

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

RESULTS OF A GALLUP - *INSIDE HIGHER ED* SURVEY OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS
— SURVEY 2

October 30, 2014



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gallup has launched a study focused on U.S. college and university presidents to track and understand their opinions on the important topics and issues facing higher education. The survey is the second in a series of three planned for 2014. The following are key findings from the study.

POLITICAL PRESSURE

- More than half of presidents (58%) are not at all concerned about being removed from office. Only 2% are extremely concerned about this possibility.
- The majority of presidents do not feel that they are under political pressure from specific levels of government. Four in five (81%) do not feel political pressure from the state's governor and 60% do not feel political pressure from any branch of the federal government to conduct their presidency in ways that differ from their judgment about the best direction of the institution.
- Among presidents whose institutions are part of a system, 41% feel political pressure from their system office to conduct their presidency in a particular way.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

- While 60% of presidents support the call for all colleges and universities to conduct campus climate surveys on sexual assault, only 32% are in favor of a policy that mandates such a survey.
- Only 21% of presidents say that their institution has conducted a climate survey on sexual assault within the last two years. Out of those institutions that have not conducted a survey, almost four in 10 (37%) plan to do so in the next two years.

DEGREE COMPLETION

- The majority of presidents rely on the following strategies to increase degree completion rates: increasing resources for on-site counseling to support students at risk (79%); setting a goal for increased college completion at their institution (73%); increasing the flexibility of course delivery mechanisms (71%); training faculty and staff in strategies to increase their institution's college completion rates (67%); and identifying and addressing inefficiencies in their institution's operating model to increase affordability (65%).
- Making completion part of faculty and staff performance reviews is the least popular strategy to increase degree completion rates; only 16% presidents say that this occurs in their institution.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- When selecting a new board member, 56% of presidents say that professional achievement is very important. Other factors that about half of presidents deem very important include diverse representation on the board (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender) (55%) and leadership experience (53%).

- When thinking about their existing board of trustees, 32% of presidents say that professional achievement describes their board extremely well. Other characteristics that sizable percentages say describe their board very well are civic involvement (23%), leadership experience (22%), existing relationships with the community (22%), and complex business experience (14%).
- Interestingly, though being a financial supporter of the institution and having the ability to donate to the institution are characteristics deemed very important (39% and 34%, respectively) by presidents when *selecting* a new member of the board, only 11% and 10%, respectively, believe that these factors describe their existing board of trustees extremely well. Similarly, while diverse representation is very important to 55% of presidents when selecting a new member of the board, only 10% say that this characteristic describes their existing board of trustees extremely well.

INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

- Half of presidents (51%) believe that administrators know the institution's identity extremely well. Only a small percentage of presidents say that members of the public, including employers (11%), presidents of colleges not like their own (4%), state and government legislators (3%), prospective students (3%), and the general American public (2%) know their institutional identity extremely well.

MISSION

- Well over three in four presidents say that student learning (98%), teaching (97%), degree attainment (90%), and job placement of graduates (79%) are very important to their institution's mission.
- More than half say that service/outreach to the local community (68%), fundraising (63%), academic innovation (59%), and technological advancement (52%) are very important to their institution's mission.

INSTITUTION INITIATIVES

- For the eight institution initiatives presented, college presidents report the most accomplishment in providing comprehensive student support services (42%); monitoring student progress and learning outcomes (38%); developing academic pathways between two-year institutions and four-year institutions (37%); and prioritizing student-focused operations (30%).
- The institution initiatives that seem most neglected is building partnerships with K-12 institutions and creating clear, transparent academic pathways; only about one in four presidents say they have accomplished these initiatives.
- In terms of supporting student degree attainment, nearly all presidents (97%) say the president is very supportive. Presidents further believe that the provost/chief academic officer (94%), chief student affairs officer (91%), chief financial officer (81%), board of trustees (81%), and enrollment management staff (81%) are also very supportive.
- In terms of influencing student degree attainment, presidents say that the provost/chief academic officer (89%), the president (80%), and the chief student affairs officer (79%) are very influential.

