

Leadership in Changing Times: **Supporting Students and Institutions With Creativity and Efficiency**



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Introduction

Economic challenges are a constant for higher education institutions these days. Government support is unreliable, endowment income can't be assured and rising price points can scare off tuition-paying parents.

In this environment, colleges and their leaders face more pressure than ever to find new ways to recruit and retain students and to do so in ways that are consistent with institutional missions and objectives. Leaders need to be savvy about economic and demographic trends – and creative about responding.

The articles in this compilation examine strategies used by various colleges. There is not a single magic bullet that will work for all. But various approaches outlined here may well be adapted for use elsewhere.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to cover such strategies. We welcome your comments on this compilation and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors

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Leading Digital Campus Transformation for Student Success



According to Gartner's [2019 CIO Agenda Survey](#), 49 percent of higher education CIOs state that digital initiatives as an institutional top priority is driving changes to their business model. As the higher education industry faces lower enrollment rates, more heated competition, and increasingly constrained resources, institutions must actively invest in innovative technologies and digital strategies to increase operational efficiency and drive student success.

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Survival of the Proactive

Small-college leaders share how their institutions have attempted to ward off enrollment crises before they happen.

By Colleen Flaherty // January 28, 2019



Allegheny College

ATLANTA -- Change -- the inevitability of it, trying predict its contours and get ahead of it -- was on the minds of many who attended the Association of American Colleges and Universities' [annual meeting](#) here last week. The news of [Green Mountain College's closure](#) only heightened interest in proactivity among institutional leaders, especially leaders of the small, private, less selective colleges that are canaries in the change mine.

And while sharing their struggles isn't always comfortable for campus leaders, a number of meeting panels highlighted what colleges have done to address potential threats to their survival.

Strategies included shrinking enrollments to become more selective, going co-ed and revamping the curriculum within an ambitious time frame. In all cases, panelists emphasized the importance of communication, lest rumor and mistrust derail goodwill efforts at change.

The phrase "culture trumps strategy" also came up more than once.

"We are acting to get ahead of what we know are demographic challenges for liberal arts colleges nationally," said Ron Cole, provost and dean at [Allegheny College](#), following a panel he co-led on leading collaborative change for the sustainable future of small, private institutions. "We are choosing to be smaller and more selective, being true to our mission and ensuring that our curriculum is relevant to the economic and social needs of our time. We believe this to be acting from a position of strength."

Case Study No. 1: Allegheny's Strategic Shrinking

Allegheny was founded in 1815 to provide access to education on the then northwest Pennsylvania frontier. It continues to fulfill its access mission with a Pell Grant-eligible student body of about 35 percent. And it was doing "all right until we weren't," Cole said during the panel.

That was in 2014, after a decade of expanded recruiting and suddenly "inconsistent" enrollments.

In 2017, Cole said, the college's Board of Trustees had a winter retreat and ordered a "reboot" of the college's current 10-year strategic plan. So in the summer of that year, about 50 members of different campus groups met to study issues of enrollment and access, programs and facilities.

The outcome of those cross-campus meetings? A decision to "strategically recruit fewer students" with "goal of becoming a smaller and more selective institution," starting with the 2018 recruiting cycle, Cole said.

While he was reluctant to share a precise new enrollment target, Cole said the peak 2,100-enrollment target will shrink by several hundred over 10 years.

To help recruit and retain fewer students with a higher academic profile, Allegheny added majors in

Survival of the Proactive

business and men's lacrosse and women's field hockey teams. Faculty members cut or collaborated on courses where possible, to reduce what Cole called the "proliferation" of the catalog. The board also invested in infrastructure.

"This is not something institutions can cut their way out of," he said. "We have to invest forward."

To prepare for needing fewer faculty members in light of a smaller student body, Allegheny's board also approved a retirement initiative. Cole said that was the "ethical" route, and that it's proved effective, with appropriate numbers of faculty members from across disciplines applying.

Cole described the process as trying but rewarding, and joked that his campus has moved through the stages of grief, from "outright denial" to close to acceptance. Key to success was communication, he added, saying that he spent hours meeting with each department or program chair at different stages to discuss it. He also met with the Faculty Council, and continues to meet with faculty interviewees to let them know that Allegheny is in the process of rightsizing.

"I've learned one thing as an administrator, that people don't like surprises," he said. "And in the absence of communication, assumptions and rumor drive the narrative." Beyond that, Cole advised those present -- mostly deans, as the session was sponsored by the American Conference of Academic Deans -- to "understand that culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Culture had a few snacks on my strategy."

Case Study No. 2: Chatham Admits Men

[Chatham University](#), also in Pennsylvania, faced enrollment woes in



I've learned one thing as an administrator, that people don't like surprises. And in the absence of communication, assumptions and rumor drive the narrative.



its undergraduate college within the last decade, too. While its co-ed graduate programs were thriving, the incoming class at the all-women's undergraduate college had dwindled to fewer than 100 in 2008 -- about three times smaller than the graduate student body.

"With an undergraduate population of less than 400, was that really a viable experience for the students?" asked Cole's co-presenter, Jenna Templeton, vice president of academic affairs at Chatham. There were additional questions about the viability of the financial model, in which graduate programs subsidized undergraduate ones by about \$5 million annually.

Templeton explained that Chatham has a history of changing, from providing access to women in the 1860s, to building the work force in the mid-20th century, to offering more graduate and professional education in the 1990s. So Chatham in 2013 began a new process of self-reflection, to consider its financial outlook and its future -- both as a women's college and a college at all. (Chatham's graduate programs were never at risk.)

The college convened a faculty reading group, starting with senior professors, namely those who were awarded tenure before the college

ceased awarding tenured positions 20 years ago. The university's Board of Trustees also developed a study group. Both were given different scenarios to consider, including the closure of the undergraduate college and its going co-ed.

Templeton said the college is part of a Pittsburgh-area consortium of institutions, and so men have in fact attended Chatham undergraduate courses for many years. And, of course, men are on campus for the graduate programs. Still, there were concerns about shifting the balance toward a co-ed college forever and what that meant for Chatham, she said.

Such concerns were aired at alumni town halls, student gatherings and blogs, which the university sponsored in an attempt to increase "buy-in" and "connection" to the eventual decisions to pursue a co-ed path. Templeton said that while older alumnae tended to prefer going co-ed to losing the college forever, some younger alumnae -- particularly a group who hadn't planned on enrolling in a women's college and were pleasantly surprised by how much they benefited from it -- were vocally opposed to enrolling men.

By the time the board approved coeducation in spring 2014, how-

ever, Templeton said, the college and its faculty had taken steps to protect the women's-only legacy, such as by creating a Women's Institute and passing statements on equity in the classroom.

By fall 2015, the college had reworked its general education curriculum for the transition and prepared to welcome men. Templeton said that incoming classes since that time have increased to 350 students. The college has added eight men's sports. Retention has improved.

Like Cole, Templeton said that change couldn't have happened without dedicated faculty members, including a professor who was appointed to dean of undergraduate innovation for the transition, prior to his retirement. Communication and the involvement of all campus constituencies were paramount, she also said.

Transparency is key.

Case Study No. 3: Dominican's Breakneck Gen-Ed Reform

Curricular reform is commonplace, but what makes [Dominican University of California's](#) story unusual is the timeline: in just one year, it overhauled its curriculum to achieve a new student-faculty ratio, and to eliminate requirements that students saw as barriers to completion and double majoring.

The original plan was to put that curriculum into place within a year, but Dominican -- having found that

design is as important as adoption -- is now taking another year to adopt the changes. (At the same time, Dominican also was working to [incubate a coding degree](#) with an outside entity.)

"We are not in fiscal crisis -- we wanted to do this before we were," said Nicola Pitchford, Dominican's vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty, during a separate panel that discussed the campus's approach to change. Still, Pitchford said, "We were doing way too much. It was a matter of fiscal responsibility. We were running way too many classes and could not economize without changing the curriculum."

So Dominican convened a summer working group in 2017 to jumpstart the process. The group was given much latitude, but was told that the new faculty ratio had to be 14 to 1, more in line with Dominican's institutional peers and more sustainable than the campus's current ratio 9 to 1.

In the fall, Dominican formed a curricular oversight committee to lead the change. It soon became apparent that a systems and operations group was needed, as well, to lead the adoption of the curriculum -- and not just for the faculty, but for admissions and recruitment teams.

Using a recent update to Dominican's honors program as a guide to reform, faculty members and administrators involved in the project

proposed a 36-unit core curriculum, instead of the college's previous 45- to 46-unit general education curriculum. Pritchard said that the "exploding carrot" for faculty buy-in was the opportunity to move to four-credit courses from three, meaning fewer course preparations for the standard 12-credit-hour teaching load. The "exploding" part? Courses had to be redesigned to align with that new configuration.

In the end, the curriculum overhaul entailed 22 revised majors, 19 minors, seven graduate programs, four new minors and a new applied computer science major. Despite that amount of work, 85 percent of the faculty approved the new core curriculum last academic year.

Mary Marcy, Dominican's president, said after the session that the overhaul needed to realize financial savings and provide students more room in their schedules, as well as stay true to what's known as the Dominican Experience. That means that every student will have an integrative coach, signature work, an experience of community-engaged learning and a digital portfolio, she said, adding that high-impact teaching practices are particularly important for Dominican's ethnically and economically diverse student body.

