

The
STATE *of* _____
INNOVATION *in*
HIGHER EDUCATION:

A Survey of Academic Administrators

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A joint project of The Learning House, Inc., and the Online Learning Consortium

Andrew J. Magda

Jill Buban, Ph.D.

A number of individuals contributed to the project.

Dr. Jill Buban led the Online Learning Consortium team, which included Dr. Karen Pedersen. Andrew J. Magda led the Learning House team, which included Kelly Dean-Bailey, Katie Savinon, Nate Ackerly, Emily Wheeler, Eric Lewis, Will Bell, and Krista Walker.

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Dr. Thomas C. Boyd, Kaplan University

Dr. Victoria Brown, Florida Atlantic University

Dr. Thomas B. Cavanagh, University of Central Florida

Dr. Marie Cini, SOC-M and University of Maryland
University College

Evangeline J. Tsibris Cummings, University of Florida

Dr. David Haus, Husson University

Dr. Jane Neapolitan, Towson University

Dr. Linda Osterlund, Regis University

Dr. Nancy Sayre, Metropolitan State University of
Denver

Robert Zotti, Stevens Institute of Technology

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INTRODUCTION

In today's higher education landscape, innovation is an unmistakably trending topic. Despite its popularity, what innovation is and looks like varies widely. Whether it's utilizing a new technology or pedagogical approach in the classroom or a substantial university acquisition — such as Purdue University's purchase of Kaplan University — innovation takes many forms, in both theory and practice. Determining what is innovative cannot be dictated by the size of the endeavor.

Innovation's broad scope presents abundant opportunities, but it also raises its fair share of barriers. No university office or department is untouched by the motivation to innovate. That, unfortunately, increases the possibility for roadblocks that slow the innovation process — or derail it altogether. Yet if higher education is to survive, innovative thought and application must thrive.

To better understand the drivers and barriers to innovation at higher education institutions, The Learning House, Inc., and the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) have collaborated to produce this report. Through it, we explore just what an innovative culture looks like at institutions across the country and how they define and employ innovation.

For the purpose of this study, "innovation" is defined as:

The implementation of new initiatives in order to drive growth, increase revenue, reduce cost, differentiate experience, or adjust the value proposition.

Once we began analyzing the data, it didn't take long to discover a distinct lack of consistency of how institutions define a term like "innovation," that is so widely used. A real contrast emerges when the data shows that 90 percent of respondents say they include innovation in their strategic or academic plans and they are "very successful" at innovating. Clouding the picture even further, many respondents indicate a lack of a dedicated budget funds for innovation, despite its inclusion in their planning documents. This reveals a disconnect between institutional views regarding their emphasis on innovation and tangible structures and/or processes to support it on their campuses. This study attempts to address that disconnect with which many institutions struggle.

This study includes a written survey of more than 100 academic administrators, as well as phone interviews that were conducted with 11 academic administrators. The study's aim is to accomplish three goals:

- Understand how innovation manifests itself at an institution
- Identify common barriers to innovation, such as institutional culture and/or structure
- Recommend ways to foster innovation and navigate the challenges that arise when implementing it

“ Market forces are driving higher ed institutions to look at how to be more innovative. ”

—Dr. Nancy Sayre, associate vice president, innovation and lifelong learning at Metropolitan State University of Denver

KEY FINDINGS

Innovation can take any number of forms and occur in any part of the institution, but survey respondents and interviewees, when asked how their institutions defined "innovation," held a fundamental view that innovation is the art of solving problems to ensure students succeed in higher education. Innovation is not a zero-sum game; even those institutions that are perceived as highly innovative or on the leading edge of innovation can benefit from observing practices and processes at an institution considered less innovative. In fact, some institutions are purposely slower to adopt innovations until they have been proven at other institutions.

While the process of innovation can be foggy, one thing is clear: Innovation can mean many different things to an institution. Below is a summary of our key findings. The findings from this report are broad, and should be tailored to fit the unique needs of individual institutions.

1. Higher education does not have a standard definition for innovation.

When evaluating all surveys and interviews, we discovered there was not a consensus definition of innovation. Furthermore, many respondents provided definitions that we, as researchers, felt could be too narrow for what innovation at an institution could encompass. This reveals how potentially broad innovation is — which is encouraging — but without a clear-cut answer as to what it is, institutions may find it difficult to set goals, acquire buy-in, and allocate funds for innovative efforts.

2. At its core, higher education views innovation as a means to solve problems.

The tools that are used and the outcomes achieved may vary; however, academic administrators surveyed and interviewed return to problem-solving when discussing their definitions of innovation. Promoting student success appears to be the chief focus of innovation initiatives, with 68 percent of respondents ranking student success as a top-three goal for innovation. The growing addition of “non-traditional” learners, such as online students, who require different and additional support services, has added to this student success issue.

3. A balance between administrative leadership and operational initiative is key.

Administrators often discuss a top-down approach — the president and provost setting the tone and directive for innovation at the institution — as creating the most success in innovation, but are also quick to point out that this approach must be carefully balanced and include a bottom-up component in which faculty, staff, and other constituents can drive the innovation process on their own. Part of the success of top-down innovation, as noted by interviewees, had to do with including innovation initiatives in strategic plans year to year, as well as a dedicated budget for innovation. Ninety-one percent of administrators noted that innovation is a priority in either their institution’s strategic or academic plans — or both.

4. As innovation often relies on interdepartmental collaboration, structural issues and cultural factors are the most common barriers to success.

Eighty percent of administrators ranked structural issues and cultural factors as top barriers to innovation at their institutions. We found these barriers can be overcome by strong leadership-shaping processes to better promote collaboration, as well as rewards and incentives to encourage shifts in culture.

SECTION ONE:

What Is Innovation in Higher Education?

The word “innovation” can be applied to many processes and outcomes within higher education, from paradigm-shifting ways of looking at pedagogy to creating a more efficient way for students to register for classes. With this in mind, a broad definition of innovation was used when conducting our survey and allowed both survey respondents and qualitative interviewees to share their definitions of innovation. For the purposes of the survey, we defined innovation as:

The implementation of new initiatives in order to drive growth, increase revenue, reduce cost, differentiate experience, or adjust the value proposition.

When asked about the definition of innovation at their institutions, many noted that there was no formal definition of innovation. Though innovation is reportedly occurring on all of these campuses, it is doing so outside of a formal context in which there is a set definition and understanding of what innovation is supposed to embody. When interviewees were asked what comes to mind first when thinking of innovation, responses seemed to fall into two camps — institutions that see innovation as a tool or a descriptor for problem-solving, and institutions that see it as a tool or descriptor for evolving.

Innovation falls into two camps: a tool for problem-solving or a tool for evolving.

“We’re looking at how to solve problems,” said Dr. Victoria Brown, assistant provost for eLearning at Florida Atlantic University. Dr. Thomas C. Boyd, dean and vice president of the School of Business and Information Technology at Kaplan University, said, “It’s focusing on solving a problem, as opposed to innovation for innovation’s sake.”

From examples provided, it appears that both camps are talking about the same thing, just from different experiences. In the end, innovation seems to be synonymous with some form of perceived improvement. Interestingly, even failure is seen as an improvement of some kind. If the initial goal was not achieved, administrators often still pointed out a lesson learned or bright spot from going through the process. That freedom to fail appears to drive even more innovation within the institution's culture.

