

INSIGHT INTO ACADEMIA®

Empowering Leaders. Driving Innovation.

March 2026 | \$5.99 | insightintoacademia.com

THE SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPUS

Faculty and staff are becoming higher education's most trusted brand ambassadors.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: 2026 Trailblazer in Higher Education Award

Introducing the Inaugural Insight Into Academia Top Colleges for Innovation Award



**Honoring institutions driving
innovation in higher education.**

Your institution is shaping the future of higher ed—we want to make sure the world knows it!

Innovation takes many forms—academic design, student experience, fundraising, employee engagement—with intentional, strategic leadership behind it. The 2026 Insight Into Academia Top Colleges for Innovation Award will honor the colleges and universities that aren't just adapting to change, but defining it.

Showcase how your institution is weaving creativity, problem-solving, and future-focused thinking into every corner. This recognition will signal peers, partners, policymakers and prospective students that your college or university sets the standard for what higher education can be.

Nominate your institution for this
unique recognition by March 17.



INSIGHT_{INTO}**ACADEMIA**[®]
Empowering Leaders. Driving Innovation.

CONTENTS

March 2026



10

DEI Policy Whiplash

Unintended fallout comes from the rollback of campus DEI.



12

Continued Focus on Student Mental Health

Campuses operationalize well-being and measure practice readiness.

8

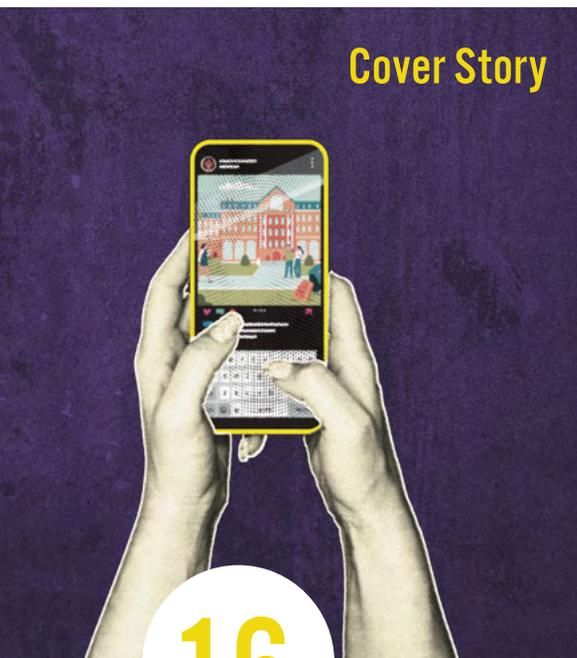
STEM Workforce Innovation

Linking education, entrepreneurship, and regional economic growth.

20

Breaking Academic Silos

Designing interdisciplinary curricula for student success and workforce readiness.



16

The Social Media Campus

Faculty and staff take the lead on social media.



22

Trailblazers in Higher Education

Insight Into Academia presents the recipients of the 2026 Trailblazer in Higher Education Award.

In Each Issue

In Brief 7

WE HIRE MORE THAN FACULTY!

**WE'RE
HIRING!**
JOIN UMB



CURRENT OPENINGS:

ADMINISTRATIVE
SUPPORT

HUMAN RESOURCES

FINANCE & BUSINESS

IT & TECHNICAL SUPPORT

FACILITIES &
OPERATIONS

STUDENT & ACADEMIC
SUPPORT

HEALTHCARE &
RESEARCH SUPPORT

APPLY NOW



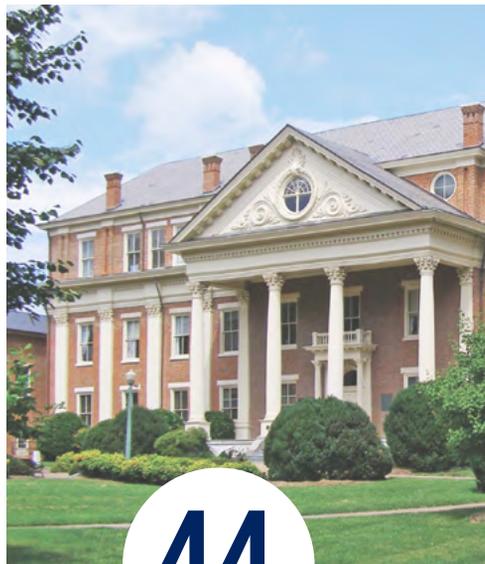
SPECIAL REPORT

Higher Ed Business Models



Tuition Discounting

Colleges rethink tuition and financial aid for college affordability.



College Mergers

What consolidation means for institutions, students, and communities.

34

Intersecting Business & STEM

Rethinking business education for a tech-led economy.

38

Revenue Rethink

Federal cuts push universities to look for new revenue opportunities.

40

The Spending in Sports

Institutions look at cutting athletics programs to cover reduced funding.

42

Subscription Campuses

Colleges monetize lifelong learning beyond one-time degrees.

Business Schools



Rethinking Scale

Shared services, consortia, and data reshape institutional sustainability.



Changing Demand

AACSB data reveals business school enrollment trends.

50

Students Partner with City for Sustainability

A new annual competition is designed to turn student ideas into implementable solutions.



6 Reasons Why

it's a **BEST PRACTICE** to advertise on
Insight Into Academia's **Career Center**

- Candidates viewing jobs on our Career Center are focused only on **higher education jobs**.
- Your jobs may post to job boards of nearly 3,000 member-based professional organizations.
- Candidates applying through Insight Into Academia are **highly qualified** with resumes targeted to meet your job requirements.
- Our job posting packages are affordable! We are the only company to include a **free print ad, online banner ad, newsletter ad, or sponsored content** in our magazine AND a **10% discount on campus climate survey administration**.
- We work with **thousands** of satisfied advertisers.
- Insight Into Academia has connected institutions of higher education to top-tier talent since 1974 — more than 50 years!

**INSIGHT
INTO
ACADEMIA**[®]
Empowering Leaders. Driving Innovation.

**INSIGHT
INTO
ACADEMIA**[®]
Empowering Leaders. Driving Innovation.

© 2026 Potomac Publishing, Inc.

March 2026 | Volume 106 | No. 6 | ISSN 2154-0349
All logos, marks, and editorial content in Insight Into Academia magazine and on insightintoacademia.com are licensed to Potomac Publishing, Inc. and fully protected by U.S. copyright and trademark laws.
Any reproduction in whole or in part, or use by others, is strictly prohibited without the express written consent of Potomac Publishing, Inc.

CONTACTS:

Lenore Pearlstein | Publisher
Holly Mendelson | Publisher
Debra Boyd | Director of Operations
Daniel Hecke | Creative Director
Erik Cliburn | Director of Website Operations, Senior Staff Writer
Misty Evans | Director of Digital Content and Strategy, Staff Writer
DeMario Easley | Marketing Coordinator

INSIGHT INTO ACADEMIA EDITORIAL BOARD:

Paula Alexander-Delpech, PhD
Frontier Nursing University

Thomas W. Bonagura, PhD
Buena Vista University

Venessa A. Brown, PhD
Consultant

Sheila Caldwell, EdD
Southern Illinois University System

Jean-François Coget, PhD
Sacramento State University

Robin R. Means Coleman, PhD
University of Virginia

Jermaine Cruz, JD
Albany Law School

Brian J. Gallagher
Loyola University Maryland

Lee A. Gill, JD
University of Louisville

Holly Harmon, PhD
University of Dayton

Luoluo Hong, PhD, MPH
Georgia Institute of Technology

Ling Gao LeBeau, PhD
Syracuse University

Anca Cristina Micu, PhD
Fairfield University

Amy Shew Moseder, EdD
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Maureen Outlaw, PhD
Providence College

Jamie M. Smith, MBA
State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota

Eric A. Weldy, EdD
Indiana University Indianapolis

AACSB NAVIGATES DEI PRESSURES IN NEW GLOBAL ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International's proposed 2026 Global Standards for Business Education mark a notable shift in how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are framed within business school accreditation, even as the organization insists that its core expectations around societal impact and inclusive learning remain intact.

Under the 2020 AACSB accreditation standards, DEI appeared explicitly as both a guiding principle and an operational expectation embedded throughout accreditation criteria. The standards emphasized the importance of broad participation, inclusive learning environments, and the responsibility of business schools to demonstrate positive societal impact. Societal impact was described as an imperative woven across the standards, with schools expected to show how their missions, teaching, research, and engagement activities contributed meaningfully to business and society.

By contrast, the proposed 2026 standards—rebranded as the Global Standards for Business Education—reframe this language in broader, more principles-based terms.

While the structural requirement for societal impact remains intact under Standard 9, references to diversity and inclusion have been repositioned within a renamed guiding principle: "Community and Connectedness."

According to AACSB, the change reflects an effort to "avoid the misinterpretation that AACSB imposes restrictive approaches to scholarship and learning," while still emphasizing "fostering awareness and appreciation of different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences."

AACSB leadership addressed the shift in a May 2025 open letter to its global membership, acknowledging concerns from institutions navigating increasingly restrictive state and national laws.

The letter emphasized that recent updates were intended to clarify existing guidance without altering the underlying expectations of the accreditation framework. Leadership underscored that the 2020 standards remain in effect, including requirements for business schools to demonstrate societal impact and for faculty to remain current in their fields while teaching a range of perspectives within inclusive learning environments.

The letter situated these updates within a broader political and legal context, noting that after the U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 decision to ban race-conscious admissions, many institutions raised concerns about compliance risks tied to accreditation language. Without revisions, AACSB warned that some schools could face pressure to withdraw from accreditation altogether.

Ultimately, the proposed 2026 standards do not eliminate expectations related to inclusion or equity, but they signal a strategic recalibration. By emphasizing flexibility, institutional autonomy, and mission-driven impact, AACSB appears to be navigating a narrowing policy landscape while seeking to preserve its global accreditation framework and keep its membership intact. ●

UTC Hosts Fourth Annual Inventanooga Competition for Student Innovators

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) turned its campus into a testing ground for early-stage innovation in December, welcoming middle and high school students for its fourth annual Inventanooga competition—a pitch event that asks young thinkers to identify real-world problems and defend their ideas before local leaders working in business, engineering, and entrepreneurship.

The daylong program brought students from across the Chattanooga area into UTC's College of Engineering and Computer Science, where they toured biomechatronics and robotics labs and received hands-on coaching from faculty and innovation professionals. The event was co-directed by Subin Im, the George Lester Nation Professor of Marketing in the Gary W. Rollins College of Business, and STEM School Chattanooga teacher Kyle Carrasco.

"Entrepreneurial mindsets and skillsets should be cultivated as early as possible because they help younger students become creative problem solvers in college and in their careers," Im said. "While most universities host pitch events for college students, opportunities for middle and high school students to pitch their ideas are rare—even though creativity often flourishes at a younger age."

Inventanooga is designed to bridge that gap, offering younger students a university-level experience that's typically reserved for undergraduates. In addition to lab tours led by Erkan Kaplanoglu, director of UTC's Biomechatronic and Assistive Technology Lab, students received targeted pitch coaching from Im, Max Fuller Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Director Mike Bradshaw, and Clarence E. Harris Chair of Excellence in Entrepreneurship Thomas Lyons.

Student projects reflected a strong emphasis on practical problem solving. One winning team, Cuttacon, proposed a platform to divert styrofoam from landfills by reselling it to craftspeople for reuse. Another winner, A.R.C., focused on residential flooding, developing a yard-based system designed to redirect water in flood-prone neighborhoods.

The competition culminated in elevator pitches and the awarding of scholarships to winning teams which can be applied toward enrollment in UTC's Rollins College of Business or the College of Engineering and Computer Science. ●



Connecting STEM Education, Startups, and Jobs in Western Pennsylvania

By Erik Cliburn

As regions across the country struggle to align STEM education with real job opportunities, a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit is testing a different approach—one that treats workforce development and company creation as parallel challenges rather than sequential steps. The STEMup Science and Technology Foundation is expanding that experiment with the help of a new \$300,000 grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, funding that will support the next phase of a program designed to connect training, entrepreneurship, and economic growth in Western Pennsylvania.

Announced in October, the grant reflects growing interest in workforce models that address persistent STEM gaps in regional economies, including demographic decline, shortages of mid-career talent, and the underrepresentation of historically underserved communities in science and technology fields. STEMup's strategy aims to confront these challenges by integrating education and training directly with pathways to employment and company formation, rather than treating them as separate stages.

Central to the initiative is what STEMup calls its "Coop Model," designed to resolve the long-standing question of whether regions should prioritize training workers or creating companies first. The model advances

both simultaneously, preparing individuals for technical and business roles while also supporting entrepreneurs and existing companies as they launch, scale, and diversify. In practice, this means aligning workforce preparation with real-time labor market needs and emerging venture opportunities.

The program's structure is built around several core components. Domain-Specific Education modules provide industry-aligned instruction in areas such as life sciences, artificial intelligence, robotics, and biomanufacturing, developed in collaboration with universities and employers. Complementing this coursework is the Pittsburgh Innovators Apprenticeship Program, which pairs participants with senior academic and industry leaders as well as specialized mentors to offer both high-level guidance and targeted skills training.

STEMup also emphasizes collaboration across sectors. Universities, private companies, nonprofit organizations, and community partners contribute curriculum content, mentorship, and access to employment and venture networks. Supporters say this ecosystem-based approach is intended to reduce fragmentation in STEM education and training, while creating clearer on-ramps to careers and entrepreneurship.

Program leaders frame the initiative as more than a workforce pipeline. "STEMup represents more than a workforce training program—it's a civic engine for Pittsburgh," said Neil Campbell, DBA, executive chairman of STEMup. "By solving the chicken-and-egg dilemma with our Coop Model, we ensure that workforce development and venture development grow hand-in-hand, creating lasting opportunities for individuals, companies, and the region as a whole."