As for the challenges many small colleges face, Marcy said, "It's extremely helpful to learn from each other as we undertake these changes." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/01/28/small-college-leaders-share-how-their-institutions-have-attempted-ward-enrollment>

Should Colleges Consider Home Equity?

Stanford becomes latest institution to drop the value of family homes when calculating ability of a student to pay.

By Scott Jaschik // December 17, 2018



SOURCE: GETTY IMAGES

[Stanford University](#) has become the latest top university to announce that it will no longer consider home equity when calculating how much money a student and her family can afford to contribute toward a college education.

The university's [announcement](#) quoted Stanford's board chair, Jeffrey S. Raikes, as explaining the change this way: "Stanford is committed to meeting the full demonstrated need for every admitted undergraduate who qualifies for financial aid, without expecting them to borrow to meet their need. Removing home equity from the financial aid calculation is the first of what we expect will be several additional steps to further enhance our undergraduate aid program in the next few years."

Stanford is not only highly competitive, but (based on sticker price) highly expensive. Tuition, room and board for 2019-20 has just been set at \$69,962.

The issue of home equity is not one on which all colleges agree, and some fear that eliminating calculations of home equity favors those who are from families of means. The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) explicitly states that the question on parents' investment holdings does not count "the home in which your parents live."

But the [CSS Profile](#), run by the College Board, does ask about home equity. And the several hundred colleges that use that profile include many such as Stanford that are among the most generous in financial aid to those who are from low-income families. Just because students must report parents' home equity doesn't mean that colleges need to include the information in their calculations of institutional aid eligibility. [Harvard](#) and [Princeton](#) Universities are among those stating that they do not consider home equity. Princeton also states that it does

not consider retirement funds. [Yale University](#) states that it does consider home equity.

Companies that advise families (generally those who can afford to pay for the advice) about financial aid regularly [include advice](#) on how to minimize the impact of home equity on colleges that do consider that asset.

Universities like Stanford and its competitors admit and enroll a very large share of students from families who are among the most wealthy in the United States. According to the [social mobility data produced by](#) Raj Chetty, only 4 percent of Stanford students are in the bottom 20 percent of family income in the United States. But 66 percent are in the top 20 percent, including 17 percent in the top 1 percent. The median family income at Stanford is \$167,500.

The issue of home equity has become more complicated in the last decade or so, at least for families

Should Colleges Consider Home Equity?

who live in the San Francisco Bay Area and the metropolitan areas around Los Angeles, New York City and other large cities. Home values in many neighborhoods have skyrocketed. A family with income of less than \$100,000, having purchased a home 25 or so years ago, can end up living in a house valued at more than \$1 million without the kind of family income normally associated with owning such a home. Such families are by no means poor, and they of course may have access to home equity loans. But typical assumptions about what it means to own a \$1 million home no longer apply.

Colleges that have dropped or adjusted calculations for home equity have seen a positive impact on yield, or the percentage of accepted applicants who enroll. Occidental College is not nearly as competitive or as wealthy as is Stanford. But Occidental's [yield for California residents](#) went from 14 to 18 percent after it eliminated consideration of home equity for California residents with family incomes of \$125,000 to \$150,000.

Stanford didn't release any estimates of how many students who might, in the past, have not been eligible for aid but would be now. But a spokesman offered the following statement on the potential impact:



Deciding on whether to include home equity will advantage one group over another, unless the school is well enough resourced to provide enough dollars in their institutional grants and scholarships to mitigate those ups and downs.



"We considered several possibilities. Eligibility for Stanford financial aid is based on other factors besides family income level. Family size, number of family members in college, family assets and other circumstances are considered. Removing home equity as a factor in the financial aid calculation for undergraduates not only expands the number of families that can receive aid, it can increase the amount of aid for families who are already eligible. It may also lessen the psychological barrier for families worrying about college affordability because they live in areas with high home values."

Some aid experts have worried about not counting home equity at colleges that have limited resources for financial aid. But that may

not be the case at Stanford.

Justin Draeger, president and CEO of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, said via email, "Differentiating a family's [ability] to pay for college is as much an art as it is a science, especially at the institutional and local levels. Where to draw up the dividing line on a student's need requires one to know the local market, cost of living expenses, and student population. Deciding on whether to include home equity will advantage one group over another, unless the school is well enough resourced to provide enough dollars in their institutional grants and scholarships to mitigate those ups and downs. I would assume that is the case at an institution like Stanford." ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/12/17/stanford-drops-home-equity-calculations-family-wealth>

At One College, 23% of New Students Will Be International

Franklin & Marshall sees its numbers surge. Could the key be not commission-paid agents, but a professor?

By Scott Jaschik // June 11, 2018



Franklin & Marshall College

These are supposed to be tough times for recruiting international students. Last year saw [a 7 percent drop](#) in new international enrollments in the United States. Enrollments in intensive English programs -- frequently the first step toward applying to a college -- are down by [even a larger percentage](#). The Trump administration and Republicans in Congress are [talking up the idea that Chinese students constitute a national security threat](#) -- even as educators question such statements. And the challenge is particularly great for liberal arts colleges, given that students in many countries focus only on large universities.

But Franklin & Marshall College is on track to have 23 percent of its new students this fall hail from outside the United States. That's up from 15 percent of those who enrolled in fall 2017, which is by it-

self a larger share than one would find at many other nearby liberal arts colleges -- [last fall's freshman class at Lafayette College](#) was 8 percent international, and at [Bucknell University](#), the figure was 6 percent.

Eric Maguire, vice president and dean of admissions and financial aid at Franklin & Marshall, said that the college has been pushing generally to increase international enrollments above the 10 percent of the class that was the norm until about a decade ago. But he said there was no particular push in the

last year, although the numbers of both applications and deposits were up significantly.

At F&M, most of the international students (as is the case generally in the United States) come from China and India. While South Korea is frequently the country sending the third-largest number of students, the third spot at F&M goes to Vietnam. Most of the students are full pay, but some do receive scholarships.

Maguire was quick to stress that "one year does not a trend make." He also noted that the larger per-

Franklin & Marshall International Admissions

	Application	Deposit for Fall
2018	2,029	138
2017	1,825	89
2016	1,731	102
2015	1,741	88

At One College, 23% of New Students Will Be International

centage this year reflects a combination of events. Yield of international students is up, and the college was trying for a slightly smaller overall freshman class this year. The past two years saw classes of close to 650 when yields were stronger than expected, when the goal has been a class size of 615. This year, the college is aiming for 610. While there are 627 deposits, summer melt among students is likely to bring the total down to around 610.

This year's numbers, he said, "are not an overnight success," but represent "a foundation of decades of doing this." Over time, the college has established relationships with counselors in China and elsewhere that result in potential students being identified who are likely to be interested in and succeed at the college. He said that the college's efforts date to the 1980s and include years of much smaller international classes than Franklin & Marshall now sees. As a result of the slow and steady growth in enrollments, Maguire said, F&M has the resources that students need and doesn't need to scramble for, say, an expert on visa issues.

And Franklin & Marshall does not use agents. "This is 100 percent ourselves," Maguire said.

In the controversy over the use of commission-paid agents, many proponents have said they are particularly important for smaller colleges that may lack the resources to send people to China and India for sustained periods of time.

In terms of new tactics this year, Maguire points to a decision to "borrow" an anthropology faculty member to spend several weeks in China in both the spring and fall. "She was there for yield events," he said. "Having a faculty mem-

ber who can speak articulately and passionately about the liberal arts college to people who are not familiar makes a big difference," he said.

Reaching Chinese Students

Monica Cable, the professor, is currently leading a four-week course in China and India for Franklin & Marshall students. But via email, she discussed her role and the challenges of recruiting students in China for a liberal arts college. She said that by virtue of her "hybrid position" on the faculty and in admissions, she thinks she can provide important insights to prospective students in China.

"A liberal arts education is relatively new to the Chinese. Unfortunately, the most commonly used translation of 'liberal arts college' mistakenly (in my opinion) places the quality of a liberal arts college below that of a university," she said. "As a professor, I can talk to prospective students, admitted students and concerned parents about what students can expect in both the classroom and in working one-on-one with faculty. I can contrast the experience at F&M with that of a previous teaching position I held at a large research institution, where I had close to 200

students in a single introductory class. With this many students, it was really only possible to learn the names of the top 10 students ... and the bottom 10 students! But at F&M, my students can expect me to know their name within a week or two. And if they have any questions about course content or just want to chat, my office door is always open to them, either during my official office hours or at an appointed time more convenient to their schedule."

Many of her crucial interactions in China, she said, are with parents. "Chinese parents are no different than American parents -- they want to know that their child will be employable after graduating, or will be able to get into a top graduate program. I love telling students and their parents about my first Chinese student who after taking Introduction to Social Anthropology with me declared an anthropology major, and then went on to complete a master's at Cambridge and will be starting a Ph.D. program this fall in Hong Kong. Or the Chinese music major I helped advise on ethnographic methods before she set out to conduct college-funded research in China one summer, and after graduation went on to a



As a professor, I can talk to prospective students, admitted students and concerned parents about what students can expect in both the classroom and in working one-on-one with faculty.



At One College, 23% of New Students Will Be International

Ph.D. program in musicology at the University of Pennsylvania.”

Questions about research come up a lot, Cable said. “Chinese students and their parents are often concerned about research opportunities while studying at a liberal arts college. Again, I can tell them not only about the research programs available to F&M students and the high number of our students who conduct research with faculty, but in more detail about the Chinese student I worked with putting together an application for college funding to spend a summer in West Africa conducting ethnographic research on local perspectives of Chinese-funded development projects.”

