

“Tell Us Something We Don’t Know”

Perspectives on the Future of Public Higher Education from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities

Executive Summary

To survive and thrive in an era of constant change, public colleges and universities must continually evolve. In that context, this AASCU brief takes stock of the challenges that AASCU members face—and suggests some of the questions that AASCU leaders must ask to meet those challenges.

The paper outlines a plethora of issues in higher education, including finances, student demographics, degree completion, technology, shared governance, public policy, access to education, workforce needs, collaboration and consolidation, teaching and learning, the professoriate, facilities, internal governance, and leadership. Enumerating specific challenges that AASCU institutions face in those contexts, this paper suggests that ideas for meeting those challenges will require the leaders of public universities to progress beyond current thinking to frame new questions and find undiscovered answers—hence its title, “Tell Us Something We Don’t Know.” For every issue they face, AASCU leaders must push beyond what they already know in order to discover new ideas, innovations, and solutions.

Key Take-Aways

- If they are to survive and thrive in today’s mutable environment, institutions of higher learning need to evolve continuously. In this context, a central challenge for the leaders of the more than 400 public colleges and universities that are members of AASCU is to engage their institutions in a productive, progressive process of continuous reinvention.
- To support continuous reinvention, AASCU leaders know that they must dive more deeply into the issues they face and frame new questions in ways that can help the sector discover the new thinking that will carry it forward.
- The central challenge for the AASCU sector, therefore, is to advance beyond current thinking to identify and operationalize bold new ideas, solutions, and tools. In essence, AASCU presidents are saying, “Tell us something we don’t know.”
- In short, AASCU leaders seek to develop a robust framework of innovative insights, models, data, ideas, and tools to help them meet the challenges they face.



For higher education, the adage that “the only constant is change” is both a cliché and a verity. The many forces and factors that affect colleges and universities evolve continuously. New factors arise regularly, sometimes with game-changing effects, even as circumstances once considered bedrock wane and disappear. Business cycles pivot inevitably between bust and boom. This ongoing metamorphosis creates an overall environment that is inherently fluid.

If they are to survive and thrive in this mutable environment, institutions of higher learning need themselves to evolve continuously. In this context, a central challenge for the leaders of the more than 400 public colleges and universities that are members of AASCU is to engage their institutions in a productive, progressive process of continuous reinvention.

On one level, the array of issues that AASCU presidents must address is well known. Current revenue streams are challenged. Student demographics are evolving. Technology is driving fundamental change in educational delivery and administrative practices. Improved efficiencies are needed across the institution. Higher education must remain accessible and affordable. Legislators and other stakeholders want universities to be more accountable and transparent. These and many other factors we could cite are assumed today to be “givens.”

To support continuous reinvention of public colleges and universities, however, the leaders of AASCU institutions seek to dive more deeply into the issues they face. In essence, AASCU presidents are saying “tell us something we don’t know.” They want to better understand the parameters and implications of given issues. They want to understand how colleagues have addressed similar issues and to find models that can help them shape their own strategies. Moreover, they want to know what they *don’t know* and what questions might help them address those gaps. They want information that will help them manage today’s challenges *and* forge a vision that will guide their institutions to success in the future.

In short, AASCU leaders want a robust framework of insights, information, models, data, ideas, and tools to help them meet the challenges they face. AASCU as an association is committed to doing everything it can to provide that framework.

Addressing the Issues

With the context outlined above as background, AASCU institutions have an ongoing interest in an array of top-level issues, challenges, and opportunities. The brief discussion that follows does not attempt to encapsulate all of the issues that AASCU institutions must address. Nor does it attempt to unpack every detail or capture every nuance of every issue. Rather, ongoing discussions with AASCU leaders and their

colleagues as well as with other experts suggest central questions and key areas around which more detail, insight, and information would help AASCU institutions move forward.

