

# **ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**THE ART AND SCIENCE  
OF CREATING THE RIGHT ACADEMIC  
PROGRAMS**

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MELISSA MORRISS-OLSON

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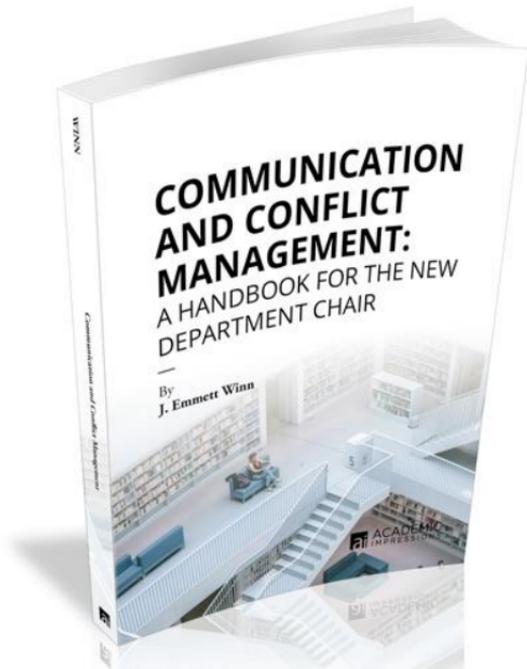
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# FOREWORD

The challenges facing higher education in recent times are well documented. The management responses that have served institutions and their leaders well for the past many years are no longer sufficient in this current highly fluid environment. Frankly, I doubt that the traditional higher education management strategies and responses to challenges have ever been optimal for creating long-term institutional resiliency. This was the focus of my doctoral dissertation in the mid-1990s. I studied the management practices and financial conditions of more than 100 small colleges and found that those colleges best equipped to survive and thrive in turbulent times exhibited something that I termed an “entrepreneurial mindset.” At the end of the day, this mindset was more important in accounting for an institution’s viability (or lack thereof) than any particular management skill set.

What is an entrepreneurial mindset? In my study, successful institutions developed and sustained an outward-looking orientation while also cultivating a discipline around driving entrepreneurial growth in strategic ways that leveraged and strengthened their mission.

Never before has it been so critical for colleges and universities, and their leaders, to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset. Especially for resource-constrained institutions (which is most of us), traditional financial management approaches (such as, resource prioritization, cutting one’s way to sustainability, and/or trying to recruit one’s way out of enrollment difficulties) are no longer sufficient long-term solutions. In this current context, successful institutions have a keen understanding about the forces that are most likely to disrupt or impact their institution.

They are highly strategic and savvy about leveraging their resources—particularly their academic program portfolio—in agile and responsive ways. This is what having an entrepreneurial mindset is all about—nurturing such a mindset at the institutional level requires art and science.

From my experience, both the art and the science are critical for ensuring financially sound, entrepreneurial growth in the current higher education context. Having a rigorous discipline that considers both elements allows you to avoid the twin dangers of either getting caught in “analysis paralysis” or making avoidable errors by flying by the seat of your pants. Such a discipline helps you move from “dream it → build it” to calculating what it will take to be successful. At the end of the day, these do not need to be mutually exclusive pursuits. I believe that true entrepreneurial thinking when applied in an academic context can help institutions fully tap their mission-centric innate potential. When art and science are applied in tandem, an entrepreneurial mindset can contribute to a deepened commitment to the educational mission of the institution.

I have spent my nearly 40-year career in higher education working in mission-centric, resource-constrained contexts, a wonderful environment for developing the ability to think and act creatively to meet the challenges that are always present. Indeed, I credit this experience for my personal formation as an academic entrepreneur. Throughout my career in higher education, I have been focused on looking outward and asking key questions, such as: “How can we do this differently,” “What do we do really well that might be leveraged in new and unique ways,” and “What market opportunities exist that we are uniquely equipped to meet?”

Across the span of my career, I have had the opportunity to lead the development of many new academic programs and initiatives and I have learned a great deal about what works. I have also experienced first-hand the difficulty of instituting change in an academic environment. There are many barriers to change at play at any given time in any college or university and the launch of a new academic program can sometimes serve as a lightning rod for surfacing resistance that might otherwise lay dormant.

Through teaching and mentoring other professionals in the “art and science” of new academic program development, I know that virtually anyone can become an academic entrepreneur. While someone may be innately creative or innovative, the attributes that comprise an entrepreneurial mindset can be taught and developed. That is what this book is all about.

## **For New and Seasoned Academic Leaders**

This is the book I wish I’d had when I started out in higher education many years ago. Most academic leaders come to their roles without experience in entrepreneurial leadership or thinking or in how to strategically manage and leverage the institution’s academic resources. This was certainly my experience. For those who are new to academic leadership, whether it be in a department or division chair, dean, or provost role, this book will provide you with a roadmap for setting the stage for innovation on your campus and developing and executing a strategic approach to managing your academic program portfolio.

This book will also be a valuable resource for seasoned academic leaders who want to become stronger entre-

preneurial thinkers and hone their skills in identifying, evaluating, and operationalizing new academic program ideas. This book includes many examples from other institutions and templates that can be easily adapted to meet the needs of your particular campus.

Doing well in this current environment requires that academic leaders think and act differently than their predecessors did even a few years ago. In many ways, today's academic leader needs to think like an investment portfolio manager. Individual academic programs do not exist in isolation within the institution. Instead, each program resides in a complex web of inputs and outcomes, and every resource decision you make about an individual program has a bearing on the broader institution, its infrastructure, and its resource capacity. In considering new programs to add to the mix, provosts and deans need to evaluate how the entire academic portfolio will be impacted by this addition and what this might mean for the broader institution in turn. Indeed, the overall reputation, quality, and financial viability of the institution are determined in large part according to the particular mix of programs that you offer. Wise and savvy academic leaders are highly intentional in shaping and managing this mix to achieve the desired balance. This begins with having a clear-eyed understanding about each program's individual net financial contribution as well as the specific ways that each program promotes or detracts from the institution's reputation and brand.

## **Navigating This Book**

This book is designed as a guide through the process of identifying and operationalizing new academic program ideas. It's organized in three sections, each of which

focuses on an important aspect of academic entrepreneurship.

**Section I** is all about the art side of academic entrepreneurship starting with those important trends and key disruptive forces that are shaping the current wave of higher education transformation. Understanding the forces that are at work in your own particular campus context is a helpful starting point for identifying new initiatives including new program possibilities. Given the challenges facing higher education, entrepreneurial leadership skills are essential, yet most academic leaders come to their roles lacking the experience which can hone such skills. Chapters 2-4 provide tips and techniques that any academic leader can adopt to create a sense of urgency on his or her own campus as well to develop one's own personal entrepreneurial leadership IQ.

