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Repositioning Fundraising and Resource Development for a Post-pandemic Era: A Presidential Challenge and Suggested Directions

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ABSTRACT

As the COVID 19 pandemic subsides, thought unevenly in time and location, its immediate and long-range impact is becoming clearer. Presidents are realizing that institutional life will never completely return to former times. Each institution of higher education will need to reposition for the new era. Guiding their institution in meeting this challenge is the new role for the president. Understanding the landscape and its potential impact to the institution, is a needed first step in leading in the post pandemic era. This study examines current thinking regarding the impact of the pandemic on institutions of higher education. Attention is focused on the fiscal underpinning and external sources of support. The role of the president in maintaining the resource base in this new environment is analyzed. In conclusion, a discussion of needed changes to institutional fundraising strategies and suggested immediate actions are presented.

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Signs that higher education was facing significant challenges were in evident before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Changing demographics were impacting enrollments. The national economy and state revenues were reflected in declining support. Increase in student debt, the disconnect between academic priorities and workforce needs, coupled with the effects of the ‘culture wars’ sweeping the country, contributed to a growing lack of public support for a collegiate education. The sudden arrival of the pandemic forced the closing of most campus functions, a shift to remote instruction, a disruption or halting of research efforts, and an interruption of institution-community interactions. Presidents found themselves in an uncharted and challenging environment. As the pandemic has worn on, it has become evident that a return to pre-pandemic conditions is unlikely. Institutional repositioning is underway. Resources are the key to success; and this is a presidential responsibility.

Presidents Role in Fundraising

The importance of the fundraising function of the president cannot be underestimated. Since the founding of colleges, a presidential expectation is that ample resources will be available to support the institutional mission. These expectations have increased as pressures for fiscal stability has exacerbated. A national study found close to 80% of presidents across all sectors reported that fund raising was one of the main activities that occupied their time. This pre-

pandemic study found that 85% of the presidents felt that alternative revenues would grow in their institutional budget, clarifying the import of fundraising (American Council on Education, 2017).

Studies of presidential recruitment, selection and success in office highlight the centrality of fundraising skills and experience. The Deloitte's Center for Educational Excellence study of the presidency (2017) reported that fundraising was an essential function, growing in importance over the president's tenure in office. Gearhart and Miller (2021) came to a similar conclusion in their analysis of the presidential role in fundraising. In a study of presidents in Texas, Satterwhite & Cedja (2005) examined the fundraising functions attributed to presidential fundraising success. Clevenger (2018, January-June) reviewed the presidential skills needed for success in fundraising. In a review of management skills for presidents, Toliver III & Murry (2017) reported fiscal management and fundraising to be of significance. June (2020, March 1) analyzed over 200 college president job ads across all sectors of higher education. Common to all announcements was the importance of fundraising experience and skills in presidential recruitment and selection.

While the literature demonstrates the importance of fundraising and resource development, differing institutional missions highlight presidential expectations and strategies that closely align with institutional needs. Illustrative of these differences are those for research universities (Duderstadt, 2000; Lombardi 2013), for small colleges (Mitchel & King, 2018; Morphew & Braxton, 2017; Schuman, 2005), for comprehensive regional universities (Jackson, 2013; Schneider & Deane, 2015), for HBCU's (Gasman, 2001; Mahone, 2021) or for community colleges (Gearhart & Miller, 2018; Glass, Jr., & Jackson, 1998). Worth & Lambert (2017) outline the scope of a comprehensive fundraising strategy across institutional types.

Institutional repositioning, consistent with mission and the new environment, has become a presidential imperative. As presidents lead their institution into the post pandemic era, fundraising and resource development may well become an even more critical presidential function.

Impact of the Pandemic

As the pandemic moves into its third academic year, decline is sporadic and uneven, with a lasting impact in evidence across the higher education landscape. Unlike other crisis, the pandemic instantly disrupted every aspect of collegiate life. Colleges were forced to suspend all on-campus activities; students, faculty, and staff were sent home, instruction moved to on-line, advising and administrative functions to virtual communication, other campus activities cancelled. An organization based on face to face, social interactions suddenly became an organization designed around technology dependent connections. The impact of this shift was felt across all institutions. Return to usual operations were neither immediate or comprehensive.