Finances

All of higher education faces fiscal challenges today. For AASCU institutions, the squeeze is complicated by two major factors:

- State appropriations for higher education, in general decline for decades, have been further depressed during the Great Recession. While current trends show glimmers of recovery in state funding of higher education, it is generally believed that funding for public higher education is unlikely to recover to pre-recession times, let alone to an era of several decades ago when some universities drew most of their revenue from state appropriations. Writing in the magazine *The Presidency* in 2012, for example, policy analyst Thomas G. Mortenson made this stark observation: “Based on the trends since 1980, average state fiscal support for higher education will reach zero by 2059, although it could happen much sooner in some states and later in others.”
- Many revenue-challenged public universities have increased tuition to try to fill the gap left by the decline in state appropriations, but students and their parents face fiscal challenges of their own, and it is generally believed that tuition may be at or near maximum levels.

Institutional finances are affected by many other factors—some of which we will discuss below—but financial pressures brought on by declines in state appropriations and the maxing out of tuition combine to help shape new fiscal realities that college leaders must learn to navigate. As a result, several significant trends will likely continue to be in evidence in the near term:

- *Continuous cost containment.* The pressures on institutional revenue have driven and will continue to drive significant changes in institutional spending practices. During the recession, public universities moved quickly from making relatively small budget cuts to making much deeper, often painful cuts, including trimming programs and people. In those processes, institutions developed new mindsets, policies, and practices for spending—or not spending—their limited revenues. They redoubled their efforts to contain spending, focusing more sharply on cutting costs and increasing efficiencies. No longer merely an exigency practice, cost containment has become standard operating procedure—and, indeed, a point of pride for many institutions committed to ferreting out efficiencies wherever they can be found.

- A central challenge for all AASCU institutions is to continue to inculcate and internalize lessons learned from belt tightening necessary to make economizing a way of life and a standard of institutional budgetary practice and policy. A related challenge will be to consolidate spending in ways that do not undercut an institution's capacity to serve students.
- *Pursuing new revenue streams.* Given that revenues from two of the traditional streams that fund public education—state appropriations and tuition—have been pared and will continue to be constricted, public universities have had to look for other revenue streams. Among many examples, institutions have added programs in high demand areas by reaching out to serve more diverse student populations, such as adult or online students, or sought to maximize revenue from auxiliary enterprises and student fees. While some public universities have become quite adept at developing new sources of income, many are actually at the beginning of the learning curve in developing new revenue streams.
 - The public higher education sector needs a way to codify and share success stories for developing new revenue streams. In the spirit of “tell us something we don't know,” leaders of AASCU institutions are looking for new, innovative ideas and creative solutions that can help them rethink traditional business models and grow revenue in new and different ways.
 - More sophistication is needed in framing and deploying strategies for raising funds from private sources, an increasingly more important source of income for public universities.
- *Evolving new business models.* Experts and pundits have lately asked the question “Is the business model broken for higher education?” That may not be the right question, because in point of fact the business model for higher education is continuously in a state of evolution. That was the case when state colleges first opened their doors to large bodies of students, during many boom and bust cycles since then, and more recently during the Great Recession. Rather than focus on what may not be working, the ongoing challenge for public universities is to find—and then hone—the business practices that will carry them forward. All that said, however, today's reality is that the old ways no longer work as well as they might once have worked.
 - Looking at institutional finances writ large, public universities need creative thinking, inspired insights, and innovative new models that will help them find the resources they need and manage more constricted institutional budgets successfully.
- *Managing resources strategically.* Moving forward, even more sophisticated and creative strategies for prioritizing expenditures and keeping spending in check will be needed. That mandates that institutions develop, use, and hone stronger tools and practices for managing resources strategically. Institutions will likely continue to drive budget responsibility deeper into units across campus, even while they take steps to also centralize priority setting for spending, linked more directly to institutional goals and mission. From performance-based indicators for academic units to formulas that show at a glance factors like tuition revenue and working capital, robust analytics will be imperative.
 - AASCU institutions will continue to need to develop stronger metrics and tools of analysis to help them assess and manage their fiscal strength.

