



# 2019 Higher Education Trends

*Following are a few statements made about trends that impact higher education and accreditation. They are taken from a Survey to Members in January 2019. At the end of each section are general trends that were identified by HLC staff members in the spring and summer of 2018.*

## FINANCE

- Other English-speaking nations are becoming increasingly competitive for international students.
- Stress on institutions that absorb large numbers of international students.
- Funding is a primary concern; enrollment declines, sustainability.
- New business models for higher education.
- A big concern about financial literacy.
- The free tuition movement – benefits and challenges.
- Increase competition – among institutions and between and among sectors (mission creep, etc.)
- Mergers and acquisitions (affiliations, collaborations).
- Increased litigation.
- Rising debt and rising tuition discounting.
- Less federal grants.
- Increasing health care costs.
- Increase in school closings.
- Importance of data-driven decisions.
- Fundraising opportunities and challenges.
- Decreased state and local funding – varies by state.
- Performance-based funding.
- Pipeline of students decreasing.
- Push for removing duplication of programs, consolidations, mergers.
- Business models are outdated.
- Out-migration from states.
- Competition (and politics among sectors).
- Institutions will cannibalize each other for students.
- Push for free college. Impact on private institutions.
- Low unemployment = less students.
- Data reporting is overwhelming, costly and does not always lead to student success.
- The high cost of pensions.
- Personnel:
  - Talent drain and competition.
  - Retirements on the increase.

## From HLC

- Recognition that new business models are needed to serve learners and sustain colleges and universities.
- Financial challenges will force institutions to do a “prosperity gap” to honestly and transparently recognize their strengths, weaknesses and strategically plan for the future.

## From HLC (cont.)

- For the first time in higher education's history, institutions are failing financially and will either volunteer to close or be forced to do so by the states, accreditors and the federal government. Small private institutions in rural area are the sector most at-risk.
- States continue to disinvest in higher education, forcing the costs to become covered by increased tuition and fees.

## ACADEMIC, STUDENT SERVICES

- A smaller culturally diverse global population due to recent changes for international students.
- Importance of quality in international programs to allow for seamless transfer.
- Importance of global citizenship.
- Greater acceptance of online degrees.
- Concerns that advanced research will migrate to research universities in countries with leadership that supports science.
- These students have a cultural influence in the universities they attend. Would be a loss.
- International students call upon the role of U.S. for doctoral-level ministry studies (reduction likely going forward).
- Focus on outcomes by many stakeholders.
- A positive growth of online programs – concern for online programs.
- Declining number high school graduates.
- Political pressures.
- Potential decreased federal regulations (not so sure, CTA, etc.).
- Challenges with the credit hour.
- Debate on tenure.
- Accreditation vs. Innovation.
- Influx of micro-credential and certificates.
- New providers. Focus on credentials versus degrees.
- Importance of keeping faculty informed.
- Declining support for developmental education.

- Faculty qualifications.
- Mental and emotional stress of student requiring more and new support services.
- Completion.
- Increased accountability.
- Transfer and articulation.
- The student success imperative.
- Need for peer reviewers – increased training in all these areas.
- Increased need for innovation.
- Lack of jobs for graduates.
- Lack of graduates for some jobs.
- Do not revert to “ancient thinking” or a cookie-cutter approach.
- Importance (and challenges) of dual enrollment.
- Outcomes focus.
- Transfer and articulation.
- Technology, Facilities
  - Increased Open Educational Resources (OERs).
  - Facilities – need less, have more deferred maintenance.
  - Role of technology is critical.
  - Role of Artificial Intelligence in higher education.

## From HLC

- Higher education is a way to earn credentials; to date that translates to earning a degree. That has all changed, and certificates or other stackable paths are coming of age. Colleges and universities unwilling to respond to this disruption will become increasingly at risk.
- The national pressures to use bright lines and a focus on outcomes (graduation rates, student debt, etc.) requires the context of sectors and environments. This may lead to risk-managed accreditation and differential accreditation.
- Time to degree (or other credentials) is very important both to learners and employers.
- The question of who regulates higher education and who assures quality is blending, confusing the stakeholders and causing defensive reactions that might not lead to productive changes for learners.

## POLITICAL, REGULATORY

- A decline in international students due to federal actions.
- International regulations on funding for students impact enrollment.
- GDPR regulations.
- EU privacy implications.
- Requirement for recognition by international agencies or councils.
- Threat to sanctuary states.
- Brexit will disrupt the higher education landscape in Europe.
- Political pressures.
- Potential decreased federal regulations (not so sure, CTA, etc.)
- Political polarization.
- Debate at the federal level about regional accreditation.
- GASB changes.
- Unqualified decision-makers in D.C.
- Political influence on programs (schools of education in one comment).

### From HLC

- Higher education is over-regulated by outdated rules and regulations at the federal level.
- There is a growing demand for decreased federal regulation.
- Political influences can pressure higher education to change during a certain time frame versus allowing for visionary long-term opportunities and solutions.
- N.B. Addition: In Negotiated Rulemaking (January-April 2019) and the position paper released from the White House (3.18.19), it is very clear that pushing regional accreditors to become national accreditors will be continued to be a focus in D.C. Presidential input from HLC member institutions will be important as the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act is underway.

## LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE

- National debate on shared governance.
- Leadership – at institutions, the states and in D.C.
- The leadership pipeline for presidencies.
- Governance issues (exacerbated with elected boards).
- Changing leadership – governors, chancellors, system CEOs.
- The importance of mission-driven decision-making.

### From HLC

- *Governance problems* create a huge productivity gap for administrators due to the huge opportunity cost of attending to split boards, disagreements with the CEO or the propagation of individual agendas.
- N.B. Addition: *Leadership changes* at institutions often place an institution in flux, and frequent turnovers suggest there may be underlying concerns.
- At the federal, state and local levels elected officials can have a large impact on higher education.

## PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS, REPUTATION OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Public perceptions of the VALUE of higher education, Return on Investment. Aligns with rising COST.
- Reputational issues (leaders, scandals) for higher education.
- Branding and marketing needs.
- Impact of predatory lending and schools.
- Ground/helicopter parents.
- Increased need for community engagement.

### From HLC

- Increased *public scrutiny of higher education* is tied to a widespread belief that a college degree is not worth the Return on Investment.
- Stakeholders will insist that transparency is increasingly expected.

### From HLC (cont.)

- The historical *liberal leanings of higher education are in conflict with an increasingly conservative movement in America*. This leaves colleges and universities under greater scrutiny, but also “suspicion.”
- A lot of *ill-informed stakeholders and influencers* are positioning American higher education in ways that detract from its international standing. The other perspective is that higher education needs to be *open to change and less defensive*.

### SAFETY AND SECURITY, ENVIRONMENT

- Fear for safety in traveling internationally.
- The free speech and safe zone debate.
- Safety on campuses.
- Climate change.
- Opioid epidemic.

### From HLC

- Social issues are on the rise at colleges and universities – ranging from freedom of speech to campus safety.
- Sexual harassment and assault are issues which are no longer being summarily dismissed and/or diminished on the campuses.

### ACCESS, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

- Move toward nationalism deters enrollments.
- Importance of equity among institutions and student populations.
- Diversity and inclusion – barriers to small institutions to meet accreditation standards in this area.
- Cultural fluency.
- One state – movement by the legislature to prohibit public funding for classes that disparage dominant culture.

### From HLC

- The access agenda remains very important, but it is at-risk due to increased competition and less financial support.
- The number of international students is declining.