Donald Very, PhD, executive director of STEMup, underscored the role of partnerships in translating the model into practice. "Our partnerships with universities, industry, and community organizations are central to STEMup's success," he said. "Together, we're building an ecosystem where education, innovation, and entrepreneurship intersect to shape the future of Western Pennsylvania."

Looking ahead, STEMup's backers see the initiative as a template that could extend beyond the region. While the current focus is on strengthening Pittsburgh's position as a 21st-century STEM hub, the long-term vision includes developing a replicable framework—the so-called "Pittsburgh Model"—that other regions could adapt to support inclusive economic growth and resilient STEM talent pipelines nationwide. ●



Prepare to

LEAD.

INNOVATE.

SUCCEED.

AACSB-accredited business education that connects students with real-world opportunities.

The SIUE School of Business prepares students across all disciplines to think creatively, leverage technology, and lead with integrity in a rapidly evolving global economy. We combine academic rigor with applied learning through paid internships, industry partnerships, advisory boards, and deep engagement with the regional community.

The result is a business education that is inclusive, future-focused, and closely aligned with the needs of students, organizations, and communities.

siue.edu

**SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
EDWARDSVILLE**

The Anti-DEI Push Reshapes Higher Education, With Unintended Consequences

By Erik Cliburn



New research and federal oversight findings suggest the outcome of the Trump administration's anti-DEI campaign in higher education may be producing consequences that extend well beyond the stated goal of "neutrality." Rather than streamlining higher education or expanding opportunity, critics argue the administration's approach has destabilized campus governance, undermined civil rights protections, and created ripple effects that threaten enrollment, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy.

Recent reporting by The Washington Post illustrates how the administration's broad anti-DEI framework may also be colliding with long-standing admissions practices that were never central to the public debate over race-conscious policies.

In examining gender trends in college enrollment, the Post notes that men—particularly White men—were already underrepresented on many campuses, with women outnumbering men in higher education for more than four decades. Federal data shows nearly 40% more women than men are enrolled nationwide, a gap driven in part by higher application rates and stronger average academic indicators among female applicants.

To address that imbalance, many selective private institutions had relied on a narrow and legally permissible Title IX exception that allowed consideration of gender in admissions.

The Post reports that schools such as Brown University, which received roughly twice as many applications from women as men, admitted male applicants at higher rates in order to arrive at a roughly gender-balanced class. Higher education leaders now warn that pressure from the Trump administration to eliminate all identity-conscious practices—including gender—has accelerated male enrollment declines.

"If we were going to eliminate preferences for men, the undergraduate population would skew to 65% female

overnight,” Ted Mitchell, president of the American Council on Education, told the Post, underscoring how a sweeping anti-DEI posture may disrupt enrollment dynamics in ways that neither lawmakers nor institutions anticipated or even considered.

A recent report, titled *DEI Under Fire: Policy, Politics, and the Future of Campus Diversity* written by researchers affiliated with the Critical Policy Collective at the University of Southern California, documents a rapid expansion of state-level anti-DEI legislation between 2024 and

that Trump administration actions targeting colleges and universities violated or likely violated the First Amendment. Judges cited a growing climate of self-censorship among faculty and administrators driven by fear of investigations, funding cuts, or retaliation tied to speech and programming.

The Sanders report also highlights the administration’s use of financial leverage. According to the analysis, nearly \$3 billion in federal funding was effectively withheld from colleges and universities during Trump’s

In January, Texas became the first state to stop requiring accreditation for their law schools from the American Bar Association (ABA), the nation’s only accreditor for these schools. While the Texas Supreme Court did not comment on the decision, the move is widely considered part of the political backlash against the ABA’s DEI requirements. The change could potentially impact Texas law school graduates in that their degrees might not be recognized outside the state. Faculty recruitment to these schools may also see an impact. Florida, Ohio,

A sweeping anti-DEI posture may disrupt enrollment dynamics in ways that neither lawmakers nor institutions anticipated or even considered.

2025. Focusing on Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas, the report details how new laws have forced the closure or rebranding of campus DEI offices, eliminated DEI-related staff positions, canceled scholarships, and curtailed identity-based student programming and offices. While framed as viewpoint-neutral reforms, the authors conclude that these measures disproportionately harm Black, Latine, and Indigenous students and faculty by dismantling infrastructure tied to access, retention, and belonging.

Those structural changes are now intersecting with federal pressure. In January, Senator Bernie Sanders released a minority staff report from the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee documenting what it describes as an “unprecedented attack on free speech” in higher education. The report outlines at least 17 cases in which federal courts ruled

first nine months back in office, despite no reduction in congressional appropriations.

In several high-profile cases, institutions agreed to settlements restoring frozen funds only after accepting new federal oversight over hiring, admissions, and curriculum—moves that higher education leaders say blur the line between compliance and coercion.

Accreditation has emerged as another pressure point. The administration has publicly described accreditation as a “secret weapon,” and the Department of Education has sent letters to accreditors questioning whether institutions under federal investigation remain in compliance with accreditation standards. Loss of accreditation would immediately threaten access to Pell Grants and federal student loans, placing students at risk of losing the financial aid they rely on to enroll.

and Tennessee are also considering breaking from ABA accreditation.

The DEI Under Fire report frames these developments within a broader pattern. Equity initiatives are being treated as optional or ideological rather than as core institutional functions. The result, the authors argue, is not neutrality, but fragmentation—where offices are dismantled, responsibilities are diffused, and accountability for civil rights compliance becomes less clear.

Taken together, the findings from campus researchers, federal courts, and congressional investigators point to a higher education system increasingly shaped by political intervention. Whether through funding threats, accreditation scrutiny, or legislative bans, institutions are being pushed to retreat from long-standing equity practices—often with little evidence that such rollbacks improve outcomes. Current data is saying otherwise. ●

Student Mental Health, Well-Being, and Readiness:

How Colleges Are Addressing the “Hidden Curriculum”

By Misty Evans

Many of today's college students are increasingly strained by anxiety, depression, and burnout. The challenge for colleges is no longer limited to expanding counseling services. Institutions are being pushed to confront a “hidden curriculum” that shapes how students cope with stress, build resilience, and transition from the classroom into professional practice.

For campus leaders facing retention pressures, workforce shortages, and growing accountability from accreditors and employers, student mental health has become a strategic issue tied directly to academic quality and career readiness.

National data underscores the scale of the problem. The American College Health Association's (ACHA) National College Health Assessment, one of the largest ongoing surveys of college student well-being in the United States, consistently shows high and rising levels of anxiety, stress, and depression that can interfere with academic performance.



In its most recent reports,

ACHA found that roughly 30% of students said anxiety negatively affected their academics, and more than one-third reported receiving mental health services within the past year, signaling both widespread need and growing demand for mental health support.

Research literature mirrors these findings. Peer-reviewed studies have documented strong associations among academic stress, reduced psychological resilience, and learning burnout among college students, suggesting that burnout is not merely an individual issue but a systemic one shaped by academic environments and expectations. Once primarily associated with working professionals, burnout is now widely documented among undergraduate and graduate students, particularly in health, psychology, and other practice-intensive fields.

Beyond Counseling Centers

In response, institutions are broadening their definition of student support. Rather than treating mental health as a standalone service, many campuses are embedding well-being into curriculum design, advising models, and professional workforce preparation.

The American Psychological Association (APA) has urged colleges to move toward a “culture of well-being” that emphasizes prevention alongside crisis response. APA guidance notes that surging demand for counseling services has outpaced institutional capacity, forcing campuses to rethink faculty training, academic policies, and structural factors contributing to student stress.

That shift is increasingly visible in classrooms. Faculty development initiatives now commonly emphasize trauma-informed teaching practices, transparent expectations, and flexibility around assessment. Research conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic found that clearer communication, predictable course structures, and supportive instructional approaches can reduce anxiety and help mitigate academic stress and burnout.

These efforts reflect a growing recognition that instructional design itself plays a role in student mental health. How courses are structured, feedback is delivered, and failure is framed can either compound stress or help students develop adaptive coping skills.

Resilience as a Learned Skill

Resilience is also being reframed as something that can be taught, rather than a trait students either possess or lack. Studies across disciplines show that resilience is closely linked to self-management, emotional regulation, and social support, all of which can be strengthened through intentional educational practices.

Experimental research has shown that even brief, structured interventions focused on resilient thinking and

problem-solving can improve a student’s ability to manage setbacks and stress, particularly at broad-access institutions serving diverse populations.

Professional organizations have begun formalizing these insights in curricular standards. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s updated Essentials framework explicitly integrates well-being, self-care, and professional identity formation into expected graduate competencies. Under the framework, readiness for practice includes a demonstrated commitment to personal health and emotional sustainability, not just clinical knowledge.

While much of this work has emerged from health disciplines, studies across higher education indicate that peer support, structured reflection, and resilience-building activities can reduce burnout and improve coping skills among students in a wide range of academic fields.

The Transition to the Workforce Gap

The transition from student to working professional remains one of the most vulnerable periods for emerging graduates. They often report feeling technically competent but emotionally unprepared for workplace demands, a mismatch that can accelerate early-career burnout.

In nursing education, researchers have documented a persistent “practice readiness” gap, noting that communication skills, confidence, and stress management are as critical as technical training for successful transitions. Studies of recent graduates show that insufficient preparation for emotional labor and high workload intensity contribute to burnout during the first years of practice.

These findings have implications beyond nursing. In medicine, psychology, and other high-stakes professions, professional organizations increasingly frame burnout as a system-level issue rather than an individual failing. Guidance from the APA emphasizes organizational responsibility for setting realistic expectations, providing mentorship, and supporting peer connection during early career transitions.

Remediation to Prevention

Taken together, the evidence suggests that addressing student mental health requires a preventive, institution-wide approach. Counseling services remain essential, but they represent only one component of a broader ecosystem that includes curriculum design, faculty practices, advising structures, and career preparation.

Experts argue that normalizing conversations about stress and mental health early in students’ academic careers can reduce stigma and encourage seeking help before crises emerge. Embedding resilience, self-care, and professional identity formation into curricular standards sends a clear signal that well-being is integral to competence rather than separate from it.

Institutions are increasingly required to demonstrate not only academic rigor but also structures that support persistence, engagement, and readiness for post-graduation employment.

Frameworks Guiding Implementation

Several established frameworks are shaping how colleges translate concern about student mental health into operational practice.

One widely used model is the Healthy Minds Framework, developed by the Healthy Minds Network at the University of Michigan. Institutions using the framework rely on population-level data to assess student mental health trends, track help-seeking behaviors and evaluate perceptions of campus support. These standardized measures allow leaders to identify gaps early and monitor changes over time, rather than responding only when demand overwhelms counseling services.

A similarly comprehensive approach is outlined in the Okanagan Charter, which calls on institutions to embed health and well-being into governance structures, academic policies, and campus culture. Although the charter originated in Canada, it has been adopted by a growing number of U.S. institutions seeking to move beyond reactive mental health models toward prevention-oriented strategies.

Accreditation standards also play a role. While language varies across regional and programmatic accreditors, expectations related to student support, learning environments, and outcomes are becoming more prominent. Institutions are increasingly required to demonstrate not only academic rigor but also structures that support persistence, engagement, and readiness for post-graduation employment.

Embedding Well-Being Into Curriculum and Pedagogy

Operationalizing well-being often begins in the classroom, where academic demands and institutional expectations intersect most directly with student experience.

Many institutions are revising course design to reduce unnecessary stress while preserving rigor. Common practices include structuring assignments so skills develop incrementally, clarifying grading criteria and feedback processes, incorporating reflection tied to professional identity development, and communicating workload expectations more transparently. Research in higher and medical education literature suggests that these approaches can reduce anxiety and burnout while helping students develop self-regulation skills essential to professional practice.

Measuring What Matters

As well-being becomes an institutional priority, leaders face growing pressure to demonstrate impact through data.

Most colleges track multiple indicators to assess progress. These often include student-reported mental health measures such as stress, anxiety, and help-seeking behavior, alongside academic outcomes like retention, persistence, and time to degree. Engagement measures, including sense of belonging and the quality of faculty interaction, are frequently used to provide additional context, while post-graduation data, such as early-career retention and self-reported preparedness, help institutions assess readiness for practice.

National benchmarking tools support this work. The American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment and the Healthy Minds Study provide comparative data that allow institutions to evaluate trends relative to peer campuses and national norms. Campus climate surveys, such as Viewfinder Campus Climate Surveys, conducted at regular intervals also provide insight into student experiences.

Linking Well-Being to Workforce Readiness

For institutions focused on career outcomes, connecting well-being initiatives to readiness for employment is increasingly important.

Employer surveys consistently show that adaptability, communication, and stress management rank alongside technical skills in determining early-career success, particularly in high-demand fields such as health care, education, and technology. Research in nursing and medical education indicates that students who develop coping skills and professional identity during training are more likely to persist in their fields during the first years of practice.

The Responsibility of Leadership

Experts consistently emphasize that institutional commitment must be visible and sustained. Efforts framed as short-term programs often struggle to survive leadership changes or budget pressures. By contrast, initiatives embedded into strategic plans, accreditation goals, and measurable outcomes are more likely to endure.

Student mental health is increasingly viewed as an indicator of institutional effectiveness. Those that move from intent to infrastructure, grounding well-being initiatives in established frameworks and measurable metrics, are positioning themselves to graduate students who are not only academically prepared but also equipped to sustain themselves in the professions they enter. ●



Hope COLLEGE

HOPE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Talent is equally distributed but access to higher education is not. Hope College is taking on this equity issue through Hope Forward, a groundbreaking model where students fund their education by making gifts after graduation rather than paying upfront through tuition and debt.

Today, 126 Hope students (and more to come!) from across the globe are piloting the program, leading the way with generosity, gratitude, perseverance, compassion and the belief that hope changes everything.

HOPE >>>
FORWARD



hope.edu/forward

The Social Media Campus

Faculty and staff are becoming higher education's most trusted brand ambassadors

By Misty Evans



When a professor posts a plain-language thread on social media about a new study, or a financial aid director explains a policy change on LinkedIn, the message can travel farther and land with more credibility than the university's official account. It's not just anecdotal. Employees increasingly are functioning as an institution's public voice.

