Leading in an Era
of Digital Transformation

Introduction

These are unsettled and unsettling times in higher education. Many colleges entered 2020 already under strain as a collection of financial, demographic and other forces constricted their revenues. Then the novel coronavirus hit, forcing institutions to send most students home and invest significant funds in digital learning, physical and mental health support, and other resources to continue to fulfill their missions virtually.

The global pandemic, the recession and the national soul searching about racial equity make this an unprecedented time for higher education – a time in which strong leadership may be the difference between institutions that thrive and those that struggle or even fail.

Which institutions will smoothly maneuver through an era in which digital competency moves from a "nice to have" to a "must have" in higher education? Will colleges use this moment to make transformative changes in their business models and offerings? What traits will enable presidents and other leaders to guide their institutions in these potentially perilous times?

These are among the questions explored in this compilation of articles. We welcome your comments on these articles and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors
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Who Leads Colleges After COVID-19?

A singular focus on the current crisis won't do, higher education leaders say. Those in power at colleges and universities must find time to prepare their institutions for an unsettled future that looks very different from the old status quo.

By Rick Seltzer // September 9, 2020

College leaders have a lot on their mind as they navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and coming years of uncertainty.

The presidents, chancellors, board members and other administrators who lead colleges and universities have been scrambling for months amid the coronavirus pandemic.

They scrambled to send students home and move classes online in the spring. Many scrambled for plans to resume in-person undergraduate instruction come fall. Now a significant number are once again scrambling to contain outbreaks, send students home or move classes online as COVID-19 counts on campus spike just days or weeks after the start of classes.

It's too early to grade leaders on the results of all that scrambling. It won't be possible to say for sure if anyone pulled off a successful in-person fall until the semester is over and case counts are tallied. What can be definitively said is that leaders have been overwhelmingly focused on the short term.

That short-term focus can say something about leadership styles, successes and failures. It also comes at a moment of changing conditions that means it's time to rethink higher education's long-term prospects.

Time will tell whether a chaotic fall shakes families' conviction that the path to a better life winds through college campuses. But conditions already dictate that the pandemic has exacerbated financial pressures, looming student demographic changes and budding technological capabilities that will reshape the American higher education landscape.

"If there is any leader in the country who thinks it is going to go back to where it was a year ago, they are lying to themselves," said Terri E. Givens, chief executive officer of the Center for Higher Education Leadership and former provost at Menlo College (and an opinion contributor to *Inside Higher Ed*). "But what this will look like is going to

Who Leads Colleges After COVID-19? (cont.)

be hugely dependent on resources. Right now, everything is in emergency mode."

Even so, leaders cannot ignore long-term thinking for the time being, according to leadership experts.

Leadership is situational, with each stage of this crisis requiring different skills, said Larry Ladd, a senior consultant at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Presidents who were put in place to make incremental changes in a relatively stable environment can no longer count on the same set of skills to carry them through the coming months and years.

Logistical skills are suddenly more important, for example. A college president might need to understand how a delay in receiving one piece of equipment -- a machine that processes COVID-19 tests -- can affect an entire campus reopening plan.

"Then there is the need for leadership for 2021 and beyond, which is an entirely different kind of leadership than the leadership they were hired for," Ladd said. "Now they have to show imaginative strategies."

Inside Higher Ed recently interviewed dozens of college and university presidents at different institutions across the country to determine what leadership skills they are building in preparation for the coming years. Their responses formed the foundation of a new special report being released today, "College Leadership in an Era of Unpredictability." That report also includes an overview of larger trends that were shaping higher education's future before the pandemic, as well as the challenges it will have to overcome. It is intended for current and rising leaders at colleges and universities, whether they hold a formal title like president or are informal leaders in faculty or administrative positions.

Leaders provided a wealth of insight that had to be left on the cutting room floor when that document was being assembled. What follows are some of the best quotes and ideas they offered that couldn't be packed into the special report.

Change

There is no going back to pre-COVID days for the higher education sector, most leaders and experts agreed.

"We confronted an apocalypse," said Mark B. Rosenberg, president of Florida International University in Miami. "Almost anyone in the service industry has. If you can't have face-to-face, how are you going to do this? If you can't have the relationship, how are you going to do this?"

Just how much long-term change is in store has yet to be determined. Will this be the moment

Mark Rosenberg

when traditional brick-and-mortar campuses adopt online classes for traditional-age students in greater numbers? Will it be the moment when some of the institutions with the weakest brands and worst financial positions are weeded out of a consolidating sector? Or will it be a moment that hurts the weakest institutions without killing them while greatly strengthening those that were already in prominent positions?

Shirley Ann Jackson

Those and other scenarios are on the table. As such, it's important to plan, think through different factors and make decisions with the best information available, leaders say.

"You have to have contingencies," said Shirley Ann Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in Troy, N.Y. "Think through

some what-if scenarios so that you can pivot."

Figure Out What You Can Control -- and What You Can't

The pandemic has in some cases crushed college leaders' rhetoric under the weight of reality.

Michael Sorrell

"Here we are, watching many, many schools recant their positions of what they're going to do in the fall," said Michael J. Sorrell, president of Paul Quinn College. "They spent the summer telling people how inadequate online learning was and how they are going to come back to school and all of this, when the reality of it is none of us have any way of defeating the science of this virus."

The virus is what it is, Sorrell said. He said the science is clear that the coronavirus thrives on close, intimate quarters and personal contact -- the foundations upon which residential colleges are built.

"There may be parts of the science that aren't clear," Sorrell said. "But the part you needed to rely upon to make a good decision was very clear."

Time will tell if any colleges are able to bundle enough mitigation strategies to hold in-person semesters without eventually court-

ing dangerous spread of the virus. Many college leaders maintain that it's possible, while others believe institutions have bought into magical thinking in order to avoid making hard decisions -- betraying students' trust in the process.

Regardless, hard decisions still loom after the virus departs. It's important leaders learn their limits and learn from their mistakes, they said.

Some leaders pointed to the words of crisis expert Larry Barton: What did you know? When did you know it? What did you do about it?

And how can you make sure it doesn't happen again?

The Importance of Leadership

It might seem self-evident, but another theme that emerged is just how important leadership is at this moment in time. Change is difficult, president after president said.

"I don't want you to underestimate just how hard this is going to be," Sorrell said. "You're asking people to do something different."

Beverly Tatum

Good leadership won't guarantee an institution's success. But experts generally agree good leadership boosts its chances, while poor leadership does the reverse.

"Leadership matters," said Beverly Daniel Tatum, former president of Spelman College. "We know that leadership matters. And what-

ever the situation is, it will be worse if the leadership is ineffective."

Partnerships

What specific long-term steps leaders are considering for the coming years seem to vary greatly. Some are still generating ideas. Several, however, returned to the idea of increased partnerships between institutions, organizations and communities that could provide a financial boost for campuses while also better serving students.

Merger and acquisition activity in recent years has generally revolved around public institutions in the same state system or wealthy private universities acquiring smaller, poorer campuses. But other models could be possible.

Can private liberal arts colleges find a way to partner with community colleges? Small liberal arts institutions often have a community college in their backyards, pointed out Thom Chesney, president of Clarke University in Iowa and former president of Brookhaven College, which is part of the Dallas County Community College District, in Texas.

Faculty, brick-and-mortar and curricular demands might line up between the different types of institutions, according to Chesney. Community colleges sometimes have programs they could grow but for classroom space limits, while liberal arts colleges tend to have underutilized classroom space.

Partnering could lead to savings through consolidated central office functions. Institutions could learn from each other's complementary core competencies. A community college might bring adult education, two-year degrees and flexible course delivery to the table. A liberal arts college might have physical assets, four-year degrees and

the ability to teach critical thinking skills or to tap global networks. Together, they could offer stackable degrees while connecting local talent to new opportunities.

Thom Chesney

"I think we're going to see a real opportunity for a different kind of partnership," Chesney says. "Imagine a small liberal arts college and a local community college having not just a memorandum of understanding but a joint operations structure."

For a much simpler type of partnership, Rosenberg, president at FIU, talked about rush hour. The university started speaking with transportation officials in Miami-Dade County who needed to minimize congestion at rush hour, he said. Implications exist for who works when and who works remotely at what times. Some changes in scheduling at a large employer like a university can have major effects on the surrounding community.

Diversity

The police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man in Minneapolis, and ensuing protests were on leaders' minds. They often returned to issues of access, equity, justice and racism.

Sometimes they talked about

how their institutions interacted with larger society to contribute to or fight racism, or how the political process fed into it.

"In order for there to be structural depravation and structural racism, you have to go into the idea of what built that structure," said Pam Eddinger, president of Bunker Hill Community College in Massachusetts. "That's our policies. That's our procedures. It's years and years of redlining in real estate policy and health policies."

Pam Eddinger

Other times leaders talked about how campuses and academe may want to look in the mirror. The tenure process was frequently mentioned.

For example, some faculty handbooks say faculty advancement should be based on superior intellectual attainment without defining exactly what that means, said Raymund Paredes, former commissioner of higher education in Texas. Superior intellectual attainment shouldn't only mean articles published in exclusive academic journals, he said. Many other actions can be included that might help faculty diversity, such as advising a retention program that helps low-income students of color

stay in college.

"People are starting to say we've got to do something dramatically different in looking at the tenure system," Paredes said. "It's fairly clear that we have got to look at the very structures and the very foundation of higher education to make sure they're fairer."

Service to the Community

Several of those interviewed attacked a model of college leadership that amounts to careerism -- constantly trying to grow an institution's rankings and prestige, only to leave it for a job further up the food chain. Instead, they stressed leadership that's focused on the communities that host an institution and the constituencies it serves.

"Leadership has to reclaim the mission of service to a community," said Deborah Santiago, co-founder and CEO of Excelencia in Education. "That will yield support from the community and others that is questionable right now."

Deborah Santiago

David Yarlott Jr., president of Little Big Horn College, a tribal community college on the Crow Indian reservation in Montana, talked about serving the broader community during the pandemic.

"We've been trying to provide

cleaning supplies to the most needy, whether it's the elders or individuals who have compromised health," he said. "It doesn't matter whether they are tribal members or not. If they are in this immediate area, they're going through the same things everybody else is."

Serving communities into the future was also top of mind. So too was serving students and putting them in a position to succeed after graduation in a world where future employment prospects are uncertain.

Neeli Bendapudi

"I think it would be a travesty if we were not to look out for what comes next for the student," said

"

I don't want you to underestimate just how hard this is going to be. You're asking people to do something different.

"

Neeli Bendapudi, president of the University of Louisville. "I wrestle with that question. I do think we need to say, what happens to work?"

This is particularly important for students who aren't likely to move to follow the ebbs and flows of the global economy -- either because they can't or because they don't want to leave home and their families. College presidents need to recognize that students must have pathways to employment, Santiago said.

"For many Latinos, at least, we tend to go to college and graduate where we live, and that's where we want to stay," she says. "So showing value as an institution by more overtly linking the employers to the institution and the students to employment is a powerful opportunity that's in reach."

Some suggest that centering on community can help with the burden of leadership, as well.

"We have to anchor our mental health as college presidents in the larger understanding of what the principles are that anchor our work without COVID," Eddinger said. ∎

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Digital transformation in higher education:
Three benefits of ERP migration to the cloud

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems handle everything from accounting to marketing, finances to inventory, human resources to customer relations, and more. Colleges and universities commit significant infrastructure and personnel resources to run and manage these vital applications. But shifts in technology adoption, reduced availability of skilled labor, and increased economic pressures push colleges and universities to assess the return on their material ERP system investments.