“ I feel like I've been empowered from the provost's office to try new things. I haven't been told, 'No, we don't want you to try that,' and I have tried things that have failed that I haven't been punished for. It's important to have that structure above you when you're trying to be innovative. ”

—Dr. Victoria Brown, Florida Atlantic University

There appears to be a sentiment within groups of individuals at institutions that some innovations are change for the sake of change, though this sentiment was not substantiated with examples. This feeling may be fostered by outside pressures placed upon an institution and the institution responding to these pressures too rapidly or without including all necessary constituencies. Dr. Nancy Sayre at Metropolitan State University of Denver noted decreased state funding, growing competition, and questioning of degrees' value as just a few examples of the pressures being placed on higher education institutions, causing some institutions to find new ways to accomplish goals while calling upon fewer resources.

INNOVATION FOR SOLUTIONS

“Think about it. The American education system is designed with complete disregard for people who don't have the luxury of having parents paying expenses while you go to school and live in the dorm. I think that Kaplan University's approach to innovation has really been to try to focus on those people.”

—Dr. Thomas C. Boyd, Kaplan University

It appears that when administrators are discussing innovation in the context of “evolving,” they are focused on how faculty can improve student learning and better fulfill the institutional mission to produce educated individuals who are successful in life. Examples of this type of innovation that administrators noted in our survey include:

- Researching new and better ways to enhance instruction;

- Trying new pedagogies, approaches, and processes to improve important metrics such as retention;
- Changing education delivery to appeal to a new target population;
- Faculty helping students learn through demonstrations, videos, photos, interactive scenarios, games, and so on, as well as with new tools and techniques to improve student learning; and
- Implementing new ideas to bring about better outcomes.

“ I tend to look at [innovation] like, how do you help large public institutions fulfill their missions, but how do they do that in a way that evolves with the times? Because most public institutions, including this university, pride themselves on traditions and almost define themselves based on their tradition. So they're inherently destined to resist change and resist innovation, unless you do it right. ”

—Evangeline J. Tsibris Cummings, assistant provost and director of UF Online at the University of Florida

The definitions above center on improving student learning outcomes by incentivizing faculty to engage in innovative practices to improve curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom tools. In examples provided during the interviews, we probed deeper into these examples of innovative practices and found the role of the administration was to provide faculty and staff with the support they needed to experiment with these innovations. This support often takes the form of incentivization and may include:

- Annual awards to recognize innovations;
- Grants or funding specifically for innovation efforts;
- A recognized process for faculty to follow when they have ideas for innovation they would like to pursue; and
- A strategic plan that includes innovation.

“ We have a pretty robust awards system for faculty that do remarkable teaching, and teaching in particular that leverages technology. So, there are great top-down recognitions and awards through the university to acknowledge the effort that faculty spend in teaching and, in particular, in online teaching. The awards and recognition

thing is very key and, of course, promoting those things and communicating them. The other top-down mechanism that I have is a fund for innovative pilots. ”

—Evangeline J. Tsibris Cummings, assistant provost and director of UF Online at the University of Florida

TOP-DOWN INNOVATION

Including innovation as part of the strategic plan is connected to a larger discussion around the institution having a “culture of innovation,” starting from the top down. In the interviews conducted, it was apparent that when the president of an institution was focused on innovation, the institution was focused on innovation at multiple levels. In these cases, structures were in place to encourage and support innovation, and when administrators and leaders discussed goals for their departments or the larger institution, goals for innovation were emphasized.

Interviewees noted that balance is necessary. One interviewee, who did not want to be directly quoted on the matter, found that when the president tried to control innovation too much, not all innovations could grow and progress equally.

Separately, at the University of Florida, Evangeline J. Tsibris Cummings found:

“ It's not so much top-down in that, 'Thou shalt innovate.' It's more of a top-down leadership support, leadership sanctioning, leadership rewarding, and also it's messaging to make sure you're defining innovation and change in the mission, which is not an easy thing to do, but it's a critical piece. ”

The connection of top-down support with individuals who have innovative ideas appears to create the most positive change at institutions.

“ The challenge of large organizations; they're big steamships in the ocean to turn around, and it takes strong leadership to create change. ”

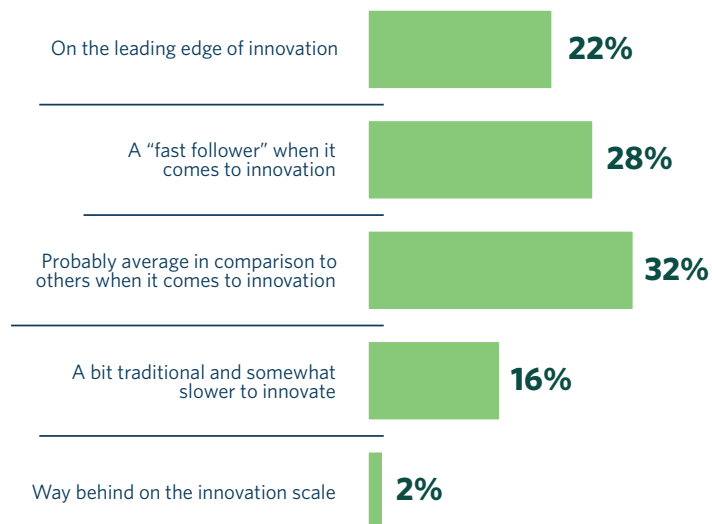
—Dr. Nancy Sayre, Metropolitan State University of Denver

SECTION TWO:

Approaches to Innovation

Fifty percent of the people surveyed would place their institution above average in regard to their positions on innovation within higher education (22 percent “leading edge,” 28 percent “fast follower”). Nearly 20 percent feel they are slower or behind when it comes to innovation, with approximately one-third believing they are “average” in comparison. Interestingly, of the institutions that noted that innovation is called out in their strategic plans, only 22 percent would say their institution is on the leading edge of innovation, and only 35 percent of those with dedicated budgets for innovation feel they are on the leading edge.

How would you label your school with regard to its position on innovation?



Interestingly, it was found in our interviews that NOT being on the leading edge can be a strategic decision by some institutions. Those institutions may take a “wait-and-see” approach to understand what innovations are successfully being implemented at other universities. These later innovation adopters will then take lessons learned from the early adopters and apply them to their own institutions, or see which innovations are “passing fads” that do not have longevity. An interviewee who asked not to be identified said, “We have a solid operational model where there are other institutions who can take those high risks, but we would like to borrow from existing models, deal with best practices, lessons learned, and partner more so than go rogue and fall and deal with major scratches.”