There is an abundance of resources that any academic leader can utilize to develop one's entrepreneurial mindset. Plus, there is a growing body of resources available to help provosts and deans nurture innovative thinking on an institutional level. What is critical is this: Academic leaders who are serious about driving entrepreneurial growth on their campuses need to adopt a management approach that balances the art with a rigorous and well supported process for identifying, evaluating, and operationalizing program ideas. This is the science part of academic entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial mindset requires that academic leaders maintain a yin and yang kind of orientation to their work making sure to balance both the art and science in planning and decision making.

In **Section II** we turn our attention to the science side of academic entrepreneurship beginning with Chapter 5 where we consider strategies for fostering new program ideas on demand. While I believe that good ideas can come

from virtually anywhere—anytime, I have learned that there are specific things that you can do to generate fresh thinking and specific ideas. It is also important to have a process for testing the viability of new program ideas before committing resources to a formal program development process. I typically have anywhere from five to seven new program ideas on my short list at any point in time and use the new program testing strategies reviewed in Chapter 5 as a filter for deciding which idea to move forward.

In Chapters 6-8 we will take a deeper dive into the science by providing a step-by-step process for bringing new academic programs to life. This is where things sometimes break down in academic organizations—as the best ideas in the world can easily get swallowed up when the pressure to retain the status quo is fierce. Having a well-articulated and transparent process that is followed consistently will go a long way towards building trust with faculty and heading off potential resistance to change. In Chapter 6, we review the important elements that should be considered as part of your feasibility study to support a new program. At my institution, these elements comprise the feasibility checklist, which all new programs must address as part of the review process. In Chapter 7, we review one additional and very important feasibility study component: the proforma. Most new programs succeed or fail based on their capacity to attract sufficient numbers of students and to generate sufficient financial resources. Section II concludes by considering those things that are important to your new program's long-term success and viability. Understanding that it's impossible to capture all variables on the front end, the potential viability of a program is difficult to fully assess until that program is up and running. While having a discipline around new program development ensures that you will anticipate most of the important potential impact issues, maintaining

a culture of flexibility and responsiveness once the program is launched is equally critical for the program's success. Chapter 8 provides guidance for academic leaders in how to do just this.

In **Section III**, we will return to an important principle that runs as a theme throughout this book, namely, that academic program development is a process that exists within an ecosystem. This ecosystem is comprised of all of the elements, people, and resources that make up your institution not to mention the broader community and world in which your institution resides. Nowhere is it more critical to consider your program's impact and the impact it will have than in the area of new program infrastructure and resource planning. No matter how small your program is or how it's structured or delivered, it will make demands on your institution's infrastructure. To whatever extent you can understand and make these demands transparent and take steps to ensure that your program's needs can be met and are integrated into your broader institutional planning and resource decision-making processes, your program's potential for success will be enhanced.

Consequently, we will delve more deeply in Chapters 9-11 into three areas that can impact your new program's viability—short-term and over time--if not considered early in the program development process. These include program marketing and promotion, the regulatory context, and infrastructure and resource planning. With each of these areas we will review important issues that can hinder your success as well as best practices.

The traditional assumptions that framed resource planning even five years ago are no longer valid in this context, where resources are constrained and the notion of what constitutes “campus space and place” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is

evolving. While it's a challenge to plan for new programs in this context, to be sure, those institutions that harness and leverage the inherent opportunities found in this context will be at great advantage to create unique, responsive, and sustainable programs to meet the needs of the generations to come.

Each chapter concludes with key strategic questions for academic leaders to consider in applying the concepts and strategies reviewed. These questions are intended to help you think broadly and deeply about both the art and science of new academic program development while attending to the unique issues that are particular to your specific campus context and culture. Each section concludes with suggestions for additional resources pertaining to the topics covered. While not conclusive, these suggestions include resources that I have utilized personally and found helpful.

The book concludes with a case study that illustrates many of the principles and strategies reviewed herein. Over the course of the past twenty years, Bay Path University has undergone a significant transformation. Central to this transformation is the execution of a highly intentional, strategic, and well executed academic portfolio management plan that has leveraged the institution's mission in powerful and effective ways. In the concluding section, this case study will be used to summarize and highlight important learnings.

# **SECTION I—BECOMING AN ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEUR**



## OVERVIEW

Successful entrepreneurial academic leaders possess a key understanding about the environmental context in which their institution resides. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the challenges at hand, the campus context often provides inspiration for these leaders. Section I provides guidance for academic leaders of all types and experience levels in how to leverage their unique context to identify and exploit new possibilities. This is what having an entrepreneurial mindset is all about.

Given the challenges facing higher education, entrepreneurial leadership skills are essential, yet most academic leaders do not have the experiences or backgrounds through which this mindset and these skills are developed. In this section, I will provide tips and techniques that any academic leader can adopt to create a sense of urgency on his or her own campus, as well to assess and enhance one's own personal entrepreneurial leadership capabilities.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **DISRUPTION, TRANSFORMATION, AND THE NEW NORMAL**

Higher education is experiencing significant disruption. Nearly every part of the system is undergoing upheaval. From increased competition and financial strain to heightened public skepticism about the value of a college degree, virtually no institution is untouched by the forces sweeping the American higher education landscape. Many prominent higher education observers have issued rather gloomy projections about the fate of the higher education industry.<sup>1</sup>

Often forgotten in these pessimistic observations about the state of America's colleges and universities is the fact that disruption and change are not new to higher education. A look back at the American higher education system since the founding of the first colonial college in 1636 finds several waves of disruption and transformation. Perhaps the most significant period of transformation dates between the Civil War and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. During this forty-year stretch, modern-day conventions of the higher education system were invented. The faculty role became professionalized as the concepts of tenure, academic freedom, and shared governance gained prominence. Also, we have the industrial revolution to thank for the invention and popularization of such characteristics as departments, majors, electives, letter grades, and the credit hour.

While the current wave of disruption is happening on many levels and at a lightning-speed pace, I prefer to view this current period as continuity of a system that has demonstrated remarkable resiliency and adaptation over the past nearly 400 years. In fact, adaptation and transformation are defining features of our American higher education system and might best be viewed as necessary triggers for keeping our system healthy and responsive to the broader and most critical emerging needs of our society. Throughout history, individual institutions and academic leaders who are adept at accurately reading the tea leaves and responding adaptively have proven able to withstand the forces and shift in response to the new reality.

