

A photograph of a meeting or conference. In the foreground, a person's hands are visible, gesturing as if speaking. A black microphone with a red ring is positioned above the hands. The background is blurred, showing other people in a room.

# **BOLD LEADERSHIP, REAL REFORM**

Best Practices in University Governance

American Council of Trustees and Alumni | Institute for Effective Governance



**ACTA**  
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF  
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



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Launched in 1995, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is a non-partisan, non-profit educational organization dedicated to working with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the country to support liberal arts education, high academic standards, the free exchange of ideas on campus, and high-quality education at an affordable price.

ACTA's Institute for Effective Governance, founded in 2003 by college and university trustees for trustees, is devoted to enhancing boards' effectiveness and helping trustees fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities fully and effectively. IEG offers a range of services tailored to the specific needs of individual boards, and focuses on academic quality, academic freedom, and accountability.

The background of the cover is a blurred photograph of a conference room. In the upper half, several black microphones with red accents are visible, extending from the top edge towards the center. In the lower half, a person's hands are shown in a gesture, with fingers spread, as if speaking or gesturing during a presentation. The overall tone is professional and focused on communication and leadership.

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# **BOLD LEADERSHIP, REAL REFORM**

## Best Practices in University Governance

**A**merican higher education has for many years prided itself on being the envy of the world, but it is in danger of losing that hard-earned status. After decades of tuition increases far outpacing inflation, the cost of a college education is higher than ever. Six years after the Great Recession, state funding for higher education remains low.<sup>1</sup> Colleges and universities across the country are seeing their bond ratings drop and their budgets shrink. Employers complain that college graduates are not prepared for the workplace, and many students find themselves saddled with considerable debt and no job to show for it. These are trying times for parents, for students, and for institutions.

Given these trends, it's no wonder that the past few years have seen an upsurge in talk about higher education reform. Governors, state legislators, and even the President of the United States<sup>2</sup> have begun to speak seriously about higher education policy, often adding sharp criticism. They are impatient for change.

As a college or university trustee, you bear fiduciary responsibility for your school. But merely managing your institution will no longer be enough. It is essential that you pursue bold, innovative strategies for promoting academic excellence while holding down costs. The future of American higher education depends on it.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is here to help. In this guide, we lay out 12 best practices for effective, reform-minded university governance. We present examples of colleges and universities that have adopted these policies, providing further guidance on how these practices can best be implemented. With this

guide in hand, you will have the knowledge and tools to make your school a stronger institution.

## **DOING MORE WITH LESS: Implementing Cost-Saving, Quality-Enhancing Reforms**

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LARGE-SCALE CHANGE in higher education is not only possible, *it has happened*, though unfortunately not often enough. With the help of engaged and active boards, the past decade saw two large public university systems successfully implement a variety of cost-saving, quality-enhancing reforms. They are proof that, as difficult as effecting change may be, it can be done. Before exploring the practices and reforms you can implement at your institutions, we begin by telling you their stories.

### **University System of Maryland**

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the University System of Maryland (USM) was in trouble. For the last decade, state funding for the system had swung up and down depending on who controlled the governor's office and legislature, and the overall funding trajectory was downward. Tuition was rising, budgets were tight, and few had faith in the system's leaders.

The USM was buffeted by criticism on all sides. Students, the public, and lawmakers were all taking aim at the system's image of wastefulness and profligacy with money. In the words of regent Cliff Kendall, "Everybody was criticizing the system for having too many administrators, the faculty wasn't working hard enough, and on and on." But instead of brushing off complaints and assuming a defensive posture, the Board of Regents took the critiques seriously. In Kendall's words, "Every suggestion for improvement, every criticism, we recorded and brought back." The USM was being accused of having too many overpaid administrators, so the board investigated administrative salaries and the administrator to student ratio. Some said professors were not teaching enough, so the board looked into teaching loads. Charges of wastefulness led to studies of use of campus facilities.

These investigations helped the board form an action plan. While the board found the administrator to student ratio was acceptable, it also focused on areas that needed improvement. The board found underused facilities, extensive delays in completing four-year degree requirements, and faculty teaching loads that were far too low for a cost-effective public university system.<sup>3</sup>

System chancellor Brit Kirwan and the Board of Regents got to work. In response to these challenges, the board launched the Effectiveness and Efficiency (E&E) Initiative. Its purpose was to “optimize [system] resources to yield savings and cost avoidance.”<sup>4</sup> The regents worked hard to bring campus leadership and faculty on board. They used online tools to help students pick the right courses to decrease time to degree completion, found ways to use classroom and dorm space more efficiently, and increased teaching loads by 10% across the system’s research universities.<sup>5</sup>

Progress was regularly measured in reports submitted in response to the Maryland General Assembly’s annual Joint Chairmen’s Report.<sup>6</sup> E&E Initiative Reports focused on detailing what initiatives had been launched; predictions and targets; assessments of success in meeting stated goals; and plans for the future. The reports articulated goals for increased faculty teaching loads, and actual loads were compared against explicit benchmarks. The reports included relevant financial analyses.<sup>7</sup> On the tenth anniversary of the initiative’s launch, the system issued a comprehensive report assessing the system as a whole, breaking it into units and categories and analyzing its success to date.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the Board of Regents received regular information about the progress and plans of the E&E Initiative. The board took an active role in monitoring its progress and providing support.<sup>9</sup> The E&E Initiative helped rebuild trust between the USM, the state government, and the taxpayers by demonstrating that the Board of Regents was taking steps to spend precious funds wisely and efficiently. The USM has removed over \$130 million in direct costs from its budget; in-state tuition held flat from 2006 through 2009; faculty classroom contact at undergraduate research universities increased by 20%; time-to-degree



reached historic best levels (averaging under 4.5 years); and thousands of students were absorbed despite the absence of additional funding for enrollment growth.<sup>10</sup>

### **State University System of Florida**

In the aftermath of the 2008 recession, the State University System of Florida (SUSF) also faced a crisis. There were huge cutbacks in state funding and the system had major budgetary challenges. Between 2007 and 2012, state funding for the SUSF fell from \$2.6 billion to \$1.7 billion. Educational appropriations per full-time-equivalent student in two- and four-year colleges for FY 2012 were well below the national average.