“ I think it's a combination of knowing and being at the forefront of the thinking, but then finding the right time. Timing is always really important. So, it might have looked like it was a reaction, but it really wasn't; it was being ready. ”

—Dr. Marie Cini, higher ed lead, SOC-M, and provost emeritus, University of Maryland University College

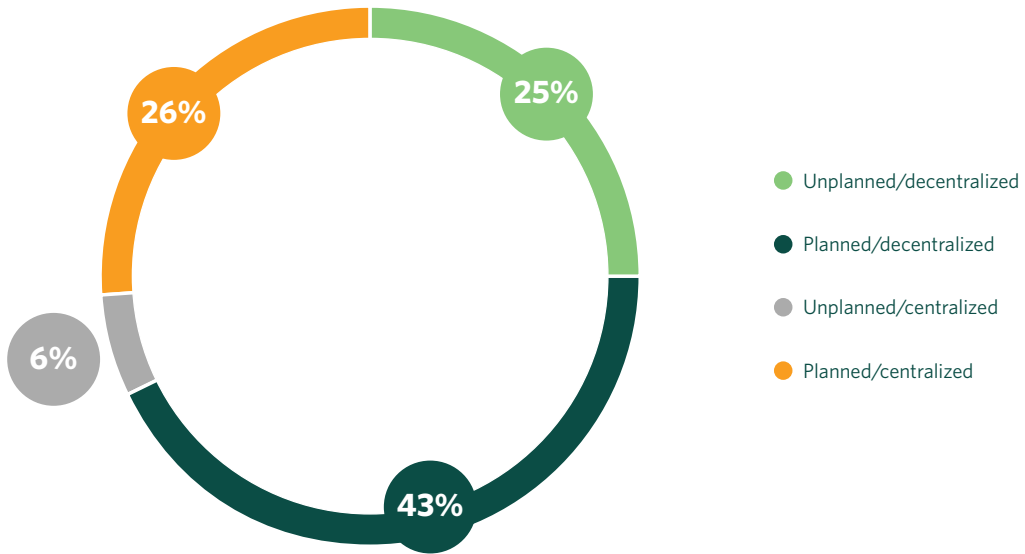
TOP-DOWN OR DECENTRALIZED

Fifty-nine percent of the administrators surveyed noted that there are multiple driving forces responsible for innovation at their institutions. This makes sense, as regardless of whether the institution follows a top-down or more egalitarian model, no individual or department controls innovation. In fact, since innovation often involves cross-collaboration between multiple departments, it cannot have a sole owner.

When describing what they feel their institutions' approach to innovation is, 68 percent of administrators responded that they feel it is decentralized, with most feeling there is some level of planning involved. Planning, in this context, can be providing support, as discussed in Section One of this report.

Those who said there are multiple driving forces responsible for innovation at their institutions often described their approach as planned/decentralized (43 percent). Those who point to the academic administration as the driving force would also describe their approach as planned/decentralized.

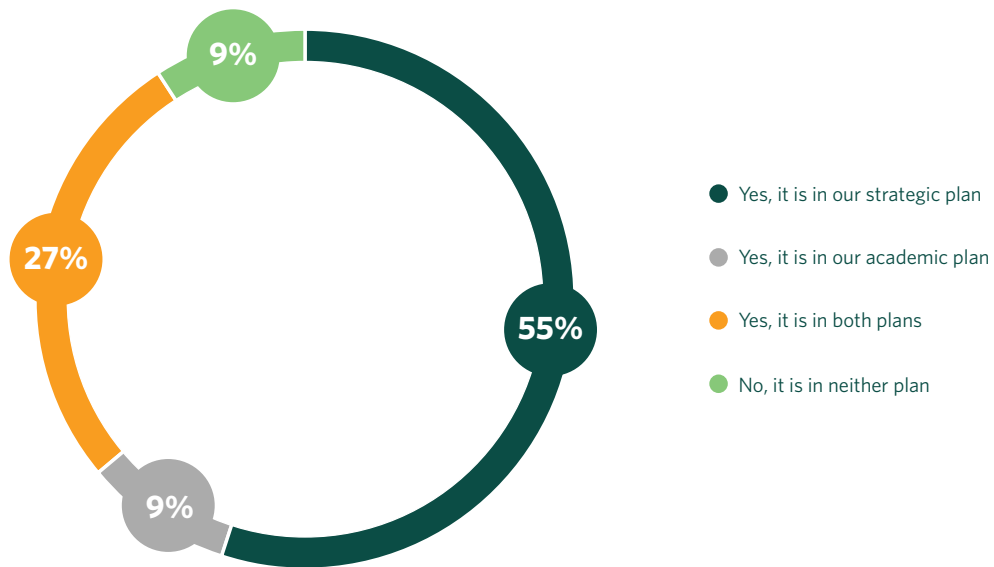
Which best describes your institution's approach to innovation?



INNOVATION AS A PRIORITY

The institutions represented in the survey are engaged with innovation, as 91 percent of administrators noted that innovation is stated as a priority in either their strategic or academic plans, or both documents.

Is innovation a priority in your strategic or academic plan?



While only 9 percent said innovation is not a part of either the strategic or academic plan, one-quarter said the approach to innovation is unplanned or decentralized. This represents a disconnect where institutions list innovation as a priority, yet do not formally plan or support that innovation, or simply do not want to be held accountable.

FUNDING

Another disconnect may be around funding innovation at institutions. Only 40 percent of responding institutions reported having a dedicated budget for innovation; again, this is a contrast to the 91 percent noting that innovation is called out in the institution's planning documents. If an institution is formally planning goals around innovation, there should be earmarked funds to support these efforts. Those who noted that innovation is driven by the academic administration were more likely to have a dedicated budget for innovation (52 percent) compared to those with multiple driving forces (40 percent).

THE ROLE OF STUDENTS

Although the level of involvement can vary greatly from institution to institution, it appears that the majority of institutions (87 percent) allow their student body to drive some portion of their innovation efforts. One-fifth of responding institutions indicate students play a significant role in driving innovation on campus.

Formal solicitation of feedback, such as through surveys or focus groups, is one way to involve students in driving innovation. Indirectly, students can spread their ideas throughout the institution:

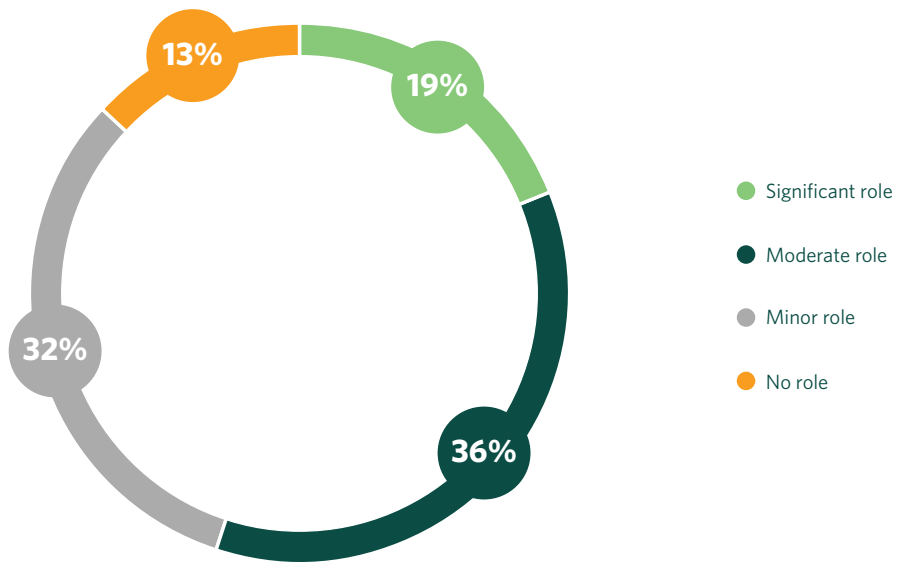
“ I think students drive innovation in actuality and probably in one of the more powerful ways, because they shared their experiences that they have in one classroom with the faculty members in another classroom. What ended up happening is that it seeds ideas that begin to spread across the university. I don't know that we always give that credence or that power to students. They're the most powerful drivers of change sometimes. ”

—Dr. Victoria Brown, Florida Atlantic University

Student groups also can impact innovations on campuses. Dr. Jane Neapolitan, assistant provost for academic innovation at Towson University, found that students were key in the adoption of open educational resources (OER), as well as some approaches for having conversations about difficult topics, such as race:

“ They are represented on a number of new committees and new initiatives on our campus. We're dealing with a lot of those issues; same on every campus in the United States, but a lot of it has been student-driven. ”

To what extent do students drive innovation at your campus?