A large percentage of presidents also think that stakeholders who interact with students, including tenure track faculty (78%), deans (75%), department chairs (69%), and academic support professionals (61%) are very influential with regard to student degree attainment efforts.

STUDENT SUCCESS

- Seventy-seven percent say that their institution has sufficient data to effectively demonstrate student success.
- One in four presidents believe that their institution is very effective in using data to evaluate student success.

METHODOLOGY

Gallup used a purchased sample list of 4,005 colleges and universities across the U.S. The list contained email addresses of U.S. higher education institutions. Data are not weighted and the sample is not nationally representative of U.S. colleges and universities.

Gallup conducted 620 Web surveys August 11-25, 2014. Gallup surveyed college and university presidents — representing public, private, two-year, four-year, community colleges, and for-profit institutions. The offerings included associates, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees.

Total Participation by Sector

	All	Public BA/MA and Doctorate	Private BA/MA and Doctorate	Community college	For-profit institution	Other Institution
Total N	620	108	261	183	26	37

DETAILED FINDINGS

POLITICAL PRESSURE

A little more than half of college presidents (58%) are not at all concerned about being removed from the office of the president at their institution, leaving approximately two in five (40%) feeling some concern. Of that proportion, only 2% are extremely concerned about being removed from office.

Table 1

On a five point scale, where 5 means extremely concerned and 1 means not at all concerned, how concerned are you about being removed from the office of president at your institution?						
	%5 Extremely Concerned	%4	%3	%2	%1 Not at all concerned	Don't Know/Does not apply
Overall	2	4	9	25	58	2
Public Bachelors and Masters and/or Doctorate	3	4	10	30	51	1
Private Bachelors and Masters and/or Doctorate	2	3	7	23	64	2

In general, college presidents feel varying degrees of pressure from government and system offices. Looking first at government sources of pressure, only 13% of presidents report that they feel political pressure from the state's governor to conduct their presidency in ways that differ from their judgment about the best direction for the institution. However, almost three times as many presidents (37%) report that they feel political pressure from any branch of the federal government. Public bachelors and masters and/or doctorate college presidents are more likely to feel political pressure from their state's governor to conduct their presidency in ways that differ from their judgment about the best direction for their institution (28%) compared with their private college counterparts (6%). Whereas, private bachelors and masters and/or doctorate college presidents are more likely to feel political pressure from any branch of federal government to conduct their presidency in ways that differ from their judgment about the best direction for their institution (49%) compared with their public college peers (27%).

Table 2A

Do you feel political pressure from your state's governor to conduct your presidency in ways that differ from your judgment about the best direction for the institution?			
	%Yes	%No	Don't Know/ Does not apply
Overall	13	81	6
Public Bachelors and Masters and/or Doctorate	28	70	2
Private Bachelors and Masters and/or Doctorate	6	89	5
Respondents With a Democratic Governor	14	81	5
Respondents With a Republican Governor	13	82	5

Table 2B

Do you feel political pressure from any branch of the federal government to conduct your presidency in ways that differ from your judgment about the best direction for the institution?			
	%Yes	%No	Don't Know/ Does not apply
Overall	37	60	3
Public Bachelors and Masters and/or Doctorate	27	71	2
Private Bachelors and Masters and/or Doctorate	49	49	2

About two-fifths of presidents report feeling pressure through their system offices. Among respondents who are presidents at public schools, 41% agree that they feel political pressure from their system office to conduct their presidency in a particular way.

Table 3

	%Yes	%No, and my institution is part of a system	Don't know/ Choose not to answer
Do you feel political pressure from your system office to conduct your presidency in a particular way?*	41	58	1

*Asked of respondents who are presidents at public schools. Omitting response "No, my institution is not part of a system."