Student Demographics

At virtually all public universities, the demographic composition of the student body is changing. Public institutions today serve an increasingly diverse student population, including more adult students and, often, students who are dispersed across multiple instructional sites. Beyond those common trends, however, student demographics are changing in different ways. Institutions in the Sun Belt, for example, often find themselves scrambling to serve a student population that is growing extraordinarily fast, while some institutions in the Rust Belt must find ways to boost their enrollment numbers in the face of a declining college-aged population.

At the same time, the motivations and circumstances of students are evolving. Driven in part by effects of the recent recession, many students have become more narrowly job- and career focused. They expect their college education to help them gain employment, and often focus their course-taking narrowly to gain specific skills they hope will appeal to employers. Conversely, they may be less interested in the potential for college to invest them with the value of a broad-based education. Today's students are more likely to hold jobs or have family obligations than their counterparts of a few generations ago. Many earn college credit at multiple institutions. These trends have several interrelated implications for the future:

- *Improved enrollment management.* Whether they are onboarding growing numbers of new students or striving to find enough students to enroll, public universities will need to continue to become more sophisticated in their enrollment management operations. Meeting enrollment goals has become more acutely linked to meeting institutional budget goals.

- Broadly speaking, institutions will need to further refine their enrollment management strategies. Many, for example, will move to recruit students more aggressively in new markets—perhaps, for example, recruiting more adult, online, out-of-state, and international students. Strategies may need to be more sophisticated in targeting more-narrowly-defined student populations.
- More will continue to be expected of enrollment management staff, requiring that institutions invest more attention to searching for (and perhaps competing for) top talent, and for investing in ongoing professional development to ensure that enrollment managers keep their skills sharp.
- *Enhanced student services.* As the student populations that institutions serve continue to diversify, as the competition for students intensifies, and as more institutions move to serve more students outside the traditional 8-hour day and 5-day week, many institutions will increasingly view their portfolio of student services as a vital retention tool.
 - More institutions will invest more financial and human resources in providing student services like class enrollment and bill paying 24/7—perhaps outsourcing many basic services once provided on campus and making them available online.
- *Expanded career services.* Growing student intensity about careers and employment is one factor driving increased attention to career services. That trend will likely continue.
 - Institutions will need to continue to allocate more financial and human resources—and, often, physical facilities—to offices that help students learn about careers and find internship and work opportunities.
- *New approaches to credit evaluation.* As more students earn college degrees by attending courses at multiple universities, and as universities engage more deeply with adult students, many of whom have been away from college for some time, we can expect to see continued increased attention to the evaluation of student coursework and life experiences in the context of assessing and granting college credit.
 - Public universities will need to continue to evolve improved systems and tools for awarding credit for prior learning, transferring credit between institutions, and assessing student portfolios.

Completion

That more students complete their education through attainment of degrees has rightfully become a national priority. Public universities will continue to enhance their support to help students complete their education. The trend will continue for institutions to devote more institutional resources to student achievement, progress toward degree, and graduation. From a practical standpoint, this goal has direct implications on many aspects of college operations:

- *Stronger student academic support.* Public universities will continue to expand programs, offices, and other initiatives that can help faculty, counselors, and students to assess a student's progress and intervene when a student goes off track. Some of this identification will continue to migrate to technological tools designed to track student progress.
 - Public universities will need to continue to place more emphasis on helping students get the academic assistance they need to complete their academic programs, including opportunities to learn course material at their own pace and get developmental help when that is needed.
- *Improved metrics on student progress.* AASCU is one of six leading higher education associations that teamed to develop the Student Achievement Measure, a new methodology for measuring student progress to degrees. That work in turn expands on earlier efforts to build better institutional measures to track student success, including the Voluntary System of Accountability, in which AASCU was also instrumental. In the near term, further development of more sophisticated tools that will be more widely used at both the institutional level and the national level is likely.
 - Tracking the stages of student success through completion of an academic program and, ultimately, graduation, will require a more robust set of analytic tools that can help institutions gather and assess the data they need to measure student progress and inform appropriate actions to help a student succeed.
- *Working across the educational spectrum.* One dimension of the move to advance degree completion rates is that universities are doing more to help students succeed at all points in the educational spectrum. We anticipate that all such activities will continue to expand in the days ahead, and that universities will continue to extend and hone their work with educational partners beyond the college campus.