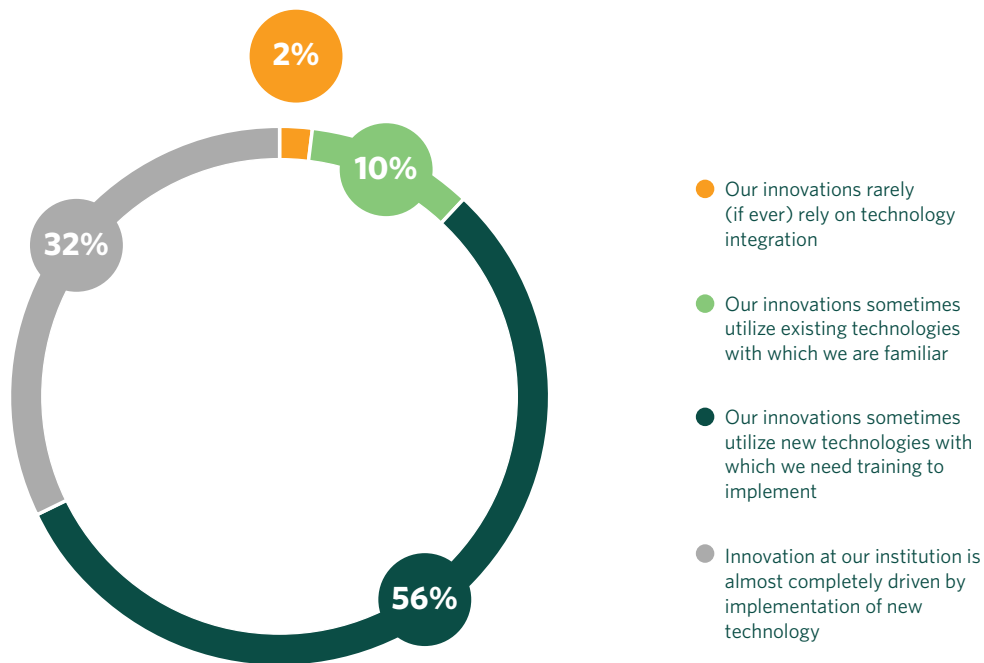


TECHNOLOGY

“ I suppose it all comes down to tools and practices. We try to get good technologies and good tools, make them available for the instructors to use, and show the instructors how to use them as needed. ”

—Robert Zotti, assistant dean, web campus at Stevens Institute of Technology

To what extent does innovation rely on technology?



Not surprisingly, innovation is directly linked to the use of new technology by a clear majority of institutions surveyed. When defining innovation, many survey respondents and interviewees either called out technology specifically or gave examples of innovations that required new technology; some even equated innovation with technology. It is unknown if this is the result of a mindset that links technology with innovation, but such a view can limit the scope of what innovation can be and could also lead to a strain on limited resources. Innovations can include sustainability initiatives, redesign of a course, changing of processes for adding or dropping courses, or countless other improvements that do not necessarily require technology and do not necessarily require large budgets to enact.

EXAMPLE OF INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Institution: Regis University

Regis University sought to add an interdisciplinary approach to its health-focused degree programs. Now, students in the areas of physical therapy, pharmacy, nursing, and counseling work together on case studies in the same room and can learn from the various points of view that are shared.

“ The students are role modeling interprofessional education, which I think is innovative. To coordinate multiple schedules and lesson plans between several departments with various faculty and students is hard to do, but the benefits of collaboration and shared learning seems worth it, and the benefits provide enough motivation to keep it going. ”

—Dr. Linda Osterlund, Regis University

SECTION THREE:

Motivations for Innovation

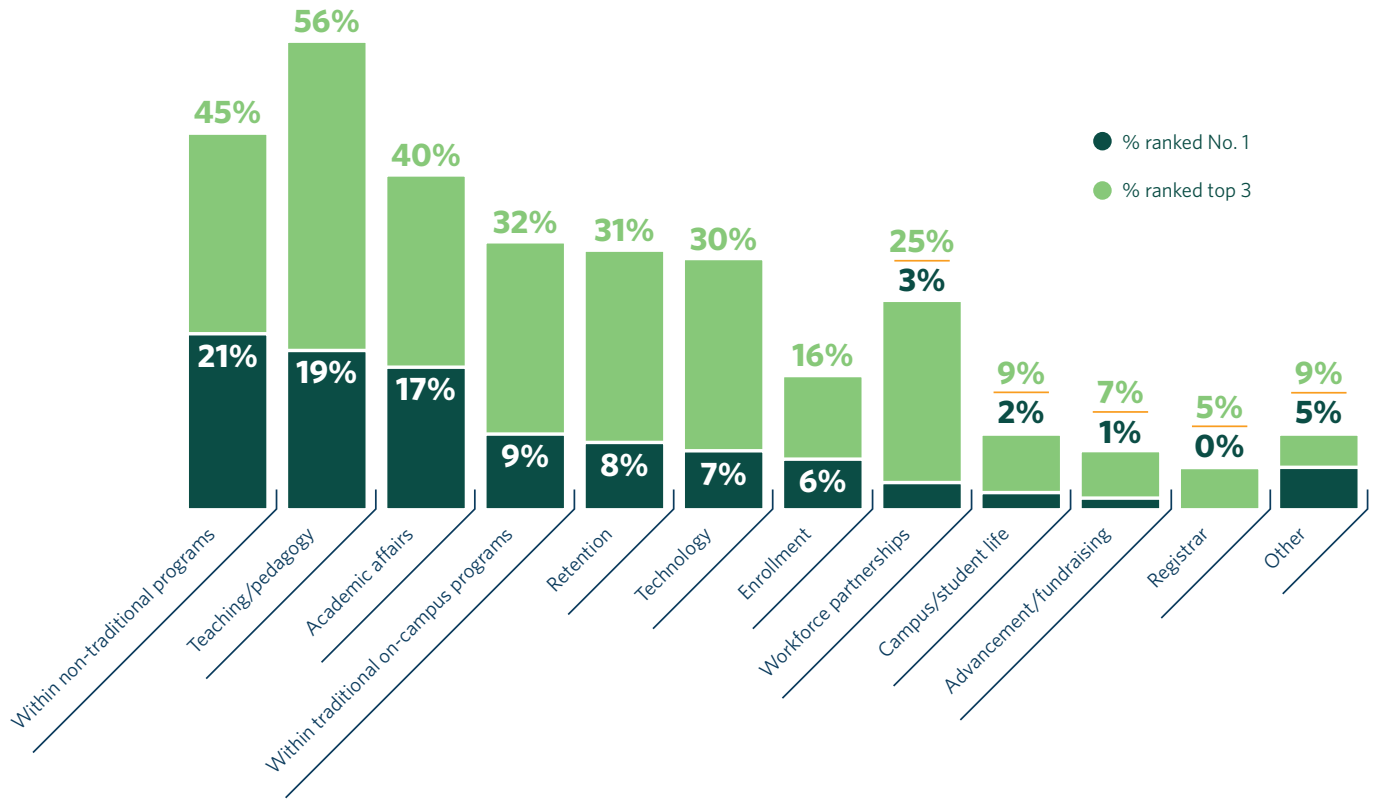
Innovation activity appears most prominently within non-traditional programs, such as those offered online, with 21 percent of institutions ranking this area as their No. 1 area for innovation. Teaching/pedagogy was also an active area for innovation, with 56 percent of responding institutions including this in their top-three areas for innovation.

