather than the extemporaneous, vulnerable, and fleeting nature of in-person dialogue that is frequently productive of building relationships and working through nascent ideas, digital repositories of student comments on LMS interfaces are reduced to an impersonal, performative activity for “points.” Such activity often lends itself to situations where students are expressing their ideas in a unidirectional manner for instructor approval, rather than toward an exchange of ideas. Furthermore, the QM rubric states with regard to “learner interaction” that “the instructor’s plan for interacting with learners during the course is clearly stated” and that “the requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated.”²¹ Here, the reach of standardization extends to one of the most basic human activities—engagement with others—while reducing this concept to discrete, measurable “interactions.” Additionally, many of these platforms keep highly specific data points on students—including how long they view particular course materials—creating ethically dubious opportunities for student surveillance.

Complicating issues surrounding surveillance, many institutions now advise faculty to record class sessions that are conducted via teleconferencing platforms, and some remote programs capture and archive all course sessions as a general practice.²² Furthermore, the proprietary nature of the course material once it is captured by the LMS is not always clear. While creative pedagogues may find ways to limit the influence of the structure of such technology on their practice, the organization of these platforms and interfaces groom educators into a paradigm of content delivery that adheres to principles of neoliberal, technorationality. As teaching moves into digital spaces, it becomes more susceptible to such forms of capture, commodification, and control. In these ways, technology functions as a homogenizing force, supported by initiatives such as QM, that seeks to render all teaching standardized—what Marcuse might call a “one-dimensional teacher.” Next, I explore the ways in which QM deploys the logic of “best practices” to create highly instrumental, scalable, and standardized courses.

²¹ See Quality Matters, *Higher Education Rubric, Sixth Edition*, April 10, 2021, <https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/QM-Higher-Ed-Sixth-Edition-Specific-Review-Standards-Accessible.pdf>.

²² See, for example, “Teaching with Zoom,” *University of Nevada, Reno*, <https://www.unr.edu/tlt/instructional-design/instructional-technology-resources/web-conferencing/zoom/best-practices>.

QUALITY MATTERS AND THE LOGIC OF BEST PRACTICES

A defining feature of QM is its leveraging of the best practices discourse. While philosophers of education have rightly criticized the notion of educational best practices, the framing of best practices within the context of online education adds several layers of complexity. First, technology often enjoys the reputation of being ideologically neutral. When EdTech is framed as merely a set of neutral tools, the ideological and philosophical implications of technology become obscured, rendering the “best practices” discourse more difficult to challenge. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic compelled a near universal shift to remote forms of instruction overnight. Many faculty were thrust out of their comfort zone and remain eager to find ways to utilize technology in ways that support their teaching. The concern here, however, is that the internal logic of best practices makes pedagogical and philosophical problems more difficult to discern and challenge. Indeed, as Wendy Brown notes with regard to best practices, “the normative work they do is achieved in part by this ostensibly generic applicability, by their emergence from the combination of consensus and objective research, and by their formally neutral status as practices, rather than purposes or missions. Best practices can be effectively contested only by postulating better practices, not by objecting to what they promulgate.”²³

Quality Matters is one such example. However, countless workshops currently being offered across higher education work to groom faculty into adopting highly standardized instruction for online and hybrid pedagogies that erode possibilities for professional judgment and risk undermining the ability of faculty to exercise creative and pedagogic control. The concern here is that as these rapid changes in instruction are taking place, faculty become more vulnerable to adopting prescribed practices as they navigate uncertain teaching terrain. Collaborating with colleagues to exchange ideas and find solutions to problems presented by adapting coursework to online and hybrid formats need not turn into scalable and highly prescribed modes of instruction. In my experience, these professional development opportunities are rarely, if ever, focused on the pedagogical and philosophical dilemmas presented by EdTech. Rather, they are often aimed at merely getting faculty accustomed to utilizing and implementing what are framed as the neutral tools available to them. As we look ahead to the post-pandemic university, these are the areas I see as opportunities for philosophical intervention.