Against this backdrop, the SUSF managed to thrive in the face of the budget crunch. The chancellor of the SUSF at that time was former lieutenant governor Frank Brogan. Chancellor Brogan was adamant about the system's responsibilities:

During this time of fiscal constraint, we must continue to maximize the effective and efficient use of our resources and work with our partners in the Legislature to achieve the proper balance of revenue derived from appropriation and from tuition. We must also remain keenly aware that the economic pressures our students face are as real as the economic challenges our universities and the Legislature are experiencing.

Despite modest increases, tuition was kept low: the flagship University of Florida still had the lowest tuition among public universities who are members of the prestigious Association of American Universities. Total student enrollment rose 11.2% between 2007 and 2012. During these hard times, graduation rates of first-time-in-college students at the same university improved 4% from the 2007 to 2012 cohorts, and retention rates at the same university for first-time-in-college students rose to 88%.<sup>11</sup>

How did the SUSF manage to improve quality and control costs despite massive reductions in funding? The system board focused on value and efficiency by eliminating 80 undergraduate programs and



suspending 94 others between 2007 and 2012; 96 graduate programs were terminated. These cuts weren't made carelessly, but were part of a wider effort to concentrate on promising programs that played to the system's strengths. In fact, 93 new undergraduate and 109 new graduate programs were added during the same period. The SUSF also managed to limit administrative spending, decreasing such expenditures by 8% since 2008, while increasing expenditures on instruction and research. System schools took steps to improve building utilization and effectively deploy distance learning.<sup>12</sup>

The policies undertaken in Maryland and Florida were spearheaded by active system boards and chancellors as well as engaged boards of trustees at individual institutions. They model what trustees can accomplish when they get the data they need and proactively reform their universities. With these examples in mind, we turn to the best practices that can help your institution better serve students, parents, and taxpayers.

## 12 BEST PRACTICES

### #1 Position Responsibility Statements

At Iowa State University, every faculty member, irrespective of appointment type or rank, has a **position responsibility statement (PRS)** that helps ensure precious faculty time is used with maximum effectiveness. This system decisively challenges the expectation that a great university professor must always be primarily devoted to research, with teaching as a distant competitor for time and attention. There are no fixed ratios to follow in the PRS guidelines for research, instruction, and service. Instead, the university seeks a match between student needs, institutional needs, and faculty skills. At the time of appointment or within the first semester after appointment, the relevant department chair and the faculty member meet in order to agree on the content of

that faculty member's PRS—in other words, how that professor will divide his or her time between teaching, research, and service. Once a PRS is agreed upon, it is signed and dated by the department chair and faculty member. For tenure-eligible/tenured faculty the PRS is to be re-evaluated at least every five years by the faculty member and department chair, but can be reviewed more frequently if necessary.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs uses **faculty responsibility statements (FRS)** as part of its tenure evaluation and promotion process. The FRS “identifies the proportion of effort by the faculty member in 1) professional teaching; 2) scholarship; 3) professional practice; and 4) service” expected of him or her. At Colorado Springs, an FRS is to be adopted within 45 days of employment and may be revised each year.<sup>14</sup>

There are several advantages to using position/faculty responsibility statements as tools to guide the tenure and promotion process. First, and most important, they allow flexibility in defining professors' responsibilities. Given the many differences between faculty in their strengths and interests and at different stages in their careers, it makes little sense to lock them into standardized and bureaucratic expectations for the tenure and promotion process. The research demands placed on a faculty member at the beginning of his or her career should almost certainly differ from those appropriate for a senior scholar. A professor who has recently completed a large research project may have more time available for teaching and advising than a professor who recently began one. Furthermore, different professors may have different strengths as teachers, scholars, and mentors. Position/faculty responsibility statements allow departments to work with professors to craft individualized expectations and responsibilities that can maximize faculty productivity.

Position/faculty responsibility statements also increase transparency and openness in the tenure review process and reduce the potential for abuse and mistrust. They can help improve the post-tenure review process by establishing clear, agreed-upon benchmarks for ongoing productivity, making the process more meaningful for

tenured faculty. As a trustee, you can discuss with the president and provost current expectations for faculty and how to implement a flexible model. The board can then ask the president to provide clear guidelines for the creation of position/faculty responsibility statements. The end result may well be greater faculty morale, more teaching productivity, more carefully-designed and focused research, and more contact between students and faculty.

## #2 Optimizing Classroom Use

The costs of large capital projects are exorbitant, but construction costs are typically less than one-third of the total cost of the building over its lifetime.<sup>15</sup> Even a building largely funded by private donations is ultimately a gift that keeps on *taking*, using operating funds of the institution long after it is built. An official at Rutgers University recently remarked that the “biggest cost savings at colleges and universities today” are in reducing the footprint of excess university facilities. “Especially at the larger colleges and universities,” this official said, “the footprint has just gotten so large, and it costs so much per square foot to just maintain that space.”<sup>16</sup>

It is very tempting for schools to spend large sums of money on new buildings, dormitories, and labs: in the short term, it projects an image of prosperity and growth, and it is a resume builder for administrators. But at a time when many families are struggling to pay for college, and taxpayers feel over-stretched, such expensive projects ought not to be undertaken unless they are absolutely necessary.