- University outreach to P-12 can help schools understand the skills students need to succeed in college and the workforce, help students gain a better understanding of their options for completing a college degree, and help students gain a toehold on college by taking college courses while still in high school.
- In part because they provide options for place-bound students to complete baccalaureate degrees, articulation agreements with community colleges will be increasingly important.
- AASCU institutions will continue to expand partnerships with corporations and government that address workforce needs for professional development.
- As stewards of place in their local areas, regions, and states, public universities will continue to expand and refine their partnerships with communities, including efforts to boost economic development and nurture lifelong learning opportunities for citizens.

Technology

The transformative power of technology continues to expand its influence on institutions of higher learning. Technology has certainly transformed administrative computing, helping institutions to streamline processes, improve the way they collect and analyze data, access better information for decision making and, sometimes, save money. Recently, technology has begun to show its promise on the academic side. Technology gives professors and students better access to more information that can improve teaching and learning. Hybrid courses, blending classroom time and online learning, open new options for pedagogy. And of course online learning, now being more widely embraced by a larger number of universities, has expanded experimentation and adoption of new modes of educational delivery—and helped many institutions better serve diverse student populations and connect with new students.

- AASCU institutions will continue to expand their options for educational delivery via online learning, developing both strategies that more fully integrate online learning into their overall educational program and deeper understanding of how the economics of online learning mesh with institutional finances and fiscal goals.
- Public universities will continue to explore MOOCs and similar modalities, seeking deeper understanding of what role they might play in the institution's educational portfolio.

- As technology becomes even more pervasive in both education and university administration, institutions will avidly seek strategies to optimize and control their expenditures on technology.

Shared Governance

As is the case today in virtually all sectors of higher education, leaders of public institutions perceive that new models of shared governance with faculty must be evolved. To be sure, public university faculty can, do, and must continue to contribute substantively in shaping the academic strategies of the institutions they serve. But in an environment when change comes with increasing velocity and ferocity, and fiscal realities mandate changes in practices across the whole of every institution, public universities need to find new ways of working that can help them be optimally efficient. In light of significant changes in the fundamental economics of higher education, faculty and institutions need to engage in deep conversations about institutional efficiency and productivity across the campus—including in teaching, learning, and research. Such discussions must encompass the ways that faculty work along with every other dimensions of university life. Faculty must be part of the conversation to help evolve new answers to the perplexing questions that public universities face.

- A central challenge for AASCU universities, as with most other types of institutions, will be to continue to evolve and internalize new models of shared governance with faculty that reflect the realities of the current landscape in higher education, including fiscal realities, while respecting the interests of all parties.
- For institutions with faculty unions, work will continue in developing new strategies for working effectively with faculty in that context.

Changing Dynamics for Public Policy

For all of higher education, but particularly for public universities, relationships with stakeholders who shape and enact legislation are evolving. In some states, the gradual erosion of support for higher education has strained relationships between institutions and lawmakers. Lawmakers and policy shapers are demanding more transparency from universities. State stakeholders are becoming more vocal in their expectations for institutional productivity and efficiency, sometimes linking those expectations directly to legislation that affects appropriations. Some governors have become more assertive about shaping the future of higher education, as evidenced in proposals for \$10,000 college degrees and specific recommendations for curricular change. Some states, too, have seen changes in the structure of state administration of higher education, sometimes putting universities at farther remove from the policy-making processes that affect them.

