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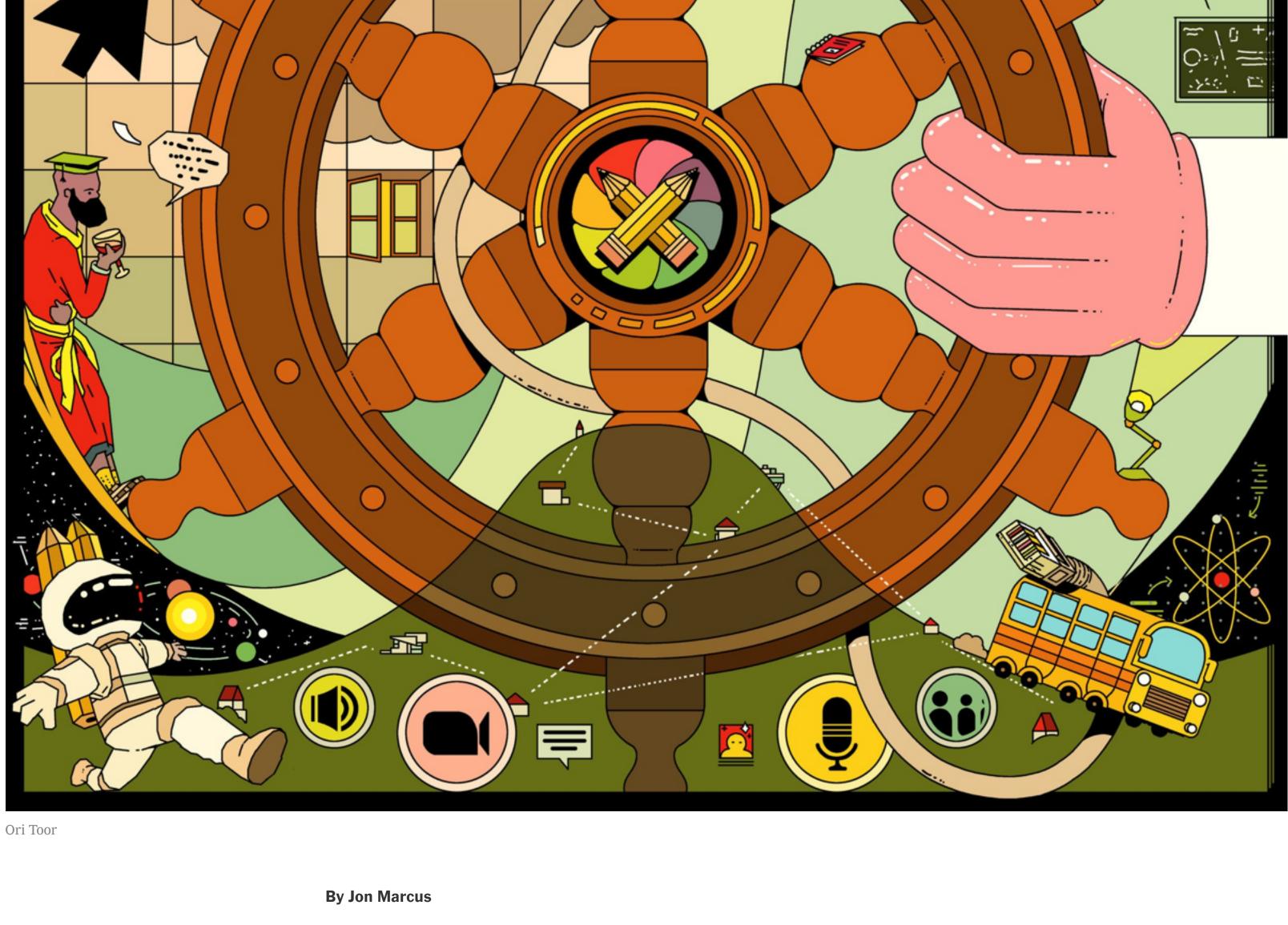






## Will the Coronavirus Forever Alter the College Experience? The answer so far appears to be no. But some online education

tools are likely to stick around.



outbreak.

checkerboards.

graduate degree.

April 23, 2020

A professor at Loyola University New Orleans taught his first virtual class from his courtyard, wearing a bathrobe and sipping

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from a glass of wine. Faculty at Lafayette College, in Easton, Penn., trained in making document cameras at home using cardboard and rubber bands.

This article is part of our latest <u>Learning special report</u>, which

focuses on the challenges of online education during the coronavirus

ingenious at colleges and universities struggling to continue teaching even as their students have receded into diminutive images, in dire need of haircuts, on videoconference

But while all of this is widely being referred to as online higher

education, that's not really what most of it is, at least so far. As for

predictions that it will trigger a permanent exodus from brick-and-

mortar campuses to virtual classrooms, all indications are that it

probably won't. "What we are talking about when we talk about online education is using digital technologies to transform the learning experience," said Vijay Govindarajan, a professor at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business. "That is not what is happening right now. What is happening now is we had eight days to put everything we do in

These trends may not transform higher education, but they are likely to accelerate the integration of technology into it. This semester "has the potential to raise expectations of using these online resources to complement what we were doing before, in an evolutionary way, not a revolutionary way," said Eric Fredericksen, associate vice president for online learning at the

training and collaboration with instructional designers, and often requires student orientation and support and a complex

"Not surprisingly, when we really do this, it does take more than

seven or eight days," Dr. Fredericksen said wryly.