Impact on Enrollments

The pandemic had an immediate negative impact on enrollments which continues. By spring 2021 several trends were evident. Overall enrollments declined (-4.2%), with undergraduate

numbers driving the drop (-5.9%). The largest decrease was across the 18-24 age cohort. Public institutions reported larger declines than private colleges. Community colleges experienced the largest declines (-11.3%). Students from underrepresented groups and of traditional age were most prevalent in community college declines. Graduate enrollments increased (+3.7% in master's programs and +8.2% in doctoral degree programs). Additionally, fewer transfer students enrolled in college (Busta, 2021, June 14; Schwartz, 2021, August 31; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021, September 2). Enrollment patterns of international students followed similar trends (Baer & Martel, 2020, November; Institute of International Education, 2020, November 16; Schwartz, 2021, April 5).

The projection of future enrollments is problematic at best. WICHE released its latest edition of *Knocking at the College Door* in December 2020 projecting high school graduation numbers. However, the many dimensions of the pandemic across all levels of education have called into question the accuracy of the projections. Current analysis of the data suggests the pandemic appears to have had a limited immediate effect. However, the long-term effect on the high school graduation 'pipeline' is not clear (Bransberger, 2021, July).

The pandemic has surfaced new behaviors, concerns and attitudes across college populations. Mental health issues among college students have increased to the level that it is a top concern of college and university presidents (INSIDE Higher Ed, 2021; Taylor, et. al., 2021). McKenzie (2021, April) summarized the findings from the Digital Learning Pulse survey, a fourth in a series published by Bay View Analytics in partnership with Cengage, the Online Learning Consortium, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies and the University Professional and Continuing Association. Overall, the study found a positive view of online courses post-pandemic. A significant majority (73%) of students surveyed preferred future instruction to be fully online while 68% desired a combination of on-line and in person course design. Faculty were less enthusiastic; 53% preferred teaching all on-line; 57% with hybrid course design. Another survey revealed student desire for additional flexibility in course design, delivery, with a clear career focus in their post-pandemic collegiate experience (Ascione, 2021, August 31). Finally, The Cengage Group recent survey (2021, September) found the top reason for students enrolling was to 'get a job'. Cost was listed as the #1 barrier to enrollment.

Impact on Institutional Programs and Services

Every campus experienced the impact of the pandemic. The immediate response was common across all campuses, closure and shift to virtual communication. It is the long-term positioning where institutional differences are evident. Campus plans are textured by a plethora of factors including, but not limited to, mission, institutional type, location, size, and resource base. Emerging are several models of the post pandemic college or university. Radecki & Schonfeld (2020, October 20) focused on the future of the research-intensive university while Volk & Bendix (2020) considered the future of the liberal arts college. Lester (2020) and National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) (2021) outlined future models for the community college. Other studies and analyses have produced an array of alternative future models (Deloitte Center for Higher Education Excellence, 2020; Kim & Maloney, 2020; Selingo, 2020; Selingo & Clark, 2021, October 8; Stanley 2019; TIAA-EY Parthenon, 2020).

Institutions are following one of three strategies to reposition in a post pandemic environment. Some desire to return to residential campus with face-to-face interactions. Alternatively, some will re-design to a full remote campus with on-line instruction and virtual interactions. Many are moving to a hybrid model; some face-to face; some on-line courses supported by a similar redesign in delivery of service and administrative functions (Selingo & Clark ,2021, October 8). Regardless of the strategy selected, the focus will be on a more student-centered institution, increased flexibility in scheduling and services, supported by an increased use of technology. Cost and career relevance will drive future enrollments. Research intensive universities will find research relevance, need for expanded partnerships, and changing priorities from funding sources influencing institutional redesign. Across all institutional types, resources will be challenged inviting expanded strategies for fundraising and resource development.