One way higher education institutions realize additional return on their scarce resources is by using cloud technologies. After AWS Consulting Partner Sierra Cedar helped Arizona State University (ASU) moved to Amazon Web Services (AWS), the university was able to effectively allocate resources to benefit its students and solve operational problems that would otherwise require additional investment. Check out three benefits higher education institutions can recognize by moving ERP systems to the cloud:

High availability

When disaster strikes—be it a data breach, power outage, or hurricane—service outages and data loss can be a devastating result. Good application design in AWS can mitigate these recovery risks through the highly resilient and scalable architecture of AWS. With an active AWS architecture design, if there is a problem with one system, failover automatically shifts to a server in another Availability Zone (AZ) with no interruption in service. And thanks to constant backup processes on AWS, there is little to no data loss. With mass virtual learning spurred by the pandemic, this kind of fallback system helps administrations to have access to important data, no matter where they are working.

Before ASU moved to AWS, its IT team had to run regular disaster recovery (DR) tests—a time-consuming process that included manual failovers. The university partnered with Sierra-Cedar to design and re-platform its systems on AWS by migrating from a five node Oracle RAC cluster to Amazon Relational Database Service (Amazon RDS). Today, the ASU team no longer needs to hold DR drills, because there is nothing to practice for.

Scalability

During student enrollment periods, ERP systems at colleges and universities need to scale rapidly with the ability to expand six-to-eight times the normal usage. Instead of scaling up on individual servers, AWS scales out by adding more server capacity to meet demand. Institutions no longer need to acquire the physical infrastructure required to handle peak stress only several weeks of the year. With AWS, they can rely on the flexibility of the cloud—saving time and money. ASU saw scalability as a huge plus for its institution during its student enrollment periods, which increase the demand on infrastructure eight-fold.

Operational efficiencies

To realize cost savings, moving an ERP solution to AWS must be designed with the cloud in mind. Why? If an institution simply moves its existing system as-is onto a new platform (commonly referred to as "lift and shift"), it will often replicate the same issues it had prior to moving to the cloud. While the move can be viewed as a win (as there will likely be gains in efficiency and costs), the same pain points existing before the migration will still be present.

When moving ERP systems to the cloud, higher education institutions should re-platform. This approach explores the original application, breaks the application down into different components, and re-architects it to a cloud-optimized application that takes advantage of a pay-only-for-what-you-consume model. This option uses value-added cloud services and the following well-architected design concepts.

Infrastructure-as-code: Allows you to "plug-and-play," easily adding on new solutions in the future.

- **Versioning:** Revert to any previously defined infrastructure version.
- **Change control:** Multiple approvals with no single actor and no console access.
- **Infrastructure deployment:** Automated deployment, configuration, and decommission of infrastructure.
- **Drift detection:** Detects if the actual AWS deployment matches the expected configuration.
- **Automated remediation:** Automatically remediate issues—often with no visibility to the customer.

When ASU partnered with Sierra-Cedar, it took the re-platform approach of moving PeopleSoft to AWS. Following its migration and the automation of general tasks such as backup, patching, and monitoring, ASU experienced reduced administrative overhead and improved performance—52 percent of batch jobs on Amazon RDS now run significantly better than pre-migration, with a further 40 percent performing slightly better or the same. These improvements occurred without any performance tuning. Bottom line: ASU has enjoyed material operational benefits moving to AWS and experienced cost savings of around 25 percent.

Tim Gehrig

Tim Gehrig, executive vice president of cloud and managed services at Sierra-Cedar, is responsible for Sierra-Cedar's managed services and cloud technology consulting businesses, including AWS, Salesforce, Oracle, MuleSoft, and Splunk. Tim has more than 20 years of business technology experience. Tim has an executive MBA from Emory University's Goizueta Business School, is certified with AWS, and has been a speaker at numerous industry and technology events.

Can Colleges Share a President?

College systems and consortia have shared academic services, libraries, transportation, even a campus. Would they be able to share a president?

By Emma Whitford // July 24, 2020

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education recently announced plans to integrate operations at three pairs of universities.

The proposals are the latest attempt by the ailing system to cut costs systemwide. During a financial review process, the system will look at the impact and potential cost savings of shared leadership, faculty and staff, enrollment management, reporting lines, and budgets.

The universities under consideration for consolidation insist that they will maintain their individual campus identities. Details of the integration processes are still very much up in the air.

PASSHE's announcement has stoked conversation about what shared academic and administrative leadership would look like and whether it could be successful. Dennis Jones, president emeritus of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, supports the system's effort.

"I applaud what they're trying to do, because they're not trying to lose institutional identity, they're trying to find ways to make the services they provide, I would say, broader and more sustainable," Jones said.

He pointed to a similar process by the community colleges in Connecticut, which are undergoing a years-long consolidation process to bring all 12 community colleges under a single, accredited Connecticut State Community College.

David Levinson, interim pres-

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/BROKENTONE

ident of the Connecticut State Community College, said the colleges were also facing financial pressure to make a change. The new college is seeking to save $28 million over five years.

"We weren't pleased with the rates of student success in our colleges, and we also felt, and feel to this day, that our resources were being depleted in terms of finance and wanting to keep all 12 institutions going," Levinson said.

Independent universities have long shared resources in some way or another. The Five College Consortium in Massachusetts -- made up of Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst -- shares a library system, intercampus transportation, joint departments and programs and promotes cross-registration. There are dozens of e-learning consortia that share online education technology and programs across campuses.

While cohesion among universities within one system or consortium is imperative to success, shared leadership comes with its own set of challenges, Jones said. Even the Claremont Colleges, which share a campus in Southern

California, still have seven presidents.

Some efforts to unite president positions at the State University of New York several years ago met stiff resistance -- a state legislator took credit in 2011 when SUNY administrators killed plans to combine the presidencies at the Canton and Potsdam campuses.

The New York system followed through with plans to install the president at SUNY Delhi, Candace Vancko, as head of SUNY Cobleskill. But it reverted back to separate presidents in 2013. It also had the head of SUNY Institute of Technology, Bjong Wolf Yeigh, lead Morrisville State College for a short time but ultimately moved back to separate presidencies at those institutions as well.

"It's the president's office that is the hardest thing to pull off," Jones said. "If a president tries to serve two institutions, they're suspect in both communities because the community doesn't know who they represent anymore."

A Case Study in Joint Leadership

Ellen Chaffee simultaneously served as president of Valley City State University and Mayville State University in North Dakota for nine years. Now a senior consultant and senior fellow at AGB Consulting, Chaffee said she'd never planned to be a college president, let alone two at once.

"People would say, 'I don't know how you do it,'" Chaffee said. "Afterwards, looking back, my phrase was: I don't know why I did it. I don't know why I allowed it to happen."

The logistics of managing two colleges were difficult. Valley City and Mayville are 75 miles apart and Chaffee bounced back and forth between them for a week at a time. She had three homes: one in Valley City, another in Mayville and a third where her husband lived, in Bismarck.

She almost never saw the provost, who also traveled between campuses on an opposite schedule to Chaffee. It was the 1990s, and Zoom and other teleworking options were not available yet.

"I had several names for the book I was going to write," Chaffee said. "One was 'the bag lady of the plains,' because I had a bag of things to take to Valley City, things to return to Mayville, clothes I would need for this event at the other place, etc."

Shared leadership for Valley City and Mayville was the result of statewide belt tightening. In 1989, the North Dakota Legislature raised taxes, and in 1990, "the people revolted," Chaffee said. State agencies were pushed to find savings in response to the outcry, part of which included moving Valley City and Mayville under a shared administration.

"We didn't have a mandate except 'save money. Get as much savings as you can. Figure out a way to do this because there's only so much money and you're more or less at the bottom of the pecking order,'" Chaffee said.

At one time, the two universities shared only nine total administrators. No one, including Chaffee, was paid extra for working two positions.

Public relations was a challenge. Valley City and Mayville "hated each other," she said.

She found ways to manage. She had a sweatshirt with "Valley City" written on the left side and "Mayville" on the right. At football games between the two, Chaffee would sit first on the side of the home team and then switch throughout the game to the side of whichever team was behind.

"Then they don't want you to sit with them. They're not jealous that you're with the other guy -- they're glad because that means they're winning," she said.

In 2001, the state Legislature had some discretionary spending and the colleges were able to write proposals to capture some of the funds. Chaffee brought in five outside college presidents as consultants, and "by the time they all got to the Fargo airport, they pretty much decided this had to stop."

In 2002, the universities switched back to having two presidents. Chaffee stayed on as Valley City's president for another six years.

"I guess it's better than closing," Chaffee said of the shared presidency, "but it's certainly far down my list of desirable things to happen to an organization." ∎

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Private Colleges Battle Disconnects

Leaders of private institutions gather to mull the gaps between the challenges they face, the opportunities they see, a hostile public narrative and what they see as a very different reality.

By Rick Seltzer // January 8, 2020

MARCO ISLAND, Fla. -- An annual gathering of private college presidents proved to be a story of many different disconnects this year.

Disconnects between markets, domestic and international. Disconnects between different institutions, stressed and strengthening. Disconnects between campuses and the public, or at least a public narrative of skepticism toward higher education that many presidents desperately want to change.

The gathering -- the Council of Independent Colleges Presidents Institute -- began with an announcement that it had grown to its largest size ever, with 851 participants including 360 presidents and 175 of their spouses and partners in attendance. But the very next topic at its opening event was a keynote speech with a different tone, as attendees heard about population trends that are placing a significant burden on their financial and enrollment outlooks.

To be sure, not every institution at the conference is under financial or enrollment stress. Some attendees were reporting their largest-ever fundraising campaigns or great successes attracting students with smart marketing, recruiting and pricing campaigns.

Still, the conference is heavily populated with representatives of small, nonwealthy private colleges that draw most of their students locally. They are exactly the type of institution most likely to struggle with enrollment or balancing the books. And in recent years, CIC has been providing more programming

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to help them address their concerns.

Even as many attendees acknowledge the sector's problems, they feel a disconnect between the value they offer students and what they see as a public narrative unfairly attacking them as unaffordable and out of touch.

"Public, the journalists, officials have come to doubt the value of our demonstrably effective institutions," CIC president Richard Ekman said as the conference opened Saturday. "So restoring public confidence in higher education and in private colleges must be a top priority for all of us here. We know that doing so requires more than rebutting our critics point by point, although we must be relentless in correcting false facts."

Ekman was followed by Nathan Grawe, social sciences professor at Carleton College in Minnesota and the author of the ubiquitous 2018 book *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press). Grawe has become an in-demand speaker sharing research findings from the book that project many colleges will have a difficult time enrolling traditional-age students in coming years because of a post-recession "birth dearth."

Large drops in numbers of high school graduates enrolling in regional four-year colleges after 2017 are expected to plateau in the next few years. But a return to the annual demand growth of the past seems unlikely for such colleges, and the sector is likely to experience sharp declines again by the second part of the decade.

Grawe expressed optimism because of constructive energy pri-

vate colleges are harnessing as they try to address the enrollment challenge. There are other reasons to be optimistic, such as rising numbers of Latinx students attending college and a Latinx population that is generally becoming more wealthy -- providing a ray of hope for cash-strapped institutions that rely on tuition revenue to stay in operation.

Optimism aside, Grawe cautioned against people's instinct to double down on old assumptions when confronted with unpleasant information.

"They will try to avoid," he said. "And it turns out, the more letters you have after your name, the more likely you are to engage in this."

Presidents asked many questions about Grawe's projections: Would adding adult students to his analysis change regional colleges' outlook? What would happen if economic conditions change, pushing more students to enroll in college when they can't find jobs? What would happen if institutions addressed concerns about affordability? How might graduate enrollment change?

The what-ifs might not change the outlook for many colleges that are heavily dependent on local 18- to 24-year-old populations. From a strategic standpoint, though, they might make sense for presidents trying to prepare institutions for the coming decade.