Overall, these data show that certain areas of the institution may be more likely to foster innovation, including enrollment, retention, and academic affairs. The registrar's office appears to be the least active in terms of innovation, with no academic administrators ranking it No. 1.

“ My focus, of course, is on the use of technology and alternative modalities for teaching, but not everyone's going to want to do that. So, the thing I try to focus on is connecting the innovators. It goes back to that bottom up, but basically connecting all the experts and practitioners that are innovating. They can, therefore, be much more of a powerful force for the organization, and they can be the ones that ultimately define what innovation means. ”

—Evangeline J. Tsibris Cummings, University of Florida

In what areas of your institution is innovation most prominent?

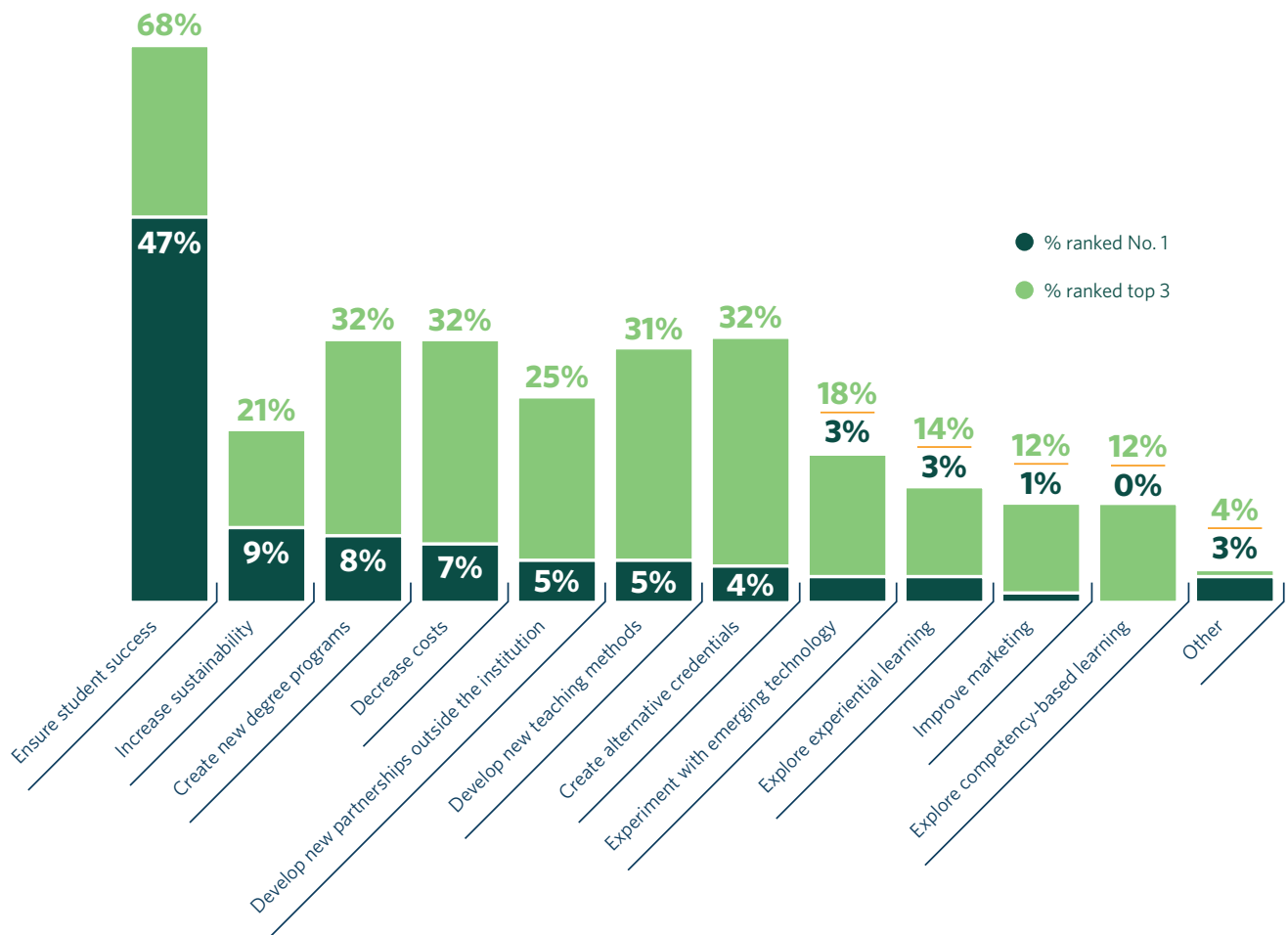


INNOVATION GOALS

“ *When I think of innovation, it is essentially us removing our preconceptions and biases so that we can find new ways of being as effective as possible at achieving our mission of teaching classes and reaching students.* ”

—Dr. David Haus, director of online and extended learning, chair of general ed, and associate professor of history at Husson University

What would you say the main goals for innovation are at your institution today?



By far, the main goal for innovation appears to focus on student success, with 47 percent of institutions choosing that as the No. 1 goal and 68 percent as a top-three goal. Sustainability, creating new degree programs, and decreasing costs are next on many institutions' lists, but far behind student success. Interestingly, though pedagogy was one of the top areas for innovation, institutions noted that experiential learning and competency-based learning (CBE) are some of the lowest goals they have for innovation. Many answer options to this question could be seen as various forms of student success; therefore, if taken in sum, the "ensure student success" sentiment is likely even greater than these figures paint.

EXAMPLE OF INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Institution: University of Central Florida

As this report illustrates, many institutions state that innovation is in their strategic plans. The University of Central Florida has done exactly that, setting up specific, measurable goals tied to the strategic plan. Then, they assign those goals to specific individuals and departments that are held accountable for the goals. As noted by Dr. Thomas B. Cavanagh, UCF's vice provost for digital learning, everyone at the institution oversees innovation. By assigning responsibility and tracking progress toward goals in a transparent manner, milestones can be acknowledged, and assistance can be provided if progress slows.