Could a College Have Too Many International Students?

Gains in international enrollments are sometimes controversial, especially at public institutions.

When word spread that Chinese students made up 10 percent of the freshman class at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2014, [critics asked why their number](#) far exceeded that of African-American students from Illinois. The University of California system has faced tough political criticism over increasing out-of-state (much of it international) enrollments. For public institutions, international students pay nonresident tuition rates and sometimes additional fees. For private colleges such as F&M, the financial benefit is typically having more full-pay students.

Maguire was quick to point out that Franklin & Marshall has increased international enrollments without seeing any decline in the percentage of Pell Grant-eligible students (17 percent last year). Further, he noted that minority student enrollments (if groups are

combined) exceed the total number of international students. Last year's percentages for nonwhite students were 7.4 percent for black students, 4.8 percent for Asian-Americans and 11.9 percent for Latinos.

This year, the goal for international enrollment was the same as last year's 17 percent. So he said there is “a conversation to have” on whether the goal going forward should be to replicate this year's international share or to aim for something different. “This is perhaps a different scale” than what had been envisioned, Maguire said. “It's a different dynamic we need to think through.”

Franklin & Marshall has a new president arriving in August, Barbara K. Altmann, provost of Bucknell. Maguire said that when she arrives, “we'll have that conversation.” ■

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How a Regional Public University Reversed Enrollment Decline (and It's Not Free Tuition)

SUNY Fredonia had been suffering year after year of declines. And while the state's new scholarship may be helping, officials attribute major gains to new policies and new strategies.

By Scott Jaschik // August 28, 2017



Orientation at Fredonia

For many regional public universities in regions with declining populations and economies that aren't booming, maintaining enrollment is a challenge. Failing to do so is dangerous. While people don't talk about public universities as being tuition dependent, most are -- through a combination of their reliance on tuition revenue and state funding formulas that are based on enrollment.

The State University of New York at Fredonia is just such a public university. While SUNY's acclaimed research universities capture attention (and swarms of applicants), Fredonia has been shrinking for years. It is located between Buffalo and Erie, Pa., near Lake Erie, in a part of the state that is about as far from Manhattan (geographically and economically) as is possible.

So that's what makes this year's freshman class at Fredonia notable. The class is nearly 25 percent larger than last year's, and the second

largest in Fredonia's history. The immediate guess about the turnaround might be New York State's new scholarships that offer free tuition at public colleges for most residents. But it turns out that only a small share of Fredonia's new class obtained those scholarships. The extra aid helped, officials said, and may help more in years ahead, but they credit other changes as more significant. At the same time, Fredonia's success may be crucial to the longterm goals of New York State's new scholarship program, which doesn't guarantee admission anywhere.

Fredonia is among the SUNY campuses that don't have strong name recognition outside their regions, but which have something else: capacity. Fredonia was ready to enroll all of its new students, and would be happy to keep the freshman class at that level. It will be enrollment trends at the Fredonias of the state (along with online pro-

grams) that will determine whether New York State ends up with a larger share of its population as degree holders.

So how did Fredonia turn things around?

Virginia Horvath, the president, says the university worked with consultants from the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, who came to the campus and met with more than 100 employees to help develop a plan, which was fully in place a year ago. She said it was important to grow enrollment without letting standards drop. The average high-school grade (on a 100 point scale that Fredonia uses) is 89.5, the same as recent years when far fewer enrolled.

The key, she said, was to focus on "what is the experience for an applicant?"

First, that meant reaching students -- both near and far.

"We weren't paying enough at-

Making an Impact in Online Courses

tention to our primary market," in Western New York, said Dan Trumata, associate vice president for enrollment services. So in Western New York, Fredonia made a determination to communicate with every high school, those with a graduating class of 30, not just those with hundreds of seniors.

At the same time, he said, Fredonia opted to use SUNY resources it hadn't in the past. SUNY has a welcome center in New York City. For the first time, Fredonia officials used the site to do outreach to New York City and Long Island students. While most of the gains this year are from Western New York, there are also more students coming from the New York City metro area. Fredonia has also started a policy (likely to have an impact in the future, not this year) of doing outreach to potential students two or three years before they might enroll, instead of focusing just on high school seniors.

Beyond outreach, Fredonia also changed policies, again with the applicant in mind.

In the past, it took Fredonia an average of 28 days to respond to

a completed application. This year, that number came down to five days. Cedric Howard, vice president for enrollment and student services, said that when students finish an application, they want to know if they will get in. Fredonia still does the same review it did in prior years, but makes sure to do so promptly, he said.

In addition, the university committed to providing information on eligibility for aid at the same time applicants were admitted. All of this was designed for an applicant who had gotten excited about Fredonia to commit and enroll.

The result: 1,164 first-year students. That's not only up nearly 25 percent from last year's 934 but exceeds the university's goal for this year, of 1,000.

The Impact of Free Tuition?

So what about the [Excelsior Scholarship](#), the new program -- pushed by Governor Andrew Cuomo -- to provide free tuition to most who enroll full-time at SUNY and the City University of New York?

Horvath said the aid is welcome. This academic year, 337 undergrad-

uates at Fredonia have the awards. Of that total, 146 are freshmen.

By the time the New York Legislature approved the program, admissions offers had been made and students were about to indicate where they would enroll. While Horvath said she assumes that the program may have been an extra incentive for some freshmen, she noted that most students and families had gone through the entire college planning process without expecting this aid to come through for next year.

In addition, Fredonia tracked a range of indicators throughout the year -- campus contacts by prospective students, applications and so forth. And everything ran 20 percent or more above last year's total throughout the year. That's why she doesn't think Excelsior was a big factor this year.

But next year, with Excelsior's opportunities as part of the equation throughout the admissions cycle, along with the new strategies in place at Fredonia, Horvath is hopeful of continuing to see a freshman class as large as the one this year. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2017/08/28/suny-fredonia-had-major-turn-around-freshman-enrollment-and-its-about>

A Private University Matches Public Prices

Oglethorpe aims to win academically strong students by aligning tuition with their states' flagships.

By Rick Seltzer // August 23, 2018



Oglethorpe University

Oglethorpe University staked out new ground Wednesday in the struggle to stand out from the crowd of small private colleges, unveiling a pricing strategy that will match public college tuition rates in every state for members of next year's freshman class who meet certain benchmarks.

The 1,280-student university in Atlanta calls the strategy the Flagship 50 program. It's a non-need-based scholarship pegging the tuition some students will pay to sticker prices at flagship public universities in each of the 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Freshmen who qualify will pay the in-state tuition rates of flagship universities in their home state. To do so, a student will need to have posted a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.5, plus a minimum test score of 1250 combined SAT or 26 composite ACT.

In some ways, the new program resembles the University of Maine's Flagship Match pro-

gram, which [brought in new students](#) from out of state by dangling the prospect that they could pay the same tuition and fees to attend the University of Maine in Orono that they would pay if they were attending a flagship campus in their home state. But Oglethorpe looks very different from Orono because it is a private institution in the South, not a public one in the Northeast. It's also far smaller, with first-year classes measured in the hundreds, not the thousands.

That could mean Oglethorpe has a smaller margin for error -- or that it needs less of an enrollment bump to move the needle.

From the perspective of a student who is shopping sticker prices and has the necessary academic chops, Flagship 50 would appear to save thousands of dollars on Oglethorpe's published price. Oglethorpe [posts](#) a tuition rate of \$37,920 in 2018-19, plus \$530 in fees, before room and board. Tuition and fees at the most ex-

pensive flagship on the [new program's list](#), the University of New Hampshire, total \$18,499. For the least expensive, the University of Wyoming, they are \$5,550.

That's not the total picture a student will face, because universities both public and private don't collect full sticker price from students. They discount tuition through scholarships and grants. Oglethorpe's discount rate has hovered at around 60 percent in recent years. The university reports net tuition per student of about \$13,700.

So the Flagship 50 program is a combination of a pricing and marketing effort aimed at one very specific slice of students: academically strong students who are often enrolling in state flagship universities instead of Oglethorpe, perhaps because the private university's sticker price scares them away.

"We're seeing a lower yield with our highest-qualified students," said Larry Schall, Oglethorpe's

A Private University Matches Public Prices

president. "Particularly in the South, with all the various scholarship programs that the southern states have, they are being drawn to the state flagships if they can get in."

Another reason the program is particularly interesting is that it is nationally branded, while Oglethorpe largely draws regionally. The university's freshman class comes from 17 states, yet it has structured the program to match tuition at flagships nationwide (the overall student body comes from 33 states and 38 countries, according to Oglethorpe). Schall expects the program to help recruit students primarily from states from which Oglethorpe has traditionally drawn the most while also helping it push its reach to other nearby states in the South and Midwest. The university won't likely draw 30 students from North Dakota next year, and it isn't flying counselors around the country on an intense nationwide hunt. It should, however, start drawing students from more than 17 states.

Along with the new program, Oglethorpe is using a variety of arguments in favor of small, private liberal arts colleges to recruit students. After financial aid is factored in, many students can attend Oglethorpe for nearly the same cost of a state university, even without Flagship 50, its marketing materials say. They continue to say that Oglethorpe offers more small classes taught by professors than public universities' honors programs and that its student body is diverse. University leaders also express confidence in students graduating in four years.

