

## Education

### One Class, One Penn?

*The leader of a whirlwind effort to organize a popular online course about the pandemic suggests “we don’t need a crisis to do this.”*

**I**t wasn’t the way Mauro Guillen would have chosen to spend the spring of his sabbatical year, but when campus closed down in

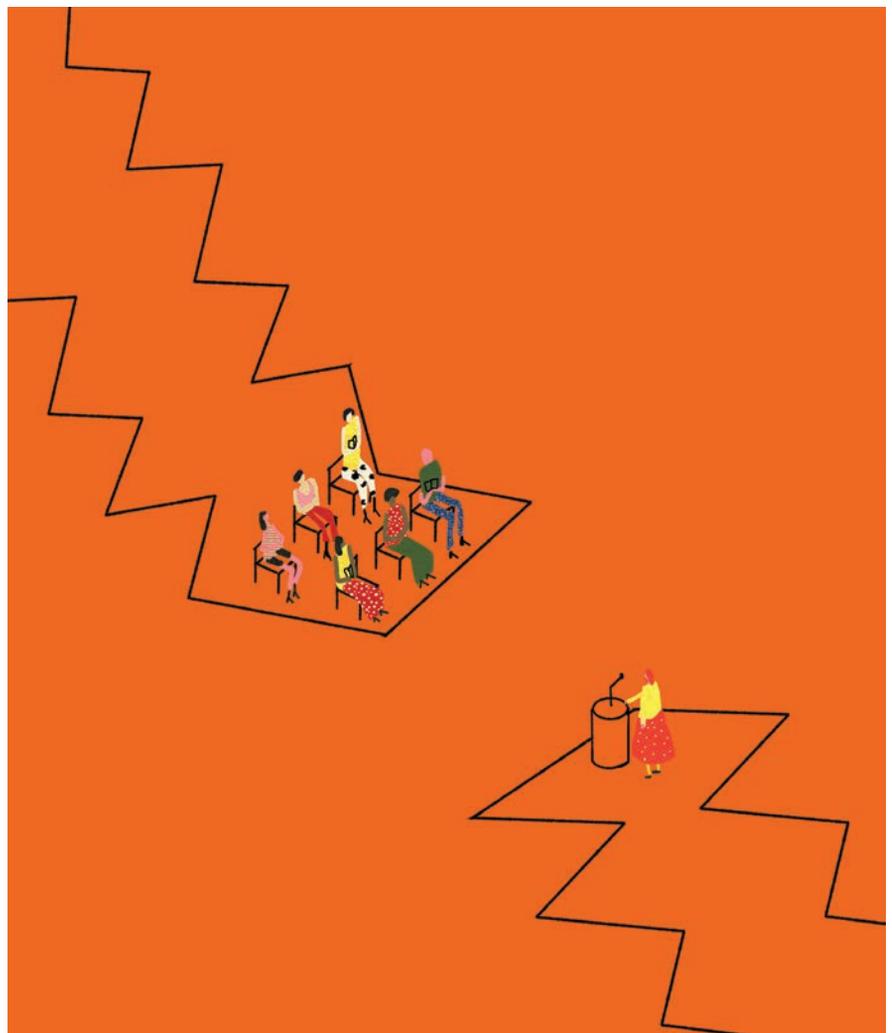
#### DISTANCE LEARNING

March the Zandman Professor of International Management was at least not otherwise occupied

when the Wharton School called on him to develop a six-week online course in which various faculty members would analyze the public health, political, and economic ramifications of major disruptions like the novel coronavirus [*“Gazetteer,”* May|Jun 2020].

“It was actually good, because I didn’t have any other teaching commitments that would interfere,” Guillen said in early May, with classes finished but grading still in process. “So I returned from sabbatical, so to speak, and I’ve been doing this for the last six weeks pretty much full time. I mean, it’s been really, really intense.”

Guillen was trained as a sociologist and is an expert on globalization, the subject of his forthcoming book *2030: How Today’s Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything* (look for more about that in our Sep|Oct issue). He’s also a “big supporter” of online education who has been teaching on platforms like Coursera and through Wharton Online, which offers a certificate program that mirrors the MBA core curriculum, going back to when the acronym MOOC (for massive open online course) was current [*“MOOC U,”* Mar|Apr 2013]. His course on global trends in business and society has been taken by 5,500 people around the world, he says, and another, “Managing in the Global Digital Economy” recently launched.



“It’s a mistake to think about online education and all the different ways we can deliver it as a substitute for classroom education. The two in the future will coexist one way or another,” he said. “I think there are a lot of synergies between classroom teaching and online teaching.” He added that the discipline required of online classes—where lectures must be pre-recorded, immediate audience feedback is lacking, and students are often much more diverse in background—can sharpen traditional classroom technique as well.

Guillen professed himself satisfied that the spring course, “Epidemics, Natural Disasters, and Geopolitics: Managing Global Business and Financial Uncertainty,” delivered on its main goals of featuring faculty expertise on a critical issue, offering students the opportunity to earn credit when many study trips had been cancelled, and reaching new

audiences beyond campus. “So far, so good,” he said. “We are done with the class, but the students are writing their papers now. But I think yes—essentially, mission accomplished.”

