Jesuit Worldwide Learning
Higher Education at the Margins

# Call for Chapter: A Journey toward a theory of Higher Education at the Margins

## Rationale

Theoretical debates on higher education have made significant contributions to understanding the purposes, values, and societal roles of universities. Scholars have challenged narrow economic and instrumental conceptions of higher education by emphasizing its civic, democratic, ethical, epistemological, and ontological dimensions (Barnett, 1990, 2026; Dall'Alba, 2009; Giroux, 2016; Nussbaum, 2010). These perspectives highlight the importance of critical thinking, human flourishing, transformative learning, and the formation of engaged citizens capable of contributing to society. However, these perspectives often assume established campuses, uninterrupted educational trajectories, and learners with access to infrastructure, institutional support, and enabling learning environments. Yet millions of learners around the world pursue higher education in contexts shaped by displacement, conflict, forced migration, poverty, systemic discrimination, statelessness, disability, and other forms of structural marginalization and exclusion. In contexts where higher education has historically functioned as a pathway accessible primarily to socially and economically privileged groups (Bellino, 2018; Green, 2006; Heffernan, 2023; Mkwananzi & Wilson-Strydom, 2018), these realities invite renewed reflection on what higher education becomes when its institutional, spatial, and social assumptions are fundamentally transformed.

These questions have increasingly been explored within the emerging field of Higher Education in Emergencies (HEiE), which over the past two decades has made significant advances in documenting barriers to access, policy responses, and programme implementation for displaced and crisis-affected populations (Milton et al., 2013; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). While these contributions have been essential, comparatively less attention has been devoted to developing theoretical frameworks that explain the distinctive purposes, pedagogies, relationships, and forms of knowledge emerging from these contexts. Consequently, there remains a gap between general theories of higher education and the realities of teaching and learning where conflict, displacement, oppression, or systemic exclusion shape educational experiences.

This volume responds to that gap by exploring Higher Education at the Margins not simply as higher education provided to marginalized populations within conventional systems, but as a lens through which to rethink higher education itself. It seeks to move beyond the traditional image of the university as a fixed, campus-based institution while also resisting the reduction of innovation to technology or online delivery alone. Instead, it examines relational, blended, community-embedded, and networked models of higher education that emerge in contexts where educational opportunity has historically been limited or deemed unattainable.

This edited volume emerges from more than a decade of experience by Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) in providing higher education at the margins. Through partnerships with universities, local organizations, and communities, JWL has worked alongside learners

affected by forced displacement while also engaging with individuals and communities experiencing other forms of exclusion and oppression, including Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and populations facing persistent social, political, or economic marginalization. By centering these experiences, the volume asks how concepts such as hope, dignity, accompaniment, epistemic justice, solidarity, and transformation might reshape prevailing understandings of higher education.

By bringing together scholars, practitioners, educators, students, and policymakers, this edited volume aims to contribute to an emerging conversation on the foundations of a theory of Higher Education at the Margins. Rather than proposing a single definitive framework, it seeks to foster dialogue across disciplines, geographies, and lived experiences, recognizing that theory can be generated not only in established academic centres but also through the practices, aspirations, and knowledge of learners and educators working in contexts of marginalization.

**Objectives**

The objective of this volume is to move beyond the documentation of promising practices and contribute to the development of an emerging theoretical framework for Higher Education at the Margins. While case studies and program evaluations provide valuable insights, theory offers a broader lens through which to understand the purposes, principles, relationships, and values that underpin educational initiatives across diverse contexts. By exploring foundational questions, such as *What is higher education at the margins for? Whose knowledge counts? How should higher education, including learning, teaching, accompaniment, be conceived in contexts of exclusion and adversity to best address the needs of marginalized learners? What distinguishes higher education at the margins from conventional models?* - this volume seeks to identify concepts that transcend individual programmes while remaining responsive to local realities. In doing so, it addresses a notable gap in the literature, where discussions of higher education at the margins have often emphasized implementation over theorization. Rather than prescribing a universal model, the proposed theory is intended as a flexible and evolving framework that can inspire research and practice across different contexts, adapting to the particular histories, cultures, and aspirations of the communities it serves.