Many experts believe that new thinking is needed to guide the relationship between states and public higher education. An AASCU initiative has been investigating strategies in that regard. In June 2013, the AASCU Task Force on Making Public Higher Education a State Priority issued its report, *Creating a New Compact Between States and Public Higher Education*, which proposed a set of values, commitments, and strategies that leaders in higher education can embrace as part of a comprehensive effort and urgent need to establish a new partnership with state political leaders.

Meanwhile, the federal government has signaled that it may become more assertive in its oversight of higher education—perhaps by becoming more engaged in assessment of colleges and universities, or by developing metrics for measuring student success and other institutional outcomes. The executive branch has become a leading advocate for better pathways to student degree completion. The future of federal financial aid, traditionally subject to political whims, seems to some extent to be always in play. In the near term, many of the areas where higher education intersects with public policy will come to the fore in the context of Congress's work on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

- Seeking to strengthen relationships that in some states have become strained in recent years, public universities will continue to explore new strategies and a new compact with legislators and higher education officials in their states.
- Public universities will have to closely monitor developments in higher education at the federal level, and may need to develop new policies and practices to comply with any new federal legislation or rules that come into focus.

Equitable Access to Education

Access to college means ensuring that all students who wish to pursue higher education have the opportunity to do so regardless of their socioeconomic, demographic, geographic, or academic backgrounds. It includes the opportunity to earn admittance, experience a supportive environment during their studies, and graduate prepared to succeed in the workplace and participate as a citizen of the world.

- Every public university seeks ways to ensure that it fulfills the promise of public higher education in offering access to college to as many students as possible. As the demographics of the student population in higher education continue to evolve, and in light of the constraints that economic challenges bring to every public university, new strategies will be needed to meet that mission.

Alignment with Workforce Needs

In recent years, more attention has been focused on possible disconnects between the skills business and industry needs to succeed and thrive in the 21st century and the abilities that college graduates bring to the workplace. Many leaders in the private sector complain that the pipeline of potential new hires is not producing enough workers with the specific technical skills that business and industry requires. Many employers are also finding that new hires have inadequate abilities in such basic workplace skills as writing, communication, and critical thinking. To compensate, some businesses have begun to expand their internal professional development programming. Others have developed closer partnerships with universities—or schools—to help prepare the workers that they need.

- Public universities need to continue and expand their efforts to better understand the skills that business leaders seek among college graduates. We will continue to see more work to better align curriculum (inputs) and student skills (outputs) with workforce needs. These factors also create new opportunities for public universities to partner with business and industry to jointly meet the needs of the 21st century workforce.

Partnerships, Collaboration, and Consolidation

Current economic pressures are leading more universities to collaborate more regularly with other institutions, even with those once considered competitors, and to engage in deeper, broader partnerships with business and industry, community agencies, and other entities. There is growing evidence that more institutions are moving away from the traditional competitive model toward one defined by cooperation and collaboration. From new compacts with community colleges to stronger relationships with business and industry, partnerships are becoming increasingly important in helping ensure that public universities deliver successfully on their missions.

In that regard, for example, we are seeing more articulation agreements with community colleges, and deeper relationships with P-12 education—efforts that often target opportunities to get more students through the educational pipeline more successfully. As mentioned above, some universities are partnering with the private sector on efforts to better align education with workforce needs. Some universities are moving to partner more often with other universities, both in the delivery of academic programs and in sharing administrative functions, such as procurement. In addition to increasing the number and scope of their partnerships with business and industry, we anticipate that public universities will also increase their partnerships with their communities, including those designed to better educate the workforce, assist with economic development,

and enrich the quality of life. Increasingly, too, universities are entering into educational partnership with for-profit partners, such as in distance learning.

At the same time, institutions in some states will face pressure from systems that seek economies of scale by forcing consolidations and mergers at both programmatic and institutional levels.

