



*AN INSIDE HIGHER ED SPECIAL REPORT*

# College Leadership in an Era of Unpredictability



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BY RICK SELTZER



# Executive Summary

This special report seeks to be a resource for college and university leaders of all types: presidents, administrators, board members, faculty leaders and those who hold informal leadership positions. Its primary goal is to provide information and ideas that leaders need as the COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a moment of unprecedented uncertainty for colleges and universities.

This report's conclusions are fed by an evaluation of key social and economic indicators; a review of literature from the corporate and nonprofit sectors; on-the-record interviews with more than three dozen college and university leaders, consultants and experts; and off-the-record conversations with others.

Leaders must understand that this moment exposes three long-simmering pandemics affecting higher education and American society:

1. **Health:** Poor physical and mental health

among individuals and fragile social or civic health

2. **Economic:** Inequalities in access to capital, earning power and economic mobility

3. **Racism:** A force that is not just in the hearts of individuals but is embedded in institutions that shape everyday life, from government to education to financial institutions.

Those pandemics have been fed by six forces:

1. Economic inequality

2. Systemic racism

3. Technology

4. The pace of change

5. A shrinking world developing growing rifts

6. Political and leadership atrophy



It remains unclear exactly what higher education will look like in the future—but it is clear most institutions will need to change. Leaders repeatedly returned to several themes when discussing the world they see coming:

- Affordability
- The public good
- Alternatives to prestige and exclusivity
- Diversity, equity, inclusion and justice
- Technology

Those in positions of power will need to strengthen dozens of skills to lead successfully in this moment and in the future. Many are soft skills, like effective communication, convening and listening. Making decisions with little information and being humble enough to change course when a better way becomes apparent will also be key.

In sum, the moment calls for a new dedication to servant leadership and a generation of leaders who want to put the public good and the good of their communities above their own career interests or even, in some cases, institutional interests. Although pandemics may sap our sense of agency, the decisions leaders make and the institutions we build today can have long-term effects on the shape of higher education's future and the future of society. ■



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# Higher Education at the Confluence

## Pervading Uncertainty

Months after a growing COVID-19 outbreak forced colleges and universities across the country to move classes online and send students home, challenge after challenge mounts.

Financial crises loom as institutions find themselves stuck between sharp downward price pressures and suddenly increased costs. Students balk at paying full price for disrupted semesters even as colleges rush to retrofit their physical, technological and human capital for the era of social distancing. Layoffs mount. Schedules scramble.

These circumstances unfold as society grapples anew with the corrosive effects of systemic racism. The nationwide protests that broke out after the police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in Minneapolis, forced a still-developing reckoning at

colleges and universities. Leadership teams grapple afresh with what roles their institutions play in deciding who has access to basic safety, education and opportunity in America. Individual campuses have long been home to protests about racism, but the new movement made it impossible to brush them away as one-off events. Everyone seems to be looking in the mirror.

The human toll of the coronavirus pandemic is being tallied but not fully realized. Faculty and staff members died of COVID-19 infections, each a human tragedy and a reminder that the decisions campus leaders make during a public health crisis come with the highest of stakes. Officials worry how many more deaths will come and what the physical and mental health ramifications will be for those who survive.

Long-term consequences won't be known for years—consequences affecting individuals' health, the health of the higher education sector and society at large. Viewed through the interests of college and university leaders, the future could hardly be more unsettling. The pandemic hit the K-12 schools that feed colleges traditional-aged students, and it hit the employers who nudge adults to enroll. It stressed some parents who may take classes while raising children and other parents who suddenly lost jobs, leaving little income available to pay for their children's tuition. It affected students suddenly taking more classes online than they'd ever imagined, posing new challenges to those with disabilities or unreliable internet access.

So much more remains unknown: when the pandemic may be beaten back permanently, when—or if—the economy will fully recover, what America's bungled response will do to public trust in government and institutions. An environment of virtually unprecedented uncertainty pervades.

"We're faced with decision making under conditions of extreme uncertainty," says Franklin D. Gilliam Jr., chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "That is, I think, the greatest challenge."

It is rare for a university to undergo any radical transformation in a short time, Gilliam adds. Now, leaders are forced to think about radical change on myriad fronts.

They must do so without any definite end to the crisis in sight. Governing board members, presidents and administrators manage crises all the time, but in most past crises they could at least look forward to a light at the end of the tunnel. At some point, a standard crisis

will be over and things will return to normal. In the best cases where institutional transformation is possible, that crisis will prompt an institution to find a new normal that is better for students, faculty, staff or some other important constituency.

But the pandemic means there is no returning to normal.

"The next 18 years' worth of students will have been affected by this period of time," says Joan Ferrini-Mundy, president of the University of Maine. "Universities, in my view, need to reform and transform and not envision getting back to some normal that was pre- all of what's transpired."

For a long while, there will be no finding a new normal. Public health conditions will change rapidly, with political and financial conditions following unpredictably. Long-unfolding demographic changes will coincide with short-term variability, with student populations generally growing less white, less wealthy, older and less centered in the Northeast and Midwest than was previously the norm. These factors will help accelerate financial, social and ethical forces that have been building on higher education and other organizations across society since before the pandemic.

Even after the public health crisis recedes, the world will look radically different. Global consulting firms like [Deloitte](#) and [McKinsey & Co.](#) have eschewed the idea of the new normal, instead embracing terms like "next normal" to show how the future is likely to be a sharp break from the past, with a lengthy period of fleeting certainty and fluctuating operating environments unfolding. A vastly changed landscape will someday become clear. When

and what it looks like remain highly speculative, although signs point to it being shaped by the developing pillars of affordability, the public good, finding alternatives to prestige, promoting racial justice and harnessing ever-changing technology.

This outlook can feel overwhelming. Epidemics undermine our sense of agency. They force us to question our vision for the future and how much we can control it. They crush our sense of possibility.

It is in these times that leadership is most important. Organizations don't think, learn, act and react. People do. When changing environments require analysis and action, organizations need leaders.

"One cannot be afraid to make a decision," says Shirley Ann Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in Troy, N.Y. "In the end, as a leader one will be judged on whether one makes what, in hindsight, looks to be more right decisions than wrong ones, irrespective of whether they are done in exactly the way someone else might do. There isn't one template that everyone must use or adhere to. But one has to be willing to make a decision."

Leading in this changing environment requires a new skill set for higher education boards, executives, administrators, faculty members, staff and even students who take prominent roles in student government, protest movements or thought leadership. The sector has long enjoyed relative certainty based on government funding, a supportive regulatory environment and the fact that it can start predicting undergraduate student populations 18 years in advance. It's impossible to know what challenges will come in

this newly uncertain environment, but it is possible to detail the skills that will help leaders rise to meet those challenges.

The best leaders don't just respond, however. They recognize that great disruptions are also moments of great possibility. Yes, the future that seemed possible before the coronavirus arrived is now gone. But in its place is a blank slate upon which a better tomorrow can be drawn. That slate will be erased many times as the pandemic takes twists and turns, exacting a terrible human toll. Each time it is erased, leaders can choose to walk away in frustration, or to redraw and refine their vision.

This special report's primary goal is to explore the tools leaders can use to adapt to uncertain times and realize a vision for a better future. In order to do so effectively, it first examines three coincident challenges that higher education faces at this unique moment in time. It then evaluates six long-term forces that have fed into those challenges while shaping society, and it examines what those forces mean for higher education. It then outlines a vision for higher education's future and core ideas upon which a version of that future can be built. Only then can it explore a new tool kit for leaders, looking at the different skills they may have to deploy. This report concludes by discussing the servant leadership model, which may be the most effective way for college and university leaders to rise to the challenges of today and create a better tomorrow.

The discussion and conclusions that follow are drawn from an evaluation of key social and economic indicators; a review of literature from the corporate and nonprofit sectors; on-the-record interviews with more



than three dozen college and university leaders, consultants and experts; and off-the-record conversations with dozens more. This approach intends to strike a balance between distilling best practices from within the higher education sector and widening college and university leaders' understanding of the larger environment in which they operate.

## Three Pandemics

A new pathogen caused the global pandemic of 2020. It exposed ancient stresses long affecting American society and higher education, overlooked but no less damaging.

These stresses are pandemics in their own right, according to Earl L. Lewis, founding director of the Center for Social Solutions at the University of Michigan. He identifies three pandemics that collided in the summer of 2020: a health pandemic, an economic pandemic and a pandemic of racism.

"In a serial fashion, one happens, and another, and another," Lewis said in an appearance at the Society for College and University Planning virtual annual conference. "In this case, all three came together to illuminate the fractures in American life and in a global world."

These pandemics are interrelated and complicated. They can be addressed, but only with sustained effort.

The health pandemic can be interpreted to encompass the physical and mental health of individuals as well as the social health in the United States. Even before the coronavirus hit, American life expectancy trailed that in much of the industrialized world. Its medical

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“We have to hold ourselves accountable, because every single person that is responsible for this condition of society right now came through our doors.”

Michael Sorrell

president  
Paul Quinn College



outcomes diverged by race and ethnicity. Access to doctors or even fresh food varied widely by geography. Key mental health indicators were deteriorating, with young people experiencing sharply more major depressive episodes even as adult suicidal ideation increased. Respect and open discourse

retreated behind the barriers of partisanship, groupthink and segregation.

The economic pandemic spans inequalities in who holds capital or can access it, who has earning power and earning potential, and whether adequate economic mobility exists in a country that has long promoted the American dream. Indeed, a select few plutocrats enjoyed the bulk of economic gains since the end of the Great Recession, even as low-paying service jobs proliferated and middle-class wages stagnated. Upward mobility flatlined as geography came to dictate one's chances of finding a better economic future.

The crisis of racism came into stark relief as the summer of 2020 began with police killing George Floyd in Minneapolis. Protests spread across the country in the days and weeks that followed. The Black Lives Matter movement had been growing for years, but this moment seemed different, at least according to the national discourse. It redirected public attention toward racism not as something in the heart of individuals but as a system—a web of institutions and structures that have functioned together to benefit white Americans at the expense of nonwhite people.

Systemic racism isn't just a thing of the past. It is still alive today, and it can be seen in key indicators within institutions of higher education and across the sector. Many colleges and universities have not always welcomed all members of society, whether by policy, by price or by unwritten rule.

Consider for example that the first African American student matriculated at the University of Missouri at Columbia halfway through the 20th century. Sixty-five

years later, a student group used the name Concerned Student 1950 after Black students reported being subjected to racial slurs on campus. Its members came to feel administrators weren't taking what they were saying seriously, and a series of attention-grabbing incidents unfolded. At one point, protesters blocked the path of the University of Missouri system's president during a homecoming parade, but he did not leave the vehicle. Eventually, the system president and the chancellor of the flagship campus resigned.