**Guiding Questions**

Contributors are invited to engage with broad theoretical and practical questions that can help shape this emerging field, including but not limited to:

- What distinguishes higher education at the margins from conventional conceptions of higher education?
- What is the purpose of higher education in contexts of displacement, fragility, conflict, and exclusion?
- How should quality, excellence, and success be understood and evaluated in these settings?

- Who produces knowledge, whose knowledge counts, and how can marginalized learners and communities contribute to knowledge creation?
- How do relationships, care, solidarity, hope, dignity, and justice reshape traditional assumptions about universities and higher education institutions?
- How can HEIs contribute to value-based education? What does Jesuit education has to offer to value-based Higher Education?
- In what ways do innovative pedagogies, technologies, and partnerships enable meaningful learning and transformation at the margins?
- What can higher education systems globally learn from educational practices developed in marginalized contexts?
- How might experiences at the margins contribute to reimagining the future of higher education for a more equitable, inclusive, and interconnected world?

The volume welcomes contributions that address these questions directly or indirectly through conceptual analyses, empirical research, critical reflections, case studies, or interdisciplinary perspectives.

**Conceptual Framework**

This volume is inspired by Ronald Barnett's conception of the ecological university (2026), which understands higher education as existing within multiple, interconnected ecosystems - including those of knowledge, learning, persons, institutions, society, culture, the economy, and the natural environment. Rather than viewing higher education as an isolated institution, Barnett's framework emphasizes its relational, ethical, and societal responsibilities. These ideas provide an important point of departure for this volume.

At the same time, this collection seeks to extend and reimagine this ecological perspective by shifting the focus from the university as a campus-based institution to higher education as a broader human, social, and relational endeavour. Many learners at the margins pursue higher education in contexts where conventional assumptions about universities –including physical campuses, stable infrastructures, formal institutional structures, and uninterrupted educational pathways– do not apply. Drawing on experiences from contexts of displacement, conflict, exclusion, and marginalization, the volume explores how higher education can be understood through new relationships between learners, educators, communities, technologies, partnerships, and diverse knowledge systems. Rather than treating Barnett's ecological framework as prescriptive, the collection adopts it as an invitation to reconsider how higher education is constituted through relationships that are continually negotiated across social, political, technological, economic, cultural, and environmental systems.

Extending this perspective requires engaging with complementary theoretical traditions that illuminate dimensions not fully developed within existing higher education theory. Design Science Research (Hevner et al., 2004; Peffers et al., 2007) offers approaches for developing

and evaluating innovative educational models in complex settings. Scholarship on digital and connected learning highlights how technologies reshape participation, pedagogy, and institutional relationships in higher education beyond traditional campuses (Bozkurt et al., 2024; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Hodges et al., 2020). Critical pedagogies foreground questions of power, agency, dialogue, and social transformation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2016; hooks, 1994), while phenomenological perspectives deepen understanding of learners' lived experiences and meaning-making (Dall'Alba, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Feminist, postcolonial, decolonial, disability, Indigenous, and Southern epistemologies further challenge dominant assumptions about whose knowledge is valued and how higher education can become more inclusive and socially just (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014; Mignolo, 2011; Smith, 2021; Goodley, 2017).

Together, these perspectives invite a systemic understanding of higher education at the margins. In particular, sociotechnical systems theory provides a useful lens for examining the interdependence between human actors, educational practices, organizational arrangements, technologies, and local contexts (Leavitt, 1965; Davis et al., 2014; Baxter & Sommerville, 2011). Such an approach recognizes that educational transformation in marginalized contexts rarely results from technological innovation alone but emerges through the dynamic interaction of social, institutional, cultural, and technological systems.

The five thematic sections of this volume integrate this transdisciplinary focus while reflecting Barnett's ecological perspective. Together, they examine the contexts in which higher education is situated, the educational models through which it is enacted, the human processes of learning and becoming that it fosters, the forms of knowledge it values and produces, and its transformative impact on individuals, communities, institutions, and society. Rather than presenting a definitive theory, these themes provide a framework for collectively exploring an emerging theory of Higher Education at the Margins.