The fact is: at far too many institutions, classrooms are woefully underutilized. In its Strategic Plan, for example, Penn State conceded the problem in a remarkable admission against interest:

Too often, these facilities are not fully utilized—and the University constructs additional facilities—because of lack of use outside of certain “prime time” class periods or times of the day. Classroom space at University

Park, for example, is near fully utilized between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on a typical day, but much capacity is under-utilized at other times of the day. While a notable reduction in classroom utilization has occurred at 8:00 a.m., in response to student (and some faculty) preferences, mid- and late-afternoon scheduling remains significantly lower.<sup>17</sup>

The situation at Penn State is typical of that at colleges and universities across the country. So notorious is the limited classroom use on Fridays that some consulting firms do not even include Friday in their calculation of average “weekly” use.<sup>18</sup>

In 2009, the Florida legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability conducted a study on classroom use at public institutions and found that university classrooms were in use approximately half of the time they were available during the week, and state and community college classroom utilization was less than 50%.<sup>19</sup> A report by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia surveying 17 public institutions in the state found that 12 of them used their classroom space less than 40 hours per week on average.<sup>20</sup> Nationwide, one architecture firm estimates that today’s college campuses have an average of 450 square feet per student, up from 160 square feet a generation ago.<sup>21</sup>

Concerns about lack of space can be easily solved. There are three ways to do this. First, an institution can **make better use of existing space on campus**. This includes holding more classes on Fridays and at non-peak hours in the evenings. It could also include expanding weekend class options or online offerings. Commendably, the Florida Board of Governors and Board of Education have jointly adopted the findings of a report that recommends policies requiring students to take a number of off-peak, night or weekend, and online courses prior to graduation.<sup>22</sup> South Texas College has begun offering classes from 8 p.m. until midnight.<sup>23</sup> And New Jersey’s Kean University even began offering tuition discounts of up to 20% for courses taken on Friday or Saturday.<sup>24</sup> The University of Iowa’s Registrar directs departments to

schedule more sections on Friday, noting that it would, among other benefits, “return student focus towards the classroom.”<sup>25</sup> The Report of the Task Force on General Education and Student Learning at the University of Georgia called for a “Seven-Day-a-Week University,” with particular focus on scheduling that would “discourage students from defining the weekend as beginning on Thursday night.”<sup>26</sup>

Another option is to partner with other universities, community colleges, or even local high schools in order to **share facilities**. The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor cooperates with local community colleges in order to share space. This helps the community colleges access needed space at a relatively low cost and allows the University of Michigan to bring in revenue rather than leaving facilities unused. Given that most classes at residential colleges are held during the morning and afternoon, but many community college students take night courses, this arrangement can prove especially fruitful.<sup>27</sup> Schools like Texas State University and Austin Community College have partnerships with local high schools through which they are able to use those high schools’ classrooms.

Your institution can also work to facilitate more interdepartmental sharing through **shared scheduling policies**, another cost-saving policy that the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor has implemented. While classrooms at the university “may be allocated to individual departments,” assignments “are not considered permanent.” Space can be reassigned as the “needs, priorities, and demands” of the institution change. Additionally, all “general purpose” classrooms and auditoriums need to be shared. Individual departments may be responsible for managing the rooms, but the Registrar’s Office is authorized to schedule all classes and final exams in any of them on Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.<sup>28</sup> This policy was established as a solution to frequent classroom scheduling difficulties and a lack of space during popular class times.<sup>29</sup> Instead of simply pouring money into a new building project, the University of Michigan sought to address the issue by setting classroom utilization targets and more efficiently using existing facilities.

Sharing of resources need not be confined to sharing space. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU) System created a **Campus Service Cooperative (CSC)**, through which the different institutions in the system share services, such as human resources capacity. The CSC began in 2012 with a series of workshops for representatives from across MNSCU campuses. With support from IBM, campus leaders began planning to get CSC initiatives off the ground.

Since then, the CSC has had several successes. Collaboration between IT business analysts, financial aid leaders, and the CSC allowed for the streamlining of the student transfer process between state colleges and universities. The process of determining Minnesota State Grant eligibility for transfer students was once the job of 18 full-time-equivalent employees. In coming years, it will be supported by the equivalent of two.<sup>30</sup> Recently, the Cooperative announced the selection of a single print services provider as part of its “Managed Print Services” initiative. The replacement of contracts with other suppliers with this single provider across campuses is projected to save \$2.6 million per year.<sup>31</sup> One MNSCU board member described the CSC as resembling a “Skunk Works” program—referencing the famous aerospace program known for “cutting-edge innovations and successfully operating outside traditional bureaucratic constraints.”<sup>32</sup>

In the words of MNSCU chancellor Steven Rosenstone, the CSC “represents the next generation in the path of efficiency and effectiveness.” It is, he told the system’s Board of Trustees, “a game-changer[.]”<sup>33</sup>

Initiatives like this may receive pushback from staff who are reluctant to end longstanding relationships with service providers and suppliers. Ultimately, however, it is better to make these changes with planning and foresight rather than under the gun, as the University of Virginia recently had to do when confronted with the state’s budgetary shortfall.<sup>34</sup> Students and faculty will come to appreciate that wise decisions in the present will prevent much greater pain in the future.

### #3 Partnering with Community Colleges

Cooperating with community colleges, which are often highly successful in strengthening academic skills and which regularly serve underprivileged and financially disadvantaged students, can help expand access to baccalaureate degrees, improve graduation rates, and lower costs.