However, what does this take? Disciplined foresight, agile responsiveness, and optimistic resiliency are essential leadership attributes for academic leaders in this new era of uncertainty. Disciplined foresight means developing the practice of being outward looking along with a keen understanding of the forces that are most likely to disrupt or impact your institution. All paths of responsiveness are not equal; nor are all paths appropriate for each and every college or university. As illustrated in the *Many Paths Forward* vignettes that you will find distributed throughout this chapter, one institution's pathway may involve altering its mission (e.g., expanding to online education) while another may involve leveraging a missional strength through new and innovative programming. What is critical here is that leaders must take the time to understand the market context in which their institutions reside, including the forces that may be particularly relevant for their future.

There are often times unique, hidden opportunities that can be found in even the most threatening disruptive force

if leaders look deeply to consider their institution's unique position and context.

## MANY PATHS FORWARD

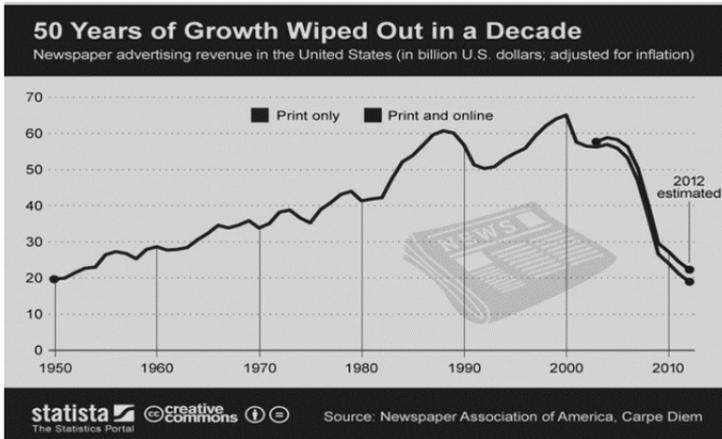
### **High Point University**

When Dr. Nido R. Qubein became the seventh president of High Point University in 2005, the institution enrolled fewer than 1,500 undergraduate students at its landlocked North Carolina campus; students came mostly from the region. Flash forward to 2018: the traditional undergraduate enrollment grew to more than 5,200 students (the majority of whom were residential undergraduates), academic schools were established to highlight institutional strength in the fields of communication, health sciences, art and design, and pharmacy, and new programs in entrepreneurship, interactive gaming, and commerce were added along with new initiatives in physician assistant, pharmacy, and physical therapy. At present, students come from more than 50 states and more than 37 countries with 80% percent of students coming from out of state. During this transformative era, the school moved to a doctoral degree-granting institution and added masters and doctoral programs; they also invested heavily in state-of-the-art technology and resourced academic programs with personnel, facilities, equipment, and budgets. High Point reached the rank of #1 Most Innovative Regional College in the South for making the most innovative improvements in terms of curriculum, faculty, students, campus life, technology or facilities.

When I completed my doctoral dissertation research in the early to mid-1990s, the American higher education system was coming out of a similarly challenged era marked by college closures, mergers, and dire warnings about the decline of the system. Reagan administration cutbacks in higher education aid programs placed particular pressure on families as a result of steep declines in federal financial aid. Colleges and universities were stretched to make up the difference and some smaller colleges failed in the process. While the economic forces were painfully disruptive for a portion of higher education during this time, the current era is marked by the convergence of several disruptive forces unfolding at the same time. Given a college's mission, location, program mix, and resource base among other things, some of these forces will be more threatening than others. Likewise, some forces may present unique transformational opportunities assuming the institution has the courage and agility to respond.

## **Critical Disruptive Forces**

One need not look very far to see the impact of disruption on what many considered to be a secure and recession-proof industry. Like higher education, print media is a 400-year-old institution. From modest beginnings, the newspaper industry experienced 200+ years of extraordinary growth, and expansion and from an industry perspective, enjoyed a stable environment. Then along came radio, and print media made some modifications which allowed it to survive. Then came the Internet. To appreciate the speed and power of technological change, consider the astonishing decline in print advertising revenue after the introduction of the Internet.



Some have argued that the conditions facing higher education today are very similar to those experienced by the print media industry just a decade ago. Clearly, digital disruption is one of the key game changing forces sweeping across nearly every industry including higher education. As the newspaper industry has transformed itself digitally in response to this new reality, every industry, including higher education, will need to consider the opportunities that are available through digital and emerging technology. While the transformation has not been easy, newspapers are now using data and digital means to better understand and serve customer needs, to deliver value in new ways utilizing technological breakthroughs, and to create consistent and relevant customer experiences. These are all things that are essential for colleges and universities to consider as well in order to remain relevant. When asked for his advice for newspaper business leaders, Flint McGlaughlin, Managing Director and CEO of MECLABS Institute, offered this: “Is news going away? News is proliferating. But, brand will still matter, and quality will still matter. And people will always pay for the things they believe are worth it.”<sup>2</sup> This advice is certainly apropos for today’s academic leader as well.

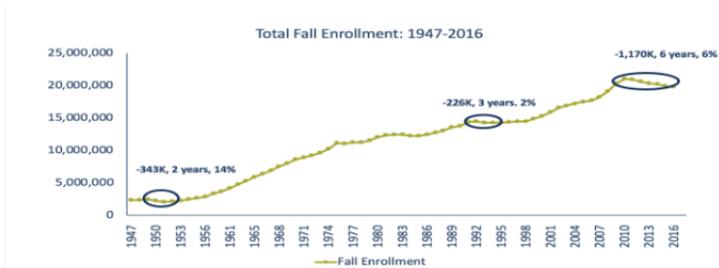
# The Impact of Demographics

In recent years, demographics have shifted in several subtle and not-so-subtle ways that are having a profound impact across nearly all of higher education—especially for some regions of the country such as the northeast and Midwest where the declining birth rate and shrinking traditional college-going aged populations are outpacing the national average.

Three megatrends are worth noting here:

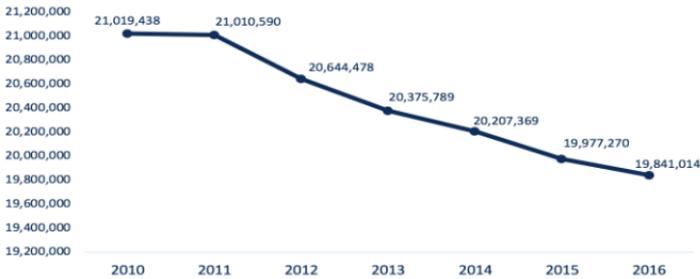
1. Total enrollment in the American higher education system is in a multi-year decline;
2. Critical demographic shifts are causing particular pain for certain segments of American higher education;
3. Online learning continues to increase at a rapid pace.

