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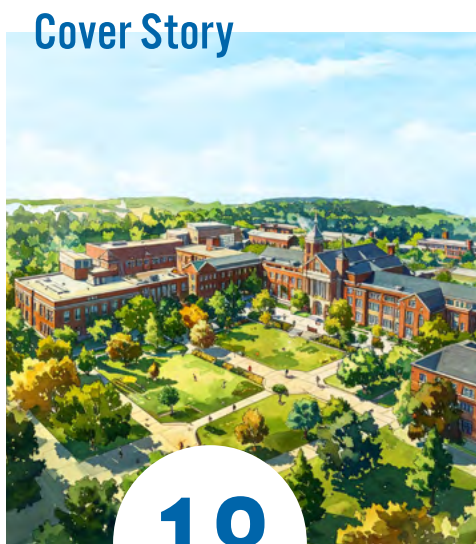
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SPECIAL REPORT

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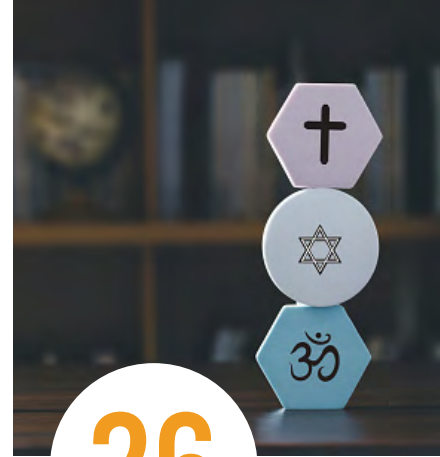
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CONTACTS:

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Misty Evans | Director of Digital Content and Strategy, Staff Writer
DeMario Easley | Marketing Coordinator

OTHER CONTACTS:

info@insightintoacademia.com
editor@insightintoacademia.com
billing@insightintoacademia.com
ads@insightintoacademia.com

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Achieving the Dream Launches National Effort to Expand Shortened College Terms

A new national initiative is reshaping how community colleges structure their academic calendars to better serve today's students. Achieving the Dream (ATD), a nonprofit network focused on advancing community college student success, has announced the launch of the Scaling Shortened Academic Terms Initiative — a five-year effort to help colleges and state systems expand eight-week or similarly condensed academic schedules.

The program, supported by funding from the Ascendium Education Group, includes 16 community colleges across Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, and Virginia. Each participating institution has already taken steps toward implementing shortened academic terms, and this initiative will help them strengthen and scale those efforts.

Traditional 15-week semesters, ATD notes, often pose challenges for students juggling work, family, and school. In contrast, shorter terms allow students to concentrate on fewer classes at once, accelerate degree completion, and maintain momentum. Evidence suggests that such models can increase course completion rates and persistence while improving overall student engagement.

Karen A. Stout, EdD, ATD's president and CEO, emphasized that the initiative is about more than scheduling reform. "We know that compressing time to degree and optimizing the delivery of our schedules, based on student needs, is essential as the field moves from completion to student economic and social mobility as our north star," Stout said. "By working with states and institutions already leading this change, we can scale structures that help students—especially adults and working learners—build momentum and achieve their goals."

Participating institutions will receive coaching, professional development, and opportunities for cross-state collaboration, all aimed at embedding shortened-term models sustainably. The effort also includes a comprehensive evaluation by the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, to measure outcomes and identify best practices.

The findings from this initiative could shape a national model for helping community colleges adapt to the evolving realities of higher education and workforce development. ●

MIAMI UNIVERSITY, CLEVELAND CLINIC DEEPEN TIES WITH NEW FACILITY AND PROGRAMS

Miami University and Cleveland Clinic are expanding their collaboration with the naming of the Cleveland Clinic Health Sciences and Wellness facility in Oxford, Ohio, underscoring a growing alliance that links advanced health care education with cutting-edge research in quantum computing.

The 165,000-square-foot facility, constructed in 2023, houses clinics, classrooms, and simulation labs, serving more than 1,300 students across health-related disciplines. Miami trustees approved the sponsorship and naming agreement, earlier this month, marking a visible step in the institutions' broader effort to prepare the next generation of health care professionals.

"We are thrilled to continue to grow our partnership with Cleveland Clinic and to honor the innovative collaboration in this way on our campus," said Ande Durojaiye, Miami's vice president of strategy and partnerships. He described the facility as part of an urban bridge between Oxford and Northeast Ohio that expands opportunities for students and strengthens Ohio's health care workforce.

The building hosts several academic programs alongside clinics providing direct services, including Health Services, Student Counseling Service, and the Speech and Hearing Clinic. It also houses Miami's Office of Student Wellness, which offers preventative and educational resources aimed at holistic well-being.

For Cleveland Clinic, the collaboration extends beyond health education into emerging technology. "Through our educational partnership with Miami University, we are creating a dynamic ecosystem to attract, develop, and retain top talent, driving advancements in quantum innovation and health care," said Dr. Serpil Erzurum, the Clinic's chief research and academic officer.

The expanded partnership builds on announcements earlier this year. In January, Miami and Cleveland Clinic launched Ohio's first specialized degree programs and research experiences in quantum computing. The effort is designed to link computing expertise with biomedical research, positioning the state as a leader in both health care and high-performance technology.

In July, the state of Ohio awarded Miami \$7 million to establish the Ohio Institute for Quantum Computing Research, Talent, and Commercialization, a joint initiative with Cleveland Clinic. The institute will focus on workforce development, research, and commercialization, and will be accessible to higher education institutions across the state.

The latest move—the naming of the Cleveland Clinic Health Sciences and Wellness facility—symbolizes how the partnership is moving on parallel tracks: meeting urgent workforce demands in health care while also investing in the next frontier of biomedical innovation. A celebration of the new facility name is planned for October. ●

Congratulations to these
higher education administrators
on their new roles!



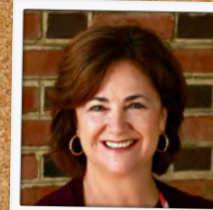
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Seven Trends Higher Education Leaders Must Prepare for Now

By Misty Evans

Artificial Intelligence Integration

AI is transforming nearly every part of higher education, from admissions and advising to curriculum design and research. Institutions must develop clear policies on ethical use, data privacy, and authorship to prevent misuse while leveraging automation to improve efficiency.

What to consider: Build AI literacy among faculty and staff, establish governance frameworks, and integrate AI into teaching and support services thoughtfully.

Financial Sustainability and New Business Models

Colleges face ongoing financial pressure from declining enrollment, rising costs, shifting demographics, and reductions in government funding.

What to consider: Explore partnerships, shared services, and revenue diversification while reevaluating low-demand programs. Scenario planning and data-driven budgeting can help avoid crisis management later.

Flexible Pathways and Workforce Alignment

Students are increasingly seeking short, affordable credentials that lead directly to employment.

What to consider: Expand micro-credentials, hybrid delivery, and stackable programs. Align degrees with workforce needs through employer partnerships and competency-based learning.

Rebuild Trust and Strengthen Brand Value

Public confidence in higher education continues to erode amid cost concerns and political polarization.

What to consider: Communicate institutional values through transparency about outcomes, emphasize affordability and belonging, and improve both digital and in-person student experiences.

Data Governance and Cybersecurity

As colleges adopt AI and analytics, they collect more sensitive data, increasing the risk of breaches and misuse.

What to consider: Strengthen cybersecurity infrastructure, clarify ownership and ethical use of data, and train staff in privacy compliance.

Changing Demographics

The student population is aging, becoming more diverse and more mobile, requiring new support strategies.

What to consider: Develop programs for adult learners, transfers, and other non-traditional students. Ensure affordability through flexible financial aid and support via mental health resources.

Employee Adaptability and Institutional Culture Change

Rapid digital shifts and new pedagogical expectations demand professional development and change management.

What to consider: Invest in training for hybrid and AI-enhanced productivity and instruction, incentivize innovation, and foster cultures of experimentation.

The next 18 months will test institutional agility. Leaders who embrace technological, financial, and cultural adaptation, while staying focused on being transparent and building trust, will be best positioned to thrive in the ever-changing higher education landscape. ●

In Flux: How Faculty Identities Evolve Amid Higher Education Transformation

By Misty Evans

Across the globe, colleges and universities are reconfiguring themselves through mergers, accountability frameworks, performance metrics, and new governance models. But in the rush to modernize, leaders may overlook a quieter shift that determines whether those reforms succeed: how change reshapes the people who carry out the institution's mission every day.

A recent global literature review led by researcher Raquel M. G. Marques, titled “Academic Identities and Higher Education Change,” published in *Higher Education Research & Development* (2023) after the article title for citation clarity. I believe that was the correct year. The review examines how these structural shifts influence faculty identity—the sense of who academics are, what they value, and how they find purpose in their work.

Drawing on 44 empirical studies published between 2010 and 2022, the review traces the ways scholars resist, adapt, or blend new expectations into their professional selves. The findings reveal patterns familiar to many higher education leaders: increasing workload and bureaucracy, heightened competition, and an uneven valuation of teaching versus research. Yet the research also points to specific conditions that help faculty maintain meaning and engagement during periods of disruption.

Marques, a Ph.D. student funded by Portugal's Foundation for Science and Technology, says her interest in the human side of reform grew from watching policy debates that rarely included the people affected by them. “We talk a lot about structures and reform,” she said. “But not so much about the impact of these changes on

the people who experience them nearly every day—teachers, researchers, and students. My research focuses on this human dimension, exploring how academics interpret their work and themselves in times of transformation.”

The literature she and her colleagues analyzed makes clear that identity in higher education is fluid rather than fixed. Faculty continually negotiate who they are in response to institutional culture, policy pressures, and their own stage of their career. According to Marques, identity is “something we continuously perform and embody,” not a static label. That means reform inevitably touches identity—and how that process unfolds can determine whether change becomes a source of renewal or burnout.

The studies reviewed show that many universities, particularly in Western Europe, North America, and Australasia, have incorporated private-sector management practices emphasizing metrics, outcomes, and rankings. These policies often redefine what counts as valuable academic labor.

Faculty describe feeling pulled toward measurable outputs such as grant income, publication counts, and student-evaluation scores at the expense of the deeper, less quantifiable work of mentoring, discovery, and public service. The tension has emotional consequences such as anxiety, fatigue, and what several studies call an “erosion of meaning.”