If anything, what people are mistaking now for online education long class meetings in videoconference rooms, professors in their bathrobes, do-it-yourself tools made of rubber bands and cardboard — appears to be making them less, not more, open to it.

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Undergraduates already seemed lukewarm toward virtual higher education; only about 20 percent took even one online course in the fall of 2018, the consulting firm **Eduventures** estimates. If they didn't like that, they definitely don't like what they're

said in December that they were open to taking even some of their college courses online, Eduventures reported; by the end of March, after some had experienced virtual instruction from their shutdown high schools, fewer than one in 10 polled by niche.com

Sentiments like these suggest there's little likelihood that students

will desert their real-world campuses for cyberspace en masse. In

fact, if there's a silver lining in this situation for residential colleges

said they would consider online college classes.

Among college-bound high school seniors, <u>fewer than a quarter</u>

cultural diversions, libraries, athletics, extracurricular activities, in-person office hours and social interaction with their classmates. "The beauty of a residential education has never been more apparent to people," said Michael Roth, the president of Wesleyan University. But advocates for true online instruction say that students' experience of taking courses on their own schedules over mobile

platforms may come back to them later, when they're ready to

Online higher education "is a thin diet for the typical 18-year-old,"

"But today's 18-year-olds are tomorrow's 28-year-olds with families

said Richard Garrett, the chief research officer at Eduventures.

move on to graduate or professional educations.

and jobs, who then realize that online can be useful."

more education or training after this pandemic say they would do it online, according to a survey of 1,000 people by the Strada Education Network, which advocates connections between

If there's anyone who's banking on this, it's the ed-tech sector. More than 70 percent of such companies have been offering products and services to schools and colleges free or at steep discounts this semester, anticipating sales later, according to the consulting firm Productive.

John Rogers, education sector lead at the \$5 billion Rise Fund, which is managed by the asset company TPG and invests in ed tech. "That really is the difference-maker. The pace of adoption of those tools will accelerate."

"Administrators and educators are reframing their attitudes," said

did can be substituted with technology and what part can be complemented by technology to transform higher education?'"

Faculty, he said, will ask themselves, "'What part of what we just

Universities should consider this semester an experiment to see

which classes were most effectively delivered online, he said — big

introductory courses better taught through video-recorded lectures

Hamilton College, in Clinton, N.Y., set up drive-up Wi-Fi stations for faculty members whose connections weren't reliable enough to let them upload material to the internet. And students in a musicology course at Virginia Tech were assigned to create TikTok videos. The disruption caused by the <u>coronavirus pandemic</u> has prompted cobbled-together responses ranging from the absurd to the

class onto Zoom." There will be some important lasting impacts, though, experts say: Faculty may incorporate online tools, to which many are being exposed for the first time, into their conventional classes. And students are experiencing a flexible type of learning they may not

like as undergraduates, but could return to when it's time to get a

includes such features as continual assessments so they can jump ahead as soon as they've mastered a skill, Dr. Fredericksen and others said. Conceiving, planning, designing and developing a genuine online course or program can consume as much as a year of faculty

University of Rochester. "That's the more permanent impact."

Real online education lets students move at their own pace and

**Learning: A Special Report** More on the challenges of online education.

Teachers and Students Describe a Remote-Learning

"The pessimistic view is that [students] are going to hate it and

never want to do this again, because all they're doing is using Zoom to reproduce everything that's wrong with traditional passive, teacher-centered modes of teaching," said Bill Cope, a professor of education policy, organization and leadership at the Sign up to receive an email when we publish a new story about the

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getting this semester. More than 75 percent said they don't think they're receiving a quality learning experience, according to a survey of nearly 1,300 students by the online exam-prep provider **OneClass**. In a separate poll of 14,000 college and graduate students in early April by the website niche.com, which rates schools and colleges, <u>67 percent</u> said they didn't find online classes as effective as in-person ones.

and universities, it's that students no longer take for granted the everyday realities of campus life: low-tech face-to-face classes,

Already, more than half of American adults who expect to need education and work.

It isn't entirely students who will move this needle, observers say. It's also faculty.

Even those who had long avoided going online have had to do it

this semester, in some form or other. And they may have the most

to learn from the experience, said Michael Moe, chief executive of

GSV Asset Management, which focuses on education technology.

Along with their students, faculty were "thrown into the deep end

of the pool for digital learning and asked to swim," Mr. Moe said.

"Some will sink, some will crawl to the edge of the pool and climb

out and they'll never go back in the pool ever again. But many will

figure out what to do and how to kick and how to stay afloat."

<u>Cengage</u>, for example, is providing free subscriptions to its online textbooks, and says it has seen a 55 percent increase in the number of students who have signed up for one. <u>Coursera</u> is providing 550 colleges and universities with free access to its online courses.

People resist new ideas until external shocks force them to change, said Dr. Govindarajan, who cites as an example the way World War II propelled women into jobs that had traditionally been done by

men. "We are at that kind of inflection point."

by faculty stars and with online textbooks, for example, which could be shared among institutions to lower the cost. Students who want classes best provided face to face, such as those in the performing arts or that require lab work, would continue to take them that way. "Let's take advantage of this moment to start a larger

conversation" about the whole design of higher education, Dr.

This article was published in cooperation with <u>The Hechinger Report</u>, a nonprofit news organization that covers education. Sign up for its newsletter.

"We had better not lose this opportunity."

Govindarajan said.

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