**Structure of the Volume**

The volume is organized around five interconnected themes that also represent five complementary levels of analysis through which an emerging theory of **Higher Education at the Margins** can be examined.

The first theme, **Histories, Contexts, and Foundations**, examines the structural and contextual conditions that shape higher education at the margins. It explores how the margins are defined, the histories of exclusion and displacement that produce them, the ethical and philosophical foundations of higher education, and the partnerships, humanitarian ecosystems, and questions of quality and legitimacy that enable educational opportunities. This section situates higher education within its wider societal, cultural, political, and economic contexts.

The second theme, **Design & Delivery system of Higher Education at the Margins**, focuses on educational practice. It explores how higher education is enacted through innovative delivery models, pedagogies, technologies, partnerships, and alternative forms of credentialing. Particular attention is given to transformative and intercultural pedagogies, community-based

learning, digital inclusion, and the evolving roles of students, facilitators, and institutions in creating meaningful learning opportunities.

The third theme, **Human Dimensions of Learning: Hope, Identity, and Agency**, places the learner at the centre of higher education. It examines how relationships, care, dignity, hope, resilience, belonging, leadership, and processes of becoming shape learners' educational experiences and challenge conventional understandings of what higher education seeks to cultivate.

The fourth theme, **Knowledge, Epistemic Justice, and the Purpose of Higher Education**, explores higher education as a space of knowledge creation rather than simply knowledge transmission. It invites contributors to critically examine whose knowledge counts, how marginalized communities contribute to research and scholarship, and how higher education can promote epistemic justice through more inclusive, participatory, and decolonial approaches to knowledge production.

Finally, the fifth theme, **Impact and Transformation**, considers the broader contributions of higher education at the margins to individuals, communities, institutions, knowledge systems, and society. It examines how educational experiences developed in marginalized contexts can influence higher education more broadly, contribute to peacebuilding, citizenship, institutional transformation, and ecological futures, and ultimately help reimagine the purposes and possibilities of higher education in an increasingly interconnected world.

Taken together, these five themes move from **context** to **educational practice**, to **human experience**, to **knowledge**, and finally to **societal transformation**. In doing so, they provide a relational framework for collectively exploring an emerging theory of Higher Education at the Margins, which recognizes learning as an ecological endeavour shaped by the dynamic interactions between learners, educators, communities, institutions, technologies, and the wider world.

## 1. Histories, Contexts, and Foundations: Defining the margins

Guiding questions: How do we define the margins? What distinguishes higher education at the margins from conventional conceptions of higher education? What is the purpose of higher education in contexts of displacement, fragility, conflict, and exclusion? How should quality, excellence, and success be understood and evaluated in these settings?

Guiding ecosystems: Society, Polity, Culture, Economy

- Defining the margins (margins not as unique experience – not homogenous)
- Contexts of the margins
- Histories of exclusion and displacement
- Barriers to higher education access and participation
- Humanitarian and development ecosystems

- Global partnerships and networks
- Ignatian tradition and values
- Quality assurance and legitimacy
- Ethics of accompaniment and solidarity
- Global Risk and uncertainty
- Communities at risk of Climate Change
- ...

2. **Design & Delivery Systems of Higher Education at the Margins: Delivery, Partnership, Pedagogy and Technology**

Guiding question: In what ways do innovative pedagogies, technologies, and partnerships enable meaningful learning and transformation at the margins? How do we design and implement higher education to foster sustainable future perspectives for communities at the margins?

Guiding ecosystems: Learning, Polity, Knowledge, Economy

- Blended learning
- Delivery model
- Connected learning
- Onsite and Online facilitation
- Transformative pedagogy
- Intercultural learning
- Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP)
- Jesuit Education and value-based education
- Catholic Vital Thought and Pedagogy
- Community-based learning
- Learning together and peer learning
- Being a facilitator
- Learning at the margins
- Digital inclusion and AI
- Flexible and alternative credentialing

- AI and digital technologies
- Economic Model of Higher Education at the Margins
- Subject Matter Experts & Instructional Design
- Accreditation Systems of higher education and global initiatives
- Curriculum Design
- Contextualization and Localization
- Culturally Sustaining pedagogies

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3. **Human Dimensions of Learning: Hope, Identity, and Agency**

Guiding question: How do relationships, care, solidarity, hope, dignity, and justice reshape traditional assumptions about universities and higher education institutions?