Leadership changed, certainly. But has the university moved key indicators significantly? In at least one area—the number of Black faculty members with professorial titles—the answer is no. Protesting students wanted Black faculty and staff to make up 10 percent of Missouri's employees by 2017-18, slightly below the 12 percent of state residents who were Black. But Black professors were just 3.5 percent of all faculty with professorial titles as of 2019. The university employed 69 Black faculty members with professorial titles that year, 13 more than it did in 2015—out of a total of more than 1,900.

Missouri isn't unique. Today, only a handful of the most selective public institutions in the country enroll enough Black and Latinx students to match their states' demographics.

"When we're talking about these issues, we need to talk about representation in the faculty," says Freeman Hrabowski III, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, which prides itself on being one of the country's top predominantly white institutions graduating African American students who go on to earn doctorates.

"It's not just about structural racism in our

society," Hrabowski says. "It's on our campuses. Eighty percent of our faculty are white, with a much larger percentage of our students who are of color."

Higher ed can't address systemic racism by papering over the way it contributes. Acknowledging that higher education is part of the problem doesn't invalidate the good work that many institutions and people do to fight racism—it empowers them to do more.

In that spirit, leaders must understand that all three pandemics currently unfolding are interconnected and the ways higher education contributes to each. This isn't a comfortable conversation. It shouldn't be. But it's necessary.

"Higher education and its leaders should ask themselves, 'Why shouldn't this be our moment? Society needs us in a very real way,'" says Michael Sorrell, president of Paul Quinn College in Dallas. "But also, we have to hold ourselves accountable, because every single person that is responsible for this condition of society right now came through our doors."

To explore the three pandemics further, we next break them down into six forces that have been shaping American society and higher education. This allows for a deeper understanding of how different factors are connected and which challenges will need to be overcome. ■





## Six Forces at Work

Leading in these uncertain times requires an understanding of the forces at play that are bigger than any individual college or university, or even U.S. higher education as a whole. Six of these forces are most important to higher education at this uncertain moment in time: economic inequality, systemic racism, technology, the pace of change, a shrinking world and political atrophy. Much like the three pandemics laid bare in 2020, each of these six forces are interrelated, complicated and hidden in plain sight.

These forces matter for leaders because it's important to scan the environment, assess risks and evaluate your strengths, your weaknesses and your opportunities as you chart a course forward.



## ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

### In society:

As the Council on Foreign Relations [put it](#) in July 2020, “Income and wealth inequality in the United States is substantially higher than in almost any other developed nation, and it is on the rise.”

In 2007, the top 10 percent of families by

income held mean wealth seven times larger than that of the next 30 percent, 17 times larger than the middle 30 percent and 45 times larger than the bottom 30 percent, [according to](#) the Federal Reserve. By 2016, the top 10 percent’s mean wealth was 10 times greater than the next 30 percent, 30 times greater than the middle 30 percent and 72 times greater than the bottom 30 percent.

Back in 1968, the top-earning fifth of U.S. families collected 43 percent of all U.S. aggregate income, [according to](#) the Pew Research Center. In 2018, that top fifth collected 52 percent. The top 5 percent of earners grew their income share from 16 percent to 23 percent over the period.

The United States ranked 16 out of 24 middle- and high-income countries in inter-generational earnings mobility in a 2016 Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality [report](#). Mobility is tied to place. “The U.S. is better described as a collection of societies, some of which are ‘lands of opportunity’ with high rates of mobility across generations, and others in which few children escape poverty,” Harvard economist Raj Chetty and other researchers [wrote](#) in 2014.







## In higher ed:

Economic inequality cuts to the heart of who can pay what for an education and how much institutions can spend. It influences where students enroll: Low-cost local community college or pricey four-year private residential campus? It drains or swells tax bases, warping K-12 budgets. It influences institutional budgets by limiting the amount of tuition certain students can pay and incentivizing colleges and universities to chase research dollars or a relatively small number of students with disposable income.

The percentage of state and local tax revenue going to higher education slipped half a percentage point from 2007 to 2017, [found](#) the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. Most public research universities prioritize recruiting out-of-state students, and out-of-state recruiting visits concentrate on affluent communities, according to a 2019 Joyce Foundation [report](#).

Private institutions, which are more tuition dependent and therefore more exposed to the way families' economic constraints affect the enrollment marketplace, have been struggling to collect tuition dollars while following a model where many students receive deep discounts off sticker prices. Net tuition

revenue per full-time-equivalent undergraduate dipped 1.3 percent between 2019 and 2020, adjusted for inflation, [according to](#) the National Association of College and University Business Officers. A handful of wealthy students paying at or near the full sticker price can make or break budgets at many small colleges, administrators say.

Institutions themselves hold vastly unequal wealth. The median of the 20 largest endowments in an annual NACUBO [study](#) grew by almost \$5 billion between 2007 and 2019, to \$11.5 billion. The median for all institutions participating in the study grew about 86 times less in dollar terms—by \$57.7 million, to \$148.8 million. Every institution with a top-20 endowment value in 2007 could say the same in 2019, although some moved within the top 20.

Data raise doubts about whether higher ed adds to economic mobility or locks in inequality. Chetty and other researchers [wrote](#) in 2017 that children with parents in the top 1 percent of income distribution are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy League institution than are children with parents in the bottom income quintile. ■

## SYSTEMIC RACISM

### In society:

Structures of the government, employers and other institutions combine to create a multigenerational machine elevating some Americans and crushing others based on their race.

Redlining—including the state-sponsored denial of services like mortgages based on the predominant race of an area's residents—continues shaping the geography of opportunity more than 40 years after federally sponsored redlined maps were scrapped. Redlined areas “generally remain more segregated and more economically disadvantaged, with higher Black and minority shares of population,” Brookings researchers [wrote](#) in 2019. “They have lower median household income, lower home values, older housing stock, and rents which are lower in absolute terms (but often

higher as a percentage of income).”

Black and brown people tend to [work riskier jobs](#), earn less, build less wealth and therefore have less of a cushion to carry them through crises. Median Black household income was just 61 percent of median white household income in 2018, according to Pew. The median Black household has consistently held less than 15 percent of the wealth of the median white household, [according to](#) the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Black Americans are five percentage points more likely to have jobs at risk of layoffs, furloughs or reduced hours amid the coronavirus pandemic than are white Americans, [McKinsey found](#).

[One 2014 study](#) found that 38 percent of Black adults and 40 percent of American Indian/Native American adults aged 24 to 34 reported being arrested at least once in their lifetime, compared to 30 percent of all adults in that age range. A 2019 [study](#) found Black men and women, American Indian/Alaska Native men and women, and Latino men face a higher lifetime risk of being killed by police than whites. A Black man in the United States is two and a half times more likely than a non-Hispanic white man to be killed by police in his lifetime.



## In higher ed:

Six in 10 of the country's top 101 public colleges and universities enroll a smaller percentage of Black students than they did 20 years ago, [according to](#) a 2020 report from the Education Trust. Just 9 percent enroll enough Black students to be considered representative of their states' Black populations. Only 14 percent enroll representative numbers of Latinx students.

More than eight in 10 new white college enrollments went to the country's 468 most selective colleges since 1995, Georgetown University researchers [found](#) in 2013. Meanwhile, 72 percent of new Hispanic enrollments and 68 percent of new African American enrollments went to open-access two- and four-year institutions.

Mechanisms at play include admissions practices and economic realities. Many contend standardized testing requirements at selective institutions disadvantage minoritized students, and some institutions privilege the children of alumni or donors in admissions decisions. Economic disparities mean non-white families must often rely heavily on debt to pay for tuition. Then there is the question of how students feel once they are on many campuses.

"Look at larger social issues like mascot issues, representation, even underrepresentation," says David Bledsoe, student engagement and communications manager at the American Indian College Fund. "A lot of times these communities feel like they're on their own, like they have each other's backs, but these are the only people who have their back—not collective leaders or a larger policy."

Many colleges and universities work hard to improve their practices and opportunities for minoritized students. But they can't do it alone. A 2018 [report](#) from the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University found that, at every level of educational attainment, whether bachelor's or post-bachelor's degree, white households are more than three times as wealthy as Black households. A Black household headed by someone with a college degree has less wealth than a white family headed by someone who did not earn a high school diploma—\$70,219 versus \$82,968.

"Studying hard and working hard clearly is not enough for Black families to make up for their marginalized financial position," the report said. ■

## TECHNOLOGY

### In society:

Digitization, internet connectivity and new manufacturing techniques like 3-D printing have been altering what can be done where, who can do it and how. In some cases, such as office employees working from home during the pandemic, society didn't seem to realize how fundamentally these developments had altered what was possible until after the pandemic hit.

Digital communication displaced institutions that had been gatekeepers while lifting up new organizations and networks. Social media helped power a generation of anti-racism protesters whose unfiltered voices could suddenly be heard—just as, a few years earlier, it helped amplify the power of the new women's rights movement with the Me Too era. The power of legacy media outlets diminished, displaced by big tech's all-seeing search, social media and targeted advertising. These developments showered fabulous power and wealth on a set of corporate and political leaders who were the most opportunistic but not always the most responsible.

But benefits have not been shared equally. In the U.S., more than one in 20 people lack access to what Pew [calls](#) high-speed, reliable wired internet connections. Rural areas and tribal lands have much lower access, [according to](#) the Federal Communications Commission. Deep [disparities](#) exist in who accesses the internet and [which devices they use](#) based on age, income and education level. Even if the divides were closed, many workers in the services-heavy U.S. economy, like restaurant employees or ride-share drivers, are unable to work remotely.

For organizations, technology allows more data to be generated, tracked and analyzed, enabling a focus on efficiency. Yet the sheer amount of information available makes it difficult to distinguish between reputable sources, useful information and misinformation. If the internet's great power is its ability to deliver unfiltered information, its liability is its potential to undermine any shared sense of reality while prompting paralysis by analysis. The information ecosystem has been shifting from one that seeks to inform, challenge and spread new reputable ideas into one that affirms, stokes fear and harnesses raw human emotion to keep eyeballs on a screen.





## In higher ed:

Technology's effect on higher education was most obvious in early 2020, when it allowed colleges and universities to quickly move to remote learning in the face of the global pandemic. Students reported varying experiences that spring, suggesting higher education's technological competencies must grow and the sector must grapple with internet access issues.

Those who had never taken an online course were less likely to say they successfully adapted than others, [according to](#) a survey of graduate and professional students at five large public research universities from the Student Experience in Research University Consortium at the University of California, Berkeley. So too were students from low-income or working-class families. Graduate and professional students with learning disabilities, mental health disorders or cognitive or neurological disabilities were also less likely to say they adapted well to online instruction.

Technological change reshapes the skills that are in demand and the type of training they require. The best coders might need certificates, not four-year degrees, to start their careers. Factory workers might need frequent training as new equipment and software hit the market. Such developments are reflected

in pushes for badging, certificate programs, stackable degrees and asynchronous learning in postsecondary education and the rise of alternative providers to traditional colleges and universities. Competency-based education dangles the possibility more students might receive credit by showing they mastered requirements instead of by serving time in class.