- Going forward, public universities will need to develop, inculcate, and refine strategies for partnering with other institutions, and with corporations, communities, and other entities in the public and private sector. Creative strategies will be needed to expand the number and scope of such collaborations, deepen their impact among participating partners, and acculturate institutions to more collaborative ways of working.
- As they expand their participation in partnerships, public universities will need to develop new sophistication in crafting and managing win-win agreements with many different kinds of partners.
- Strategies will also be needed to manage and address pressures to consolidate institutions and programs.

Teaching and Learning

The disruptive forces that affect colleges and universities today extend beyond factors like economics and demographics to reach down into the heart of the university mission: teaching and learning. In the wake of the recent economic crunch, many universities have pared courses and even programs that are no longer sustainable. In the process, many institutions have undertaken a careful curricular review with an eye toward refining the institution's mission—or perhaps moving more closely to adhere to a mission—in an era when most institutions can no longer afford to be all things to all people. There is considerable change in progress at the curricular level.

Classroom learning is also undergoing transformation. The mere availability of the Internet has brought a wealth of new content and data into classrooms. In some classrooms, faculty members have moved away from lecture formats to instead guide students in more self-directed learning. Technology has made possible the hybrid course and other teaching innovations that change the way certain courses are delivered, but collectively also have deep implications for many other dimensions of education, including student responsibility for their learning, the use of faculty time, allocation and scheduling of classroom space, facilities planning, and more. MOOCs and distance learning further challenge traditional educational assumptions.

We are learning more about how students learn, and the factors that affect student learning outcomes. We are finding new tools to measure student learning, including those based on institutional ability to collect and assess more data. Approaches to assessing student learning are becoming more finely tuned.

- In an era when it is no longer cost effective for every institution to offer every major and discipline, institutions will continue to face choices about what they do best, and the need to decide how they will concentrate their curricular capacity. As is the case in so many other fast-evolving aspects of university life, the central challenge for university leaders is to go beyond obvious solutions to find new solutions and chart new paths. Long-held assumptions about what a particular institution is and does will have to be questioned—and will often have to be changed.
- Public universities will continue to explore the new opportunities in teaching and learning that technology creates—even as technology continues to create even more options. A challenge for institutional leaders will be to understand all of the options in some depth, and to have enough information about each to make informed decisions about which might fit best within the context of their university.
- Public universities will continue to focus more energy on refining the ways they measure student outcomes, and using that information to improve educational quality and effectiveness.

The Professoriate

The faculty role also will continue to change. We have already talked about the shift in many classrooms from the faculty member moving, as the now familiar refrain suggests, from being a “sage on the stage” to a “guide on the side.” Also well documented is the rise of institutional reliance on adjunct faculty, and the fact that many of today's older professors are near retirement age. But other factors are also at play. Some institutions are asking their faculty to serve more students, and to teach more classes. The realm of curriculum development and course design is evolving rapidly as more courses are taught online or in hybrid formats, sometimes requiring that faculty collaborate in wholly new ways with cognitive specialists, graphic designers, and other professionals. The future of faculty governance, including questions about the control of the curriculum, courses, and content, is increasingly a topic of discussion at many institutions.

Faculty members are being asked to be more transparent about what they do, and there are increasingly more open conversations about faculty productivity writ large. The future viability of tenure is sometimes a topic of institutional discussion. Some institutions envision more differentiated roles for faculty—for example, decoupling the traditional marriage of teaching and research. Many of these issues prompt truly difficult questions around which to engage in productive conversation, but the fact that such discussions are taking place at all underscores the sense that the professoriate may truly be in a period of transformation.

- Like other institutions of higher learning, public universities will continue to grapple with often challenging questions about the future role for the professoriate. Leaders of public universities will continue to seek creative ideas and models that offer positive paths forward.