Still, the evidence also shows that academics respond creatively. Some resist, invoking disciplinary values and professional autonomy to challenge what they view as the commodification of knowledge. Others adapt by reframing new tasks as opportunities

for impact or by selectively aligning with institutional goals to protect time and resources for students. Many inhabit a middle ground that blends both approaches. One study calls these scholars “Flexians”—faculty who shift their language and emphasis depending on context, using strategic flexibility to survive and sometimes thrive in a system of constant flux.

Marques sees this negotiation nearly every day in her research interviews. “For example, a professor may engage in entrepreneurial activities to align with funding priorities while still presenting these efforts as a form of social contribution rather than market compliance,” she said. “They resist internally but must adapt externally. Their ongoing negotiation between personal values and institutional pressures is what we mean by identity in flux.”

The review also highlights key differences between early-career and senior academics. Newer faculty, already socialized into a culture of metrics and precarity, often display remarkable adaptability but recognize there is little freedom to push back. “They know they have to play the game,” Marques said. “They are the most precarious, therefore the most vulnerable.” Senior academics, with tenure or reputational security, tend to adopt a more critical stance. Some express nostalgia for collegiality and autonomy they feel has eroded, but many use their stability to mentor younger colleagues or advocate for policy reform.

What determines whether change feels empowering or alienating, Marques said, is institutional culture. “Institutions that value collegiality, dialogue, and transparency can be

empowering, as people experience a sense of shared purpose,” she said. “However, when the culture becomes more individualistic or competitive, change tends to feel alienating and emotionally draining. The same policy can produce completely different reactions depending on whether academics feel seen and heard.”

Studies consistently find that organizational environments emphasizing trust, open communication, and community mitigate the negative effects of reform. When departments operate as cooperative “tribes” rather than performance units, faculty display higher resilience and engagement. Conversely, when universities reward individual competition, short-term

have to see people,” Marques said. “We cannot lose sight of what matters—not the profit, but people, knowledge, science, education.”

In practice, that means coupling performance systems with genuine investment in trust and community. Institutions that provide forums for reflective dialogue, equitable workload design, and recognition of multiple forms of contribution sustain healthier academic cultures. Studies cited in the review point to four broad strategies that correlate with stronger identity resilience and lower burnout.

Balance Evaluation with Belonging

Use transparent promotion and tenure criteria that value teaching, mentorship, and community engagement alongside

entering the profession already inside a performative culture,” Marques said. “We must show them that reflection and integrity are still valued.”

Cultivate Psychological Safety

The review underscores that well-being is not ancillary to performance; it’s foundational. Institutions that normalize discussion of stress, provide confidential counseling, and train department chairs to recognize overload see higher morale and retention.

While structural reform is unavoidable, Marques believes leaders can shape its moral tone. “Change is inevitable,” she said. “But whether it becomes a source of renewal or burnout depends on how institutions care for the people who make them alive.” Her message echoes what the research shows. Identity work is emotional work, and ignoring it undermines innovation.

Across the 44 studies, scholars describe a profession that is simultaneously resilient and at risk. They recount renewed enthusiasm when collaboration or student learning is prioritized, and disillusionment when they feel reduced to data points. The most consistent recommendation from researchers is deceptively simple. Treat academics as partners in meaning-making, not as metrics to be managed.

Marques argues that universities stand to gain from reframing performance as participation. “Universities thrive when academics feel their work matters—to students, to knowledge, and to society,” she said. “We have to preserve this capacity to reflect and to think.”

The takeaway for leaders is less about abandoning accountability than about balancing it with agency. Faculty will continue to adapt; their identities will continue to evolve. The question is whether institutions design environments that honor that evolution. When administrators invite shared reflection, protect time for high-impact work, and align incentives with core academic values. Reform can strengthen rather than erode professional purpose.●

When universities reward individual competition, short-term productivity, or constant self-promotion, identity fragmentation and emotional exhaustion increase.

productivity, or constant self-promotion, identity fragmentation and emotional exhaustion increase.

For senior administrators, the implications are clear: how leaders manage the relational side of change, acknowledgment, participation, and meaning-making matters as much as the structural redesign. Faculty buy-in, Marques noted, is not a product of compliance but of coherence: people need to see how new systems connect to the fundamental purposes of education and scholarship.

The review also surfaces the cost of ignoring the emotional labor of academic life. Universities often underestimate the toll of continuous adaptation. Faculty not only teach and research, they also absorb uncertainty, model stability for students, and shoulder invisible service work that keeps departments functioning. “We

research reduce alienation. Several European universities cited in the reviewed literature have begun weighing “third mission” work, knowledge transfer, and civic partnership as part of faculty assessment.

Redesign Workloads to Protect Their Purpose

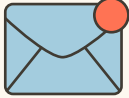
Many of the studies describe faculty overwhelmed by administrative and reporting tasks that crowd out meaningful teaching and research. Streamlining bureaucracy and assigning credit for collaborative work can restore alignment between time spent and institutional mission.

Invest in Early Career Development

Because junior academics face the steepest pressures and least autonomy, targeted mentoring and professionalization programs can prevent early burnout. “They are

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Confronting the Global Mental Health Crisis, Together

By Lisa Coleman, PhD | President, Adler University

North America is not alone in its mental health crisis. From Europe to Asia to Africa, too many communities lack access to counselors, therapists, and psychologists—and the ripple effects strain public systems and reverberate across society, affecting families, educators, employers, and economies.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the global median number of mental health workers is just 13 per 100,000 people, with extreme shortages in low- and middle-income countries. In the United States, more than 122 million people live in federally designated mental health shortage areas, and by 2037, the shortfall of counselors, psychologists, and other providers could exceed 100,000. In Canada, youth and young adults are facing steep barriers to care, with more than half of those aged 18 to 24 citing cost as the main obstacle to accessing mental health services.

Across regions, the details differ, but the throughline is the same: the need for innovation in mental health training, leadership, and delivery has never been more urgent, and this is not just a personal or family issue; this is systemic and economic. Behavioral health access is related to the workforce and the varied mental health and wellness challenges across generations of peoples. WHO estimates that depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy more than \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity, again underscoring the magnitude of the concern.

These data reflect larger truths: health and wellness, across generations and geographies, will continue to be one of the defining challenges of our century.

Many are ill-equipped to navigate the growing needs. Meeting these challenges requires breaking out of our conventional silos in higher education, industries, governments, NGOs and nonprofits, hospitals and medical care facilities, and moving across dividing

lines and disciplines. It requires us to work together in the cultivation of professionals who can move beyond individual solutions and strengthen entire systems of care.

The stakes are high, and too often, mental health is treated as an isolated, individual problem, and responses remain siloed and fragmented. Alfred Adler's principle of social interest reminds us that well-being is inseparable from community. Today, our communities are global, and the opportunities ahead are vast.

At Adler, we are not waiting for systems to catch up. We work with partners to expand training, transform systems, and pioneer new models of care. Our graduates are building resilient initiatives grounded in community engagement and effectiveness. We are reshaping how mental health and well-being are addressed by breaking away from traditional models of care. Our work explores intersections with technology, industry, governance, and community well-being alongside organizations across the globe—from Chicago and Vancouver to Nigeria and Bulgaria.

Adler's students and alumni are forging new paths as leaders, scholars, and practitioners because of their deep work with collaborators in industry, government, the arts and culture, the military, sports, philanthropy, and other sectors. This enables them to engage in the life-long process of learning and working with others to better navigate current and future societal complexities.

Clinical preparation anchors our work, as illustrated by Adler Community Health Services (ACHS). Each year, ACHS provides trauma-informed behavioral health services in person and via telehealth through a network of local organizations in Chicago and Canada, delivering more than 13,000 hours of free care to those who otherwise might go without it.

But this is just one piece of our larger global strategy.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023) highlights ongoing weaknesses in mental health workforce planning and training across countries, creating leadership vacuums.

As a global higher education institution, Adler is responding by helping to fill these gaps by reshaping curriculum and preparing leaders who can influence health systems, design organizational policies, and advance well-being across sectors.

New programs in health and wellness, global leadership, partnerships with industry, and specialized certifications will expand the pipeline of professionals who will not only deliver care but also reimagine how care is structured, funded, and accessed worldwide. These initiatives are reinforced by partnerships with organizations such as Fulbright Canada and Vancouver Community College by creating opportunities to expand leadership, training, research, and innovation.

As Adlerians, we remain focused on social interest, thus evolving through our work with others. We emphasize humility and cultural responsiveness as we prepare graduates who will strengthen systems of care by leveraging trauma-informed methodologies, community learning, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies. Together, these collaborations help shift the focus of wellness and mental health from the individual "I" to the collective "we."

At Adler, we have begun the journey, but we cannot do it alone. By working across sectors and borders, we can move beyond fragmented responses and build stronger, more connected systems of health and healing for generations to come. Meeting this moment will require courage to challenge convention and create change—and we invite you to join us. ●

The Era of the Long-Term Interim President

Why Boards Are Reimagining Leadership Transitions

By Misty Evans



Turnover in higher education's

top ranks is accelerating, and campuses are feeling the effects. Deloitte's 2025 Higher Education Trends report notes that leadership roles have experienced heightened churn in recent years, with chief academic officers and chief human resources officers among the most affected. The American Council on Education's (ACE) most recent American College President Study adds a key data point: college presidents in 2022 had been in their roles an average of 5.9 years—down 2.6 years from 2006—underscoring how difficult it has become to sustain continuity at the top.

As vacancies mount and searches lengthen, many boards are turning to a different playbook. They are appointing interim or acting leaders for multiple years to stabilize operations while national searches proceed. A recent prominent example is the University of Florida (UF), where the state board confirmed Donald W. Landry, MD, PhD, as interim president under a contract that runs through Aug. 31, 2026. Reporting in the *Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 2025) describes the broader rise of interim presidencies across the country, with boards relying on temporary leaders for longer time periods amid political pressures, donor concerns, and the complexity of finding permanent candidates.

The rationale is straightforward. Presidential and cabinet-level searches have grown more demanding, candidate pools are tighter, and stakeholder scrutiny is higher. Extended interim appointments can buy time for inclusive, rigorous searches while maintaining day-to-day stability. But they also carry trade-offs. Interim leaders—no matter how capable—may face informal limits on mandate and momentum, and faculty, staff, and donors can hesitate to commit to major long-term initiatives without a permanent president in place. The *Wall Street Journal*'s coverage

captures both the appeal and the risks. Interims can make hard calls and calm turbulent waters, but prolonged “temporariness” can slow strategy and blur accountability if boards do not clearly define authority and timelines.

