



What does the university uniquely offer when knowledge has dispersed beyond its walls and expertise can be automated?

After Expertise.

*On the Dispersal of Knowledge, the Formation of Wisdom, and What
Universities Must Now Become*

WISDOM ... RECOVERED · ISSUE 06

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WISDOM ... FORGOTTEN · ISSUE 06

In This Issue

This issue brings together two books separated by nearly three decades, and a question that connects them more powerfully than the years between them might suggest.

In 1994, a team of six scholars argued that the university's position as the world's primary producer of knowledge was no longer secure. The process they described, the emergence of distributed, transdisciplinary, application-driven knowledge production, was not a decline but a transformation, one already visible in research laboratories, corporate innovation centers, government agencies, and international networks that neither deferred to academic norms nor waited for university approval.

Three decades later, a researcher with thirty years of artificial intelligence experience at MIT pressed the same institution from a different direction. Expertise, the very thing universities had organized themselves to produce and certify, was being absorbed by intelligent machines faster than institutions were prepared to acknowledge.

What AI cannot replicate, what it cannot cultivate through simulation or pattern recognition alone, is wisdom: the capacity for judgment under uncertainty, for reflection earned through consequence, for deciding well when no algorithm offers a ready answer.

Read in sequence, these two books do more than describe challenges facing contemporary universities. They define a horizon. The university that understands both must ask, honestly and without deferral, what it uniquely offers a world that can now produce knowledge without it and may soon automate much of what it has long called expertise. The answer to that question is, for any serious institution, the most important one it will ever face.

This issue of Wisdom Forgotten is dedicated, as always, to those who dare to reimagine.



ARTICLE ONE

When Expertise Is Not Enough

Christopher Washington, Ph.D.

Across higher education, there is growing recognition that students are entering a world defined by uncertainty, rapid socio-political change, and the expanding influence of technologies such as artificial intelligence. Increasingly, work is characterized by ambiguous and novel situations that require judgment, not just technical proficiency. Consequently, as a former Provost, I have seen firsthand how faculty are responding by designing more experiential, applied, and reflective forms of learning as part of the core educational experience.

However, much of instruction and assessment offered at universities remains anchored in an earlier model, one that assumes success is demonstrated through the ability to perform under known and relatively stable conditions.

Education continues to reward performance in structured contexts, while the world students are entering demands judgment in evolving ones.

In his 2023 book, *Wisdom Factories: AI, Games, and the Education of a Modern Worker*, Tim Dasey anticipated this tension well before generative AI became embedded in everyday life. His argument was direct: as machines assume routine cognitive tasks, the distinguishing mark of an educated person will extend beyond what they know, to how they decide.

The Safe Room: Why Wisdom Anchors Educational Excellence

As knowledge has become both abundant and readily accessible, Dasey suggests that wisdom becomes the university's "safe room." Dasey asks us to consider the difference in significance between information, skills, expertise, and wisdom when we are faced with disruption. Information can be transmitted.

Skills can be trained. Expertise can increasingly be replicated, even automated. But wisdom must be formed. So for Dasey a university can be a safe room, not from disruption caused by social and technological advancements, but because it is more difficult to commodify wisdom that emerges through the integration of experience, reflection, and consequences.

As university leaders consider what it takes to cultivate wisdom, Dasey cautions that wisdom is slower to develop and resistant to shortcuts. This introduces a fundamental tension: faculty often design curricula around the development of expertise and structure assessment around what can be measured efficiently. And yet, what is easiest to measure is not always what is most important to cultivate.

A shift toward cultivating wisdom therefore requires a corresponding shift in faculty identity, the architecture of curriculum and teaching, and the design of learning assessment.

Dasey's Architecture of Wisdom

What constitutes "wisdom"? Dasey frames wisdom not as abstraction, but as a set of experience-dependent capacities.

- **Contextual transfer.** Recognizing when knowledge applies across domains.
- **Pattern recognition under uncertainty.** Detecting signal without complete data.
- **Value balancing.** Weighing tradeoffs without clear optima.
- **Adaptive reflection.** Revising mental models based on outcomes.

These capacities are actively cultivated, requiring action and feedback to be tightly coupled.

For this type of learning Dasey provides the example of educational games. He suggests that well designed games compress time, simulate complexity, and force players to decide, fail, and adapt. They also make consequences visible, something traditional instruction may avoid until a final grade is assigned.

Excellence is not about eliminating failure, but structuring failure in a way that it becomes instructive.

Universities as Accelerators of Wisdom

Dasey believes that universities already possess the raw materials to become “wisdom factories.” The question is whether they organize these experiences by design.

Dasey points to where wisdom already emerges: a lab where failure forces reinterpretation, a seminar where competing frameworks reveal limits, a clinical setting where decisions carry ethical weight, and collaborative projects where coordination and conflict must be navigated.

