Adaptation Across the Higher Ed Landscape

By Hilary Daninhirsch

INSIDE HIGHER ED | WITH SUPPORT FROM Jenzabar

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What Are Your Peer Institutions Doing to Overcome Enrollment Challenges?

54%
will be offering non-credit certificate courses

36%
will be offering micro-credentials

47%
will be offering stackable degrees

64%
will be investing more in technology

For more information on what your peers are doing, read our full report.

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Introduction

Colleges and universities are often caricatured as slow and reluctant to change. As with many stereotypes, there's truth at the core of that one. The institutions proudly cling to tradition and zealously guard against changes they perceive will undermine what distinguishes them or damage their quality.

But colleges and universities aren't nearly as calcified as they're made out to be, and most can cite significant (if carefully considered) changes to their academic programs, operational structures and student profiles.

What is true is that most institutions change when they must, and not so much when they are comfortable and secure. Any doubts about that should have been erased by higher education's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as colleges pivoted virtually overnight to what was, for many institutions and their employees, atypical ways of delivering instruction, doing their jobs, and running their operations.

As the pandemic recedes, though, significant questions remain about whether colleges need to change fundamentally and, if so, whether their people are willing and able to do what's needed to prepare them for a secure future.

The college leaders, experts and others interviewed for this report take as a starting point that the answer to the first question is Yes for the vast majority of most institutions, especially among community colleges, regional public universities, and less-selective (and non-wealthy) private nonprofit colleges.

The issues with which those institutions are grappling include:

- Flattening or declining enrollments and expected drops in the number of traditional-age college students in the decade ahead.
- Growing societal doubts about the return on investment of a college degree.
- Increasing competition from technology-enabled alternativee providers to meet the learning and credentialing needs of traditional and post-traditional students alike.

"There are a lot of storm clouds on the horizon; these storm clouds are darker in different corners of the higher education ecosystem than in others," says Cole Clark, managing director for higher education at Deloitte.

Dealing successfully with those challenges will require institutions to develop and implement long-term structural or strategic changes even as they navigate the near term. "You might not see the payoff right away, but you need to have a longer-term vision in order to innovate," says Tanya LaViolet, director of the College Excellence program at the Aspen Institute. "If you're consistently caught up in the short-term, innovation will fall short of what is needed. You've got to have one eye on the mission, and one eye on the bottom line: in between that is where innovation falls."

The Current Landscape

Enrollment is Issue No. 1 for most colleges. Most had been bracing for the anticipated "demographic cliff" due later this decade, stemming from the decline in the number of traditional-age college students because of a birth dearth during the 2008 Great Recession. What they didn't expect was the COVID-19 pandemic, which led many students to opt out of either starting or continuing their postsecondary educations.

Those trends are intensified by the fact that the student body of the future will, as the country's overall population diversifies, be increasingly made up of students of color and from low-income backgrounds -- the groups that higher education have historically served least well.

David Soo, vice president for strategic engagements at Jobs for the Future, a nonprofit group focused on learning and work, says declines in traditional-age students

doesn't necessarily need to become an enrollment decline. "If you're looking at the demand for a bachelor's degree or associate degree and the number of people in the age demographic is going down, it might look like an enrollment or demographic cliff," he says. "But if you're thinking about the entire labor force need for lifelong learning, it's not an enrollment problem."

But those learners have different needs -- many are place-bound, they may not want to have to leave the workforce for more education or training, and they may have family commitments that limit when, where and how they can learn.

"Colleges are going to have to think of how to help people who are the nontraditional college student, not the student right out of high school for whom postponing a return on investment is possible," says LaViolet. "It's just not, for most adults."

To meet those needs, institutions will have to "structure programs in a way that captures enormous new demand, and that dovetails with alternative providers -- they are structuring themselves to meet that demand for lifelong learning," says Soo.

A market scan by Jobs for the Future's JFF Labs showed a wide range of alternative providers and credentials aiming to meet the needs of learners and workers: bootcamps, apprenticeship programs, vocationally oriented certificate programs and the like. "I see the future being more modular, where the best tools can be combined -- either by institutions building programs or even by learners themselves," says Soo.

Employers such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft are increasing getting in the game themselves, both directly and in partnership with colleges and universities. Employers are also influencing the landscape by beginning to recognize credentials other than degrees when they hire employers.

"Competition with alternate providers is aided and abetted by employers starting to recognize alternative credentials are valuable to them besides a traditional degree, like in STEM fields," says Clark of Deloitte. "I don't really think it's going to be something that will necessarily displace the four-year degree as the coin of the realm but it is another factor in the headwinds."

Soon-to-be graduates from Northeastern University attend commencement. (Boston Globe/Contributor/Getty Images)

An additional force bearing down on institutions is public skepticism about the value and the opportunity cost of getting a college degree. Those doubts have been fueled by longstanding concerns about affordability, and exacerbated by gaps in educational attainment by race, socioeconomic income and other factors.

Public trust and confidence in higher education is at an all-time low, creating a dissonance in the perceived value of a college degree. A recent poll by New America found that only 55 percent of those surveyed believe that institutions of higher education are having a positive impact on the country. And in 2021, a survey found that only 60 percent of respondents believed that a college education was worth it.

The sections that follow the introduction take closer looks at how these issues are playing out in three major sectors of higher education -- community colleges, regional public colleges and universities, and small private institutions. Each section also explores how the institutions are responding to the challenges that are particularly roiling them, including several case studies exemplifying specific strategies and approaches.

We hope the report will help you navigate this challenging environment, seizing the opportunities and positioning your institutions for a sustainable future. Please contact us with comments or suggestions for future coverage.

--The Editors

editor@insidehighered.com

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

All Hands on Deck to Reverse Enrollment Declines

Community colleges are the affordable, open-access stepping-stone to a four-year degree, a primary engine of workforce development for American employers, and a driver of much of the socioeconomic and racial diversity in U.S. higher education.

Two-year institutions benefited from increased public recognition and political support in the last decade, but no set of colleges has suffered a bigger collapse in enrollment, pre- and post-pandemic, than they did. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse for fall 2022 showed a slowing but continuing decline in community college enrollments, with a drop of 5.4 percent, or 830,000 students, since 2020. From the post-Great Recession peak of 7.5 million students enrolled in two-year institutions in 2010, that represented a total decline for community colleges of about 2.5 million students.

The reasons for the drops are complex. Significant numbers of community college students, particularly adult learners, live on an education/work bubble: when the economy and the job market are good, would-be learners often choose jobs over school; when economic conditions are weak, they often seek more education and training, creating a countercyclical effect.