Facilities

A raft of related factors combine to make facilities management and planning at public universities a challenge. Constricted resources overall are, of course, a major factor. At the same time, many institutions have amassed considerable deferred maintenance, a perpetual challenge that increasingly can no longer be ignored or delayed. Looking forward, the rapid rise of technology affects many aspects of facilities planning, including classroom and library design, to say nothing of building and sustaining a campus-wide infrastructure that will accommodate the ever-increasing demand for technology. Variations in student enrollments affect facilities planning in many different ways. Constrained funding for research, and evolution in institutional thinking about the teaching/learning/research continuum affect facilities management and planning as well. Some institutions capitalized on economic conditions during the recession to fund capital projects when the costs of credit were low, but of course such conditions are variable.

- Facilities management and planning will continue to pose a challenging set of problems—and perhaps opportunities—for many public universities. College and university leaders will be seeking new models and new ideas for the use and maintenance of their physical space.

Internal Governance and Management

Driven in large part by the changed environment in which public higher education exists, new thinking is emerging about how institutions run their day-to-day operations. Given that institutions have shrinking resources to meet growing demands, the need has perhaps never been greater for careful planning and prioritization that integrates decision making and resource allocation across campus functions—and across silos—in integrated ways that contribute directly to

institutional goals and mission. Often that requires rethinking and reframing the ways that campus leadership and management teams work together. Moreover, as institutions have consolidated units, streamlined management slots, and moved to flatter structures overall, universities used to doing business through a rigid chain of command need to learn new ways of operating. This dimension of governance is increasingly a focus of more attention among campus administrators. Some institutions are starting to use the term “enterprise governance” to refer to how a university steers the process of managing on a daily basis to effectively set priorities, meet goals, and fulfill its mission. Used in campus IT management for some time, “enterprise governance” is today being applied in a much broader way, across the whole of institutional operations. As institutions continue to inculcate the lessons learned from their experiences during the recent recession, we anticipate that more universities will devote more attention to “enterprise governance.”

- One of the most critical challenges for public universities will be to rethink and retool the ways they operate internally. In particular, they will seek to develop more integrated and transparent strategies and practices for planning, priority setting, and resource allocation.

Leadership

Fundamentally, the future of public colleges and universities hinges on their ability to attract and retain leaders who have the skills to envision and implement creative new ideas that will ensure a robust future for their institution, even while they effectively provide the strong day-to-day leadership that is critical for meeting immediate challenges.

According to data from the American Council on Education, three-quarters of university presidents today are over 60 years of age. One critical implication is that public higher education needs to invest in the development of a cadre of leaders who can assume responsibility in the coming years. In that context, the dearth of women and people of color in university leadership today argues for the need to broadly diversify the pipeline of potential future university presidents.

The public sector of higher education needs to continue to find ways to provide rich opportunities for professional development for the leaders who occupy the president’s chair today. It is critical that presidents have access to a wealth of data, models, and ideas that can help them lead their enterprises, and that they regularly have opportunities to share ideas with colleagues who are in similar positions.

A related challenge for public higher education is that campus administrators other than the president—including, for example, the chief academic officer, the chief financial officer, and the chief information officer—are increasingly being asked to assume larger, broader roles in institutional operations. In particular, for example, institutions that

have flattened their administrative hierarchies, perhaps as cost-savings measures, have put added pressure on many campus leaders to have both a vision for the future of the institution and strong managerial and operational skills. Like the president, those leaders need regular professional development that will help to invest them with the capacity and abilities they need for success.

In light of the countless ways in which university leadership is evolving, leadership from trustees of public universities also needs to evolve. In part, university presidents need tools and insights to help educate board members about how higher education is changing and what the implications of those trends are for particular institutions. In part, too, board members need ongoing education about how they can best engage with—and be most effective on behalf of—the institutions they serve, without attempting to micromanage them.

