

Date: May 19, 2016

Subject: Higher Education Trends

In February, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* released its [annual Trends Report](#), which charts 10 key shifts in higher education from the past year. Introduced as “a briefing on what informed college leaders need to know in 2016,” the report highlights important changes in the post-secondary landscape.¹ This brief summarizes those trends, cites local examples when applicable, and discusses several other trends not mentioned in *The Chronicle’s* report.

10 Trends Cited by *The Chronicle*

Free Speech: Institutions such as [Yale](#), [Williams](#), [George Washington](#), and others have encountered resistance from some students against speech or speakers that they find objectionable. Protests of this type have become increasingly common in recent years, as the desire to maintain free speech on campus clashes with the desire to prevent language viewed as hateful, emotionally damaging, or intolerant.

Washington connection: In response to a [syllabus controversy](#) at Washington State University, State Representative Matt Manweller, who is also a professor at Central Washington University, introduced [a bill](#) to create an academic bill of rights, legislation designed to protect free speech on campus and in the classroom.

The UW has also included language in its graduate employee contracts prohibiting “microaggressions,” implicit or explicit language which causes the employee to feel marginalized. See [this article](#) for more information.

Sexual Assault: Numerous sexual assault cases and lawsuits in the past few years have prompted schools to step up their efforts to educate students on sexual assault via [training programs, faculty messaging and more](#).

Washington connection: In 2016, the state legislature passed several bills related to sexual assault, including [HB 2530](#), which enhances law enforcement’s ability to analyze sexual assault kits, and [HB 2711](#), which aims to help increase sexual assault victims’ access to sexual assault nurse examiners.

The UW convened a task force in 2013 to study and make recommendations on addressing sexual assault. The task force made 18 recommendations, all of which were approved for funding. See more on the task force recommendations [here](#). UW sexual assault resources include a UWPD Victim Advocate, a Health and Wellness Advocate, and Green Dot bystander training. For more on these and additional student sexual assault resources, visit <http://www.washington.edu/sexualassault/>.

Faculty Productivity Metrics: Private companies are developing metrics for colleges to use when evaluating faculty members’ productivity. These metrics are viewed skeptically by some faculty, who contend that the metrics do not accurately reflect an instructor’s contribution to the school.

Washington connections: At the UW, like most universities, academic units maintain metrics on faculty members’ publishing activities. However, the University does not employ outside agencies to perform this analysis.

¹ For further information on each of the trends, see *The Chronicle’s* [Special Report](#) page.

Administrator Responsiveness: Colleges and universities have adjusted their communications strategies in response to the rise of social media as a major force in campus discourse. Effective use of social media allows administrators and staff to react more quickly to occurrences affecting students or the school.

Washington connection: The UW [has recently developed social media guidelines](#) which lay out social media dos and don'ts, including an emphasis on frequent engagement with followers and other users. In addition, President Ana Mari Cauce is well-known for being highly accessible on social media.

Shared Governance: Faculty leaders have long had a role in the decision-making processes affecting their institutions. Over the past few years, however, faculty influence has diminished in key administrative areas such as [presidential hiring](#). Many have pointed to [restructured tenure policies](#) as another example of this trend.

Washington connection: Please visit the Faculty Senate & Governance [website](#) for more information about shared governance at the UW. Last session, state legislators introduced [HB 2546](#), which would have added a faculty representative to the UW Board of Regents. In addition, the UW chapter of the American Association of University Professors has partnered with SEIU Local 925 in an effort to form a faculty union at the UW. The outcome of this partnership effort has yet to be determined.

Privatization of University Services: For decades, universities have outsourced auxiliary services, most notably cafeterias and bookstores. In recent years, however, schools have begun to privatize central university functions, including advising and teaching.

Skepticism of Research: Academic research is being viewed with increased skepticism following several incidents of questionable behavior by authors, including a few where private money created a conflict of interest. Prominent examples include a [Coca-Cola-funded research study](#) and [a retracted study on changing attitudes toward gay marriage](#).