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault is a serious consideration across American campuses, and a topic that recently has come under scrutiny once again. Reflective of the importance of this topic, nearly two-thirds of college presidents (60%) support the call for all colleges and universities to conduct campus climate surveys on sexual assault. Nearly one in three (28%) do not support the administration of these campus climate surveys

Table 4

	%Yes	%No	Don't know/ Choose not to answer
Do you support the call for all colleges and universities to conduct campus climate surveys on sexual assault?	60	28	12

Although most college presidents are in support of the call for all colleges and universities to conduct campus climate surveys on sexual assault, only 32% are in favor of mandating the use of such surveys. A slight majority (52%) oppose such a policy. As with the previous question, a considerable proportion of the respondents (16%) either don't know or chose not to respond to this question.

Table 5

	%Yes	%No	Don't know/ Choose not to answer
Would you favor or oppose a policy that mandates campus climate surveys on sexual assault for all colleges and universities?	32	52	16

Although many college presidents say that they support conducting campus climate surveys for sexual assault, if we look beyond *attitudes* and toward *action*, only 21% of presidents report that their institution has conducted such a survey within the last two years. Two-thirds (68%) report that their institution has not administered such a survey in the last two years, and again 11% either don't know or refused to answer.

Examining the presidents whose institutions have not conducted a climate survey on sexual assault, 37% indicate that their institution plans to conduct such a survey in the next two years. The combined majority of presidents, however, either do not plan to conduct such a climate survey (32%) or say that they don't know or choose not to answer (31%).

Table 6

	%Yes	%No	Don't know/ Choose not to answer
Has your institution conducted a climate survey on sexual assault within the last two years?	21	68	11
Does your institution plan to conduct a climate survey on sexual assault in the next two years?*	37	32	31

*Asked of institutions that have not conducted a climate survey on sexual assault.

DEGREE COMPLETION

The survey presented eight ways that institutions might increase degree completion. College presidents report the most reliance on the following strategies: increasing resources for on-site counseling to support students at risk (79%); setting a goal for increased college completion at their institution (73%); increasing the flexibility of course delivery mechanisms (71%); training faculty and staff in strategies to increase their institution's college completion rates (67%); and identifying and addressing inefficiencies in their institution's operating model to increase affordability (65%). Institutions are less likely to change rules regarding course structure and credential transfer; 54% of presidents share that their institution increases the flexibility of course structure and 51% say that their institution increases the recognition of inter-institution credentials to increase degree completion rates. Holding faculty and staff directly accountable for completion is the least popular strategy to increase degree completion rates; only 16% of presidents state that their institution makes completion a part of faculty and staff performance reviews.

Table 7

Which of the following are ways your institution works to increase degree completion rates? (Select all that apply)	
Increase resources for on-site counseling to support students at risk	79%
Set a goal for increased college completion at your institution	73%
Increase the flexibility of course delivery mechanisms	71%
Train faculty and staff in strategies to increase your institution's college completion rates	67%
Identify and address inefficiencies in my institution's operating model to increase affordability	65%
Increase flexibility of course structure	54%
Increase the recognition of inter-institution credentials	51%
Make completion part of faculty and staff performance reviews	16%
Don't know/Does not apply	3%

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

We presented college presidents with 13 characteristics and asked them how important each one is for selecting a new member of their institution's board of trustees. When looking at what presidents deem very important factors in choosing a new trustee, there are considerable differences of opinion. In fact, of the 13 characteristics, only three garnered more than 50% support at the very important level. Factors that most presidents deem very important are professional achievement (56%), diverse representation on the board (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender) (55%), and leadership experience (53%). Potential board members' connectedness with the community also matters, as 47% and 42%, respectively, of presidents deem existing relationships with the community and civic involvement to be very important factors for selection. Being a financial supporter of the institution and the ability to donate to the institution are very important criteria to 39% and 34% of presidents, respectively. Factors that are very important to a smaller percentage of presidents include knowledge of higher education (21%), development or fundraising experience (19%), and previous board experience (12%).