Technology allows institutions to step into voids and provide services to constituencies that would never before have been imagined. Northern Michigan University, for instance, [has been](#) working to build out wireless internet service in the state's rural Upper Peninsula.

But technology has also undermined higher education's position as a central holder of information. Misinformation and emotion-driven discourse are at odds with the scientific method and an emphasis on reason. When it comes to running an institution, longtime presidents say technology has changed expectations for how responsive an institution must be.

"Technology has meant people expect more responses, a larger number of responses and in a shorter period of time," says Hrabowski, who has led UMBC since 1992. ■



## THE PACE OF CHANGE

### In society:

At first glance, change seems to have been rapid in recent years. Consider products that only existed in science fiction a decade or two ago, like smart speakers answering questions and cars running hundreds of miles on a single electric charge. Or think about an intricate global supply chain enabling you to order luxury goods and groceries straight to your door. The country's largest companies in 2005 were Walmart, Exxon Mobil, General Motors, Ford and General Electric, [according to](#) the *Fortune* 500 list. Fifteen years later, Walmart still topped the list, and Exxon Mobil was No. 3. But newcomers rounded out the top five: Amazon.com, Apple and CVS Health.

Social mores have changed, too. Just 27 percent of Americans supported same-sex marriage in 1996, [according to](#) Gallup. By 2015, the year a U.S. Supreme Court decision made same-sex marriage legal across the

country, 60 percent supported it.

But past changes pale in comparison to what's coming. Artificial intelligence and robotization threaten to further upend the world of work. Massive demographic shifts are unfolding even as global climate change threatens communities, agriculture and supply chains.

The U.S. population's growth rate is slowing, according to a 2017 Census Bureau [report](#). Older populations are growing faster than younger ones, and the country will likely become more reliant on international migration to drive growth. At the same time, the non-Hispanic white population is expected to contract in coming decades even as the number of people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds grows.

Productivity will have to increase if these changes are to be navigated without drastic cuts to quality of life, because relatively fewer workers will have to produce more goods and services in order to support older generations. Yet the pace of productivity growth has long been slowing. U.S. gross domestic product per hour worked rose 24.6 percent over the 10 years ending in 2005, according to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [data](#). The measure rose a third as quickly for the 10 years ending in 2018, by 7.3 percent.



## In higher ed:

Designed to be insulated from change and acculturated against it, colleges struggle to adapt to new generations, which are less white, less wealthy and older than the high school graduates campuses traditionally educated.

For the year ending in 2000, tuition, fees and room and board stickered at an average of \$12,440 at public four-year institutions, adjusting for inflation, [according to](#) the College Board. Full freight totaled \$33,060 at private four-year institutions. A decade later, charges had grown by 46 percent at public institutions and 26.4 percent at private institutions. By 2020 they'd grown another 20.9 percent at public institutions and 19.4 percent at private institutions, to \$21,950 and \$49,870, respectively. Even public two-year tuition rose by 20.5 percent and 21.9 percent over the two decades, ending at \$3,730. Total student loan debt climbed across the country, growing 101 percent between the first quarters of 2010 and 2020, [according to](#) the New York Fed. Colleges follow an established rising-tuition, rising-discount model backed by student borrowing.

Graduation rates change little. Only six in 10 students who started at two- and four-year colleges in 2011 graduated eight years later, [according to](#) the National Student Clearinghouse.

[Faculty](#) and administrative demographics

don't match students or the U.S. population. American Council on Education [estimates](#) show racial parity won't come to college and university presidents until after 2060. Based on historic growth rates, the percentage of Hispanic college presidents shouldn't be expected to match Hispanic representation in the U.S. population that year, the last for which estimates are available. College president parity for African Americans isn't expected until 2050, which is 14 years after parity is expected for Asian American college presidents.

"We're building up the pipeline, but we're not addressing the interpersonal, the ways people are experiencing these institutions," said Justin Rose, dean for faculty recruitment, retention and diversity at Rhodes College, in an email after being asked about Black faculty members seeking tenure and administrative positions. "Why would they want to go on and become president?"

Other factors push higher education to change more quickly. New technology potentially commoditizes education and undermines students' willingness to pay. Federal anti-trust pressure on the National Association for College Admission Counseling prompted 2019 [changes](#) that might supercharge competition for attractive students. ■

## A SHRINKING WORLD WITH GROWING RIFTS

### In society:

Different countries have grown more connected over time as supply chains span the globe and technology connects people across continents. But rifts deepened amid backlash against globalization, intellectualism, expertise and economies spreading benefits unevenly.

Stresses were evident in the summer of 2020 as the United States and China closed each other's consulates following U.S. accusations of intellectual property theft. Similar tensions between the world's largest economies had been rising for years. Some predicted the two countries would soon [form hostile economic blocs](#). International trade growth had already leveled off, as [measured](#) by the World Bank in imports as a percentage of GDP. But even if deglobalization was taking hold, countries' economies moved in sync. The International Monetary Fund [wrote about](#) a "synchronized slowdown" in the world economy even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

At home, deep divisions grew in U.S. society. Political polarization hit remarkable highs as Republicans and Democrats increasingly bought into their own information ecosystems, value systems, institutions and

personality cults. President Donald Trump provided an obvious lightning rod. As he began the fourth year of his term, Gallup [found](#) 82 percentage points separated his job approval ratings from Republicans—89 percent—and Democrats—7 percent. Partisanship divided how people saw issues including how concerned they were about COVID-19's impact on their own health, [according to Pew](#).

Of great concern, some seemed to feel connections to others slipping away entirely. Former surgeon general Vivek Murthy [worried](#) about a loneliness epidemic and related addiction, violence and depression before the pandemic ever brought social distancing.

Major countries approached a decision about whether to keep stitching the globe closer together or to start moving further apart. But in many individual lives, there is no decision. We have been drifting apart from one another. We are alone and distrustful, of others and of experts.

"These are interesting times we live in, and dangerous times," says Dannel Malloy, chancellor of the University of Maine system and a Democratic former governor of Connecticut. "There is an anti-intellectualism present in the United States that we all have to deal with."



## In higher ed:

A shrinking world means new opportunities for higher education, which has thrived on international exchange of scholars and ideas. But the same tensions that threaten to rend political and economic alliances loom for colleges and universities.

The Trump administration in 2020 sought to ban new international students from coming into the United States if they were going to study entirely online—placing stress on any university’s plans to use online instruction to combat coronavirus risks. That development, part of a broader tightening of immigration policies and intense government rhetoric discouraging international enrollment, highlighted how any slowdown in the international student market threatened college and university finances. International students pay full price at much higher rates than domestic students, and some colleges rely on international tuition dollars to balance budgets. The Bipartisan Policy Center estimated 14 percent of total tuition revenue at four-year institutions came from international students, even though they are only 6 percent of total enrollment.

Restrictions on the movement of international scholars could also curtail important research. But federal prosecutors charged

several visiting researchers in 2020 for allegedly lying about ties to the Chinese military on visa applications, demonstrating that questions about intellectual property will be important.

Should diplomatic ties keep fraying, universities could become more instrumental as bridges between nations. The pursuit of knowledge is a powerful shared interest upon which to build. Some college leaders see opportunity to make connections between institutions, nations and individuals. In the summer of 2020, the president of the University of British Columbia, Santa J. Ono, took over for outgoing University of California president Janet Napolitano in leading the University Climate Change Coalition, a network of 22 North American research universities attempting to address climate change. Big challenges like climate change are so large they can only be addressed by multiple institutions, Ono says.

“Our way forward has been to actually bring people together, to listen to the college students, to listen to the next generation,” Ono says. “Most people are good-willed, and bringing them together or listening results in, after a relatively short period of time, a common agenda.” ■

## POLITICAL AND LEADERSHIP ATROPHY

### In society:

At best, political leaders have taken only halting action to address major issues.

The 115th Congress, which ran from 2017 to 2019, passed 442 laws. Pew [judged](#) 69 percent of them substantive. That 69 percent was actually higher than many recent Congresses achieved. It included changes to the federal criminal justice system and the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which significantly changed the tax structure for individuals, businesses and even higher education.

But policy makers in Washington and state capitals frequently wade into partisan fights or punt important issues to other sources of authority. The future of Confederate monuments became a wedge instead of an opportunity for national soul-searching. Congress fails to address divisive issues like immigration, leaving them to the courts or the executive branch. Court decisions and executive action take on increasing importance, making it possible for the next president or a higher court to undo changes. The cumulative effect is that people and organizations spend energy adapting to incremental shifts,

fighting them in court or waiting them out—effectively sitting paralyzed over time.

Evaluate how the country handled the spread of COVID-19 in 2020. Different parts of the federal government gave conflicting information, leaving states and localities to start banning large gatherings or issue face-mask requirements piecemeal. The 116th Congress rapidly passed a relief package in the spring, pumping money into the economy and propping up asset prices. As infections appeared to slow in the spring, some states reopened their economies quickly and were soon seeing infection counts rise. Commentators [speculated](#) about a “K-shaped” recovery benefiting wealthy and middle-class workers who own stocks and could continue working, even as it left out blue-collar workers who disproportionately lost their jobs and had never bought into the stock market.

Long-term challenges loom: the graying of the country, a [pension crisis](#) and [rising](#) state Medicaid costs threatening to choke out public spending on other services. Climate change remains largely unaddressed, as does systemic racism and income inequality. The country seems unable to summon the long-term political will needed to meet these challenges.





## In higher ed:

Leadership in higher education fancies itself different from that in other sectors because of the tradition of shared governance—the division of responsibilities between board, administration and faculty. At its best, this structure allows each constituency to focus on important management areas: the board on its fiduciary duty, the administration on running an institution and the faculty on the academic enterprise. But it does not protect higher education from the effects of leadership atrophy in broader society.

The different parties often point fingers at one another rather than working together or approaching each other's new ideas in a spirit of good faith. Structural issues are barriers to change—higher education is a highly regulated industry that uses peer accreditation, which means it emphasizes conformity, adherence to norms and incremental change over nimbleness and adaptability. It is also reliant on government action if it wants to pursue foundational transformation. But the federal Higher Education Act has not been reauthorized since 2008, despite major changes in society and on campuses since then.

This doesn't excuse colleges and universities that have failed to adapt to unfolding

demographic changes, financial pressures and technological capabilities. In the face of large problems, the sector has often nibbled around the edges, relying on recycled pricing strategies or marketing plans in the place of structural change.

Higher education's atrophy shows up in the way politicians, students and families [view it](#). In late May and early June 2020, the think tank [Populace](#) asked the general population, parents, enrolled students and college-bound students whether higher education was headed in the right or wrong direction. At least half of every constituency said wrong, and only about a fifth of each said right. More concerning for higher education is that 62 percent of respondents said their opinion has stayed the same amid the pandemic. If people aren't happy with higher education, it isn't because of the coronavirus.