Flagship 50 isn't only about recruiting students across state lines. Oglethorpe's main competi-



We have some empty beds, we have room in classrooms, so we have capacity. We look at net tuition per student, but our strategic goal is to grow overall net tuition.



tors for students from Georgia are Georgia's public institutions, Schall said. That's worth noting because Oglethorpe draws 73 percent of its students from within the state, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

It's also worth noting because the sticker price for the University of Georgia that Oglethorpe would charge under Flagship 50 is \$11,830 -- below Oglethorpe's overall net tuition per student. Some of the state flagships targeted have higher sticker prices than Oglethorpe's net tuition per student, which could help offset those with lower prices.

But many flagships in neighboring states -- those most likely to send large numbers of students to Oglethorpe -- have sticker prices below Oglethorpe's net. Take, for instance, the University of Florida, with its sticker price of \$6,380. Flagship 50 could introduce unintended consequences.

Schall maintains even those consequences wouldn't have to be uniformly negative.

"If we had 100 new students from Florida come in, that would impact the net tuition price per student in a not-positive way," he said. Still, he continued, overall tuition revenue would increase in such

a scenario because Oglethorpe would be growing in enrollment and total tuition revenue collected. It would also increase the amount of money Oglethorpe collects from room and board charges, potentially adding to the bottom line.

In other words, Oglethorpe could often be collecting less in tuition revenue from the students it enrolls under Flagship 50 than it does from those who don't qualify for the program. But the program isn't intended to grow net tuition per student.

"We have some empty beds, we have room in classrooms, so we have capacity," Schall said. "We look at net tuition per student, but our strategic goal is to grow overall net tuition."

If Flagship 50 were in place this year, 40 students would have qualified. When the program is in place next year, Oglethorpe projects 70 students will qualify. Predictions show total fall enrollment growing from 1,280 this year to 1,310.

The university projects net tuition revenue per student will hold roughly even when the new program is in place. Total net tuition revenue is expected to rise from \$16.6 million this year to \$17.25 million.

Oglethorpe's pricing strategy is

A Private University Matches Public Prices

likely to grab attention from affluent families who are comfortable paying the full sticker price at a public flagship university but might still be sensitive to higher published tuition costs at a private institution, said Bill Hall, founder and president of Applied Policy Research, an enrollment and pricing advising firm.

The approach is more about generating a marketing bump than it is about building revenue, Hall said. But if a university has excess capacity, additional students can help beyond generating incremental dollars. They can provide recruiters with a beachhead from which to break into new territory.

"If it gets you before populations you're not normally going to be in front of, you can see where the inquiries build and dedicate more resources," Hall said.

In that line of thinking, Flagship 50 functions like one of the tuition resets that [many colleges rolled out last year](#) -- a way to grab attention and enroll more of the most attractive students.

Schall draws a distinction between Oglethorpe and many of the institutions that put tuition resets in place. For the most part, tu-

ition resets were rolled out to "stop the bleeding" at struggling institutions, he said. Oglethorpe has not been struggling financially, he said, pointing to a history of surpluses. Yet it still needs to grow.

Oglethorpe's program could also be considered more targeted than a tuition reset. Where a reset cuts sticker prices for all students, Flagship 50 reduces them for a much smaller group. And while Oglethorpe committed to the scholarship for next year's freshman recipients for four years, it could change the program for entering classes after that.

Also, next year's scholarship recipients will have their awards frozen, but Oglethorpe's tuition will not be fixed. That means students will pay more if the university's tuition rises, which it typically does by 3.5 or 4 percent annually.

Colleges can be successful if they can point to a unique feature that's easily recognized, said another consultant, Larry Ladd. Oglethorpe rolled out a catchy name for the attention-grabbing strategy and appears to be complementing it with marketing efforts contrasting its small size

against the "city-like state" of public flagships, said Ladd, who is national director for Grant Thornton's higher education practice.

He still sounded a note of caution.

"So far, there is little evidence that creative pricing strategies are working to expand enrollment and especially net revenue," Ladd said in an email. "They are new enough that it is too early to tell. If others duplicate it, the competitive advantage will slowly decline in value and it will need to develop other similar strategies to differentiate itself in the marketplace."

Criticism sometimes lobbed at tuition resets also echoes here: if a small college is competing only based on price, it is in a dangerous position.

Oglethorpe leaders can retort that they have other advantages to attract students, like the aforementioned class sizes and location. Some other private institutions in Georgia are struggling, Schall said.

"Our students come because they want the opportunity that Atlanta brings," he said. "We would not be doing nearly as well as we're doing if we were not in Atlanta." ■

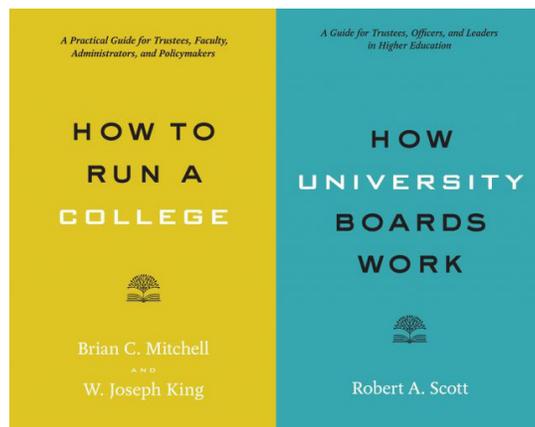
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Ending 'Mom-and-Pop' Governance

Authors break down the basics of university governance but can't resist looking at the big picture.

By Rick Seltzer // March 1, 2018



The challenges colleges and universities face are well documented and often intimidating.

[Population trends](#) will leave institutions in some parts of the country without enough traditional-age local students to fill classrooms, while stretching others' capacity. [Costs keep escalating](#), high sticker prices are a consistent source of angst and [constantly rising discount rates](#) leave many private colleges in the difficult position of not having enough money coming in even as they're perceived by students as being too expensive.

Yes, market conditions are difficult. But that doesn't mean higher education's leadership will escape scrutiny. It's worth wondering if governance practices currently in place are adequate for attracting good leaders, training them and putting them in a position to succeed in the face of challenges.

Some experts believe solutions have to start at the top, with changes to the way shared gover-

nance plays out between trustees, administrators and faculty members. Among them are the authors of two books released in January by Johns Hopkins University Press, [How to Run a College](#) and [How University Boards Work](#).

"Can American higher education navigate through uncharted waters if the leadership relies on an unprepared, inexperienced captain and crew?" ask the authors of *How to Run a College*, Brian C. Mitchell and W. Joseph King. Mitchell and King are both experienced college presidents and trustees who believe higher education's most important challenge is professionalizing its governance.

Failing to professionalize governance isn't good for anyone, said Mitchell, a former president of Bucknell University and Washington & Jefferson College, in an interview.

"There should be a clear delineation of authority and a clear understanding -- and a transparent un-

derstanding -- of how power is executed on a college campus," he said. "Until then, we have a kind of mom-and-pop approach to governance, and that's not serving anyone well."

Mitchell and King argue that higher ed is suffering through a particularly bleak period, one that can seem unprecedented. But viewing the current era as a historical outlier can lead to damaging paralysis among college and university leaders. It is also historically inaccurate.

American higher education has already gone through and survived two similar periods of pressure, according to Mitchell and King. The first was a depression in the 1870s, and the second was the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Those eras, which the authors refer to as inflection points, were marked by hundreds of colleges and universities merging or closing. But they were also times of great adaptation and innovation.

Colleges and universities are nimble, Mitchell said. If today is indeed a third point of inflection, lessons can be drawn from the past to help colleges and universities survive.

Mitchell and King argue for colleges and universities to evolve, modernizing practices and monetizing assets. They examine major elements of college operations: governance, finance, enrollment advancement, academic affairs, student life and athletics. They support shared governance, but it's clear they believe the system could work better if all parties re-focused on educational strategies and transparency between different leaders.

"It's a misunderstanding of what trustees do, what faculty do and how their work relates that causes many problems," said King, who is president of Lyon College. "If you have substantial malfunction or dysfunction, it's not going to go anywhere."

Some of the authors' greatest concerns are focused on the state of governing boards. Mitchell and King believe boards are often too big and too dysfunctional. Those at private universities often run more than 40 trustees deep and come with internal politics, which leads to complacency, they write.

While public universities may have board issues of their own, including charges that trustees are politically [motivated](#) or [appointed](#), their boards are typically smaller than private boards and therefore don't attract as many criticisms related to size.

Voting boards should have no more than a dozen active members, Mitchell and King argue. Larger advisory boards can also play a separate role, approving pol-



Can American higher education navigate through uncharted waters if the leadership relies on an unprepared, inexperienced captain and crew?



icy and preventing boards from becoming insular, but they should be geared toward offering advice and helping with fund-raising.

It's a model like the one used by Harvard University, where the 30-member Board of Overseers influences strategy and carries certain responsibilities but is eclipsed in direct power by the 13-member Harvard Corporation, which has fiduciary responsibility and approves major operations.

A Focus on Trustees

In *How University Boards Work*, Robert A. Scott doesn't go so far as to advocate for limiting voting boards to 12 members. He thinks 12 is on the small side, he said in an interview. Yet he also advocated for limiting the size of voting boards.

"It depends on the institution," he said. "Eighteen would be the low end -- certainly no more than 30. Eighteen to 24 is manageable. You can get in touch with everybody in a day."

