

Executive Summary

Major Management Issues Facing College Leaders:

Innovation, the Academic Work Force, and Student Needs

The “always on” transformation. That’s the term Jim Hemerling, a prominent management consultant, uses to describe the mentality that many business executives in the 21st century must embrace. In response to globalization, market disruptions, and other factors, companies should rethink traditional practices and commit to more-frequent transformations, he argues.

While not all the external and internal pressures are the same, higher education faces a similar situation. Thanks to the rapid pace of technological development, changing student expectations, shrinking resources, and other issues, it seems the only constant for higher-education leaders today is change itself.

To help college leaders prepare for this “always on” environment, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has published this executive summary. It’s a guide to three areas that require new thinking from academic managers and possibly institutional change at colleges: innovation, the academic work force, and student needs.

- In innovation, colleges want to apply fresh ideas and new tech tools to teaching, whether online or in the classroom. But they often struggle to make widespread improvements because faculty members may resist such efforts,

and higher-education pedagogy has changed little in generations.

- Within the academic work force, institutions must respond to a remade professoriate — one that has many more instructors off the tenure track than on, with many scholars who are past traditional retirement age.
- Today’s students expect, if not demand, more. Colleges have to be more responsive to concerns about health and wellness, academic success, and career prospects.

These issues often require creative, systematic management solutions. According to Hemerling, such organizational change can be exhausting for both CEOs and employees if not done well. Leaders need to communicate frequently and transparently about the need for change in order for it to work, he says.

This executive summary is meant to help college leaders with that communication.



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Innovation

As the pace of technological discovery and the rollout of new digital devices have increased in recent years, academic officials have often had a hard time keeping up. They are expected to maintain educational standards while exploring new delivery methods online and on campus. What's more, colleges want instructors to rethink their traditional methods of teaching, with technology and without it, in part to improve academic outcomes for a new generation of students. This rapidly evolving landscape has resulted in a continuing and complex discussion within higher education about how to move forward.

According to a 2017 survey that Maguire Associates conducted for *The Chronicle*, colleges are ramping up plans to roll out new educational offerings. About half of the respondents said they

were likely to begin online or hybrid programs within the next year. An additional 36 percent said they would start such efforts in the next five years.

Experts warn, however, that colleges often confuse innovation with technology, which doesn't necessarily improve learning. Indeed, the *Chronicle* survey also found that most senior officials believe that their institutions have become only moderately more innovative in teaching and learning practices in the past five years.

The survey also highlighted another important management issue for college leaders: getting faculty members to try new things. There was an almost even split between the numbers of those who at least frequently design their courses, lectures, or syllabi with an eye toward innovation, and those who sometimes or rarely do.

How Much Has Your College Become More Innovative at Teaching and Learning in the Past Five Years?



Source: "Making Way for Innovation: Crafting New Strategies for the Future of Higher Ed," by Michael Anft, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017. Research brief based on a survey by Maguire Associates.

How Often Do Your Faculty Adopt New Innovations in Teaching and Learning?



Source: "Making Way for Innovation: Crafting New Strategies for the Future of Higher Ed," by Michael Anft, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017. Research brief based on a survey by Maguire Associates.

To foster fresh approaches, colleges have embraced design thinking and new teaching and learning centers. Two years ago, Michigan State University, for instance, created its [Hub for Innovation in Learning and Technology](#) to connect specialists in instructional design with professors. At the University of Georgia, administrators have supported [faculty learning communities](#) where instructors trade notes about how to improve the traditional lecture, among other topics.

The pace of technological change and the lack of a way to easily measure progress with changes to teaching methods have made it difficult to identify best practices, or to get all stakeholders at an institution on the same page. Experts worry that these varied approaches toward transformation are perhaps too varied — and lack enough focus. Using the right tools to deliver higher education is key, they say, but they emphasize that there is a lack of understanding about how technology can transform an institution, and that colleges and universities often mistake “activity” for transformation.

One thing seems clear: With budgets tight, college leaders are being asked to do more with less when it comes to educating students. Management practices have to be as innovative as the new approaches to teaching and learning that leaders want to see take root at their institutions.

The Remade Academic Work Force

As college administrators race to keep up with the pace of new technological opportunities and innovations, they must also adapt to changes that move at a far slower speed, but which nonetheless have a major impact on how higher education operates.

One of those changes is in how the academic work force has been remade.

The largest shift has been the growing reliance on faculty members who serve on fixed terms under contract and aren’t on a path toward tenure. According to an analysis of 2015 [data](#) from the U.S. Education Department, 66 percent of the nation’s 1.38 million faculty members were not tenured, not on the tenure track, or in a college system without tenure. Most of them worked under contracts of less than a year, and many worked part time.

The working conditions of adjuncts and other contingent faculty members is not a new concern. But college managers are being pushed to find new ways to improve those conditions, in part because of an increase in [unionization](#) of part-time instructors.

For example, Pennsylvania State University about four years ago started to take steps to ameliorate the worries of so-called fixed-term instructors after they became the majority of the faculty. It began to overhaul its process for promoting instructors off the tenure track. The Faculty Senate recommended that the administration standardize titles for those who are not on the tenure track, and in most cases, include the word “professor” in their titles.

Colleges and universities must also manage an increasing percentage of professors who are at retirement age. From 1995 to 2015, the share of postsecondary instructors age 65 or older increased from 4.4 percent to 11.6 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (The data include teachers at trade schools as well as college professors.)