As shown in the chart below, enrollment has declined significantly only three times in the modern era. The most recent period of decline began in 2010 and is projected to be a long and protracted period extending well into the next decade and beyond.



Source: U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, NCES. 2017 Digest of Educational Statistics.

In numerical headcount terms, total enrollment in degree-granting institutions has declined by more than one million students in six years:



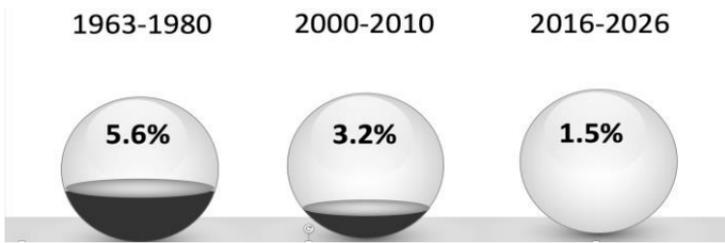
*Source: Digest of Education Statistics*

Most recently, the two-year and for-profit sectors have been especially hard hit; the two-year sector has lost 1.37 million students and the for-profit sector has lost nearly 850,000 students. The private nonprofit sector has remained relatively flat overall while the public four-year sector has experienced modest growth during this same timeframe.

The impact of this enrollment decline is obvious when considering the average growth rate of the higher education system over the past half century. Following a robust period of growth during the 1960s to the early 1980s, things have slowed to a snail's pace more recently. The growth rate is projected to remain virtually flat well into the next decade.

As academic leaders consider future options for their institutions, several implications of this slower growth pace should be kept in mind. Most importantly, colleges that have relied on traditional means of enrollment growth to

## ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

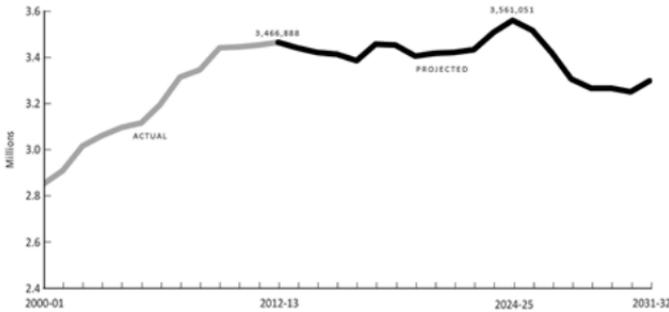


*Source: U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, NCES. 2017 Digest of Educational Statistics*

fund expansion will have to adapt to a slower pace and think creatively about the student markets their institutions are best equipped to serve. The traditional 18 to 22-year-old market will continue to shrink and the competition for these students will become increasingly fierce. Some, if not many, institutions that predominantly rely on this market for their sustainability will need to expand their horizons or face extinction. Leaders would be wise to level-set their growth expectations in light of their own unique market data and devote resources to tracking and managing market share with an eye towards new markets. Understanding the segments that make-up student enrollments across all markets will be a critical priority for the future.

These critical demographic shifts have implications in three other important ways: regional enrollment variations, ability-to-pay, and student academic preparation issues.

As shown below, the projections for the size of the traditional college-going-aged population (total U.S. public and private high school graduates) are dynamic.



*Source: Knocking at the College Door. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2016.*

According to the demographers who prepare the annual Knocking at the College Door report by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education,<sup>3</sup> the drop in the number of public and non-public high school graduates over the next several years will be most profound in the middle and northeastern regions of the country. This shift will be compounded by a concurrent shift in ethnicity as the traditional going-to-college-aged population becomes increasingly more diverse. For those institutions that have historically drawn their enrollments from less diverse markets and have not yet readied their institutions for a more diverse student body, the impact will be significant.

Many colleges and universities will also need to consider how to meet the needs of students who will be increasingly underprepared for the academic demands of the college classroom. According to a recent report issued by ACT, *The Condition of College and Career Readiness*, on average, students of color are entering college today with significant gaps in academic preparation and readiness, especially in contrast to their White, Non-Hispanic classmates. The

findings suggest that African American and Hispanic students are entering college today with significantly less academic preparation on average in English, Reading, Math, and Science than their White classmates.

A third critical impact resulting from these demographic shifts is the student's ability-to-pay for a college education. As reported by The College Board in its *Trends in College Pricing* report, Hispanic and African American families have median incomes that are approximately 61% of White families. Compared to Asian, non-Hispanic and White Non-Hispanic families who report average family incomes of \$93,500 and \$82,070 respectively, the average Hispanic family income is \$51,110 and the average Black family income is \$49,370.

With a shrinking pool of available 18 to 22-year-old students that is demographically stunningly different than the pool of students historically recruited, most institutions will not be able to maintain the status quo. Many will need to radically reimagine who they serve through a combination of *new* market penetration, market development, and program development strategies just to keep pace—not to mention stimulating demand in this low/slow growth and rapidly shifting context.

A third megatrend that needs to be on the radar of every academic leader is the growth in online learning. According to the most recent report issued by the Babson Survey Research Group (2018), online student enrollments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have increased every single year since 2002. “The growth of distance enrollments has been relentless,” said study co-author Julia E. Seaman, research director of the Babson Survey Research Group. “They have gone up when the economy was expanding, when the economy was shrinking, when overall enrollments were growing, and now when overall enrollments are shrinking.” At the same

time, the number of students studying on a campus has dropped by over one million (1,173,805, or 6.4%) between 2012 and 2016. More than 30% of all enrolled students report taking at least one distance education course with enrollments remaining local: 52.8% of all students who took at least one distance course also took a course on-campus, and 56.1% of those who took only distance courses reside in the same state as the institution at which they are enrolled.

## MANY PATHS FORWARD

### **Saint Leo University**

When Dr. Arthur Kirk assumed the presidency of Saint Leo University in 1997, he inherited a tenuously balanced budget, significant deferred maintenance, including: leaking roofs across the campus, depressed salaries, and no funding with which to innovate. Even still, he led a bold reallocation process, abandoning some programs and activities, and cutting others to free up \$600,000 to develop online infrastructure, content, and services to launch online programs. Kirk's boldness and foresight set the stage for the eventual transformation of the institution—from a small campus of 780 students, 91% of whom were enrolled on military bases, to a thriving campus of nearly 20,000 students, 2,300 of whom study on the main campus and the remainder taking classes at over 40 locations in several states and online. Under Kirk's leadership, Saint Leo University built one of the largest and most respected online education programs among private, nonprofit colleges in the nation and became one of the largest catholic universities in the country.