Clemson University's **Bridge to Clemson** program shows the potential of such partnerships. It is an invitation-only program for students who "narrowly missed admission to Clemson."<sup>35</sup> Students admitted to this program spend one year at Tri-County Technical College, a nearby community college. While studying there, students receive help from advisers provided by both Tri-County and Clemson. The program includes advising, student support, and student life components, all designed to prepare students for the transition to a four-year, residential college. Subsequent admission to Clemson is conditioned upon maintaining at least a 2.5 GPA and earning a minimum of 30 transferable credits. Should a student meet these requirements, he or she will be admitted to Clemson without having to resubmit an application. Students receive Clemson credit for the classes they take at Tri-County, though the grades earned at Tri-County do not count toward their Clemson GPAs. Should a student fail to meet the requirements for admission to Clemson, he or she must apply for admission at a later date.<sup>36</sup>

Bridge to Clemson's results have been overwhelmingly positive. Students have called the program a "great transition from high school to college."<sup>37</sup> And the graduation rate for 2006 cohort participants who successfully transferred to Clemson after one year was 85.4%,<sup>38</sup> higher than the overall six-year graduation rate for Clemson's 2006 cohort (83%).<sup>39</sup>

Programs like this help address an important issue colleges and universities often face. Dr. Harry Stille, professor emeritus at Erskine College, has shown that admitting underprepared students to public



universities can result in high dropout rates that waste billions of taxpayer dollars.<sup>40</sup> But the alternative need not be shutting such young people out of the system. A partnership with a local community college, combined with appropriate developmental work and guidance before students enter a four-year program can open up doors of opportunity to students while improving graduation rates.

An institution ought not to attempt to be everything to everyone. Instead, it must focus on doing the things it does well. Remediation programs can drain precious resources and accomplish little. That is what the City University of New York (CUNY) found at the turn of the century, when then-Mayor Giuliani commissioned a top-to-bottom evaluation of the system. In light of these findings, CUNY phased out nearly all remedial instruction from its senior colleges. Instead, remediation was centralized in the system's community colleges. This, along with other reforms, helped CUNY undergo a massive turnaround in which graduation rates and academic standards rose and CUNY became a symbol for academic renewal. And despite dire predictions to the contrary, the number of minority students at the four-year colleges actually increased.<sup>41</sup>

While Bridge to Clemson's major focus is on providing remedial instruction, the University of Colorado (CU) **guarantees admission to qualifying community college transfer students** in an effort to use community colleges as an access point to a four-year program. Any transfer from a Colorado community college who has 1) a high school diploma or GED; 2) 30 semester hours of transferable course work, with a GPA of 2.7 or higher; 3) a cumulative GPA of 2.7 or higher for all college coursework, with consistent or improving grades; 4) completion of Colorado's Minimum Academic Preparation Standards;<sup>42</sup> and 5) completion of all admissions documents by the required deadline, is guaranteed admission to the College of Arts and Sciences at CU-Boulder. This program was started in large measure through the efforts of CU regent Stephen Ludwig, who spent several years advocating for the program. By guaranteeing admission to qualified students, the CU program is designed to provide encouragement for

low-income, first-generation community college students to continue their educations and pursue a four-year degree.<sup>43</sup>

Massachusetts' **Joint Admissions Program** and **Tuition Advantage Program (TAP)** represent a similar model that combines guaranteed admission with financial assistance. The Joint Admissions Program allows Massachusetts community college students who are enrolled in an approved academic program and graduate with a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5 to receive guaranteed admission to the University of Massachusetts (UMass) and most other state colleges.<sup>44</sup> TAP provides benefits to students who have earned an associate's degree in the Joint Admissions Program with a cumulative GPA of 3.0. It allows a two-year 33% reduction of in-state tuition (not including fees) at state colleges. UMass-Amherst will even cover up to two years of the remaining tuition expenses of TAP-eligible students provided they attend no later than one year after graduation, enroll continuously until graduation, and maintain a 3.0 GPA while at UMass.<sup>45</sup>

By creating strategic partnerships with local community colleges, a four-year institution can ensure its doors are open to every student who possesses the potential to succeed, irrespective of his or her income or educational background.

## #4 Program Prioritization

The desire to be everything to everyone can also lead colleges and universities to fail to set reasonable academic priorities. When faced with a budget crunch, the temptation may be to cut academic programs across the board. But, as former president of the University of Northern Colorado and founding vice-president of the Lumina Foundation Robert Dickeson notes, such cuts “will inevitably diminish academic quality.”<sup>46</sup> What boards must do is take the courageous step of setting academic priorities.

Several years ago, Minnesota's Bemidji State University faced a budget crisis. The state was looking at a \$6.2 billion budget deficit, and higher education funding was drying up. So in January of 2011,

Bemidji State's president, Dr. Richard Hanson, announced his plan to meet the school's projected \$5 million budget shortfall. His plan was a bold move in the direction of **academic program prioritization**. His plan called for meeting three goals: reducing and reshaping existing programs; focusing on emerging programs; and implementing an institutional distinctiveness agenda.

Rooted in a commitment to avoid across-the-board cuts, Bemidji State had to make some difficult choices. Programs like art history and massage therapy were slated for elimination. Programs from philosophy to sociology to physical education were to be reduced. And the sports program was pared back.