Too often, these learning experiences occur on the periphery: in advanced seminars, capstone experiences, or optional internships, while the core learning activities in courses remain oriented toward content mastery and discrete evaluation.

What if excellence were defined not by how efficiently students acquire knowledge, but by how frequently they engage in judgment under real conditions?

In a world of rising demand for analytical judgment, communication, coordination, and AI tool orchestration, a shift to focusing on wisdom would require redefining rigor, not as content difficulty alone, but as the complexity of decisions students must make and justify.

Why Wisdom Factories Matter Today

For Dasey, as technological systems grow more capable and knowledge becomes increasingly accessible, the differentiating value of higher education moves elsewhere. Universities that can refine the conditions for developing wisdom may be the ones that remain most relevant in an age of intelligent machines.

This matters first for students entering a workplace where professional fields are becoming more complex and interdependent. Career success is no longer defined by what one knows. The ability to reason under uncertainty, coordinate across boundaries, and act with discernment becomes a core professional capability, not a peripheral one.

Lifelong learning under these conditions is not simply a matter of adding another credential. It is an iterative learning process that includes experience, reflection, and recalibration.

For universities, the implications are equally significant. If knowledge transmission becomes increasingly commoditized, institutional value will be defined less by access to information and expertise and more by the ability to design learning environments that intentionally cultivate wisdom.

This is why the idea of a “wisdom factory” is provocative as a future focus for universities. It suggests that wisdom can be cultivated systematically through design: curricula organized around integrative problems, not just disciplines; assessment focused on reasoning and reflection, not just answers; learning environments that make consequences visible; faculty roles shifting from information delivery to experience design.

The broader implication is societal. In a world shaped by accelerating social and technological change, the capacity for universities to cultivate wisdom is a distinctly human activity, one that strengthens how individuals interpret complex situations, make sound decisions, and act responsibly within the organizations and professions they serve.

The key question for academic leaders, then, is one of design: what would it take for every student to experience an education where wisdom is not incidental, but expected?

Christopher Washington

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08 April 2026

ABOUT THE BOOK

TITLE	Wisdom Factories: AI, Games, and the Education of a Modern Worker
AUTHOR	Tim Dasey
PUBLISHER	Rejuvenate Publishing
YEAR	2023
PAGES	258
ISBN	979-8-9882386-0-7
CORE INSIGHT	As artificial intelligence absorbs the cognitive tasks that universities have long treated as the core of education, the university's most enduring contribution becomes the cultivation of wisdom: the experience-dependent capacity for judgment, pattern recognition under uncertainty, and reflective adaptation that no machine can replicate or shortcut.

#WisdomForgotten #WisdomFactories #FutureOfWork #AIAndEducation #HigherEducation



ARTICLE TWO

The Knowledge We Can No Longer Keep to Ourselves

Prof. Bassem Khafagy

For most of the twentieth century, the university operated with a quiet confidence about its place in the world. It produced knowledge. Others consumed it. The arrangement seemed natural, even permanent: the scholar in the laboratory or the library, generating insight that would eventually, through publication and teaching, flow outward to society. The university did not merely hold knowledge. It held the process by which knowledge was legitimately made.

By the time Michael Gibbons and five colleagues published *The New Production of Knowledge* in 1994, that confidence had already begun to erode. What Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott, and Martin Trow described was not a crisis of

university morale or funding. It was something more fundamental: a structural transformation in how knowledge is produced, and by whom.

The university did not merely hold knowledge. It held the process by which knowledge was legitimately made.

They named it, with deliberate precision, the emergence of Mode 2.

Two Modes, One Transformation

The distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production is the book's central and enduring contribution. Mode 1, the familiar form, is knowledge produced within disciplines, governed by academic norms, evaluated by peer review, and organized around the university as its natural home.

It is curiosity-driven, relatively autonomous, and primarily accountable to the academic community itself. Mode 2, by contrast, is produced in the context of application. It is transdisciplinary, cutting across the boundaries that disciplines have spent generations constructing. It involves heterogeneous teams drawn from industry, government, civil society, and the academy working together rather than in sequence.

It is accountable not only to scholarly peers but to a wider range of stakeholders who have a direct interest in its outcomes. And crucially, it does not wait for the university to convene it.

What made this argument so unsettling to many readers in 1994, and what continues to unsettle in retrospect, is that Gibbons and his colleagues were not describing a marginal phenomenon. They were describing the dominant direction of change.

The university had long assumed that its monopoly on legitimate knowledge production was a permanent feature of the intellectual landscape. The Gibbons team argued, with considerable empirical support, that this monopoly was dissolving, and that the dissolution was not a failure but a consequence of the university's own success.

The Paradox of Dispersal

The more universities had trained people to produce knowledge, the more people had spread across every sector of society with the capacity and the inclination to do so. The very expertise the university cultivated had escaped its walls and found new homes, new alliances, and new forms of organization. Research institutes, corporate laboratories, government agencies, and international networks were all producing knowledge of consequence, knowledge that bore on real problems, tested against real outcomes, and shaped by those who would use it.