A related key shift that is important to consider is the fact that distance education enrollments are increasingly con-

centrated among a very small number of institutions. The Babson report suggests that approximately 5% of all higher education institutions enroll nearly 50% of all distance education students. The term mega university has been coined to describe these fast-growing institutions; institutions like Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), a private institution that has grown from 8,600 degree-seeking students in 2008 to more than 122,000 in 2018 with a goal of tripling its enrollment by 2023 and Western Governors University, a nonprofit entirely online institution that currently enrolls 100,000 students with plans to serve more than one million learners in the not-so-distant future.<sup>4</sup>

## The Impact of Strained Economics

Increasingly, higher education observers, politicians, economists, the general public, and even those within higher education are suggesting that the higher education business model is broken. For example, in a recent *Inside Higher Education* survey, 13% of presidents reported that they could see their own institutions closing or merging within the next five years.<sup>5</sup> A basis for these concerns can be found in the online tracking report for college and university closings and consolidations maintained by EducationDive. According to this source, between 2016 and 2018, more than 100 for-profit colleges and 20 nonprofit colleges have ceased operations, merged, or been acquired by other entities.<sup>6</sup> Even the larger university systems are experiencing strain as evidenced by recent high-profile consolidations, such as the set of mergers underway within the University of Wisconsin System, which will consolidate 13 two-year colleges into seven four-year colleges and the ongoing consolidation of the

many campuses which make up the University of Georgia system. It is telling that the higher education industry was downgraded by Moody's from stable to negative in December 2017. Standard and Poor's followed suit in January 2018 with a negative outlook due to increased credit pressures.

The shifting enrollment demographics discussed earlier are certainly a critical contributing factor to the strained financial condition of higher education. However, this is not the whole story. The increasingly tuition-dependent financial model is not sustainable—except perhaps for the top 100 institutions that can rely on multi-billion-dollar endowments. Independent institutions have historically balanced their budgets through annual tuition sticker price hikes and increased enrollments, two strategies that are difficult to make work in this new era. Evidence abounds that families can no longer keep pace with the cost of tuition and institutions need to dig ever deeper to fund the gap between sticker price, student financial resources, and family willingness to pay. The chart below shows how since 1978 college tuition has increased faster than virtually any other component of the U.S. Consumer Price Index.<sup>7</sup>



## ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Increasingly, colleges and universities are stepping up to close the funding gap for students resulting in increased tuition discounting and decreased net student tuition revenue. According to a 2018 report by Moody's Investors Service, nearly a fifth of all private colleges report a first-year student tuition discount rate of 60%.<sup>8</sup> The annual NACUBO Tuition Discounting Study confirms the growing practice by many schools, a practice that if left unchecked could potentially risk the financial health of an institution.

### Average Tuition Discount Rate for Private Institutions



Tuition revenues rarely cover the full cost of delivering the education experience on most campuses, and endowment is an increasingly important part of the funding mix. Yet, the median endowment among all ranked institutions at the end of fiscal year 2017 was a modest \$57.5 million with a handful of schools reporting endowments of less than \$1 million.<sup>9</sup> Hundreds of institutions on this same list reported endowments of less than \$100 million.

Institutions are also dealing with aging facilities that are in need of modernization to keep pace with the demands of

## MANY PATHS FORWARD

**Plymouth State University**

Plymouth State University needed to change. A 16% drop in undergraduate enrollment over three years spooked administrators at the tuition-dependent regional public university. They also wanted to better prepare students for an increasingly interdisciplinary world, whether they went on to industry or to graduate school, according to Donald L. Birx, who became president in 2015. When Birx was still new to his role, he set his sights on overhauling the general-education curriculum, which was a distribution model in which students picked courses from a menu of options. In the years that followed, the New Hampshire college, surrounded by mountains and lakes, settled on a vision: Undergraduates would move purposefully from one of a revamped set of first-year seminars to interdisciplinary general-education courses and would connect their experiences with a senior capstone project.

While not everyone is on board with all of the changes, Plymouth State has started to unveil parts of its new curriculum. The college's experience, like that of other institutions, illustrates how fraught big general-education changes can be. "You have to work with faculty and convince them about the need for major change," Birx says. "At the same time, we also are overhauling the administrative side. It's got to be done together synchronously, because it's a system change." Universities change their core curricula for many reasons. At Plymouth State, the new president wanted to increase retention and enrollment by creating excitement around a new model.

today's student—not to mention a high fixed cost structure. Additionally, with anticipated budget cuts to both financial aid and grant funding, there will be continued pressure for institutions to make up the difference through alternative revenue sources and cost containment measures. For public institutions, the combination of declining state funding and mandated limits on tuition increases creates a structural deficit of a different kind. Public institutions have become increasingly privatized but often lack the flexibility to pursue options for alternative revenue funding that are more easily available to private institutions.

A recent report from Ernst & Young affiliate the Parthenon Group found 800 colleges vulnerable to "critical strategic challenges" due to their small size, compared to a much smaller share of colleges with enrollments over 1,000. The report lists several risk-factors for small colleges in particular, including: enrolling fewer than 1,000 students, the absence of online education programs, tuition increases greater than 8% and discounts higher than 35%, and depending on tuition for more than 85% of revenue.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Impact of Technological Innovation**

With the introduction of the Internet, we began a slow creep toward the convergence between our physical and digital worlds. Today's traditional-aged college-going population was weaned on technology and they think and process information fundamentally different than their predecessors. In his groundbreaking article, "Digital Immigrants and Natives," Marc Prensky outlined the

implications of this trend for how we teach this new generation.<sup>11</sup> He differentiates between digital immigrants (those born prior to 1974) and digital natives (those born after 1974) and suggests that by the time the average digital native graduates from high school they will have spent considerably more time engaged in digital activities than reading.

This translates into digital natives having very different expectations for their learning experience than the digital immigrants who are still primarily delivering the experience. This results in challenges as well as opportunities for educators who are willing to embrace these differences and adapt their approach to meet digital natives where they are. A few years ago, we instituted an iPad initiative on my campus. When I heard one of our professors talk about how he had started using the iPad to teach cell biology, the potential for students became obvious. This educator described an experience unconstrained by the physical classroom; instead, his classroom experience was boundaryless. He was connected to his students and his students to one another 24/7 regardless of where they were located physically. Essentially, what he described was an educational experience that places students in control of their learning with access to a rich array of resources accessible at their fingertips.

## **The Impact of Regulatory and Societal Shifts**

With each new U.S. presidential agenda comes a host of political and regulatory changes that have the potential to impact higher education. In the current era, the

deregulatory agenda coupled with selective increased restrictions is reaching every corner of the federal government, including policies and procedures that relate to higher education. For example, a recent slowdown in international student enrollment in American colleges and universities has led some educators to surmise that international students are being deterred by more restrictive policies on visas coupled with the Trump administration's rhetoric on immigration. It's important for leaders to be aware of these shifts and their potential impact on an individual institutional level.