The relatively strong economy of the 2010s suppressed two-year enrollments, and the COVID-19 pandemic that shut campuses led many students to abandon their studies to take care of family members, seek out work or avoid remote learning. As the pandemic began to ease, the job market heated up, and employers raised wages and offered bonuses for service and front-line workers.

"There was such an increase in prevailing wages and demand for jobs, even for workers who didn't have a lot of skills," Joe Garcia, chancellor of the Colorado Community Colleges system, on *Inside Higher Ed*'s Key podcast in June. "So many of our students and potential students saw the opportunity to suddenly make $16 or $18 now or get a $500 bonus for coming back. And so they , 'Why would I go to college now—now's the opportunity to make up for some of the lost wages over the last year and a half?' "

Some experts also suspect that growing public questioning of the value of going to college is starting to have an impact on individuals' decisions about whether to choose college or go another route.

The enrollment woes have created significant hardship for a sector of institutions that are enormously dependent on tuition revenue, and for which much of their state and local government support is linked to enrollment levels.

So for two-year institutions, building and sustaining enrollments is by far their most important need, and they're adapting in numerous ways in response. While many of those approaches focus on getting more students into the institutions, particularly in the few areas that are seeing growth such as dual enrollment programs for high-school students, community colleges are also adapting by enhancing their graduates' ability to enter the workforce, smoothing the process for transferring to four-year institutions, and collaborating with their peer colleges to improve how they operate.

"Community colleges have the opportunity -- and really a leg up already -- since they have been designing programs to meet student and labor-market needs for generations," says David Soo, vice president for strategic engagements at Jobs for the Future, a nonprofit group focused on education and the workforce. "Yet they'll have to rapidly adapt to the new demands

quickly. Think of all of the jobs around electric vehicles or green technology. Community colleges are already retooling to meet these needs. It remains to be seen which programs will have more currency in the market and best prepare students for the future. Colleges and universities shouldn't assume that they will be the best option for students simply because they might have been in the past."

The areas in which community colleges are striving to adapt include:

Reenrollment of adult learners. Tens of millions of Americans pursued postsecondary education or training at some point but ultimately left without a credential. Sometimes they struggled academically, sometimes their economic circumstances changed. Sometimes life intervened. Those in the "some college no degree" category are seen as a logical starting point for identifying potential students. A 2022 report issued by the nonprofit InsideTrack outlined several re-enrollment campaign strategies aimed at reenrolling students who have previously left the institutions.

"Helping former students re-enroll and finish college is vitally important for the success and sustainability of community colleges," Kai Drekmeier, co-founder and chief development officer of InsideTrack, in a press release. "But more importantly, it's vital for promoting opportunities for economic mobility and advancement for learners and their families. Through this research, we hope to advance the field's understanding of not only the reasons why adult learners can benefit from personalized support, but also how community colleges can help them navigate a successful return to college."

Skills development. Ideally, community colleges should have their proverbial fingers on the pulse of local and regional workforce needs and respond accordingly to prepare students with the requisite skills, particularly technical proficiencies. Community college systems like Austin Community College, for example, have begun offering microcredentials to enhance digital fluency for its students and accommodate the rising local demand for such skilled workers. (See case study on Page 10.)

Smoother transfer. Community colleges are mostly a source of transfer students for four-year institutions, although it's becoming more common for students to enroll in two-year or certificate programs after attaining a bachelor's degree or to take courses at two-year institutions and four-year colleges at the same time. However students are flowing, improving the process of credit mobility and recognition across higher education is an important priority. One case study that follows examines a regional "transfer guarantee" spearheaded by the New England Board of Higher Education. (Please see case study on Page 12.)

Collaboration and consolidation. For many two-year institutions (and colleges generally), new funds will be hard to find in the coming years. So many of them are looking at cross-institutional cooperation as a way to improve efficiency and free up money to redistribute to support key needs or new initiatives. A new collaborative in New Mexico, for example, aims to centralize administrative functions and ultimately enable cross-registration among largely independent community colleges. (Please see case study on Page 8.) ■

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Case Study: Teaming Up, but Not Merging, in New Mexico

Collaborative for Higher Education Shared Services

Given the enrollment and other challenges they face, a group of previously independent community colleges in New Mexico have decided they're stronger working together on key problems than toiling apart.

CHESS (Collaborative for Higher Education Shared Services) is a groundbreaking, first-of-its-kind non-profit collaborative made up of six community colleges throughout New Mexico. Their goal: partnering on operations and best practices while remaining independently governed.

"CHESS was formed when five presidents came together and decided to form our own consortium so we can partner together more formally and at a higher level," says Becky Rowley, president of Santa Fe Community College and chair of the consortium's Board of Directors. "We're independent in a lot of ways from the higher education department in New Mexico: we forge our own path, create our own agenda and decide which projects we want to run going forward."

The primary tool that will bind these colleges together is a common business enterprise software system, Workday. The first phase of the shared technology system, was set to go live in December 2022, is designed to create efficiencies in areas such as payroll and human resources. "There will be employees at the CHESS level we will also fund as a group so we don't have to keep hiring new people at individual colleges," Rowley says.

Combining student functions and federal and state reporting will come next. "Ultimately, we're creating a different experience for our students -- they can come in and be co-enrolled at these institutions. We will simplify the registration and admit processes through teams at the different colleges." Students will be able to take courses that they need at any of the colleges that are part of the collaborative, and the cloud-based interface will be more user-friendly for students.

The project has been in the works for at least four years, but the pandemic moved the needle a bit. It has been fully remote, with no physical office. "We kept it that way intentionally so it doesn't appear to be physically associated with one college," Rowley says. In addition, every college president has one equal vote in deciding how to move forward with different projects.

By design, the organization has been structured so that additional institutions can join the collaborative at a later date. A sixth institution, Luna Community College, did so this past November, joining the original five: San Juan College and Central New Mexico, Clovis, Northern New Mexico, and Santa Fe Community Colleges.. Institutions from other states have expressed interest as well.

Rowley says the community colleges never considered a merger. "We are all independent community colleges -- we all have elected boards and are tied to a

taxing district," Rowley says. "There's a lot of community involvement and determination with how we work, what we do and programs we offer. In this project, one of our key tenets is that we preserve the individualism of each community college; we want to be independent colleges that share a lot of common practices."