Impact on Finances and Budgets

Like other aspects of the pandemic intrusion into institutional life, impact on higher education finances and institutional budgets are of major concern. The American Council on Education (ACE) surveyed presidents over the first year of the pandemic. In the final survey, presidents continued to rate mental health of students of highest concern followed by mental health of faculty and staff. The long-term financial viability of the institution was rated of highest concern by 41%. A majority (60%) of the presidents reported an increase in institutional expenses, while 72% reported a decrease in revenues as a result of the pandemic (Taylor, et. al., 2021, March 4). The INSIDE Higher Ed 2021 Survey of College and University Presidents (Jaschik & Lederman, 2021) reported similar presidential concerns for the immediate and long-term financial viability.

In fall 2019, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APIU) (2020) surveyed their membership across leadership groups regarding the top challenges facing their institution and how to respond. Seventy seven percent (77%) felt governmental funding was the top challenge. No significant differences were found between leadership groups. i.e., presidents, provosts/vice presidents, and deans. The study followed up the findings with in-depth interviews with presidents (APIU, 2020). Finley (2021) survey a sample of stakeholders, presidents, middle managers, and faculty, across American Association of Colleges and Universities institutions. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the respondents ranked ‘financial constraints’ the most significant challenge facing the member institutions in responding to the pandemic.

However, the 2021 INSIDE Higher Ed Survey of College and University Business Officers suggested a more optimistic view of current finances. They noted the influx of federal dollars as a major contributor to lessening the pressure on the immediate fiscal situation. They project a positive financial picture based on the assumptions of improved over-all economy, solid enrollment, increased revenue streams and targeted institutional reforms (Lederman, 2021, July 28). Institutional response to these assumptions suggests repositioning as a priority activity.

Impact on Revenue Streams

The major revenue streams supporting college and university budgets differ by institutional type. Nationally public college and university revenues are 20% tuition and fees, 7% auxiliary services, 41% government appropriations, 3% interest, and 29% all other sources. For private

institutions the distribution is 34% tuition and fees, 8% auxiliary services, 12% governmental appropriations, 12% interest, and 36% all others. All have been impacted by the pandemic environment. (IES NCES, 2021).

Tuition and fees. Tuition and fee revenues are enrollment driven. The decline in enrollments since the pandemic has resulted in a net revenue decline for fiscal years 2020 and 2021. Moody's Investors Service reported about 75% of private colleges and 60% of public colleges reported net decline in revenue as compared with 39% and 54% respectively in 2020. The anticipated continued decline in enrollment suggests continuing fiscal pressures (Bauer-Wolf 2020, October 29; Moody's Investors Service, 2020, March 18). Disruption to campus functions continue to have a negative impact on auxiliary revenues from housing, foodservices, bookstores, student activities, athletics, and other campus events.

Federal, State, and Local Support. Federal support to higher education comes through two major sources, student financial aid and research support. Institutional type plays an important role in the allocation of the second of these funding sources.

The plethora of federal scholarships and grants, the most influential of which are PELL grants, were generally not impacted through the pandemic. Many federal grants, loans, and scholarships are directed toward underserved student populations. Institutions with large numbers of these students were well served.

Institutional allocations through the CARES act were partially targeted at student support. This was a one-time appropriation with continuation unlikely. Most of the federal support for graduate students supports enrollment at research intensive universities.

For the first time in decade earmarks are being introduced into the appropriation process (Gravelly, 2021, July 21) suggesting a future source of project or one-time funding.

Federal support of research directed primarily to programs at research intensive universities has remained relatively unaffected through the pandemic (Monahan, 2021, September 29). To be determined is the impact on internal research enablement and support (Radecki & Schonfeld, 2020, October 26; Radecki & Schonfeld, 2021, February 21).

State revenues and funding for higher education vary across the states. This factor alone is results in an uneven impact. Reports from the State High Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) estimated that 70% in the states will experience a decline in higher education tax appropriations, 2021 over 2020 (Laderman & Tandberg, 2021). The National Association of State Budget Directors (NASBD) (2021) observe that the declines over the same period were not as great as initially expected at the start of the pandemic. Even with stable state economies, enrollment driven allocation formulas will affect institutional budgets.