"When you're on that plateau, you're in a different world," Grawe said. "You're in something of a world of scarcity, where there aren't just more students you can go recruit. We have to think differently, as a result."

In sessions and in conversations throughout the conference, presidents demonstrated some of the ways they're trying to prepare for

> " Restoring public confidence in higher education and in private colleges must be a top priority for all of us here. We know that doing so requires more than rebutting our critics point by point. "

the future. They discussed corporate partnerships, outreach to adult learners and finding ways to better meet student needs. Some discussed the overcoming challenges facing rural institutions, like isolation and regional economic development.

Presidents were also buoyed Monday by talk of employers needing the critical thinking and learning skills that their institutions emphasize.

And they heard from a global higher education leader who sees opportunity in international students. Mariët Westermann, vice chancellor of New York University Abu Dhabi and former executive vice president for programs and research at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, spoke Sunday of a disconnect between the stresses small colleges in the U.S. are feeling and rising demand for education in regions like Africa, the Middle East and India.

"All I hear is of unmet need, versus in America we're headed obviously for a situation where we're having too low a birth rate to fill our seats," Westermann said. "So I

think there is an opportunity coming no matter what happens in our political landscape."

She acknowledged broad challenges, however.

"While global citizenship -- this idea of global citizenship -- seems a necessary ideal for a planet as under duress as it is, the shine has gone off of that idea a little in recent years," she said.

Indeed, talk of opportunity contrasted with some presidents' insecurities, concerns and discomfort. A session on building a senior leadership team for stressed institutions was heavily attended. Presidents grilled members of the press about free college proposals from Democratic presidential candidates and on what some see as an unfair public narrative about out-of-control student debt.

Presidents are arguably feeling the stress of forces much bigger than their own institutions bearing down on private, regional, non-wealthy colleges. Those forces include income inequality, a suddenly skeptical public, leery policy makers and, some whisper in private conversations, campuses where

Private Colleges Battle Disconnects (cont.)

complacency dominates. Some boards or faculty members wish to return to the past, one president confided. But the past is not coming back.

Under such conditions, it should be no surprise that presidential tenures have been shortening. Those short tenures create a challenge for presidents themselves and the boards tasked with guiding institutions over time.

The closing plenary included talk about who is responsible for improving financial conditions at colleges when presidential turnover is high.

"I think when the presidents are churning, the board has a differ-ent set of responsibilities than it had when you used to have long-term presidents," said Lawrence M. Schall, president of Oglethorpe University in Atlanta. Schall is an exception to the trend of shortening tenures, having been president of Oglethorpe since 2005 and planning to step down in June.

Not everyone would agree that boards should push for changes in times of presidential turnover. Some would prefer to see boards empower presidents to make changes themselves.

Separately, some argue against using finances as the only marker of institutional health.

"To me, it is the mission that drives the health of the organization," said Mary Dana Hinton, president of the College of Saint Benedict in Minnesota.

Missions vary widely by institution, as do conditions on the ground. It could be said that, as much as they share, small private colleges must overcome disconnects between each other in order to find strategies that will work for all of them.

As a result, meeting the challenges of the next decade is a difficult, complicated problem. Hinton may have summed it up best:

"I cannot think of a single question in higher ed right now for which there is one perfect answer." ∎

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aws public sector

The power of the cloud, made easy

Colleges and universities are racing to adopt cloud solutions, with higher ed spending on cloud migration predicted to double from 2018 to 2022.[1] But if you're like many higher education leaders, making the transition feels overwhelming. That's where Amazon Web Services (AWS) Education Competency Partners can help.

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Survey finds campus leaders most concerned about COVID-19's impact on institutional finances and on students, particularly disadvantaged ones. As they look ahead, they see need and opportunity for transformation.

By **Doug Lederman** **// June 29, 2020**

As *Inside Higher Ed* has surveyed college and university presidents several times over the course of this COVID-19-dominated spring, some things have remained constant. The leaders' sometimes conflicting concerns about student and employee health and institutional finances. Uncertainty about if and when they will reopen campuses and resume sports programs. Awareness that difficult financial decisions, driven by the recession, are ahead.

But certain issues have taken on greater magnitude as a fall like no other nears.

A new iteration of the survey of campus leaders by *Inside Higher Ed* and Hanover Research, published today, finds presidents likelier than they were two months ago to expect their institutions to reduce their portfolio of academic programs (55 percent versus 41 percent in April).

Majorities of presidents remain confident in their colleges' ability to educate students safely and well, whether they're on campuses or off this fall. But far fewer believe their institutions can ensure the safety of vulnerable people in their surrounding communities (39 percent) or ensure that students will behave responsibly when they're not being watched (29 percent).

And nearly three-quarters of presidents (72 percent) are either very or somewhat concerned about a "perceived decrease in the value of higher education" because of COVID-19, up sharply from 60 percent of respondents in April and 48 percent in March.

That worry seems to flow from college leaders' sense that what they are capable of delivering in the COVID-19 era will reinforce already existing doubts about quality and value: growing numbers of campus leaders, about half, said they worry about student demands for room and board and tuition reimbursement; more than two-thirds fear a decline in alumni/donor giving rates; and 39 percent, up from 29 percent in April, said they anticipate "perceived negativity" from campus constituents about their institution's response to COVID-19.

The survey's results suggest that campus leaders are approaching the fall and beyond with deep uncertainty and more than a little anxiety, but that many see opportunity as well.

Asked to assess how their institution will respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuring recession, a full half, 50 percent, said they hoped it would make "difficult but transformative changes" to "better position itself for long-term sustainability, while another 35 percent said their college or university should "focus more on what it does best" so it can "invest and grow in those areas once the recession ends. About one in 10 presidents said they believe the institution could "ride out the current difficulties" and return to normal within 12 to 18 months, and just 3 percent said their institution should tighten its focus and emerge "smaller but better."

Taken together, the survey results find college leaders balancing health and financial issues and concerns, a yin and yang that underlies

Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis, Part III:
A Survey of College and University Presidents

A study by *Inside Higher Ed* and Hanover Research
June 2020
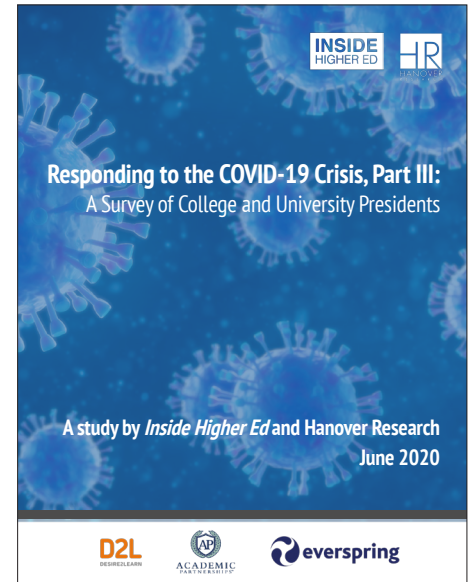
just about every decision facing they face right now, as they weigh whether to open their campuses fully, partially or not at all.

Current Concerns

Inside Higher Ed asked a fairly consistent set of questions in its surveys in March, April and June, which allows some analysis of how presidents' views have changed over the four months since the pandemic descended on higher education and shuttered most campuses. (Significantly fewer presidents responded to the June iteration of the survey, for reasons that are not clear.)

Presidents' top concerns have remained largely the same over that time, focused on a mix of student and employee health and institutional financial woes.

While the pandemic's disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students and the mental health of

How would you rate your current level of concern related to the following issues in regard to COVID-19?
% Very Concerned + % Somewhat Concerned
March (n=164) | April (n=183) | June (n=97)

Issue	March	April	June
Unbudgeted financial costs related to COVID-19*	87%	84%	96%
Disproportionate impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds	87%		93%
Mental health of students	92%	91%	91%
Accelerated rates of student attrition	85%	86%	86%
Physical health of employees*	85%	69%	82%
Mental health of employees	88%	83%	81%
Physical health of students	81%	73%	80%
Student accessibility to online learning platforms and tools	76%	76%	80%
Faculty readiness to conduct online learning or hybrid learning*	75%	63%	68%
Technological readiness to conduct online learning	57%	52%	57%
Ability to communicate effectively with constituencies regarding updates	45%	39%	51%

Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

How would you rate the level of success at your institution associated with moving in-person classes to a remote or online setting this spring for the following activities?
% Extremely Successful + % Very Successful
March (n=144-158) | April (n=169-176) | June (n=92-93)

Activity	March	April	June
Having technology support available*	41%	46%	81%
Achieving faculty buy-in*	61%	60%	73%
Ensuring technology tools and resources were ready and available*	37%	39%	63%
Ensuring academic standards remained high*	21%	28%	55%
Providing adequate tutoring, advising, and other academic support			53%
Training faculty less familiar with digital delivery*	18%	23%	47%
Ensuring equitable access for students*	19%	22%	45%
Incorporating feedback from students and faculty to improve the experience as the spring went by*	23%	23%	41%
Maintaining student engagement*	10%	15%	31%
Ensuring students' emotional well-being	17%		

Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

students remain near the very top of issues on which presidents relayed their "current level of concern," they've been displaced in the most recent survey by presidents' worries about unbudgeted financial costs related to COVID-19, about which 96 percent of leaders said they were either very or somewhat concerned, up from 84 percent in April.

Concerns about the physical health of students and employees is rising again as campuses start or prepare to reopen. In March, as the pandemic bore down, more than eight in 10 presidents expressed worries about their constituents' physical health. That eased in April, but it has climbed again in June.

Presidents expressed less (if still meaningful) concern about their institutions' forced shift to remote learning, and that same sentiment emerged when respondents were asked to assess how that shift went.

Two-thirds or more of respondents said their institutions had been extremely or very successful at having technology support available, achieving faculty buy-in and ensuring the availability of technology tools and resources, and more than half gave themselves high marks at ensuring high academic standards and providing adequate tutoring and other academic support. On most of those points, presidents' assessment improved as the term went on.

In other areas the presidents acknowledged room for improvement, sometimes significant.

Under half of college chiefs said they had been extremely or very successful at training faculty members less familiar with digital delivery (47 percent), ensuring equitable access for students (45 percent) and incorporating feedback from students and instructors to improve

the experience as spring went on.

Their self-reviews were even worse when it came to maintaining student engagement and ensuring students' emotional well-being. More presidents (27 percent) said their institutions were slightly (25 percent) or not at all successful at ensuring student well-being than said they were extremely or very successful (17 percent), while just 31 percent gave their colleges top marks on student engagement. Fifty-three percent said they were moderately successful on that front.

Tamara Hiler, director of education at Third Way, a center-left think tank, said that the group's research into students' perceptions of their education last spring found that students "have been very forgiving of institutions, understanding that much of what has happened has been outside of their control." But she said presidents' perceptions

Many institutions took the following actions as COVID-19 hit this spring. If your institution took these actions, when do you expect to reverse them by?

Legend: Over the Summer · Start of the Fall Semester · January 2021 · Never · Already Reversed · Uncertain Timeline

Action	Over the Summer	Start of the Fall Semester	January 2021	Never	Already Reversed	Uncertain Timeline
Suspended international travel for students (n=74)	11%	15%				72%
Suspended international travel for faculty/staff (n=80)	9%	18%				69%
Instituted salary reductions (n=36)	14%	6%			14%	64%
Froze or reduced benefits (n=34)	9%	6%		29%		53%
Furloughed employees (n=45)	24%	18%	16%			40%
Reduced workforce (n=51)	14%	16%		25%	6%	39%
Invested in additional physical or mental health resources (n=57)	16%	11%	4%	35%		33%
Invested in emergency response resources (n=63)	30%	6%	5%	24%		33%
Moved campus tours online (n=85)	31%	15%	6%	4%	14%	31%
Suspended athletic programs (n=70)	16%	43%		4%	4%	30%

Note: Respondents only saw actions that they indicated they had already taken.