At the same time, some changes are having an apparently lasting impact, such as the multi-year agenda to make college cost and value more transparent to the general public. Through the establishment of the College Scorecard, now freely available on the U.S. Department of Education website,<sup>12</sup> anyone can go online and immediately assess and compare an institution's cost and value. This is a wonderful benefit for the higher education consumer who can easily compare and contrast many institutions at the same time on such features as average annual cost, graduation rates, salary earnings post-graduation, financial aid, and typical student debt after graduation. This increased focus on transparency means that colleges need to be especially diligent about their public institutional data and the stories that the data tell to the external world. Institutions that are focused on providing the best value to their students and are smart about how they use and mine data as evidence for return on investment will be in a strong position in this new era of accountability.

Societal change is a second important concept for academic leaders to be aware of and is something most of us take for granted. Change is ongoing, always happening,

and not something we typically take the time to understand, especially when we are in the midst of it. Yet, the profound social changes that are happening within our country and world right now are having a significant impact on how we relate to each other, how we work together, our workforce structures and needs, and opportunities for the future. Institutions that become adept at understanding and forecasting these social changes with a particular focus on what these changes might mean for workforce needs and demands will find many educational opportunities to exploit. A wonderful example of this can be found in the approach that Southern New Hampshire University recently took in developing its 2018-2023 strategic plan. As described on its website: “We pulled together our best thinking about the current context in which our students live and study (p. 13) and engaged The Institute For The Future to help us think through how the world would be different for our students in 2030 (p. 29, the SNHU 2030 section).<sup>13</sup> A review of SNHU’s plan finds many new strategies that directly respond to this imagined reality and position the institution well for this future state.

As a case in point, a recent Pew Research Center survey<sup>14</sup> found that 87% of workers believe it will be essential for them to get training and develop new job skills throughout their work life in order to keep up with changes in the workplace. This survey noted that employment is much higher among jobs that require an average or above-average level of preparation (including education, experience and job training); average or above-average interpersonal, management, and communication skills; and higher levels of analytical skills, such as critical thinking and computer skills. As the U.S. economy moves deeper into the knowledge age, the need for lifelong learning and ongoing career skill upgrading will provide opportunities

for institutions to present themselves and their program offerings in more relevant ways. The good news here is that the total amount of education needed for workforce relearning is significant and growing. The student of today and tomorrow will need more education—not less. Colleges and universities that are able to shift their educational mission from one that is entirely front loaded to one that meets the needs of learners of all ages and stages will find themselves at an advantage going forward.

As noted earlier, the shifting social and political climate has impacted the number of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. Since the 1950s, the U.S. has seen a surge in the number of international students, hitting a record high of 1.1 million in 2016/2017. As a percentage of all U.S. higher education enrollment, the percentage of international students has seen routine increases over the past several years with the biggest share coming from China, India, and South Korea. Even with the recent slowdown in international student enrollments, the potential market remains significant.

Increasing enrollment of international students is just one opportunity available to colleges and universities in this new global era. Technology has provided the means for all institutions to redefine their market positions and find a distinctive niche by weaving internationalization into curriculum in new and innovative ways. Even for a small liberal arts college in rural Iowa, with the Internet and the right program mix, their market context could be the world.

## MANY PATHS FORWARD

**Indiana University**

When Michael A. McRobbie became president of Indiana University in 2007, things were tough. The state's tax revenue was in a freefall resulting in a steep budget cut for the University—about six percent of its top line. McRobbie and the trustees pursued several of the typical austerity tactics including a salary freeze, cutbacks on travel, and limiting non-essential hiring. McRobbie also went much further, viewing the economic downturn as an opportunity for renovating and upgrading the campus at a relatively cheap price point. Instead of pushing the pause button and hunkering down to weather the retrenchment, McRobbie moved aggressively to add new buildings and programs, to borrow for construction at a cheaper rate, and to scale up fundraising efforts to pay for new construction. In overhauling and adding new programs, McRobbie repurposing and reorganizing under-enrolled majors to make them more market appealing and also highlighted signature areas such as informatics and global studies. Other new programs, such as engineering and architecture, were added to fill important regional market niches while taking advantage of the university's strengths.

## **The Impact of Changing Educational Paradigms**

Perhaps the most seismic shift in recent times is the recognition that learning content and delivery is becoming ever more widely available and increasingly inexpensive.

We are already beginning to see a shift in the delivery of the learning experience from classroom-based to learning anywhere, from instructor-centric to learner-centric, from teacher as instructor to teacher as a facilitator of the learning experience, from mainly oral instruction to technology supported instruction, from fixed seat and place time to any time as learning time, from “you learn what we offer” to “we offer what you want to learn,” and from education as a one-time activity to education as lifelong activity. In addition, the economic issues discussed earlier have resulted in a growing number of free tuition pilot programs at both two-year and four-year institutions and innovative educational models which are intended to bring down the cost of a college education, such as the Paul Quinn College model that combines academic focus, financial aid, and work to keep cost and debt to a minimum. More colleges and universities are also experimenting with open educational resources as a way to bring down the ancillary cost of a college education by replacing expensive textbooks with free or mostly free course resources.

While many institutions still rely predominately on face-to-face delivery mode, the range of delivery options now available to colleges and their students includes hybrid and online, to name just two, with many variations on each. Add to this mix the increased, less costly options available for credentialing (including badges, micro-credentials, nanodegrees, and other alternative models) and the options can seem limitless. Consider, for example, Georgia Institute of Technology’s one-of-a-kind “MOOC-inspired” online Master of Science in Computer Science, built and launched in 2014 in partnership with for-profit providers Udacity and AT&T. Costing only a fraction of the cost of traditional, residential graduate programs, this collaboration brought together leaders in education, MOOCs, and industry to apply the disruptive power of

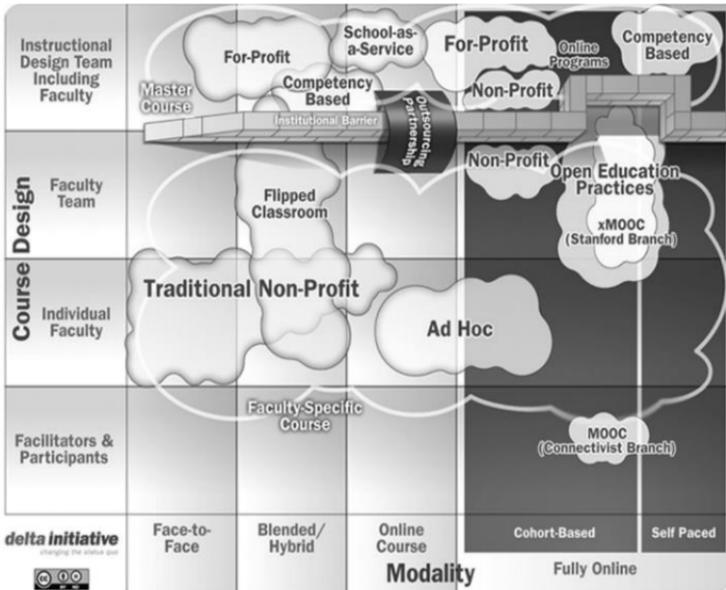
technology to widen the pipeline of high-quality, educated talent needed in computer science fields. In just two years, the program has received nearly 8,000 applications and enrolled nearly 4,000 students, all working their way toward the same Georgia Tech M.S. in Computer Science as their on-campus counterparts.