That reality creates a modern higher ed tension: Colleges need authentic, human messengers, but they also carry legal, reputational, and academic freedom obligations that do not fit neatly inside a "please share this post" culture.

In trust-starved public life, employers have become unusually influential. The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust at Work found that "my employer" was the most trusted institution among employees in its seven-market global dataset, ahead of business in general, government, and the media. According to Edelman, this trust dynamic has persisted in recent years as information has become more politicized and communities have become more polarized.

For universities, that advantage can show up in recruitment, fundraising, research visibility, and crisis communications. But it works best when the employee voice is supported rather than forced, and when guardrails are designed with faculty rather than simply handed down from a compliance office.

Individual Voices Often Surpass the Company Accounts

Social platforms are built for people, not logos. A Refine Labs analysis comparing posts from seven employees' personal LinkedIn profiles to the company's LinkedIn page found the personal profiles averaged 2.75 times more impressions and five times more engagement per post during the same period, despite having fewer followers on average. The results align with a basic behavioral truth that audiences engage more with people than brands.

LinkedIn's own marketing guidance frames employee advocacy as employees promoting their organization through their personal social channels and networks, adding that those messages are perceived as more credible and authentic. They found that employees also tend to have much larger personal networks than institutional follower numbers might suggest, which can amplify further when employees choose to share posts.

Higher education has an additional tailwind. Faculty expertise is, by design, evidence-driven. When that expertise is translated into accessible social media posts, it can serve the public mission and strengthen institutional reputation at the same time.

The University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation (IHPI), for example, publishes guidance encouraging research professionals to choose one or two platforms, use layman's language for public audiences, and share evidence carefully. According to IHPI, researchers use platforms such as LinkedIn and X to disseminate their work, connect with policymakers, and fight misinformation, and it notes that communications staff can be a tremendous support when researchers are unsure about sharing.

The Academic Freedom Line Leaders Cannot Ignore

Universities cannot treat employee social media as purely "brand management," especially for faculty. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has warned that overly restrictive institutional social media policies can limit academic freedom. In a statement on these policies, the organization says institutions can provide guidance for faculty posting in an official capacity, but they must recognize that faculty speech on matters of public concern is subject to academic freedom principles.

They also recommend working with faculty to develop social media policies and emphasize that social

media can blur the distinction between private and public communication in new ways.

For presidents, provosts, and communications leaders, the practical takeaway is not "hands off." It's "co-design." Policies drafted without shared governance buy-in may undermine legitimate public scholarship and spark conflict at the first controversy.

Encouraging Thought Leadership Without Inviting Institutional Risk

The goal is not to turn every employee into an influencer. It's to make it easy for willing faculty and staff to show their work safely, accurately, and in ways that advance institutional priorities.

Here is a workable framework higher ed leaders can implement:

1. Define two lanes: official speech and personal scholarship.

The AAUP explicitly distinguishes guidance for official-capacity posting from faculty. Universities can mirror that by clearly defining who speaks for the institution, what requires approval, and what is personal expression.

2. Build an "enablement" program, not a compliance seminar.

Offer short trainings on plain-language research translation, accessibility basics (such as alt text), and platform norms. IHPI's guidance highlights practical steps such as using audience-first language, using visuals, and asking communications professionals when unsure.

3. Create a low-friction content library.

Provide optional, ready-to-share assets: approved graphics, linkable research summaries, key stats with citations, and suggested wording for sensitive topics. Make it easy for employees to add their own expertise and context rather than copy and paste a press release.

4. Plan for harassment and pile-ons.

The AAUP notes that targeted

In 2026, the strategic move is to stop asking, “How do we control the message?” and start asking, “How do we responsibly support the people our audiences already trust?”

harassment tied to social media posts has shaped institutional responses and policy debates. Leaders should pre-plan escalation paths, security support, and doxxing response protocols, especially for public-facing scholars.

5. Protect what must be protected.

Faculty and staff need clear reminders about FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), patient privacy in clinical contexts, research embargoes, conflicts of interest, and confidential internal information. Guardrails should be specific and scenario-based, not vague warnings that scare people into silence.

6. Measure what matters.

If you want employee voices to help increase enrollment or reputation, track outcomes such as: referral traffic to program pages, media inquiries sparked by posts, event registrations, or increases in qualified job applicants. Refine Labs’ comparison is a reminder that personal posts can outperform brand pages, but leadership still needs metrics that map to institutional goals.

The Leadership Mindset Shift

The social media campus is an ecosystem. The strongest institutional brands increasingly look like a chorus. It’s researchers explaining why their findings matter, student affairs leaders

showing what support looks like, and staff members translating complex work into human language.

In 2026, the strategic move is to stop asking, “How do we control the message?” and start asking, “How do we responsibly support the people our audiences already trust?”

Most university employees were never trained to communicate publicly outside of peer-reviewed journals or internal reports.

Start With Permission, Not Pressure

One of the fastest ways to undermine employee advocacy is to mandate it. Effective institutions start by making participation optional and clearly frame it as professional development, not brand compliance.

Build a Free, Internal Content Creation Course

One of the most effective, low-cost interventions is a short, voluntary content creation course designed specifically for higher education professionals. It doesn’t need to resemble influencer culture. A strong course focuses on translation, accuracy, and boundaries.

Create an Opt-In Amplification System

Institutions often want to amplify employee posts but lack a respectful

mechanism to do so. The solution is consent-based amplification.

A simple model includes:

- An internal form or Slack channel where faculty and staff can flag posts they are comfortable having reshared.
- Clear criteria for resharing, such as relevance to institutional priorities or public education value.
- Light editing support, if requested, without altering the original voice.

According to LinkedIn, employee advocacy works best when employees retain ownership of their voice and participation feels authentic rather than transactional.

The Long-Term View

Colleges and universities already house extraordinary expertise. The challenge is not creating content. It is building systems that help people share what they know responsibly, safely, and in ways that strengthen both individual careers and institutional trust.

In a fragmented information environment, the institutions that thrive will not be the loudest. They will be the ones who empower their most credible voices to speak and know when to stand behind them. ●



UNIVERSITY
AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Congratulations

TO UALBANY'S OUTSTANDING LEADERS



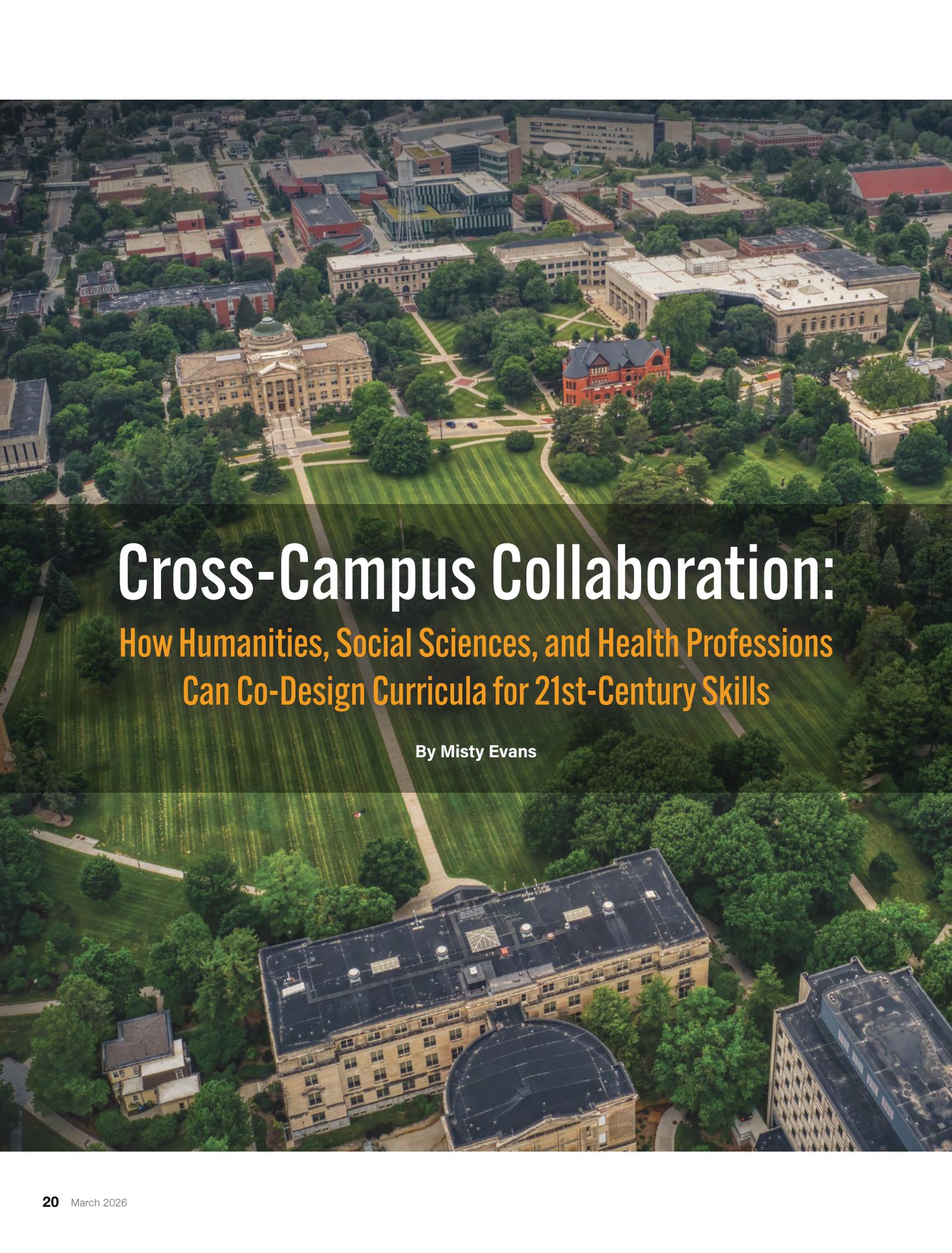
PRESIDENT
Dr. Havidán Rodríguez



PROVOST
Dr. Carol H. Kim

2026 Trailblazers in Higher Education

Thank you for setting a true example of unleashing greatness.
At UAlbany, our values drive our priorities – student success, research excellence, diversity and serving our community. President Rodríguez and Provost Kim: you exemplify our mission. We're proud to have you at the head of our organization as we strive to impact the lives of our students, staff and broader community so that they, too, can unleash greatness.

An aerial photograph of a university campus. The central focus is a large, well-maintained green lawn with a path leading through it. Surrounding the lawn are various university buildings, including a prominent classical-style building with a dome and a modern glass-walled building. The campus is lush with green trees and walkways.

Cross-Campus Collaboration:

How Humanities, Social Sciences, and Health Professions Can Co-Design Curricula for 21st-Century Skills

By Misty Evans

As colleges and universities

confront enrollment pressures, retention challenges, and growing skepticism about the value of a degree, long-standing academic silos are facing renewed scrutiny.

Employers increasingly expect graduates to communicate clearly, work across differences, and solve complex problems, yet many institutions still organize learning along narrow disciplinary lines. In response, a growing number of campus leaders are turning to cross-campus collaboration to align curricula with the realities of the 21st-century workforce.

National higher education frameworks have long argued that essential learning outcomes do not develop in isolation. The American Association of Colleges and Universities, through its Liberal Education and America's Promise initiative, emphasizes that skills such as critical thinking, ethical reasoning, teamwork, and written communication are most effectively cultivated when students engage across disciplines and apply learning in real-world contexts. Their research consistently links integrative learning to stronger student engagement and persistence.

Workforce data reinforces this conclusion. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce has found that employers across industries prioritize broad competencies, including communication, problem-solving, and collaboration, alongside technical knowledge. In health care, education, public service, and related fields, these skills are often decisive in hiring and advancement. For institutions, this highlights a growing mismatch. While workforce demands are increasingly cross-functional, academic structures frequently remain discipline-bound.

Health professions education offers one of the most well-developed models for addressing this dichotomy. The

World Health Organization defines interprofessional education as learning that occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from, and with one another to improve collaboration and outcomes. While initially focused on clinical training, this model explicitly recognizes that effective health care depends on cultural understanding, ethical decision-making, and communication, areas traditionally rooted in the humanities and social sciences.

In the United States, the Interprofessional Education Collaborative has formalized this approach through a set of core competencies centered on values and ethics, roles and responsibilities, interprofessional communication, and teamwork. These map naturally into disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, and communication studies, creating opportunities for shared coursework and co-designed learning experiences across colleges.

Research suggests that such integration supports student success and retention. The National Survey of Student Engagement consistently reports that students who participate in high-impact practices, including learning communities, collaborative assignments, and community-based projects, demonstrate higher levels of engagement and are more likely to persist to graduation. Interdisciplinary courses that combine humanities inquiry, social science analysis, and applied health perspectives often incorporate several of these practices simultaneously, strengthening students' sense of belonging and relevance.

On many campuses, cross-campus collaboration does not require dismantling of departments or restructuring governance. Instead, institutions are experimenting with targeted curricular bridges. Some have introduced co-taught gateway courses that enroll students from

health professions, social sciences, and liberal arts programs around shared themes such as health equity, public health ethics, or health communication. Others have developed interdisciplinary certificates or minors that embed humanities and social science perspectives into professional pathways, particularly in nursing, public health, and allied health fields.

Collaborative capstone projects provide another model. When students from nursing, public health, sociology, and philosophy work together on community-based or applied research projects, they practice the competencies employers value while gaining a clearer understanding of how different disciplines contribute to shared goals. These experiences mirror professional environments and help students see their education as connected rather than fragmented.

There are operational advantages as well. Interdisciplinary curricula allow institutions to leverage existing faculty expertise, reduce content duplication, and encourage shared responsibility for student success. Rather than launching new standalone programs, campuses can respond more nimbly to workforce and societal needs by redesigning existing pathways.