The least salient factors seem to be alumni status and real estate experience, as only 6% and 1% of presidents, respectively, say that these are very important factors for selecting a new member of the board. These two factors have the highest percentages of presidents reporting not at all important.

Table 8

How important are each of the following characteristics for selecting a new member of your institution's board of trustees?					
	%Very important	%Somewhat important	%Not very important	%Not at all important	Don't know/ Does not apply
Professional achievement	56	29	3	1	10
Diverse representation on board (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender)	55	30	3	2	10
Leadership experience	53	32	2	2	11
Existing relationships with the community	47	34	7	2	10
Civic involvement	42	41	6	1	10
Financial supporter of the institution	39	26	16	8	11
Ability to donate to the institution	34	29	14	12	11
Complex business experience	23	52	13	2	10
Knowledge of higher education	21	52	13	3	10
Development or fundraising experience	19	41	20	9	11
Previous board experience	12	45	24	8	10
Graduate of the institution	6	37	26	21	11
Real estate experience	1	22	41	26	11

We presented college presidents with the same 13 characteristics and asked them how well each describes their institution's board of trustees. According to 32% of presidents, the characteristic that describes board members extremely well is professional achievement; this is also the factor that the largest proportion (56%) of presidents say is very important for selecting a new board member. About one in four presidents believe that civic involvement (23%), leadership experience (22%), and existing relationships with the community (22%) describe current board members extremely well. Only 11% and 10% of presidents, respectively, say that being a financial supporter of the institution and having the ability to donate to the institution are characteristics that describe current board members extremely well. Note, however, these same two factors are very important to 39% and 34% of presidents with respect to *selecting* a new member of the board. Next, diverse representation on the board (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender) describe board members extremely well for only 10% of respondents, despite the fact that 55% of presidents say that this factor is very important for new board member selection. Previous board experience and alumni status describe board members extremely well for 7% of presidents. Only 5% of college presidents believe that having knowledge of higher education describes their current board very well. The two least salient descriptions for current board members is development or fundraising experience and real estate experience (2% each).

Table 9

Using a five point scale, where 5 means extremely well and 1 means not well at all, how well would you say that each of the following characteristics describe your institution's board of trustees?						
	%Extremely well	%4	%3	%2	%Not well at all	Don't know/ Does not apply
Professional achievement	32	42	17	4	1	4
Civic involvement	23	42	24	6	0	4
Leadership experience	22	43	24	6	1	4
Existing relationships with the community	22	38	25	9	1	5
Complex business experience	14	35	29	13	4	4
Financial supporter of the institution	11	26	26	20	10	7
Ability to donate to the institution	10	27	30	15	10	7
Diverse representation on board (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender)	10	23	32	23	8	4
Previous board experience	7	31	37	17	3	5
Graduate of the institution	7	17	27	24	18	6
Knowledge of higher education	5	26	41	21	3	4
Development or fundraising experience	2	11	36	29	16	6
Real estate experience	2	9	25	40	17	7

INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

An organization's identity encompasses why it exists, how it is known to the world, and how it acts. Only about half of college presidents (51%) believe that administrators know the institution's identity extremely well, and this is the largest category of constituents that presidents believe know the institution's identity extremely well. Other categories of constituents presidents think know the institutional identity extremely well include the board of trustees (43%), presidents of other colleges like their own (31%), and tenure track faculty (28%). Just over one-quarter of presidents (26%) think that alumni know the institutional identity extremely well, and about one-fifth (21%) say the same about current students. Notably, however, 47% provide a "4" response with respect to the categories of alumni, and a little more than half of presidents (55%) give a "4" in relation to current students. So, while presidents are not saying that alumni and students understand the institutional identity extremely well, many of them do think that these groups have some sort of understanding of it.

Presidents perceive that members of the public, with possibly limited connection to the institution, do not have a firm understanding of their institution's identity. Only a small percentage of presidents believe that employers (11%), presidents of colleges not like their own (4%), prospective students (3%), state and government legislators (3%), and the general American public (2%) know their institutional identity extremely well.