While many faculty members, especially those from departments slated for cuts, opposed the program, academic prioritization meant more than cuts at Bemidji State. The school redirected resources to promising programs and burgeoning fields. It focused emphasis on STEM fields and even added positions to the business and mass communications programs. Likewise, Indian Studies and unique language offerings were strengthened in order to build a nationally distinctive program.<sup>47</sup>

Other schools have adopted similar initiatives. The University of Hartford spent six months evaluating over 250 academic and administrative programs as part of its program prioritization efforts.<sup>48</sup> In 2012, Emory University eliminated programs in education, visual arts, and journalism in order to refocus its resources on "core areas" and "expand into new ones."<sup>49</sup> It is notable that these two institutions undertook their initiatives not under the pressure of financial duress, but as steps to improve the quality of their programs. The Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) conducted a comprehensive statewide academic review and presented its findings to the governor in 2011. The study used several criteria for assessing programs, including: centrality to the sponsoring institution's mission; objective evidence of success in addressing statewide needs; maintenance of a critical mass of majors and graduates; performance on assessments of general education; performance on nationally-normed

tests; average employment placement rates; and alumni and employer satisfaction. Ultimately, “[a]s a result of this academic program review, four-year institutions deleted 72 programs, or 18% of the programs that MDHE identified for review.” At three institutions, multiple independent foreign language programs were folded into a single umbrella foreign language program with separate tracks.<sup>50</sup>

In order to reduce faculty and student opposition to a program of academic prioritization, program evaluations must be done properly. Robert Dickeson recommends “simultaneously evaluating all programs against solid criteria and through an academically defensible process,” in order to ensure that decisions are made fairly and resource reallocation decisions are strengthened. Fair and objective standards will reduce inevitable pushback.

As a trustee, you must take responsibility for shaping your institution’s future. That means insisting that your institution identify its strengths and decide what kind of school it ought to be. Through program prioritization, you can ensure that your institution pursues “targeted excellence rather than across-the-board mediocrity.”<sup>51</sup>

## #5 Academic Reorganization

Perhaps your institution is not prepared to cut programs and degree offerings. That does not mean you cannot make cost-saving changes to your academic programs. A well-executed **academic reorganization** initiative could allow your school to save millions of dollars without eliminating academic offerings or any tenured or tenure-track positions.

Arizona State University (ASU) has pioneered an alternative method of academic structuring that again shows how budget savings can be achieved without compromising academic quality or offerings. Just two years after he became ASU’s president, Michael Crow published a white paper entitled “One University, Many Places,” in which he laid out his vision for the university. The idea behind the tagline is that ASU is “not a system with separate campuses, and not

one main campus with branch campuses. ASU has four distinctive campuses[.]” In other words, ASU reorganized itself so that each campus has a specific focus and mission. For example, the Tempe campus focuses on “research and graduate education along with an undergraduate education that is analytic and preparatory[.]” while the Polytechnic campus focuses on “an applied approach to professional and technological programs ... and an emphasis on technical education[.]”<sup>52</sup> This organizational approach, controversial at the time, has led to decreased duplication, greater efficiency, and more innovative academic programs. It even helped ASU to eliminate the separate accreditation of one campus, and bring it under the university’s single accreditation.

Many universities are stuck with an outmoded academic model in which every discipline and sub-discipline gets its own academic department, replete with the staff and bureaucracy that comes with it. The nature of the academy is such that a distinct academic department is perceived as granting prestige and legitimacy to a discipline. But such a model leads to an unnecessary proliferation of costly administrative staff as well as needless duplication and inefficiency.

ASU began moving away from this traditional, rigid departmental structure and toward a more flexible administrative model. Graduate “faculties” were assembled from across departments to supervise graduate work, freeing graduate programs from departmental control. This allowed professors to be members of several faculty groups at once, increasing the rosters of faculty available in doctoral programs by 72% without making any new hires.

On the undergraduate side, the tie between degree programs and departments also was broken. This allowed schools and departments to merge without a reduction in degree programs offered. It also helped reduce needless course duplication. No longer are funds distributed without a plan, a procedure which only encourages the inefficient duplication of courses. Instead, money is distributed on the basis of planned course enrollments. So instead of multiple departments offering an introductory statistics course, each expecting funding based

on the added credit hours taught, a single department may offer the class and receive funding based on how many students it enrolls.

ASU's academic restructuring has "saved approximately \$500,000 of recurring expenses for each unit eliminated, and the total saved ... was \$13.4 million annually." Just the merger of the College of Design and the College of Arts into a single Institute of Arts and Design saved \$1.5 million. As former ASU executive vice president and provost Elizabeth Capaldi Phillips notes, this is because it became possible to cut down the administrative staff. There are no longer "two deans, two finance or business offices, two admission offices, two directors of undergraduate education, and two directors of graduate education, there is now only one of each."<sup>53</sup> In this administrative downsizing, "faculty administrators" returned full-time to their core function of teaching and research. Significant numbers of professional administrator and classified staff lines could then be eliminated.

The advantages of academic reorganization transcend financial calculations. In fact, ASU's initiative was not undertaken solely due to budgetary considerations.<sup>54</sup> Surveys of academics show that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, research is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and collaborative. Rigid department structures inhibit the interdisciplinary research and learning that is increasingly more important. The current trend has been to turn interdisciplinary fields into their own academic departments, but such a move is unnecessary and wasteful. Collaboration can be increased, research improved, and interdisciplinary degree offerings expanded simply by moving away from the department model. Academic reorganization is thus not only a boon to budgets, but to the core functions of the academy as well.

As Phillips writes, the traditional department structure "suboptimizes the university's resources, because it breeds wasteful competition, an inefficient use of resources, and a rigidity that discourages rapid responses to challenges and opportunities."<sup>55</sup> Your institution can move away from this outdated model and toward a future that can save money without compromising your school's academic mission.

## #6 Course Sharing through Technology

Many observers of higher education tout technological innovations as a threat to traditional brick-and-mortar institutions. But technology can be a powerful tool for improving opportunities and cutting costs at traditional colleges and universities.

The Associated Colleges of the South's (ACS) **New Paradigm Initiative**, launched in 2012, seeks to “broaden and enhance academic offerings for students such as upper level language courses and other specialized offerings not currently available at a number of institutions.”<sup>56</sup> It applies a “blended learning” approach that utilizes new technologies while striving to maintain the personalized approach to education that characterizes residential, liberal arts colleges.