The case for cross-campus collaboration is no longer theoretical. Evidence from national higher education organizations, workforce analysts, and student engagement research converges on a single conclusion: students learn best when education reflects the complexity of the world they are preparing to enter. For institutions willing to move beyond silos, co-designing curricula across the humanities, social sciences, and health professions offers more than pedagogical innovation. It provides a strategic pathway to stronger retention, clearer institutional value, and a learning model aligned with the demands of the 21st century. ●

TRAILBLAZERS

Lighting the Way Forward

At a moment when higher education faces mounting pressures and unprecedented opportunity, a select group of leaders is choosing not to simply navigate change, but to design it. We proudly announce the recipients of the inaugural 2026 Trailblazer in Higher Education Award, honoring presidents, chancellors, and provosts whose leadership is actively reshaping the future of colleges and universities across the nation. These are leaders who question legacy systems, rethink what's possible, and transform bold ideas into measurable results for students, employees, and the communities their institutions serve.

The Trailblazer Award recognizes forward-thinking executives who challenge convention, implement courageous strategies, and deliver tangible progress. This year's honorees stand out for their commitment to expanding access, strengthening belonging, advancing student success, and building resilient institutions prepared for tomorrow's realities. Their work is not theoretical. It is visible in outcomes, culture shifts, and sustainable growth.

"These leaders are not simply managing change. They are creating it," said Lenore Pearlstein, co-publisher of Insight Into Academia. "Trailblazers reimagine what higher education can be and then build the systems, partnerships, and cultures to make that vision real. Their work provides a roadmap for institutions everywhere."

Selected for their ability to drive strategic innovation, foster thriving campus communities, strengthen institutional sustainability, and translate vision into lasting impact. Through their stories, readers will discover practical models, replicable strategies, and leadership insights that can be adapted on campuses nationwide.

Reserved exclusively for presidents, chancellors, and provosts, the Trailblazer Award serves as a benchmark of excellence at the highest levels of higher education leadership and a celebration of those bold enough to move the sector forward.



Ross C. Alexander, PhD

Ross C. Alexander, PhD, is president and CEO of Texas A&M University–Texarkana, where he has led rapid, culture-shifting growth since assuming the role in 2023. In just over two years, Alexander has positioned the university as the fastest-growing institution in Texas, expanding enrollment, strengthening community and legislative partnerships, and elevating A&M–Texarkana’s profile within the Texas A&M University System. Known for his solution-oriented, relationship-driven leadership, he has united campus stakeholders around a bold vision for smart growth, regional impact, and student opportunity. His tenure has been marked by record fundraising, significant campus development, and workforce-aligned partnerships that connect academic programs to career pathways. Alexander’s leadership is reshaping both institutional momentum and regional economic vitality.



Lisa Coleman, PhD

Lisa Coleman, PhD, is president of Adler University, where she has brought a globally informed, mission-driven approach to academic leadership grounded in social responsibility, inclusion, and innovation. Since assuming the presidency, Coleman has revitalized Adler’s mission, vision, and values, reaffirming its foundational commitment to social connectedness while advancing community-centered health and well-being initiatives. Previously, she held senior leadership roles at New York University and Harvard University, where she led global inclusion, strategic innovation, and large-scale interdisciplinary initiatives supported by NIH and NSF funding. Known for collaborative leadership and ethical innovation, Coleman has strengthened partnerships, expanded access to mental health education, and positioned Adler as a hub for addressing global well-being challenges through systems-level change.



Because of your vision, leadership, and unwavering belief in our Texans, Tarleton State University is rising faster than ever.

Since your arrival, Tarleton State has become Texas’ fastest-growing public university. More than 21,000 students from across the state and around the world now choose Tarleton State as their first destination for purpose, possibility, and a future worth building.

Under your leadership, Tarleton State has led Texas in graduate success for six consecutive years. Our students don’t just enroll, they complete, compete, and launch careers that reflect the strength of a Texan education.

A visionary trailblazer, you have expanded opportunity, elevated research, and redefined what’s possible for the fastest-growing public university in Texas and beyond.

Thank you, **Dr. James Hurley**, and may you forever Bleed Purple!



TARLETON STATE UNIVERSITY
Member of The Texas A&M University System



Brooke A. Flinders, DNP, CNM

Brooke A. Flinders, DNP, CNM, is president of Frontier Nursing University, where she has brought clinically grounded, mission-driven leadership to an institution serving rural and underserved communities. A nurse and nurse-midwife by training, Flinders leads with a holistic, evidence-based approach that prioritizes practical impact, ethical decision-making, and collaboration. Since assuming the presidency, she has guided a rearticulation of the university's mission, strengthened compliance and shared governance, and led Frontier's first fully collaborative strategic planning process. Previously at Miami University, she spearheaded the launch of a high-demand Master of Science in Nursing program. Through transparent leadership, intentional listening, and investment in faculty and emerging leaders, Flinders is reshaping how nursing education prepares professionals to meet urgent workforce and public health challenges.



Maureen Forrester Finney, EdD, PA-C

Maureen Forrester Finney, EdD, PA-C, is provost of Nazareth University, where she has led institution-wide efforts to reimagine student success through a holistic, student-centered lens. Since assuming the role in 2022, Finney has spearheaded a comprehensive student success self-study grounded in the Thriving Framework, reshaping academic structures, advising, and well-being supports to strengthen belonging and persistence. Her leadership has driven academic reorganization, strengthened data-informed decision-making, and secured Title III funding to modernize systems and expand student support infrastructure. A physician assistant by training, Finney also led the development of Nazareth's innovative hybrid Physician Assistant master's program. Her human-centered, integrative approach continues to position Nazareth as a model for student-focused academic leadership.

MOLLOY UNIVERSITY

CONGRATULATES



President James Lentini

for receiving the Trailblazer Award for Presidents
and Chancellors from Insight into Academia

1-888-4-MOLLOY
www.molloy.edu
1000 Hempstead Ave.,
Rockville Centre, NY 11570



**MOLLOY
UNIVERSITY**

Leadership Exemplified.



Growing the Future,
Leading the World™

David K. Wilson, *President*,
Morgan State University

Under President David K. Wilson's leadership, Morgan State University is generating graduates and increasing its impact. **Congratulations to President David K. Wilson**, a visionary leader whose bold governance is profoundly shaping institutional achievement and trailblazing a path for student success.



150+ Academic degree programs and certificates



40 New academic degrees added since 2020



#1 In degrees awarded to African Americans in Maryland



Retention rate of 70% or higher for the past 14 years



More than \$100 million in research in FY25



3rd largest HBCU in the U.S.



Maryland's Preeminent Public Urban Research University



MORGAN
STATE UNIVERSITY™

morgan.edu



James Hurley, EdD

James Hurley, EdD, is president of Tarleton State University, where he has led a period of historic growth and transformation over the past six years. Under his leadership, Tarleton has emerged as one of the nation's fastest-growing comprehensive public universities, achieving record enrollment, expanded research activity, and significant gains in fundraising and infrastructure. Hurley spearheaded the Tarleton State Forward 2030 strategic plan, which helped elevate the institution to a Carnegie designation as a high-research spending, doctorate-producing university. A first-generation college graduate, he has prioritized access and affordability through initiatives such as the Tarleton Promise, while strengthening academic quality, workforce preparation, and regional economic impact.



Rachel Kartz, PhD

Rachel Kartz, PhD, is chancellor of Ivy Tech Community College's Hamilton County campus, where she has guided rapid growth by aligning academic excellence with workforce and community needs. A former English faculty member, Kartz brings a deep commitment to teaching, communication, and student-centered leadership to her administrative work. Since stepping into campus leadership, she has expanded academic programs, strengthened student support services, and positioned the campus as a key driver of workforce development in one of Indiana's fastest-growing counties. Her career path from first-generation college student, to faculty member to chancellor, reflects her belief in the transformative power of community colleges. Kartz's leadership continues to advance access, belonging, and career-ready education for students across the region.



Melik Peter Khoury, DBA

Melik Peter Khoury, DBA, is president and CEO of Unity Environmental University, where he has led a decade of bold institutional transformation. Under his leadership, Unity has reimagined its governance and academic delivery model, achieving sixteen-fold growth while expanding educational access, financial sustainability, and technological innovation. Khoury pioneered Unity's enterprise-based structure, enabling the university to scale mission-driven programs while remaining resilient in a challenging higher education landscape. A strong advocate for data-informed leadership, he has championed predictive analytics, modern technology infrastructure, and early adoption of artificial intelligence to improve decision-making and student outcomes. Today, Unity graduates more students annually than it enrolled a decade ago, positioning the institution as a national model for how small, private universities can thrive through innovation, access, and long-term impact.

LEADERSHIP SHAPED BY COMMUNITY

A new era of applied leadership begins here. Through research and graduate education, Adler University is preparing leaders, scholars, and practitioners to improve health outcomes locally and globally.



adler.edu



Carol Kim, PhD

Carol Kim, PhD, is provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at the University at Albany, State University of New York, where she has spent more than six years advancing a bold, mission-driven vision for public research universities. A nationally respected academic leader and NIH- and NSF-funded molecular virologist, Kim has strengthened student success, expanded interdisciplinary research, and positioned UAlbany as a leader in artificial intelligence, public health, and social mobility. She oversaw the launch of AI Plus, led major faculty cluster hires, and helped grow research expenditures to more than \$470 million. As chair of the APLU Council on Academic Affairs, Kim also helps shape national conversations on innovation, access, and student success in public higher education.

Linda M. LeMura, PhD

Linda M. LeMura, PhD, is president of Le Moyne College, where she has provided more than a decade of steady, mission-centered leadership focused on access, academic excellence, and student success. Appointed in 2014 as the first female lay president of a Jesuit institution in the United States, LeMura has since become the longest-serving president in Le Moyne's history. A first-generation college graduate, she has expanded access and affordability while overseeing record enrollment, historic fundraising growth, and the successful launch of new graduate and doctoral programs. Her tenure includes leading the College through the COVID-19 pandemic, elevating Le Moyne's national profile, and advancing initiatives that strengthen regional economic development and campus belonging, firmly grounding institutional growth in Jesuit values and social responsibility.



James P. Lentini, DMA

James P. Lentini, DMA, is president of Molloy University, where he has led a period of sustained growth, innovation, and institutional resilience over the past five years. Under his leadership, Molloy transitioned from college to university status, achieved Hispanic-Serving Institution designation, posted record enrollment gains, and strengthened financial stability amid national enrollment declines. Lentini has expanded access through strategic enrollment management, workforce-focused partnerships, and new academic credentials aligned with regional labor needs. Previously, as provost at Oakland University, he played a central role in launching Michigan's first new medical school in 50 years. A collaborative, mission-driven leader, Lentini continues to advance student success, faculty scholarship, and inclusive belonging at a modern Catholic university.

TRANSFORM YOUR
WORKFORCE WITH



PARTNER WITH UNITY TO HELP GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Unity experienced record growth by changing our business model and focusing on what businesses need now: a green workforce. We not only graduate students with environmental-based degrees, we have customized training modules to help businesses like yours by training your workforce in skills that help you meet regulatory and consumer demands for environmentally-conscious businesses.

By partnering with Unity, you can enhance your CSR profile, and co-create educational pathways tailor-made for your specific needs.

LET'S TALK.

Email us at partnerships@unity.edu



Dr. Melik Peter Khoury,
President and CEO of
Unity Environmental
University

WHY UNITY

UPSKILLING

Train your employees to work in a climate-adaptive environment.

CO-BRANDING

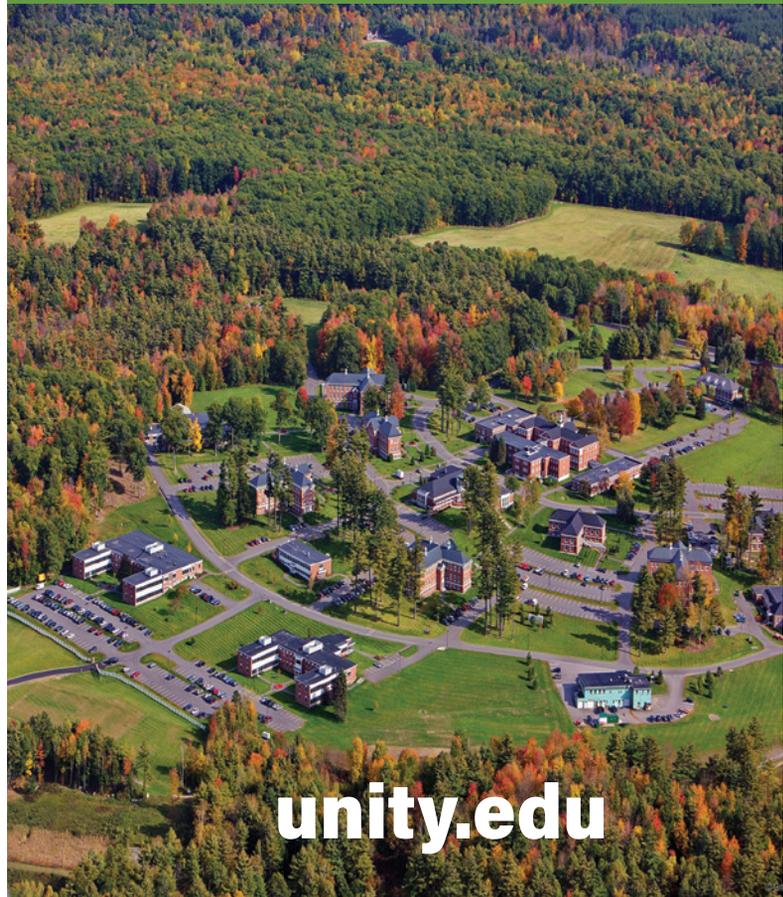
Amplify your message to mission-aligned audiences.

WORKFORCE PIPELINE

Connect with skilled graduates in sustainability science.

PROGRAM CREATION

Special credentials developed to meet your industry needs.