Still, Scott, who is the former president of Adelphi University and Ramapo College, sees plenty to worry about in boards. Among his many concerns are that board members often know little about

the higher education enterprise or their own institutions, and that board chairs sometimes act like emperors. Trustees with experience on other boards or in business frequently believe they do not need a guide when they start on college or university boards, he writes. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

Trustees need to be much more knowledgeable about their institutions than they are today, Scott believes. They need to know a college's history and heritage, its competitors and where it fits in the overall higher ed ecosystem. They also need continuing professional development. That support will help them understand how to navigate challenges.

Scott also argues for trustees to spend more time listening and asking questions -- and for others in university governance to do the same. He advocates for presidents to eschew the corporate-style chief executive officer role in lieu of a chief education officer ideal, with an emphasis on being collaborative. Boards, he writes, should be a president's partner in establishing priorities.

Toward its end, *How University*

Ending 'Mom-and-Pop' Governance

Boards Work includes a list of ideas best described as policy priorities. For instance, Scott writes that colleges should be held accountable for graduation rates. He suggests they might pay more attention to student retention if they were forced to repay public financial aid dollars for students who drop out before graduating -- an idea that has parallels in [risk-sharing concepts](#) that have drawn interest at the federal level. He also suggests making non-need-based aid count as taxable income for a recipient's family, because so-called merit

scholarships are a major cost driver among colleges.

The ideas are presented alongside some changes colleges and universities could make on their own, like modifying class schedules to make better use of facilities. But the inclusion of policy ideas in a book aimed at trustees fits a larger idea: the big picture matters for colleges and universities, and their leaders, as they face the future.

It's a theme running through both books, even though they dedicate many of their pages to the basics of running a college or uni-

versity. In practice, the big picture could mean a faculty member taking a more active role in student life, because much of what students learn on campus comes from outside the classroom. It could mean presidents being more engaged and transparent with faculty members, even in times of crisis. It could mean trustees advocating for higher education funding when they're meeting with politicians.

"Enterprise risk is not just about one's own institution," Scott said. "It's about the whole enterprise." ■

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The Tuition-Reset Strategy

Large number of private colleges plan tuition resets next year despite many experts' view that the practice is a gimmick. The colleges hope to grow enrollment, contain student costs and prove critics wrong. But it won't be easy.

By Rick Seltzer // September 25, 2017

The marketplace spoke. BSC LISTENED.

Birmingham-Southern College has cast its aggressive tuition reset as the result of it listening to students.

Presidents and trustees at private colleges are increasingly interested in assuaging student concerns about affordability by slashing sticker prices, with a surprisingly high number of colleges and universities in recent weeks announcing steep cuts to next year's published tuition.

Between Sept. 5 and Sept. 15, at least eight colleges and universities announced such price cuts for next fall. While that's a tiny percentage of the roughly 1,200 degree-granting private nonprofit institutions operating across the country, it's also a significant number in comparison to recent years. Fewer than 30 colleges and universities put such price cuts in place in the dozen years between 2002 and 2014, according to the count of one consulting firm.

On the surface, the increasing popularity of price cuts -- called tuition resets in the world of college enrollment -- would seem

to be a clear win for students and their families who have been squeezed for years by published tuition marching steadily higher. It would also seem a blow against colleges and universities, an acknowledgment of diminished pricing power and an admission they will have to charge students less.

Dig deeper and the reality is vastly more complex. Most institutions are actually banking on tuition resets as a way to attract more students in order to raise the overall amount of tuition money they collect. Yet the only guarantee when a college resets tuition is that its wealthiest students will end up paying less.

That's because resets typically aren't being used as a mechanism to cut the net price a private college or university charges -- the net price being what students and their families actually pay after colleges lower the sticker price by offering grants and scholarships.

Resets' impact on students' actual tuition bills is blunted by colleges and universities dropping their financial aid offers in step with the sticker-price cuts. So resets are being deployed as a signal to the market that an institution is affordable -- a way to grab students' attention and tell them they really can find a way to pay for a private college.

From colleges' point of view, resets are a risky proposition. They're jeopardizing revenue from a small but important percentage of their student bodies -- the handful of students who pay the full price of tuition without receiving any financial aid. Still, colleges and universities struggling for position in a competitive market are pursuing the strategy in hopes of luring more students who had previously been scared off by published tuition prices few students actually pay.

Any individual tuition reset's

The Tuition-Reset Strategy

success or failure is likely to depend as much on whether a college is targeting the right group of students with the right message, programs and services as it is on whether the college is priced correctly. The price cut is the hook grabbing students' attention. A college's other attributes and strategies are what reel them in.

"If you think marketing rather than pricing, you're on the beat," said Bill Hall, founder and president of Applied Policy Research Inc., an enrollment and pricing advising firm. "How do you turn the affordability, the price of higher education, into something to talk about to attract attention?"

The eight institutions recently announcing resets for next year tackle this question from a variety of angles -- some of them unexpectedly unique. Whether they will be successful, and whether the reset strategy can work generally, remains a hotly debated issue.

Who Is Cutting Prices?

Colleges and universities have also been cutting their sticker prices in differing amounts. Among eight colleges recorded as announcing tuition resets this month, Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Mich., plans the smallest cut for next year, an 11 percent reduction, to \$24,500. Birmingham-Southern College in Alabama plans the largest, 51 percent, to \$17,650.

Generally, colleges and universities announcing resets over the years have been small, enrolling under 5,000 students. They have also often struggled with finances or to attract students.

A sampling of the colleges recently announcing price cuts proves that point. [Birmingham-Southern](#), [Drew](#) and [Mills](#)

have all been saddled with financial troubles in recent years. So has Sweet Briar College, which [is cutting](#) its sticker price by 32 percent next year to an advertised \$34,000, a figure that includes tuition, room, board and fees. The University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, which is cutting undergraduate tuition and fees by 37 percent to \$25,000, laid off faculty and staff members this spring and cut programs to close a budget shortfall.

This effectively means that financially challenged institutions are putting on the line their biggest source of revenue -- tuition dollars.

"Reduced price is essentially a reduction of the potential to draw money into what is the primary revenue stream for most of these institutions," Hall said.

Why Reset?

Still, small colleges under pressure are increasingly finding reasons to consider a tuition reset. They usually weren't doing particularly well in today's dominant pricing paradigm, in which private colleges raise tuition every year to eke out incremental revenue gains from wealthier segments of their student bodies while jacking up their discount rates so everyone else can afford to enroll.

The higher education world has been wringing its hands about the growth of discounting for years. [In 2016](#), discounting at private colleges and universities reached an all-time high, according to an annual report from the National Association of College and University Business Officers -- the institutional discount rate for first-time, full-time students hit 49.1 percent, and the rate for all undergraduates reached 44.2 percent.

Avila University, Kansas City, Mo.

Cutting tuition plus books and campus fees for full-time, traditional resident undergraduates by 33 percent, to \$19,900, in 2018-19.

Fall 2016 undergraduate enrollment: 1,333

Notes: The university is promising students their tuition will not increase by more than 3 percent per year. Avila is guaranteeing an internship or research experience for students. It is also offering monetary travel awards.

*

Birmingham-Southern College, Birmingham, Ala.

Cutting tuition and mandatory fees by 51 percent, to \$17,650, for 2018-19.

Fall 2016 undergraduate enrollment: 1,293

Notes: Returning students will have their tuition reset, but financial aid will be adjusted concurrently so their net price should be similar to what they pay this year.

*

Cleveland Institute of Music, Cleveland

Cutting tuition for new undergraduates and graduate students by 15 percent, to \$40,000, in 2018-19.

Fall 2016 total enrollment: 431

Notes: Tuition resets for graduate students are unusual. Returning students have their sticker price frozen at \$47,200. The institute plans to shrink in size while growing fund-raising.

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The Tuition-Reset Strategy



Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith

In many cases, resets are being driven by new presidents or ideas from boards of trustees. Birmingham-Southern is a good example.

The president of the 1,300-student college, Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith, took over in June 2016, although she'd worked with the college earlier as a consultant to its trustees and as chief of staff under one of its former presidents. A tuition reset was on her list of initial strategies to pursue, she said.

The college started work on the idea at the beginning of August 2016, studying it for about a year before announcing its reset Sept. 12. It found that 80 percent of students in Alabama wouldn't consider a college with tuition, fees, room and board adding up to more than \$50,000. It also found that the South was different from other parts of the country in that more than three-quarters of students preferred public universities to private colleges if the two op-

tions cost the same amount.

"They're so steeped in the public climate, they wouldn't even check a private if it was significantly higher," Flaherty-Goldsmith said.

But Birmingham-Southern's tuition discount rate was 60 percent. In other words, the average student isn't paying \$35,840 in tuition -- they pay just north of \$14,000. Students were passing over Birmingham-Southern because they were looking at the sticker price and never even considering the net price they would pay after financial aid.

"When we started looking at the data, it became clear to us we were missing the opportunity to market to a number of students who could really benefit," Flaherty-Goldsmith said.

The reset won't equalize Birmingham-Southern's tuition with tuition at state colleges. The University of Alabama at Birmingham, for example, charges full-time in-state undergraduates \$10,410 to \$12,270 annually this year, depending on their program and before any financial aid. But the idea is that Birmingham-Southern will scare away fewer students with its lower sticker price, enabling it to sell itself on its lower student-to-faculty ratio, internships and new programs in order to grow to a larger size of 1,600 to 1,800 students.

Many of those students will hopefully come as transfers from two-year colleges. Birmingham-Southern has been creating articulation agreements with two-year colleges, and it's hoping the tuition reset helps it with those and other students.

"We think that we'll get a lot more transfer students, and they'll be from a lot of different back-

Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Dropping tuition by 11 percent for traditional undergraduate students, to \$24,500, for 2018-19.