Legend: Over the Summer · Start of the Fall Semester · January 2021 · Never · Already Reversed · Uncertain Timeline

Action	Over the Summer	Start of the Fall Semester	January 2021	Never	Already Reversed	Uncertain Timeline
Implemented work-remote policies for staff (n=91)	31%	21%	5%	13%	7%	23%
Revised admissions standards (n=31)	10%	10%	6%	45%	6%	23%
Moved the majority of all in-person classes online (n=89)	20%	48%		8%		20%
Moved admissions online (n=81)	42%	12%	5%	14%	7%	20%
Delayed admissions deadlines (n=56)	29%	21%	4%	16%	14%	16%
Closed academic buildings/faculty offices (n=85)	49%	21%	5%	5%	8%	12%
Closed administrative offices (n=72)	49%	17%		10%	11%	11%
Invested in new, online learning resources (n=83)	31%	4%	5%	47%		11%
Closed dining halls (n=74)	24%	53%		4%	7%	11%
Suspended administrative operations (n=31)	48%	29%		13%		10%
Closed residential halls (n=51)	12%	71%		8%	6%	4%

Note: Respondents only saw actions that they indicated they had already taken.

that that "they were extremely or very successful in maintaining high standards in their move to online courses feels like it may be setting institutions up on a collision course with students who did not seem to indicate that this was the case," especially if the "benefit of the doubt" colleges received wanes this fall.

It's All About Fall

College officials are focused intensely on their plans for the fall term right now, and the survey offers insights into presidents' thinking about how it will unfold.

One question asks them when they think they will reverse the various steps they took during the spring in response to COVID-19 and, consistent with the pronouncements they have made in recent weeks, most campus leaders seem intent on reopening their physical campuses this fall.

Two-thirds of presidents say they will undo the decision to move the majority of in-person courses on-line by summer (20 percent) or fall (48 percent), while 8 percent say they plan to do so by January and 20 percent said they had an "uncertain timeline." At least three-quarters said they would reopen campus dining and residence halls by fall, but only 59 percent expected to restart athletics programs by fall, with 30 percent envisioning an uncertain timeline.

Regarding the campus workplace, about seven in 10 said they would reopen academic and administrative buildings by fall, but fewer, 52 percent, said they expected to reverse remote-work policies by then. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) cited an uncertain timeline for reversing those policies, and 13 percent said they would never reverse those policies.
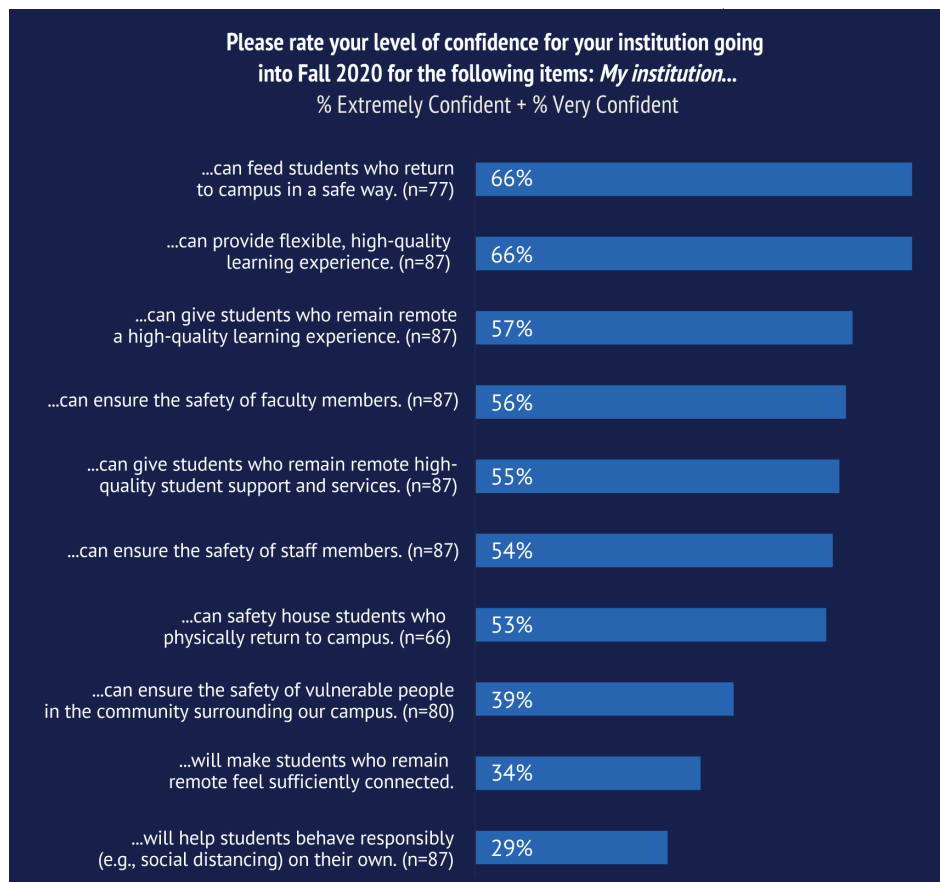
Roughly half of presidents said their institutions had taken steps this spring to curtail their workforces or their budgets for employees, through furloughs or layoffs or cuts in salaries or benefits. Some of those cuts may end up being permanent: for example, 39 percent of campus leaders who said they had reduced their workforce said they had an uncertain timeline for reversing those cuts, and 25 percent said they never expected to do so. Similarly, 29 percent of those who had reduced benefits said they did not ever anticipate undoing those reductions.

The survey asked presidents to directly assess their confidence about various elements of their institutions' approach to the fall.

When it comes to bringing students back to campus, two-thirds of presidents said they were extremely or very confident they could feed returning students safely and give them a "flexible, high-quality learning experience." Slightly more than half (53 percent) expressed confidence that they could house students safely, and roughly similar numbers said they could ensure

Please rate your level of confidence for your institution going into Fall 2020 for the following items: *My institution...*
% Extremely Confident + % Very Confident

...can feed students who return to campus in a safe way. (n=77)	66%
...can provide flexible, high-quality learning experience. (n=87)	66%
...can give students who remain remote a high-quality learning experience. (n=87)	57%
...can ensure the safety of faculty members. (n=87)	56%
...can give students who remain remote high-quality student support and services. (n=87)	55%
...can ensure the safety of staff members. (n=87)	54%
...can safety house students who physically return to campus. (n=66)	53%
...can ensure the safety of vulnerable people in the community surrounding our campus. (n=80)	39%
...will make students who remain remote feel sufficiently connected.	34%
...will help students behave responsibly (e.g., social distancing) on their own. (n=87)	29%

the safety of faculty members (56 percent) and staff members (54 percent). Most of the rest said they were moderately confident; fewer than 10 percent said they were only slightly or not at all confident.

Fewer said they believed their institutions could ensure the safety of "vulnerable people in the community surrounding our campus" (39 percent), and even fewer seemed confident they could protect students from themselves. Only 29 percent said they were extremely or very confident that their institution "will help students behave responsibly (e.g., social distancing) on their own," and 30 percent said they were either slightly or not at all confident.

Presidents expressed a similarly mixed assessment about how the fall might unfold for those who remain virtual. Nearly six in 10 leaders expressed confidence that their col-

lege or university can "give students who remain remote a high-quality learning experience" (57 percent) and provide high-quality student support and services (55 percent). But only a third, 34 percent, are confident they can make students who remain remote "feel virtually connected."
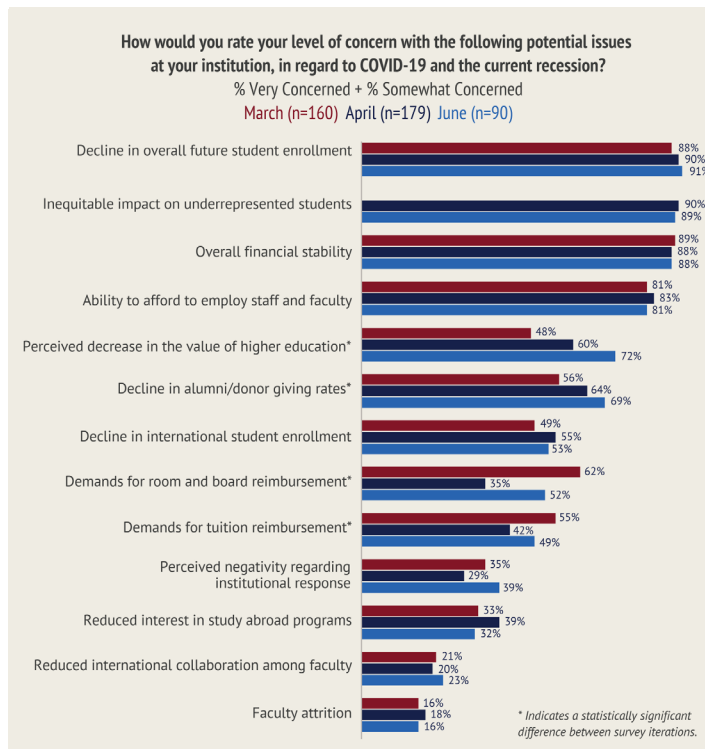
Those answers capture the conundrum that many college leaders are facing as they make decisions about the fall now, says Samantha Fisher, managing director of the education practice at Accenture, a consulting firm. "One of the things most on students' minds when making a decision of where to enroll -- student engagement -- is something that [college presidents] don't believe they have done well in spring -- less than one-third feel they were successful at maintaining student engagement," Fisher said.

"The dominant solution seems to be to get students physically back on campus, but the restrictions needed for fall mean that the experience will not be what it once was. If they want to maintain enrollment, institutions will need to grapple with how to foster virtual student engagement and connectedness -- whether for their on-campus-but-restricted students or for a more equitable experience for their remote students."

Worries Ahead

While much of what's in store remains uncertain, presidents seem relatively sure that they will face financial difficulties. Asked to rate their level of concern about a list of potential issues, 91 percent of presidents said they were very (50 percent) or somewhat concerned about declines in future student enrollment, and 88 percent expressed concern about woverall financial

How would you rate your level of concern with the following potential issues at your institution, in regard to COVID-19 and the current recession?
% Very Concerned + % Somewhat Concerned
March (n=160) April (n=179) June (n=90)

Issue	March	April	June
Decline in overall future student enrollment	88%	90%	91%
Inequitable impact on underrepresented students		90%	89%
Overall financial stability	89%	88%	88%
Ability to afford to employ staff and faculty	81%	83%	81%
Perceived decrease in the value of higher education*	48%	60%	72%
Decline in alumni/donor giving rates*	56%	64%	69%
Decline in international student enrollment	49%	55%	53%
Demands for room and board reimbursement*	62%	35%	52%
Demands for tuition reimbursement*	55%	42%	49%
Perceived negativity regarding institutional response	35%	29%	39%
Reduced interest in study abroad programs	33%	39%	32%
Reduced international collaboration among faculty	21%	20%	23%
Faculty attrition	16%	18%	16%

* Indicates a statistically significant difference between survey iterations.

Which of the following most closely reflects your view of how your institution will respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession?

Response	%
Transform institution: My institution should use this period to make difficult but transformative changes in its core structure and operations to better position itself for long-term sustainability.	50%
Reset for growth: My institution should use this period to focus more on what it does best so it can invest and grow in those areas once the recession ends.	35%
Return to normal: My institution can ride out the current difficulties and return more or less to normal operations within 12-18 months.	11%
Shrink institution: My institution should use this period to tighten its focus to come out of the recession smaller but better.	3%
Don't know/ Does not apply	0%

stability (31 percent said they were very concerned). Eighty-one percent expressed concern about their ability to afford to employ faculty and staff members.