PATHWAYS FOR RESISTANCE

The financial crisis across higher education that was precipitated by the pandemic is likely to have ripple effects for years to come. Here in Iowa alone, the three central public universities estimated a \$187 million loss as a direct

²³ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 132.

²³ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 136.

result of the pandemic.²⁴ Considering the trends in remote and hybrid forms of instruction in the years preceding the crisis, it is ironic that in-person instruction has become the focus for maintaining student enrollment. While remote and hybrid forms of instruction may have functioned as a stopgap during the height of the virus, in-person coursework remains the bread and butter of many institutions. While this would require capitulating to neoliberal logic, the value of face-to-face instruction that has been underscored during this time may provide inroads for faculty to assert the importance of in-person coursework in years to come.

As an educator and scholar who remains deeply concerned about the relationship between educational technology and the economic rationalization of schooling, this has been a time of ongoing tension. After all, technology has been the thread holding our educational system together and keeping students and teachers safe throughout this time. On the other hand, I am troubled by the speed at which the landscape of P-12 and higher education has changed and maintain that we should be thinking ahead to the long-term implications of these changes. We, of course, want to serve our students in the present but ought to remain cautious of the longstanding impacts of such concessions on the future. I have been heartened to see that amidst this crisis, the value of in-person, low-tech educational spaces has been reinforced for so many. This, I believe, will present additional opportunities for resisting technological impositions in the future.

LOOKING AHEAD

While scholars have leveraged critiques of technologically mediated forms of instruction since their inception, until recently, online instruction was generally understood as a *distinct category of educational practice*. However, the rapid, totalizing shift to fully remote instruction in the Spring of 2020, followed by the phasing in of hybrid and blended forms of instruction over the course of the last year, left the boundaries between in-person and online instruction blurred. Whether to adapt aspects of their courses to allow for social distancing or to accommodate remote attendance, nearly all faculty are utilizing technology in unprecedented ways. Even for those like myself who have been teaching courses that meet in person, faculty are having to simultaneously adapt many aspects of these courses for students who are in isolation or permit students to attend remotely via teleconferencing platforms. In other words, any previous distinction that existed between in-person and online instruction is increasingly eroding. For example, before the virus, it was fairly common for faculty teaching in-person courses to have very little if any component of their classes online, including records such as attendance and grades. At the risk of speculating, it seems unlikely that we will return to a time where this techno-avoidance will be

²⁴ See Charles Flesher, “Iowa’s Public Universities Expect to Lose \$187 Million as Result of the Coronavirus Pandemic,” *The Des Moines Register*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/education/2020/04/30/iowa-public-universities-expect-187-million-loss-coronavirus-shutdown/3057983001/>

possible or even permissible. Long-term, this raises questions surrounding what will constitute online instruction, and consequently, which types of courses should be subjected to programs like Quality Matters.

To be clear, we can and *should* use this opportunity to consider which of the changes we have recently made (e.g., conducting routine departmental business remotely) that are worth adopting long-term. It is equally important, however, that we have ongoing debates surrounding which practices should be left behind. Although it is difficult to imagine now, the magnitude and scope of the current crisis will eventually recede. What should be of concern to us, however, as philosophers of education, is questions surrounding what education will look like on the other side. As digital technologies become increasingly ubiquitous, pedagogical and philosophical problems with such technology are rendered more difficult to discern and challenge. However, we must advance the idea that philosophical and pedagogical considerations should precede, not follow, widespread adoption of new technologies. If, on Marcuse's view, technology has the capacity to fundamentally reorganize our social relationships, the ability to reshape how we understand the world, and the potential to function as a system of control and domination, it is critically important that we take seriously recent trends in educational practice. A central concern is that such technologies more deeply entrench the student-teacher relationship in a consumer-service provider paradigm that reshapes teaching as a technocratic exercise in content delivery, scorekeeping, accountancy, and surveillance. As such, as we look ahead to the post-pandemic university, we must engage in appropriately normative, philosophical discussions surrounding the role of technology in teaching and learning and the trajectory of standardization in higher education.