Why do leadership continuity and the design of these new roles matter? Governance experts point to direct effects on morale, strategy, and reputation. The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) emphasizes that frequent turnover can disrupt strategic planning, hinder performance, and erode stakeholder confidence. It urges boards to plan proactively for both expected and unexpected transitions. Effective transition planning, AGB adds, should explicitly address governance clarity, relationship-building, and practical onboarding to enable a new leader to act quickly in the early months.

For boards and human resource leaders, the current cycle calls for a more deliberate approach to both interims and successors:

- Treat using multi-year interims as a strategy, not a stopgap. If market conditions or political dynamics make extended interim service likely, boards should define a clear mandate, decision rights, measurable objectives, and an expected timeline. That framework can help prevent wait-them-out paralysis and signal to the campus that interim does not mean inactive. The UF appointment, with a defined term through 2026, illustrates how formal structure can support operational stability while the search proceeds.
- Strengthen succession and capacity in academic leadership. Deloitte highlights particularly high turnover in chief academic officer and human resources roles. Boards, presidents, and chief human resource officers can

respond by building deeper internal benches—through rotational assignments, deputy roles, and targeted leadership development—so that interim appointments draw on prepared internal talent where feasible and appropriate.

- Protect strategic continuity and advancement. Even during interim periods, cross-functional transition teams can keep accreditation, budget planning, and fundraising milestones on track. AGB's guidance is blunt. Without intentional planning, leadership churn can stall strategy and weaken stakeholder trust.
- Use evidence to calibrate timelines and expectations. Sector-wide data on tenure and turnover can help set realistic search timelines and onboarding plans. ACE's findings on declining presidential tenure should prompt boards to plan for more frequent transitions and to normalize succession conversations long before a vacancy.

The forces behind today's turnover—demographic headwinds, financial strain, political crosswinds, and rapid technological change—are not likely to abate any time soon. Interim leadership can provide valuable breathing room, but only if paired with clear authority and disciplined search processes.

In short, leadership design has become a strategic lever. Institutions that professionalize succession and clarify interim mandates will be better positioned to steady morale, sustain strategy, reassure donors, and respond quickly to the next disruption. Those who treat leadership changes as episodic, rather than as structural features to manage, risk remaining stuck in prolonged transition, just as the pace of change demands clarity and speed. ●

MEETING THE MOMENT:

Employee Resource Groups Reinvent Campus Belonging

By Erik Cliburn

Amid budget constraints and political headwinds, many colleges are trying new ways to sustain employee morale and retention: employee-led communities with institutional backup. From formal employee resource groups (ERGs) to grassroots affinity networks, the through line is clear—give faculty and staff structured ways to connect, share know-how, and be seen.

At Duke University, that strategy takes center stage this month with a virtual ERG information fair that lets employees sample multiple groups in short breakouts and learn how to launch new ones. Duke has formalized the model with clear guardrails. Groups submit a charter tied to the university's mission, select an executive sponsor, and join an advisory council that exchanges ideas and receives leadership training.

Human resources also offers start-up guidance—templates, interest forms, and a beginner's guide—plus funding for approved activities and an open-membership policy. The payoff, leaders say, is tangible.

"We launched several new ERGs in the past year, and they have grown and proven to be great sources for connection and support among members," said Paul Grantham, Assistant Vice President for Work Culture and Communication Services at Duke. "It's also been rewarding to see the growth and development of emerging leaders within each of these groups."

A similarly intentional approach is reshaping community at The Pennsylvania State University (Penn

State). Since launching university-wide ERGs in 2023, Penn State has seen a rapid uptake across caregiving, veterans, LGBTQIA+, and sustainability communities—supported by Microsoft Teams channels, regular meetups, and educational programming.

The caregiver umbrella, Penn State Cares, grew from a single employee's question into two active subgroups that host talks on topics from depression in caregivers to health care directives. For co-founder Teresa McCloskey, the work is deeply personal. "My number one motivation in doing all of this is because, what was the point of living through it if I can't reach behind me and help the next person coming through?" she said.

Penn State's veterans ERG, Vet-aLIONce, shows how employee-led networks can influence policy and practice. Co-leaders Sharon Lucas and Col. Eugene McFeely helped bring the U.S. Department of Defense SkillBridge program to the university, expanding on years of informal resource-sharing and community events. "We really needed a mechanism to share the resources we knew about," McFeely said. The university has also backed ERGs with operational support, budget lines, and visibility—hosting a cross-group summit under the theme "Connect ... Learn ... Grow" and, in the case of the SustainaLions ERG, seeding a mini-grant program for office-level projects.

Not every effort begins as a formally chartered ERG, and that's part of the point. Binghamton University's

Professional Staff Senate-sponsored LGBTQIA+ affinity group has built year-round momentum with low-lift, high-frequency gatherings—coffee walks, museum visits, family-friendly picnics—and through close collaboration with the campus Q Center. The model prioritizes access and belonging for employees who may not have found community as students or early-career professionals.

At Elon University, a veterans ERG co-founded by staff members Jessica Hill and Navy veteran Raymond Fletcher underscores how personal passion can catalyze institution-wide impact. The group convenes information sessions with the Department of Veterans Affairs and local nonprofits, partners with athletics on recognition events, and strengthens ties with ROTC programs—all while helping veteran-affiliated employees find one another.

The praise extends beyond the ERG's founders. "We remain committed to finding meaningful ways to recognize and honor those who have served in our community," said Mary DeFriest, assistant athletic director of marketing and fan engagement.

Across these campuses, several best practices are emerging:

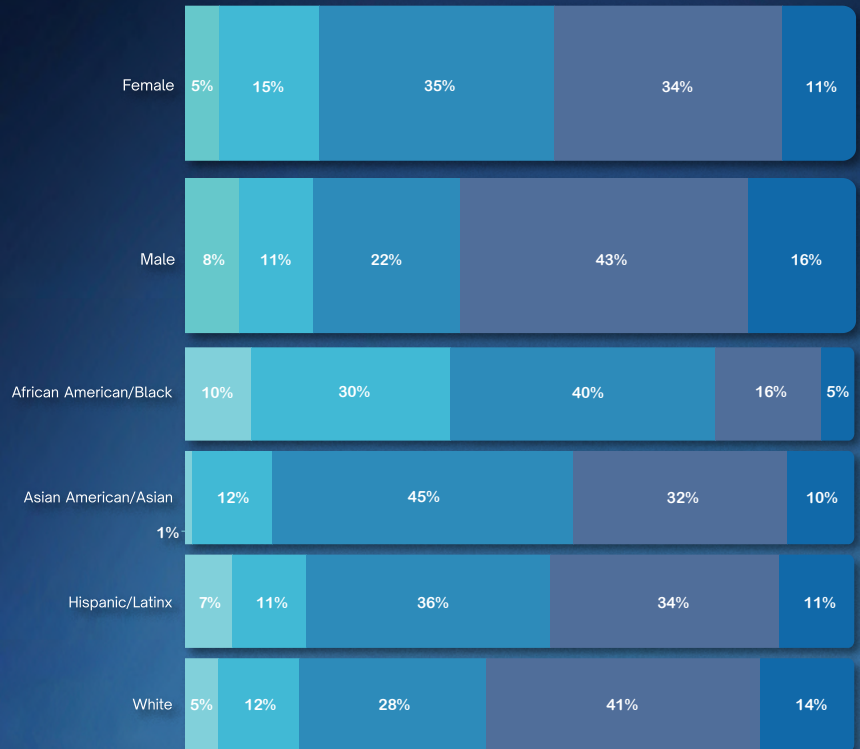
- Empower employee leadership, then scaffold it. Institutions like Duke and Penn State pair employee-run groups with executive sponsors, training, with modest budgets—enough structure to endure staff turnover without stifling initiative.

There is a great sense of belonging at my institution.

- Build in multiple on-ramps. Virtual information fairs, open Teams channels, and frequent, informal meetups lower the barrier to entry and keep participation inclusive of remote and geographically dispersed employees.
- Tie purpose to institutional mission. Charters and advisory councils help ERGs align programming—whether mini-grants, resource hubs, or family-friendly events—with institutional goals in talent retention, well-being, and student success.
- Value lived experience as expertise. From caregivers sharing hard-won advice to veterans navigating benefits, ERGs turn personal knowledge into shared infrastructure that benefits the broader workforce.

In a period when salary increases are scarce and travel is curtailed, these efforts offer a relatively low-cost, high-return way to strengthen culture. They also signal to employees that community-building is not a side project—it's critical work. As one Binghamton leader summed up the stakes: "Finding the queer group has been revolutionary in my life, and it has brought so many amazing changes and positive aspects to myself, to my family and to my work life," said Brenda Feinen. For colleges seeking to keep people connected through uncertainty, that's a metric that matters. ●

● Strongly Disagree ● Disagree ● Neutral ● Agree ● Strongly Agree



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A Groundbreaking National Lens on Campus Climate

Inside the Viewfinder® Dashboards

By Erik Cliburn



Higher education leaders now have an unprecedented view into how students, faculty, and staff experience campus life across the United States. The Viewfinder® National Campus Climate Dashboards (NCCDs) developed by Viewfinder® Campus Climate Surveys, bring together the most extensive database of campus climate survey results ever assembled, transforming six years of institutional survey data into an interactive research tool.

“This is the first national data repository of campus climate data,” said Gabriel Reif, PhD, vice president of research and evaluation at Viewfinder® Campus Climate Surveys. “We pulled together information from nearly 150 college campuses, including both student and employee surveys. Altogether, the dataset represents 200,000 respondents.”

From Local Snapshots to a National Picture

Until now, campus climate studies were largely confined to individual institutions and benchmarking against a limited set of peers. Colleges could gauge perceptions of belonging or inclusion internally, but there was no reliable way to compare findings or identify national trends. With the launch of the NCCDs, drawing on data collected from 2017 to 2025, researchers can benchmark progress, uncover disparities, and examine questions that were previously impossible to answer.

The dashboards include responses from more than 120,000 students and 90,000 employees, covering campus experiences ranging from safety and acceptance to overall satisfaction. Users can filter the data by single

or multiple demographics, role, institution type, or region, enabling detailed analysis of specific identity groups or workplace categories.

Reif said the system’s ease of use and flexibility is one of its greatest strengths.