- As the public university as an enterprise grows increasingly complex, and as unprecedented challenges and opportunities present themselves, public institutions will require leaders with exceptional abilities. From an institutional perspective, increased attention is needed to support the nurturing of a richly productive pipeline of leaders who can adroitly execute both transactional and transformative leadership.
- University leaders need access to a rich complement of models, ideas, data, and other tools that can support them in their roles. In particular, the need for new thinking and creative solutions is acute.
- Institutional leaders other than the president also need tools that can help them succeed, as well as ongoing professional development that can help them hone and polish their skills.
- Presidents of public universities need ideas and tools to educate current and future board members about the new realities for higher education, and how board members can contribute optimally to the institutions they serve.

Conclusion

This brief paper obviously does not address countless other factors that influence the landscape for public higher education today. Overall, for example, higher education faces unprecedented challenges from outside academe, particularly from for-profit companies that are moving effectively to claim some of the territory traditionally held exclusively by nonprofit colleges and universities. That trend alone is challenging traditional thinking about how education is delivered, how students earn credit, the forms of credentials students earn, and how they are assessed for their competency, to cite just a few factors. Among many

other broad and significant trends, we could also discuss eroding public confidence in colleges and universities and the globalization of higher education, to name just two of many.

We will stop here, however, and simply recognize that the complex world of higher education is only growing more complex. But even as the challenges that public universities must address become more exigent, exciting new opportunities are emerging that portend new ways for public higher education to thrive. As we have said, AASCU leaders want to know that which they do not already know. The central challenge for the AASCU sector, therefore, is advance beyond current thinking to identify and operationalize bold new ideas, solutions, and tools.

Critical Questions for Further Study

Leaders of AASCU institutions need a robust portfolio of insights, information, and tools if they are to manage institutions effectively, and position them to move forward even as fundamental factors in the landscape shift. Toward these ends, these are some of the questions that AASCU institutions are asking today:

1. How can we learn the skills and perspectives that will enable us to lead effectively in the new environment for higher education?
 - How can we simultaneously be both effective transactional and transformational leaders?
2. Given that the success of higher education demands continual reinvention, what does the public university of the future look like and how can we implement that vision?
3. How can we make sure we understand all of the critical nuances of the educational environment? How might current and emerging environments affect our institution's mission?
 - What data do we need to make critical assessments, and how can we get those data?
 - What metrics can help us determine whether we are on track to meet the demands of a fast-evolving educational marketplace? Are new metrics needed, and if so how can we develop them?
4. How can we best identify solutions and innovations that are working at given public universities—across all the dimensions of the enterprise—and best capture those so they can be modeled at other institutions?
5. How can we engage more widely and more creatively in partnerships with industry, our communities, schools, and other colleges and universities?

6. How can we evolve more productive models for shared governance with faculty?
7. How can we best position our institutions to meet the needs of a changing student population that is becoming significantly more diverse?
8. How can we best retool our institutions to capitalize on emerging technologies and evolving understanding to improve teaching and learning?
9. Beyond those that we might already be outsourcing, what services that institutions have traditionally provided might also be outsourced to gain efficiency and save money, while preserving core mission activities?
10. How can we optimize the ways we collaborate with and serve our varied stakeholders, including: legislators and state policy makers; students and their parents; the local, regional, and state communities that we serve; and boards and alumni.
11. How can we optimize the ways through which we contribute to and collaborate with the global community?
12. What don't we know that we need to know—and how can we determine an answer to that question?

American Association of State Colleges and Universities

AASCU is a Washington-based higher education association of more than 400 public colleges, universities and systems whose members share a learning- and teaching-centered culture, a historic commitment to underserved student populations, and a dedication to research and creativity that advances their regions' economic progress and cultural development. AASCU members are found throughout the United States, including Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Member institutions range in size from approximately 1,000 to 50,000 students and are located in suburbs, towns and cities, and in rural America. Nearly four million students attend AASCU colleges and universities, representing half of all students at public four-year institutions and a third of all students attending four-year colleges and universities.