The perception that the core mission of the contemporary research university is imperiled and scientific and humanistic investigation threatened must be qualified. There is broad consensus regarding the core mission of the academy, referring in a generalized sense to free inquiry and the advancement of discovery, innovation, and creativity. The demand for advanced teaching and research, moreover, and for the new ideas, products, and processes that are its products, is at fever pitch and exceeds the currently available supply. Questions regarding the relevance of an institution, however uninformed, need not be perceived as threatening, nor indeed should scrutiny of the accountability of its operations and practices. To the extent that threat exists, it comes no less from the design limitations inherent in our institutions than external forces, which, for example, champion public disinvestment.

The perception of threat should instead be construed as a challenge. In an era of burgeoning demand for higher education, the foremost challenge is to increase the capacity of research universities by an order of magnitude. Appropriate historical models from which to derive a course of action commensurate to the challenges that confront us do not exist. Inherent design limitations in our universities hamper rapid change in response to real-time demand, impeding our potential to develop appropriate organizational structures, learning technologies, and transdisciplinary curricula. Entrenched assumptions and rigid social constructs hinder adaptability. In order to accelerate the evolution of our universities, we must develop new models focused not only on discovery but also access to a broad demographic and greater engagement to maximize societal impact. Research universities must exhibit academic enterprise and make the case for investment from all sectors predicated on outcomes. Despite the imperative for new and differentiated institutional models, however, academia must never retreat from its core values.