Presidents remain very concerned about the current situation's inequitable impact on underrepresented students, who are likeliest to have their educational plans derailed by a combination of job or income loss, increased family responsibilities or health risks related to COVID-19, or diminished engagement with their college or university.

And rising on the list of presidents' worries is a perceived decrease in the value of higher education, with nearly three-quarters of campus leaders saying they are very or somewhat concerned about that, up from just half in March.

Denny Meadows, who consults with colleges on strategy with SilverFern Advisory, noted that public doubts of the value of a college degree have been "building for many years," as college prices and debt levels rise and wages stagnate. "It seems to have taken a pandemic for some leaders to take them seriously," she said, describing that recognition as a potential "silver lining" of the current situation.

She and others cited as evidence of that recognition presidents' answers to a new question about how their institution will respond to the pandemic and recession, with a full half of campus leaders saying they believed their college or university should "use this period to make difficult but transformative changes in its core structure and operations to better position itself for long-term sustainability." About a third of presidents said their institution should focus more on its strengths so it can emerge from the recession in a position to grow. Smaller numbers of presidents said they hoped to ride out the recession and return to normal or shrink.
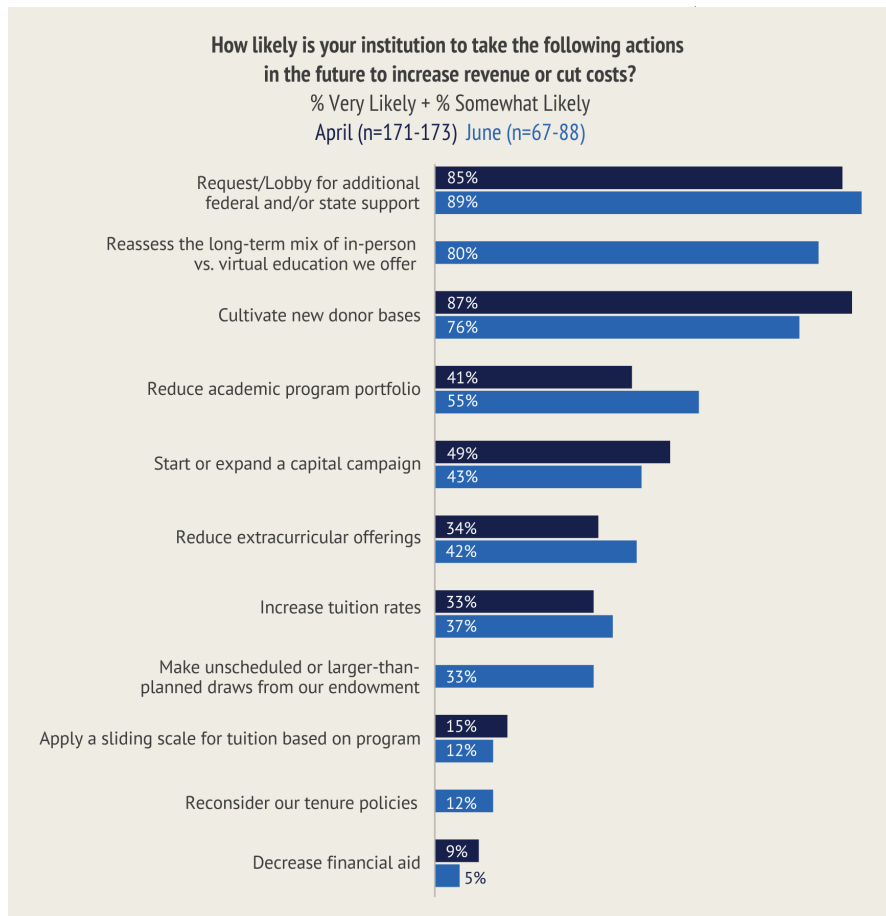
The survey offers some evidence of what that re-envisioning might look like.

Asked which of a series of potential revenue-generating or cost-cutting measures they might take in response to budgetary concerns in the coming months, seeking more federal or state support continued to top presidents' lists. But fewer presidents in June than in April said they would try to cultivate new donor bases or start or expand capital campaigns, suggesting increasing recognition that they may struggle to tap traditional sources of revenue. A third said they would make "unscheduled or larger-than-planned draws" from their endowments. Only 12 percent said their institutions would reconsider their tenure policies, although 22 percent of private college leaders said that.

Meanwhile, eight in 10 said they would "reassess the long-term mix of in-person vs. virtual education we offer," and 55 percent (up from 41 percent in April) said they would reduce their academic program portfolio.

"It looks like institutions will be

How likely is your institution to take the following actions in the future to increase revenue or cut costs?
% Very Likely + % Somewhat Likely
April (n=171-173) June (n=67-88)

Action	April	June
Request/Lobby for additional federal and/or state support	85%	89%
Reassess the long-term mix of in-person vs. virtual education we offer		80%
Cultivate new donor bases	87%	76%
Reduce academic program portfolio	41%	55%
Start or expand a capital campaign	49%	43%
Reduce extracurricular offerings	34%	42%
Increase tuition rates	33%	37%
Make unscheduled or larger-than-planned draws from our endowment		33%
Apply a sliding scale for tuition based on program	15%	12%
Reconsider our tenure policies		12%
Decrease financial aid	9%	5%

thinking of more fundamentally changing their cost structure through a permanent shift in how they deliver education," said Accenture's Fisher, noting that nearly half of presidents said they would not reverse new investments they had made in online learning resources. "This contributes to mounting evidence that the COVID crisis may have spurred the shift to an era of pervasively hybrid education." ∎

Read Original Article ▶▶ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/survey/college-presidents-increasingly-worried-about-perceived-value-degrees

Higher Education's Digital Transformation

❚ Data, delivery and curricular design.

By Steve Mintz // May 30, 2019

If higher education is to thrive, digital will be a big part of the answer.

We see this already.

Data analytics are beginning to drive decision making. Digital delivery, whether hybrid or fully online, is allowing institutions to serve existing students better while also reaching new markets — without building new classrooms and labs. Digital courseware, interactives, virtual labs, and simulations are allowing a growing number of faculty members to personalize instruction and make it more interactive. Mobile computing is making support services more accessible, allowing instructors to integrate remote learning experiences into their courses, and giving students opportunities to create digital projects: podcasts, course websites, digital stories, and apps.

Expenditures on higher education's digital transformation are more likely to pay off than spending on facilities, equipment, and hardware.

The barriers to this transformation are great. Expertise, including expertise in instructional design and technology development, is in short supply. Start up costs are high. Legacy technologies abound, and, as a result, consolidating data across multiple silos is a task worthy of Sisyphus.

Vendors prey on institutions with promises to good to be true. Enterprise software requires extreme customization. Online pro-

HIGHER ED GAMMA

MOOCS and beyond.

gram managers demand onerous contracts. Analytics require irretrievable historical data.

But the biggest challenge involves mindset. If higher education is to truly seize the opportunities offered by digital transformation, it must become more willing to think outside our incumbent boxes.

The digital economy does not conform to a traditional nine to five weekday schedule, and higher education, too, needs to operate outside its traditional academic structures and schedules: fixed start dates, fifteen week semesters, 3-credit hour courses, and 9-5 office hours.

Thinking outside these boxes isn't easy. But we already see promising alternatives to business as usual especially at community colleges and fully online institutions: Programs with multiple start dates, six week courses, intensive

boot camps.

A special challenge is providing services outside normal business hours. But this isn't impossible. We already provide access to library and instructional resources 24/7.

Many students are online virtually all hours of the day and night. We need to make sure they have digital tools that will allow them to communicate with classmates, or reach out for academic help, at times most convenient to them.

Many faculty might be willing to teach at unconventional hours, if they can do so online from home.

But digital transformation will mean little if it isn't accompanied by innovations in pedagogy.

Medical education provides a useful model. Med students, who are less and less willing to attend standard lecture classes, want an education that is more experiential, often taking place outside tra-

Higher Education's Digital Transformation (cont.)

ditional classrooms: in clinical, laboratory, and community settings. Their education is increasingly technology mediated, involving virtual cadavers and surgical simulations, virtual rounds and even virtual interactions with computer simulated patients.

To be sure, we must make sure that higher education's digital transformation doesn't come at the expense of the essence of a high quality educational experience: rich relationships with instructors and classmates, substantive feedback from a genuine expert, and a sense of membership and active participation in an academic community.

We've learned what doesn't work in a digital environment: Passive spectatorship, lack of structure and scaffolding, the absence of genuine interaction and personalized feedback, and services tailored for full-time residential students.

We've seen horrors perpetrated in the names of access and affordability: Online programs that substitute "coaches" and "mentors" for faculty, courses that consist of little more than crude roadmaps to various Internet resources, and classes that offer training or instruction, but little in the way of substantive discussion, debate, and critical thinking in collaboration with colleagues.

In other words, if higher education's digital transformation is to mark a genuine advance, it needs to leverage technologies to enhance the elements that make a higher education higher: communication, collaboration, constructive feedback, and active engagement in a shared experience of inquiry, analysis, interpretation, and problem solving. ∎

Bio

Steven Mintz, who directed the University of Texas System's Institute for Transformational Learning from 2012 through 2017, is Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin.

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More Than a Lifeline

Technology can no longer be seen as a utility working in the background, writes John O'Brien. It's a strategic asset that's vital to every institution's success.

By John O'Brien // May 5, 2020

Over the course of days and weeks, higher education institutions around the world have moved with unparalleled speed and agility to serve students and work together in the shadow of a global pandemic. It's an open question whether the crisis cascading throughout higher education will persist until, or even through, the fall.

In fact, this uncertainty and the intense difficulties ahead may be the only thing everyone agrees on completely. As one exasperated colleague told me a few days ago, "My problems have problems."

In spite of the problems, when one steps back from the day-to-day effort, the move to remote teaching and learning, research, and services was and continues to be a remarkable accomplishment. What the leap to remote everything lacks in elegance it more than makes up in scale. Even though it feels like trying to be heard during a windstorm, I want to acknowledge and thank the technology staff from colleges and universities who have redefined "above and beyond." These professionals from academic technology, IT, instructional design, libraries and elsewhere on campus are literally doing whatever it takes to get their institutions through this crisis.

Their tireless work reminds us that technology can no longer be seen as a utility working quietly in the background. Now more than ever, technology is a strategic asset that is vital to the success of every institution.

During one weekend in March, I invited our Educause community members to share their personal impressions in emails to me, and I was overwhelmed with the response. More than one campus sent me a long list of work that was somehow completed in days, a collection of accomplishments that one might expect to find in a three- to five-year campus strategic technology plan -- and an aggressive one at that. "Nonstop" work was mentioned repeatedly, and I don't think it was meant to be a rhetorical flourish. One representative expression of gratitude came from Paige Francis, vice president for information technology and chief information officer at the University of Tulsa, who spoke passionately about moving all classes to remote delivery with "less than 10 hours' notice."

Along with the hard work of the technology teams involved, faculty members and professionals from all corners have come together, working far outside their comfort zones in many instances. Francis, along with others who responded to my invitation to share views, went out of her way to acknowledge the vital role of some key vendor partners, who responded quickly to unreasonable timelines without upselling. She insists, "It's a crazy time. A scary time. And we are the better for all of the folks we surround ourselves with. I am thankful." Many who wrote me pointed out colleagues who canceled vacations, paused work on doctoral programs and made any number of personal sacrifices to do whatever

SOURCE: ISTOCK.COM/SORBETTO

it took while the clocks were ticking down to "go." Other campus technology leaders pointed to the vast amount of work their teams had completed, even while dealing with the anxiety and fear that came with a number of infections among students and employees.