About two-thirds of Americans believe colleges and universities put their own institutional interests first. Just 9 percent said they put students first, and only 4 percent said institutions prioritize the greater good. ■

# How to Respond

## Frameworks for Seizing the Moment

Without intervention, none of the three pandemics or six forces discussed earlier in this report will change direction. In the early weeks and months of the virus's spread, pre-existing trends only grew stronger.

"To a remarkable degree, industries that were experiencing declining economic profit before the crisis have suffered even greater declines because of it, while those that were growing their profit have seen outsize gains," McKinsey experts [wrote in July](#). "Online delivery's volume increased by the same amount in eight weeks as it had over the entire previous decade. Telemedicine experienced a tenfold growth in subscribers in just 15 days. Similar acceleration patterns can be seen in online education, nearshoring, and remote working, to name but a few areas."

Leaders reported a similar dynamic within

the admissions market for colleges and universities. Those institutions in best positions—those with the most wealth, strongest brands or most direct connection to students—were widely expected to weather the crisis better than those that had been struggling to enroll students or were already feeling downward price pressure.

So what did the three pandemics change? They heightened the sense of urgency, and they raised the stakes. Where before college and university leaders could make decisions focused on the upside to students' lives, the potential for economic growth and the possibility that research could lead to societywide improvements, they must now grapple with life and death in their core operations.

"They are having to make complicated decisions with limited information," says Philip

Rogers, senior vice president at the American Council on Education. "The tolerance for ambiguity has to be extraordinarily high, and ultimately what's on the line are the lives of millions of teachers and students."

The weight of that can be terrifying. Crises like these can breed fear, distrust between colleagues and organizational paralysis.

Leadership is the key to overcoming that paralysis and seizing the moment. And leadership starts with a choice.

"When you're frightened or anxious, that's a discriminative stimulus," says Benjamin D. Reese Jr., president and CEO of a diversity, equity and inclusion consulting firm, adjunct professor at the Duke University School of Medicine and former vice president of the Office for Institutional Equity at Duke. "You can either go in two directions: you can be frightened or anxious and not step forward. Or you can step forward while you're anxious."

These are the moments when leaders can shine, because crises snap constituencies out of complacency. The right leader can use these moments to articulate a strong vision for the future, root it in institutions' values and become change agents, pushing past the fear of the unknown and instead reaching for what was never before possible.

"The idea of crisis theory is basically that when things are in steady state, when things are going as usual, is not a good idea for change, because why would you change?" said Ana Mari Cauce, president of the University of Washington, during an [interview](#) on the "Weekly Wisdom" webcast. "But during crises, when everything is in flux, when our structures are thrown up in the air, it creates a real opportunity for change."

But the moment is fleeting. While the crisis may seem to be stretching on forever, and it may feel as if uncertainty will continue to reign indefinitely, the window when structural change is possible will close very quickly.

"My magic number is 24 months," says Terry MacTaggart, senior consultant and senior fellow at AGB Consulting. "Ask your campus, what kind of school are you going to be then? It will almost certainly be a lot different."

Working within some sort of a framework, whether traditional strategic planning, scenario planning or some alternative, is necessary to change the course of a sprawling operation like a college or university. Boards, executives, administrators and faculty members must find a way to address day-to-day tasks while keeping the bigger picture in mind.

Regardless of the formal framework, higher ed leaders and experts return again and again to several ideas that might be combined: disassembling problems, triage, strategy and momentum.

**Disassembling problems** into smaller components can make the unmanageable seem manageable. **Triage**, in a medical sense, is assigning degrees of urgency to maladies when the number of casualties could overwhelm providers. It's a way to ration resources. Some higher ed experts suggest prioritizing problems based on whether they need to be addressed immediately or in the short, medium or long terms. Take care of any that must be done right away, while also setting aside time for those that aren't as urgent.

But triage is sometimes criticized for lacking a clear goal, like saving the greatest number

of patients. That's where **strategy** comes in. Once you've broken down a problem and assigned degrees of urgency, how can you address it in a way that fits into a larger goal or set of goals?

Finally, **momentum** is important because short-term actions add up. Address enough short-term or small challenges strategically, and leadership teams can begin to see bigger problems shrinking. You've moved the institution forward in tangible ways while also changing people's concept of what is possible in the long run.

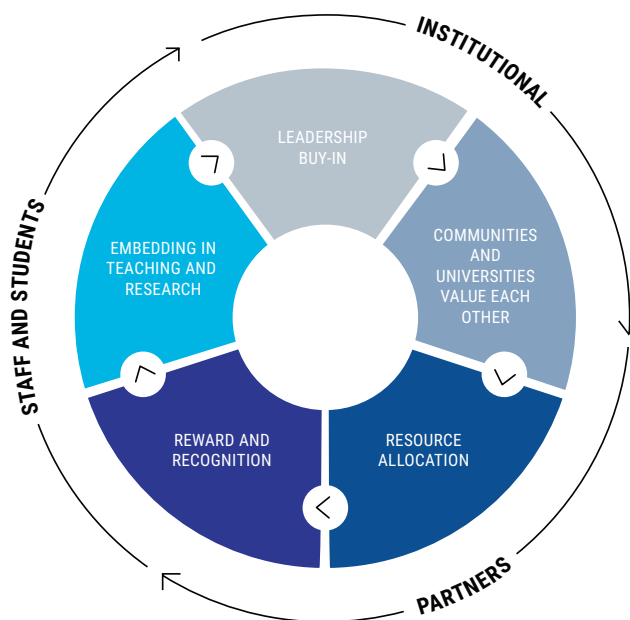
Short-term responses feed long-term recovery, adaptation and change. You can build a new university by swapping out one component at a time.

A framework built around these ideas comes with two glaring problems. How do you decide what's important when priorities aren't obvious? What do you do if you've lost your way? Go back to your institutional **mission and values**, experts say. Root your decisions in values, reclaim the mission and decide whether you need to adjust that mission to fit a changing world.

"Mission and values become even more critical in the midst of a crisis," Rogers of ACE says. "When you're making a judgment call that will impact the long-term future of an institution, you can't exclude mission and values."

A useful model for sector behavioral change was recently outlined as part of a report on how universities can measure, evaluate and promote their societal impact or engagement. It includes leadership buy-in so that a college's senior management endorses priorities; having the university and communities

## Sector Behavior Change



Source: "Advancing University Engagement: University engagement and global league tables." Prepared by Nous Group for King's College London, the University of Chicago and the University of Melbourne.

value one another; committing university resources to community engagement; setting up rewards and recognition as an incentive structure for staff and students; and embedding engagement in curriculum and research.

"In my mind, engagement is about the broader impact we can have in communities and cities on broader societal issues," says Derek R. B. Douglas, vice president for civic engagement and external affairs at the University of Chicago. Douglas co-authored the report, titled "Advancing University Engagement: University engagement and global league tables," along with representatives from King's College London and the University of Melbourne.

That particular report focused on global league tables—rankings that have huge influence on universities with a global reach—and

how global rankings might change to recognize university engagement. At a time when all must grapple with large societal issues and civic engagement, some of its ideas might be adapted for any U.S. community college, regional public, liberal arts college, research university or the U.S. higher education sector as a whole.

## A Vision for the Future

Meeting the challenge of the moment by driving change rooted in institutional mission and values might sound simple enough. But a key component can't be left out: vision.

Leaders must have a vision for what their institutions will look like in the future, whether that means a year, two years, five years or 10. They must be more concerned about the future of their institutions than they are about their own careers—a significant caveat for a sector where high-profile leaders are often accused of careerism.

Given the uncertainty that currently prevails and the wide range of institutions operating in U.S. higher education, it's impossible to say how many of these visions may need to change or how many times. This report won't attempt to parse the question of which vision is appropriate where.

Instead, it will draw from themes that leaders surfaced repeatedly in order to sketch out core components the higher education sector as a whole might use to build a vision for the future. First, however, it must briefly explore higher education's place in the world and the constituencies it serves.

Higher education has long fancied itself a

unique positive force that improves the lives of its students, raises their potential, adds value to their lives and promotes the public good for any number of constituencies. That's different from the purpose of for-profit companies or even many narrowly focused nonprofit organizations.

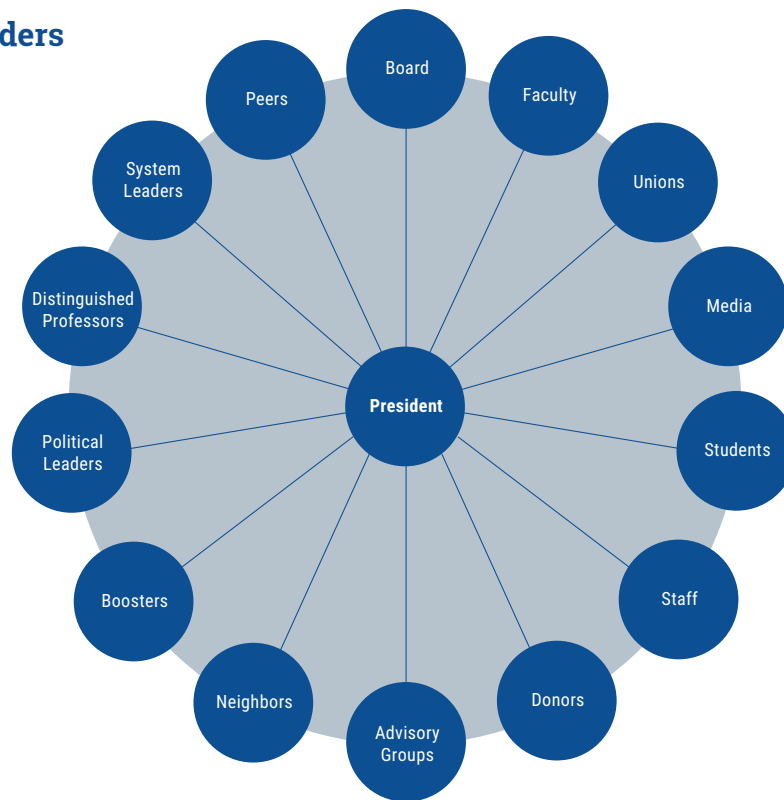
But higher education's position is in peril. Not only do surveys show many Americans believe the sector prioritizes its own interests, others are moving in on the idea of the public good. The for-profit sector has been touting the idea of stakeholder capitalism, or conscientious capitalism, as evidenced by the idea of a B corporation that balances purpose and profit, which broke onto the scene a few years ago. Investors have increasingly been discussing environmental, social and governance factors. This broad movement received mainstream attention when CEOs of leading companies who are members of the Business Roundtable [committed](#) to leading their organizations to benefit all stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers and communities—along with the shareholders whose interests they have for decades prioritized.