Interestingly, though adjunct or contingent faculty are connected to the institution, only 7% of presidents think that they know the institution's identity extremely well. That being said, 43% of presidents acknowledge that this group does have some familiarity with the institution's identity, by providing a rating of "4."

Table 10

An organization's identity encompasses why it exists, how it is known to the world, and how it acts. How well you do think each of the following constituents understand your institutional identity?						
	%Extremely well	%4	%3	%2	%Not well at all	Don't know/Does not apply
Administrators	51	38	8	1	0	0
Board of trustees	43	37	12	4	1	2
Presidents of other colleges like yours	31	39	23	6	1	0
Tenure track faculty	28	43	15	4	1	9
Alumni	26	47	22	4	0	0
Current students	21	55	21	2	0	0
Employers	11	45	34	9	1	0
Adjunct or contingent faculty	7	43	38	10	1	2
Presidents of other colleges not like yours	4	18	33	32	12	1
Prospective students	3	38	45	12	2	0
State and government legislators	3	22	37	28	9	1
The general American public	2	10	37	36	14	1

MISSION

Presidents tend to be student-focused when thinking about factors that are most important to their institution's mission. Respondents almost unanimously agree that student learning (98%), teaching (97%), and degree attainment (90%) are very important to the overall mission. Nearly all presidents also believe that job placement of graduates is very important (79%) or somewhat important (18%). Service/outreach to the local community (68%), fundraising (63%), academic innovation (59%), and technological advancement (52%) are very important to more than half of presidents.

The two areas where opinions about importance to the institution's mission seem to vary widely are scholarly research and internationalization. While 19% of presidents believe that scholarly research is very important, 26% think it is not very important and a further 14% think that it is not at all important. Similarly, but to a smaller extent, while internationalization is very important for 26% of presidents, a notable 11% think it is not very important and a further 3% say that it is not at all important.

Table 11

How important are each of the following to your institution's mission?					
	%Very important	%Somewhat important	%Not very important	%Not at all important	Don't know/Choose not to answer
Student learning	98	2	0	0	0
Teaching	97	3	1	0	0
Degree attainment	90	9	1	0	0
Job placement of graduates	79	18	2	0	0
Service/outreach to the local community	68	29	3	0	0
Fundraising	63	27	5	5	0

Academic innovation	59	35	5	0	0
Technological advancement	52	43	5	0	0
Internationalization*	26	37	11	3	22
Scholarly research	19	41	26	14	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0

*On August 20, 2014 the wording was corrected and 202 people responded. These data reflect only those who responded after the correction.

INSTITUTION INITIATIVES

For the eight institution initiatives presented, most college presidents report accomplishment in the following areas: providing comprehensive student support services (42%); monitoring student progress and learning outcomes (38%); developing academic pathways between two-year institutions and four-year institutions (37%); and prioritizing student-focused operations (30%). Lower percentages of presidents say that their institutions are accomplished in building partnerships with employers/industry (29%); building partnerships with K-12 institutions (26%); and creating clear, transparent academic pathways (25%).

Though fewer presidents say that their institutions have accomplished this last initiative, nearly two-thirds (59%) share that their institution has taken some action related to it. In fact, on all but one of the initiatives presented, more than half of presidents say that their institution has taken action. The exception is developing academic pathways between two-year and four-year institutions; 47% of presidents report action in this area. Perhaps the most neglected area is building partnerships with K-12 institutions, as 7% of presidents say that neither discussion nor action has occurred regarding this initiative.