Still, it has been gratifying that the member colleges have been able to work well together. "There are cross-functional teams comprised of members from all of the various institutions that work together all day, every day. They're employed by the different institutions, but their work during the day is with people from other colleges, so they have formed very strong teams," says Rowley. "At the president/board level, we've had to really agree to trust each other. It's a pretty big leap of faith in a lot of different ways."

New Mexico is slowly climbing out of an enrollment hole, but the colleges know they'll need to invest more money on recruiting and supporting students, Rowley says. They expect that the "expensive [upfront] implementation" on CHESS will "create further efficiencies and save funds [to] allow us to focus more time and resources on students." ■

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Case Study: Preparing Workers for the Digital Economy

Austin Community College's digital fluency microcredentials

Aligning curriculum with workforce needs is a top priority of late for some forward-thinking institutions. In an era in which many if not most jobs have a digital component, Austin Community College formulated an innovative solution: offering stackable microcredentials as part of an initiative centered around digital fluency.

Officials at the two-year institution had multiple reasons to make a big bet on digital skills. Community colleges are known for preparing the workforce in their area, and in Austin -- nicknamed Silicon Hills -- digital skills are needed in many industries and jobs. Even if they're not called out in the job description, candidates with digital skills tend to get a leg up in the hiring process, says Linda Smarzik, dean of digital fluency and innovation at Austin.

Additionally, ACC, which has 11 campuses in Central Texas, is like many two-year institutions in serving a large population of students from low-income backgrounds and underrepresented minority groups, who disproportionately lack the digital skills to get even an entry-level job.

The seeds for the initiative were planted when Austin received a grant from AARP to train people over age 50 to go back to work. Smarzik says that participants, many of whom were Latina women, lacked confidence in applying for jobs because many did not possess the requisite digital skill set. Confidence is key, she says. "With that comes the ability to get a better job, and more than anything, it keeps people who can slip very easily into that lower wage job and bring them into a higher wage job."

When Austin officials looked for a project to focus on in their Quality Enhancement Plan with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges, it selected Digital Fluency and Innovation. The college defines digital fluency as "the user's ability to effectively transfer digital skills from one technology to another to problem solve and communicate."

ACC initially built four courses but ultimately restructured them into smaller, noncredit microcredentials aligned with professional core competencies. The initiative will offer four microcertificates fundamentals of computer skills for job readiness; web presence fundamentals; interactive presentations for effective communication; and problem solving with systems thinking and technology.

Students can earn between three and five microcredentials per course, which are taught both online and in the physical classroom. For example, in fundamentals of computer skills for job readiness, students can obtain microcredentials in intro to computers and internet research; word processing; presentation software; spreadsheets; and database management.

The first microcredential was piloted in summer

of 2022. Ultimately, says Smarzik, the goal is to reach 10,000 students over the course of the five-year accreditation project. “These microcredentials represent competency-based education,” she says.

Smarzik says that ACC also embeds core workplace competencies like critical and creative thinking skills, writing and ethical skills into these microskills courses. “It’s a lot, but we wanted to build a Holy Grail of education,” she says.

The 16 microcredentials linked to digital skills are just the start for Austin, which has plans to offer additional microcredentials and microcertificates in up-and-coming subject areas; other community colleges have reached out to ACC, expressing interest in modeling a similar program.

“You have to be on top of your toes, evolve and be innovative,” Smarzik says. “Community colleges have to become innovative enough to respond to the jobs that will exist five years from now.” ■

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Case Study: A Regional Approach to Easing Transfer

(Nebhe.org)

Students' ability to move between and among the thousands of U.S. colleges and universities -- and have their academic credits flow with them -- is notoriously constrained. A 2017 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, for instance, found that students lose approximately 43 percent of credits earned at community colleges when attempting to transfer to a four-year college.

The historical approach to addressing the problem, individual "articulation agreements" between a single community college and a corresponding four-year university, has been recognized as a piecemeal, inadequate solution. More holistic approaches across public university systems and within states have emerged, but those usually leave private nonprofit institutions out of the equation.

Strain and crisis often drives innovation in higher education, so perhaps it's not surprising that New England -- the region most affected by the economic and enrollment pressures buffeting higher education – is addressing this problem, too.

With the goal of helping to dismantle conventional transfer obstacles, the New England Transfer Guarantee streamlines transfer pathways between community colleges and four-year independent institutions in participating states. Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island have been part of the program since last year; the New England Board of Higher Education, which coordinates the program, is in the process of expanding it to Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, based on promising early data.

Depending on the state, students who earn associate degrees and maintain a minimum grade-point average (set by the individual states) are guaranteed admission to participating institutions, and all credits are guaranteed to transfer. Importantly, transfer students are eligible for institutional scholarships, and application fees are waived. That helps abate the perceived affordability gap for independent institutions.

Two-year institutions in the region benefit from the standardized guarantee as well, of course, by no longer having to rely on individual articulation agreements with four-year institutions, which streamlines the advising process. The transfer guarantee program also requires students to have earned an associate degree from an in-state community college, which is designed to boost completion rates at the two-year institutions.

"The perception is that the sticker price seems very high, but a lot of institutions we are partnering with offer really great financial aid scholarship awards," says Emily Decatur, senior program manager of transfer initiatives at the New England Board of Higher Education. "Part of the Guarantee is having institutions commit to offering merit and scholarship aid to these students

and specifically, to transfer students. Historically, transfer students have been shut out of opportunities to receive aid because it goes directly to native first-year students."

When Decatur came to the board in 2017, each of the three original states had its own transfer guarantee as a means to establish systematic transfer pathways between community colleges and four-year independent institutions, but there was no regional initiative. "We did not want to reinvent the wheel or create another system of transfer, as that would have gummed up the transfer process; standardization reduces complexity within the transfer space," says Decatur.

This groundbreaking initiative, modeled on existing state-specific transfer policies, has been fully operational since 2021. A November 2022 analysis of the first 470 students to take advantage of the New England Transfer Guarantee revealed that most students are transferring with a GPA well above the minimum threshold; 77 percent of the transfer students enrolled with full-time status. Like other community college students, Guarantee students are a bit older, with a median age of 26. And 44 percent of the students are students of color, quite a bit higher than the region's overall population.

Importantly, guarantee students are consistently being awarded scholarships: In all three states, students have saved more than $4 million over three semesters, with students saving an average of $14,000 per year on tuition bills representing direct institutional aid. "We are very proud of it, and it shows our institutions' commitment to the students as well," Decatur says.

