

# *Leading Change Without Changing Leaders*



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Higher Education Advisors

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## ***Presenters***



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- Current Higher Education Landscape
- Institutional Perspective
- Presidential Perspective
- Board Perspective
- Solutions
- Questions



# **Current Higher Education Landscape**

## *Current Higher Education Landscape*



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# *Time for Transformation*

The Business Model for Higher Education is Broken



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# *What Type of Transformation is Needed?*

## Financially Vulnerable Schools

- Emergent
- Financial turnaround
- Mergers and affiliations

## Financially Strong Schools

- Strategic
- Market Creation
- Acquisitions

## *What are the Challenges?*

### Financially Vulnerable Schools

- Emergent
- Financial turnaround
- Mergers and affiliations
- Short runaways

### Financially Strong Schools

- Strategic
- Market Creation
- Acquisitions
- Complacency





## *Vulnerable or Strong*

The Business Model for Higher Education is **Still** Broken



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## *Weighing on the Presidency*

“Financial constraints are the hardest aspect of being a college president.”

- Inside Higher Ed 2025 Survey of College and University Presidents



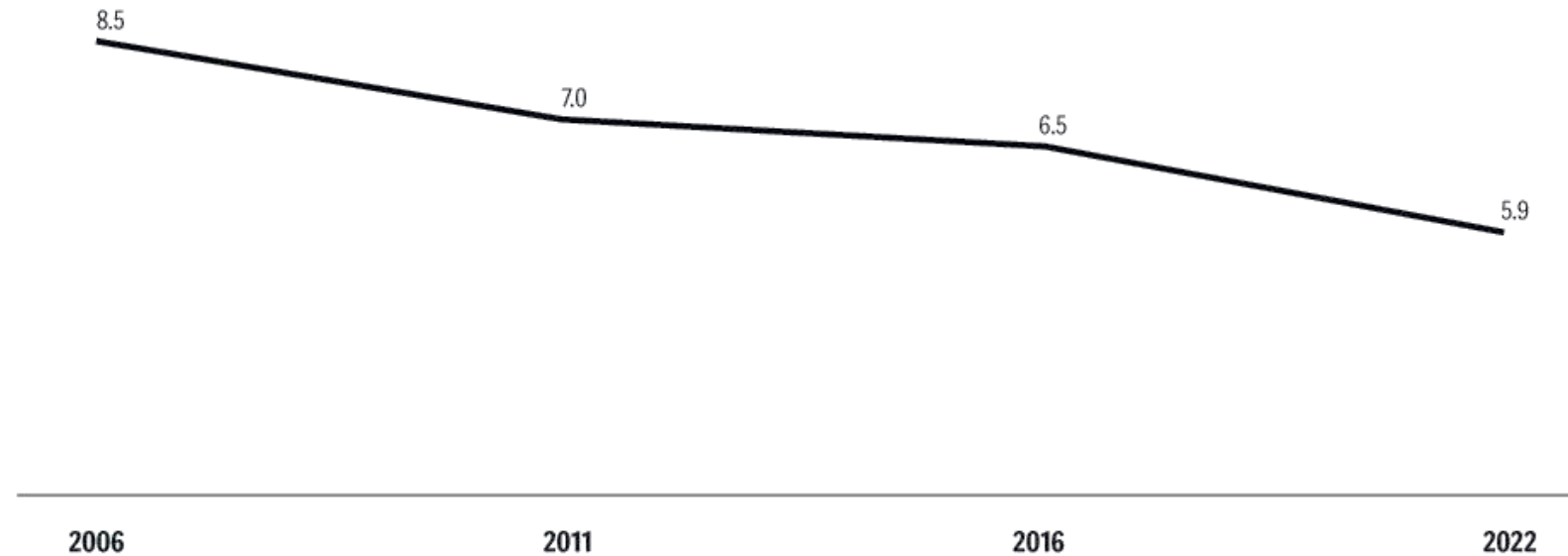
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# Current Higher Education Landscape

## The average tenure of college presidents continues to decline

*Average time in current presidential position, in years: Selected years 2006–2022*



Source: American Council on Education, *The American College President: 2023 edition*, April 14, 2023.

**Deloitte.** | [deloitte.com/us/en/insights/research-centers/center-for-government-insights.html](https://deloitte.com/us/en/insights/research-centers/center-for-government-insights.html)



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## ***Current Higher Education Landscape***

- Over half (55%) of Presidents planned to step down from their current positions within the next five years
- While the majority of Presidents agreed that they have a support system with which they share their feelings, some Presidents indicated that they struggle to find people who understand the experience of being a President

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***The American College President: 2023 Edition by the American Council of Higher Education***



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## *Era of Consolidation*

130+

“...major closings, mergers, acquisitions and other consolidation among public and private nonprofit institutions from 2016 to the present.”