How does this play out in practice? Students at Hendrix College in Arkansas, for example, have enrolled in a weekly theater class at Rollins College in Florida. Remote video technology made this possible. The Rollins course was live-streamed once a week to students, and Hendrix attracted significant interest in the course. Instructors in Chinese language courses at ACS colleges have also been working together to stream classes across campuses.<sup>57</sup>

It is important to remember that these aren't Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which broadcast to thousands of students across the world and which can be taken on a student's own time, but are relatively non-interactive. The New Paradigm Initiative's intercollegiate course-sharing uses live, synchronous sessions in which class enrollment is limited and students must attend classes at specified times, thus preserving the unique advantages offered by small, interactive classes.

Several Ivy League schools have collaborated to create a similar program. Yale, Columbia, and Cornell have created a consortium whereby less commonly taught languages, such as Romanian, Dutch, and Nahuatl are taught to students at each campus simultaneously through video-conferencing. Like the New Paradigm Initiative,



these classes are live and class-size is kept low so as to maintain the “effectiveness of computer-mediated learning.” In the words of one student, “The technology for the class is very similar to a Skype session ... The great thing about it is it allows for viewing the students, the professor and the whiteboard alone so I can get an overall feel of being in a classroom when I’m hundreds of miles away.”<sup>58</sup> Mark Taylor, Chair of the Department of Religion at Columbia University, has also written about how powerful a course that connects students in real time across national borders can be.<sup>59</sup>

This kind of intercollegiate course sharing can help institutions extend more opportunities to students despite tight budgets. With technology that makes it possible to create an intimate “classroom” that stretches across hundreds of miles, there is no reason similar institutions all have to maintain small, niche departments in every discipline. Instead, each institution in a consortium can focus on building up a few departments through which it can develop its specialties and offer courses across schools.

The California Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) notes that reduced facilities usage and lower instructional costs will result in substantial savings. The LAO cites research at the University of Texas that found using distance education reduced costs by \$90 a year per unit—roughly \$2,500 per student.<sup>60</sup>

In the broader economy, division of labor and specialization have led to greater efficiency and quality. Intercollegiate course sharing makes that a possibility in higher education. If your institution is not already involved in such a consortium, talk with your president about reaching out to other institutions and building the kind of trust needed to create one. If your campus is part of a multi-campus system, then consider the cost-savings of consolidating programs across campuses. Urge the president to work with the provost to ask faculty to join in the creation of such courses. Tight budgets and program cuts do not have to mean a reduction in options and quality for students.

## #7 Raising Faculty Productivity

At many colleges and universities, faculty teaching assignments are shockingly low. Limited teaching duties mean fewer available sections for students, making it harder for students to graduate on time and preventing institutions from serving as many students as they otherwise could. It is vital that you, as a trustee, have precise information on the actual teaching responsibilities of the different ranks of faculty in different departments.

As discussed in the introduction, the University System of Maryland was able to **increase teaching assignments** by 10% across the system's research campuses, requiring faculty to teach five and a half, rather than five courses. At the comprehensive universities in the system, teaching loads were raised from seven courses to seven and a half.

How did they do it?

Knowing that faculty, concerned that increased teaching duties could decrease academic quality, often object to such initiatives, the Maryland Effectiveness and Efficiency Initiative took pains to make faculty part of the decision-making process early on. A member of the Board of Regents spoke before the Faculty Senate and clearly laid out why faculty teaching assignments needed to increase. In approaching the issue, he made it clear that if the system's regents failed to take action, the system could face even deeper budget cuts from the state. Additionally, small compromises were made. For example, the board agreed to measure faculty productivity by department rather than by individual faculty member. This gave departments more leeway in deciding how to allocate responsibilities, allowing some faculty to teach less, so long as others taught more.<sup>61</sup>

There are metrics, too, to measure research productivity and impact. Professor Lawrence Martin, a former dean and associate provost at Stony Brook University, has developed a program called **Academic Analytics**.<sup>62</sup> The Academic Analytics Database "includes information on over 270,000 faculty members ... at more than 385

universities in the United States and abroad.” Data include measures of publication of scholarly work, citations in published journal articles, government research funding, and academic awards. Academic Analytics data are “designed to support university leaders as they strive for excellence” and can serve as “a useful tool to guide them in understanding strengths and weaknesses, establishing standards, allocating resources, and monitoring performance.”<sup>63</sup> Academic Analytics’ clients are universities and university systems themselves, and its services can be a useful tool to university leaders, including trustees.

It is important to remember that not all research is created equal. As Professor Mark Bauerlein of Emory University has persuasively shown, a great deal of faculty research contributes little to the world of scholarship; it is read by few and cited by fewer.<sup>64</sup> It is therefore incumbent on institutions to measure not only the quantity of research produced, but also its quality and value. For example, certain departments could announce that they will no longer require the publication of a book for tenure, but will instead judge tenure-track faculty on the basis of the quality of a smaller amount of research output and a greater commitment to teaching.<sup>65</sup>

However you define and analyze faculty productivity, in keeping with your school’s mission, it is of vital importance that trustees make sure productivity is measured and, where it is already being measured, ensure that it is reported clearly and on a regular schedule. At a time when many universities are struggling financially, measuring faculty productivity is an indispensable part of responsible stewardship.

## #8 Presidential Performance Pay

Executive compensation in higher education has risen to a level far beyond justification. The *Chronicle of Higher Education*’s annual report on presidential pay at private and public institutions shows base pay for many chief executives that tops the salary of the President of the United States. Many compensation packages exceed \$1 million.<sup>66</sup> At

a time when families are struggling to make ends meet in a sluggish economy, this is simply unconscionable.