"At the outset, enrollment is a big issue right now in New England, so intuitions are thinking critically about how they can maintain or sustain their enrollment numbers or even grow them," she adds. "Having transfer students come in and enroll is another piece of puzzle. Transfer students bring so much to campus: diversity of thought and experience. You're bringing in students who aren't necessarily 18 years old, and that creates more value to the community."

At the time of the report, 22 out of 35 participating institutions, or 63 percent, have enrolled students via the guarantee. ■

REGIONAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

'Workhorse' Institutions Respond to Enrollment and Funding Woes

Regional public colleges are viewed as the gateway to local communities' economic sustenance. They produce the many teachers, nurses and other professionals their regions need; meet the educational, economic, social and cultural needs of citizens and employers; and "remain steadfast to their historical roots of being inextricably tied to the communities they serve," as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Stewards of Place Presidential Task Force described it.

Yet regional public colleges have been dubbed the middle children of higher education, as they do not get as much attention from lawmakers, journalists and the public as their flagship public university or prestigious private college siblings receive.

That relative invisibility has long led to the institutions being less well-funded by their states than flagship and land-grant universities, and without the research base that many of the larger universities have, most regional comprehensive institutions are heavily tuition-dependent. When postsecondary enrollments shrink, they often struggle.

The pandemic took a toll on them: while undergraduate enrollment at public four-year institutions over all fell by 4.3 percent between 2020 and 2022, it actually climbed slightly (0.6 percent) at highly selective public institutions and fell only modestly (-1.9 percent) at very competitive public institutions -- most of which are flagship and land-grant universities. By contrast, enrollment fell 6.4 percent at "competitive" four-year publics and dropped 8.2 percent at "less selective" four-year institutions, most of which are regional publics.

That unexpected decline won't position the institutions well for the projected demographic cliff that has been looming over the higher education landscape, due to the drop in births during the Great Recession of 2008. And the institutions are also wrestling with the reality that more of the students they will enroll will come from demographic groups with which most higher education institutions have long struggled: those from low-income backgrounds, working learners and others.

"When you look at the research, a larger percentage are older and are working," says Mildred Garcia, AASCU's president.

While college leaders are aware that demographic shifts are happening, it can be difficult for regional colleges to develop a tailored strategy, since the enrollment issues play out differently depending on the region.

"Some areas are seeing huge drops in population, while others are seeing more stable, incremental declines," says Alisa Fryar, professor and chair of political science at the University of Oklahoma and director of data for the Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges. "The difference in how to respond to those two kinds of population loss is meaningful, but rarely discussed."

Many of the institutions are also facing doubts about the value of going to college.

"We serve many rural students, and sometimes, families can perceive that higher education doesn't add any extra value," says Sharron R. Scott, chief financial and operating officer of the newly established Vermont State University. Students, she says, will say things like "'If I can have that same job working in a manufacturing facility or store, why do I need to get a higher education, what will that buy me?' Providing that resolution to that

equation is a challenge … all of higher ed [is facing], but particularly regional publics who serve students who are lower income and more rural."

Adding to the enrollment declines and doubts about value is intensifying competition with alternative providers, presenting a trifecta of headaches plaguing regional colleges.

"In all three cases, there's not much conversation that talks about agency within these institutions. It's all happening to or around them," says Fryar. "There aren't a lot of states that talk about how to partner with regional colleges effectively to do a better job of understanding changes in the environment and how to respond to them."

"Although in-state public regional colleges continue to be among the highest 'value for money' institutions, we still forget that the size of a student's 'investment' isn't determined only by the college," Fryar adds. "States that have decided to fund public universities through direct appropriations and student financial aid programs have been able to meaningfully reduce the cost of attending an in-state public four-year institution. The decisions made by state leaders are very important in how we think about these conversations about ROI.".

Fryar urges regional public institutions to "be innovative on the little things that can help them better adapt to the environmental shifts and changing needs of students and student demographics," she says. "But I don't think we need a change in the system -- stability has served us well and has served students who are most vulnerable."

While their situations vary from state to state and region to region, public comprehensive institutions are embracing certain common strategies to adapt to their changing circumstances. Among them:

Consolidation and Collaboration: As a survival strategy, some smaller regional colleges are merging, forming multi-campus institutions or otherwise joining forces to create economies of scale, increase programming, and cultivate a more equitable, longer-armed reach. The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education has combined six institutions into two regional units, following on the heels of similar combinations in Georgia and Wisconsin.

Most recently, three regional institutions in Vermont have come together to form Vermont State University, which is set to formally launch in July 2023. (See case study on Page 20.)

Proving Value by Strengthening Employer Ties: To ensure relevancy and survival, many regional public universities are doubling down on their core competencies and finding inventive ways to deliver what they've set out to do: train students to enter the local workforce. "Employers are having a hard time finding employees with skills they need to sustain their operations, particularly as you get into the demand for high tech types of positions," says Tony Pittarese, dean and professor in East Tennessee State University's College of Business and Technology.

Recently developed an initiative in which students have the opportunity to earn an accelerated tech degree, with embedded work experience and a guaranteed job offer from a local health care provider. (See case study on Page 16.)

"The underlying impetus," says Garcia, "is to demonstrate to the students that when they finish these programs and internships, they can have a fulfilling career that gives them the economic independence and demonstrate the value of higher education in order to move forward."

Improving Career Preparation: Utah Tech University has developed a Four-in-Four model, awarding "stackable" academic credentials for every 30 credits earned. This approach allows learners to earn a marketable certificate or degree each year for four years, providing off-ramps to employment. (See case study on Page 18.) ■

REGIONAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Case Study: Working With Employers to Train Future Leaders

Participants in the BlueSky Tennessee Institute program

From their earliest days as teachers' colleges, regional public colleges and universities have focused on being the workhorse institutions that provide their local economies with the professionals they need. They still produce teachers, nurses and the like, but today, that increasingly means producing graduates with technology skills.

Nationally, the job outlook for computer scientists is forecasted to grow 21 percent between 2021 and 2031, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In Tennessee, the number of technology jobs has grown during the pandemic by almost 8 percent, the largest increase of any U.S. state, according to a report by the Technology Councils of North America.

In conversations with local employers, officials at East Tennessee State University recognized the unfulfilled demand for tech workers and a need to close the digital skills gap, which has persisted and is predicted to widen tremendously.

"Universities are in the talent-production business," says Tony Pittarese, dean and professor in East Tennessee's College of Business and Technology. "If we can figure out ways to connect students with organizations in a way that are mutually beneficial, that is exciting to pursue."