Gibbons and his colleagues were also attentive to the quality dimensions of this transformation. In Mode 1, quality is defined primarily by disciplinary standards: rigor, originality, contribution to the field. In Mode 2, quality is assessed against a broader and more demanding set of criteria, ones that include practical effectiveness, social value, and ethical accountability.

This broader assessment framework does not make Mode 2 knowledge less rigorous. It makes it differently rigorous, accountable in ways that pure disciplinary scholarship need not be.

The very expertise the university cultivated had escaped its walls and found new homes, new alliances, and new forms of organization.

There is something almost prophetic about this argument when read from the vantage of the present. The three decades since 1994 have accelerated every trend the Gibbons team identified. Open-access publishing, cross-sector research partnerships, citizen science, and artificial intelligence, each in their own way, has deepened the dispersal of knowledge production that Gibbons described. The university finds itself in an environment it once could not have imagined: one where it is neither the sole producer of knowledge nor, in many domains, the most agile one.

The Invitation Within the Challenge

And yet the book's import is not merely cautionary. The challenge it poses to the university is also an invitation. If Mode 2 knowledge production is characterized by transdisciplinarity, social accountability, and application in real contexts, then the university can choose to be a leader of that transformation rather than a reluctant follower.

It can organize itself not as a custodian of established disciplines but as a convener of diverse knowledge communities, one that brings to those communities something no other institution in society can fully replicate: a tradition of rigorous inquiry, a commitment to critical reflection, and the time and space for ideas to be tested against their deepest implications.

The book also raises a challenge that universities have been slow to absorb: if knowledge is now produced in distributed, application-driven settings, then the disciplines that organize academic life are not neutral containers for truth. They are historically constructed boundaries that serve certain interests and obscure others. The Mode 2 world does not ask departments to disappear. It asks institutions to hold them less tightly, to allow the porousness that real problems demand.

What Remains When Knowledge Has Left

Reading Gibbons alongside the argument Dr. Washington presents in this issue, a convergence becomes visible. If knowledge production is dispersing outward, and if expertise is being absorbed by intelligent machines, the university is left with something older and harder to define.

It is left with the conditions for forming wisdom: the laboratory where failure demands reinterpretation, the seminar where competing frameworks reveal their limits, the clinical setting where decisions carry weight, and the long arc of a student's education where experience, reflection, and consequence are held together long enough to become something more than information.

What Gibbons and his colleagues understood, and what university leaders have been slow to accept, is that the question facing higher education is not whether the production of knowledge will change. It has changed.

The question is whether universities will organize themselves around what they uniquely offer, or whether they will remain organized around a function that the world has already distributed far beyond their walls.

That question is now more urgent than it has ever been. Thirty years after the Gibbons team named the transformation, the pressure has only intensified. And the answer, as always, depends on whether those who lead universities are willing to reimagine the institution they serve.

To those who dare to reimagine.

Bassem Khafagy

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ABOUT THE BOOK

TITLE	The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies
AUTHORS	Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott, and Martin Trow
PUBLISHER	SAGE Publications
YEAR	1994
PAGES	192
ISBN	978-0-8039-7794-5 (paperback); 978-0-8039-7793-8 (hardback)
CORE INSIGHT	Knowledge production is no longer the university's exclusive province. A new mode of knowledge creation, transdisciplinary, distributed, and accountable to society beyond the academy, has emerged alongside the traditional disciplinary model, compelling universities to rethink what they are, what they produce, and what kind of institution the world now requires them to become.

#WisdomForgotten #ModeTwo #KnowledgeProduction #HigherEducation #UniversityOfTheFuture



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- If there is a book that you believe deserves a place in this conversation, tell us. Recommend it. Make the case for it.

About this newsletter • *Wisdom ... Forgotten* is a weekly newsletter by Prof. Bassem Khafagy and Dr. Christopher Washington. Together, they bring six decades of combined experience spanning global higher education strategy, institutional leadership, governance, workforce innovation, and organizational transformation across multiple continents. Each week, this newsletter surfaces ideas from two classic academic works that were often written for moments very much like the one higher education is navigating today, and asks what becomes possible when those insights are brought back into active practice. This newsletter is not a book review. It is a conversation between two thought leaders and a growing community of academics, university leaders, and practitioners who believe the future of the university is strengthened when we reconnect with the intellectual foundations that shaped the field and reinterpret them for today's realities. Many scholars and leaders have carried these ideas forward. Our goal is to help reconnect them to everyday leadership, policy, and institutional design decisions.

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The visual compositions • throughout this newsletter and the series are original works by Prof. Bassem K. Khafagy. They are crafted using advanced technological tools, including artificial intelligence, guided entirely by the author's artistic vision and design sensibility. In a series about reimagining the university, it felt only right that the art itself reflect that spirit of creative possibility.

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