What the Data Reveal

Early reports drawn from the dashboards reveal several pressing issues shaping campus life nationwide. The following four free reports can be found online at campusclimatesurveys.com/national-campus-climate-data.

Antisemitism and Campus Climate

The report found that Jewish students experience lower levels of comfort, safety, and respect compared to peers of other faiths. More than one in five Jewish students (20.4%) said they could not openly express their religious beliefs, and nearly one in five (18.9%) said their beliefs were not respected by other students—about double the rate of their Muslim or Christian peers. Over a third (37.6%) reported encountering microaggressions on campus.

The report recommends that institutions work proactively with religious leaders, administrators, and students to co-create solutions—such as listening sessions, policy reviews, and greater holiday accommodations—to foster safety and belonging for Jewish students.

Drivers of Employee Discontent on College Campuses

This analysis reveals widespread dissatisfaction among higher-education employees. Roughly 61% of faculty and 63% of staff said they were underpaid, while nearly two-thirds

of all respondents believed pay disparities exist at their institutions. Faculty and administrators also cited excessive workloads and inconsistent professional-conduct standards.

“These results highlight systemic challenges that can erode trust, morale, and retention,” the report concludes, urging campuses to conduct regular compensation reviews, expand professional-development funding, and ensure transparent promotion and evaluation processes.

The Compounding Effect

The study provides one of the clearest statistical illustrations of how overlapping marginalized identities compound challenges to belonging. Nationally, just over half of students (53.9%) said they felt a strong sense of belonging. Among students with a non-Christian spiritual affiliation, that rate dropped to 45.7% and fell further, to 40%, for those who also received Pell Grants.

A similar pattern appeared in perceptions of safety: while 82.7% of students overall felt safe on campus, only 71.4% of students of color with non-Christian spiritual affiliations who were also Pell Grant recipients said the same. The findings underscore the need for intersectional approaches to inclusion that address how multiple aspects of identity—race, religion, disability, gender, and socioeconomic status—interact to shape campus experience.

Contrasting Perceptions of Political Expression

Differing political identities also emerged as a significant factor in how students and employees experience campus life. According to the data, just

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28.6% of conservative students and 18.4% of conservative employees said they could openly express their political views at their institutions, compared with 70.6% of liberal students and 53.4% of liberal employees. Similar gaps appeared in whether respondents felt their views were respected.

Despite these differences, conservative and liberal respondents reported comparable levels of overall satisfaction with their institutions, suggesting that discomfort with expression does not necessarily translate into general dissatisfaction. The report recommends that colleges promote open dialogue through structured forums and faculty training on navigating political diversity.

From Data to Direction

Reif emphasized that the dashboards are meant to provide insight for improvement. “The results reflect how people are actually experiencing campus life—a valuable pulse check from your constituents. At the national level, we’re looking at those constituents across all of higher education,” he said.

Each of the reports were based on current critical topics in higher education and includes actionable recommendations, from pay-equity reviews and interfaith programming to strategies for improving dialogue across ideological divides. Reif said the aim is to help leaders translate quantitative data into informed decisions that support inclusion, recruitment and retention, and morale.

“All of the reports include recommendations,” he explained. “There have been some really innovative developments in higher education over the past few decades, and I’m a huge proponent of

intergroup dialogue as a way to bring people from different backgrounds and perspectives together. ... It’s about institutional leaders being aware of those practices and prioritizing them.”

Building Inclusive and Informed Campuses

Reif stressed that inclusivity must extend to everyone on campus.

“Inclusivity means everyone—including people who have felt marginalized in higher education in recent decades,” he said.

By illuminating how students and employees experience campus life across hundreds of institutions, the NCCDs offer a new evidence base for building belonging. The dashboards allow users to benchmark their own data against national norms, drill down into specific populations, and export custom reports for presentations and strategic planning.

A New Era of Evidence-Based Leadership

Reif credits advances in data science and Viewfinder’s comprehensive campus climate survey instruments for making the project possible.

“With new data science tools like Tableau Software, it was only a matter of time before something like this could be executed,” he said. “Campus climate surveys have been happening for years—thousands of colleges have conducted them—but data science strategies hadn’t been applied to this space before. ... We know we’re working with valid data as we build these dashboards and the repository behind them.”

In an era when campus leaders face heightened pressure to demonstrate progress on belonging, retention, and trust, the NCCDs translate thousands of individual voices into a national conversation. ●

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ACE Commission Elevates Role of Faith-Based Colleges in Higher Education

By Erik Cliburn

The American Council on Education (ACE) has steadily expanded its efforts to spotlight underrepresented corners of higher education, and one of its newest initiatives—the ACE Commission on Faith-Based Colleges and Universities—is taking that mission further.

Formed in 2024, the commission aims to increase visibility for religious-affiliated institutions while creating stronger connections with their secular counterparts on issues that cut across the higher education landscape, such as access, affordability, and student success.

Co-chaired by Shirley V. Hoogstra, JD, president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and Clark G. Gilbert, DBA, commissioner of the Church Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, brings together presidents from Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and historically Black colleges and universities. ACE President Ted Mitchell, PhD, said the initiative reflects both the long-standing role of faith-based schools and the challenges they face today.

“Faith-based institutions are the bedrock of higher education. We have not paid adequate attention to that role and that responsibility,” Mitchell told attendees at the commission’s Washington, D.C., convening this summer. “I hope that this group, along with other groups and associations, can return to the idea of a search for moral clarity, a search for purpose, and the establishment and embodiment of values into the process of education with our students.”



A Platform for Collaboration

The commission was born from a recognition that faith-based colleges are not only numerous, but also deeply influential. Institutions such as the University of Notre Dame, Yeshiva University, Pepperdine University, and Brigham Young University are members of the inaugural executive committee, joined by leaders from schools including Dillard University, George Fox University, and Oakwood University.

For Mitchell and others, the goal is not to silo faith-based education but to situate it firmly within the wider policy and research conversations in higher education. Commission members have emphasized that the moral and intellectual traditions of

these schools can contribute fresh perspectives on enduring problems like college affordability, completion rates, and access.

Gilbert, in outlining the vision of the commission, stressed how many students still seek a college experience where their spiritual lives are recognized alongside their academic pursuits. “A faith-based mission on campus can unite people with diverse backgrounds and drive accessibility in education,” he said. “This is happening all across America, where young adults are looking for somewhere that will value and recognize their faith. And they don’t often feel that in other institutions.”

Hoogstra echoed the importance of acknowledging the roles these

schools play. “In today’s higher education climate, it is vital to celebrate and advance the different contributions that various sectors of higher education represent,” she said. “Religious universities offer a unique contribution to the world and we are grateful for the broad involvement and support of the institutions represented on this inaugural committee and ACE’s leadership.

A Washington Convening

The commission held one of its most visible gatherings on June 9, 2025, when more than 100 college presidents, policymakers, and higher education leaders met at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The day included closed-door sessions for presidents and an afternoon public program featuring speeches, panel discussions, and the premiere of a documentary series.

Ryan P. Burge, PhD, associate professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University and a leading researcher on religion and politics, delivered the keynote. He challenged assumptions about declining religious affiliation among young people, pointing instead to evidence that Gen Z students may be more likely than expected to bring faith into their educational expectations. “We have to have a more accurate representation of what the relationship between education and religion looks like in this country, because it is not what people think it is,” Burge said.

The afternoon’s centerpiece was the screening of “HIGHER ed: The Power of Faith-Inspired Learning,” a new documentary produced by BYUtv. The film highlights stories of students and leaders from faith-based institutions and examines the role of belief in shaping education. Following the screening, Gilbert moderated a panel that included Rabbi Ari Berman president of Yeshiva University, Reverend Robert A. Dowd, CSC, PhD, president of the

University of Notre Dame, Michael Lindsay president of Taylor University, and Candice McQueen, PhD, president of Lipscomb University.

Dowd, who took office at Notre Dame in 2024, underscored the way his institution’s Catholic identity guides its research. “We have opportunities to tell our story, thanks to the research profile of our university,” he said. “Taking research seriously, recognizing that we’re called to know the world around us, called to discover, called to discovery, called to ask questions, called to be curious. That’s all grounded in our Catholic mission.”

McQueen emphasized visibility as a critical challenge. “We sometimes show up to say what we’re against, but we don’t show up to say what we’re for and what we’re doing, and we’ve got to change that,” she said.

Looking Ahead

As the commission continues its work, members plan to host additional convenings, publish research, and advocate for policies that strengthen both religious and secular institutions. Leaders hope the commission will create a more unified voice in national discussions about higher education’s future while ensuring that faith-based schools—many of which serve significant numbers of first-generation and low-income students—are recognized for their contributions.

The initiative arrives at a time when higher education faces heightened scrutiny over costs, enrollment pressures, and questions about value. By positioning faith-based institutions as partners rather than outliers, the ACE Commission is aiming to influence the sector’s responses to those challenges.

Whether this new body can translate its convenings into lasting influence remains to be seen. But its creation has already signaled that religious identity, once treated as marginal to the national higher education conversation, is increasingly being recognized as central to it. ●

“We have to have a more accurate representation of what the relationship between education and religion looks like in this country, because it is not what people think it is.”

Ryan P. Burge, PhD



Beyond the Pews

How Faith-Based Colleges Recruit Unaffiliated Students

By Misty Evans

As more young adults identify as religiously unaffiliated, faith-based colleges are rethinking how to connect with students who grew up with little or no religious identity. The challenge is staying true to their institutions' convictions, while inviting students to apply who might not share them.

According to the 2023–24 Religious Landscape Study from Pew Research, 62% of U.S. adults identify as Christian, while 29% say they are religiously unaffiliated (atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular”). Among 18- to 29-year-olds in North America, fewer than half identify as Christian, and roughly 44%

fall into the unaffiliated category. That generational divergence has put pressure on Christian and other faith-based colleges, many of which view themselves as countercultural or value-centered alternatives to secular institutions.

Yet Christian higher education is not uniformly shrinking. Thirty evangelical colleges and universities reported significant enrollment growth in 2024, per data compiled by the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU). Some of these institutions point to leaning into identity as a strategic advantage rather than a liability.

All Faiths Welcome, With Clarity

At the University of Notre Dame, the admissions site states plainly: “We are a Catholic institution, but all faiths practiced within our community are welcomed and supported.” By explicitly framing belonging, Notre Dame offers a model of how strongly religious institutions can affirm mission while opening their doors to everyone.