Community colleges also rely on local tax support. Nationally, 20% of their budgets rely on this revenue source (DataPoints, 2020, July 6). State and local economy influence these allocations going forward.

Institutional Foundation Support. College and University affiliated foundations create and manage endowment funds providing a payout to the institution. Here too, the pandemic is affecting this revenue stream. Profiting from the strong stock market in recent years, endowments have grown (Whitford, 2021, August 4). Concurrently, only a few presidents (17%) indicated an increased endowment pay out rate or use of endowment funds to offset current budget challenges (INSIDE Higher Ed President Survey, 2021). Endowments are often program specific and ‘in it for the long-haul.’ Presidents will need to work with their foundation leaders to reassess their investment strategies and interest pay out as the economic impact of the pandemic years evolves (Goldenberg-Hart, 2020, December 18; Myers, 2021, May 21).

Impact on Expenses

Over the pandemic, pressures on reducing institutional expenses, long a topic of concern, only exacerbated. Growth in instructional and administrative costs are well documented (Neetu, 2021, March). The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (2021) report illustrate that these trends have not had a positive impact on student achievement and completion. Friga (April 20, 2020) identifies areas across an institutional budget that should be examined for potential savings. The pre-pandemic focus on building enhanced campus facilities to attract enrollment is now challenged, leaving some institutions with significant debt.

Conversely, re-emerging from the pandemic has produced new areas demanding additional attention and resources. A majority of presidents surveyed over the course of the first two years of the pandemic reported an increase in institutional expenses directly related to the pandemic (Taylor, et. al., 2021). Going forward, additional support for mental health assistance (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020) and developing an effective technology infrastructure including professional development (Scott, 2010, August 27) will place additional pressure on institutional budgets.

Impact on Philanthropic Support

The importance of philanthropic support to higher education cannot be underestimated. Institutional endowments built from contributions from alumni and friends are an important source of revenue. Revenue from foundations, corporations, and joint ventures provide additional avenues of support. Philanthropic support is dependent upon a successful match between doner interests and the institutional response. Changes in either may result in an interruption in support. Presidents will need to recognize external changes and adjust philanthropic efforts as they guide their institution in a post pandemic environment.

Over the first two years of the pandemic individuals, foundations, and corporations set a record for philanthropic donations. Individual giving continued to generate the largest amount, with wealthier doners increasing their contributions while smaller doner giving declined. Most foundation wealth grew at a solid rate fueled by the strong market. Corporate giving decreased by 6.1% reflecting concerns about the economy. Needs for pandemic relief and response to racial unrest became prominent giving priorities. (CCC Fundraising, 2021) The 2020 Bank of America/Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy survey of charitable giving patterns by affluent households reported that a majority of doners shifted from organization

based giving to issue based support. The finding that wealthy donors care more about supporting a cause than giving to a charity simply because of past support will have an impact on fundraising strategy (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2021).

The pandemic has had a negative impact on philanthropic support to high education. Charitable giving across the higher education subsector declined. The Blackbaud Institute (2021) reported a -5.4% decline for higher education in 2020 and a -1.3% three year rolling trend. Higher education did enjoy the highest average gift; \$1671, against an overall average gift of \$737. The CCS Fundraising Philanthropic Climate survey (conducted in January 2021) found 39% of respondents indicated increased fundraising results; 44% reported a decline. Only 27% projected increases for 2021 while 43% predicted a continuing decline (CCS Fundraising, 2021, January). Similar findings were found in an ERB survey where one in four institutions reported a 30% or more decline in fundraising revenues (Martin, February 03, 2021).

Priorities for giving have been impacted and will drive future fundraising efforts. The three new driving trends; student support, response to racial issues and economic inequities, and enhance technology are superseding more traditional institutional priorities such as building and facilities, athletics, campus activities or niche programs. Moving to a student-centered campus will be necessary to strengthen solicitation (Rosowsky, 2021, June 5; Scutari, 2021, June 16; Stoute, 2021, July 26).