Still others praised their team's commitment to the well-being of their campus community, matched only by their creativity in solving one intractable problem after another. As campus technology professionals worked to exhaustion to sustain academic continuity at their institutions, a broad range of stress fractures quickly appeared. In fact, like clockwork, almost every few days a new problem would make itself known. There have been challenges with lab courses, test proctoring, commencement, privacy concerns and the distressing digital divides that leave some of our most vulnerable students struggling with limited or no broadband access and/or without appropriate devices to engage in learning. Yet

at every turn, technology leaders and professionals have sought and found creative solutions.

In the case of student access, an Educause QuickPoll found that 36 percent of students have found it moderately or extremely difficult to access bandwidth/Wi-Fi, a number comparable to the proportion of students (37 percent) who have found it moderately/extremely difficult to access health services. Campuses have responded quickly and creatively, with 81 percent offering loans of devices and options for free or very low cost. Half are loaning Wi-Fi hotspots to students, and 40 percent are helping students purchase equipment, including mailing the equipment to them. Many campuses are expanding campus Wi-Fi nodes or moving Wi-Fi hotspots to parking lots for students who need to connect from there because they don't have necessary connectivity from home. In short, even beyond the initial weeks of the crisis, "whatever it takes" continues to be the mantra on campus, energized by creativity and realized thanks to hard work.

Technology professionals will be the first to acknowledge that the great lift we have seen was made possible by many hands working together across campus. More hands are required. Globally, help in the form of government support is badly needed, in particular for the massive technology investments that have been so quickly made. While $14 billion in federal funding has been made available to colleges and universities in the United States, that is only a fraction of the roughly $50 billion requested by the higher education community to address the pandemic's effects.

Those resource needs have only grown more pressing as clouds continue to gather on the horizon

> **Post-crisis, digital transformation can no longer be considered an aspirational concept. It must be understood as an imperative.**

when it comes to revenue projections, enrollments, state support and any number of other areas. Many institutions will not see a path to financial sustainability without a significant shift in external support. The higher education sector stands ready to do all it can to help sustain student success and help stimulate the nation's economic recovery. To make that possible, the federal government must provide additional funding as well as tax and regulatory relief now. It must maintain that funding and relief over the next several months. And it must help institutions help their students acquire and maintain the online access necessary to ensure they can continue learning and earning their degrees.

It is inevitable that everything will be seen in a new light when the crisis fades and our collective heart rate slows. For example, the concept of digital transformation (Dx), which has been the focus of certain colleges and universities, will be seen differently post-pandemic. Dx is the work of transforming the institution's operations, strategic directions and value proposi-

tion through deep and coordinated shifts in culture, workforce and technology. Institutions that were already well along on their Dx journey have found themselves better prepared to adapt to the pandemic. Post-crisis, Dx can no longer be considered an aspirational concept. It must be understood as an imperative. And that well-worn, precious notion of technology professionals on campuses doing work that is only noticed when there is an outage? That, too, needs to be a thing of the past.

Meanwhile, the work continues. We do the right thing to reserve the banging of pots and pans or other grand expressions of gratitude for those amazing health-care professionals putting themselves at personal risk during this health crisis. Given the long history of technologists working quietly in the background, it's true that our community itself isn't always comfortable with shout-outs. It may be time, though, for that to change.

Let's all acknowledge the contribution of our technology experts now and honor them going forward by recognizing a critical re-

More Than a Lifeline (cont.)

ality that actually existed long before this crisis: technology is not a utility. It is not just a lifeline that got us through a tricky situation. It is a vital asset, a differentiating value and a path to achieving institutional goals and stability. Not just in the future but now, technology must increasingly be understood as an integral, strategic part of any successful college or university.tion through deep and coordinated shifts in culture, workforce and technology. Institutions that were already well along on their Dx journey have found themselves better prepared to adapt to the pandemic. Post-crisis, Dx can

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nity itself isn't always comfortable with shout-outs. It may be time, though, for that to change.

Let's all acknowledge the contribution of our technology experts now and honor them going forward by recognizing a critical reality that actually existed long before this crisis: technology is not a utility. It is not just a lifeline that got us through a tricky situation. It is a vital asset, a differentiating value and a path to achieving institutional goals and stability. Not just in the future but now, technology must increasingly be understood as an integral, strategic part of any successful college or university. ∎

Bio

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Beyond Incrementalism

In a time of growing and increasingly complex challenges, too many top administrators, leadership teams and boards are focusing on tactics rather than strategy, writes Susan Resneck Pierce.

By **Susan Resneck Pierce** // **September 22, 2020**

It is common knowledge that many colleges and universities face growing and increasingly complex financial challenges. Many have responded by incrementally cutting expenses and adding new revenue streams. But COVID-19 has rendered such incrementalism insufficient for those countless institutions -- public and private, large and small -- that might suffer severe cutbacks or even be forced to close if the pandemic persists through the first semester, the coming academic year or beyond.

Coping with these trying circumstances is more difficult than ever, given that past performance can no longer predict what may happen going forward in crucial areas like admissions and retention. As one president told me, "I'm used to making important decisions with the best information I have, knowing it's still only partial information, but I'm now making daily decisions based on no information at all."

In the last weeks, I've had at least 20 conversations with deeply dispirited college presidents from various sectors of higher education who have told me confidentially that they have never been so exhausted. (In the interest of that confidentiality, I'm not naming them.) They've all struggled with whether their institutions should resume face-to-face education, move totally to remote teaching or offer some hybrid approach. In making those decisions, they've sought to make their campuses both safe and financially sustainable, although, in all honesty, those goals may conflict with one another.

Determining how to approach the fall semester did not, of course, end the continuing need to make other equally difficult decisions.

For example, as many people anticipated, not all students are adhering to safety practices. As one friend put it, if 18- to 22-year-old students are confronted with choosing between their college's honor code and their hormones, hormones are often going to win. And indeed, a number of institutions that welcomed students back to campus, confronted with daunting numbers of positive cases, have abruptly pivoted either temporarily or in an ongoing way to remote learning.

Campuses are contending with other pressures. Faculty and staff members fearing exposure to the virus seek to work remotely. Families are worried and complaining on social media that safety practices on campuses are insufficient. And some local residents have protested the return of students and prompted new city ordinances requiring masks and social distancing.

Many campuses embracing e-learning are now struggling with student demands for reduced tuition and fees as well as financial relief for students who had leased off-campus housing expecting they would be taking in-person classes. The counterargument that remote education is costlier than face-to-face education is not persuasive to students enrolled at residential campuses who believe that tuition

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dollars provide for a rich collegiate experience, not just classroom learning.

Many of the presidents with whom I talked were dispirited that what they had previously thought were healthy relationships with their faculty colleagues have become fraught with conflict. Some attributed the contentiousness to the faculty's dismay in learning that, although they have primary responsibility for academic matters, the trustees have ultimate legal authority. Many faculty have been equally upset to learn that, in times of financial exigency, boards aren't required to adhere to the processes outlined in faculty handbooks. The result: some faculty members are now attacking the legality of some leadership decisions, while others are voting or threatening to vote no confidence in their presidents.

Two presidents who prided themselves on their collaboration with faculty were particularly distraught that their faculty colleagues had

turned on them. When one became president more than a decade ago, the institution was on the brink of closure. Since then, he's worked closely with the faculty to create and practice shared governance. He's spent a great deal of time with students. In recent years, this university's situation improved dramatically, as it obtained healthy enrollments, annual surpluses, an enhanced reputation and a transformed physical campus. But because the institution has depended on robust numbers of international students, indicators are that enrollment will drop significantly this fall. To cover the anticipated multimillion-dollar deficit, the institution has suspended retirement contributions and frozen all hiring. The president explained his stress this way: because of these recent actions, seemingly overnight, he is no longer viewed as the institutional savior but as a villain.

The second president, too, has worked collaboratively with the faculty for her eight years, also emphasizing shared governance in the strategic planning process and involving faculty, staff and students in shaping the institution's budget. She has routinely included faculty members in trustee retreats. She has raised lots of money for faculty positions and programs. Yet despite recently signing a new multiyear contract, she plans to make this year her last. Her motivation for leaving: a portion of the faculty is vilifying her in the local press and on social media for various COVID-related decisions. She is especially stung that even though no tenured and tenure-track faculty have been laid off, not one of those who once praised her has come to her defense. Instead, many have signed a public letter denouncing her as incompetent.

All this said, I should also add

that some presidents had nothing but praise for their faculty and staff colleagues, saying that the COVID crisis had led to new levels of collaboration. And they admired the resilience and commitment of faculty, staff and students to adapting to the new realities.

Most of the presidents I've interacted with have also been grappling with another almost unprecedented challenge: how to deal with the emerging demands of various campus constituencies that their institution immediately provide significant support to eradicating systemic racism and other social inequities on their campuses -- as well as to improving the living conditions and opportunities of those beyond the campus.

Several presidents spoke of the letters along those lines that faculty members at universities as prestigious as the University of Chicago, Dartmouth College and Princeton University have signed. These presidents all applauded the goals of the protestors and those articulated in statements from members of their campus community. A number observed that their institution's commitment to diversity and inclusion had, in fact, led to significantly more diversified boards, senior leadership teams and student bodies. But they all said they were unsure how much they could actually do right now when they must cut rather than add new positions and new programs at their institutions.

Many were unsettled by being presented with demands in areas for which they had neither responsibility nor authority. Several noted that members of their campus community did not understand that presidents alone cannot redesign the curriculum (for which the faculty has primary responsibility), cannot unilaterally decide to spend

money from the endowment (which is ultimately a board decision) and cannot simply by wishing it be so diversify their faculty.

Tactics, Not Strategy

What most concerned me in my conversations with these presidents, however -- and what I believe may be the most fundamental issue -- was how many top administrators and apparently their leadership teams and boards are focusing on tactics rather than strategy. Understandably, most presidents have been preoccupied with how their campus should function this fall. As a result, they unfortunately also have not in a deliberate way been thinking about the long-term, strategic implications of the tactical decisions they are now making. Rather, almost all have been engaging in some sort of magical thinking: if only we can get through the fall semester, things will somehow return to normal.

Although most presidents who reopened their campuses told me they would probably shut it down if they had a COVID outbreak, very few said they and their colleagues had analyzed in depth the financial and reputational implications of such a closure. I was also struck by how few campuses had engaged in tactical scenario planning beyond this fall semester, anticipating the possibility that COVID-19 will negatively impact the entire academic year and perhaps several more.

In addition, most presidents told me they simply didn't have the bandwidth now to consider -- much less to consult robustly with other administrators, faculty, students and trustees about -- what it would mean for their institution truly to make, and not just give lip service to, a long-term commitment to racial equity and social justice. Those communicating mainly through vid-

eo calls saw that as a further impediment.

So how should presidents begin to think strategically about the content and the pedagogy of the education their institutions will offer going forward? How should they lead their institutions to take concrete steps to eliminate systemic inequities on their campuses? How can they facilitate a commitment to combat racism not only on their campuses but also in their local communities and beyond? How can they manage all this as many face daily threats to their institution's financial health?

My own answer to these sorts of questions is, that despite the tyranny of today's immediate, this is a time when presidents, in collaboration with their campus community and their trustees, should lead a review of how they can fulfill their institutional mission post-COVID -- or even whether that mission needs to be revised.