Transcript Design: As employers and graduate schools look for more than just academic achievement in college, some schools are changing their transcripts to match. New sections are designed to convey students' skills and experiences—such as internships, volunteer work, research, and studies abroad—which go beyond coursework.

Instructional Design: Online courses are becoming increasingly popular. The rise of instructional designers, who work with faculty to help them craft their courses for online instruction, has mirrored the increased interest in online learning.

Marketing to Increase Enrollment: Some institutions are reacting to declining enrollments by devoting more resources to marketing, including more targeted outreach programs to potential students, decreased response time to inquiries, and even making institutional changes in response to public perception.

Other Higher Education Trends

The trends highlighted by the Chronicle portray a field in the midst of turmoil and we agree that these trends are important to bear in mind when considering policies for 2016 and beyond. We have also identified several encouraging trends which we believe are worth mentioning. The following are a selection of positive changes in the 2015 higher education landscape.

Increased scrutiny of for-profit institutions: The federal government stepped up its crackdown on for-profit education providers in 2015. A set of regulations that took effect in July will cause career colleges (mostly for-profits) to lose access

to federal funding if their graduates do not get jobs that allow them to pay back a sufficient portion of their loans. In addition, the Department of Justice's fraud case against Educational Management Corporation (EDMC) resulted in a \$95.5 million settlement—the government's largest ever settlement with a for-profit education provider. [According to Politico](#), for-profit colleges enroll 11 percent of students but account for 44 percent of student loan defaults. The federal government's continued focus on holding the industry accountable will help protect students from predatory education providers going forward.

Expansion of Income-Based Repayment: Income-based repayment plans, consisting of Income-Based Repayment (IBR) and Pay As You Earn (PAYE), are now the most popular form of federal student loan repayment, [accounting for just over one third of all federal loan money](#). While IBR plans are not a solution for everybody—students in income-based repayment plans usually pay more money overall than those in standard plans²—they do help ensure that student loan repayments do not overly burden students' monthly budgets. IBRs may already be making a difference: federal officials credited the increase in IBR enrollment with contributing to the drop in the national 3-year cohort default rate (CDR)—a widely used metric that measures the percentage of students who default on their loans within three years of graduation.³

Focus on transfer students: Despite comprising [over one third](#) of the total college population, transfer students have often been overlooked by universities. Part of the reason lies in historical absence of reliable transfer student data. This, in turn, has resulted in an information deficit surrounding transfer students and the additional challenges that many face in completing a degree (see more on these challenges [here](#)). Columbia University's Teachers College [recently published a report](#) illustrating that 80 percent of community college enrollees intend to earn a four-year degree, but only 25 percent succeed in transferring to a four-year school and only 17 percent earn their bachelor's. Simplifying the transition from community college to a four-year institution is especially important for addressing equity in higher education; [research has suggested](#) that transferees into four-year institutions are much more likely to be low-income than those who enrolled in four-year institutions from the start.

In the past year, however, organizations and universities are stepping up efforts to better account for transfer students. The National Student Clearinghouse, using significantly improved transfer student data, [has published](#) one of the first comprehensive reports on transfer student enrollment and graduation patterns. Multiple states have begun developing, or have already developed, guided pathways to help transfer students navigate the transition from two-year community colleges to baccalaureate institutions.⁴ In addition, the federal government's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) has begun collecting data on graduation and transfer rates for all students, including those who have transferred from another institution.

Conclusion

The public higher education landscape is shifting. The trends highlighted here are some of the timeliest and most important, but there are many other challenges which universities will also have to address in order to preserve their role in American society. As universities seek to balance the institutional status quo with contemporary culture, their flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances will be a key element in determining the fate of public higher education going forward.

² [This student loan calculator](#) will show you how much each plan will cost, depending on the starting balance and income of the borrower.

³ For more on the change in the 3-year CDR, [see our earlier blog post](#).

⁴ The most common type of transfer.