Finally, the pandemic has challenged fundraising strategies. Lockdowns have curtailed or eliminated face to face cultivation and solicitation. Absent or diminished campus activities has limited a powerful motivator for building alumni enthusiasm and support. The pivot to a more digital outreach mode is challenging higher education personnel to seek effective cultivation and solicitation efforts (Bremer, 2020, May 8; Cloud, 2020, May 19; Martin-Barbero & Luscurain,, 2020, December 10; Perlmutter, 2020, March 29; RNL, 2021). Each campus will need to develop a combined in-person and technology facilitated fundraising style.

In sum, the pandemic has affected all aspects of higher education. Changes to revenue streams and modes of resource acquisition are pervasive and significant. With little evidence to suggest a return to a pre-pandemic environment, each institution now faces the challenge of readjusting its institutional strategies, tactics and programs consistent in response to this new reality. Restoring, maintaining, and, ideally, enhancing the institution's financial position is an immediate task facing the president. Clearly, previous fundraising and revenue strategies will need to be repositioned in response to the current and future environment

Repositioning Fundraising and Resource Development

The following illuminates six important steps a president will need to take in repositioning the institution to effectively maintain a productive fundraising and resource development agenda. Each individual college or university face a unique set of conditions. History, mission, governance, location and but a few of the considerations that will inform the repositioning. The landscape illustrates that former strategies will not be productive in meeting future fiscal needs. A major challenge facing the president is to position fundraising and resource development

consistent with institutional mission its desired future and the realities of the post-pandemic environment.

Shifts to Reposition Fundraising and Resource Development

| From Pre-Pandemic | To Post-Pandemic |
|--|--|
| Strategic planning | Scenario planning |
| Institutional focus | Student focus |
| Targeted revenue streams | Multi-, goal-focused revenue streams |
| President as "chief fundraiser" Development Office | President as fundraising team leader All-campus function, Development Office support service |
| Communication, messaging often mixed or by function | Coordinated, transparent, goal and achievement oriented |
| Face-to-face orientation – Technology as support | High tech/High touch – technology as integral to strategy |

Shift to Include Scenario Planning

Given the volatile and uncertain environment as the pandemic wears on, an additional planning model, scenario planning, is necessary to guide institution actions including fundraising and resource development. Scenario planning is about creating alternative institutional futures depending on environmental trends and events. Each scenario projects needed institutional actions including resources. While a plethora of scenario planning models are available (for example, Hanover Research, 2020; or Sayers, 2010, January 2), the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) model focuses on institutional recovery and future amidst a ‘volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA)’ environment. Scenario plans include both impact on and creation of resources under ‘what if’ conditions. The development of a college or university scenario plans coupled with the institutions strategic plan should result with an understanding of the colleges desired future with ‘how are we going to get from A to B’ and ‘what will it cost’ (Santilli & Wutka, 2020, October 2).

The president will need to direct the development of a scenario plan that can supplement the institutions strategic plan. A review and dissemination to major stakeholders requires presidential involvement and leadership. Along with the strategic plan, scenario plans should provide a roadmap for fundraising and resource development; transparent and clearly communicated to all.

Shift to a Student Focus

A review of the philanthropic environment reveals that many foundations, corporations, and governmental funding sources are placing priority on student success. Support across the student demographics of first generation, adult, and those from traditionally underserved populations are of interest to many philanthropic organizations. Many corporations have signaled this priority. Alumni and friends support will continue, dependent upon the strength of the donor-institutional bond. Here too, interest may shift toward activities that can offer direct support for

student success. Campaigns seeking support for buildings, athletics, niche programs, and the more traditional ‘enhancements’ may no longer be view as a high priority by potential donors.

The president will need to review and reprioritize projects and strategies. The new environment demands a focused set of priorities. Documented evidence of success with previous projects will enhance solicitation or grant requests.