Fall 2016 undergraduate enrollment: 1,856

Notes: Returning students will have a one-year net tuition freeze. The tuition reset is being combined with a pricing restructure, charging students a block price for 12-18 credit hours instead of 12-17 credit hours.

*

Drew University, Madison, N.J.

Cutting undergraduate tuition by 20 percent, to \$38,668, in 2017-18.

Fall 2016 undergraduate enrollment: 1,521

Notes: Returning students will be covered by the tuition reset but, as is common, will have their financial aid adjusted downward along with the tuition reduction.

*

Mills College, Oakland, Calif.

Cutting base undergraduate tuition by 36 percent, to \$28,765, in 2018-19

Fall 2016 undergraduate enrollment: 821

Notes: The college has previously said it is planning a new signature experience for undergraduates. It has promised returning undergraduates will not pay more in 2018-19 than they did in 2017-18, although their financial aid will be decreased along with the sticker price.

The Tuition-Reset Strategy

grounds," Flaherty-Goldsmith said. "We think that we're going to open it up to schools that are in the inner city who have always assumed Birmingham-Southern is out of the realm of possibility."

The college is not, however, doing away with discounting. Its tuition and fee discount rate for freshmen entering this year is around 65 percent, Flaherty-Goldsmith said. Next year the rate is expected to drop to between 30 percent and 35 percent. Current students who are returning next fall will be included in the tuition reset, but their financial aid will be reduced by approximately the same amount as tuition. The college anticipates them paying a net cost next year that's similar to what they're paying today.

"The numbers work out for us because we did give so much financial aid," Flaherty-Goldsmith said. "More than 90 percent of our students received scholarships, so it's not as though we had very many full-pay students. I think you'd find that to be true with many small colleges."

A Risky Road

Although most small private colleges enroll a relatively low number of full-pay students, those students' importance to the budget shouldn't be overlooked.

Take, for example, Drew University, which announced its own tuition reset Sept. 11, about a year after admissions leaders and some trustees started discussing the idea. Drew is cutting tuition by 20 percent next year, from \$48,336 to \$38,668. Returning students will be included.

About 5 percent of Drew students receive no financial aid, according to Robert Massa, senior vice president for enrollment and

institutional planning. He has no doubt that in next year's applicant pool, there will be students who will not receive any financial support from Drew because they come from families too wealthy to be judged as having financial need and they do not qualify for non-need-based aid.

"For them, it is a real \$10,000 savings," Massa said. "It is also a reduction in revenue for the institution, so we need to make up that loss."

Making up for that loss could take many forms. An institution could theoretically use a tuition reset as a way to simultaneously drop its sticker price while nudging up its average net price for all students. Depending on how financial aid dollars are disbursed, that could mean a college or university cuts net prices for its wealthiest students but raises them for other groups of students. Unsurprisingly, colleges are usually saying they'll make up the lost revenue by boosting enrollment instead.

Drew, for example, will be sending returning students comparisons of their sticker price, financial aid packages and the balance they must pay in three different scenarios: this year, next year with a theoretical standard 3 percent tuition increase, and next year with the tuition reset that will actually be taking place. They'll see that they're paying about the same amount of tuition this year and next year under the reset, although the cost of room and board will increase, Massa said.

To make up for lost revenue, Drew will have to bring in 80 new students. This year it enrolled 452 freshmen with a 59 percent discount rate. Next year, it is aiming for 530 new students at a discount

Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, Va.

Cutting tuition, room, board and fees by 32 percent, to \$34,000, in 2018-19.

Fall 2016 undergraduate enrollment: 365

Notes: The price cut will apply to both new and returning students. It is being paired with a curricular and organizational overhaul developed around the theme of women's leadership and three centers of excellence.

*

University of the Sciences, Philadelphia

Cutting undergraduate tuition and general fees by 37 percent, to \$25,000, for undergraduates enrolling in fall 2018 and freezing rates for cohorts. Students accepted into accelerated six-year doctoral programs will pay a total cost of \$190,000, down from higher sticker prices.

Fall 2016 enrollment:

1,344 undergraduates, 1,197 graduate students

Notes: A combined reset and tuition freeze is unusual. Tuition for current students is not being reset but is being frozen.

of 49 percent on the lower tuition rate.

"Our market research study indicated that we could expect a 20-25 percent bump in applications as a result of this price reset," Massa said. "We have a lot of work to do to make that happen, and we're prepared to do that. It may seem like a lot, 80 new students between first year and transfers, but I think we're poised to achieve that."

Drew expects enrollment growth

The Tuition-Reset Strategy

especially from “middle-class families who may not have qualified for need-based aid,” according to an online Q&A about the tuition reset.

A wealthier applicant pool can also help colleges and universities offset the cost of lost revenue from full-pay students. Tuition resets have in the past attracted the attention of well-off families. Concordia University in St. Paul, for example, reset tuition in 2013. It found that the number of freshmen it enrolled judged to have no financial need doubled between 2012 and 2016, to 24 out of 239 freshmen.

Critics Abound

Many attack resets as a strategy prone to overpromising and underdelivering. Among the critiques: they're gimmicks. They're marketing ploys that won't work if more than a handful of colleges and universities try them. They work for a year or two, but then colleges and universities see applications and enrollments tail off. Colleges are putting them in place as temporary measures before they go back to jacking up tuition and discount rates at unsustainable rates.

“They're not changing their model,” said P. Jesse Rine, assistant provost at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, who wrote [a white paper](#) last year comparing the practice of tuition discounting to a shell game.

“If you're using the same model but just doing it on a smaller scale, the fundamental or inherent flaws in the model remain,” he said. “Right now, the model's susceptibility to unsustainable escalation is still a feature of an institution's pricing and financial aid model if all they're doing is resetting tuition.”

Rine believes a more straightforward approach for colleges and universities would be to identify

the cost of providing an education, use it to calculate a published tuition price, then use endowment resources to lower the cost for some students through financial aid. He thinks the current high-price, high-aid model is unsustainable over the long term and that it has seriously damaged private colleges' credibility with students and families who are dissatisfied with opaque tuition practices.

Tuition resets have often been pitched to the public as being responsive to the market and being transparent pricing, Rine noted. Colleges and universities seem to be trying to address a sense of lost trust.

Others urge caution to any institution considering a tuition reset.

“We don't recommend a tuition reset,” said Kathy Dawley, principal at Hardwick Day, the financial aid consulting division of EAB. Instead, she advocates for making every attempt to lower discount rates carefully, with an eye toward how net revenue is affected.

“There are occasions where lowering discount without any check, actually, itself, brings down revenue,” Dawley said. “So it has to be managed pretty carefully.”

Still, Hardwick Day counted 27 institutions that had put tuition resets in place between 2002 and 2014. They cut tuition on average by \$6,000, reducing the average sticker price by 17 percent.

Results among those institutions are mixed, according to Dawley. Some showed improved retention rates initially, only to have tuition revenue and enrollment decline over time.

Remember also the question of whether tuition resets actually translate to students. After the University of Charleston in West



Ed Welch

Virginia cut its advertised tuition in 2012 from \$25,000 to \$19,500, its average net price for students from families making less than \$30,000 rose 39 percent, *The Hechinger Report* said in [an article published last year](#).

Any increase in net price for low-income students was unintentional, said Ed Welch, Charleston's president. The university cut tuition across the board and decreased financial aid by a corresponding amount because it was not attempting to collect more or less money from students, he said in an interview.

“If anything, we thought the first reset would appeal to more middle-class people, because we thought they might be price conscious,” he said. “We just thought that the time was right for people to be more responsive to a lower advertised tuition, rather than having to do tuition plus financial aid. Then we found out that didn't work for our audience, sadly.”

[A study of eight colleges](#) that reset tuition between 1996 and 2014 found seven increased fresh-

The Tuition-Reset Strategy

man enrollment the year they put their price change into effect. The 2015 study, by the economist and former Mercy College President Lucie Lapovsky, noted that administrators at the institution that did not increase freshman enrollment said they did not provide enough attention to the reset and executed it poorly. That college experienced a 42 percent drop in freshman enrollment in its reset year.

Lapovsky was able to analyze net tuition revenue per first-year student at the seven colleges that increased enrollment in the year of their resets. Three increased net tuition revenue per student the year they reset tuition, by 0.5 percent, 4.2 percent and 4.3 percent. Four saw net tuition revenue per student decrease, by 2.6 percent, 11.3 percent, 13.9 percent and 16.4 percent. But because of enrollment gains, five of the seven colleges increased net total tuition revenue. Net total tuition increases ranged from 8 percent to 57 percent, while losses were 1 percent and 9 percent.

Four institutions had reset tuition long enough in the past that Lapovsky was able to analyze enrollment over several years since their resets. All four institutions were still reporting higher freshman enrollment than they were the year before they reset tuition. Three of those colleges had grown enrollment since the reset was put into effect.

Lapovsky is in the process of updating the study, she said in an interview. In the meantime, she is a strong advocate of resets in the right circumstances.

Institutions that are candidates for resets are those giving aid to almost all of their students and any with a discount rate above 50 per-



I never had an assumption that when you do a tuition reset you do a tuition freeze. It just means you are starting from a much lower base.



cent, she said. They also include institutions with excess capacity.

"I think that there's a feeling that the spread between the published price and the average price has just grown far too wide," she said.

Lapovsky pushes back against the idea that a tuition reset is a failure if an institution goes back to raising tuition rates in subsequent years. Unless colleges are able to expand enrollment every year, it is a given that they will have to increase the sticker price to keep up with cost growth, she said.