“ In the climate that we've been living in the last year or so, things are explicitly and directly tied to the strategic plan. People are being held accountable. There are public websites you could go to to see our progress and who's responsible for it against that goal. There are meetings where every dean and every kind of key stakeholder in these metrics is presenting to the provost on their progress. It's not punitive, but more, 'Where are you against these goals? If you're not quite hitting where we want you to hit, why? What can we do to help?' I think it's been pretty remarkable because it's got everybody aligned toward the same objectives, where in the past colleges could kind of set their own objectives. Now we've got institutional goals. ”

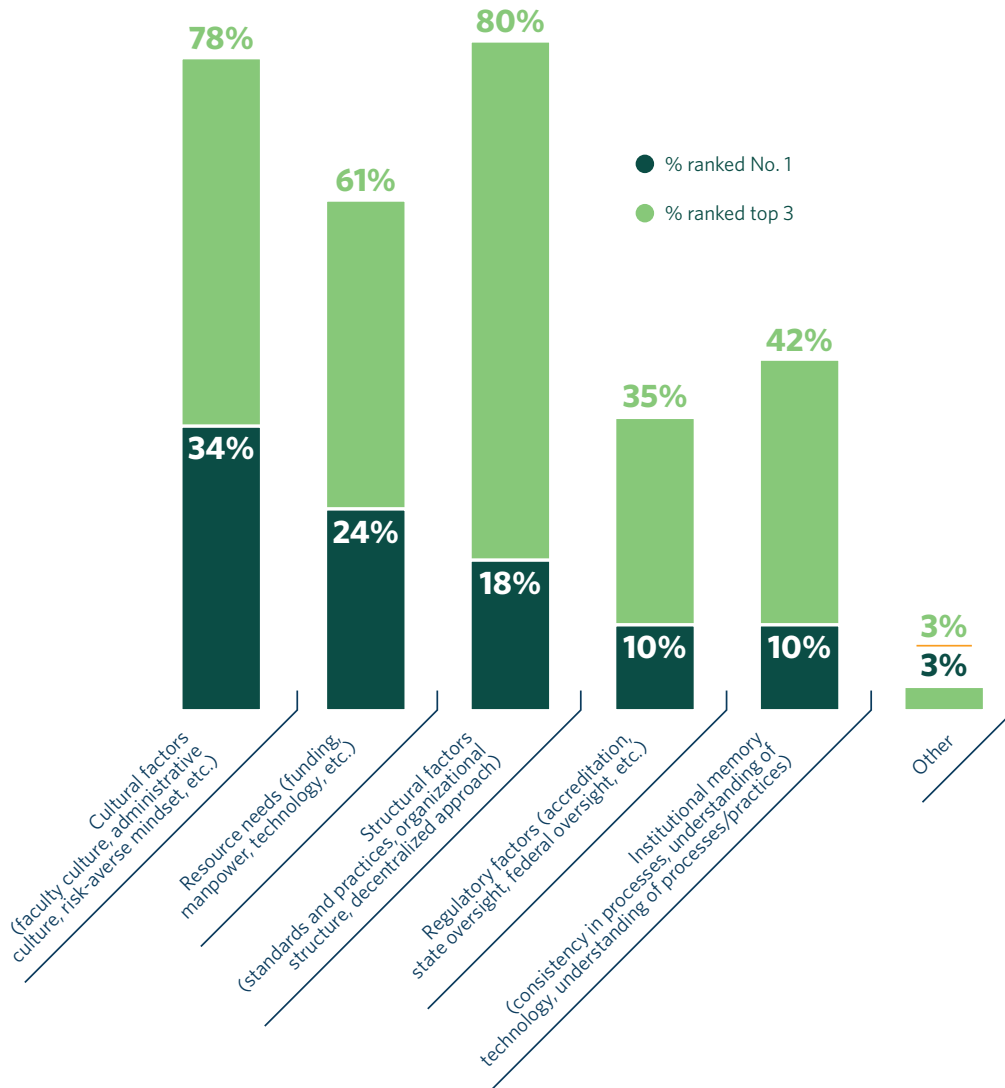
SECTION FOUR:

Barriers to Innovation

Culture, resources, and structure of the institution all appear to be significant barriers to innovation, with more than half of institutional representatives surveyed ranking these factors in their top three. This lends credence to the idea that strong, transparent, and supportive leadership has an impactful role in fostering innovation at higher education institutions. With the right leadership, culture can shift and be more open to innovation, and, in doing so, inspire new initiatives, ensure resources are properly allocated to support these initiatives, and shape institutional structures to further support innovation. Regulatory factors and institutional memory were far less likely to be named a No. 1 factor, but are still included in the top-three list by more than one-third of responding administrators.

Interviewees noted ways to navigate the common barriers of resources and faculty resistance. For example, at Regis University, a “micro-grant” program is utilized, which helps provide the sometimes-limited resource of funding for innovation and, at the same time, demonstrates to faculty that there are rewards for trying new ideas in the classroom. Both University of Florida and Stevens Institute have annual awards for innovation that also include a monetary prize as a way to promote how one can be rewarded for innovation.

Please rank the following factors in terms of the barrier they pose to innovation at your institution:



SECTION FOUR: BARRIERS TO INNOVATION

“ [A chief academic officer] has to have a certain vision and a certain willingness to take some risk, because you can only cut the pie up in so many pieces. I've noticed that in institutions where the chief academic officer really puts some teeth behind an initiative, some resources — whether it's money or people or purchasing something that will help make a difference — that's when you can really expedite the change. ”

—Dr. Jane Neapolitan, Towson University

BUILDING BRIDGES AND NEW PATHS

One of the more difficult tasks cited by interviewees is getting all the relevant groups on campus together to discuss possible innovations. Each group also can represent more than one student group, any or all of which could have competing ideas as to which innovations would best benefit them at the institution, as noted by Dr. Linda Osterlund at Regis University:

“ It is difficult trying to get committees together and have representation across all the colleges. We have a unique setup because we have a traditional college, and then we have four that have both non-traditional and traditional students. These student groups each have unique needs, as well. ”

Cross-disciplinary representation is key to innovation, as students interact with multiple parts of the college or university daily. Looking at problems from a student's perspective can be instrumental in seeking out opportunities for innovation and how best to address them. Not having all the constituencies represented in the innovation process can slow the process or derail it completely due to a lack of complete buy-in and difficulty obtaining a 360-degree view of the issue they are attempting to address. Without this buy-in and cross-functional and disciplinary perspective, innovation may not be as impactful or might even be set up to fail.

“ In large higher-ed institutions, new initiatives need to get buy-in from many groups across campus, and that can slow things down. ”

—Dr. Nancy Sayre, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Therefore, in some cases, going through the process of innovation requires reiterations to plans and paths to outcomes, as noted by Dr. Brown at Florida Atlantic University:

“ In my office, we do not accept barriers. If it's something that needs to be done, it needs to be done, and if you're a person who is saying, 'No,' we're OK with that. We are going to find another path and have an 'I-can-do' attitude vs. an 'I-can't-do' attitude. If we decide that something needs to be done, we organize and we get people on board and we move forward. ”

EXAMPLE OF INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Institution: Towson University

By opening communication channels with students, Towson University has created a process for students to voice their ideas. One such idea was using OERs in class. This enabled the student body president to suggest the use of OERs to the University System of Maryland (USM) student government counsel, and the USM has provided funding for faculty to utilize OERs in their classes. This shows the importance of blending a strong top-down approach to innovation with bottom-up sources so that ideas can be incubated at lower levels and then raised when they are ready for broad implementation.