Similarly, Baylor University publishes a “Christian Identity FAQ” that addresses common concerns from prospective students. It asks: “Are people of all faiths welcome at Baylor?” and the response is “Yes.

While a very large percentage of students are Christian, Baylor is made a better place by including its religious diversity.” Baylor also provides spaces for Muslim prayer and reflection, acknowledging plural religious needs.

These institutions use two rhetorical moves. First, they make clear their faith identity; second, they assure respect and support for those of other or no faith. That dual message is often baked into campus tours, admissions materials, and preview days.

Transparency and Expectations

One sticking point in recruitment is expectation—how much faith practice is required once enrolled. Some campuses require chapel or religious formation covenants. Wheaton College, for example, mandates chapel attendance and publishes spiritual life expectations in handbooks available to prospective students.

Faith-based colleges must decide which requirements are nonnegotiable and then be transparent. Unaffiliated students often tell enrollment officers that hidden expectations (e.g., mandatory worship attendance, unspoken codes) are a dealbreaker. In interviews, admissions officials say offering a preview of the culture helps students self-assess whether they will thrive.

Belonging Beyond Belief

Uneasy with institutional religion but seeking community and purpose, many unaffiliated students respond to values, service, belonging, and intellectual engagement. Faith-based campuses often amplify these appeals.

- **Service and justice focus:** Many religiously affiliated colleges build their pitch around service learning, social justice, and ethical leadership. These are ideals that resonate even with those skeptical of doctrine.
- **Intellectual engagement:** Institutions that emphasize Christian scholarship, rigorous liberal arts, or worldview integration often attract students drawn to big

questions, even if they come from nonreligious backgrounds.

- **Safe pluralism:** Campuses increasingly offer interfaith chapels, meditation spaces, spiritual counseling (not strictly doctrinal), and student groups for seekers. The idea is not to dilute conviction but to model hospitality.

Some Jesuit campuses, via the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), actively discuss how to serve the “nones”—those who do not affiliate with any organized religion—in Catholic contexts,—creating pastoral approaches that welcome questioning, ambiguity, and plural spiritualities.

Voices on Choice

Unaffiliated students who choose faith-based colleges often cite community, academic quality, and values alignment more than doctrinal agreement. One student told a campus tour guide that they didn’t grow up religious but appreciated that they can learn, explore, decide—and not be judged.

From the institutional side, an admissions director summarized the recruiting calculus. “We’re not trying to sell everybody on doctrine. We’re trying to find those who value truth, purpose, belonging—and who see our mission as adding, not excluding.”

Challenges and Tradeoffs

Faith-based institutions still face tensions. Push too far toward

Recruiting is only half the battle.

Retention of unaffiliated students is often a test of how well the institution balances mission with inclusion.

Retention, Yield, and Internal Data

Recruiting is only half the battle. Retention of unaffiliated students is often a test of how well the institution balances mission with inclusion. Some colleges track retention and satisfaction by student religious identification, using those metrics in annual reviews.

Although few institutions publish these breakdowns publicly, admissions and institutional research officers often say their models now include “religious affiliation” as a demographic filter, alongside race, income, and first-gen status, to better understand yield dynamics.

Baylor’s enrollment data show steady growth in applications and enrollment over the past several years. While those figures don’t break down by religious identity, they signal continued demand for a faith-oriented option even in a more secularizing environment.

pluralism or ambiguity, and donors, denomination partners, or alumni may complain of mission drift. Stay too rigid, and the institution risks shrinking the prospective pool.

Another risk is mis-selling. Some students say they were drawn in by inclusive marketing, only to find strict expectations, social friction, or a lack of support for skeptics once on campus. That churn can hurt reputation and retention.

The shift is clear. With younger generations more likely to be unaffiliated, faith-based colleges cannot win by default. Their success will depend on the art of inclusion without capitulation. That means honest presentation of mission and expectations, robust pathways for belonging, and support for students whose faith is still forming—or never was, and may not be in the future. ●



Religious Colleges That Lean Into Their Identity Make Gains

By Misty Evans

As many U.S. colleges struggle with enrollment declines and shifting demographics, a growing number of religious institutions are moving in the opposite direction—and doing so by doubling down on faith. From Kentucky to North Dakota and Utah, colleges that openly embrace their Christian or religious identities are attracting students and families seeking community, meaning, and what they describe as safe, values-based campuses.

At Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, last year's student-led revival drew tens of thousands of visitors to the small campus for two weeks of spontaneous prayer and worship. When classes resumed that fall, the school announced its largest total enrollment in history. "Students are hungry for purpose," President Kevin Brown told Christianity Today in January 2025, adding that Asbury's spiritual culture had become a major draw for new applicants. The school now frames its mission more explicitly around spiritual formation and Christian service.

A similar story is unfolding across other evangelical colleges. According to Christianity Today, more than 30 evangelical institutions reported enrollment growth in 2024, with several reaching record highs despite a national downturn. Leaders attribute the uptick to a renewed emphasis on mission and community at a time when many families view secular universities as culturally or politically charged.

The pattern extends beyond Protestant campuses. The Catholic News Agency reported in late 2024 that Catholic universities with strong religious identities, including the University of Mary in North

Dakota and Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio, also saw record enrollment. University of Mary President Monsignor James Shea said in a statement that "students are seeking clarity, not compromise," and that maintaining an "authentic Catholic identity" has become central to recruitment.

At the same time, Latter-day Saint institutions are experiencing sustained expansion. Deseret News reported that enrollment across the Church of Jesus

families choose a Christian college. The report cautioned that institutions that "soften the edges" of their faith to appeal to broader audiences risk alienating their core market.

That lesson resonates with campus leaders. In a panel discussion covered by The Christian Post, presidents and administrators at the American Council on Education's annual meeting urged religious institutions to be unapologetic about their missions. Interfaith America founder Eboo Patel told attendees that

More than 30 evangelical institutions reported enrollment growth in 2024.

Christ of Latter-day Saints' educational system—including Brigham Young University (BYU) campuses and affiliated seminaries—has surpassed 900,000 students worldwide, up markedly from pre-pandemic totals. BYU-Idaho enrolled its largest freshman class ever in 2024, defying predictions that younger Americans were abandoning organized religion.

Analysts say the renewed interest in faith-based colleges fits broader social trends. Many students and parents, especially after the pandemic, cited a desire for belonging and moral grounding as major factors in their college decisions. A 2025 survey by the Center for Academic Faithfulness & Flourishing, summarized by Religion News Service, found that religious commitment ranked as the top reason

"identity is not exclusion — it's clarity," arguing that colleges should articulate their spiritual commitments while remaining open to dialogue.

Market data supports the notion that religious distinctiveness can be a competitive advantage. BestColleges reported that faith-based schools collectively grew enrollment by 82% between 1980 and 2020—compared with 57% growth across higher education overall. Many of those gains have been concentrated at institutions that emphasize affordability, service, and faith integration in academics.

Still, not all faith-based colleges are thriving. Some small religious campuses continue to close or merge due to financial strain, and a few large Christian universities face public scrutiny over compliance and transparency.

In November 2024, The Associated Press reported that the U.S. Department of Education fined Grand Canyon University \$37.7 million for allegedly misleading students about the cost of doctoral programs. Liberty University, another high-profile Christian institution, previously paid a \$14 million penalty over Clery Act violations related to crime reporting. Both cases highlight the tension between marketing safe environments and ensuring accountability.

Legal developments may also shape the sector's future. In August 2024, a federal court ruling in Minnesota allowed religious colleges to participate in a state dual-enrollment program, even though they require statements of faith from faculty and students. The decision underscored constitutional protections for religious institutions and could broaden access to high school pipelines that feed private faith-based institutions.

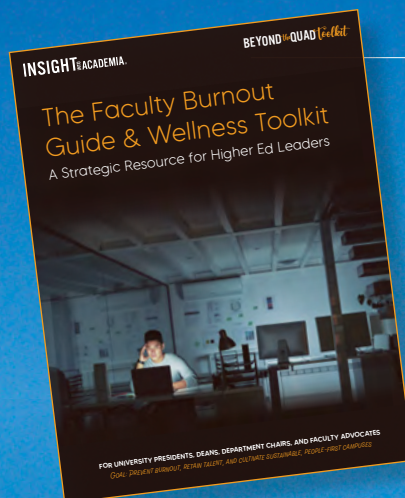
Experts say the growing appeal of religious colleges reflects a broader cultural polarization that has pushed some families to seek ideological and moral alignment in higher education. For institutions, leaning into faith identity can strengthen loyalty and recruitment—but it also requires navigating political scrutiny and maintaining academic credibility.

"Students today are looking for communities that mean something," said Peter Rine, a researcher who studies faith-based college enrollment trends. "They want an education that aligns with their worldview and feels anchored in purpose."

For colleges willing to define themselves clearly, the reward may be renewed relevance in an era of shrinking applicant pools. But clarity also carries risk. The most successful religious institutions, experts say, will be those that combine moral conviction with openness and transparency, proving that faith and academic rigor can coexist. ●

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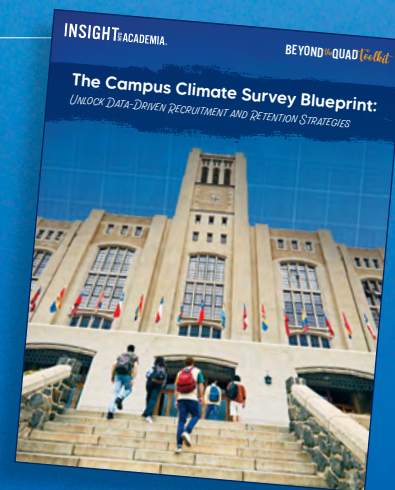


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Free Speech for Me, Not for Thee: The Campus Double Standard

By Erik Cliburn

When President Trump signed his Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship executive order on January 20, 2025, the White House framed it as an effort to protect Americans' constitutional rights and the first amendment. The order declared that government censorship of speech is intolerable in a free society and directed federal agencies to ensure that no taxpayer resources are used to "unconstitutionally abridge the free speech of any American citizen."

In practice, however, the landscape for open expression on college campuses remains complex. Even as the administration pledges to safeguard free speech, it has faced legal challenges and public scrutiny over actions that appear to restrict certain viewpoints—particularly those critical of U.S. policy or aligned with pro-Palestinian advocacy.