Peter Lindstrom, MFA

Peter Lindstrom, MFA, is interim president, vice president of academic affairs, and provost at the Community College of Denver, where he has led student-centered academic innovation focused on access, affordability, and workforce mobility. Drawing on a career that spans faculty, instructional design, and academic leadership, Lindstrom has advanced flexible, stackable credentials, expanded bachelor's pathways, and championed student-focused program redesign. He played a central role in launching CCD's record-setting High School Diploma program, intentionally aligned with certificates and degrees to re-engage adult learners. Under his leadership, initiatives such as open educational resources and credit for prior learning have helped up to 70% of students graduate debt-free. Lindstrom's work reflects a commitment to dignity, practical opportunity, and community college transformation.



Timothy E. Moore, PhD

Timothy E. Moore, PhD, is president of Indian River State College, where he has spent the past five years applying research-driven leadership to expand access, belonging, and workforce impact at an open-access institution. Under his leadership, the college launched a philanthropy-funded Promise Program that removes tuition barriers for local graduates and implemented the OneRiver operating model to redesign orientation, advising, and first-year success. Moore also strengthened regional workforce pipelines through the development of advanced training facilities aligned with labor market demand. A proponent of evidence-based institutional design, he has positioned Indian River State College as a national model for pairing affordability with persistence, accountability, and measurable economic return for students and the surrounding community.

CONGRATULATIONS, DR. FRANKLIN!



Insight Into Academia has named you a winner of the **2026 Trailblazer in Higher Education Award** — a recognition that reflects your vision, your leadership and the countless lives you've inspired.

All of us at Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences are so proud to celebrate this well-deserved honor with you.

Angela L. Walker Franklin, Ph.D., President and CEO

DES MOINES  UNIVERSITY
MEDICINE & HEALTH SCIENCES

Christopher M. Reber, PhD

Christopher M. Reber, PhD, is president of Hudson County Community College, where he has led a nationally recognized transformation centered on student success and comprehensive support. During his tenure, Reber launched Hudson Scholars, an award-winning student success model that combines proactive advising, financial stipends, and early academic intervention to significantly improve retention and completion for students facing the greatest barriers. He also expanded wraparound services through the Hudson Helps Resource Center and advanced innovative workforce and apprenticeship partnerships aligned with regional economic needs. Known for transparent, collaborative leadership, Reber has cultivated a strong culture of belonging and continuous improvement. His work has positioned HCCC as a national model for how community colleges can advance access, mobility, and meaningful student outcomes at scale.



Havidán Rodríguez, PhD

Havidán Rodríguez, PhD, is president of the University at Albany, State University of New York, and the first Hispanic president of a SUNY four-year institution. During his tenure, UAlbany has strengthened its position as one of the nation's most diverse Research 1 universities while advancing student success, research growth, and inclusive academic excellence. Rodríguez has led major academic and structural initiatives, including the AI+ strategy to integrate artificial intelligence across teaching and research, expansion of health sciences and engineering programs, and increased undergraduate enrollment. In 2022, UAlbany became the first public R1 institution in the Northeast to earn the Seal of Excelencia, recognizing evidence-based outcomes for Latino students, and earned recertification in 2025. His leadership reflects a sustained commitment to innovation, opportunity, and public impact.

Zaldwaynaka Scott, JD

Zaldwaynaka "Z" Scott, JD, is president of Chicago State University, where she has led a period of revitalization marked by mission-driven growth, policy leadership, and expanding opportunity for students historically underrepresented in higher education. Since assuming the presidency in 2018, Scott has strengthened CSU's academic profile, elevated its research capacity, and positioned the university as a national leader in economic mobility and urban public higher education. She co-founded the National Coalition of Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI) and helped catalyze the first Congressional PBI Caucus, advancing recognition and resources for access-focused public universities nationwide. Under her leadership, Chicago State earned its first Carnegie Research University designation and achieved significant enrollment gains, while remaining deeply committed to access, belonging, and student success.



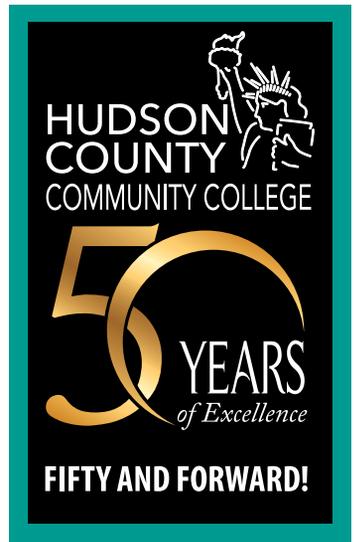


**The Hudson County Community College Family
congratulates our President,
DR. CHRISTOPHER M. REBER,
Recipient of the *Insight Into Academia*
2026 Trailblazer in Higher Education Award.**

**We applaud Dr. Reber's dedication to innovative programming that
advances student success, faculty engagement, and community impact
at Hudson County Community College and beyond.**



For more information, visit: www.hccc.edu





Lynette D. Stokes, EdD

Lynette D. Stokes, EdD, is president of South Suburban College, where she has led the institution for more than seven years with a servant-leadership approach rooted in access, opportunity, and community impact. As the first woman to lead the college in its nearly century-long history, Stokes has strengthened academic quality, stabilized enrollment, and expanded partnerships that connect adult and returning learners to meaningful workforce opportunities. Drawing on her professional background in academic leadership and her lived experience navigating the foster care system, she has centered student support, belonging, and institutional accountability in decision-making. Her tenure has reinforced the essential role of community colleges as engines of mobility and opportunity in the Chicagoland region.

Angela L. Walker Franklin, PhD

Angela L. Walker Franklin, PhD, is president and CEO of Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences, where she has led transformative change for more than 14 years. As the first woman to lead the institution in its 125-year history, Franklin has redefined what a modern medical and health sciences university can be by expanding academic offerings, embedding cultural competency across curriculum and operations, and championing holistic admissions and student belonging. She spearheaded the development and opening of DMU's state-of-the-art West Des Moines campus, completed during the COVID-19 pandemic on time and on budget. A nationally recognized leader, Franklin's vision continues to shape health professions education, workforce preparation, and inclusive leadership in higher education.

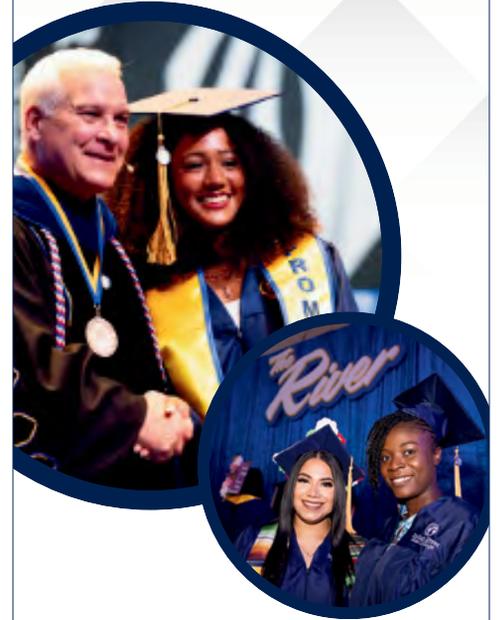


David K. Wilson, EdD

David K. Wilson, EdD, is president of Morgan State University, where he has led a 15-year era of transformational growth known as the "Morgan Modern Era." Under his leadership, Morgan has evolved into Maryland's preeminent public urban research university, expanding from 60 to more than 150 academic programs and significantly strengthening its research enterprise, enrollment, and national standing. A first-generation college graduate, Wilson has championed mission-centered innovation, shared governance, and workforce-aligned academic expansion while securing historic investments in campus infrastructure and sponsored research. His tenure has positioned Morgan as a powerful economic engine for the state and a national model for how HBCU leadership can drive scale, excellence, and opportunity.



Indian River State College

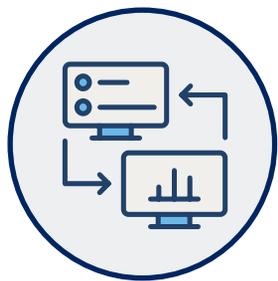


LEADING ACCESS

DELIVERING OUTCOMES

[LEARN MORE](#)

IRSC.EDU



A New Model for Business Education Emerges

By Erik Cliburn

As industries increasingly demand leaders who can translate technical innovation into strategic decision-making, universities are reshaping business education to sit squarely at the intersection of STEM and enterprise. Two institutions—Purdue University and Manhattan University—are taking different but complementary approaches to preparing students for a data-driven, technology-intensive economy.

At Purdue, that shift is unfolding at scale within the Mitch Daniels School of Business, where leaders are embedding science, technology, engineering, and math into the foundation of business education. Since assuming leadership in August 2023, Dean Jim Bullard, PhD, has prioritized transforming it into a technology-centered institution aligned with Purdue's broader research-driven identity.

"We're not just expanding our business school — we're redefining it by putting STEM at its core," Bullard said. "In a world where technology drives every market, we're preparing our students to lead, whether it's in the boardroom or a science lab."

That vision is reflected in structural and physical investments. In December, Purdue's Board of Trustees approved a reorganization of the school from two departments to nine, a move designed to increase responsiveness to industry needs and emerging fields.

The Daniels School also hired 35 new faculty members, including senior scholars recruited through Purdue's Moveable Dream Hires program. New appointments span accounting, economics, finance, strategic management, and supply chain

analytics, reinforcing the emphasis on data science, artificial intelligence, and quantitative decision-making.

Faculty expansion is paired with new infrastructure. Construction is underway on a \$168 million, 164,000-square-foot facility scheduled to open in 2027, replacing the Krannert Center and restoring the school to a three building footprint. The Daniels School is also extending its reach to Purdue's Indianapolis expansion, where programs such as Integrated Business and Engineering are designed to train graduates fluent in both technical systems and business strategy.

"In a world where technology drives every market, we're preparing our students to lead, whether it's in the boardroom or a science lab."

Jim Bullard, PhD

While Purdue is scaling a comprehensive transformation, Manhattan University is concentrating its efforts through a focused graduate program. The university recently launched a STEM-designated Master of Science in Business Analytics within its O'Malley School of Business.

The program is designed to prepare students for roles where analytics and automation increasingly guide organizational strategy. Coursework emphasizes statistical modeling, machine learning, artificial intelligence, data visualization, and programming, alongside applied business decision-making. Offered in a low-residency format, the degree

blends online coursework with limited in-person sessions in New York City, targeting both early-career students and working professionals.

"Organizations are looking for graduates who can bridge technical expertise with strategic business thinking," said Hany Guirguis, PhD, dean of the O'Malley School of Business. "This program develops exactly that combination—preparing students to become leaders in analytics-driven decision-making."

Graduates are positioned for careers such as business analyst, data scientist, operations analyst, and analytics

consultant—roles that rely heavily on AI-enhanced forecasting and data interpretation across sectors including finance, marketing, and supply chain management.

Together, Purdue and Manhattan University illustrate how business education is evolving in response to technological change. Whether through large-scale institutional redesign or targeted graduate programs, both approaches reflect a growing consensus: tomorrow's business leaders must be as comfortable with data models and algorithms as they are with balance sheets and strategy. ●

EVERYTHING IS BUSINESS



Whatever career path you pursue, business is always part of the equation. At the University of Louisville College of Business, we prepare leaders across every industry.

Located in Kentucky's economic hub and accredited by AACSB, we offer award-winning programs from undergraduate degrees and minors to MBA, MSBA, MSAA and flexible online options. Our certificates and specialized programs in distilled spirits, healthcare and the equine industry connect learning directly to the region's most vital sectors.



Wherever you're headed, a UofL business education gives you the skills, strategy and confidence to move forward.



BUSINESS.LOUISVILLE.EDU



When Discounts Drive the Price Tag: Rethinking Tuition and Financial Aid for College Affordability

By Erik Cliburn

For many families, the first number they look for in a college search is the one that makes them stop searching: the sticker price.

In 2025–26, average annual published tuition and fees reached \$11,950 for in-state students and \$31,880 for out-of-state students at public four-year universities, \$4,150 at public two-year colleges, and \$45,000 at private four-year institutions, according to the College Board.

Those figures don't include housing, food, books, and other essentials—costs that often determine whether affordability is real or theoretical.

The College Board estimates average annual budgets (tuition plus living costs

and other expenses) of \$21,320 for public two-year in-district students and \$65,470 for private nonprofit four-year students, with public four-year budgets averaging \$30,990 for in-state students and \$50,920 for out-of-state students.

At the same time, financial aid has grown—especially aid provided by states and institutions. That reality helps explain why affordability debates can feel contradictory: families hear that most students don't pay full price, yet they still report that cost is the biggest barrier to enrollment.

A large part of the disconnect is embedded in a financing approach that has become common across higher education: “high-tuition, high-aid,” also

known as tuition discounting.

A November 2025 analysis by The Century Foundation (TCF)—authored by Peter Granville, Deputy Director of Higher Education Policy, Denise A. Smith, PhD, and graduate intern Jaime Ramirez-Mendoza—argues that today's tuition-financial aid structure has become increasingly disconnected from affordability, even as total grant aid has grown. They argue in the report, titled “A Better Hundred Billion: Improving State and Institutional College Financial Aid,” that in many parts of the sector, tuition is intentionally “priced up” and then adjusted down through grants—often in ways that confuse families, distort institutional

incentives, and fail to consistently reduce the financial burden for students with the greatest need.

The “High-Tuition, High-Aid” Model—Why It Can Backfire

In the “high-tuition, high-aid” system, colleges advertise a high sticker price, then use institutional grants and sometimes state grants to present the net price as reflecting a large “discount.” In the language cited by TCF from college leaders, one rationale is that higher prices can signal higher value: “We feel we’ve increased the value proposition to get [families] to be willing to pay more.”

But student psychology can run in the opposite direction. TCF describes a recurring pattern: sticker shock pushes some students away before they learn what aid they might receive, while institutions and states spend substantial grant dollars competing for students who may not actually need the aid to enroll.