To that end, ETSU has entered into a symbiotic partnership with BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST) to develop the BlueSky Tennessee Institute Program. The first cohort of 30 students were given an opportunity to pursue an accelerated B.S. degree in computing with a concentration in information systems and cybersecurity management, including an embedded internship with the insurer and a guaranteed offer of employment at the end of the 27-month program (which students are not obliged to accept).

"Students will come out of that program with a lot more hands-on, industry-ready experience than students who just pursue traditional class-based education," says Pittarese.

The classes are held in person at BCBST's headquarters in Chattanooga, three hours away from the main campus, and are taught by East Tennessee State faculty. Participating students fulfill other general education requirements online and are able to take advantage of other university resources, such as counseling services.

Through funding with various partners, including the insurance company, the BlueSky Tennessee Institute Program is entirely free for students, who also receive two complimentary cafeteria meal tickets per day. "The goal is to eliminate as many factors as possible that might cause them to abandon their educational pursuits," Pittarese says. There is no housing in Chattanooga for students, though the university is seeking possible partners for the future.

The curriculum is the same, accredited one that ETSU

teaches at its main campus in Johnson City. "The only change is the accelerated format and required internships," says Pittarese, adding that the program's pace is sped up primarily by optimizing the students' schedules and requiring winter and summer enrollment. Winter term is just one class, taken online during winter break. In the summer, students will have the same type of schedule they have in the fall and spring, with a shorter summer vacation.

"The use of summer alongside fall and spring gives us seven full semesters," Pittarese adds. "The acceleration comes from 'semester packing' as opposed to shortening semesters or classes. This also ties into our need for scaffolding the student experience and providing various academic and nonacademic supports."

"It's given us the ability to reach out to student populations that might have not been thinking that they could pursue this kind of educational program because of expense or logistics. We've been able to reach out to underserved populations," says Pittarese. Female students made up 38 percent of the first cohort; 34 percent were students of color. "Hamilton County [Tenn.] designates priority public schools that are among the lower performing schools in the region, and 50 percent of the first cohort is from this set of schools," he adds.

East Tennessee interviewed more than 100 candidates for the program and offered admission to 32 -- all of them accepted. There has been no attrition since they started in summer 2022.

The internship requirement is a primary selling point. "We know that giving students internship opportunities is a big accelerator to career success: it helps them to contextualize their learning and gives them a vision for what their future career will look like, Pittarese says.

Employers like it, too. They generally find that it can take up to a year for a new employee directly out of college to learn to work independently on projects; internships help shorten that "rookie" time frame and allow newcomers to move into leadership roles more quickly.

Pittarese says that BCBST preferred that students earn a bachelor's degree rather than microcredentials, to help prepare what they view as their next generation of leaders.

"They wanted well-rounded students not focused on a single area of technological expertise," he says. "That got us excited, as it is consistent with our philosophy and what we are trying to do. That idea, coupled with the ability to build in internships, gave us the best of both worlds."

Pittarese envisions the possibility of similar partnerships with other corporations in Tennessee if the BlueSky Tennessee Institute Program succeeds. "Universities have to demonstrate their relevance in a different way than perhaps they have done traditionally." ■

REGIONAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Case Study: Expanding Credentials to Meet Learners' Many Needs

Mechanical engineering students at Utah Tech

Skepticism about the value of a college degree is growing, despite plenty of evidence that degree-holders earn more and are more recession-proof than peers without a degree. In response, many institutions are considering adding certificates and microcredentials to respond to what Ryan Craig calls "faster and cheaper alternatives to college."

Some institutions are better positioned to do this than others. Utah Tech University is part of a small but growing breed of regional public institutions that call themselves dual mission colleges. By design, these institutions offer a blend of certificates and two- and four-year programs and credentials. There are no community colleges in the region, so Utah Tech serves that function as well as offering career/tech education, baccalaureate degrees and even some master's degrees that address local employment needs. That array of offerings helps Utah Tech, which like many regional public institutions admits almost all applicants, meet the diverse needs of its learners.

"We get outstanding students, some of whom were more challenged in high school, students who have been out in the workforce, and everything in between," says Michael Lacourse, the provost. The university is thoughtful about how it can create pathways in and out of the university for those students who are cycling between education and work.

In its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, Utah Tech outlined its Four-in-Four Initiative. Under this model, students may be awarded up to four academic credentials in a four-year period; these credentials are vertically stackable, building blocks of sorts that evolve toward a degree. "After every 30 earned credits, the students are eligible for some type of academic award, so if you need to leave for whatever reason, you would not leave the university with nothing," says Lacourse.

Utah Tech implemented the Four-in-Four model a few years ago; of its 58 standalone baccalaureate programs, about 25 now offer the stackable credentials. "All new degree programs, when proposed, will demonstrate what certificates will be embedded. Eventually most of our degree programs will have this characteristic," says Lacourse.

A freshman who starts a program in information technology has classes bundled the first year to can earn a certificate in IT. For example, that first year a student would take Fundamentals of Programming, Introduction to Unix/Linus, and Web Design Fundamentals, as well as three other related classes.

Should that student continue into the second year, they can earn an associate degree after completing the requisite 60 credits; general ed requirements are built into all associate degrees.

By continuing on through junior year, more classes are bundled so that they may get an advanced industry certificate, and by sticking it out for four years, the student

will earn a B.S. in information technology.

"If they drop out their first or second year, they can have some value added to their portfolio so that they can get a job," says Richard Williams, the president. This also would ideally lead to a sense of accomplishment, even if a student does not complete a bachelor's.

Moreover, students who work over the summer can start accumulating career experience, having earned some credentials, and even earn money to have less debt in college as they are moving through the system.

"We're hopeful that if people need to stop out, they have something to show for their college education. This ties in to nimbleness and value to education; we're creating more and more value every year that you are at this institution," says Williams.

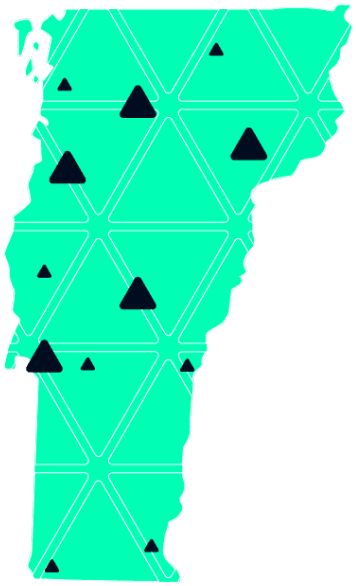
The stackable credentials benefit both the students, many of whom work while they are going to school, as well as the potential employers in the region. "Almost all of the certificates we've created are workforce- and industry-recognized or they are those we know are in demand by employers," says Lacourse. In fact, he adds, many programs have advisory boards that help inform their content. "We have high-frequency meetings with employers in all colleges."