Federal Action and Judicial Pushback

Trump's executive order was intended to reverse what it described as the previous administration's censorship of Americans' speech on online platforms. It tasked the Attorney General with investigating federal conduct inconsistent with the purposes and policies of this order and making recommendations for corrective measures.

At the same time, the administration has defended efforts to revoke visas and sanction individuals it accuses of spreading anti-American or pro-terrorist messages. Those

measures became the focus of a recent high-profile court case, when U.S. District Judge William Young ruled that such actions violated constitutional protections.

In a 161-page opinion, Young found that federal officials deliberately and with purposeful aforethought ... intentionally [sought] to chill

freedom of speech," he wrote.

The Department of Homeland Security criticized the ruling as undermining public safety, while the State Department said it would continue to revoke visas from individuals deemed security risks. The Justice Department declined to comment.

"The president's palpable misunderstanding that the government simply cannot seek retribution for speech he disdains poses a threat to Americans' freedom of speech."

U.S. District Judge William Young

the rights to freedom of speech and to assemble peacefully. The lawsuit, filed by the American Association of University Professors and the Middle East Studies Association, alleged that immigration authorities had relied on information from Canary Mission, an anonymous website that tracks pro-Palestinian students and faculty.

Young concluded that the government's conduct threatened core First Amendment principles. "The president's palpable misunderstanding that the government simply cannot seek retribution for speech he disdains poses a great threat to Americans'

Shifting Boundaries in the Classroom

Beyond federal actions, tensions around expression have also surfaced within colleges and universities. Conservative organizations such as Turning Point USA have renewed efforts to expose what they describe as political bias among faculty.

The group's Professor Watchlist—an online database that highlights instructors accused of promoting "leftist" or "anti-American" views—has been cited by critics as contributing to a culture of intimidation. NBC News reported that several professors listed

Measuring the Campus Climate for Free Speech

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) released its 2026 College Free Speech Rankings this fall, offering a comprehensive look at how students perceive open dialogue on campus. The survey, conducted with College Pulse, drew responses from more than 68,000 undergraduates across 257 institutions—making it the largest of its kind in the nation.

The results paint a sobering picture: 166 colleges received failing grades for protecting free expression, while only 11 earned a C or higher. Claremont McKenna College topped the list for the second year in a row, followed by Purdue University, the University of Chicago, Michigan Technological University, and the University of Colorado Boulder.

Students reported growing discomfort with discussing controversial topics, especially those related to the Israeli-Hamas conflict. On more than 20 campuses, three-quarters of students said it was difficult to have open conversations about the issue.

Equally concerning, one-third of respondents said they viewed violence as acceptable in some circumstances to stop a speaker. “More students than ever think violence and chaos are acceptable alternatives to peaceful protest,” said Sean Stevens, FIRE’s chief research advisor. “This finding cuts across partisan lines. It is not a liberal or conservative problem — it’s an American problem.”

on the site received threatening messages or harassment.

“If you make statements that right-wing politicians don’t like, then you can lose your job. Period. That is chilling,” said Isaac Kamola, director of the American Association of University Professors’ Center for the Defense of Academic Freedom.

Turning Point founder Charlie Kirk defended the project in a 2018 interview, calling it “an awareness tool” designed to “shine a light on what we feel has been an

unfair balance toward left-leaning ideas and biases in our universities.”

In an ironic twist, more than 18 institutions have terminated, suspended, or expelled faculty, staff, or students who expressed unfavorable comments about Kirk immediately after his assassination. Lawsuits have been filed against universities in South Carolina, Indiana and more.

The debate has raised broader questions about whether calls for ideological diversity are compatible with academic freedom. Some scholars argue that the watchlist and similar campaigns discourage open discussion by transforming classrooms into politicized spaces.

Students and the New Free Speech Divide

According to new data from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), the climate for campus dialogue is worsening across the political spectrum. In its 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, 166 of 257 institutions earned failing grades for promoting open discourse.

“This year, students largely opposed allowing any controversial campus speaker, no matter that speaker’s politics,” said FIRE President and CEO Greg Lukianoff. “Rather than hearing out and then responding to an ideological opponent, both liberal and conservative college students are retreating from the encounter entirely.”

Still, some institutions have improved their standings. Dartmouth College, Vanderbilt University, and Yale University all rose in the rankings after revising policies and creating new programs on expression. Harvard University, which ranked last in the previous two years, moved up slightly to 245th.

A Debate Without Clear Lines

Across higher education, the push and pull over free speech continues to evolve. While the Trump administration emphasizes its commitment to protecting expression, its enforcement actions have drawn accusations of political selectivity. Meanwhile, college communities face their own challenges in balancing safety, inclusivity, and the exchange of ideas.

As both courts and campuses grapple with the meaning of free speech in an era of polarization, the question may be less about whether it is protected and more about who decides what it protects—and why. ●

University of Maryland Will Open Cutting-Edge Quantum Lab Through Microsoft Collaboration

By Erik Cliburn

Maryland's push to cement its reputation as the nation's "Capital of Quantum" recently took a major step forward with the announcement that Microsoft will open a quantum research center at the University of Maryland College Park (UMD) Discovery District.

The facility will provide faculty, students, and government partners unprecedented access to cutting-edge quantum technologies while building on the state's more than \$1 billion commitment to expand its quantum ecosystem.

Gov. Wes Moore unveiled the plan at a press conference in College Park, describing the partnership as central to Maryland's long-term vision for innovation.

"Maryland is making big bets on the future to grow our economy and drive innovation. Quantum is at the center of that strategy," Moore said. "We are honored to partner with Microsoft in this effort, as we work together to create jobs, spark discovery, and stimulate growth. And together, we will continue to make Maryland the best place in the world to change the world."

At the Center of Quantum Growth

UMD has long been recognized as a hub for quantum research, home to world-renowned institutions such as the Joint Quantum Institute and the Joint Center for Quantum Information and Computer Science. By housing Microsoft's new lab in its Discovery District, the university will be at the forefront of integrating corporate innovation with academic research.

"This is a landmark moment for the University of Maryland and for the entire state," UMD President Darryll J. Pines, PhD, stated in a press release, calling the project a milestone in the university's decades-long work to establish leadership in quantum science. "The launch of Microsoft's advanced quantum lab in our Discovery District is a testament to the incredible momentum we've built in quantum science and innovation. It reflects years of world-class research, visionary investment, and bold collaboration that together have made Maryland and the greater DC region the true Capital of Quantum."

The center will provide UMD students and researchers with early access to Microsoft's quantum hardware, including Majorana 1, the company's recently unveiled chip designed with a topological qubit architecture. That design has been hailed as a potential breakthrough for error-resistant quantum systems that could reach commercial viability faster than anticipated.

Quantum research

explores how tiny particles behave in strange ways to build powerful new technologies—like super-fast computers and ultra-secure communication—that go beyond what regular science can do.

Quantum technologies are advancing rapidly across several fields, with real-world applications emerging in both research and industry.

Partnerships Driving Innovation

The new facility builds on the Capital of Quantum Initiative, launched by Moore in January at the College Park headquarters of IonQ, a UMD spinout and one of the world's leading quantum companies. The initiative has already attracted nearly a dozen quantum startups to the Discovery District and committed more than \$1 billion in combined state, university, and private investment.

UMD is a central player in these efforts. The university has pledged more than \$70 million toward advancing the state's quantum capacity through academics, workforce development, and technical support. Moore's fiscal year 2026 budget added another \$52.5 million to bolster the initiative.

Federal partnerships are also shaping the landscape. In April, the state signed a memorandum of agreement with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to create the Capital Quantum Benchmarking Hub at UMD. The deal secures up to \$100 million in federal funds and ties the state directly into DARPA's rigorous Quantum Benchmarking Initiative. Microsoft, one of just two companies advancing to the final phase of DARPA's program, will use its College Park center to collaborate directly with DARPA's testing and evaluation teams.

Microsoft's Role and Vision

Microsoft leaders have emphasized that the new lab is designed to foster cross-sector collaboration, not just corporate research.

"We are excited to be part of Moore's vision for the Capital of Quantum through the opening of this unique, partner-focused quantum center in Maryland's Discovery District," said Jason Zander, executive vice president of strategic missions and technologies at Microsoft. "Together, we can advance quantum technology and accelerate U.S. leadership in science and innovation. This partnership exemplifies what is possible when state and federal leaders, academia, and industry unite for a common purpose."

Microsoft's decision to locate its quantum center at UMD highlights the university's role as both a training ground for the next generation of quantum scientists and a nexus for partnerships with government and industry. The center will also attract top talent to College Park, giving students opportunities to work alongside Microsoft engineers while expanding Maryland's skilled workforce in one of the most competitive fields in technology.

Maryland's Strategic Position

Quantum science has emerged as a critical frontier in computing, promising to solve problems far beyond the reach of classical systems. With institutions like the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the National Security Agency nearby, Maryland has leveraged its proximity to federal agencies and research capacity to position itself as a national leader.

As Pines noted, the move represents more than a facility—it is the culmination of years of investment, collaboration, and vision. For Maryland, and especially for UMD, the opening of Microsoft's new quantum center places College Park at the epicenter of a rapidly evolving field that promises to transform science, technology, and industry. ●

Universities Launch New Research Incubators to Accelerate Innovation

By Erik Cliburn

Across the nation, universities are introducing new research incubators that blend faculty innovation, student engagement, and real-world problem-solving. From William & Mary's (W&M) interdisciplinary model for applied scholarship to the University of Houston's (UH) National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded training hub and the University of Chicago's (UChicago) state-of-the-art commercial labs, these initiatives aim to transform how academic research reaches the public sphere.

William & Mary: A Four-Tier Model for Faculty and Student Collaboration

W&M's Global Research Institute (GRI) is launching a university-wide incubator that redefines how research is conceived, developed, and scaled. Designed to support faculty across W&M's five schools and the College of Arts & Sciences, the new model builds on the university's elevation to R1 research status and seeks to integrate students into nearly every stage of discovery.

"W&M's elevation to R1 status presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine how we support breakthrough research," said Provost Peggy Agouris. "GRI's next chapter embodies our commitment to fostering the kind of collaborative, student-centered research that will attract top talent from across the nation and establish W&M as widely recognized for leadership in addressing global challenges."