The 2017 Maguire Associates survey commissioned for *The Chronicle* found that a quarter of college administrators described faculty members working past

traditional retirement age as a top concern. A smaller portion identified as a problem not being able to hire new scholars for tenure-track positions, as well as losing younger faculty members because of a lack of retirements.

But retirement is a tricky issue to manage. Senior professors often have deep institutional knowledge and can contribute to research and teaching well into their 80s or even 90s; administrators don't want to be seen as pushing them aside.

As a result, institutions are trying to offer more-creative incentives to get tenured faculty members to retire. The University of California at Los Angeles allows [faculty members to map out the end of their employment](#). They negotiate perks like a reduced teaching load before retirement or continued support for their research after retirement in exchange for a commitment to step down in the future.

Easing the path to retirement for some professors and improving conditions for others are important steps. But college leaders will continue to have to wrestle with the organization-wide implications of a graying professoriate and a faculty in which the majority of members are off the tenure track.

Student Needs and Success

According to a survey of presidents and student-affairs leaders that Huron Consulting Group conducted for *The Chronicle* in 2017, most college leaders and managers see students as primary drivers of change on campus. Institutions are pivoting to meet the needs, demands, and expectations of an increasingly diverse and complex student population.

The challenges for leaders are extensive: More students than ever are struggling with mental-health issues,

and many flounder with balancing the demands of the academic workload and personal responsibilities. Campus bureaucracies, like financial aid, can seem impenetrable, especially to first-generation students. Students come from a wide array of cultural backgrounds and have varying expectations — more than a quarter of college students are now 25 or older, and an increasing number are the first in their families to attend college or are members of minorities. Economically disadvantaged students need help getting basic necessities, like books, while many of the more affluent and privileged want nice dorms, good food, and a Starbucks in the library. And everyone wants a job after graduation.

[The rising demand for mental-health services](#) has forced colleges to contract with outside providers, focus on mental wellness during orientation, and show videos on suicide prevention. The stakes are high: More than one-third of college students had difficulty functioning in the past 12 months because of depression, and nearly 10 percent had “seriously considered suicide,” according to the 2015 National College Health Assessment, conducted by the American College Health Association. [The 2016 annual report](#) from Penn State's Center for Collegiate Mental Health found that 61 percent of students who had been treated at campus health centers reported anxiety as one of their major health concerns.

In addition to confronting and working to ease students' mental-health issues, college leaders face another key issue: improving student success. The path to graduation has become more uncertain — according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, more than a third of students transfer at least once in six years, and many take longer than four

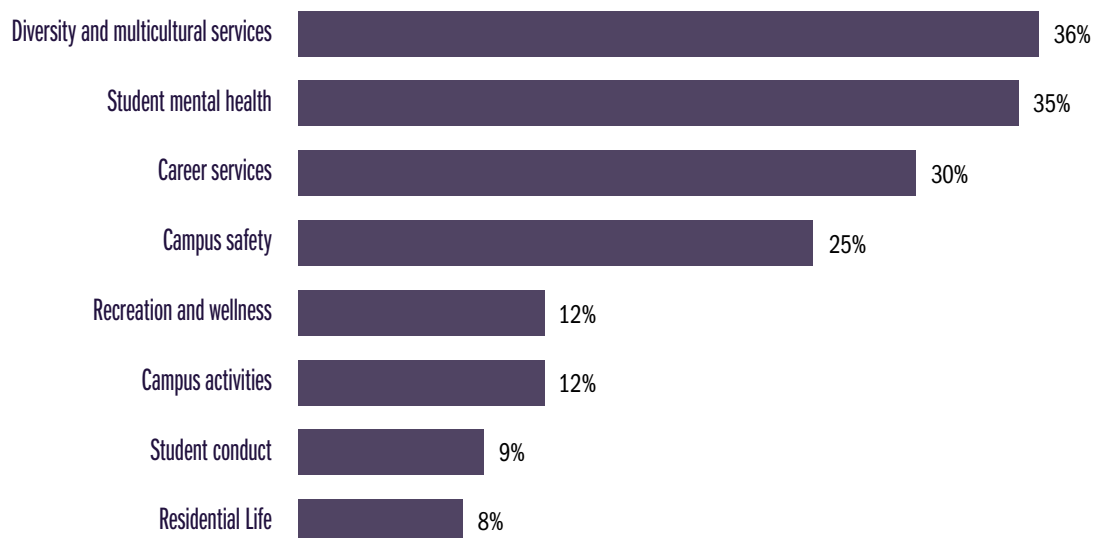
years to obtain their undergraduate degrees. To meet this challenge, colleges are exploring competency-based education, beefing up academic advising and other student services, and improving learning analytics to help with retention efforts.

Other pressing student issues include campus safety, diversity and multicultural services, and career services — all areas that look likely to receive increased

attention and funding in the coming years.

The fear is that if students aren't engaged on campus, aren't emotionally healthy, and don't feel supported or safe, they won't stick around to graduate. It's critical for college leaders to address these issues, because they have a big impact on an institution's effectiveness, retention rates, and ability to attract students.

Where Will Your Institution Likely Focus Additional Resources Next Year?



Source: "The Student-Centered University," by Julie Nicklin Rubley, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017. Research brief based on a survey by Huron Consulting Group.