"I never had an assumption that when you do a tuition reset you do a tuition freeze," she said. "It just means you are starting from a much lower base."

Colleges and universities also often continue to raise charges for room and board during and after tuition resets.

Although she backs resets in some cases, Lapovsky isn't blind to their potential drawbacks. Colleges could turn off students if they price themselves incorrectly for how they are positioned. They could communicate the reset poorly. They could miss with their financial modeling.

"You have to redo your leveraging matrix without any data, because you don't have a history to

base it on," Lapovsky said. "That's a challenging thing for schools, so schools are scared. There is risk involved."

The risk spans multiple years. Backers of tuition resets say institutions that have done the best job of implementing them used them as long-term strategies instead of just short-term shots in the arm.

Their strategy includes how future tuition increases will be put in place.

"They've mapped out what those smaller increases on a smaller starting base would look like over time, and they prepared for it," said Carole Arwidson, vice president and director of market research for the Lawlor Group. "The reset, in their minds, was never a one-year strategy. It's a five, 10-year model."

The Lawlor Group is, along with Lapovsky, generally seen as one of the leading advocates for tuition resets in the consulting world. It has argued resets can succeed if institutions are operating from a position of strength, those with a valuable educational experience to offer to students, and those that are willing to respond to the higher education marketplace.

Resets in other circumstances can be more problematic, according to John Lawlor, the firm's

The Tuition-Reset Strategy

founder and principal.

"We've had clients that explored doing this, and our recommendation was 'your brand equity isn't strong enough,'" he said. "If we did this, it would be a case of cheap just got cheaper."

In that light, it is worth reiterating that many of the institutions announcing tuition resets for next year have faced financial struggles recently. Some skeptics believe a wealthy institution like a Williams College or Amherst College would have to implement a tuition reset before the practice is taken seriously. That would signal prices had grown out of alignment with demand throughout the market, they said. Because of their prestige, it would also be harder for rival institutions to try to poach their applicants by dangling eye-popping financial aid packages to offset high sticker prices.

Of course, a wealthy institution implementing another controversial pricing strategy, tuition freezes, didn't validate that practice for many in the broader market. Princeton University [froze tuition](#) in 2007, but the freeze didn't last. Even as some try tuition freezes and other similar plans, like [fixed net price tuition plans](#) keeping student cohorts' tuition level for all of the years they enroll, many view them with suspicion.

Otherwise, many likened tuition resets to a strategy tried by the retailer J.C. Penney. Several years ago the chain, which traditionally tagged items with high sticker prices and drove traffic to stores with coupons and flashy sales, attempted to change to a model of fair and square prices without the markups and deep discounts. Sales plummeted, the store's stock price crashed and CEO Ron John-

son was fired less than two years after he was hired and implemented the strategy.

Some, including Johnson, have argued that J.C. Penney should have stuck with the strategy longer. Others said he put it in place before its time. But others feel he simply misread the chain's market position, trying to make J.C. Penney something it could never be.

Many would point out that college is not clothing. Paying for a pair of Dockers is very different from deciding where to try to earn a diploma.

Resets can be part of returning a college to solid financial footing, said Elizabeth Hillman, president of Mills, which had to make cuts as it faced a several-million-dollar deficit in its \$57 million operating budget heading into this year -- but the college is still cutting its sticker price for undergraduate tuition by 36 percent next year, to \$28,765.

"I think moving from a tenuous financial position to a really thriving and robust space requires a lot of steps," Hillman said. "This is an important step that really clarifies what costs are going to be and hopefully energizes some of the people who come to our campus, say it looks great, but then they look at the sticker price and they say, 'It's not for me.' We want to make clear this can be for them."

Per-student net tuition is likely to stay the same at Mills as its discount rate drops along with sticker price -- from more than 60 percent for incoming students this fall to below 50 percent next year. But the college can increase revenue by growing enrollment, Hillman said.

That growth can come from both high school students who are writing off Mills based on price and from transfer students.

"No private college in California fails to compete with our public university system," Hillman said. "So we do hope that we can actually work to make a more seamless transition from the community colleges to Mills because of this."

Unusual Resets Unfold

Several institutions announcing resets this year stand out as particularly unusual, either because of their recent history or because of the details embedded in their plans.

In Virginia, Sweet Briar's tuition reset will come just three years after it went through another high-profile reset of a different sort. The women's college's former board attempted to close it because of concerns about its long-term sustainability as a going concern, only to have alumnae wrest away control of the college and run it under new leadership.

The new president of Sweet Briar, Meredith Woo, who started at the college this year, brought up the idea of a reset, according to Teresa Tomlinson, who chairs the college's board. She also put several other structural changes on the table. In addition to the reset,



Teresa Tomlinson

The Tuition-Reset Strategy

Sweet Briar is adopting a new core curriculum focused on women's leadership, reorganizing its academic departments and revamping its academic calendar.

The timing of Sweet Briar's tuition reset announcement might seem strange to the outside observer, given that it has gone through so many other major changes of late. But the college needed to stabilize its core operations before it could plot its way forward, according to Tomlinson.

"When you're restructuring a college like this, you have the national reputation and a brand and the potential to be exactly what you want to be -- which is a formidable women's liberal arts college -- you're going to have to spend some time remaking things and getting your house in order," Tomlinson said.

The Cleveland Institute of Music has its own unique take on the tuition reset. It is cutting tuition with an eye toward shrinking, not growing, its student body.

"We have set a new threshold of tuition from which we are going to work down," said Paul W. Hogle, the institute's president and CEO. "Most people do this to increase applications in order to increase matriculation. We're increasing applications so we can be more selective."

The institute is cutting tuition by 15 percent, to \$40,000, for 2018-19, a year after holding tuition flat for the first time in more than 50 years. Its freshman tuition discount rate is expected to drop accordingly, from north of 60 percent to the middle or high 50 percent range.

Currently, the institute has 400 students. Next year it will have 350 to 375, and in the next 10 years Hogle wants enrollment to drop to the low 300s.



Paul Hogle

One way to make the math work is through fund-raising. For the last 20 years, the institute has raised about \$1.4 million annually in nonrestricted gifts, Hogle said. Over the last several years, that has climbed to \$2 million. He thinks it will be \$2.25 million this year and grow to \$3 million in the future, raising money for scholarships.

The Cleveland Institute of Music is using a tuition reset toward a different end because it plays in an entirely different space than the four-year undergraduate institutions that usually deploy the mechanism. As a conservatory, it competes against top names like the Juilliard School and the Colburn School. The most sought-after students don't pay to attend conservatories.

"The gold standard in my category is 100 percent," Hogle said of the tuition discount rate his institution is competing against. "In an orchestra world, you would love to think it is the Tchaikovsky who sold the program. It is often the other things."

Also standing out is the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, which is pairing a tuition reset and tuition freeze. The university is cutting undergraduate tuition from \$39,994 per year to \$25,000 next year. The university is also guaranteeing that undergraduates will not pay more than \$25,000 per year in tuition and fees until they complete their degrees. It is also guaranteeing students accepted into its six-year doctoral programs will pay a total cost of no more than \$190,000. That's down from a sticker price typically over \$300,000, according to administrators.

Current students will not see a tuition reset, but their tuition will be frozen for the rest of their time on campus.

Currently, the university's first-year undergraduate class numbers 358. It aims to grow to 387 next year and 400 the following year, said Patricia Vanston, vice president for business development and enrollment management.

"Our target student is who we are going after now -- students in the tristate area, the Mid-Atlantic part of the country," she said. "We're going aggressively after smart science kids who want to go to a science school."

The sticker price cut comes on the heels of [layoffs and program cuts](#) as the university sought to close a \$4.5 million hole in its \$90 million budget earlier this year. Its enrollment had also been slipping even as its discount rate increased.

"What's happening now is unsustainable," Vanston said. "I looked at our trajectory. What are we going to have, an 80 percent discount? I felt like I'd rather be on the front end of this [reset movement] because I feel like it's going to be much bigger."

The Tuition-Reset Strategy

The other institutions announcing a tuition reset in September are Cornerstone University, a Christian institution in Michigan, and Avila University, a Catholic university in Kansas City, Mo. Cornerstone is cutting its sticker price next fall from \$27,520 to \$24,500. The cut is being paired with a one-year tuition freeze for returning students and an expansion of the college's block tuition. Instead of paying one price for taking 12 to 17 academic credit hours, students will be able to take between 12 and 18 credits for the same price. That change starts in January.

Cornerstone expects to decrease its discount rate and keep its net price per student similar to what it is today, according to Bob Sack, vice president for advancement. It anticipates enrollment growth as more students see the lower sticker price and believe the university is



In an orchestra world, you would love to think it is the Tchaikovsky who sold the program. It is often the other things.



affordable.

Avila, meanwhile, plans a 33 percent cut in its listed price, to \$19,900, starting next year. The price includes books and campus fees. Avila is promising tuition protection, keeping tuition from increasing by more than 3 percent per year in the future.

The university is also taking steps to ensure students graduate in four

years, guaranteeing students an internship or research experience, and making students eligible to apply for a \$1,000 travel award. Current students have already received information about the new pricing. The university says incoming freshmen in 2018 will see the "full benefit" of the new model but that all students will receive a reduction in tuition pricing. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/09/25/trustees-and-new-presidents-lead-push-tuition-resets-despite-debate-over-practices>

Diversifying the Presidency

The last five campus leaders picked at Cal State have been women, and recent hires have doubled the number of Asian-Americans who will be campus presidents.