Some of the presidents with whom I talked, along with several trustees and faculty members, have inspired the following suggestions for how at least some campus leaders may begin to think about the future. I want to emphasize that none of these approaches pertain to all institutions. I also want to make it clear that I have long advocated for the value of a residential college experience, recognizing that a great deal of important learning does take place outside the classroom, for example in conversations among students, faculty and staff and in an array of co-curricular activities. And so I am mindful that many of the following suggestions envision a very different model.

Move even more online. Several presidents confided that they had long wanted to advance online learning but could not overcome faculty resistance to the idea.

> Despite the tyranny of today's immediate pressure, this is a time when presidents, in collaboration with their campus community and their trustees, should lead a review of how they can fulfill their institutional mission post-COVID -- or even whether that mission needs to be revised.

The spring semester, they told me, has changed that dynamic. Many praised their faculty colleagues for their commitment to learning how to teach remote classes effectively and the pleasure many of them took in doing so. Those presidents believe that online teaching will help them address growing concerns about costs and encourage admissions, persistence, improved graduation rates and accelerated times to degrees. Several presidents believe that many students, even those who are residential because they want the college experience I describe above, will nevertheless prefer to take at least some classes online. To that end, they are redesigning all classrooms to enable every student going forward to take classes in person, online asynchronously or, in some instances, both.

New online options could also attract and retain students who might otherwise forgo college. In addition, traditional-age students could routinely take online courses during the summer, while on study abroad, during an internship or co-op experience, or even as an overload. Institutions might also consider extending the geographical online reach of programs of strength. International students who previously attended or would have attended American universities might now be amenable -- given travel restrictions and financial concerns -- to earning their degrees from these same institutions remotely.

Rethink goals in light of demographic realities, concerns about costs and shifting student interests. Some institutions with large commuter populations have been seeking to become more residential by building additional residence halls and creating a more vibrant campus life for residential students. Those institutions might now instead focus on ensuring that commuter students are appropriately supported. They might work with commuter students to determine what sort of activities are of interest to and value to them, recognizing that many commuters work full-time, have families and are older than the traditional residential student.

Reconceptualize and streamline institutional structures to better serve faculty and student realities. As David Rosowsky and Bridget Keegan recently suggested, institutions might want to abandon the departmental model and move either

Beyond Incrementalism (cont.)

to divisional or new interdisciplinary structures. And even if campuses wish to preserve the departmental model, they might encourage and support faculty efforts to create new interdisciplinary programs. For example, the University of Puget Sound, where I served as president for 11 years, now offers a bioethics program that, according to the catalog, "encompasses work in the fields of biology, natural science, neuroscience, religion, philosophy, literature, sociology, psychology, politics, economics and business."

Consolidate student support services. Many institutions have created one-stop shopping for students, co-locating such areas as financial aid, student accounts, the registrar, advising, the writing center and career services. Institutions should also consider partnering with other institutions to create a shared services model and/or to partner in terms of academic programs. Such efforts have in the past been elusive for many campuses because one or more of the potential partners have significant liabilities. Others have faltered because of a failure to agree on matters of governance, the location and even the name of a new partnership entity. But now is the moment to decide to function in ways that will better serve students and more effectively use human and financial resources.

Embrace the virtue of the out-of-doors. Colleges in temperate climates might emulate other institutions that have equipped outdoor spaces with Wi-Fi to create socially distanced classrooms and dining facilities as well as safer venues for students to study solely or in small groups. Post-COVID, such colleges should continue to offer such spaces.

Budget for mission, with long-term strategies in mind. In addition, as painful as it probably will be, institutions with huge COVID-related deficits should engage in zero-based budgeting in order to direct resources to areas that are mission-critical and adequately staff programs with high student enrollments. As one president described this shift in reallocating resources, the board is not changing the nature of the institution but rather seeking to fund the institution it has become.

Address systemic racism, sexism, homophobia and other biases. Perhaps most important, presidents, leadership teams and trustees must listen and be open to suggestions from members of the campus community, particularly those who have historically been subject to and harmed by such biases. Campuses should work to diversify the faculty and staff at all levels and to institute policies that ensure equity and inclusion. Areas in need of being addressed include hiring practices, tenure and promotion policies, the curriculum, and financial aid.

Administrators should ensure that faculty and staff members from underrepresented groups aren't exploited by the expectation that they serve as diversity representatives on committees and as mentors/advisers to larger than normal numbers of students (a role that they should be applauded for fulfilling but that should also be recognized and rewarded accordingly). In addition, institutions will need to contend with their own histories if those histories are rife with bigotry.

While focusing on such strategic questions today may seem at first overwhelming, I urge presidents to begin to take steps toward doing so, first by listening and then by working together with colleagues, students and, as appropriate, trustees to identify, prioritize, develop and implement concrete actions. For such conversations to result in positive change, presidents must be clear from the outset about who ultimately will be responsible for making which decisions, what criteria they will use and what resources are available so that those who are offering ideas are informed from the beginning about what is possible.

Ultimately, despite all the challenges, presidents must, through collaboration and genuine communication, lead their faculty, administrators and students to focus on not only what their institution is today but also what it can and will be. They must put in place planning processes that allow their institution to pivot so as not only to survive but also thrive in ways that are true to their core values and goals. In other words, they must think beyond the current crises and, while responding to the needs of the moment, think and act strategically for the future. ■

Bio
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Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/09/22/too-many-presidents-are-focusing-tactics-rather-strategy-during-challenging-time

5 Bigger and Better Ideas for Campuses

It's time for campus leaders to start generating more innovative options for fall 2020, which means considering some wilder ideas, argues José Antonio Bowen, who offers some suggestions.

By José Antonio Bowen // July 20, 2020

Any way you slice it, this fall is going to be hard on everyone. Higher education institutions are desperate for some tuition revenue, but we all know we are not offering the usual college experience. So far, most of us are planning some combination of:

- Fewer students on campus. Some institutions (like the University of Texas) are simply offering the option of taking remote classes only (but with no reduced tuition), while others (like Bowdoin College) are only letting first-year students come to campus along with a few senior honors thesis students and those who have home situations that make online learning nearly impossible. Stanford University plans to rotate students with half on the campus for one quarter and then another half the next.

- Fewer students in class. Many campuses have made all large classes online only and are reducing the capacity of rooms. Students spaced six feet apart and wearing masks has led to its own set of concerns about pedagogy: what kind of active learning will work, for example. But recent analysis suggests that colleges are massively overestimating how many students they can safely have in spaces. A Cornell study found that colleges should be planning for only 13 to 24 percent of capacity. A California Institute of Technology study assumed eight feet of distance,

since longer proximity demands more distance and airflow is uncertain. The researchers concluded that 11 percent was the maximum safe capacity, which allows for only 16 students in a 149-seat, 2,000 square-foot classroom.

- Social isolation outside class. Students can expect singles, bathroom assignments, boxed meals and severe restrictions that they won't like. But in the words of the most recent academic mathematical models: "It is extremely important that students refrain from *all* contact outside of academic and residential settings."

What that means for students is less incentive to come, and if they do come (and pay with no refund option), the prospect of isolation and quarantine on top of a compromised education. For faculty members, that means some combination of virtual and face-to-face teaching (i.e., more work) and preparation even in small classes for some students in quarantine and online for some of the semester.

Part of the problem is that we always want to replicate rather than innovate. Forget about the past. This disruption is real and massive. It is time for campus leaders to look at some wilder ideas -- even some beyond the 15 scenarios Joshua Kim and Edward Maloney have proposed -- although a few of my suggestions are updates of

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those. Before you say no, consider the following:

- What you are currently considering is already a lot of extra work, is motivated by a potential budgetary collapse, is unappealing to almost everyone, could fail terribly and will increase inequity.

- Really big ideas are iterative. None of these are fully baked, and all will need adaptation to your campus and students. Many could be combined, and maybe only a piece of something will work for you.

- Yes, these ideas might fail, but everything we are trying comes with risk. Which is most likely to prepare your institution for success this fall and in a few years? Try first asking, "How might we make this work?" and generate

a few more detailed alternatives for your campus. Then decide which two or three to pursue in greater detail.

■ Yes, time is short, but the situation is also changing quickly: What will you do if your state demands a two-week quarantine for students coming from California, Arizona, Texas or Florida? Is your campus already reporting COVID cases in staff and students? Now is the time to start generating more options, like the following:

No. 1: Quarantined residential learning communities. Groups of families are deciding they can cooperate and quarantine together: after two weeks of individual quarantine, they remove the social barriers between their households and act like one extended family. Similarly, small groups of faculty, staff and students could live together in isolated clusters for a few weeks or an entire semester *without* social distancing after testing or a short quarantine. Think of this like one of the 38 Oxford colleges: an isolated social and educational unit as part of a larger university. Students might need to isolate in dorm units, but faculty could quarantine at home.

This unit would have no need for low density. Students could eat, sleep, party and have sex together. Some older dorms have their own dining halls, but a housing unit could also eat in its own group shift in the main dining hall without restrictions. Even double rooms, with some reserved singles for quarantine, perhaps, might be fine. Faculty who were willing and able to live in the dorm might teach a double load for a semester (or perhaps a shorter block within the semester of four or eight weeks) and then

be off the next block. (They would have to pledge to self-isolate when away from the campus to be most safe.) As is the case at Oxford and Cambridge, individual colleges would offer limited subjects, but students could take virtual courses from any other part of the university. But this way, they would at least get some of the other social benefits of college and some great face-to-face classes.

The advantages would include almost full capacity and full revenue. People would have to social distance when they leave their dorms but would get to socialize within their cohort. If the entire campus is isolated in this way, then after two weeks, larger groups could be allowed to mix -- depending on the risk your institution wants to take.

This model would also work for graduate students in the same program. The incoming cohort of physics or history Ph.D.s will take some group of courses together anyway. Building a cohort might even increase retention and a sense of community.

No. 2: Big-problem interdisciplinary seminars. Offering a couple of larger interdisciplinary courses would create engagement, relevance and focus; allow for small group projects and experiences; and build community through shared experiences for students. It would allow for high-quality, asynchronous video content combined with synchronous small group, high-touch faculty and student interactions.

This is work that can be divided and shared. Not everyone has to design and teach every part of the course. If individual faculty are recording only a few lecture videos a semester, they can be really good, and not everyone would have to or

would want to do what is a highly specialized skill.

Imagine every student on campus taking one of three or four big ideas courses (or even just one big course on the pandemic). Individual faculty could still supervise small groups doing individual projects. The planning could also be done virtually in large interdisciplinary committees. Many of us have now attended a virtual conference, and students routinely use social media and other virtual tools to think about how to solve large social problems.

Such an interdisciplinary seminar could focus on racial equity. Plenty of naysayers might say that chemistry or engineering is immune from such issues, but what would happen if you really looked at the potential for how everyone feels in these classes? Why are certain diseases and projects funded? Who benefits? How might science be done more equitably?

Again, not everyone has to design an entire semester of material, but could you change your campus culture and curriculum going forward if the science faculty focused on two weeks of content but spent the rest of the semester involved in this collaborative exploration? I challenge you to think of a more important or transformative project for your institution.

You could go even further and create a single campus seminar or focus virtually all the fall curriculum on race and equity. You would probably still want to offer a few other required courses for majors, but you could design a large course for everyone that tackles a problem that virtually everyone thinks matters right now. Groups of biology or history majors could work on their own projects, but the institution would make a bold commitment

to something that is engaging and important. What about how to do campus policing and public safety more equitably? Such topics could also be the focus of a new gap year program, as I describe next.

No. 3: Structured gap years. Gap years (and structured group internships) have been growing in popularity and often result in students who return to campus with more focus and maturity. They were fourth in the *Inside Higher Ed survey* of what appealed to students for this fall and should get more attention.