It is sometimes argued that a generous and competitive compensation package is essential for attracting the kind of talent your institution needs for a job as challenging as university or college president. But Purdue University's Mitch Daniels and the Purdue University board show there is an alternative. Daniels accepted a base pay that was lower than his predecessor's, something almost unheard of in higher education. Even better, Daniels' contract ties nearly one-third of his compensation to five performance benchmarks. These are 1) fundraising; 2) improving graduation rates; 3) improving affordability; 4) academic excellence; and 5) student academic knowledge. These metrics are weighted, with different measures accounting for different percentages of performance-pay. Though it is a five-year contract, the president's pay starts back at the base salary every year, with the performance-pay evaluated annually based on measurable progress in the designated areas.<sup>67</sup>

Not every college or university president would accept such an arrangement, but more schools need to move toward this type of performance-based model. Should you need to conduct a presidential search, a candidate's openness to a performance-based compensation package ought to be a consideration in evaluation. This model could even be extended to other senior administrators, as Purdue also began doing in 2013.<sup>68</sup> Top administrators who are willing to put their own leadership to the test are those who promise to be most effective.

## **#9** Graduation Rate Initiatives

Graduation rates at many American colleges and universities are abysmal. The U.S. Department of Education reports that the four-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time freshman students at all four-year institutions is just 38.6%. Even the six-year graduation rate is under 60%.<sup>69</sup>

If you are seeking to improve the graduation rate at your institution, California State University's (CSU) **Graduation Initiative** may provide a model. The initiative, launched in 2010, involves all 23 of CSU's campuses and aims to raise six-year graduation rates by 8%. This target was set with the goal of putting CSU's graduation rate in the top quartile of the nation.<sup>70</sup>

The initiative has many moving parts, and different schools are adopting a variety of measures to improve graduation rates. Humboldt State University has adopted policies that place limits on second majors or minors and require mandatory and enforceable graduation plans for students with 110 units.<sup>71</sup> CSU-Bakersfield has taken action to expand pre-collegiate remediation programs and provide early intervention to struggling students.<sup>72</sup> And CSU-East Bay is seeking to consolidate and better coordinate student advising.<sup>73</sup>

An important part of the initiative is constant evaluation of project results. Through monthly, quarterly, and yearly updates and reports, the Graduation Initiative can constantly monitor whether or not improvements are being made and targets are being hit.

CSU's system-wide project followed on the heels of impressive improvements in graduation rates at CSU-Long Beach. Despite big increases in the number of students admitted, and in the number of low-income, Pell Grant-eligible students particularly, Long Beach managed to increase its six-year graduation rate from 31% to 52%. It did this by requiring freshman advising before class registration; creating learning communities for at-risk students needing math and English remediation; stepping up attention to enrollment and schedule management; and closing and consolidating under-enrolled courses.<sup>74</sup>

The steps taken at each of the system's schools have common denominators. They seek to intervene as early as possible, making sure students are on a track to graduation from the moment they set foot on campus. They seek to take care of remediation as early as possible. They involve regular monitoring of student progress. And they seek to keep students focused on their end-goal: graduating with a degree.

What makes CSU's model so attractive is that it is part of a system-wide initiative with frequent reporting. This allows universities within the system to learn from one another and to share best practices. It also prevents policies from being implemented in a scattershot manner by setting clear targets and goals.

In addition to learning from CSU's initiative, you can also look into **strengthening general education requirements** as part of a broader effort to boost graduation rates. Complete College America has found that the average college student takes far more credits than are necessary for graduation (e.g. 136.5 credits for a 120 credit bachelor's degree). This is one of the reasons many students fail to graduate on time. In Florida, the state sought to address this issue with an "Excess Credit Hour Surcharge" for all credits taken above those required for graduation.<sup>75</sup> However, this move has not yet gone far enough in reducing excess credits and bringing down completion time.

Complete College America suggests that "a common general education core program" can help cut down on excess credit hours by creating curricular consistency.<sup>76</sup> As a Lumina Foundation report so aptly put it, "students get tangled up when there are too many course choices; lacking guidance, they take too many non-essential courses and prolong the time it takes to get a degree."<sup>77</sup> Instead of a vast menu of unrelated "distributional requirements," a well-designed core curriculum focuses students on fundamentals needed for success in college and later in career and community.

Thus, strengthening general education requirements can both improve the quality and breadth of students' educations while also addressing the problem of low graduation rates.

## #10 Measuring Student Learning

Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa rocked the academic world when they published *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Their research shows that for too many students, a college education provides little in the way of actual education. On key metrics

of learning like critical thinking, complex reasoning, and written communication, many students show little or no improvement during their time in college. To be precise, their study finds 45% of students show no significant learning gains during the first two years of college, and 36% show no improvement after a full four years.<sup>78</sup>

The tool Arum and Roksa used as a measure of student learning gains was the Council for Aid to Education's **Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)**. First piloted in 2002-03, the CLA has been available to colleges and universities since the spring of 2004. Its questions are designed to replicate the challenges of "real-world" employment. For example, a test-taker could be asked to write a memo or policy recommendation after evaluating a variety of sources.<sup>79</sup>

In 2013, the Council for Aid to Education released an updated version of the exam called **CLA+**. Whereas the CLA exam was designed as a measure of *institutional* accountability, the CLA+ is additionally focused on assessing the skills of *individual* students. CLA+ results, therefore, hold the potential not only to be useful for institutional accountability, but also to be used as a credential in lieu of, or in addition to, resumes and college transcripts. They can also provide "data to faculty and administrators for making decisions about grading, scholarships, admission, or placement."<sup>80</sup>

CLA+ can serve as a valuable tool for your institution. As a trustee, it is vital that you know how effectively your institution is educating students. The CLA+, or another nationally-normed learning assessment like the **ACT's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)** or the **Education Testing Service's Proficiency Profile**, will provide you with crucial information that you can use to evaluate how effectively your college or university is fulfilling its educational mission. Such exams are also formative assessments to improve teaching and learning. Over 700 institutions in and outside of the United States have used the CLA, including schools as diverse as Arizona State University, Kalamazoo College, and Harvard University. The CLA+ was received by the business community with substantial enthusiasm and promises to be a widely used instrument.<sup>81</sup>



In advocating for the use of a nationally-normed learning assessment, you may encounter several objections. Many within the higher education establishment fear such transparent accountability. But clear metrics are the indispensable prerequisite for improvement. The assessments discussed here will not promote “teaching to the test”—they are all designed to measure cognitive skills rather than mastery of specific knowledge.