“ It is really taking off. Now, the USM has provided money for faculty to use OERs in their courses, and that has gone all the way up to the governor of Maryland through the USM. It was a student from Towson that brought up the idea to the USM. ”

—Dr. Jane Neapolitan, Towson University

SECTION FIVE:

Lessons Learned

Through collecting these data and conducting these interviews with academic administrators, we have compiled a list of tips and lessons learned. Of course, every institution is different, so it is difficult to recommend best practices. As institutions vary in classification and student population, there is no universal formula that will work across institutions when it comes to fostering innovation.

START AT THE TOP

Innovation starts at the top with the president and provost. Leadership that supports championing innovation, instills a culture of progress and change, and provides the resources needed to make it happen are factors that lead to success. Administrators should take a facilitative approach when they incentivize innovation and remove barriers to implementation.

Dr. Nancy Brown from Florida Atlantic University, discussing the role of the president in regard to instituting innovation at the institution, said:

“ For the most part, [the president is] very supportive and he brought in good ideas for innovation. You can see that being implemented across the campus right now with the pillars. We now have pillars as part of our strategic plan and platform, and you're starting to see those come to life. He had some innovations that he had brought with him and some creative ideas. Some of them did work, some of them didn't, but it didn't affect the way it goes when you're working with innovation. ”

The president and provost then need to prioritize, not just include, innovative efforts in planning documents. This could be accomplished by detailing the goals for innovation within the institution's strategic plan, therefore creating a baseline and milestones to achieve, and providing direction for funding. From the survey findings, it appears that innovation is noted in many planning documents but not necessarily given the priority and weight for it to be seen as vital to the institution's future success.

CARRY THE MESSAGE DOWN

From this top level, the goals of innovation and the tools being provided to execute these innovations need to be clearly and consistently shared with stakeholders. The president of Florida Atlantic University often cites the pillars adopted in FAU's strategic plan; by doing this, the goals for innovation are reiterated and remain top of mind for those at the institution. Annual innovation awards can also help spotlight wins each year and highlight progress on major goals. Mid-level administrators should focus their departments on helping to accomplish these major goals by supporting and highlighting the efforts of individuals who contribute.

“ We do have a strategic plan and obviously innovation needs to be tied to that plan, and our plan is broad enough that it really covers almost every area of the university. Again, as long as there's funding for the initiative, they're very supportive of that. I have not run into that barrier myself. ”

—Dr. Victoria Brown, Florida Atlantic University

CREATE STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES TO SUPPORT INNOVATION

Once all faculty and staff are aware of the goals and tools that are available, the next crucial step is having channels for ideas to be raised, opportunities for direct communication, and a space for collection of feedback. This would include surveys, focus groups, and the creation of student and faculty groups dedicated to a topic. Interdisciplinary and cross-functional groups should be the goal to ensure all points of view are being considered and resources are shared.

“ We welcome anyone who has an idea or suggestion that we think could improve student learning or improve the student experience in a significant way. When we receive these ideas, we will do experimental testing. We have large enough cohorts that we can randomly assign students into different conditions and test whether or not the innovation has an impact on student learning. I do not know many universities that have institutionalized that kind of testing of innovation. ”

—Dr. Thomas C. Boyd, Kaplan University

INVOLVE AND EMPOWER ALL GROUPS

By having multiple avenues for communication, various constituencies are empowered to drive innovation in their own way. Faculty opposition, cited as a barrier to innovation, can be dissuaded when faculty feel they are given a voice and an equal seat at the table, as well as resources and channels to test their innovations. Collaboration must be university-wide and ensure all constituents have a voice in the process. Students can also take an active role in shaping their institutions, from suggesting changes in policies to encouraging faculty to experiment in the classroom.

“ The UF Online student advisory committee, on the one hand, is a sounding board. On the other is a place where I took a very specific activity that we were about to launch, I took it to them before we launched it, and I got their feedback [on an optional student fee package] They also gave us really good advice about how to spread the word. They also volunteered to help us spread the word, which was fantastic. They were out there on social [media] kind of explaining what it was. They were answering questions. It was a great example of, I think, the University of Florida administration being responsive, being innovative in designing this optional fee package, but then relying on the students to kind of help us shape the rollout. ”

—Evangeline J. Tsibris Cummings, University of Florida

“ We do not have a chief innovation officer that is responsible for that. It is more like everybody is the chief innovation officer of their area. ”

—Dr. Thomas B. Cavanagh, University of Central Florida

FAILURE IS ALWAYS AN OPTION

When discussing goals for the institution and how innovation is needed to help achieve those goals, the president and the rest of the administration should also emphasize that it is OK to fail. There will be stumbles along the way, and not every project will be a success. Failures should be presented as opportunities to learn and adjust so that success can be achieved down the road. Growth can be small and incremental, yet still deemed highly successful, as noted by Dr. Linda Osterlund at Regis University:

“ We're actually making some movement in not being siloed between our colleges and having more collaboration than in the past. For example, in the college for health professions, they are doing exercises where they'll have a case study and all the professions are represented, like physical therapy, pharmacy, nursing, and behavioral health counseling, and they will be in the same room together as faculty and students, role-playing the scenarios and sharing ideas from their unique perspectives. So, they're really role modeling interprofessional collaboration to take into the workplace, which I think is innovative. To coordinate multiple schedules and lesson plans between several departments with various faculty and students is hard to do, but the benefits of collaboration and shared learning seems worth it, and the benefits provide enough motivation to keep it going. ”



METHODOLOGY

For this report, Learning House and OLC partnered in the spring of 2017 to devise a 15-question survey instrument that could be deployed to OLC's extensive list of more than 1,600 academic administrators, including deans, vice presidents, and provosts. Outreach also included providing a link to the survey to subscribers of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* via a purchased email. These efforts yielded 110 completed surveys, a 6 percent completion rate with a 9 percent margin of error. As such, survey results should be considered directional.

During the survey, we asked the administrators if they would like to be contacted for an in-depth follow-up interview, of which 11 such interviews were conducted. Interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes in length.

APPENDIX A:

Survey Questions

1. Which entity is responsible for driving innovation activities?

- a. Academic admin (provost, vice provost)
- b. IT administration
- c. Faculty or faculty teams
- d. There is no driving force at all
- e. There are multiple driving forces responsible
- f. Office of innovation
- g. Other (Please specify): _____

2. Which best describes your institution's approach to innovation?

- a. Unplanned/decentralized
- b. Planned/decentralized
- c. Unplanned/centralized
- d. Planned/centralized

3. To what extent do students drive innovation at your institution, whether through innovations in the learning experience or in the campus' environmental impacts?