Table 12

For each of the following initiatives, please indicate if there has been discussion about the initiative, if action was taken on the initiative, or if the initiative has been accomplished by your institution.					
	%Accomplished	%Action taken	%Discussion only	%No discussion or action	Don't know/ Does not apply
Providing comprehensive student support services	42	54	4	0	0
Monitoring student progress and learning outcomes	38	59	3	0	0
Developing academic pathways between 2-year institutions and 4-year institutions	37	47	9	3	4
Prioritizing student-focused operations	30	58	9	0	2
Building partnerships with employers/industry	29	58	11	1	0
Building partnerships with K-12 institutions	26	52	12	7	3
Creating clear, transparent academic pathways	25	59	12	1	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0

College presidents almost unequivocally think they, as a group, are very supportive of efforts to increase student degree attainment. The vast majority of presidents believe that the provost/chief academic officer (94%), chief student affairs officer (91%), board of trustees (81%), chief financial officer (81%), and enrollment management staff (81%) are also very supportive of this cause. Considering those who are more likely to interact directly with students — academic support professionals (79%), deans (74%), department chairs (55%), tenure track faculty (54%), athletic administrators (52%), and administrative support professionals (51%) — the proportion of presidents who say that each of these stakeholder groups is very supportive of the effort to increase student degree attainment ranges from one-half to about three-quarters. Fifty-eight percent of presidents perceive students to be very supportive of efforts to increase degree attainment.

The number of adjunct or contingent faculty is growing across American campuses, and an increasing number of students receive at least a portion of their instruction from this group of stakeholders at many institutions. Only 35% of presidents, however, believe that adjuncts or contingent faculty are very supportive of the institution's efforts to increase student degree attainment. A further 56% say that this group is somewhat supportive.

Less than half of presidents think that auxiliary service employees, including computer/information technology professionals (47%), campus safety workers (33%), and maintenance/grounds technicians (26%) are very supportive of degree attainment efforts, although many presidents select don't know/does not apply to these items.

Table 13

How supportive are each of the following stakeholders of the institution's efforts to increase student degree attainment?					
	%Very supportive	%Somewhat supportive	%Not very supportive	%Not supportive at all	Don't know/Does not apply
President	97	2	0	0	1
Provost/Chief academic officer	94	4	0	0	2
Chief student affairs officer	91	5	1	0	3
Board of trustees	81	14	2	0	3
Chief financial officer	81	16	1	0	2
Enrollment management staff	81	15	1	0	3
Academic support professionals	79	18	1	0	2
Deans	74	18	1	0	7
Students	58	38	0	0	3
Department chairs	55	34	2	0	8
Tenure track faculty	54	35	2	1	8
Institutional researchers	54	20	2	0	23
Athletic administrators	52	21	1	0	26
Administrative support professionals	51	40	2	0	7
Computer/Information technology professionals	47	41	3	0	8
Adjunct or contingent faculty	35	56	4	0	6
Campus safety workers	33	39	3	0	25
Maintenance/Grounds technicians	26	43	5	0	26
Other	0	0	0	0	0

Stakeholders who most college presidents think are very supportive of efforts to increase student degree attainment are also considered to be very influential in these efforts. A substantial proportion of presidents think that the provost/chief academic officer (89%), the president (80%), and the chief student affairs officer (79%) are very influential. A large percentage of presidents also think that stakeholders who interact with students, including tenure track faculty (78%), deans (75%), department chairs (69%), and academic support professionals (61%) are very influential to student degree attainment efforts. Encouragingly, 70% of presidents believe that students are very influential, and a further 26% think that they are somewhat influential.

Only 38% of presidents perceive adjunct or contingent faculty to be very influential, though a further 44% believe that this group is somewhat influential. Recall that a small percentage of presidents think that auxiliary service staff, such as computer/information technology professionals, campus safety workers, and maintenance/grounds technicians are very supportive of degree attainment efforts. The data show that even smaller percentages think that these groups are very influential in these efforts.