That matters because sticker price still shapes behavior. If families interpret high price as out of reach, they may never make it to the stage where financial aid changes the equation.

Where the Money Goes: Need-Based vs. Competitive Aid

TCF’s central critique is not that grant aid is scarce, but that too much of it is poorly targeted. State and institutional grant programs together total close to \$100 billion annually, yet TCF finds that a meaningful share goes to students whose grants exceed what they need to cover college costs after accounting for expected family contribution.

One of the report’s starkest findings is that more than half of students from the top income quartile receive grants in excess of need (56%), compared with virtually none (0.2%) among students in the bottom quartile—meaning top-quartile students are 280 times more likely to receive grants above need.

Overall, TCF estimates about 10% of total grant aid is provided in excess of need, amounting to at least \$10 billion per year in state and institutional grants.

TCF also points to program design choices that can tilt aid away from affordability goals, including a long-term shift toward merit-based aid. The report notes that the share of state grants awarded based on need has fallen over time, reflecting a rising role for merit-based awards that are often linked to test scores and GPAs—metrics that can mirror unequal K–12 opportunities rather than family financial constraints.

The State Funding “Balance Wheel” and Tuition Pressure

Affordability is not only about how aid is awarded; it’s also about what institutions must charge to cover basic costs. In a recent report, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) describes state higher education funding as volatile and often treated as a “balance wheel” during recessions—cut when budgets tighten and partially restored later.

The evidence BPC highlights suggests that when appropriations fall, costs often shift toward students.

In research summarized by BPC, economist Douglas Webber finds that since 1987, each \$1,000 decline in state funding per student is associated with an average \$257 increase in student costs—through tuition increases, enrollment shifts toward higher-paying out-of-state or international students, and/or reductions in institutional aid. BPC also notes Webber’s finding that the share of cuts passed on to students has risen over time, from 10.3% before 2000 to 31.8% since 2000.

BPC’s review also underscores why outcomes differ by state and institution type. As Sandy Baum and coauthors write: “Each state has a different composition of institutions and students, a different starting level of tuition, a different ability to attract out-of-state and international

students, different capacity utilization, different tuition-setting mechanisms, and different levels of expenditures per student.”

What Can Change: Practical Levers to Improve Affordability

The policy takeaway from these analyses is not that aid should shrink, but that it should work harder for the students it’s meant to serve—and that tuition-setting incentives should stop rewarding sticker-price escalation.

TCF argues states can begin with basic accountability: audits of how grant dollars affect net price burdens by income, how much aid is awarded above need, the balance of need- versus merit-based aid, and whether state dollars disproportionately flow to the most selective institutions. Those audits can inform reforms that shift dollars toward need-based grants that reduce out-of-pocket costs and borrowing for low-income students.

“These lawmakers correctly identify a problem, stating the market is not functioning properly, but they get the cause wrong,” says Granville.

At the institutional level, TCF’s critique points to a related move: re-centering financial aid budgets on access rather than recruitment—so discounts don’t function primarily as enrollment-management tools for attracting higher-income students.

And for states, BPC’s evidence review implies that stabilizing public investment can relieve some tuition pressure—particularly for broad-access institutions that have less ability to offset cuts by recruiting out-of-state students or raising prices without losing enrollment.

None of these steps eliminates the complexity of higher education financing. But together, they point to a more direct definition of affordability: reducing what families actually pay—not just increasing the size of the discount printed on an award letter. ●



Why Alternative Revenue Matters More as Federal Research Funding Falters

By Erik Cliburn

As federal funding uncertainty intensifies—and some institutions also face tighter state appropriations—college leaders are being forced to revisit a financial model that already leaves little margin for error. New revenue strategies can help, but the most durable moves tend to be the ones that build on existing strengths, avoid large upfront costs, and come with a realistic path to return on investment. At the same time, many campuses are confronting the uncomfortable reality that meaningful savings often require changes inside the academic enterprise itself, not just back-office trimming.

An analysis of IPEDS data by EAB, a global education consulting firm formerly known as the Education Advisory Board, underscores why targeted funding cuts can hit hard. Across public, private, and research-intensive institutions, the two sources of revenue and funding that dominate are tuition and government funding.

Public institutions rely heavily on government support, with EAB estimating that it accounts for 61% of

funding at public institutions compared with 10% at private institutions and 26% at research-intensive universities.

Tuition and fees remain another essential pillar, representing 23% of revenue at public institutions, 52% at private institutions, and 25% at research-intensive universities. EAB notes that auxiliary enterprises and private gifts are rarely sufficient to compensate for large losses, making up only about 10% of funding for public and research-intensive institutions.

That reliance helps explain why many institutions are moving quickly on cost controls. In a March 2025 overview of budget pressures, EAB pointed to cost-savings measures such as Stanford University implementing a hiring freeze, Penn State University considering the closure of twelve commonwealth campuses due to enrollment challenges, and St. Francis College conducting layoffs and selling its Brooklyn campus. These moves reflect a sector increasingly treating budget stresses as structural.

At Harvard, the stakes of federal

research disruptions were laid out in stark terms. In an interview accompanying the university's fiscal year 2025 financial report, Chief Financial Officer Ritu Kalra said, "About \$116 million in sponsored funds—which are reimbursements for costs the university has already incurred—disappeared almost overnight." Kalra added that Harvard closed the year with a \$113 million operating deficit on a \$6.7 billion revenue base.

Harvard's leaders described cost controls that many campuses may recognize, including a hiring freeze across the university, pausing salary increases for exempt staff, and delaying nonessential capital projects.

For institutions seeking new revenue, EAB argues that some popular ideas routinely disappoint because they require years to mature or demand investments that outstrip likely returns.

One example is launching new online microcredentials, often pitched as a quick win. Their criticism is that building microcredentials from the ground up can carry significant

upfront costs, including faculty course development and staffing, while revenue expectations may not justify the investment.

The more promising approach, they suggest, is to repackage existing curriculum into non-credit offerings designed for employers—especially in high-demand areas such as AI and data science—where institutions may secure upfront payments to cover customization. That shift reduces risk. Colleges sell refined versions of what they already teach instead of betting on an entirely new product line.

EAB also recommends exploring corporate sponsorships beyond campus athletics support. Expanding sports programs can be financially risky in a disrupted athletics landscape, while sponsorships tied to career fairs, hackathons, incubators, or innovation hubs can be easier to scale and may

strengthen talent pipelines for students. Examples cited include tiered career services sponsorship packages and event sponsorship menus housed within academic units.

Other common fee-based approaches can be politically fraught and financially modest. EAB points to parking fee increases as a typical example. They are often incremental and may be absorbed by maintenance or specific projects rather than generating flexible surplus dollars. A more meaningful alternative is renting underutilized campus spaces—recreation facilities, fitness centers, and other assets that can generate revenue from community memberships or hourly fees.

For research-focused universities, another temptation is to increase research output in the hope of generating commercial revenue. EAB cautions that research costs can

outpace returns and that the biggest gains often depend on rare “hit products.” Instead, the firm points to monetizing research infrastructure—renting out lab space and equipment to outside organizations during off-hours—as a more reliable option for campuses with specialized facilities.

None of these revenue strategies eliminates the need to confront costs. EAB estimates that academic costs make up at least 61% of expenditures across segments, and labor is the biggest driver—averaging 56% of total expenses.

The implication is straightforward. If institutions want significant, sustainable savings, they must evaluate instructional models, staffing patterns, and academic operations—choices that are often contentious but increasingly difficult to avoid as federal policy becomes a less stable pillar of institutional finances. ●

BUILDING CONNECTIONS. GROWING TOGETHER.

At Texas Christian University, connection is more than a word — it's the foundation of our community. The Center for Connection Culture fosters meaningful relationships among TCU Horned Frogs®, inspires personal and professional growth and celebrates achievements across campus.

**Discover More About
TCU's Connection Culture**
tcu.edu/connection-culture



LEAD ON.

TCU



As Athletic Costs Rise, Colleges Face What is Affordable

By Erik Cliburn

Intercollegiate athletics

has emerged as one of the most contentious—and costly—areas of campus finance. While a small number of marquee programs generate substantial revenue, most athletics departments operate at a deficit, relying heavily on institutional subsidies and student fees to stay afloat.

Data compiled in the Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database shows that the financial model underpinning Division I athletics is increasingly dependent on sources that have little to do with ticket sales or media contracts. According to publicly reported figures, roughly 92% of NCAA Division I athletics programs rely on some combination of both.

The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics has long warned that this trajectory is unsustainable. In partnership with financial services firm CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA), the commission released a detailed analysis projecting finances for public colleges' Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) programs through 2032. The findings suggest that without significant changes, athletics spending will continue to drift further from the educational missions universities claim to prioritize.

CLA projects that total annual athletics revenue for public FBS institutions will reach \$20.9 billion by 2032—more than double 2022 levels. Of that total, \$16.7 billion is expected to flow to public institutions in the Autonomy 5 conferences (ACC, Big

Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, and SEC). Yet the influx of new revenue, largely driven by expanded College Football Playoff distributions and media rights deals, is not projected to relieve the financial strain for most campuses. Instead, the report concludes that “business-as-usual athletics spending patterns” will intensify existing imbalances rather than correct them.

One of the report's most striking findings centers on what the Knight Commission calls the “crossover

chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, called for a Government Accountability Office inquiry into how athletics spending affects students. “The data on spending on college athletics raises distinct questions about how schools fund their athletic programs and the extent to which Title IV student aid subsidizes these costs through students’ tuition and fees,” Walberg said.

Recent campus decisions suggest those concerns are not hypothetical.

By 2032, nearly half of public Autonomy 5 institutions are projected to spend more on compensation for just 11 football coaches than on scholarships and medical expenses for all athletes across all sports.

point.” By 2032, nearly half of public Autonomy 5 institutions are projected to spend more on compensation for just 11 football coaches than on scholarships and medical expenses for all athletes across all sports. In aggregate, CLA estimates that football coaching compensation at those schools will total \$1.36 billion—nearly matching the \$1.37 billion projected for athlete scholarships and medical support combined.

These figures raise uncomfortable questions about priorities, particularly at institutions where athletics budgets increasingly depend on student dollars. In February, U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg,

The University of Minnesota approved a new \$200 annual athletics fee for Twin Cities students, citing the rising expense of its athletics department following the NCAA's landmark House settlement, which allows schools to directly compensate athletes. According to university estimates, the fee is expected to generate about \$7 million annually, helping offset a projected \$9 million shortfall in the athletics budget.

Similar dynamics are playing out elsewhere. South Carolina approved a new \$300 annual athletics fee for undergraduates, while Iowa State University has forecast recurring budget gaps averaging nearly \$25 million

“There is a great sense of belonging at my institution.”

annually through 2031, even after halting capital projects and raising donor contribution requirements.

For institutions outside the top tier of revenue generators, the financial picture is even starker. According to NCAA data cited by lawmakers, no Division II athletics programs operate at a profit. Even within powerhouse conferences, deficits are common. Louisiana State University, often held up as a financial success story, reported a deficit in its most recent full budget cycle.

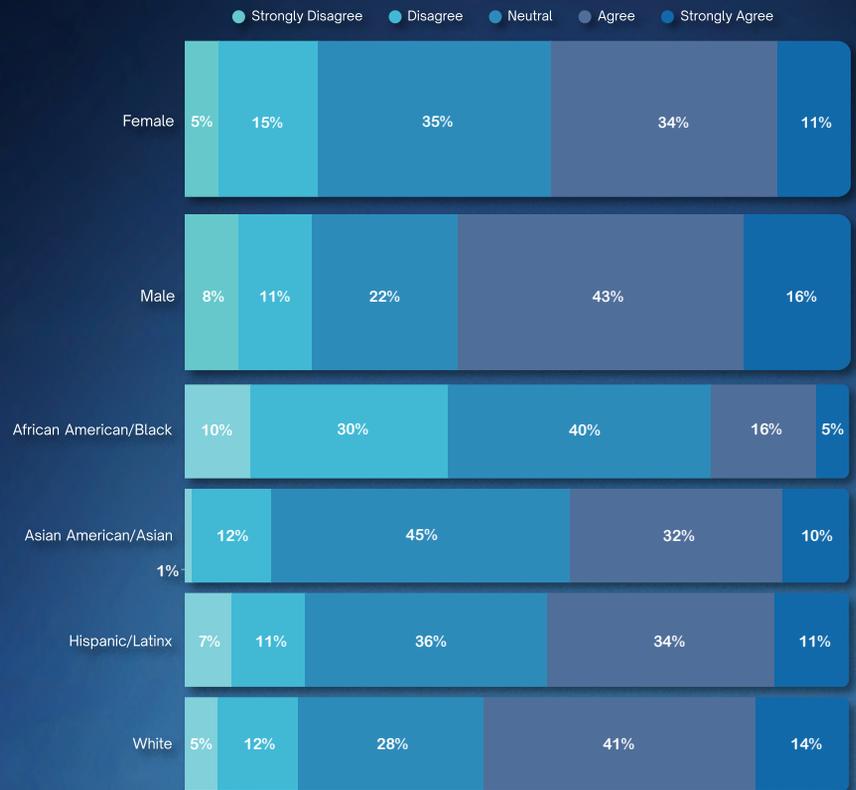
These pressures have revived a debate that many campus leaders prefer to avoid—whether some athletics programs should be cut altogether. Former Ramapo College and Adelphi University president Robert A. Scott, PhD, whose institution eliminated football amid state funding reductions, has argued that such decisions can free resources for core academic needs.

“I was amazed at how much it cost not only in dollars, but in allocation of resources,” Scott said. “Few higher education institutions actually make money from football.”

The Knight Commission stops short of calling for widespread program cuts, instead urging governance reforms, spending controls, and stronger alignment between athletics finances and educational values. Still, its analysis underscores that new revenue alone will not resolve the structural imbalance.

As Pennsylvania State University President Emeritus Eric Barron wrote in 2023, “A cardinal rule of college budgeting is that it is much easier to revamp spending priorities with new revenue than to reallocate existing spending.”