Although it remains to be seen whether corporate leaders can follow through, the development is another reason for universities to redouble their efforts at engagement and promoting public good.

"There are so many challenges in the world right now, and there are a lot of sectors that are galvanizing, whether it is the public sector, or you're seeing more talk right now in the private sector," Douglas says. "Universities need to get in the game as well. They have a lot to bring to the table and have a history of solving the big challenges facing the world, whether



## World of Stakeholders



Source: Adopted from "Assessing and Developing College and University Presidents" by Terrence MacTaggart, AGB Consulting

it be in the areas of science, education—we can go down the list. In my mind, engagement is about that broader impact we can have in communities and cities on those broader societal issues."

Balancing the interests of different stakeholders is a difficult proposition because different stakeholders' interests are sometimes in direct opposition to each other. But leaders have to think through what that means.

MacTaggart has mapped the different stakeholders college presidents directly touch, counting 14. Leaders may also want to think through what other stakeholders others in their organizations touch, like employers or public health officials.

Knowing all of this, what components might a new vision for higher education have? Leaders returned, again and again, to several

ideas. It remains unclear how, exactly, each of them will influence individual institutions or the higher ed sector as a whole, but many leaders will have to harness at least some of them in the future.

## Affordability

Look for a moment through consumers' eyes at the value of a college education. Over time, consumers have been asked to shoulder larger and larger risks in order to attend college. The risk of missing out on earnings for the years spent in education has always been present, but as sticker prices rise, the risks of paying high prices and taking on student loan debt seem larger to students and families.

"How do we reframe what we're doing right now, in this day and age?" asks Deborah

Santiago, CEO of Excelencia in Education, a nonprofit focused on Latinx student success. “Even before, we were concerned about the value proposition. People were starting to question the price, affordability and value of higher ed.”

Remember too that current parents have now been through two massive economic downturns in their adult lives. Families know too well how quickly the economy and their ability to pay tuition can change. Also, speculation has been running high that the jobs of tomorrow won't look like the jobs of today and that continuing education will be needed. The result is that families are being asked to pay a rising sticker price for an education that may not be valuable for a full lifetime.

A focus on affordability could help colleges and universities bring the educational product back in line with consumer expectations. The challenge here is making sure affordability doesn't come at the cost of resources that help underrepresented and underresourced students succeed in college. Access, completion and quality matter, too.

“The mission to serve students is more than just enrollment in this day and age,” Santiago says. “You have to fulfill the promise that I think is implicit when students enrolled. They enrolled, and your job is to help them complete.”

A select few colleges are desirable enough that they operate in a separate market insulated from families' affordability concerns. But they should remember that when higher education is viewed as a private good, even the most prestigious institutions risk populist backlash that can result in negative ramifications, like the 2017 implementation of a federal endowment tax.

## The Public Good

Colleges and universities can try to reverse the perception that they are largely bestowing private benefits. Doing so might require them to change behaviors. For example, experts have argued that research institutions are increasingly attempting to commercialize intellectual property instead of opening it up for widespread public use.

“Instead of embodying an open-knowledge commons, higher education risks becoming a propertied space where institutions predominantly view their identities through a commercial lens,” [wrote](#) Jacob H. Rooksby, who is now dean of Gonzaga University School of Law, in his 2016 book, *The Branding of the American Mind*.

The public good doesn't always mean national markets. It can be stepping up in local communities and thinking about issues colleges face—even if leaders don't have all the answers right away.

“If we had universal broadband and it's inexpensive enough, like a utility, the residents of Chelsea can access medical appointments online,” says Pam Eddinger, president of Bunker Hill Community College in Boston. “They can access K-12 education online. They can access higher education online and I'm not delivering food and Chromebooks to them in order to keep their academic continuity going. But the fact that we don't have universal broadband is a system of deprivation.”

The challenge is finding ways to address that system.

Tribal colleges offer an example of how community can be both local and national from

which institutions of all types might learn. They are place-based institutions focused on family, community, land and the environment, says Carrie Billy, president and CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. They've had to find ways to replace activities that build human connections, like eating together or holding ceremonies, in the era of social distancing.

"For us, figuring out how to keep that community and that spirituality—that is really the core of tribal colleges," Billy says.

The coronavirus pandemic has been horrible for minority and native communities in part because of their pre-existing disproportionate negative health outcomes, Billy says. Still, tribal colleges have tried as much as possible to turn it into a chance to reconnect virtually with the large percentage of American Indians and Alaska Natives who live in urban areas and aren't located on reservations with a tribal college, Billy says.

"There are a lot of Native people who don't know their language," she says. "They aren't that familiar with the culture. They want to be taught by Native people, or they want to be in class with Natives and other students who look like them. Now, tribal colleges are developing that ability."

## Alternatives To Prestige and Exclusivity

College presidents frequently complain about the systems used to rate their institutions, with the widely recognized *U.S. News & World Report* rankings receiving the most scorn in the United States. The rankings are criticized as privileging wealth, reputation, prestige and

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“For us, figuring out how to keep that community and that spirituality—that is really the core.”

Carrie Billy  
president and CEO  
American Indian Higher Education Consortium



exclusivity over what actually happens in the classroom.

At the same time, presidents admit to closely watching the rankings. It's hard to measure how much students learn in college or what they earn after they graduate. It's easy to count dollars, conduct polling on reputation and calculate what percentage of applicants a university rejected. What gets measured gets managed, as the truism goes.

"In the past we've connected quality to

dollars, and the social capital and connections being paid for and bought," Eddinger says.

It's not just the way colleges measure themselves against each other that is at issue. It's the way they measure students.

"We're defining merit in ways that privilege some individuals more than others," said Cauce, president of the University of Washington. "So how do we rethink that?"

How far is the sector willing to go to find alternatives to prestige? Could institutions try to remove the bias toward four-year degrees? Those degrees add certain value for students but are also proxies employers use instead of measuring soft skills. Finding alternative credentials has been emphasized by the Trump administration and groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Could colleges do a better job of resisting the urge to try to transform into prestigious research universities?

"One of the real challenges we have in public higher education is we only have one definition of excellence," says Raymund Paredes, former commissioner of higher education in Texas. "That's the big public research university."

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice

Many campuses have diversity, equity and inclusion offices. But some push for a new lens focused on justice.

The difference is important, advocates say. An equality lens emphasizes providing equal tools and assistance to all but fails to correct

for the fact that some start out with unequal access to opportunities. An equity lens provides special tools to some who would otherwise be shut out from access to opportunities, but others continue to enjoy more access. Justice, on the other hand, fixes the system itself so that all have equal access to both tools and opportunities.

How can systems be redesigned and hearts changed so that all have equal access to college and the opportunities it presents?

"What kind of additional scaffolding do I need to make sure that we're not just an institution that can show we believe in equality and equity but that we actually have engaged in intentional effort, at thinking through the dynamics for us of what it means to be just and to engage in justice?" asked Lewis, of the University of Michigan. "It needs to happen at the institutional level. It needs to happen at the unit level ... But it also has to happen at the individual level."

## Technology

In many cases, it would be a shame if colleges and universities rebooted their campuses after the coronavirus threat passes without changing how they use technology to deliver courses and enable employees to work.

So much has been tried and learned. Faculty members have been willing to attempt never-considered changes and virtual instruction. That's important, because what prevents change is often not available resources or technical constraints. It's the limit of what people are willing to do.

Forward-thinking leaders are asking how online and hybrid classes can be better woven

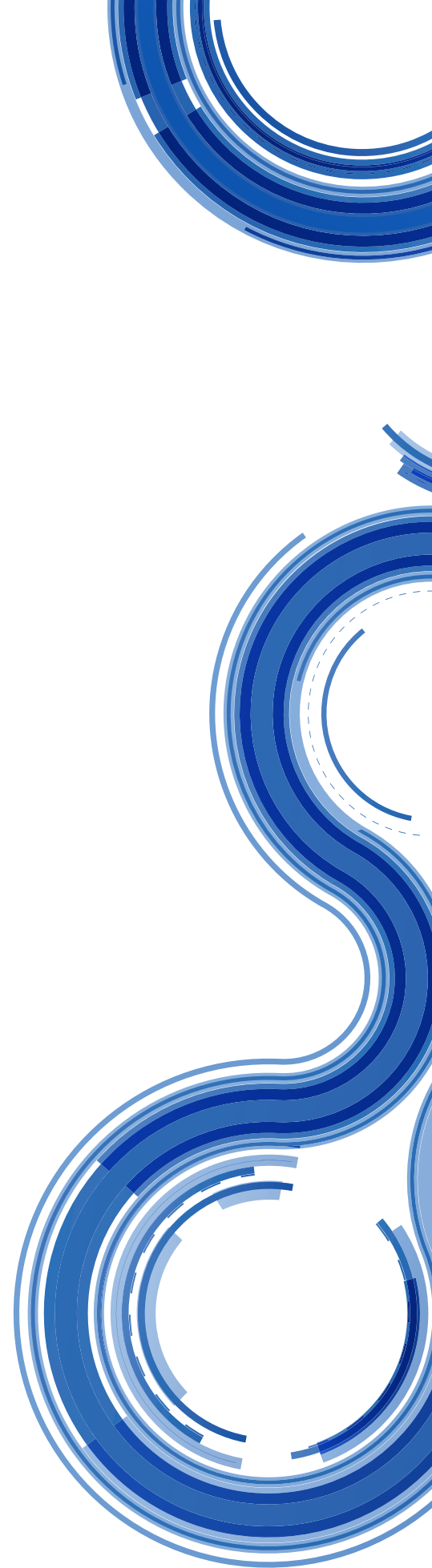
into the fabric of their institutions, their peers say. They're also asking what other ways technology might better serve different student populations.

A shy student might feel more comfortable reaching out to a professor in a video call than speaking in person. First-generation students might be more at ease asking a chat bot to talk about the basics of college life but nervous asking an adviser. And the potential for matching course content with the best modality should excite anyone who cares about learning.

"We are looking at how developments in technology will be changing how people will be doing teaching and learning, thinking through how hybrid can be used more than before," says Hrabowski of UMBC.

This will require changes to the core business model in some cases. If classes that had been 100-student lectures turn out to be better delivered through asynchronous online environments, it will mean the death of an academic cash cow.

"There will be winners and losers," says Mark Rosenberg, president of Florida International University. "A lot of what we're doing was set in the last century or the latter part of the 1800s. The mind-set is still very agricultural, industrial. That needs to become more sensitive to a digital mind-set that sees exponentiality as a virtue rather than as a vice." ■





# Leaders' New Tool Kit

With so much uncertain in a rapidly unfolding paradigm shift, institutions will need their leaders to improve. They must be able to use a range of skills in order to successfully take what they've seen in recent months, adapt and intentionally build an institution that rises to meet the moment—all while upholding institutional mission and values.