At the time, Guillen said he was still fielding 80-120 emails a day from students, who were working on their final papers in teams of three or four. There were 20 teaching assistants assigned to the course, and students were also doing peer evaluations of other teams’ work. “And then I will go over all of that and make the final determination,” he said. “But we’re engaging them not just as writers of papers, but also reviewing other student’s papers.”

Because of time zone differences, schedule conflicts, and other issues, about half of the students attended class in real time while the rest watched a recording. “But for those following it live, we enabled the Q&A feature” online, he said. “We had two mod-

erators who would feed me the questions, and then I would ask the faculty member. So in each lecture we would probably handle about 30 questions from the audience, which is not bad considering the numbers.”

About 2,500 people participated in the class, including 500 or so auditors. “To put things in perspective, that’s about 11 percent or 12 percent of Penn students,” Guillen said. “It was a big experiment.”

He also suggested that it could be a model for future courses built around a key topic with broad appeal. “Under certain circumstances, to go fully online like we did in this class—out of necessity, of course—makes sense if you want to deliver something really quick to a lot of people,” he said. “Even once we no longer have social distancing, at some point in the future, I think there’s a need for these kinds of classes at Penn.”

Drawing an analogy with the Philadelphia Free Library’s One Book, One Philadelphia program, he suggested there could be an annual One Class, One Penn. “People can take it for half a credit, we get 2,000 people taking it every year, and the topic rotates. Using this technology we can do it in a way that everybody can participate,” he said. “I think that’s for me the biggest potential. We don’t need a crisis to do this. We can do this during so-called normal times as well.” —JP

## Trading Places

*Higher education’s future may be a hybrid of online and in-person learning.*

When Robert Zemsky was a boy in Tucson, Arizona, in the 1940s, a burgeoning baby boom meant there wasn’t enough space in the local schools—which managed by instituting split sessions.

### EDUCATION ECONOMY

America’s campuses, he says now, might need to consider something similar to cope with coronavirus. Half the students could be assigned to remote learning for a few weeks, after which they’d trade places with the other half.

Currently a senior scholar at Penn GSE’s Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy, Zemsky joined the faculty in 1964 and gained firsthand knowledge of the issues facing campuses as the University’s chief planning officer and master of Hill College House. For 20 years, he was the founding director of the University’s Institute for Research on Higher Education.

He’s in demand lately because of the pandemic—and because, by coincidence, he and two coauthors have just come out with a relevant new book. *The College Stress Test: Tracking Institutional Futures Across a Crowded Market* was written with Susan Shaman, Penn’s former director of institutional research, and Susan Campbell Baldrige, a former provost at Middlebury College.

From his home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where his dogs raucously announced the arrival of a FedEx delivery, Zemsky sat for a Zoom interview with *Gazette* contributor Daniel Akst C’78 on the future of higher education in the time of coronavirus.

### How did you come to study the higher education marketplace?

Forty years ago I was Martin Meyerson’s faculty assistant when he was the University’s president, and he would ask me questions to which I had no answers. So I went and figured out the market. At least a third of my career has been doing market analysis of higher education, and after a while I got pretty good at it.

In February we brought out *The College Stress Test*. We were interested in how many institutions were really likely to close, and the answer we came up with is: a lot fewer than most people were imagining.

### What was the state of affairs before the pandemic? In your book you said one in 10 colleges were at serious risk.

The rich were getting richer and the big were getting bigger. And that’s a classic description of Penn. But if you were a private institution with less than 1,500 students, you ought to worry. If you were

also in the Midwest, you should worry. And if you had been cutting your price trying to keep enrollment and it wasn’t working, you should really worry. Yes, 10 percent were likely to close. But they only account for 2 percent of enrollment. For their communities, it’s sad, the way it was a loss for some towns when military bases closed. But it is not about the whole academic enterprise.

### OK, that was pre-coronavirus. How does the pandemic change things?

One of the things that happened in early March was that a whole lot of authority passed out of the institutions. Public officials began to determine what was going on, and it has been that way ever since. By late April it was clear the disease was not going away. I actually have a mini roundtable of college presidents. We convene in a Zoom zone every Sunday afternoon. One of the presidents said, “You want to know the sad news in a nutshell? We’re all going to learn to live with disease and death.”

### And the implications for campuses in trouble?

It’s not 10 percent anymore, it’s 20 percent. If the pandemic forces the cancellation of the coming academic year, those schools may never come back. Those institutions are losing enrollment, but they’re also getting less cash per student. They’re cutting prices and getting less volume. You can’t survive that way.

### But will most schools reopen in September?

Oh, yes. They say, “We have no choice. We’re opening.” Originally everybody said everything will get cleaned up and we can have a normal fall. There isn’t anybody expecting a normal fall now. Now what they are thinking about is, how do we open under social distancing? All of them run dorms with doubles, some with triples. How are they going to operate in that world?

In the late 1940s when I was in elementary school, they didn’t have nearly enough