For colleges already stretching student budgets to sustain unprofitable athletics programs, that window may be closing. Whether institutions respond by restructuring, cutting some sports, or continuing to pass costs along to students will shape not only the future of college sports, but the affordability and integrity of higher education itself. ●



Uncover the power of belonging on your campus.

Insight’s Viewfinder® Campus Climate Surveys help colleges and universities understand what students, faculty, and even prospective students are truly experiencing. Whether it’s your first survey or your fifth, our expert team ensures a smooth, stress-free process—backed by years of experience across all institution types.

The sample data shown highlights just how varied the sense of belonging can be. With our interactive, no-cost dashboards, you can easily explore results and make data-driven decisions that boost recruitment, retention, and equity—one click at a time.



Elevating Voices. Inspiring Action.

The Rise of the Lifelong Learning Model

By Misty Evans

For more than a century, American higher education has operated on a familiar pathway. Students enroll, earn a degree, and exit. That model, long treated as foundational, is increasingly under strain. Declining birth rates, enrollment volatility, rising public skepticism about tuition costs, and accelerating workforce changes are forcing colleges and universities to reconsider not just how they teach, but how they sustain relevance over time.

In response, a growing number of institutions are reimagining education as an ongoing service rather than a one-time product offering. Often described as “education as a service,” this new approach emphasizes continuous access to learning across a career, offering alumni and working professionals modular courses, certificates, and credentials they can engage with repeatedly as skills demands evolve.

The shift reflects both economic and cultural pressures. Employers increasingly value demonstrable skills over static credentials, while professionals face shorter job cycles and faster technological disruption. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students age 25 and older accounted for roughly 36% of postsecondary enrollment in 2022, underscoring the growing importance of adult learners to institutional stability.

For higher education leaders, lifelong learning is no longer a peripheral mission or an auxiliary revenue stream. It is emerging as a strategic response to

demographic change, pricing scrutiny, and long-term financial resilience.

From Degree Transactions to Ongoing Relationships

At its core, the subscription campus model reframes institutional value. Instead of relying primarily on first-time enrollment and degree completion, colleges seek to build durable relationships with students that extend across decades. Learners may enter through a single course or certificate, pause to apply skills in the workforce, and return later for additional credentials without restarting the admissions process.

This logic mirrors broader shifts in the economy. The World Economic Forum has reported that a substantial share of workers will need reskilling within the next decade as automation and artificial intelligence reshape job roles. Meanwhile, surveys from LinkedIn and the Society for Human Resource Management indicate that employers are increasingly prioritizing skills-based hiring and continuous professional development.

For colleges, the financial implications are significant. Modular programs allow for more flexible pricing, lower upfront costs for learners, and repeat engagement that can smooth revenue over time. Rather than relying solely on growth in traditional degree enrollment, colleges can diversify their income streams through stackable credentials, professional education, and alumni learning.

The result is a shift in mindset from tuition dependency to lifetime learner value, where institutional success is measured not only by enrollment counts but also by how often and for how long learners return.

Georgia Tech and Scalable Upskilling

Few institutions illustrate the economic potential of lifelong learning as clearly as the Georgia Institute of Technology. Through its suite of online master’s programs and professional certificates, Georgia Tech has demonstrated that high-quality credentials can be delivered at scale and at significantly lower cost than traditional residential models.

Their online Master of Science in Computer Science, developed in partnership with Udacity, is among the most cited examples. The program offers a fully accredited degree at a cost substantially lower than comparable on-campus programs, and enrolls thousands of students globally.

According to Georgia Tech Professional Education, the university has since expanded its portfolio to include additional online master’s degrees and professional certificates aimed at working adults.

University leaders have framed these programs not as replacements for campus-based education, but as extensions of the university’s public mission. By lowering price barriers and offering flexible pacing, the programs enable learners to re-engage with the institution as their careers evolve, rather

than making a single, high-stakes enrollment decision early in life.

Georgia Tech has also expanded modular certificate pathways that can stand alone or stack toward graduate credentials. While tuition is still assessed per course, the structure allows learners to progress incrementally, aligning closely with subscription-style logic.

Harvard Extension School and Flexible Pathways

Harvard Extension School offers a similar model grounded in permeability and long-term access. As part of the Division of Continuing Education, the school has long served adult learners seeking part-time, flexible study options to coincide with professional and personal commitments.

Students may take individual courses for enrichment, pursue graduate certificates, or apply credits toward a degree over time. According to the Harvard Extension School, most graduate certificates require four courses and can be completed in as little as eight months or over multiple years.

This flexibility reflects an acknowledgment that adult learners rarely move in linear paths. Rather than forcing students to choose between enrichment and credentialing, Harvard Extension allows goals to evolve. Access itself becomes the central value proposition, with credentials emerging as milestones rather than endpoints.

Harvard University's broader Professional and Lifelong Learning initiative reinforces this strategy by aggregating nondegree offerings across schools into a single ecosystem. The emphasis is on sustained engagement across career stages, from early-career skill building to executive education and personal enrichment.

University of Michigan and the Alumni Learning Pipeline

The University of Michigan has similarly positioned lifelong learning as a strategic priority, particularly through professional certificates and alumni-

focused education. Through its Center for Academic Innovation and Office of University Outreach and Engagement, the university has expanded online learning, workforce-aligned programs, and community partnerships.

Michigan offers professional certificates in areas such as data analytics, leadership, and health sciences, many of which are designed for learners who already hold degrees. These programs often serve as entry points into a longer relationship with the institution rather than terminal credentials.

Alumni engagement is central to this approach. By offering continued access to education, Michigan strengthens alumni affinity while responding to employer demand for current applied skills. For advancement leaders, lifelong learning serves as a bridge between the academic mission and alumni relations, positioning graduates not only as donors or mentors but also as ongoing participants in the intellectual life of the institution.

Pricing Strategy and the Subscription Mindset

While most colleges still charge tuition on a per-course basis, subscription logic is increasingly shaping pricing and enrollment strategy. Lower upfront costs, shorter program lengths, and modular credentials reduce risk for learners, particularly those balancing work and family obligations.

For institutions, education-as-a-service models emphasize predictable, repeat engagement over one-time enrollment spikes. Marketing shifts from recruitment cycles to relationship management, requiring closer collaboration among admissions, continuing education, alumni relations, and workforce development units.

Data analytics play a growing role, helping institutions identify when learners are most likely to return and which offerings align with labor market demand. In this context, lifelong learning becomes both a revenue and a retention

strategy, applied not only to students but also to alumni and professionals.

Governance, Quality, and Equity Considerations

Despite its promise, the subscription campus model raises important governance and equity questions. Accreditation frameworks, faculty workload policies, and financial aid regulations were largely designed around degree programs rather than continuous access models.

Faculty governance remains a critical factor. Institutions must balance innovation with academic oversight, ensuring nondegree and modular programs meet the same standards of rigor and integrity as traditional offerings. Without careful alignment, lifelong learning initiatives risk being perceived as revenue-driven rather than mission-driven.

Equity considerations are also central. While online and flexible programs can expand access, they may disproportionately benefit learners with strong digital literacy or employer support. Institutions adopting lifelong learning models must ensure flexibility does not come at the expense of student support, advising, and inclusion.

A Structural Shift, Not a Passing Trend

What distinguishes today's lifelong learning movement from earlier continuing education efforts is scale and strategic intent. For many institutions, education as a service is no longer ancillary. It is becoming a core component of institutional identity and financial planning.

As Georgia Tech, Harvard Extension School, and the University of Michigan demonstrate, the subscription campus is less about abandoning degrees but instead extending their value. The strategic question facing higher education leaders is no longer whether learners will need to return, but whether institutions are prepared to meet them when they do. ●



Why More Colleges Are Turning to Mergers

By Erik Cliburn

As colleges and universities across the United States confront mounting financial pressures, mergers and absorptions are increasingly moving from contingency planning into the strategic mainstream. Once considered a rare or last resort option, they are now a tool more frequently discussed by presidents, governing boards, and state higher education leaders seeking to stabilize institutions amid enrollment declines, constrained public funding, and rising operating costs.

A recent report prepared for the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) sheds new light on how widespread these transactions have become. The report analyzes federal student aid data and identifies 521 merger-related events between January 2000 and August 2025, including 446 institutional mergers and 75 absorptions. Despite their growing prominence, the report underscores that systematic tracking and research on the topic remain limited.

Financial Pressures and Demographic Changes

The SHEEO report situates the rise in merger activity within a broader set of structural challenges facing higher education. Many institutions are

grappling with declining enrollment, particularly among traditional college-age students, while stagnant wages and growing price sensitivity make tuition increases harder to sustain. At the same time, reductions in state funding, inflation-driven cost increases, and long-standing infrastructure needs continue to strain institutional budgets.

These pressures are reflected in leadership sentiment. A 2025 survey cited in the report found that 19% of college and university presidents had engaged in serious discussions about merging with another institution. While many of those conversations did not result in formal agreements, they signal a growing recognition that existing institutional models may not be financially viable in the long term, especially for smaller and tuition-dependent colleges.

Analysis from The Change Leader, Inc., a higher education consulting firm, echoes this assessment. The firm points to a convergence of risks—including the impending demographic cliff, post-pandemic funding shortfalls, inflation, and competition for a shrinking pool of students—that has left many institutions struggling with overcapacity and aging facilities.

According to the firm, colleges with fewer than 2,500 students, limited endowments, or high tuition discount rates face heightened risk of closure, making mergers or strategic partnerships increasingly attractive.

What Mergers Mean In Practice

The SHEEO report draws clear distinctions between different forms of institutional combination. A merger typically involves two or more institutions forming a new entity under a single governing structure. An acquisition occurs when one institution absorbs another while retaining its own identity. Consolidations, often framed as unions between equals, are far less common in practice.

These distinctions are mirrored in federal reporting. In the Federal Student Aid data used for the SHEEO analysis, consolidations occur when multiple institutional identifiers are transferred into a single surviving entity, while absorptions involve one institution becoming inactive following acquisition. The form a merger takes has significant implications for governance, campus culture, staffing, and student services, particularly when institutions differ in mission, sector, or population served.



Willamette University in Salem, Oregon



Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia

Where Consolidation Has Occurred

Between 2000 and 2025, SHEEO found that consolidation activity was most common among proprietary institutions. Public institutions represented roughly one-third, while private nonprofit institutions made up the remainder. Absorptions, however, were most frequently observed among public institutions.

Geographically, consolidation has been uneven. California recorded the highest number of consolidations and absorptions combined over the 25-year span, followed by Pennsylvania and Georgia. Several states—including Arkansas, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming—reported no activity during the period analyzed by SHEEO.

Cost Savings and Institutional Capacity

For many institutions, the appeal of mergers lies in their potential to improve financial sustainability. By combining operations, colleges can reduce administrative duplication, streamline academic offerings, and centralize services such as information technology, finance, and facilities management. The SHEEO report highlights Georgia’s systemwide consolidations as an example, noting that leaders anticipated millions of dollars in annual administrative savings while also seeking to eliminate duplicate academic programs and improve regional access.

Beyond cost reductions, mergers are often framed as a way to strengthen

capacity. Consolidated institutions may be better positioned to expand academic programs, enhance research infrastructure, and invest in student support services. Research suggests that post-merger institutions have, in some cases, experienced improvements in retention and graduation rates, which researchers attribute to greater financial flexibility and expanded academic support.

The report also documents cases where mergers were used to preserve access for vulnerable student populations. In the University of Texas System, the merger that created the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley followed significant financial hardship at one campus. Subsequent analysis found that the new institution experienced sustained enrollment growth while continuing to serve a predominantly Hispanic student population.

Challenges and Community Concerns

Despite their potential benefits, mergers carry substantial risks. Integrating administrative systems, governance structures, and campus cultures can be complex and time-consuming. Case studies summarized in the SHEEO report point to challenges such as leadership succession disputes, difficult academic restructuring, and delays in addressing concerns raised by faculty, staff, and students.

Community impact is another recurring issue. Recent discussions surrounding a possible merger involving

the Appalachian School of Law in Virginia illustrate how consolidation proposals can raise concerns about economic consequences for rural regions where colleges serve as major employers and civic anchors.

Regulatory hurdles further complicate efforts. Institutions must often navigate multi-step approval processes involving accreditors, state authorities, and the U.S. Department of Education, extending timelines and introducing uncertainty during transition periods.

What Does the Future Hold?

SHEEO concludes that these combinations are likely to remain part of the higher education landscape as institutions confront ongoing financial pressures and declining public investment. However, it also emphasizes that this is not a universal solution. Alternatives such as shared services agreements, consortia, and strategic partnerships may offer some of the same benefits with fewer disruptions.

As higher education continues to adapt to demographic shifts and economic constraints, the central question may no longer be whether mergers will occur, but under what conditions they can strengthen institutions while preserving access, mission, and community trust. For state leaders and campus executives alike, the SHEEO report underscores the need for clearer data, careful planning, and sustained attention to student outcomes as consolidation becomes a more common feature of the sector. ●

Beyond Enrollment Growth

How Shared Services, Data, and Collaboration Are Redefining Sustainability

By Misty Evans



Rising costs, shifting demographics, and growing public scrutiny have pushed many colleges into a familiar script: enroll more students, add more programs, chase new revenue. But as enrollment growth slows and public funding remains uncertain, finance leaders are increasingly pointing to a different playbook. Share what can be shared. Measure what matters. Protect the areas of the institution that make it distinctive.

The goal, they argue, is not to become bigger. It is to become sturdier.

That shift is visible in the priorities dominating campus business officers' agendas. In its 2025 annual survey of higher education finance and administrative leaders, the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) listed financial sustainability among the sector's top business issues, alongside workforce shortages and operational

complexity that makes long-term planning more difficult. The message from finance leaders is clear. Growth alone is not a reliable path to stability.

One strategy gaining traction is shared services, a model that consolidates routine administrative functions to reduce duplication, strengthen compliance, and redirect staff hours toward academics and student support.