The use of the word “skills” here isn't accidental. With work, leaders can learn these abilities, whether hard or soft skills.

Also intentional is the use of the word “leader.” Leaders don't need to have formal titles like president, board chair or provost. They can be deans, department heads or anyone who takes responsibility and aspires to help their organizations meet challenges.

The following discussion of skills is intended for anyone who wants to excel in leadership in a formal or informal role at this moment. It has been developed after interviews with a wide range of college presidents, board

members, administrators and experts. While technical skills remain important, this list is notable for its skew toward soft skills.

“Beyond standard baseline technical knowledge, I get the sense that committees are looking more at the soft skills of their candidates,” says Zachary A. Smith, managing partner and practice leader for the search firm WittKieffer. “How flexible and adaptable are you? What kind of work have you done during a crisis?”

The set of skills and discussion that follow is long, so they are organized by the different roles leaders fill. Some may be most useful to those holding executive positions. Others may be useful for governing board members or faculty members. Many of the skills reinforce each other, though. Learning one naturally feeds into others. Even if a skill primarily supports a leader in one role on campus, it may be useful in the tool kit of another.

# COMMUNICATOR

Experienced leaders preach **communicating effectively** in any uncertain situation. This means **finding the messages that are important** and **repeating** them again and again.

"I don't think it's possible to overcommunicate during a time of crisis," says Beverly Daniel Tatum, former president of Spelman College. "People want to know where you are, even if you don't know for sure what you're doing. People want to know what you're thinking about and how you're thinking about it."

It also means the **right message for the right audience at the right time**.

"You have to be a good translator," says Santiago of Excelencia in Education. "The way you communicate to a student and family is about the individual. You need to be able to relate to them. You need to talk to the board in a way that scales this perspective, because they want to see numbers. They want to see movement."

Simply providing numbers isn't enough, though. That risks data being misinterpreted, which can undermine larger goals and visions. Even sophisticated constituencies need you to tell the story behind the data. **Present the facts and help others make sense of them**.


"There are exorbitant amounts of data out there," says Femi Ogundele, assistant vice chancellor and director of undergraduate admissions at the University of California, Berkeley. "Turning data into useful information is going to be really important, because

there is a difference between having a lot of data and a lot of information. Narrative building is also going to be really important."

Good communicators must also be **candid** and **transparent**. Those who are operating on a set of principles need to articulate them. Those who are moving toward a goal can't hide it, nor can they hide it when things are going poorly or mistakes are made. In such cases, helping others understand what's guiding your decisions can reduce anxiety.

"You have to be honest with people and have those conversations," says Sorrell, of Paul Quinn College. "There's a candor that I think is essential. I don't think that means you can't be vulnerable. You can say, look, we're afraid. We're afraid that if we do what's right by the science, it's going to put us in economic peril."

Sorrell was speaking about the difficult position college and university leaders were in as they grappled with whether to welcome large numbers of students back to campus in the fall of 2020. It's a good example of being stuck between competing priorities: what's safest for students versus what's best for institutional finances. It's also an example of a situation where any decision is likely to draw criticism. The ability to take criticism constructively is a skill that leaders need to develop. Criticism can prompt reflection, help you realize shortcomings and expose you to new points of view. Even in cases where criticism isn't warranted, it's better to absorb it than to react emotionally, experts say.



They also say that sometimes leaders must speak truth to power.

“Take a stand when you need to,” says Ono, president of the University of British Columbia. “It’s really going to be important for leaders ... to be clear that university campuses should be places that people feel included, where there is zero tolerance for any kind of systemic racism. Articulate steps that the institution is going to take to deal with systemic racism.”

Discussing identity with compassion and human terms grows in importance. Students and activists need leaders who listen to the many aspects of identity that contribute to who they are, which can include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and national identity. Good communication is about deep listening and active listening more than speaking.

Effective communication using new forms of technology will also be critical long after the coronavirus threat has passed. Learn to be comfortable in front of a camera, how to conduct an effective meeting by video-conference and how to reach students through their medium du jour. The current generation of leaders holding formal titles has risen in part by being skilled in face-to-face contact and direct relationships. Now, it’s a brave new world where other forms of communication can’t be brushed away.

“Presidents have to really hone their communication skills and be more adept themselves

at using technologies like social media,” says Cheryl Crazy Bull, president and CEO of the American Indian College Fund. “I think a lot of presidents neglect that as a way to communicate because they don’t see their voice being as critical in the space. But I think people want leaders to give them support and advice.”

Can you set aside time to directly answer student questions online? Can you immediately post a video on social media honestly explaining a difficult decision? No matter the medium, candid, transparent conversation breeds trust. And trust, the foundation of a good relationship, is the most important asset any leader can have.

“The trust you need in order to make decisions and have them be implemented well, especially in remote environments, really benefits from good, clear communication,” says Merrill Schwartz, senior vice president at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. ■

# TONE-SETTER

The well-worn adage that culture starts at the top can be frustrating. Yet it's true.

Leaders are by definition the ones who represent an institution to both internal and external constituencies. The sum of their decisions, communications, mannerisms and interactions adds up. Make sure you are **building strong organizational culture**.

Culture matters in part because it attracts or repels talented people. An institution that is a bad place to work or study will lose its best people and its best students. Culture can help make a campus welcoming for first-generation or underrepresented students. It can also make it intolerable. This always mattered, but it's back in the spotlight in 2020. Conversations about what it means to dismantle white supremacy and be antiracist are happening in places across the country where they haven't happened before, Tatum says.

"I know there are campuses where presidents are trying to look at how they can address campus climate issues, maybe more vigorously than they have previously," she says. "This is not the first time people have wrung their hands and said, 'We need to do things differently.' I think there is an opportunity to do things differently. Whether people will or not remains to be seen."

Building culture is about more than what you say. It's about reflecting on what a larger national conversation means for your campus. It's also about how much you listen to

your constituencies, internalize what they tell you, measure it against other sources of information and act to make changes if necessary.

"How are students doing?" asks Hrabowski, president of UMBC. "Black students, for example, in terms of graduation rates and performance. And then how are they feeling about the experience? Do we have surveys and climate checks? How are we listening to them and letting them know we're listening?"

The tone set by leaders can help make an organization more resilient and flexible. Employees need to be supported by culture and to have psychological protections. Leaders provide both, shielding workers from unnecessary stress and letting them focus on their jobs. Avoiding hard decisions doesn't help. It just leaves the ax hanging over everyone's heads for longer periods of time.

Leaders can add to organizational resiliency by inspiring a **problem-solving mentality**.

"Do I worry about things?" asks Jackson, president of RPI. "Of course I do. But I'm also thinking about what I can do to come out of this, or at least what I can do to lessen the impact of it on the institution as I lead the institution—but also the people."

**Entrepreneurialism** and **innovation** can go hand in hand with problem solving. When Karrie G. Dixon took over as CEO and chancellor of Elizabeth City State University, in North Carolina, she was the historically Black university's third leader in four years.



The university was operating under the NC Promise tuition plan, a program enacted by the state Legislature setting tuition at \$500 per semester, which had drawn criticism from some faculty across the University of North Carolina system because it infringed on university control and because they worried it limited revenue streams.

Dixon embraces the NC Promise, saying the low tuition helps draw interested students. Her priority upon taking over was making the university stand out. She seized on its aviation program.

"I needed to come up with a niche," she says. "What makes us different from everyone else? That, too, offers a sense of sustainability when you have something different. It was right here in front of us. We hadn't told our story and elevated it. It was aviation—producing pilots in our state, both private and commercial pilots."

The niche allowed for expansion that could come in handy when the airline industry hits turbulence. Elizabeth City State went on to start a four-year degree program in unmanned aircraft systems, or drones.

"Even now in the pandemic, we have people calling us, wanting to be trained on drones and drone delivery," Dixon says. "We're working with UNC Chapel Hill, our flagship, going into communities in our region and delivering medical supplies and testing and contact tracing. Our drones are going to be used to do those things."

Strike a balance between **learning from the past** and **having a short memory**. Very little in higher education is new—the sector has weathered past pandemics and protests. How have people behaved in the past? What lessons or principles can be applied to your particular situation? Can you help the institution forget about the way things have always been done and focus instead on the best way to do them? ■



“I needed to come up with a niche. What makes us different from everyone else?”

Karrie G. Dixon  
CEO and chancellor  
Elizabeth City State University



# CONVENER

Leaders aren't an island. They're strongest when they're not isolated—when they can lean on the wisdom of peers at other institutions and learn from the perspectives of constituencies within their own.

"It's a good time to have colleagues," Tatum says. "It's a good time to be able to talk to your fellow presidents and ask, 'How are you thinking about this? How are you doing?'"

Leaning on others isn't as effective if you only listen to people who think and look exactly like you do. So widen your circle to include people who don't look, think or act like you.

"The intergenerational piece of it is really important," says Rosenberg, of FIU. "We've got to not just surround ourselves with boomers or millennials, but we've got to do a much better job of getting the fresh, younger thinkers engaged with us."

How leaders do this can vary. Some might hire for the positions around them differently, emphasizing diversity of life experiences instead of similarity to their own backgrounds. Others might convene committees or focus groups. Still others can attend different meetings, like student government meetings, or invest more time in relationship building.

Widening your circle can also help you understand decisions' unintended consequences that you never would have anticipated otherwise. If an institution was holding in-person instruction but requiring a mandatory quarantine period in the fall of 2020, what was it saying to low-income students who had to

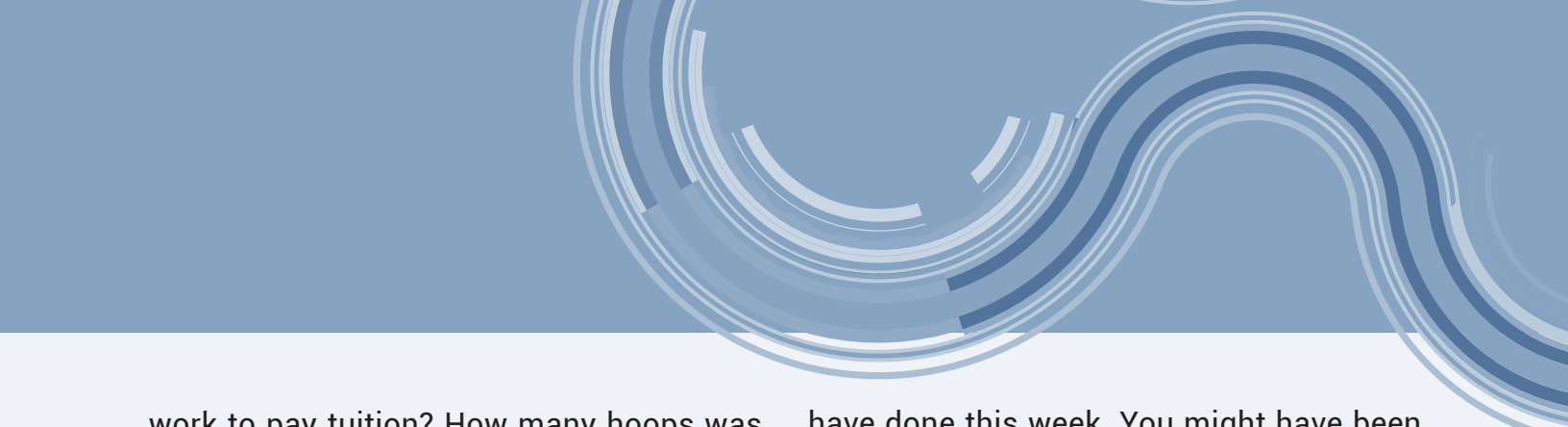
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“How do we ensure that those most impacted by what we're trying to do are part of the process?”