GRI director Mike Tierney described the initiative as a "pipeline

that transforms ambitious ideas into sustainable research programs with global impact," adding, "This next chapter embodies our vision of teaching through research—where students don't just learn about research, they collaborate with faculty to create new knowledge that makes a difference in the world."

The incubator's four-tier structure—Engage, Explore, Incubate, and Transition—creates a progression from idea generation to long-term sustainability. Early stages provide workshops, networking, and professional development, while later tiers include up to three years of support for high-potential projects, including student research teams, grant-writing assistance, and faculty course buyouts.

Vice provost for research Alyson Wilson said that the incubator breaks down silos and builds "a research ecosystem that will solidify W&M's leadership in high-impact areas while providing the best liberal arts and sciences preparation for engaging in complex, interdisciplinary problems."

The program also expands the university's global reach. AidData, GRI's largest existing research lab focused on international development, will become a stand-alone unit reporting to the vice provost for research.

Over the next five years, GRI plans to train more than 200 faculty members, incubate at least 15 scalable projects, engage 500 students, and generate more than \$20 million in funding. The first cohorts will launch in spring 2026, signaling

A research incubator is a structured environment or program designed to support the early development of research ideas, projects, or collaborations—especially those that are innovative, interdisciplinary, or not yet fully formed.

What it typically offers:

- **Mentorship and guidance from experienced researchers or faculty**
- **Access to resources like funding, data, labs, or administrative support**
- **Workshops or seminars to refine research questions, methods, or proposals**
- **Opportunities for collaboration across departments or institutions**
- **Support for grant writing or publication strategies**
- **Think of it as a launchpad for promising research that needs time, space, and support to grow before it's ready for formal funding or implementation.**

what Agouris calls a transformative model for research excellence and student engagement.

University of Houston: Building a Biomedical Research Workforce

In Houston, UH is partnering with the Texas Medical Center and multiple institutions to launch the Houston Area Incubator for Kidney, Urologic and Hematologic Research Training (HAI-KUH). The program, backed by \$6.25 million from NIH, seeks to address a pressing public health need in the region—kidney disease, hypertension, and sickle cell disease are prevalent—while strengthening the biomedical research pipeline.

HAI-KUH will fund six pre-doctoral students and six post-doctoral researchers through a competitive process, offering mentorship, interdisciplinary training, and collaboration across a network of 58 investigators from institutions including Baylor College of Medicine, Rice University, MD Anderson Cancer Center, and Texas A&M. Participants will work on projects that span prevention, diagnostics, and treatment of KUH-related diseases, supported by faculty from both UH and leading medical research centers.

The initiative aims not only to develop new treatments but also to strengthen the regional biomedical workforce—connecting emerging researchers to opportunities for innovation in health care, public policy, and translational science.

University of Chicago: Linking Research and Economic Growth

On Chicago's South Side, UChicago recently celebrated the opening of Hyde Park Labs, a \$300 million, 300,000-square-foot facility that merges academic research, commercial innovation, and community engagement. The complex includes space for the UChicago Science Incubator, which will support startups and research ventures in fields such as life sciences, quantum

technology, artificial intelligence, and climate science.

President Paul Alivisatos described the project as a “waypoint” in the university's broader effort to connect discovery and economic growth.

“It will help to energize the local economy and will also help us to do more, because it builds on itself,” he said. “We intend to continue to invest and to continue to build the local innovation ecosystem here in Hyde Park.”

The incubator, managed by UChicago's Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, provides startups with access to laboratory facilities, mentorship, and investment opportunities—including the new \$25 million Harper Court Ventures Fund. IBM researchers affiliated with the National Quantum Algorithm Center will also occupy space in the building, alongside community initiatives such as the Southside STEM Station, which offers free science programs for local students and families.

“There's going to be a lot going on in our 30,000 square feet,” said Nadya Mason, dean of the Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, “but even more important are the connections that we're going to make with researchers throughout the building. It's at these interfaces between fields and between sectors that the magic really happens.”

A National Trend Toward Collaboration and Impact

From Williamsburg to Houston to Chicago, these incubators reflect a shared goal: to reimagine how universities translate research into tangible impact. By combining interdisciplinary collaboration, hands-on training, and forming partnerships beyond academia, colleges and universities are moving toward a model of innovation that connects the classroom, the laboratory, and the community. ●

OUR NEXT ISSUE

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Faculty Scholarship: Choosing AI, Human Research, or Both

By Misty Evans

Across colleges and universities, faculty are increasingly harnessing generative AI tools—most prominently large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT-4 (OpenAI)—to accelerate key phases of scholarship: literature reviews, data handling, hypothesis generation, and even draft writing.

A recent study by Mehrnaz Mostafapour, PhD, et al., titled “Evaluating Literature Reviews Conducted by Humans Versus ChatGPT: Comparative Study,” published in *JMIR AI* (2024) compares a GPT-4-led literature review with one conducted by human researchers. The findings offer a useful entry point into how these tools are reshaping research norms and underscore the urgent need for new best practice frameworks around authorship, credit, error mitigation, and peer review.

In the study, the authors asked GPT-4 to conduct a literature review on relational dynamics between physicians and patients in medico-legal contexts using iterative prompt engineering. This was then compared with a human-led review employing a systematic search in Ovid MEDLINE and thematic analysis.

The results showed that GPT-4

generated a broad list of 21 relational factors in seconds, identifying a wide breadth of content and responding rapidly. The human review, while much slower, provided deeper contextualization, greater accuracy, and clearer methodological transparency. For instance, about 14% of GPT-4’s listed factors were judged irrelevant, and 7.5% of its references were categorized as irrelevant by the researchers. The authors concluded that GPT-4 may serve well as a preliminary research assistant but cannot replace expert human scholarship.

For faculty, the study signals opportunity and caution in equal measure. Generative AI can help produce an initial draft of a literature survey, map a field rapidly, and surface connections that might otherwise take weeks to identify. It may free up time for interpretation, synthesis, and writing. Yet it also raises profound questions about how research is done, who deserves credit, how errors propagate, and how peer review must adapt.

If a faculty member uses GPT-4 extensively for literature retrieval, drafting text, or generating hypotheses, what is the proper attribution? Traditional norms assume a human author—or author team—drives all

substantive intellectual contributions. When AI contributes significantly, should it be named as a “co-author” or simply acknowledged as a tool?

The Mostafapour study treats the model as an assistant and emphasizes human oversight: “We suggest approaching GPT-4 as a research assistant who possesses limited contextual expertise and occasionally synthesizes responses entirely to overcome the second challenge.”

Still, many journals and institutions are only beginning to define governance policies. If the human researcher shapes nearly every prompt, selects outputs, verifies references, and corrects errors, the researcher remains the author. Yet the efficiency gain and initial content generation come from AI—a new and complex ratio of labor and contribution.

Best-practice recommendations might therefore include:

- Full disclosure of the use of generative-AI tools in literature reviews, data work, or drafting.
- Clear delineation of what the human researcher completed (prompt design, verification, interpretation, editing) versus what

the model contributed (retrieval, initial synthesis).

- Authorship assigned only to humans who take final intellectual responsibility. AI tools should not receive authorship unless their design or code forms part of the research contribution.

Error Rates, “Hallucinations,” and Peer Review Implications

GPT-4’s speed comes at a cost. The model frequently produces irrelevant results and occasional hallucinations—information that is factually incorrect, fabricated, or misleading. The authors caution that GPT-4 “will not communicate ... when the topic has been saturated or knowing when to stop asking for more information.”

From a faculty perspective, this introduces a new kind of risk—errors hidden beneath polished prose. If an AI-assisted draft enters peer review without rigorous human auditing, reviewers may find it harder to trace sources, check for veracity, or catch subtle interpretive mistakes. The opacity compounds the challenge. Human researchers document full search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and screening flows—steps an LLM cannot replicate. The study notes significantly less transparency in the way that LLMs process prompts, collect information, and generate outputs at this time.

To maintain rigor:

- Treat AI outputs as draft material, not final text.
- Use human experts to verify nearly every reference, assess relevance, and review interpretive depth.
- Report prompt structures, AI versions used, and human oversight steps in the methods section.
- Encourage journals and peer reviewers to ask: “Was AI involved? What steps did the human author

take to verify outputs?”

Beyond authorship, generative AI is transforming the peer-review ecosystem itself. If faculty can generate a first-pass literature review in hours rather than weeks, there may be pressure to accelerate submissions. That shift raises questions about reviewer capacity, expectations, and the overall quality of published work.

Moreover, as AI becomes integrated into scholarly writing, universities and departments may need to revisit hiring, promotion,

Generative AI is rapidly embedding itself into faculty workflows, enabling faster reviews, surfacing wider literatures, and supporting hypothesis generation. But it does not replace the human capacity for judgment, interpretation, and accountability.

and tenure guidelines—especially when AI-assisted work is acceptable but human oversight remains central. The Mostafapour study suggests a promising hybrid: “The structured approach to prompt engineering may serve as a model for researchers looking to integrate generative AI into their literature searches.” That hybrid model could serve as a blueprint—AI for speed and breadth, human expertise for nuance and depth.

Using a Best Practice Framework

Drawing from the study, four elements form the initial foundation of a best practice framework for AI use in academic research:

- **Transparency:** Declare use of the model (version, training date, prompt-engineering steps) and describe how human oversight occurred.
- **Verification:** Human authors must verify all AI-generated content, including references, facts, and interpretations. Treat AI output as an early draft.

Authorship clarity: AI is a tool, not an author, unless its creation is central to the research itself. Human authors define and claim their own intellectual contributions.

- **Peer review readiness:** Manuscripts using AI should include a methods statement on its use, allowing reviewers to assess reliability and verification processes.

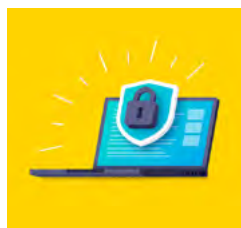
The study suggests faculty can responsibly use generative AI in literature reviews—but only with

human expertise, oversight, and transparent reporting. Neglecting those safeguards risks errors, misattribution, and erosion of trust in scholarly work.

Generative AI is rapidly embedding itself into faculty workflows, enabling faster reviews, surfacing wider literatures, and supporting hypothesis generation. But it does not replace the human capacity for judgment, interpretation, and accountability. As the technology evolves, research offices, journals, and faculty governance committees must establish clear guidelines around credit, accuracy, and oversight.

The Mostafapour comparative study captures both the promise and the precautions. The takeaway is simple but vital. Treat AI as an accelerator, not a substitute.