Table 14

How influential are the following stakeholders on the success of your institution's efforts to increase student degree attainment?					
	%Very influential	%Somewhat influential	%Not very influential	%Not influential	Don't know/ Does not apply
Provost/Chief academic officer	89	10	0	0	1
President	80	17	1	0	1
Chief student affairs officer	79	16	1	1	3
Tenure track faculty	78	13	1	1	8
Deans	75	17	0	0	8
Students	70	26	2	0	2
Department chairs	69	21	2	0	8
Academic support professionals	61	31	5	1	2
Enrollment management staff	55	35	6	1	3
Chief financial officer	40	47	10	2	1
Board of trustees	39	41	14	3	3
Athletic administrators	39	28	6	2	24
Adjunct or contingent faculty	38	44	13	2	2
Administrative support professionals	33	48	12	2	4
Institutional researchers	23	39	16	3	19
Computer/Information technology professionals	21	50	20	4	5
Maintenance/Grounds technicians	10	39	26	10	16
Campus safety workers	9	41	24	7	19
Other	0	0	0	0	0

STUDENT SUCCESS

Although the majority of presidents (77%) say that their institution has sufficient data to effectively demonstrate student success, only one in four (24%) believe that their institution is very effective in using such data effectively. An additional two-thirds believe that their institution is only somewhat effective in using data to demonstrate student success.

Table 15

	%Yes	%No	Don't know/ Does not apply
Does your institution have sufficient data to effectively demonstrate student success?	77	22	1

Table 16

	%Very effective	%Somewhat effective	%Not too effective	%Not effective at all	Don't know/ Does not apply
How effective is your institution at using data to evaluate student success?	24	66	9	0	0

CONCLUSION

Much of this survey examines presidents' views of institutional identity: What is the mission of the college and how is that manifested on a daily basis in areas such as degree completion, student success, and the makeup of the board of trustees? In an age when institutions are seeing declining enrollment and are facing financial difficulties, it is more important than ever that colleges and universities understand and promote their mission and what makes their institution unique. Understanding and operating according to the stated mission streamlines operational decision making and differentiates the institution to students and benefactors.

Despite this importance, few college presidents think that many of the 12 constituent groups we asked about understand their institutional identity extremely well. Of the 12, only one group — the administration — is above the 50% marker for understanding the institutional identity extremely well, coming in at 52%. The board of trustees, a group one might think of as integral to acting according to institutional identity, is only seen as understanding that identity extremely well by 44% of college presidents. Tenure track faculty, another important group, is further down the scale, with fewer than one in three college presidents believing that they understand the institutional identity very well. Similarly, alumni are at 27%, which is only slightly higher than current students, at 22%. Prospective students, for whom institutional identity is crucial in attracting applications and luring matriculants, is very low, with only 3% of college presidents believing that they know what distinguishes their college from others very well.

What might be reflected in institutional identity? Almost all presidents believe that teaching and student learning are very important to the institutional mission. On average, only one in four presidents believe that scholarly research is very important to their mission, although this varied greatly by institution type. Many believe that degree attainment and job placement of graduates are also very important.

With respect to degree attainment, most presidents believe that the provost is very influential in efforts to increase degree attainment. In fact, even more presidents say that the provosts are very influential in this regard than they themselves are, although not by much. Just as many presidents, though, rate themselves as very influential as they do the chief student affairs officer and tenure track faculty. Surprisingly, those who are more often on the front line with helping students graduate — academic support professionals and enrollment management staff — are less likely to be seen by presidents as very influential. This belief is especially interesting given that the most agreement on ways their institutions are working to increase degree completion rates is to increase resources for on-site counseling to support students at risk — a front-line activity. Many presidents also report that their institution provides comprehensive student support services, which is a case of implementing policy rather than setting policy.

Perhaps this belief is a reflection on how *effective* the presidents see implementing policy is, as opposed to simply establishing policy.

The next most likely ways presidents report that their institutions work to increase degree completion rates are policy oriented: setting a goal to increase degree completion and increasing the flexibility of course delivery mechanisms. Although most presidents believe that they have sufficient data to effectively demonstrate student success, only one in four think their schools are very effective in how they use those data.

Results from this survey indicate that institutional identity, including the mission of an institution and how they live out that mission, is not well perceived, at least in the view of college presidents. Since understanding institutional identity is integral to effectively communicating what distinguishes an organization in a sea of competitors, this is an area in which colleges and universities can improve in order to thrive in these disruptive times in higher education.