Kevin McDonald

vice president for diversity,  
equity and inclusion  
University of Virginia





work to pay tuition? How many hoops was it making them jump through? How many of those barriers could it remove?

“If we’re centering equity, how do we ensure that those most impacted by what we’re trying to do are part of the process?” asks Kevin McDonald, vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion at the University of Virginia. Leaders can’t be “sitting in our war room and coming out with a decision process that hasn’t included the populations that are often the most vulnerable.”

Engage off campus. Connecting with donors and fundraising will always be front of mind. But emphasize interacting with local leaders, including employers, mayors, public health officials, nonprofit executives and school leaders. Lawmakers are a special group to engage. Higher education has its well-established lobbying arms. But extra attention to lawmakers can matter in an unsettled environment.

Engaging off campus will be most effective if institutions can prove to lawmakers and communities that they’re important. As the saying goes: What have you done for me lately?

Think also about the best way to convene students to drive positive action. Remember that students are transient. They bring great energy to any situation, but they also don’t know what happened on campus five years ago.

“Because the student body turns over, you always have fresh energy,” Tatum says. “But those new students don’t know what you did last year. They just want to know what you

have done this week. You might have been working on improving the thing they’re concerned about for a number of years, but if it isn’t completely fixed when they walked in, they want to know what you’re doing this second, and understandably. They want to have a positive experience, and not four years from now.” ■

# INDIVIDUAL

Leadership skills are individual skills. So time spent on self-improvement can be time well spent.

“The leadership framework has become much more personal,” Eddinger says.

First and foremost at this moment in time is empathy. Finding a way to project **empathy** in an age of video calls isn’t easy, but it’s necessary. **Care about people** with whom you work and the students you serve. Even when leaders have to choose between what’s best for some of those people and what’s best for their organization, looking at situations through others’ eyes and trying to feel their emotions matters.

“It has to be based upon the fact that you are truly listening to your faculty and staff and students,” Ono says. “It has to be about them, not the struggles you are facing as a leader. You have to be **humble** and empathetic toward those you are seeing in the community.”

Think, for a moment, about the incoming freshman in fall 2020. Instead of celebrating their high school graduations, many were sitting at home, staring at a screen. Instead of anticipating the start of a new chapter in their lives all summer, some dreaded hard decisions about whether to risk their health to enroll on campus come fall. Many will feel lonely, isolated and disconnected from peers and professors alike, Ono says.

Empathy is another step toward **building trust**.

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“The leadership framework has become much more personal.”

Pam Eddinger

president

Bunker Hill Community College





“COVID has made more evident than ever before the need for trust,” says Ron Mahurin, senior consultant at Design Group International. “It’s not that we didn’t need it before. It’s just that we need it so much more now, and we need it in spades, and we need it yesterday.”

It can be frustrating, then, that trust still takes time to build. In fact, many priorities take time to realize. **Patience** is key, says McDonald of the University of Virginia.

He knows, because his job includes reorienting institutions around diversity and inclusion, which requires different constituencies to understand what he calls “a shared responsibility that needs to be woven into the academic enterprise.” It’s work that can require returning time and again to talk to the same people about the same weighty issues. Laying the groundwork with people can be a long process, he says.

“To earn trust, you’ve got to build it,” McDonald says. “Those building blocks are not instantaneous. These are not cookie-cutter homes that you’ve got to put together. This isn’t microwavable. For every constituency, it’s a different experience that you have to be able to tap into, understand, do your own research.”

Such work requires **courage** and **resiliency** as you are turned away again and again.

Leaders also build mental muscles allowing them to **reflect** and take **personal accountability**. Thinking about your own behaviors

and what contributes to them are levers for change and improvement.

“It’s at the root of counseling and psychotherapy,” says Reese, who is a clinical psychologist. “Reflection in and of itself doesn’t make change, but it’s one of those levers. It’s one of the key elements.” ■

# FACULTY LEADER

The faculty serves as the academic heart of any college or university. Presidents, provosts, board chairs, faculty senate chairs and informal leaders all need to know how to exercise leadership with faculty members.

To start, experts suggest learning to **honor shared governance** in word and deed.

“Emphasizing the importance of shared governance with the faculty had to do with making everyone feel valued in the process of transformation,” says Dixon, of Elizabeth City State. “As a leader, I think that’s critical, because the trust comes in when they see you. The actions speak louder than words in some situations. When they see you’re doing these things, they see change, I think it speaks loudly to a renewed energy and momentum.”

Trust matters even more at this moment because leaders had to take quick action to move institutions online in the spring. Faculty members adapted quickly and remarkably well. But as the summer unfolded, many had reason to be worried about their job prospects and security, their health and challenges encountered teaching online. With so many pressures bearing down, strong leaders had to make faculty members feel valued and respected.

“Leadership requires presidents and their shared governance partners to cut through that noise quickly and arrive at collective solutions that really embrace shared values of the university community,” says Rogers, of ACE.

Faculty mind-set proves to be critical in

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“Tenure and promotion committees need to expand beyond their very limited idea of what ‘real’ scholarship is, if we are to achieve equity within the academy.”

**Justin Rose**

dean for faculty recruitment,  
retention and diversity  
Rhodes College







facilitating or limiting institutional change, according to presidents. Those that are dug in against a change can make things very difficult. Those that are receptive and adaptable can be great allies.

In the coming months and years, the composition of the faculty is likely to be a key question. Privately, some leaders confide that they have tried to promote hiring more faculty members from underrepresented groups. But existing faculty members push back, using excuses like the quality of research or research frequency. Provosts, deans and department chairs start to back down, and the initiative dies.

The ability to **diversify the faculty** isn't a single skill, but it must be front of mind.

"We need to give those people more incentive to do the right thing," says Paredes, former commissioner of higher education for Texas. "A lot of times, people get in trouble not because they were trying to do the wrong thing but because they were trying to do the right thing at the wrong pace."

Different levers will **motivate change** for different faculty members. Faculty members themselves need to think about doing things differently, because their actions—or collective lack of action—reflect on the entire academy.

"These are fundamental incentive structures that we need to think about—faculty of color getting denied tenure because they aren't published in the most 'elite' journals, journals that grow in prestige based upon how many submissions they reject," said Rose, a dean

at Rhodes College, in an email. "Therefore, tenure and promotion committees need to expand beyond their very limited idea of what 'real' scholarship is, if we are to achieve equity within the academy." ■

## BOARD LEADER

The importance of leadership with governing boards can't be overlooked. Skills matter whether you're an administrator interacting with a board, a board chair leading other members, an individual board member seeking to lead through soft power or a faculty member who needs to educate and learn from a governing board.

First and foremost, board members need to be oriented to **look forward**, experts say.

"One of the most worrisome things I hear is that a trustee is nostalgic from when they were a student," Schwartz, of AGB, says. "No matter how you got there, you have to look at the whole institution. That's your fiduciary responsibility. Recognize your role as a trustee."

Boards must fight problem blindness and optimism bias. They need to internalize real threats and recognize that the world has changed. This moment is one where **learning** is key.

"This is an opportunity to educate boards about the factors that really influence the running of the college," says Richard Ekman, president of the Council of Independent Colleges. "Having said that, there are some boards or individual trustees who just have impossible expectations or understandings of how these things really work."

Presidents generally want board members to inject ideas, provide support and provide oversight of key operations. Board members' knowledge and skills can be of great help,

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“One of the most worrisome things I hear is that a trustee is nostalgic from when they were a student.”

Merrill Schwartz

senior vice president

Association of Governing Boards  
of Universities and Colleges





provided they don't overstep their authority and become controlling.

Strong leaders **diversify governing boards**. Wealthy board members have long been tapped for their money. Corporate executives have often offered management expertise. But could board members be brought in from elsewhere in the educational pipeline?

"I would love to see more former superintendents of K-12 school districts on university boards," Paredes says. "These people could lead the university in developing closer partnerships with K-12 in terms of academic standards, in terms of picking career goals and so forth."

Remember that even amid the confluence of three pandemics, boards can't be focused on crisis management all the time. They need to have conversations about the future—make time for strategy and **planning**.

"People always think of planning as something extra that you do, as opposed to it being the infrastructure that organizes how you do what you do," Jackson of RPI says. "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

Find a framework to evaluate and **manage risk**. Boards that don't aren't fulfilling their fiduciary duty. Enterprise risk management is a way to identify, analyze and rank risks. Be careful, though, because it has been criticized as breeding complacency or leading to the misdiagnosis of problems.

And when the going gets tough, leaders need to **honestly evaluate the composition**

**of the board**. What additions, subtractions and changes need to be made to rise to the moment? ■

# EXECUTIVE

The defining role of any executive is making decisions and taking responsibility for them. And in this era of uncertainty, college and university presidents will need to **learn to make decisions quickly with imperfect information.**

“We have to be pretty nimble,” says David Yarlott Jr., president of Little Big Horn College, a tribal community college on the Crow Indian reservation in Montana. “Be able to make quick decisions with the best information that you have. But also be able to make some changes when you recognize things are changing around you.”

Experts offered a few things to keep in mind while making tough decisions. Focus on what you can control instead of what you can't. Try to cut bureaucracy while still listening to different voices. Empower your team. Together, this advice means fewer people duplicating briefings in redundant meetings and more conversations and collaboration. Document decisions and decision-making processes so your teams can go back, dissect what went right or wrong, and improve upon the steps for next time.

Engage the leadership team around you. Experts say those who feel valued and that they can be their true selves at work are more likely to be engaged. Make sure you're rewarding creativity, imagination and problem solving instead of groupthink and yes-men. **Provide and listen to honest feedback.** Sometimes the truth hurts, but leaders are better off knowing it.


Remember the old adage that personnel is policy. Work to **institutionalize important values** in midlevel managers and leaders in different formal and informal roles.

“You have to embed the changes you're trying to make deep within the organization,” Tatum says. “Folks who have been there 20 years, who are administering the financial aid or working in the registrar's office or teaching the classes having long been tenured—it's the people who have the long history and investment in the institution who also have to embrace the change.”