Faculty who adopt transparent, verified research practices will be best positioned to use generative AI responsibly—advancing and accelerating scholarship while safeguarding the integrity of authorship, credit, and peer review. ●



Massachusetts and California Move to Safeguard University Research

By Erik Cliburn

States that anchor the nation's research enterprises are moving to blunt the impact of the Trump administration's freezes and proposed cuts to federal science funding—testing how far states need to go to safeguard labs, jobs, and long-term competitiveness.

In Massachusetts, Gov. Maura Healey unveiled the Discovery, Research and Innovation for a Vibrant Economy (DRIVE) Initiative in late July, pairing executive actions with a \$400 million legislative package aimed at stabilizing university and hospital research.

The plan would split funding evenly between a multi-year research pool at MassDevelopment and a bridge-funding reserve for public college campuses, and includes support for indirect costs, cross-campus collaborations, and early career researchers. It also creates a philanthropic Research Catalyst Fund and a Research Opportunity Review Board to steer funding to high-impact projects.

"Massachusetts is the global leader in innovative research and the discovery of lifesaving cures," Healey said, adding that research funding is economic infrastructure for the state. Lieutenant Gov. Kim Driscoll called it an innovative proposal to back game-changing scientific and medical research, while strengthening the economy.

Healey's office ties the effort directly to the state's outsized dependence on federal research and development dollars—\$8.57 billion annually that supports 81,300 jobs and generates more than \$16 billion in economic activity, according to the UMass Donahue Institute. Her administration argues the state must buffer against federal uncertainty by leveraging stabilization fund interest and Fair

Share surtax revenue, while broadening eligible uses of state match dollars, including support for the Health Safety Net Trust Fund to shore up safety net care.

On the West Coast, California lawmakers are pursuing a much larger proposal, a \$23 billion general obligation bond, SB 607, to be put before voters in November 2026. The measure would create the California Foundation for Science and Health Research, a new public entity authorized to issue grants and loans to University of California, California State University, and other colleges and universities, as well as public and private research organizations. Priority would go to projects defunded by the federal government. Governance would include scientific peer review, annual audits, and public disclosure requirements.

"California needs to lead, and we are already a leader on science," said state Sen. Scott Wiener, the bill's sponsor. "We should double and triple down on that leadership and make California the absolute global epicenter of scientific research and discovery."

Scientists and trainees warned that the federal funding freezes are already disrupting lab work and patient-focused studies. At UCLA, a lung cancer research program reported suspending projects after roughly \$8 million in support was halted, while graduate researchers described widespread uncertainty about jobs and the fate of long-running experiments.

Supporters of SB 607 framed the measure as a bridge to keep cancer and Alzheimer's research on track until federal funding stabilizes, according to radio station KQED.

The California push comes amid a high-profile funding standoff at

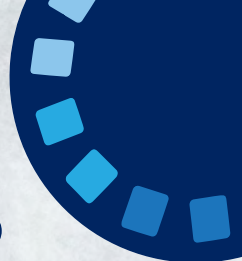
UCLA. The Trump administration froze roughly \$584 million in grants this summer. A federal judge has since ordered the government to restore more than \$500 million, a temporary reprieve while litigation proceeds. The University of California system has warned that it could lose a significant portion of the \$5.7 billion it receives annually in federal research and program support if the freeze spreads.

Policy design differs across the two states. Massachusetts is moving first with executive action and a relatively modest—but immediately actionable—\$400 million package to bridge grants, retain talent, and keep core research capacity online. California is opting for a longer runway and heavier lift, a multibillion-dollar bond issuance that would build a parallel state funding channel sized to cover multi-year federal shortfalls and capital needs.

Both approaches reflect the same calculus. With Washington utilizing research dollars as leverage to control campus speech, admissions, and other contested issues, states that rely on research as an economic engine are preparing their own safety nets.

For higher education leaders, the stakes extend beyond balance sheets. Research interruptions create a ripple effect on clinical trials, graduate training, and regional supply chains—from construction to retail—that depend on stable grant funding flows.

Whether via Massachusetts's targeted bridge funds or California's proposed bond issuance, these state-led interventions aim to keep labs open, people employed, and public-impact science moving—even as the politics of federal research funding grow more volatile. ●



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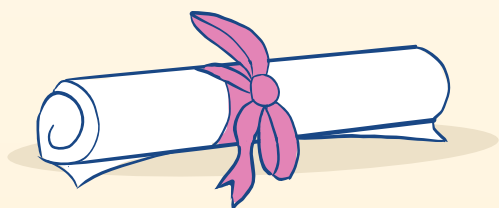
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THE ENROLLMENT FLIP: WHY FEWER MEN ARE EARNING COLLEGE DEGREES

By Misty Evans



Women now outpace men in college completion rates, a reversal that has quietly reshaped the landscape of American higher education.

According to a 2024 Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census data, 47% of women ages 25 to 34 hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 37% of men. The share of women with college degrees has climbed steadily for four decades, while men's progress has slowed.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) reports that men account for only 42% of students ages 18 to 24 currently enrolled at four-year colleges—down from 47% in 2011. Women make up nearly 60% of total undergraduate enrollment.

This shift, sometimes called the enrollment flip, has prompted growing concern among educators and policymakers who fear the gender imbalance could have lasting social and economic effects.

The gap begins well before students reach campus. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment found in a study that 15-year-old girls outperformed boys in reading in nearly every participating country, including the United States. Reading proficiency is one of the strongest predictors of college readiness, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Economic pressures also shape the divide. Many young men enter the workforce earlier or pursue apprenticeships instead of college. In a 2024 report, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that men make up roughly 90% of active registered apprentices, with participation increasing in construction, manufacturing, and information technology.

Rising tuition and the lure of immediate wages can make four-year degrees less attractive, particularly for men from low-income backgrounds. Yet

2023 data from the U.S. Department of Education shows that adults with bachelor's degrees earn about 67% more, on average, than those with only a high-school diploma—a gap that continues to widen.

Disengagement and Belonging

While cost and opportunity matter, campus belonging and engagement also play key roles.

Research by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation on college success programs for men found that proactive advising, culturally responsive teaching, and small learning communities are among the most effective strategies for improving persistence.

Several universities have adopted such approaches. At Georgia State University, the African American Male Initiative combines academic advising, peer mentoring, and community engagement. Institutional data show double-digit increases in retention rates for participants compared with peers.

The City University of New York's Black Male Initiative founded in 2004, operates on nearly 30 campuses and provides tutoring, mentorship, and leadership development. CUNY's annual reports indicate that participants achieve higher grade-point averages and stronger persistence than nonparticipants.

California's A²MEND Network (Advancing and Achieving Men in Education), supported by the state's community-college system, trains faculty mentors and awards scholarships to men of color. The program's design aligns closely with best practice research from MDRC and the Community College Research Center (Columbia University) on holistic student supports.

The consequences of male under enrollment extend beyond individual outcomes. The NCES 2023 Digest of Education Statistics shows that women earn 58% of all bachelor's degrees and

62% of master's degrees nationwide. Economists warn that this imbalance could limit the nation's long-term workforce potential, especially as jobs requiring postsecondary credentials continue to grow.

Richard V. Reeves, author of "Of Boys and Men" and founder of the American Institute for Boys and Men at the Brookings Institution, argues that addressing male educational decline is not a zero sum issue. In a 2023 essay, he wrote that "the problem of boys and men should not be seen as a competition with women and girls."

Lower male attainment also intersects with race and class. The NSCRC's 2024 "Some College, No Credential" report found that men are overrepresented among the 40 million Americans who have earned some college credit but did not complete a degree. Men of color and those from lower-income backgrounds are most affected by stopout and attrition.

Reversing the trend will require early intervention and targeted campus strategies. Experts recommend improving literacy instruction in K-12 schools, recruiting more male educators, and creating structured bridges between high school, community college, and four-year programs.

On college campuses, data disaggregation by gender and race helps institutions identify who is falling behind. Programs that combine advising, mentoring, and community-based engagement show the most substantial evidence of success.

As the national conversation about gender equity broadens, higher education faces a dual challenge: maintaining hard-won gains for women while ensuring that men, particularly those from underrepresented groups, are not left behind.

The numbers suggest that doing both will be essential. A balanced student population contributes not only to equity but also to the innovation and diversity that colleges and employers increasingly depend on. ●

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Terms like “synergy,” “transformative,” “belonging,” “innovation hub,” and “student-centric” are unavoidable. So let’s have some fun with it. Your card also includes a Bonus Square: “AI”—because it’s been mentioned in nearly every meeting since 2023.

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RIT: Building Relationships that will Expand Your Horizons.

Expect to make exceptional connections at Rochester Institute of Technology. We're passionate about preparing students to become creative thinkers and leaders.

That's one of the goals of RIT's Spirituality and Religious Life office, within the Center for Campus Life. University Chaplain Andrew Cirillo leads the team and is associate director for Campus Life.



"The extracurricular experience within spiritual involvement only enhances a student's academics, often causing them to ask new questions, remain positive in their approach to what success really signifies, and how to achieve it."

Spirituality and Religious Life is home to some 25 different religious, secular, and spiritual organizations, jointly hosting close to 1,400 events each year.

"Exploring, remaining open, and moving in and out of curious states of mind is a normal component of collegiate life. Extracurricular services and programs such as those in the spiritual realm are vitally important to a student's overall and holistic growth as a young adult. Offering communities that they might already be familiar with and/or have a vested interest in from secondary school and childhood can provide an existing comfort and presence that contributes positively toward mental health."

Additionally, Cirillo states, "For those who may have experienced some sort of spiritual trauma or those within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, the "home away from home" atmosphere of the organizations that make up the office allows inquisitive students the ability to explore freely, at their own pace and within their own bounds of safety, security, and alongside a network of trained chaplains."

In addition, there's the Interfaith Council made up of representatives from each of the seven major faith bodies—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Interfaith/Non-Religious/Secular, Islam, Judaism, and Paganism. Cirillo says it's centered on genuine understanding, education across difference, and moving beyond boundaries to attitudes of peace, compassion, understanding, and kindness.

"The activities that this Council, and more generally the entire office, has put on and will continue to develop well into the future will be built upon a message of love—love of neighbor, self, and community."

At RIT we provide countless ways to connect with your community.

To learn more about RIT and Spirituality and Religious Life please visit www.rit.edu/campuslife/spirituality-and-religious-life