- a. Students play a significant role in driving innovation
- b. Students play a moderate role in driving innovation
- c. Students play a minor role in driving innovation
- d. Students play no role in driving innovation

4. Is innovation a priority in your strategic or academic plan?

- a. Yes, it is in our strategic plan
- b. Yes, it is in our academic plan
- c. Yes, it is in both plans
- d. No, it is in neither plan

5. Do you have a dedicated budget for the purpose of innovation?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

6. Is your budget for innovation:

- a. Higher than previous years
- b. Lower than previous years
- c. About the same as previous years
- d. We do not have a budget
- e. Unsure

7. Please drag and drop each of the following areas in order of their rank in terms of being a prominent source of innovation at your institution, with "1" being the most prominent:

- a. _____ Within traditional on-campus programs
- b. _____ Within nontraditional programs
- c. _____ Academic affairs
- d. _____ Advancement/fundraising
- e. _____ Campus/student life
- f. _____ Workforce partnerships
- g. _____ Enrollment
- h. _____ Registrar
- i. _____ Retention
- j. _____ Teaching/pedagogy
- k. _____ Tech
- l. _____ Other (Please specify): _____

8. Please drag and drop each of the following goals in order in terms of which are seen as the main goals for innovation at your institution today, with "1" being the top goal:

- a. _____ Create alternative credentials
- b. _____ Create new degree programs
- c. _____ Decrease costs
- d. _____ Develop new partnerships outside the institution
- e. _____ Develop new teaching methods
- f. _____ Ensure student success
- g. _____ Experiment with emerging technology
- h. _____ Explore competency-based learning
- i. _____ Explore experiential learning
- j. _____ Improve marketing
- k. _____ Increase sustainability
- l. _____ Other (Please specify):

9. How does your institution define "innovation" currently?

For the purposes of this survey, we are defining innovation as: The implementation of new initiatives in order to drive growth, increase revenue, reduce cost, differentiation of experience, or adjustment of value proposition.

10. Does the above definition match your institution's definition of innovation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. How does your definition differ?

12. How would you label your institution with regard to its position in innovation?

- a. Our school is on the leading edge of innovation.
- b. Our school is a “fast follower” when it comes to innovation.
- c. Our school is probably average in comparison to others when it comes to innovation efforts.
- d. Our school is a bit traditional and somewhat slower to innovate.
- e. Our school is way behind on the innovation scale.

13. Please drag and drop each of the following factors in order of their rank in terms of the barrier they pose to innovation at your institution, with "1" being the largest barrier:

- a. _____ Cultural factors (faculty culture, administrative culture, risk averse mindset, etc)
- b. _____ Structural factors (standards and practices, organizational structure, decentralized approach)
- c. _____ Regulatory factors (accreditation, state oversight, federal oversight, etc)
- d. _____ Resource needs (funding, manpower, technology, etc)
- e. _____ Institutional memory (consistency in processes, understanding of technology, understanding of processes/practices)
- f. _____ Other (Please list)

14. At your institution, to what extent does innovation rely on technology?

- a. Our innovations rarely (if ever) rely on technological integration
- b. Our innovations sometimes utilize existing technologies with which we are familiar
- c. Our innovations sometimes utilize new technologies with which we need training to implement
- d. Innovation at our institution is almost completely relies on the implementation of new technology
- e. Other (Please specify): _____

15. Thank you for completing this survey. We will be conducting follow-up over-the-phone interviews with institutions to further learn about their innovation practices. Would you like to possibly be contacted for such an interview?

- a. Yes (please specify an email for contact) _____
- b. No

APPENDIX B:

Qualitative Interview Questions

This conversation will be recorded. Are you OK for the interview to be recorded and transcribed? Select quotes may be highlighted in the study. Should we select a quote, we will ask you to review it prior to publication.

- 1. When you hear the word “innovation” in relation to your institution, what comes to mind first?**
- 2. Would you say your institution is ahead of the curve or lagging behind when it comes to innovation in higher education? Why?**
- 3. What does the process of innovation look like at your school? Who is involved? Who leads? Is there a formalized process? Is it a proactive or reactive process?**
- 4. Do you have any personal experience with innovation at your school? How are you involved?**
- 5. Can you talk to me about some of the current (non-confidential) innovation efforts/projects going on at your institution?**
- 6. Talk to me about how students are involved in innovation at your institution, if at all? (Initiators? Task force members? Consult?)**
- 7. What would you say are some of the more common barriers to innovation at your institution? Tell me how you’ve seen them come into play.**

- 8. How much is technology a part of your innovation efforts? In what way?**

- 9. Does your institution have a process in place for selecting innovation pilots that will continue to move forward? Alternatively, how does your institution decide when to discontinue an innovation?**

- 10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?**

PARTNERS

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

The Learning House, Inc., helps people improve their lives through education. As an academic program manager, Learning House offers technology-enabled education solutions designed to meet the needs of a dynamic global market. Solutions include Online Program Management (OPM), Enterprise Learning Solutions, The Software Guild, Learning House International, and Advancement Courses. With a focus on data-driven decision-making, Learning House is on the leading edge of higher education. Learning House provides expertise in research and analytics, marketing, enrollment, retention, and instructional design. Through its broad portfolio, Learning House delivers more students, more graduates, and better outcomes.

The Online Learning Consortium is a collaborative community of higher education leaders and innovators, dedicated to advancing quality digital teaching and learning experiences designed to reach and engage the modern learner — anyone, anywhere, anytime. OLC inspires innovation and quality through an extensive set of resources, including best-practice publications, quality benchmarking, leading-edge instruction, community-driven conferences, practitioner-based and empirical research, and expert guidance. The growing OLC community includes faculty members, administrators, trainers, instructional designers, and other learning professionals, as well as educational institutions, professional societies, and corporate enterprises.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Jill Buban serves as the senior director of research and innovation for the Online Learning Consortium. In this role, she oversees the OLC Research Center for Digital Learning and Leadership and works on key strategic leadership initiatives, such as the Leadership Network. She also oversees the organization's peer-reviewed journal, *Online Learning*, for which she serves as a special-issue editor. During her time with OLC, Buban has provided multiple keynote addresses and presentations, both nationally and abroad.

Before joining OLC, Buban was the assistant provost for research and innovation at Post University where she supervised all facets of the school's digital learning initiatives. She also served as the dean of Post's School of Education, the academic program manager for its Master of Education program, and worked in academic affairs at SUNY Empire State College.

Buban is a member of the Senior Leadership Group for the Association of Chief Academic Officers' Digital Fellows Program and is on the board of directors at the National University Technology Networks. She also volunteers with several local organizations in her community.

Buban earned her Ph.D. in educational studies, with a specialization in adult learning, from Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She holds an M.S. in curriculum and instruction from SUNY Plattsburgh, and a B.A. in history from the University of New Hampshire.

Buban has received several honors for her accomplishments. She was named to the 2017 class of OLC Fellows; received the Best in Track Award from Sloan-C International Conference on Online Learning (2011); was named an Emerging Scholar for the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood (2012), and was included in the Hartford Business Journal's "40 Under 40" list (2014).

Andrew J. Magda is the manager of market research for Learning House. He leads in the development of custom and large-scale market research studies and assists partner institutions with their research needs. Prior to Learning House, Magda was a senior analyst at Eduventures and a project manager at the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Learning House, Inc.

(502) 589-9878

bcesarano@learninghouse.com

www.learninghouse.com

Online Learning Consortium

(617) 716-1414

jill.buban@onlinelearning-c.org

www.onlinelearningconsortium.org