Evaluate others' strengths and weaknesses and always **put people in a position to succeed.** Think about individual positions that might be pressure cookers. For example, provosts who came up as faculty shop stewards frequently use up their social capital once they become chief academic officers, Ekman says. How can you avoid this?

“Speaking from the position of having been a provost, one of the biggest challenges is going to be the financial,” says Donald Heller, vice president of operations at the University of San Francisco. “For any institution, there are going to be big financial challenges. **Drawing on the experience** you have in being able to make changes to budgets in short order is going to be an important skill.”

Putting people in a position to succeed can also mean removing them from roles in which they're destined to fail. Those who were well suited to positions in times of tranquility



might not be right for them amid today's uncertainty.

"Is this pandemic experience revealing for some institutions?" asks Thom Chesney, president of Clarke University, in Iowa. "Do we have a provost, CFO or president who is really equipped? Were they developed to do this? Did they come to us with the experience to do this, or did they get revealed to us?"

**Find perspective.** Remember that the crisis of the day will eventually fade. Your campus fits into a larger higher education ecosystem. And as hard as it is to admit, institutional leaders can't fix everything on their own.

"One of the things I'm trying to focus on is called zooming in, zooming out," says Neeli Bendapudi, president of the University of Louisville. "We're forced to zoom in on the events of today and the crisis of today. But if I don't consciously carve out time to zoom out and take a moment to look at what's happening, I think I will not be serving the university well."

Several leaders emphasized the skill of **saying no**. Be realistic about the resources that will be required for any action and the resources that are actually available.

"Strategy is learning where you say no," Bendapudi says. "It's not learning where to say yes."

Finally, **demonstrate competence and take action**. Leadership isn't issuing a statement and collecting a paycheck while keeping things running the way they've always run.

It's using expertise to identify problems and overcome challenges.

This difference is most apparent now when it comes to addressing systemic racism. Many college presidents issued statements of solidarity or support. What changes did they actually make? What did they do to follow through?


Ideas for action aren't hard to find. Student and faculty groups have been issuing requests and demands for years now. Take [a few](#) drawn from the SUNY Black Faculty and Staff Collective, a group organized across the State University of New York system.

The group's demands in the summer of 2020 included racial representation on boards of trustees matching the demographics of campuses; a dedicated chief diversity officer at each campus; that the system sever contracts with prisons making school supplies; that the system direct funding to each campus for hiring Black faculty; for revised curricula and course requirements; and for initiatives to support Black students on campus.

That's not a comprehensive list of demands leaders might face on their own campuses, but they should think about what they'll do to address the issues activists are attempting to fix.

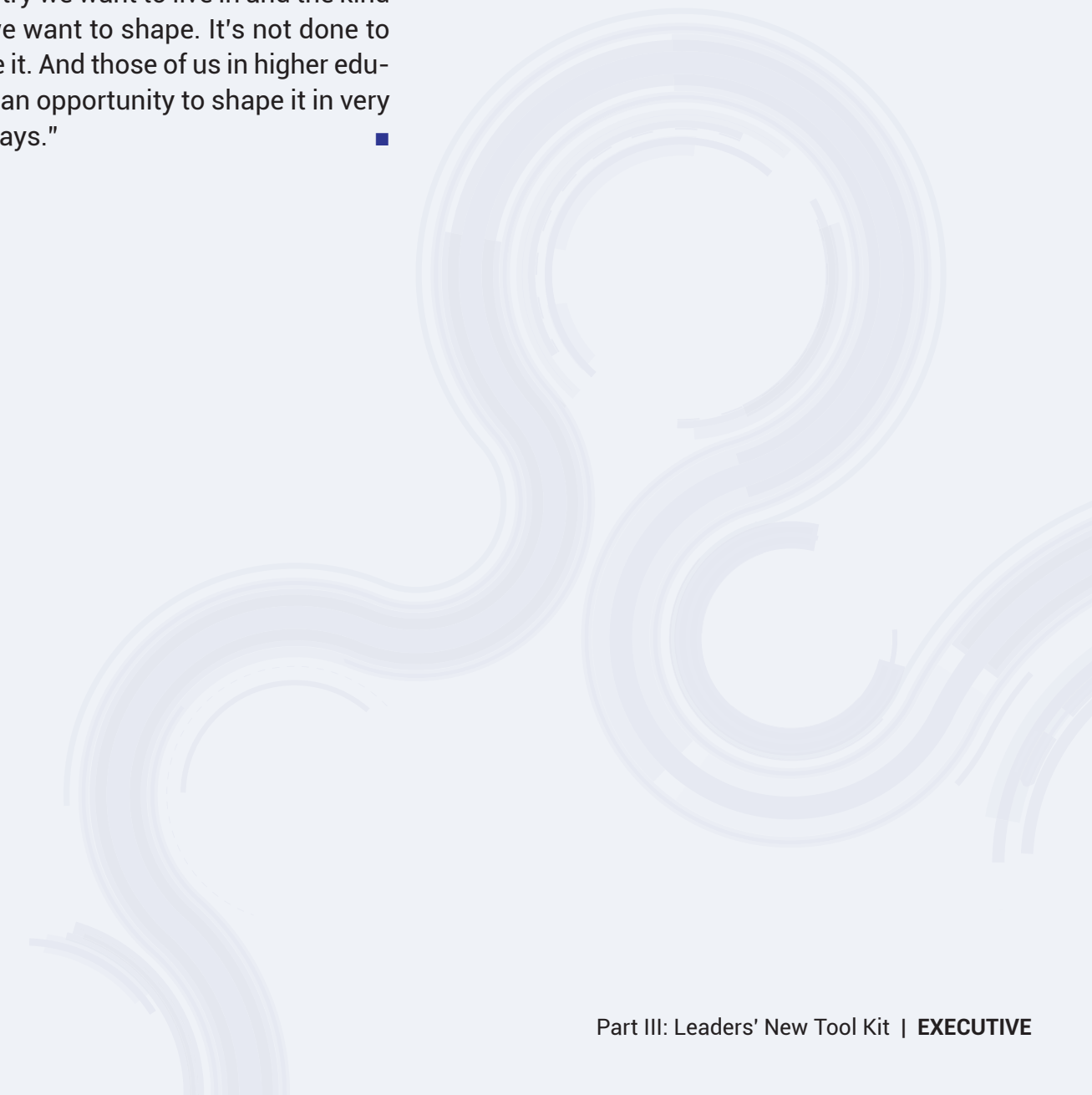
"Leaders have to take action going beyond the words," Hrabowski says. "People are tired just hearing the words about structural racism. So what? What are you going to do about it?"





How sustainable are your efforts? What are your long-term commitments?

"I appreciate all the statements in reaction to the horror of police brutality, but I'm more interested in what do the organizations, companies, people that make these statements do," says Sarita Brown, president of Excelencia in Education. "It's up to us, the kind of country we want to live in and the kind of society we want to shape. It's not done to us. We make it. And those of us in higher education have an opportunity to shape it in very particular ways." ■



# Conclusion: Building a New Servant Leadership in Higher Education

The executive lens comes last in this special report's discussion of leadership roles in the previous section for a reason. Executive action, decision making and authority are often the first concepts we think of when we hear the word "leader." Although they are more critical than ever in this moment, they must be informed by looking at the world through other lenses. They must be supported by other skill sets.

Successful leadership in the coming era won't be about power, personal success and individual rank. It will be about putting others first, both on and off campus. It will be about service to others and rebalancing the needs of the powerful against the needs of rising generations and the needs of greater society.

The concept of servant leadership can be traced back to 1970, when Robert Greenleaf wrote an essay, "The Servant as Leader." Servant leaders "take the traditional power leadership model and turn it completely upside down," according to the Society for Human Resource Management.

Many of the board members, presidents, administrators, faculty members, staff members and students in higher education already practice a form of servant leadership or aspire to it. Yet the model is at odds with the systems that pervade much of higher education.

"The problem is, in higher education more so than many other careers that I see, advancement is more of a strategic play than, many times, anything else," Sorrell says. "You take on the right project at the right schools that create the right mentors that push you toward the right next opportunity. For a good chunk of your career, you spend your time plotting not to be where you are but to not hurt your ability to get to your next place."

Sorrell isn't criticizing individuals, he says. He's observing. Individuals are reacting to a series of incentives set up long before they ever rose through the ranks on campus.

It's time to ask whether those incentives and the system they form suitably prepared leaders for the current moment.

"We could grow out of this in a way where we become more grossly inequitable," says Daniel Greenstein, chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. "We have to fight against that."

Again and again, college leaders return to two overarching ideas: rebuild higher education around the concept of the public good and reorient it around people's needs instead of institutions' needs like exclusivity and prestige. Different steps can be taken toward those goals,



and they could be realized under vastly different models. The unifying thread is that the process of change starts with leaders across all levels of higher education prioritizing other people's needs over their own ambitions.

"We're in this together," says Cynthia Lindquist, president of Cankdeska Cikana Community College, a tribal college on the Spirit Lake reservation in North Dakota. "How do we protect our employees, our students and ourselves?"

If the greater good isn't enough of a motivation for such a change, remember how higher education's special position in the United States is threatened. CEOs at some of the biggest for-profit companies have rejected the idea of shareholder primacy, signaling that their own corporate growth isn't the only important thing. Only time will tell whether they act on those ideas or if their statements will ring hollow in history. But does higher education really want to take the chance of getting outflanked by for-profit companies in the struggle to be a force for public good?

"You look out into the world and you see Black Lives Matter," said Rose, a dean at Rhodes College. "You see COVID-19. You see climate change. For me, the primary questions are, 'What is the college's purpose in the world? And how can we be justice-minded change agents? How

can we be concerned about creating a structure that can continue into the foreseeable future while thinking about the value of human life, the value of work?'"

By focusing on the tools above, a new generation of college and university leaders can hopefully build upon the framework of servant leadership to create a better tomorrow. Existing leaders can hopefully reframe their own work.

The coming months and years will be filled with thankless work. But they also hold great potential to make a difference.

"Being a leader, whether board or president or faculty leader, is a more important calling now than it was a year ago or 10 years ago," MacTaggart says. "Sure, it's hard, depressing and thankless. But to be able to make a difference to your institution, to your community, for your students—what an opportunity. How many people are given that?" ■

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Beverly Daniel Tatum, former president, Spelman College

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Rick Seltzer, projects editor, joined *Inside Higher Ed* in 2016, covering business and management. He came to the publication after working as a money and general-assignment reporter for *The Baltimore Business Journal*. Previously, he was a business reporter for *The Bloomington Herald-Times*, and he covered small business and health care for the *Central New York Business Journal*. A native of south central Pennsylvania, Rick started his career as a local beat reporter for *The Harrisburg Patriot-News*.



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