Shift to Multi, Goal Focused, Revenue Streams

The new environment will require institutions to maximize resources from all available funding sources. Darden (2021) argues that an ‘entrepreneurial’ focus will be needed for institutional viability going forward. Each institution needs to develop a portfolio of funding opportunities across all sectors of philanthropy and external support. Alumni and friends’ networks will need to be expanded and nurtured. Foundation and corporate funding will need be approached. Governmental grants and contracts offer another revenue opportunity. With enrollment being a significant driver of institutional revenue, all efforts to attract and retain students provides another revenue enhancement strategy.

Presidential leadership encouraging the creation of a multi revenue stream approach to fundraising and resource development will be required. Discussion of this strategy with all stakeholder groups is called for. Review of internal policies and resources to ensure that they support seeking new funding resources should be a high priority. Partnerships between the institution and interested stakeholder groups will need be enhance. Cooperative projects should be facilitated. Such arrangements can only be articulated, encouraged, legitimized, and enhanced through explicit presidential interventions.

Shift to President as ‘Team Leader’

College and university presidents have always been the institutions ‘chief fundraiser’ and that responsibility will not diminish. Most institutions leave the fundraising activities to president, an advancement department and the institution’s Foundation. The post pandemic environment will require institutions to expand their revenue streams. This shift will necessitate an all-campus view of fundraising with everyone having an important role. The president’s role will need to move to ‘chief team leader for fundraising’; the advancement office as resource center and campus consultant to enhance funds, and all stakeholders involved.

As a starting point, presidents might immediately convene conversations with the Board and the Advancement leadership and staff regarding the current state of institutional fundraising. The scenario plan will provide information and context for the discussions. Desired changes in policy, procedure, staffing and functions should be identified. These ‘work products’ could serve as a focus for a broader institutional conversation. At the conclusion of these sessions a clear workplan needs be developed and disseminated. If fundraising and resource development is to be repositioned to meet current and future needs, visible presidential actions are required.

Shift to Coordinated, Goal and Achievement Focused, Communication/Messaging

A variety of communication modes are available to the many units within a college and university. Over time, all need to get important information to key internal and/or external stakeholders. This makes consistency in messaging a challenge. Beyond communicating matters of administrative and academic matters, the presentation of the institution to external audiences is of import. A clear, coordinated strategy presenting a focused, success-oriented institution, worth of support will undergird fundraising efforts.

Only the president can assure that such messaging is in operation. The president, in reviewing institutional communication, should make sure that mission, future institutional configuration and programs, communication, and fundraising priorities and strategies are closely aligned. Institutional messaging, both internal and external, that project an 'all things for all people' will make fundraising efforts difficult. In the new era philanthropic agencies will support institutions that project a clarity of purpose, with documented accomplishments that support announced goals.

Shift to High-Tech/High Touch Communication Strategies

Fundraising is known as a relationship enterprise. Building face to face contacts guided fundraising strategies. Lockdowns and closed campuses lead to cancelled or disrupted personal or group development functions. Communication by internet or virtual events became the norm. As colleges and universities reopen, there is no reason to believe that total return to only face to face relationships will occur. Technology will continue to be an important component in fundraising and resource development. New configurations of high-tech and high-touch cultivation and solicitation will need to be developed and installed.

The president will need to assure that an appropriate technology infrastructure is in place to support all campus stakeholders. IT will need to be present in institutional planning for fundraising and resource development. Ample professional development opportunities across all campus members will be needed. Presidential leadership will be needed to prioritize and support such activities. Partnerships with technology companies to the mutual benefit of both will require presidential leadership and support.

Conclusion

The pandemic has disrupted all aspects of a college and university life. Return to prior institutional characteristics is unlikely. A repositioned organization able to successfully thrive in this new era is the new challenge facing the president. Given the reality of current and future economy and college/university fiscal structure, adjustments to fundraising and resource development have become one of the presidents most critical and vexing challenges. Presidents are invited to consider six shifts in current practice to respond to the post pandemic era.

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