Some might see awarding job-relevant credentials along the way as risky because it might encourage students to leave the institution. But Williams says life circumstances often dictate whether students stay enrolled or stop out for work, and that earning credentials along the way gets students "more excited to persist. This allows them to obtain college employment while they're pursuing a degree.

"We think this will help our retention rates and diminish stopout rates," he says. "The key is to do both -- it encourages them to go on but in the event they have something with life where they have to go to work, they have something in hand to give them a little better life." ■

REGIONAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Case Study: In Vermont, Stronger Together Than Apart



The locations of the new Vermont State University
(Vermont State University)

As the country's second-least populous state and one of many with a shrinking number of high-school graduates who are choosing to attend college, Vermont has been Ground Zero for struggling colleges. Three private nonprofit institutions shut their doors at the end of the last decade, and the demographic challenges, combined with state underfunding and structural deficits, have put intense pressure on most of its public institutions as well.

In 2022 Vermont joined states such as Georgia, Maine and Pennsylvania that have turned to merger and consolidation as a strategy to combat the challenges facing regional public colleges. Three regional universities in Vermont -- Castleton University, Vermont Technical College, and Northern Vermont University (itself the result of a previous merger of Johnson State College and Lyndon State College) -- are combining to create Vermont State University. It will formally launch next year and will maintain five campuses, along with 12 teaching sites across a sprawling, mostly rural 100-mile area, putting a state college facility within 30 miles of every Vermont resident.

The new institution, which earned accreditation from the New England Commission on Higher Education, will employ a new academic model that shares academic programs across campuses, reduces dependence on physical facilities, and relies heavily on hybrid forms of learning. The university calls itself "the first statewide hybrid institution."

The former chancellor of the Vermont State Colleges system had proposed to close several of the colleges -- an unappealing prospect given that several of those institutions had existed for more than 100 years.

"The idea of ripping out campus locations would have ripped out the fabric of those communities and would have resulted in higher education deserts," says Sharron R. Scott, the Vermont system's chief financial and operating officer.

A special panel of state legislators and education officials laid out a more sustainable path for the system, including the consolidation, increased legislative funding and a commitment from system leaders to reduce the $25 million budget deficit over a five-year period. The state provided a 50 percent increase in its general fund appropriation as a down payment in 2022.

Given the decline in traditional-age students, the new Vermont institution is like many regional publics eyeing other student populations. A 2018 impact report by the Vermont State system found that there were 60,000 Vermonters who had some college but no degree. "That is an extraordinary market -- most jobs require some level of [postsecondary education and training]," says Scott. "Forty years ago, you could be a mechanic; now, when mechanics bring a computer to your car, they

are really doing programming on your car. Education is really necessary to be able to move people forward, and it is partially our job to make sure it happens."

The system has also hired a director of workforce development to ascertain and meet the needs of local businesses.

Teaching in new ways is increasingly essential for reaching those and other populations, hence the embrace of hybrid learning, which is designed to make every course possible to take in person or virtually.

While major shifts like those in Vermont tend to generate discomfort if not outright opposition from faculty and staff members, Scott says most employees recognize that this merger was essential if the system is to survive and thrive. "We're really setting the stage for where we will be in 50-100 years. We have to make sure we set ourselves up for success by understanding where we are today, who we want to be in the future, and can we get there in a financially sustainable way."

Mergers are enormously complex and hard, and the difficulty may discourage policy makers from considering them. But given the mounting challenges facing many non-selective public institutions, finding ways for them to work more closely together -- from collaboration through more formal marriages -- may be essential.

"I think the cost of running a higher ed organization is so expensive, and in many parts of the country, demographics are not on our side, and yet, having a college or university campus location in your backyard is a tremendous economic asset," Scott says. "It's really important that states figure out that education remains one of the few tools we have at our disposal, and unless states have unlimited resources, to consider the possibility of consolidation." ■

PRIVATE NONPROFIT COLLEGES

Standing Out at a Time of Constrained Resources

The roughly 1,200 private nonprofit colleges and universities in the United States include some of the world's best-known postsecondary institutions. But apart from the few dozen highly selective independent colleges with huge endowments and enough applicants to fill their classes several times over -- the Harvards, Stanfords and Williamses of the world -- many private colleges face significant turmoil and, in some cases, existential threats.

Lacking the state government funds that flow to their publicly supported peers and the research dollars that buttress many larger universities, these institutions are extremely dependent on undergraduate tuition revenue -- a vulnerable resource at a time when the number of 18-year-olds is declining, concerns about college debt and affordability are growing, and many Americans question the value of the liberal arts learning at the core of many of these institutions.

Constrained revenues aren't their only problem: Many of these traditionally residential institutions have significant physical footprints and high-touch (and expensive) educational models. Taken together, the economic forces have led analysts to deem hundreds of private nonprofit institutions to be at serious financial risk, especially if they don't significantly alter their operational and business models.

The problems are especially acute depending on where institutions are located.

"There's a high percentage of independent colleges located in the Northeast and the Midwest, and those areas are experiencing a population decline," says Mary Marcy, president emeritus of Dominican University of California and founder of MBM Consulting. "There is a misalignment of bricks and mortar and population shifts."

Jenny Watermill, senior associate director for experiential learning and career development at Mount Holyoke College, agrees, noting that the rural setting of many liberal arts college is incongruous with access to experiential career learning opportunities for students. "There is always that extra emphasis that a career center and the rest of the school has to put on making meaningful connections with employers," she says.

Leaders of independent institutions acknowledge the strains they're under, to a point. Just one in five chief business officers at private baccalaureate colleges said in a 2022 survey by *Inside Higher Ed* that they were confident in their institution's 10-year financial sustainability. And fewer than a third said they were "very likely" to have a positive operating margin in the 2021-22 fiscal year when excluding federal COVID recovery funds.

With the financial and enrollment pressures unlikely to abate for most private nonprofit colleges, many of them are looking for ways to increase revenue, cut (or redistribute) costs, or both. Compared to their public college peers, they may have more flexibility to do so, because they have more independence from government overseers and, in many cases, fewer unions and weaker faculty governance bodies.

But most private nonprofit colleges don't have the sorts of system arrangements and cross-institutional partnerships that their public college counterparts do, and frequently find themselves facing much more competition from public and private institutions alike.