Or what about the much talked about “Blockchain Revolution” which some suggest will be the most important technological innovation yet to transform higher education? Described as the second generation of the Internet, the blockchain provides a rich, secure, and transparent platform for creating a higher learning global network. According to tech experts Don Tapscott and Alex Tapscott, the blockchain will provide an unparalleled and boundaryless opportunity to transform the educational experience. They envision a network and ecosystem that brings together the world’s best learning materials online and a worldwide network of instructors and educational facilitators with students who will be able to customize their learning paths from anywhere around the globe.<sup>15</sup>

Given that the preponderance of learners now entering the higher education system are digital natives, colleges and universities must clearly understand the potential and limitations of their current educational delivery mix. Understanding one’s core competency or niche in the learning delivery space is perhaps the most essential strategic question today for most colleges and universities. It’s important to be aware of the range of available options when considering new programs. While a bit dated, the Delta Initiative <sup>16</sup> worksheet shown here is a useful tool for academic leaders to use in assessing their current delivery models and mix.

You can carve out a niche and attract a new market (just in terms of delivery) if you understand what and how similar

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programs are being offered. For example, when Bay Path University launched its MFA for Creative Nonfiction, the feasibility study research found that nearly all similar programs required a residency experience which added considerable student cost. Armed with this market data, Bay Path launched one of the first fully online MFA programs with this particular program niche.

When innovating and developing new programs, it's not always necessary to do something entirely new or from scratch. Sometimes, you can capture a new market for a program just by changing the modality by which a program is delivered or by restructuring the course design. Georgia Tech had a long-standing graduate program in computer science when it launched its innovative new program using a different modality.

I want to end this chapter by summarizing the key issues which frame the current higher education landscape.

## MANY PATHS FORWARD

**Trinity Washington University**

President of Trinity Washington University since the late 1980s, Pat McGuire is widely credited as the woman who saved the dying Catholic women's college. One of the longest serving presidents in the nation, McGuire has doubled enrollment, expanded academic programs, completed successful capital campaigns, and led the transformation from college to university. While courageously and deliberately embracing a shift away from a traditional role of educating wealthy white women—a market it was losing—and toward a mission of educating low-income Washington women, including many Black, Latino, and immigrant students, McGuire ensured that the school remain faithful to its rich tradition. Founded by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, TWU's mission remains focused on supporting the success of women through professional programs that are grounded in the liberal arts and that reflect the Catholic intellectual, moral, and social justice tradition. From revising the curriculum to expanding services and programs that support academic achievement and establishing signature initiatives—such as the \$21 million Trinity Center for Women and Girls in Sports—McGuire bucked the traditional norms of higher education by carving out a mission centric niche and aligning the institution's resources to fully leverage and support this niche.

There are five that I believe are most essential for understanding the context and which provide both challenge and opportunity as you think about new programs and other possibilities for the future. The first has to do with *accessibility*. Several key questions are important for academic leaders to address: In the future,

who will have access to my institution, and what kind of experience will they have? Who does my institution currently serve, and how might that need to change going forward? Will my institution be a place of destiny for the privileged or a place of opportunity for the growing majority who are not as privileged? Such questions require that we understand who we are enrolling in terms of demographics, family economics, and market position. This also means that we need to have a keen and accurate understanding about the student market we are best equipped to serve. For many institutions, the market opportunities for the future may look very different than what the institution has historically relied upon. There may even be new program opportunities that exist within these new markets. A few years ago, Bay Path expanded its long-standing Saturday One-Day campus-based program by adding a fully online degree completion option at a lower tuition price for adult women through The American Women's College (TAWC), a change that allowed us to provide a less costly educational access to women who do not have a college degree. Likewise, Pat McGuire's paradigm shift at Trinity Washington University embraces a mission of providing access for the underserved in TWU's backyard. Given the shifting demographics discussed earlier, most of us will need to adapt to both the changing size and characteristics of the new market. Considering the issue of access is a good place to start.

*Affordability* is a second key issue. It's perhaps best understood by asking these key questions: How will students and their families pay for a college education? Who can afford my institution, and whom can my institution afford to enroll and educate? Without a doubt, the cost of college has become a critical challenge facing institutions everywhere today. Over the last decade, many institutions have focused on using pricing and the financial aid strategy—primarily through discounting—to maximize

access and revenue at the same time. But today, fewer students can pay the posted price of attendance, and many schools are maxed out in terms of their capacity to absorb the tuition discount. The essential dual question that most must face today is: Who can afford us, and whom can we afford? Not to mention, what implications might this have for the program mix? When Sweet Briar College began its long climb back from near closure, its strategy included an overhaul of the curriculum, a new and more flexible calendar, and a pricing reset. Their new strategy is designed to shift the focus from what had been a genteel women's college with horses and lakes into a 21st-century liberal-arts institution that provides an education that is both relevant and affordable. The institution now costs about the same as Virginia's flagship public universities. The long-term sustainability of most colleges and universities will require finding a similar balance that they can live with—something that is increasingly difficult.

The third issue—*accountability*—is reflected in these important questions: What kinds of outcomes should students, parents, and society expect of higher education? What promises do we make to our students about their educational experience on our campuses, and how well do we deliver on these promises? From the public's view of what we do, demands for accountability are closely tied to issues of affordability. The question being asked by an increasing number of students and their families as they consider enrollment is this: Is this an investment worth making? As you consider new program possibilities, you will want to think about programs that might increase your value to your community or key stakeholders in some way. As reported by Laurence Biemiller in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, colleges and universities would be wise to redefine and re-imagine their role in terms of who they serve.<sup>17</sup> Shifting from a focus on serving individual students, Biemiller suggests that colleges consider them-

selves as a kind of community asset, a learning community for the region. For example, for institutions located within close proximity to retirement communities, the opportunities for partnership are numerous. Consider The Forest at Duke that partners with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Duke University to provide adult continuing education courses held on both the Duke campus and the retirement center. Another example is Antioch College's partnership with its local community in Ohio, offering memberships at its Wellness Center. At Bay Path, our decision to launch a graduate degree in Physician Assistant Studies was informed in large part by the growing shortage of medical doctors in western Massachusetts and our belief that we could help address this issue by preparing physician assistants who would stay in the region. The addition of this program has done more than just about anything else we could have done to enhance our reputation in the region and position us as a valuable partner in addressing pressing workforce needs.

