

## THE PROBLEM

For most Americans, college is no longer working. A bachelor's degree doesn't reliably guarantee what universities say it delivers: an investment that prepares you for the workplace and the world. While the income gap between college and high school grads is well documented, the wealth gap is "indistinguishable from zero" due to unconstrained costs, regardless of race or ethnicity. Put differently, college grads will earn more but because of their student loans, they'll have the same amount in their bank account as someone who didn't go to college at all<sup>1</sup>. Barely one in ten (11%) business leaders believe that college graduates have the skills and competencies that their workplaces need<sup>2</sup>. Instead, employers report recent hires showing up without the requisite skills required to contribute as productive employees<sup>3</sup>.

Traditional universities spend more on non-instructional initiatives like research and athletics instead of developing knowledge and skills that prepare its students. Today, 1M students annually report that they didn't enroll or they dropped out of college because of the cost<sup>4</sup>. Americans carry \$1.8T in student loan debt while universities have *increased* the cost of tuition by 30-40%<sup>5</sup> since 2010. Economists report that over the next ten years, businesses will have increasingly more job openings for college graduates with no adequate supply<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, as artificial intelligence threatens jobs across industries, humans will be pushed up or out – up to more intellectually intensive and integrative roles, or out of the workforce altogether. Our nation's economy needs a sustainable, accessible, and effective approach to college if we're to compete globally.

## THE SOLUTION

Polymath University will produce **more-prepared graduates** through a **three-major curriculum**, delivered year-round and **remotely to same-city cohorts**, who will serve **apprenticeships** en route to graduation in three years.

A polymath is someone who has built depth, breadth, and integration of knowledge. Specifically, polymaths can operate fluently and with expertise (depth) in three or more non-adjacent domains (breadth), and have built the critical skill of applying concepts and frameworks in one domain to complex problems in other domains (integration). Polymath University empowers leaders and problem solvers to thrive in a more complex and technologically-enabled world.

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<sup>1</sup> Emmons, William R.; Kent, Ana H.; and Ricketts, Lowell R. "[Is College Still Worth It? The New Calculus of Falling Returns.](#)" Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Working Paper, Jan. 7, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Gallup-Lumina Foundation Poll on Higher Education; [Higher Education's Work Preparedness Paradox.](#) 2013. Gallup; Lumina Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Hansen, Michael. "[The U.S. Education System Isn't Giving Students What Employers Need.](#)" Harvard Business Review, May 18, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=75>

<sup>5</sup> Kerr, Emma; Wood, Sarah. "[A Look at 20 Years of Tuition Costs at National Universities.](#)" U.S. News & World Report. Sep. 23, 2023

<sup>6</sup> Tough, Paul. "[Americans Are Losing Faith in the Value of College. Whose Fault Is That?](#)" NYT, Sep. 5, 2023

## RANGE

Polymath University's approach to education, and its namesake, is built on ensuring that graduates are curious, creative, collaborative, and critically-minded. Polymaths have been proven to be more creative and more adept at solving complex problems, and more resilient against economic shocks<sup>7</sup>. Building a broad, generalist field of knowledge and expertise, as opposed to the hyper-specialization that traditional higher education encourages, makes graduates more valuable in the world and workplace.

According to a 2012 study of serial innovators<sup>8</sup>, polymaths are described as having a high tolerance for ambiguity and as systems thinkers. Polymaths can connect disparate pieces of information in new ways, making them highly effective at innovative problem solving. And they are adept at repurposing what is already available and synthesizing information from many different sources.<sup>9</sup> A Future of Jobs report highlighted the following skills being increasingly demanded by employers (all of which polymaths excel at): creative thinking; analytical thinking; technological literacy; curiosity and lifelong learning; resilience, flexibility, and agility; and systems thinking.<sup>10</sup>

## REAL-WORLD APPRENTICESHIPS

Polymath University will partner with employers to ensure that its degree programs serve the talent acquisition needs of regional business and organizations, and that those degrees include skill development that is often short-changed by traditional universities.

In years two and three, students will serve as apprentices with those employer partners in high-demand, early career roles. Across the country, more employers are building apprenticeship programs as a key part of their talent acquisition strategy, with Department of Labor registered apprenticeships doubling since 2010 to 250,000. Many of these employers pay some or all of the tuition for their apprentices to concurrently earn a college degree.

## REMOTE

Educational outcomes lead all other priorities for Polymath University, and we must hold this as our north star. This means that the most important activity for faculty will be teaching or the associated development through coaching and mentoring their students. As Polymath University is led by the former CEO of the Pat Tillman Foundation, and counts ten Tillman Scholars on its Advisory Board, the Tillman Scholar community will seed Polymath University's initial set of faculty, drawing on their service and academic experiences to support student learning. Courses will be delivered remotely, but to same-city cohorts that will facilitate week-long immersive and collaborative in-person experiences as well as informal study groups throughout the year, unlocking persistent relationships and networks within our community.

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<sup>7</sup> Hanks, Andrew; Jiang, Shengjun; Qian, Xuechao; Wang, Bo; Weinberg, Bruce. (2024). [Do Double Majors Face Less Risk? An Analysis of Human Capital Diversification](#). NBER.

<sup>8</sup> Vojak, Bruce; Griffin, Abbie; Price, Raymond L. (2012). [Serial Innovators: How Individuals Create and Deliver Breakthrough Innovations in Mature Firms](#). Stanford, Stanford University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Epstein, D. J. (2019). [Range: why generalists triumph in a specialized world](#). New York, Riverhead Books.

<sup>10</sup> [Future of Jobs Report](#); World Economic Forum. 2023.