These instruments measure precisely the kinds of skills colleges ought to be providing. Helping students succeed at the tasks demanded by the workplace is most certainly valuable preparation. And remember that nationally-normed assessments provide unique information that cannot be gained from “portfolio assessments” which evaluate students based on their “best” performances. The CLA+ and similar exams are far more objective.<sup>82</sup> Whatever other accountability measures and student evaluations your institution uses, a nationally-normed learning assessment ought to be among them.

## #11 Honest Transcripts

Grade inflation is a national crisis. Professors Stuart Rojstaczer and Christopher Healy have documented that the most common grade given at colleges and universities today (43%) is an “A.”<sup>83</sup> This problem extends to America’s elite universities. Recently, the *Harvard Crimson* reported that the median grade at Harvard College is an “A-” and the most common grade awarded is an “A.”<sup>84</sup> The effects of grade inflation can be seen in growing employer frustration about the usefulness of college transcripts and shockingly low levels of student engagement.

One practice that can rein in grade inflation is the adoption of “**honest transcripts.**” Such transcripts publish the average class grade alongside a student’s grade—making clear whether or not a student earned a high mark through outstanding work or merely by taking easy classes. The Texas legislature has been considering a bill that would mandate honest transcripts at public universities in the state.<sup>85</sup>

But you don't have to wait for legislatures to pass laws in order to take action as a trustee. Columbia University implemented a version of honest transcripts when it began printing the percentage of A-range grades in each class on transcripts.<sup>86</sup> The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill prints the median class grade as well as each student's percentile ranking in each class on its transcripts.<sup>87</sup>

Trustees have successfully taken action on this front before. In 2006, the University of Colorado Board of Regents decided to add class rank to the transcripts of students who requested it. That modest measure alone led to a decrease in average GPA, though its effect was muted because it remained a voluntary practice.<sup>88</sup> As a trustee, you can also request information about the grade distribution over time of each department or program, thus identifying pockets of rigorous or inflated grading. Collecting such information will help you determine which specific reforms you can adopt to fight grade inflation and provide valid and trustworthy student transcripts.

## #12 Increasing Transparency and Sharing Data

What you are about to read is perhaps the most important of all the best practices.

All too often, colleges and universities are unwilling to share the kind of data that policymakers, students, and parents need in order to make informed choices about higher education. As a trustee, you should work to promote initiatives that will increase transparency at your institution.

The University of Texas System is a pioneer in this area. Its **System Productivity Dashboard** is “a business intelligence system that includes web-based applications for extracting and analyzing institutional data.” Its function is “to provide current data, trends over time, and comparative benchmarking across a variety of metrics in support of better decision- and policy-making.” The dashboard is publicly available and allows “viewing, exploring, and sharing data related to

the performance across all mission areas of UT System and UT System institutions.”<sup>89</sup>

The dashboard tracks performance across all of the system’s 15 campuses. It includes data on enrollment, graduation rates, faculty productivity, return on research, endowment size, and cost per degree. Users can manipulate the data in a variety of ways and extract Excel spreadsheets in order to delve further into the numbers.

The dashboard is graph-heavy and can be challenging for a wider public to use.<sup>90</sup> The State University System of Florida Board of Governors has addressed this issue with a very user-friendly design. It publishes **annual accountability reports**, which include information on access to and production of degrees, meeting statewide workforce needs, research capacity, resources, efficiency, and effectiveness. Reports are published for the individual institutions in the system as well as for the University System as a whole. These accountability reports are extraordinarily lucid. Florida’s accountability reports are accessible to any layman looking for information about the system’s schools. And the most recent report is even accompanied by an online dashboard similar to that of Texas.<sup>91</sup>

One of the most impressive things about the accountability reports is the candor with which the system’s leaders are willing to admit deficiencies,<sup>92</sup> such as less-than-ideal graduation rates. In this respect, the State University System of Florida is a model for transparency and accountability.

Such transparency must become standard procedure for all colleges and universities. By making information available and holding schools publicly accountable, governing boards will shore up trust among the public and its representatives and also drive improvement.

The examples in this guide illustrate a wide variety of proven best practices that have been implemented at institutions of all types across the country. They show that through bold leadership, colleges and universities can lower costs, increase efficiency, and improve

educational quality. Their success stands as an ongoing reminder that significant improvements in academic quality and cost-effectiveness can be implemented and implemented quickly.

As always, ACTA's Institute for Effective Governance is here to help. We are ready with information and advice. Drawing on a broad network of higher education experts, we can facilitate board study sessions and retreats and organize regional conferences on key topics in higher education policy and governance. On ACTA's website, trustees can find an extensive range of reports and guides designed to help them understand the many issues they encounter.

We welcome your questions and contact at any time, by phone: 202-467-6787 or email: [info@goacta.org](mailto:info@goacta.org), attention: Institute for Effective Governance.

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American Council of Trustees and Alumni  
1726 M Street NW, Suite 802  
Washington, DC 20036  
P: 202.467.6787 • F: 202.467.6784  
info@GoACTA.org • GoACTA.org