

An Open Letter to the Higher Education Community

Higher education has outsourced its digital soul, it's time we reclaim it!

Higher education has spent twenty-five years building digital ecosystems that power teaching, learning, research, and scholarship. These systems, a mix of open and proprietary technologies, have enabled tremendous innovation. Yet as the landscape has evolved over the past decade, greater reliance on a small number of proprietary technology providers has quietly increased.

During this period, the strategic visibility of *Open Solutions* (open source software and open standards) has faded while market disruptions, such as consolidation and bankruptcies, have significantly narrowed institutional choice. Once central to higher education's innovation agenda, openness has been deprioritized due to prevalent myths regarding open source risks and perceptions of past challenges, both amplified by proprietary marketing narratives. This observation is not a critique of higher education but rather a realization of **an opportunity to strengthen and safeguard autonomy while reimagining our digital future.**

Around the world, digital sovereignty, data privacy, and software security are becoming a defining priority¹. Globally, communities and nations recognize that addressing these strategic issues requires reducing reliance on singular proprietary pathways. Open Solutions offer the clearest path forward: transparency, **collaboration when desired, independence when needed**, and the freedom to shape our tools, not merely adopt them. Higher education shares this imperative and, because of its historical role in producing Open Solutions² as well as preparing our future workforce, it has a unique opportunity to lead.

Ironically, even as investment in Open Solutions has declined, dependence on them has grown. At the core infrastructure level, open technologies can be found in nearly every proprietary product used in higher education today³. Open standards enable interoperability. Open source forms the backbone of the internet itself. **Higher education already relies on an open infrastructure for all of its core business operations, but without an intentional strategy to sustain it nor innovate on top of it with new enterprise academic applications.**

A more intentional and strategic approach to investing in and sustaining Open Solutions has the potential to elevate quality, expand access, spark innovation, and reduce the cost of higher education's digital ecosystem. But such a shift will not be simple. It requires coordinated investment, capacity-building, applying lessons learned from the past, and—most importantly—a **mindset change from being a consumer of edtech to becoming a producer and co-creator**

¹ Higher education example: the majority of German institutions have adopted an open source LMS

² Linux, Apache Web Server, R, LTI, and Python (among others) all originated at institutions of higher education

³ See [Open Source in Higher Ed: Early Findings from Apereo's OSSHE Study](#)

of digital solutions. If realized, this transition unlocks something proprietary models fundamentally cannot: true autonomy over the digital commons that institutions rely on every day. Open Solutions break vendor lock-in, stimulate meaningful market competition, lower long-term costs, and empower institutions to innovate on their own terms, aligned with their missions, values, and the communities they serve.

For these reasons, we issue a collective call to action: **It is time for higher education to reclaim strategic control of its digital future and the commons on which it relies.**

If this call to action resonates with you, we need your help!

We are at the beginning of this work and seek trailblazers who can [join our small but mighty community](#) to help shape the movement to come. A movement focused on catalyzing a global shift in higher education toward building, adopting, deploying, and sustaining Open Solutions, restoring openness as a strategic priority and strengthening the shared digital commons on which higher education relies.

Are you ready?

[Then join our movement and sign the letter!](#) While joining only commits you to receiving regular updates on our work, we hope that you will also consider contributing to our early initiatives, which will include applying lessons learned to new strategic solutions, seeking resources to spur and drive new Open Solutions, conducting and publishing related research, and supporting communication and marketing initiatives to galvanize academic leadership.

Signed,

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Names added to PDF version from web signatures April 14, 2026.