Gap years struggle at the concept level, because we think of them as lots of disparate individual events without a revenue stream. But if colleges designed them, both problems could be eliminated. Could you charge students a small amount and then hire them out to do work for someone else? Yes, if you really provide value and structure. And if you priced it right, federal aid might cover it. Could you combine some existing data analytics, leadership, sociology or public policy course with a problem that your community might be facing and let students work on it for a year? There are countless new local COVID-19 problems to add to all of the existing ones.

You might also be able to house students while they do such work. That wouldn't solve the density problem, but for many campuses, underenrollment this fall may, in fact, be the problem. If keeping students away but engaged is the goal, then a gap year should be virtual.

Champlain College is charging about a third of its $21,000 tuition for a six-credit Virtual Gap Program described as "a semester-long, inspiring journey into academic college life, holistic well-being, and

> *Part of the problem is that we always want to replicate rather than innovate. Forget about the past. This disruption is real and massive.*

finding meaning through virtual internship and service experiences." The Global Citizen Academy offers leadership training and usually a global fellowship, but this year it will be virtual.

No. 4: Virtual and global partnerships. Thanks to the internet, forming a global network and having conversations with people on the ground in different countries is certainly much easier than visiting those countries these days. Faculty already have connections around the world; perhaps those connections could be used to create some student projects with a partner university, organization or even corporation somewhere far away. For example, many English-speaking students attend Indian universities, and India also has a growing number of new liberal arts universities and a shortage of faculty.

This could be a simple virtual exchange program, with professors swapping teaching assignments in another country. More complicated but better would be to use this opportunity to create much more diverse classrooms. Most campuses suffer from some problematic homogeneity in classroom discussions -- students are from similar places, backgrounds or academic orientations.

Normally, we think of local when we look for partnerships or consortium, and there is a benefit in sharing services, academic support or course design with another institution. But with more classes going virtual, you could pick a partner institution or two that has a complementary mission but is across the state, country or planet. If your student population is too homogeneous, find an institution that has different students. Partner with a historically Black college or university, a Hispanic-serving institution or an institution that serves a different region, age or demographic. That will indeed create new problems, but it might also increase learning.

The Stevens Initiative of the Aspen Institute has resources (and even grants) to help you get started. It might just be a single project, like the COVID-19 Virtual Global Design Challenge that the Johns Hopkins University Center for Bioengineering Innovation and Design created this spring (with over 200 teams) or IREX's Global Solutions Sustainability Challenge, which uses a project-based learn-

ing model. You could look to share a course and create more diverse discussion groups or find a partner institution that already uses your learning management system -- although with Zoom as a common format for so many classes, this approach is much easier lift than you might imagine.

No. 5: Relationship-first hybrids. One common model for hybrid distance graduate programs is to start by bringing people together first; these are sometimes called low-residency programs. The key is that they usually start with a people living together for perhaps a week or two, so they can get to know each other. As has been noted about this spring: relationships already formed in person are easier to continue online. Low-residency programs were designed to allow an international group to meet with each other, become friends and then leave but still learn together while dispersed all over the world. During a time of travel restrictions, that won't work, but the idea might be adapted to our need to limit physical interactions, even if we live near each other.

In this model, you could meet your students where they are -- literally. You already know where your students live -- in which cities, if you are a national institution, or which neighborhoods, if you are a local one. You might simply create neighborhood or local "cohorts" of students who could get together physically to create some relational bonds. Let students know who is already around them at your institution.

To create true relationship-first hybrid courses (probably mostly for regional institutions, but think also about your feeder schools), students would get together initially in groups physically with the professor. That would require social distancing, but being together physically, even for just a day, can create a sense of connection. You could use your largest spaces and rotate who comes when.

For the first day of class (and perhaps once every two weeks or once a month after that), groups would meet in person and then spend the rest of the time online. Online groups can create a similar sense of community, but for those of us who teach mostly face-to-face, this might be a safe and easy way to simulate the positive feelings of community that we took into our online transition this past spring. For commuter campuses or community colleges, for example, this could significantly improve student engagement.

From Tactical to Strategic

A crisis always shifts short-term attention to the tactical -- or "business continuity," or how we keep doing what we were doing. But strategy is about what will improve our odds to thrive into the future.

Now is an important time to ask strategic questions like: Which of our courses and degree programs can really only be taught residentially, and which might now be moved -- and even improved -- online? That does not mean the end of residential education; the value of community has only been affirmed by the pandemic. But we have also learned that working from home can sometimes be more productive than in person and that well-designed online learning can be effective. You have new data, market conditions, assumptions and behaviors to consider.

Your planning time for fall is short, but at least some portion of your time and some collective group on your campus needs to be thinking wildly outside the box right now. You need options. You also need to be thinking about the bigger what-if scenarios and the "how might we" questions. Try a pilot program of something -- anything -- new this fall, just in case your attempts to recreate fall 2019 fail. Strategy is the art of sacrifice. What do you need to be considering now that can also improve your odds for success years into the future? ∎

Bio
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Navigating the Storms

In this tumultuous period, colleges must be open-minded to various forms of restructuring and learn from other nonprofits, John MacIntosh writes.

By John MacIntosh // July 7, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is buffeting planning and magnifying financial pressures for every institution of higher education. Most institutions are now projecting severe threats to revenue from reduced enrollment (among both new and returning students), lower contributions and grants, and precipitous declines in everything from executive education to summer camps. Expense-side burdens include increased aid to support students with higher needs due to widespread employment disruption; the return of spring room and board funds; downward pressure on tuition; and higher costs for instructional design and technology, facilities cleaning and employee health insurance.

COVID both exacerbates and accelerates many challenges that private colleges were already facing while also creating new ones. As a result, the trustees of private colleges are being challenged as never before to be mission-driven, clear about institutional priorities, tough-minded in assessing their risks and available options, and open-minded to various forms of restructuring -- mergers, joint ventures, teach-out partnerships and even dissolutions.

Unfortunately, few private colleges have experience in dealing with these issues. However, as we at SeaChange describe in *Navigating the Storms: A Primer for Private College Trustees*, they can learn from the deeper experience of other types of nonprofits -- social service agencies, hospitals, cultural institutions -- that have faced similar issues. Although private nonprofit colleges seldom self-identify as nonprofits, they share fundamental features -- cost-minus funding, cost disease, zero-sum revenues and the ever-present danger of a run on the bank -- while being more complex in their uniquely competitive market, shared governance, alumni, deep connection to place and complex regulatory framework.

The worst practices that lead to distress and failure for colleges and nonprofits are also similar. Most important are an absence of explicit and realistic scenario planning, an insufficient level of background knowledge and context among trustees, a lack of timely and actionable information at the appropriate level of detail during a crisis, and the scourge of magical thinking. (The state attorney general letters with respect to Mount Ida College and the Cooper Union should be mandatory reading for all college trustees. For traditional nonprofits, fundraising dominates magical thinking; in the college context it's enrollment, new programs and technology.)

Private colleges must also accept that even strong leadership and disciplined risk management do not guarantee survival. Restructurings and reorganizations -- consolidations, mergers and acquisitions, divestments, orderly teach-outs, wind-downs -- will be inevitable. But it is tragic when dis-

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tress causes an institution to lose the capacity to make wise choices and the time to act on them. That can result in exposing current students to unacceptable risk. It can mean needless damage to small towns and rural communities where the sudden closure of even a small or struggling college does great damage to the social and economic fabric. It can create difficult moral dilemmas, as struggling institutions balance their need to attract new students with the possibility that they may not be able to serve those students through to graduation. It can expose trustees to personal liability. In bankruptcy, everybody loses as scarce charitable assets are squandered on legal and transaction costs.

Equally tragic are institutions that -- although limping along -- are too weak to offer effective or

efficient educational programs and use whatever resources they can muster for mere survival. This can mean hollowing out student services, staffing, class size, the mix of programs or composition of the student body.

To avoid this fate, colleges wishing to explore various forms of restructuring in response to the COVID crisis should consider the elements of the exploration process that have proven successful for their nonprofit brethren.

■ A foundation of shared understanding. A common understanding among trustees and leadership about institution's mission, operating environment, strengths, weaknesses and business model.

■ Proactive, empowered leadership. Trustees -- particularly those with for-profit merger and acquisition experience -- seldom appreciate how long the exploration process takes. Higher education institutions often start too late without even knowing it. Starting too late is the single greatest reason for failure.

■ Mission alignment. Unless the mission-related benefits of a potential transaction are significant, mutually acknowledged and constantly communicated, the process is unlikely to reach a successful conclusion. The primacy of mission often allows an institution to quickly identify one or two preferred partners without exhaustive research. Most institutions already know their likely partners well.

■ Cultural compatibility. A transaction that leaves people deeply demoralized will generally be unsuccessful. While staff are seldom enthusiastic, even when

> *The trustees of private colleges are being challenged as never before to be mission-driven, clear about institutional priorities, tough-minded in assessing their risks and available options.*

the status quo is dire, strong leadership in support of a mission-aligned transaction can usually bring them along provided that transaction has been well thought through and the institutions share similar cultures.

■ Sensitivity around language. Language often becomes a source of confusion and needless friction. "Acquisition," "takeover" and "merger" can be loaded terms. "Union," "integration," "combination," "partnership" or "collaboration" should take their place and will do a lot to build trust. The legal structure of a transaction should not dictate the language used to describe it in nonlegal settings.

■ Financial awareness, not single-mindedness. Financial considerations are, of course, important. The benefits often come from a reduction in identifiable redundancies in overhead functions, as well as in areas like real estate, insurance or technology. But they are generally not a sufficient reason to pursue a transaction in the absence of mission alignment.

■ Outside support. Experienced practitioners can help provide legal, consulting, communication and facilitation services to help navigate the process. Many nonprofit-to-nonprofit discussions benefit greatly if the parties select and jointly retain a neutral facilitator.

■ An appropriate pace. Protracted discussions can be exhausting for all parties and potentially destabilizing as word gets around that something is afoot. The passage of time also reduces degrees of freedom and resources if it turns out that the original transaction does not pan out.

■ A commitment to celebration. The end point of a transaction should be celebrated. This might be through an event, a jointly signed letter, a webinar or a video. Even a transaction that could never be celebrated as success, given the circumstances, should be reconsidered positively in light of other options and alternatives.

Judging Success
Research about the overall success rate of nonprofit restructur-

ings and reorganizations has been limited, although several books and articles have recently been published in the area of higher education. Generally speaking, taking such actions is viewed with deep suspicion. Perhaps that's because of a visceral feeling among many people in academe that events like mergers (and the associated language) are part of the objectionable corporatization of the higher education sector -- and that any decision not to continue as is somehow reflects failure. That is ironic, given that those events are more often the sign of mission-driven governance by those who take their duty of obedience seriously in the face of objective circumstances.

Some commentators also suggest that an exploration that does not lead to a completed transaction is, by definition, a failure. But that is not true. Provided that the process is disciplined, the exploration of a transaction, even if it is not completed, can be a very efficient form of strategic planning and self-assessment.

In our experience, the vast majority of organizations that get the process right believe -- when asked two or more years after their reorganization has been completed -- that the transaction met or exceeded their expectations. There is no reason to believe that the situation in higher education should be any different.

The Will to Act

Fortunately, courageous, mission-driven trustees still have time to avoid letting the institutions they govern fall into distressed or zombie states. Higher education leaders have long promised students -- particularly first-generation and low-income students -- that college is important, an investment that will pay off and a ticket to the American dream. They owe it to those students to keep that promise front and center as they make tough decisions over the weeks, months and years ahead. ∎

Bio

John MacIntosh is the managing partner of SeaChange, which champions nonprofits facing complex challenges and is a partner of choice for funders seeking to help. SeaChange has been making grants to support nonprofits in exploring mergers and sustained collaborations since 2008.