Among the strategies the institutions are embracing to position themselves to survive (if not thrive):

New Offerings for New Populations: Many of these small colleges have historically served a student body that was overwhelmingly traditional college enrolled

full-time, predominantly white, and in the top third of their high school class. That is no longer the case for many of them.

"They'd like to have the top people, but in reality, the student population may be much more first-gen and diverse than they've experienced in the past, and they need to adapt to that and serve those students," Marcy says. "The institutions I see moving forward in an effective way have adapted to becoming MSI or Hispanic-serving institutions or have implemented high impact practices that cut across all sectors."

Marjorie Hass, president of the Council of Independent Colleges, agrees that many institutions have expanded their offerings to appeal beyond their traditional demographics, to include graduate programs, certificates, degree completion options for students with prior college credits, and early college. "There are lots of ways they have creatively broadened who they serve," she says.

"A number are doing extraordinarily well with underrepresented students, and all of that can mean that students have a high likelihood of success. Most of them, if they don't lead primarily with the liberal arts, do ensure that there is an integration of the liberal arts and professions in a way that leads to a more comprehensive experience for students," Marcy says.

While some colleges are moving away from the liberal arts, even those that retain a fundamental liberal arts curriculum are embedding real-world experience through internships and applied learning, such as the Lynk program at Mount Holyoke College. (See case study on Page 26.)

Collaboration/Partnerships: While many private colleges operate mostly independently from their peers, more are recognizing that they can no longer afford to be islands unto themselves. New partnerships are emerging "based on alignment of programs or missions," says Marcy. "I'm seeing more discussion about using technology to increase back-office savings. And there are more affiliations with non-higher ed entities."

These trends even extend into academic programming, which has historically been the last bastion of cross-institutional collaboration. Expanding a college's academic offerings to serve new or different student populations takes startup funds and faculty expertise that institutions may not have, says Marcy. "They have to be very strategic about what programs they offer for students and prospective students." Marcy says.

Course sharing arrangements across colleges have gained traction as a result. Belhaven University, for instance, is one of numerous institutions working with Rize, an educational company that powers the course-sharing model for the Lower Cost College Consortium. (See case study on Page 24.)

Rethinking Operations: Changing circumstances often require colleges to reassess some of their core operations, such as restructuring their academic calendars or using their physical spaces in new ways. The struggles many colleges have had around faculty and staff satisfaction and burnout led College to expand a pandemic experiment into a permanent shift to a 32-hour work week for its staff, a move designed to boost employee morale and retention and, by extension, bolster student success. (See case study on Page 28.)

In an era of increased competition for students and constrained resources, experimentation and adaptation will be key, says Tanya LaViolet, director of the College Excellence Program at the Aspen Institute. "You have to innovate in this space in order to differentiate yourself from peers." ■

PRIVATE NONPROFIT COLLEGES

Case Study: Sharing Courses to Expand Offerings Efficiently

(PeopleImages/Getty Images)

Belhaven University wanted to expand its course offerings for students in high-demand fields such as supply chain management and sales management, but as a small Evangelical Christian institution in Jackson, Miss., it had neither the capacity nor the funding to do so.

Belhaven is a longstanding member of the Lower Cost Models Consortium (LCMC), a coalition of 130 small private colleges and universities whose goals are to reduce the price of college attendance while enhancing the financial sustainability of their campuses.

The consortium's core initiative is a course-sharing model that helps members give students access to new degree programs in fields that would "otherwise be too expensive and risky to start as individual institutions," says Charlie Anastasi, the head of growth at Rize Education, which powers the course-sharing model.

The program gives students at the consortium's member colleges access to online courses across 20+ high-growth fields that may not be offered at their own institutions. Rize develops content for these courses and provides supporting services for its 85 partners.

This is a "great model for small private colleges to offer more robust majors without the cost investment," says Roger Parrott, Belhaven's president. "I'm really pleased with the quality; they're not just throwing online classes up there but they are putting in the support and integrity that holds up to Belhaven's standards."

The emerging course sharing trend purports to address declining enrollment and revenue, particularly among smaller colleges that simply do not have the financial resources to invest in enrollment growth initiatives. It also helps provide students with marketable skills.

These types of partnerships between small private colleges and course-sharing companies carries less risk for the institution from both a financial and program development standpoint, though of course it comes with costs: Rize charges an institution that uses one of its academic programs a fixed fee that typically averages between $12,000 and $20,000, plus $500 per student who registers for a three-credit course. (Much of that $500-per-student registration goes to the teaching institution and the professor teaching the course.).

Via Rize, Belhaven is now able to offer a B.S. in actuarial science; a B.A. in sales management; and a B.A. in supply chain management. Belhaven is expanding its offerings for fall 2023, with several technology minors, as well as a game development concentration. As they are online, classes are open to students from any institution who is a member of the LCMC; the courses are taught by instructors at an LCMC member institution.

"I think it provides the opportunity to do front-edge majors that a small college normally could not. At a small college, you need full-time faculty to offer these degrees, and that gets expensive," says Parrott.

Belhaven has experienced an uptick of about 8 percent in its enrollment this past fall, which Parrott attributes partially to the new offerings.

The arrangement is going so well, in fact, that Parrott has encouraged other university presidents to follow suit. “It’s not a silver bullet that solves everyone’s problems, but it’s a wonderful addition to help us all be relevant in a changing job market,” he says.

“Colleges have to get more flexible in what we deliver, what we offer, and how we package things,” he adds. “The schools that will be successful are the ones who will be proactive.” ■

PRIVATE NONPROFIT COLLEGE

Case Study: Infusing Workplace Experience Into the Liberal Arts

A Mount Holyoke student shares experiences from her Lynk-funded internship with peers.

As more consumers question the value of higher education, some liberal arts institutions struggle to persuade prospective students that their degrees will pay off in the workforce (despite plenty of historical evidence to back that up). Some liberal arts colleges are thinking outside the box of ways to change the narrative.

To help its students build confidence in their employability, and to give them practical experience, Mount Holyoke College, a private women's liberal arts college in Massachusetts, developed a program called the Lynk Initiative that focuses on integrative learning and making connections to career from the liberal arts by helping them identify goals and realize their strengths.

"Our students have so many career interests," says Jenny Watermill, senior associate director for experiential learning and exploration. "It is not as though we are a school that has a particular career focus affiliated with it, like law or business. Here, there are hundreds of career interests that often fall into the cracks between easily defined work. We get government data on where work exists, but often, students work in between where it's less visible."