*Higher Ed Dive July 15, 2025*



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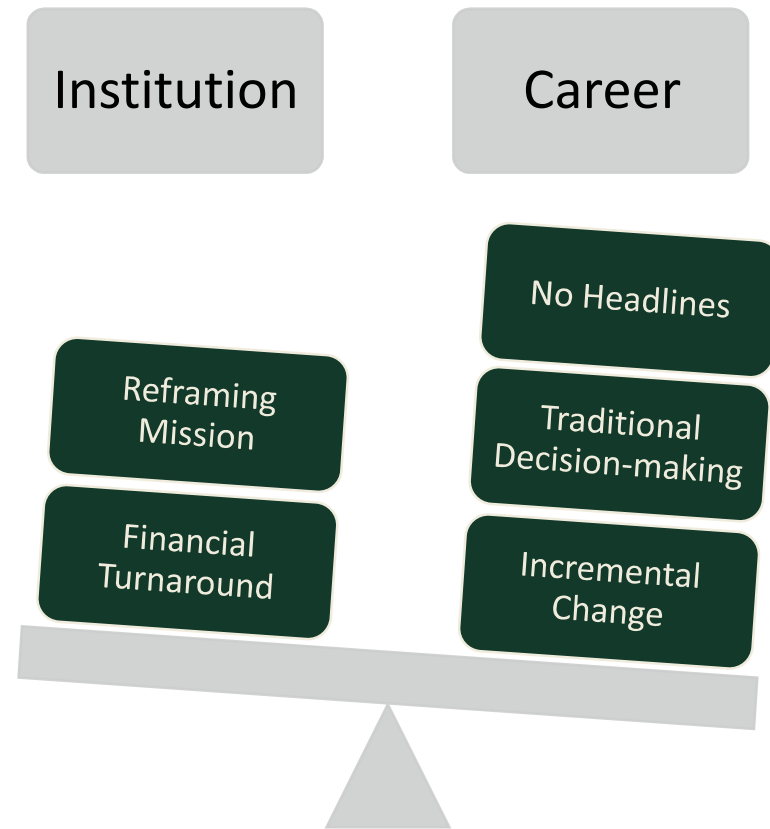
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## *Other Change Leadership Challenges*

- Enrollment cliff and student demographic shifts
- Higher ed policy shifts
- Public scapegoating
- Program closure and expansion
- Student mental health
- Changing instruction modalities and advent of A.I.
- Changes in athletics
- Funding threats
- Short runways vs. slow decision-making processes



## *Leader's Choice*



# **Institutional, Board, and Presidential Perspective**



## *Institutional Perspective*

- Leadership changes are time consuming, expensive, and stressful
- Delay/regression of strategic planning and implementation
- Loss of relationships
- Morale impact



## ***Board Perspective***

- Need to attract and retain strategic and caring leaders
- Need to work with the President to navigate challenges and work toward agreed upon mission and goals
- Need to understand the current landscape and how the Board can support the President
- Significant changes are needed
- Fiduciary duties moving to front burner
- Business model is broken



## *Presidential Perspective*

- Burnout is real
  - Financial stress
  - Political pressure
  - Legal whiplash
  - Pandemics, protestors, pandemonium, oh my!
- Leading change is table stakes for boards
- Internal audiences favor status quo
- Change agents are stretched between the two



# Solutions

# *Solutions*

- Hiring and Retention Issues
  - Contract terms
  - Non-monetary comp considerations
  - Contract length and renewal



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# *Solutions*

- Defining the Leadership Role
  - What are you expecting Presidents to do?
  - Agreed-upon goals and measuring tools
  - Assessment vs. evaluation
  - Incentivizing meeting goals



## *Solutions*

- Defined roles of the President and the Board
- Board and Presidential agreement on handling difficult issues
- Uniformity of messaging from the President and Board
- Open support of Presidential actions that may be unpopular
- Public unity of the Board on issues even where there are divided votes



## *Solutions*

- Board training on role and obligations
- Campus meetings regarding strategic planning and changes
- Involvement of key constituencies to build consensus support
- Incentivizing strategic change
- Clear and transparent communications





## *Solutions*

- Other leadership options
  - Use of outgoing/interim presidents to tackle unpopular changes
  - Board leadership to address matters
  - Use of consultants to recommend changes



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## *Questions?*



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