The University System of Georgia has built a Shared Services Center that provides centralized transactional support, particularly in human resources and payroll, across its 26 institutions. According to the system's fiscal affairs division, the model is designed to streamline processes, manage compliance risk, and allow campuses to focus more directly on student-facing work.

This approach extends beyond staffing. The system has also

centralized technology and procurement decisions to improve consistency and reduce costs. In public documentation describing its administrative services infrastructure, the system cites reduced hardware, licensing, and maintenance expenses compared with institution-by-institution contracts, as well as savings generated through a unified procurement process. The emphasis, system leaders note, is on efficiency and service quality rather than academic standardization.

Shared services can be politically sensitive inside higher education, where institutional autonomy is often treated as mission critical. Systems that succeed tend to frame consolidation as an operational choice, not an academic takeover. Centralizing payroll, benefits administration, or procure-to-pay workflows does not require campuses to standardize curricula, admissions

priorities, or community partnerships. Instead, the goal is to keep essential systems running with fewer leaks.

A related but distinct strategy is the consortium model, in which institutions retain their identities while sharing infrastructure that would be costly or redundant to replicate independently.

The Claremont Colleges in Southern California offer a long-running example. The Claremont Colleges Services organization, established in 1925, serves as a central coordinating entity for seven independent colleges and supports more than 30 shared programs and services. The arrangement allows institutions with distinct missions and cultures to pool resources while maintaining academic independence.

Libraries often sit at the center of these collaborations because they are both essential and expensive to run. The Claremont Colleges Library describes itself as supporting the seven-institution consortium through shared collections, resources, and services across campuses. Its mission emphasizes partnership across the consortium, reflecting a view that shared infrastructure can strengthen, rather than flatten academic life when it is designed around faculty and student needs.

Consortia can also enable investments that individual campuses might struggle to fund alone. The Claremont Colleges Library's Digital Scholarship Collaboratory, for example, is designed as a teaching and learning space for students and faculty across the seven colleges. In this sense, shared services are not limited to back-office consolidation. They can also be a way to build academic assets that benefit from scale without requiring institutional mergers.

A third path to stability is data-driven decision-making, particularly in large public systems attempting to align budgets, academic programs, and student outcomes under tight resource constraints.

The Minnesota State System includes 33 colleges and universities

and has centered its strategy around a system-wide student success framework supported by analytics tools intended to identify gaps and improve outcomes. Its Equity 2030 initiative sets a goal of eliminating educational equity gaps by 2030 and calls explicitly for intentional systems and culture change to reach that target.

One way the system operationalizes that work is by making performance and equity data easier to see and act on. They describe its Equity Scorecard as a tool designed to highlight disparities and prompt campuses to improve outcomes and experiences for students and employees across demographic groups. By standardizing how data is

centered approach to program design and delivery that supports students from entry to completion. While pathways are often discussed primarily as a student success reform, they also intersect with financial sustainability by reducing excess credits, improving time to degree, and helping institutions focus resources on programs with demonstrated outcomes.

Taken together, these approaches share a common theme: stability without surrender.

For institutional leaders, the hardest work is often not technical but political. Shared services raise concerns about service quality, job redesign, and local control. Consortia require

The institutions most likely to endure may be those that treat scale as something they can borrow rather than something they must become.

collected and shared, system leaders aim to support more consistent decision-making across their institutions.

Centralized financial analysis also plays a role. Minnesota State's Financial Planning and Analysis unit oversees and coordinates budgeting efforts across the system, providing analysis and guidance to help colleges and universities prepare budgets, allocating expenses and funds in alignment with board policies. That centralized capacity becomes especially important during enrollment declines or fluctuations in state appropriations when leaders need comparable data to assess trends and make informed program and investment decisions.

Data-informed approaches can also shape academic and student support strategies. Minnesota State's Guided Learning Pathways framework is described by the system as a student-

trust and clear agreements around cost allocation and decision-making authority. Data-driven budgeting can trigger fears that algorithms will replace academic judgment.

Yet the alternative is not a return to simpler times. As NACUBO's issue tracking suggests, colleges and universities are operating in an environment where cost pressures, workforce challenges, and operational risk are persistent rather than temporary. Growth can help when conditions allow it, but it is not universally available, and it is rarely sufficient on its own.

The institutions most likely to endure may be those that treat scale as something they can borrow rather than something they must become. Sharing the machinery, protecting the mission, and using data as a flashlight instead of a cudgel. ●



Business School Enrollment Shifts From Growth to Strategic Transformation

By Erik Cliburn

Business schools around the world are navigating a shifting enrollment landscape that reflects broader changes in student preferences, global mobility, and program design—even as overall demand for business education remains resilient, according to the Enrollment Trends at the AACSB Business Schools: 2025 report.

The study, produced by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International, draws on a multi-year dataset from accredited business programs participating in the association's Business School Questionnaire (BSQ) Programs Module. Its analysis paints a nuanced picture: business education is not in decline, but it is evolving in ways that challenge traditional assumptions about undergraduate and master's-level enrollment.

Interest is Up, Enrollment Patterns Are More Complex

At the undergraduate level, interest has surged over the past five years. Applications to business programs increased by 38%, and offers of admission rose 30% during the same period. However, the number of students who ultimately enrolled climbed by a more modest 10%. This discrepancy suggests that prospective

students are casting wider nets and making more selective choices before committing to a program.

A similar pattern is visible at the master's level. Applications grew 25% over five years, yet enrollment numbers increased just 6%. The lag points to intense competition, expanded options for applicants, and perhaps greater deliberation as students weigh the return on investment, especially in a crowded market.

Regional Dynamics and Enrollment Figures

Enrollment growth has not been uniform across the globe. In undergraduate programs, growth in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) was at around 6%. In contrast, undergraduate enrollment in the Asia Pacific region declined by about 6%. These variations highlight how local economic conditions, demographic shifts, and competitive factors shape enrollment differently by region.

At the master's level, there was moderate growth everywhere—roughly 4% in Asia Pacific and 6% in EMEA—suggesting continued interest among graduate-level students. But digging deeper into program types reveals divergent trends that speak to shifting student priorities.

MBA Enrollment Declines as Specialist Programs Rise

One of the most striking findings in the report is the contrasting trajectories of MBA programs versus other graduate school offerings. Over the five-year period, MBA enrollment declined by 6%, while specialist and generalist master's programs grew by 11% and 17%, respectively.

Specialist programs—often focusing on areas such as finance, analytics, or entrepreneurship—increasingly attracted students seeking skills tied to current job market demands. They now represent the majority of master's enrollment, especially outside North America. This trend aligns with broader shifts in graduate education, where focused credentials often promise quicker returns for career-minded learners.

Gender and International Mobility Trends

Gender representation has been relatively stable over time. At the undergraduate level, women consistently make up about 44% of enrollment. While many undergraduate programs remain male-dominated—approximately 30%—achieve gender parity. The master's level shows similar stability,

though specialist programs have a higher proportion of female students compared with MBA programs.

International student participation has grown significantly at the graduate

international enrollment remains more modest, rising only about 3% globally, with notable regional differences. EMEA institutions saw strong gains in international

One of the most striking findings in the report is the contrasting trajectories of MBA programs versus other graduate school offerings. Over the five-year period, MBA enrollment declined by 6%, while specialist and generalist master's programs grew by 11% and 17%, respectively.

level, increasing by 25% over five years and accounting for 36% of total master's enrollment. Specialist programs attract the majority of this growth, drawing nearly three-quarters of all international master's students.

However, undergraduate

undergraduate numbers, while the Americas and Asia Pacific reported declines. These shifts underscore how visa policies, political climates, and post-graduation work opportunities increasingly influence where global learners choose to study.

Changing Delivery Formats

The delivery of business education is also evolving. Undergraduate programs remain overwhelmingly full-time and in person. But graduate programs, particularly MBAs, reveal more diversity in format. Roughly 60% of MBA students now pursue part-time or flexible study formats, and fully online MBAs grew from 30% to 38% over the past five years. These figures reflect broader trends toward accommodating working professionals and leveraging digital platforms.

Strategic Implications for Business Schools

The AACSB report underscores that institutions must adapt to shifting student expectations and market conditions. From specialized graduate offerings to flexible delivery models, business schools that anticipate and respond to these trends are better positioned to attract talent in a competitive environment. ●

The Registry® | A zrg COMPANY

Trusted Interim
Leadership.

Proven Success.

Transforming colleges
and universities for
over 30 years.



Interim Placements ★

Consulting Services ★

RegistryInterim.com ★

978-532-4090

Business Students, City Partners Team Up in New Sustainability Impact Challenge

By Erik Cliburn

The University of Colorado Denver

Business School is positioning itself at the center of Denver's sustainability conversation with the launch of the Blair Gifford Mile High Sustainability Impact Challenge, a new annual competition designed to turn student ideas into implementable solutions for the city's most urgent urban challenges.

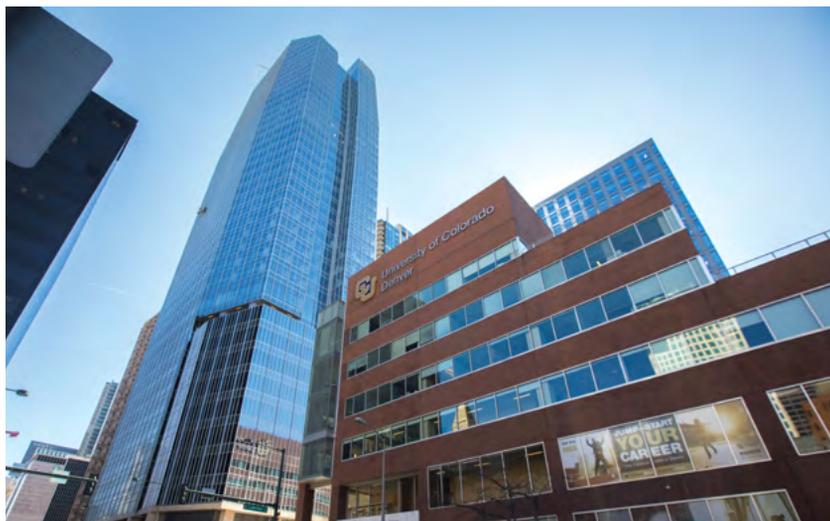
Backed by a philanthropic gift from social entrepreneur and CU Denver Business School professor emeritus Blair Gifford, PhD, the challenge brings together students, local organizations, and public-sector partners to address issues ranging from climate resilience and water scarcity to housing affordability, mobility, and equitable access to green space. Rather than emphasizing theoretical exercises, the competition is structured to generate proposals that can realistically be piloted in downtown Denver.

The challenge officially kicked off in late January with an introductory event that outlined expectations, resources, and the scope of sustainability issues facing the city.

In the weeks following, student teams have begun forming across disciplines and institutions, reflecting the program's emphasis on collaboration between business and non-business fields such as urban planning, environmental studies, engineering, and public policy.

Teams are required to partner with a local nonprofit, government office, or business and secure a letter of collaboration demonstrating that their ideas have real-world feasibility.

Organizers describe the competition as a signature initiative for the school's Sustainable Business Program, designed to strengthen ties between the university and the City and County of Denver, while giving students



The University of Colorado Denver

hands-on experience working on place-based challenges. Projects must focus on downtown Denver and look ahead five years, requiring teams to identify specific locations—neighborhoods, corridors, or blocks—and develop proposals that balance environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Focus areas for submissions include green infrastructure and climate resilience, sustainable transportation and mobility, circular economy and waste reduction, energy and building efficiency, and sustainable urban development. Teams may also explore how artificial intelligence can be applied to urban planning, energy management, and climate-impact modeling. Proposals are expected to include implementation strategies, cost estimates, financing approaches, and metrics for measuring success, moving well beyond conceptual visioning.

In addition to financial awards, the competition offers a structured support system. Faculty mentors and local subject matter experts are scheduled to

lead capacity-building and feasibility workshops, helping teams refine ideas, test assumptions, and incorporate stakeholder input. Finalists will be invited to a pitch night in early May, where they will present their proposals to judges and community leaders in a Shark Tank format.

Winning teams will receive cash prizes along with additional funding earmarked specifically for project implementation. Organizers say that pairing prize money with pilot support is central to the challenge's goal of ensuring that strong ideas do not stall after the competition ends.

By embedding sustainability, community impact, and economic viability into a single applied framework, it reflects CU Denver's broader mission as an urban public research university. For students and partners alike, it offers an opportunity to shape the future of downtown Denver—not just through ideas, but through action grounded in local collaboration and practical execution. ●



INCLUSION LIVES HERE
INNOVATION LIVES HERE
IMPACT LIVES HERE

next lives here



University of
CINCINNATI



A.T. Still University – Demonstrating excellence in graduate-level healthcare education

Making a difference in the health of underserved communities



Founded in 1892, A.T. Still University (ATSU) has built a legacy of excellence and inclusion as the founding school of osteopathic medicine, dedicated to preparing healthcare professionals who serve underserved populations. The University offers an array of graduate-level health professions degrees in medical, dental, and health science programs, on three campuses and online.

ATSU's newest campus, the College for Healthy Communities (ATSU-CHC) in Santa Maria, California, was established to amplify the University's mission of preparing graduates who are ready to make a difference in underserved communities through bold, innovative, and integrated healthcare education. ATSU-CHC's Central Coast Physician Assistant Program proudly focuses its recruitment within the Central Coast region, helping ensure students who learn here become the committed healthcare providers who serve here.

ATSU is proud to continue this history as a recipient of the 2025 Health Professions Higher Education Excellence and Distinction Champion award for the ninth consecutive year. The University offers an array of graduate-level health professions degrees in medical, dental, and health science programs, on campus and online.

ATSU campuses and locations: Kirksville, Missouri; Mesa, Arizona; Santa Maria, California; and St. Louis, Missouri



Learn more at atsu.edu

ATSU | A.T. Still University
FIRST IN WHOLE PERSON HEALTHCARE