Lynk, she says, aims to help students "connect theory with practical applications of the liberal arts and sciences through multiple opportunities for reflection and applied learning in and out of the classroom. As they integrate learning along their individual Lynk pathways, students develop a deeper understanding of the world and their own professional and civic goals."

The initiative includes four elements: goal setting, professional development, practical experience, and the launch into post-college life. Watermill says the initiative looks different for each student as they follow their own individual paths. "Since Lynk was created to be organic and ubiquitous, engagement can look different for different students, but all students engage in the Lynk program in some way," she says. These elements are accomplished through such resources as career advising, networking events, alumni partnerships, faculty mentoring, class assignments that mirror post-graduate work, and experiential learning, which includes Lynk-funded internships for sophomores and juniors.

About 60 percent of students complete the Lynk Summer Funding Program, which guarantees funding for one summer of an unpaid internship, research assistantship or independent project. Students are then required to participate in a reflection course and present their observations of their experience in a Learning from Application (LEAP) symposium.

Since the Lynk initiative has been in place, many participating students have obtained both global and domestic internships in order to explore career interests, often resulting in pursuing graduate studies or

finding employment in a related field.

One 2021 graduate, a Spanish major with an accompanying interest in education and mathematics, completed an internship at a boys' Catholic orphanage in Mexico, tutoring students in English, Spanish and Math. In the Leap symposium following the conclusion of the internship, the student reported that she learned how to bridge language barriers in an academic STEM setting and how to teach materials with limited resources. She now works as a math teacher in a public school system.

Another student, a Spanish and international relations double major, interned at the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, SDG Academy, collecting and promoting intellectual resources for sustainable development; she also had an internship with an NGO and managed a team investigating rural water quality in southwest China. She's now a consulting analyst with a Scotland-based company. ■

PRIVATE NONPROFIT COLLEGE

Case Study: Shorter Workweek Boosts Morale and Productivity

Lorrie A. Clemo, president of D'Youville University

Like virtually every other industry, higher education has struggled with the Great Resignation -- or as the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Kevin McClure prefers to call it, the great "disengagement" -- of employees. The white-hot job market, combined with the long-term fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, elevated stress levels, contributed to burnout, and diminished morale of countless employees, prompting many to leave and others to stay, disgruntled.

In response, many colleges upped their pay, reassessed their policies on remote or "flexible" work, and explored other ways to reengage employees. D'Youville College, in Buffalo, N.Y., a small private institution with 2,700 undergraduate and graduate students, took a novel approach: It shifted from a five-day, 37.5 hour to a four-day, 32-hour workweek as of January 2022 for its 180 full-time staff and administrators -- without a reduction in pay or benefits.

In a several month experiment in 2020 with the New York State Work Program, the university temporarily reduced employee hours to 32 per week; employees in turn were eligible for supplemental unemployment benefits. This was akin to a trial run of a reduced workweek, and D'Youville's president, Lorrie Clemo, referred to it as wildly successful. "We were able to not only have all of the work covered those employees were typically doing in a 37.5 hour week, but we saw an increase in innovation, creativity and productivity during that time," she says.

Later, when the worst of the pandemic began to recede, Clemo continued to look for ways to give employees more flexibility and improve well-being. "Because of the feedback from our employees trying to maintain a better work-life balance, we decided to pilot this program in 2022 so we could see if it would work again under a more normalized work environment," Clemo says.

Besides employee wellness, another important goal was to achieve greater efficiencies through the use of technology and incentivizing professional development. Clemo introduced Google certificates in IT training, for example, to create a more efficient and effective workplace. "It upskilled our employees, and they were motivated to engage in this professional development because they were very motivated to engage in a 32-hour workweek," she says.

The university also introduced cross-training across offices to share roles, serving to provide continuity in services and making sure no office or department would be closed on a given day. "The only way that this will work is if there is that level of collaboration and cooperation between employees and supervisors to make sure there is coverage," Clemo says. To keep the mailroom open, D'Youville introduced Amazon lockers for students to be able to pick up packages, but actual mail had to be collected daily. This is where the cross-training came in handy, as another employee was trained to distribute mail during the day the mailroom

employee was out.

D'Youville plans to collect more official data in the new year, including employee feedback and turnover rates, but for now, based on an employee pulse survey and anecdotal reports, the staff appears to be quite satisfied with the new normal. And importantly, Clemo has noticed no drop in efficiency because people are working fewer hours, as they seem to be maximizing their time spent in the office.

Tyra Henson has worked as D'Youville's director of strategic enrollment management in the Office of Admissions for the past four years. She notes that the transition from 37.5 to 32 hours was smooth.

Rather than slow down her productivity, the self-admitted workaholic says that knowing she only has 32 hours a week to complete her workload has made her more productive. "I am so grateful I have this extra day that I want to put more effort and energy on the days I'm here to make sure I'm getting my work done. I'll try to wrap up my week before I take my day. It has made me more productive, and I feel that motivation," says Henson.

Clemo, too, noticed that the work culture has changed for the better over the past year. "Employees will stop me and say, 'I don't think I can go back to a five-day workweek. I have a better family life, and on weekends, I'm not running around as much.' There's been a lot of that anecdotal information," she says. Clemo believes the policy will keep attrition rates low and be a factor in recruitment.

The 32-hour workweek was a lure for Rachel Dah, one of two mental health therapists at D'Youville. As the parent of two small children, Dah had been working part-time, striving to strike a balance between work and being a parent. "When I saw this open position in June 2022, it seemed like a nice way to jump back into working full time with full-time pay and benefits, an asset you don't get with part-time positions," she says. With her weekly Mondays to herself, she is able to clean the house from the weekend and plan meals for the week. "I'm a little more present; I can get my older son off the bus and have the benefits of working full time professionally.

"As a mental health therapist, I know it's good for us to have downtime. The more we can improve mental health in the workplace, the better we're all going to function," Dah adds.

Whether or not this is the wave of the future for smaller higher education institutions remains to be seen, but Clemo has already fielded some calls from other interested presidents. ■

About the Author

Hilary Daninhirsch is an award-winning freelance journalist and content writer whose work has appeared in numerous local, regional and national trade publications. She has a special interest in higher education and writes content for several universities in her hometown.

Before embarking on a writing career, she practiced law, specializing in Pennsylvania Workers' Compensation and Federal Black Lung litigation.

She is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. She has two daughters in college and lives in Pittsburgh with her husband and two rescue dogs.

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1150 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 400

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