By Rick Seltzer // June 3, 2016



Ellen Junn



Mary Papazian



Judy K. Sakaki

The California State University System has named women to lead campuses in five straight presidential searches in 2016, nearly doubling the number of women presidents at the 23-campus system in what some hope signals an accelerating trend toward diverse higher education leadership.

The latest hiring for the 475,000-student university system came May 25, when it named Ellen N. Junn the next president of California State University at Stanislaus. Junn is currently at Cal State Dominguez Hills, where she is provost and vice president for academic affairs. She will take over at Stanislaus State after President Joseph F. Sheley retires at the end of June.

Junn's appointment comes after Cal State named four other women

to presidential roles starting in January, three of whom will be replacing retiring male presidents. It also means the Cal State system will have women presidents at 11 of its 23 campuses. That's a significant difference from the end of the 2014-15 academic year, when just six of its presidents were women.

Also of note is that Cal State will go into the next academic year with four Asian-American presidents, up from two last year. The change comes at a time when many Asian-Americans have worried they're underrepresented in administrative ranks despite broad success in higher education. The Cal State system also has five Latino and three African-American presidents.

More broadly, the hiring string is a high-profile development for one

of the country's largest higher education systems at a time when women's leadership at colleges and universities has remained strikingly -- and to many observers disturbingly -- low. In 2011, 27 percent of college and university presidencies were held by women, [according to the American Council on Education](#). That's sharply out of step with student body compositions at large. The portion of women enrolled at postsecondary institutions has hovered around 57 percent for nearly 20 years, [according to the National Center for Education Statistics](#).

Experts hailed the hirings as having the potential to spark more applications from women for high-level positions at Cal State and across the country. Cal State leaders said they were possible

after the system took steps that increased diversity in its applicant pools.

Junn, for her part, is focused on Stanislaus State issues. But when asked, she also said it is important for organizations to find ways to recruit emerging leaders from all backgrounds, genders and ethnicities. More and more, higher education institutions are coming to realize that they have to invest in a new generation of leaders, she said.

At the same time, the national statistics showing a gap between the diversity of student populations and campus leaders speak for themselves about the state of leadership.

"We're still a long way off," Junn said. "And so the fact that the CSU is making these significant gains is quite remarkable, and I think it's noteworthy from that standpoint."

It is also noteworthy because the direction of higher education in California is often an early indicator of the path the rest of the country will take, said Molly Corbett Broad, president of the American Council on Education. Broad was executive vice chancellor and chief operating officer for the Cal State system in the mid-1990s before leaving to become University of North Carolina president in 1997.

"California has historically been a leader in change," she said. "Especially given the population of California, where in the next decade or so, the majority of the workforce will be persons of color, California plays this kind of role to be a leader."

The diversity gains reflect efforts to broaden applicant pools, said Timothy P. White, California State University System chancellor. Cal State didn't stack the deck or set out with the specific inten-



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tion of appointing five consecutive women presidents, he said. It hired the strongest candidate for each position.

But the chances of hiring women or minorities for leadership roles are higher when the applicant pool is more diverse.

So the diversity gains prove Cal State's search process deepened the pool, said White, who has been chancellor since the start of 2013. Cal State has paired open campus forums with confidential searches. The goal is to give deans, provosts and sitting presidents the ability to safely apply for new positions while still receiving feedback from campus constituencies.

Open forums take place early in the search process, White said. They allow students and faculty members to tell trustees' search committees what they want to see in a new president and what they view as campus needs. Videos from the forums are then posted so potential applicants can hear from students, faculty members and others they would be interacting with as president.

That allows prospective applicants to gauge the job and the campus at a time when they're de-

termining whether their skills line up, White said. In addition to the public forums, which are open to communities at large, Cal State pairs trustees' search committees with advisory committees including faculty, staff, students, alumni and others. It's an attempt to keep hearing from key groups while maintaining confidentiality during the hiring process.

White acknowledged the practice of conducting confidential searches can be controversial. Students and faculty members often seek to give input throughout the search process and want to know who is being considered for a job. Cal State's solution is a balancing act of sorts.

"It creates a safe place for people to come, to both learn about the place beyond what you see written and to have a chance to be reviewed and interviewed in a safe environment," White said. "From that, we're getting diversity of gender and diversity of race and ethnicity in ways that we have not been able to do in the past."

More colleges and universities are moving toward confidential searches, according to recruiters. Public searches tend to draw fewer

Diversifying the Presidency

applicants from comparable institutions as well as fewer applicants who are women or minorities, said Jan Greenwood, an executive search consultant who is co-owner and partner at Greenwood/Asher & Associates in Miramar Beach, Fla.

"I think perhaps women and minorities are more concerned about a backlash if they are a candidate for a position and don't get the offer, and possibly being damaged back on their home campus," she said. "It's not a matter of better or worse, one way versus another. It's simply a matter of, 'Do you want to see people from all kinds of backgrounds in the pool?'"

Questioning the number of women and minorities in leadership roles often dredges up a discussion over the talent pipeline. The common talking point has argued that the pipeline is narrow -- the relatively low number of women and minorities in leadership roles can't be changed until their representation increases in lower-level positions that feed those top jobs. In other words, there will be fewer women presidents until more women rise to become provosts.

But there have been many qualified women in the pipeline for decades, Greenwood said. She recalled resistance among some trustees and search committees to women and minority candidates gaining more opportunities in the 1990s.

"I can remember crazy conversations then, which were, 'If we have a woman president, then we don't need a woman provost,'" she said.

Long-running cultural shifts toward more representative leadership have accelerated in recent years, Greenwood said. Simply put, attitudes today are different.

Yet more men still hold the roles that tend to be stepping-stones to presidencies, according to Jamie Ferrare, managing principal of AGB Search, a Washington, D.C.-based higher ed executive recruitment firm.

"Most presidents come from senior-level administration work," Ferrare said. "Boards are looking for fund-raisers. Generally, fund-raisers have been male over the years. They're looking for people who have strong academic backgrounds -- provosts, academic deans. If you look at who the provosts are in the country, it's dominated by males."

Many have contested the pipeline argument's legitimacy. There are more than enough qualified women to step into available leadership roles, [the American Council on Education has argued](#). The group pointed out that more women than men have earned bachelor's degrees for 30 years and that more women currently earn doctoral degrees than men.

Studies have pointed to other reasons women may not be making it to the top. [A 2014 study](#) showed two-thirds of female college and university administra-

tors reported being discouraged or sabotaged as they pursued leadership roles. Two-thirds also felt expectations were different for women and men, according to the study, based on interviews with women college leaders conducted by researchers from the Center for Creative Leadership, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and Higher Education Resource Services, or HERS.

Regardless of how accurate concerns over the talent pipeline have been in the past, Ferrare said more qualified women are available today for leadership positions. Essentially, the pipeline today has widened.

"Good institutions are beginning to recognize talent at the junior level, at the faculty level, at the department chair level and the dean level," Ferrare said. "They're starting to, in essence, prepare candidates who are employees, professionals, on their campus for the next level of leadership."

Such institutional support could be key to more balanced university leadership. The American Council on Education and Colorado Women's College have recommended support for women ad-



You're going to see women from California and New York looking at positions in the middle of the country and around the country as well, because they begin to get excited at the opportunity. I think they're going to start feeling a lot more comfortable.



Diversifying the Presidency

vancing to positions like chief academic officer or provost. They've also recommended reviewing hiring and promotion policies -- including for tenure-track positions, more diverse search committee composition and making sure candidate pools are diverse.

But some hope Cal State's string of hiring women presidents could create a needed level of attention on diversity at the top. They could make it clear leadership positions are attainable for women and minorities, which could in turn lead to more women and minorities seeking leadership roles. Thus the Catch-22 of many women not applying for or winning leadership positions until there are more women in leadership positions could be wiped away.

In theory, at least, that could create more interest in systems like Cal State that have made high-profile shifts toward more diverse leadership. But the largest state systems can also lead a trend in pub-

lic and private universities across the country, Ferrare said.

"You're going to see women from California and New York looking at positions in the middle of the country and around the country as well, because they begin to get excited at the opportunity," Ferrare said. "I think they're going to start feeling a lot more comfortable."

Still, it's too early to say whether Cal State's hiring marks the start of a real transformation, the acceleration of a trend that many have predicted for years, or a bright blip on an otherwise bleak radar. Broad, the American Council on Education's president, said a series of moves in a short period of time does not necessarily have an outsize lasting impact.

"The best evidence that this is a real transformation of opening up opportunity occurs when a woman or a person of color is followed by a woman or person of color," she said. "Once this becomes an ongoing part of who comprises the fac-

ulty and who comprises the vice presidents and presidents, it becomes real."

Cal State's other presidential appointments this year include Gayle E. Hutchinson, who is Cal State Channel Islands provost and vice president for academic affairs and will take over for the retiring Paul Zingg in Chico. Erika D. Beck, provost and executive vice president of Nevada State College, will take over for the retiring Richard R. Rush at Channel Islands, and Judy K. Sakaki, the vice president of student affairs in the University of California's Office of the President, will take over for the retiring Ruben Armiñana at Sonoma State University. Finally, Mary Papazian, president of Southern Connecticut State University, will take over for Susan Martin at San Jose State. Martin was an interim president starting in August of 2015 after Mohammad Qayoumi departed for a senior government position in Afghanistan. ■

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