Guiding ecosystems: Persons, Culture, Learning

- Hope
- Resilience
- Agency
- Dignity
- Courage
- Gratitude
- Joy and joyful pedagogy
- Servant leadership
- Identity formation
- Belonging
- Aspirations and futures
- Being a student at the margins
- Will to learn
- Processes of becoming
- Transformation

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4. **Knowledge, Epistemic Justice, and the Purpose of Higher Education**

Guiding questions: Who produces knowledge, whose knowledge counts, and how can marginalized learners and communities contribute to knowledge creation?

Guiding ecosystems: Knowledge, Society, Culture

- Whose knowledge counts?
- Student-led research
- Knowledge co-creation
- Epistemic justice
- Decolonial perspectives
- Indigenous and local knowledges
- Research from and with marginalized communities
- Learners as producers rather than consumers of knowledge
- Reimagining the university's mission
- Role of Higher Education in societies
- ...

**5. Impact and Transformation**

Guiding questions: What can higher education systems globally learn from educational practices developed in marginalized contexts? How might experiences at the margins contribute to reimagining the future of higher education for a more equitable, inclusive, and interconnected world?

Guiding ecosystems: Society, Polity, Natural Environment, Culture

- Impact on students and graduates
- Community transformation
- Impact on faculty and facilitators
- Institutional transformation
- Influence on universities and higher education systems
- Contributions to peacebuilding and social cohesion
- Influence on global policy and practice
- Transforming knowledge production
- Rethinking the future of higher education
- Reimagining possibilities

- Toward ecological futures
- Global and ecological citizenship formation
- ...

## Call for Abstracts

### Abstracts

We invite scholars, practitioners, educators, policymakers, university representatives, community leaders, and students of Jesuit Worldwide Learning to contribute to this edited volume on Higher Education at the Margins. The volume seeks to advance an emerging theoretical and practical understanding of higher education in contexts of displacement, conflict, forced migration, marginalization, and exclusion.

We welcome conceptual, theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practice-based chapters from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. Contributions may engage directly with one or more of the themes outlined above or propose complementary perspectives that deepen understanding of higher education beyond conventional institutional settings from the context of JWL.

Recognizing that knowledge about higher education at the margins is generated across diverse communities, we particularly encourage interdisciplinary contributions from fields including, but not limited to, education, sociology, anthropology, political science, philosophy, development studies, refugee and migration studies, peace and conflict studies, disability studies, gender studies, environmental studies, theology, psychology, public health, information systems, digital learning, artificial intelligence, learning sciences, organizational studies, design research, and human-computer interaction.

We especially encourage submissions that foreground perspectives from marginalized communities and amplify voices that are often underrepresented within higher education research.

### Student and Emerging Scholar Contributions

One distinctive feature of this volume is its commitment to creating space for student and emerging scholar voices. We warmly welcome submissions from undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students, particularly those with lived experience of displacement, conflict, or marginalization.

Student contributions may include:

- student-led research projects
- participatory and community-based research
- reflective essays grounded in educational experience

- co-authored chapters with faculty or practitioners
- innovative methodologies developed through practice
- case studies documenting local initiatives and educational innovation

Submissions from students are encouraged both as independent contributions and as collaborative chapters developed alongside faculty members, practitioners, or community organizations.

**Abstract Submission**

Please submit an abstract of 300–500 words outlining:

- the proposed chapter's objectives
- theoretical or conceptual framework
- methodology (where applicable)
- anticipated contribution to the volume

Authors are welcome to include a short list of indicative references that inform the proposed chapter.

This call is open to partners, practitioners, colleagues, students, alumni, and staff affiliated with Jesuit Worldwide Learning, as well as invited collaborators working in related fields. Interdisciplinary collaborations and co-authored chapters across institutions, disciplines, and communities are particularly encouraged.

- **January 15th:** Deadline for abstract submissions.

Jesuit Worldwide Learning

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