The fourth issue—*sustainability*—is all about the institution's capacity to generate sufficient resources. For academic leaders, the key question is: Can my institution generate the resources it requires to continuously improve our academic and developmental quality and still remain accessible to students of all means? These twin objectives (resource generation and access) often compete with each other, especially at less wealthy institutions—and one typically loses. It is essential that colleges assess both their *real* revenue opportunity and their *real* expense value in the context of their *real* market position. This is a difficult thing for many colleges; their aspirations may not line up neatly with their operational capacity. Program mix can play a critically helpful role here if your program portfolio is intentionally developed and managed to include a balance of high demand and high revenue producing

programs. To whatever extent that academic leaders can begin to view their program mix similarly to an investment portfolio with an eye on making the right programmatic decisions to maintain the right balance of resources and access, their institutions will be well served.

The fifth and final issue has to do with *differentiation*, which, according to marketer Marty Neumeier, is all about passing the “onlyness test.”<sup>18</sup> More than ever, colleges and universities need to distinguish their programs and experience from the other 4,000+ options available. In this era of increased competition, the institutions that stand out have a much better shot at winning their share of students. Neumeier suggests that you cannot advertise your way to “onlyness”—it needs to permeate everything that you do. Your one and only strategic position comes from your organization’s core and can be clarified by thinking deeply and clearly about the following statement:

Our \_\_\_\_ (*offering*)  
is the ONLY \_\_\_\_ (*category*)  
that \_\_\_\_\_ (*benefit*).

Nearly all colleges like to cite similar things about their institutions: great faculty, personalized environment, quality programs, etc. Yet, this does not go far enough in defining your “only.” I believe that every college and university has something in its DNA that can serve as a foundation for a truly “only” strategic position. This is where creative and smart academic program development and planning can be a powerfully helpful strategy. Nurturing a program mix that pulls out and leverages the unique DNA of your institution is one of the best things you can do to ensure success and security in our new economy. Consider the case of North Park University, a

church-related liberal arts institution located on the northwest side of Chicago in one of the most diverse zip codes in the country. For many years, North Park took its urban location for granted, going so far as to play it down in admissions marketing out of fear that the urban setting would discourage enrollment. Under the leadership of a new provost, the institution considered this question of onliness and created the following statement: "Our University is the ONLY faith-based institution that resides in the heart of a world class city." With this position in mind, the faculty created a new required signature experience that leverages the vast benefits of attending a college that exists on the rim of a world class city like Chicago. Called *Catalyst 666*, the program uses Chicago as an extended classroom with students given first-hand experiences that allow them to identify vocational interests, get inspired by leaders in their field, and establish relationships with invaluable professional contacts. Since the program's inception, North Park has seen a steady increase in its traditional undergraduate enrollment with many new students citing the existence of this program as a primary reason for enrollment.

## What's Next

In this chapter, we reviewed a variety of forces that are causing disruption for countless colleges and universities across the country. It is essential that academic leaders understand the particular and unique context in which their institutions reside and respond accordingly. Adopting an entrepreneurial and adaptive management style is especially helpful during these dynamic times. The next chapter provides a guide by which academic leaders can assess and strengthen their personal entrepreneurial leadership IQ.

## KEY STRATEGIC QUESTIONS FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS

These questions are designed to help you think about the disruptive forces that are particularly and uniquely impactful for your institutional context. While each force represents risk and challenge for sure, there are also opportunities to be found. Consider what opportunities might exist for your institution as you work through these questions:

1. In considering your institution's current context, which forces are potentially most disruptive?
2. How is your institution currently weathering these forces?
3. Do any of these forces suggest an opportunity for your institution?
4. How do you assess your institution's current capacity for responding to and/or leveraging these critical issues facing higher education: Accessibility? Affordability? Accountability? Sustainability? Differentiation?
5. To what extent does your institution occupy a one-and-only market position?

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ACADEMIC LEADER—DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?**

In an era of heightened disruption and revolutionary challenges, academic organizations require a new style of leadership and decision making. Academic leaders who possess the skills to initiate and execute innovations, and serve as catalysts for leading their institutions in complex and disruptive times, are increasingly in demand. This view was echoed by a recent AGB Trusteeship article which envisioned that, “in an environment of unprecedented disruption, rapid change, and nontraditional challenges, a new mode of leadership and decision making may be required.”<sup>19</sup> The article identified several essential attributes required for college and university leaders today, including: courage, entrepreneurial aptitude, and experience in successfully leading change. Similarly, the respondents to a survey of Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) presidents identified leadership attributes they believe to be critical in hiring their senior staff: initiative taker being the most important, followed by relationship builder, problem solver, and emotionally intelligent.<sup>20</sup>

However, most academic leaders come to their roles through the traditional academic pipeline, lacking the experience needed to cultivate a more entrepreneurial mindset and skillset. A study compared the competencies, values, and traits of corporate executives with those of

successful higher education leaders. In the resulting report, “Leadership Traits and Success in Higher Education,” the authors concluded that the most significant difference between successful higher education leaders and corporate leaders related to entrepreneurial skills; higher education leaders demonstrated a lower proclivity overall to initiative taking, risk-taking, and creativity; whereas, commerce leaders were more likely to prioritize finance and business issues over other matters. <sup>21</sup>

## PROFILE OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADER

### **Maria Klawe—Harvey Mudd College**

When Klawe assumed the presidency of Harvey Mudd in 2006, virtually no women were studying computer science. Today, approximately 40% of graduating CS majors are women. How did she do it? Klawe aggressively hired female faculty, heavily recruited female students, and made them both feel welcome in the department. With a personal passion for bridging the gender gap in STEM fields, Klawe is the first to admit that her strategy was not rocket science. Instead, she drew on best practices in the field and aligned the execution of strategies with her ambitious goal.

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*See Aghajanian, Liana. “Maria Klawe: The Forward-Thinking President of Harvey Mudd College.” LA Weekly. 14 May 2014. [www.laweekly.com/news/maria-klawe-the-forward-thinking-president-of-harvey-mudd-college-4640479](http://www.laweekly.com/news/maria-klawe-the-forward-thinking-president-of-harvey-mudd-college-4640479)*