

Academic Innovation Incubators:

Emerging Models and Strategic Considerations for Leaders



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Leaders of colleges and universities are deeply concerned about how best to leverage academic innovation to improve student success, strengthen learning outcomes, and enhance the experience of a postsecondary education. Academic innovation—for example, “product innovations” such as competency-based education, or “process innovations” such as new pedagogical formats and tools—can help meet the demands of students, parents, employers, politicians, and other stakeholders for greater access; for demonstrable learning outcomes; for efficiencies in time to completion; for enhanced learning support; and more. At scale, academic innovation may help to address concerns over ever-rising tuition costs. With institution-wide adoption, academic innovation can even transform organizational approaches to core functions (e.g., academic advising, general education design, and developmental education delivery) at colleges and universities for faculty, staff, and other internal stakeholders. But many leaders find themselves awash in a sea of urgent priorities and significant performance pressures, unable to give desired amounts of focus and attention to supporting academic innovation development at an enterprise-wide level. In response, academic “innovation incubators”—specialized units dedicated to the identification, selection, and implementation of solutions at the institutional level—begin to emerge across the higher education landscape to ensure that academic innovation is prioritized in some way, as other units continue to focus on the core business. Institutions are experimenting with the form and function of these incubator units, resulting in a diversity of structures, mandates, and outcomes across higher education.

As we consider this development, a number of questions arise:

- At a time when many institutions are cutting expenditures, merging units, and sharing personnel, are dedicated academic innovation units a productive investment?
- Is this work being done wholly or in part or at the institution already (either centrally or in a distributed model)?
- How can an institution identify the best-fit model that fosters engagement across campus or across a system without stifling organic innovation or resulting only in a set of small projects with limited impact and exposure?
- Is the academic innovation unit the beginning of a long-term trend or simply a flash-in-the-pan response to the proliferation of new solutions presenting themselves to the education industry?
- How can presidents/chancellors, system offices, and boards work cooperatively to support meaningful academic innovation that demonstrates a direct contribution to student success without unnecessarily taxing already constrained resources and focus?

To help answer these questions, Huron Consulting Group and the American Council on Education (ACE) conducted research throughout 2014 to gauge some of the current thinking and practices of select institutions on this issue and to provide insight for institutional leaders considering their next steps. A survey of a sample of ACE member institutions (N=224) revealed that approximately 10 percent had any organized institutional-level unit or effort dedicated to academic innovation development. Follow-up interviews provided further context and included discussions with Arizona State University (ASU); Miami Dade College; University of Connecticut; University System of Maryland (USM); and University of Maryland University College (UMUC). Finally, additional interviews with leaders of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation provided a national perspective and further considerations.

We present insights from our discussions and findings and offer mini-case examples from our interviews to illustrate and deepen points of emphasis.

Defining Academic Innovation and Academic Innovation Incubators

What is meant by academic innovation and transformation in this context? For the purposes of this research, we defined academic innovations as those that address challenges to and augment outcomes around student success and completion. These innovations—including educational technologies, tools, and solutions; pedagogical models and formats; extending, bridging, or alternative credentials; and practices, policies, and programs—can be sustaining or disruptive. For example, academic innovations can include:

- Product innovation (e.g., competency-based education programs)
- Process innovation (e.g., long transcripts)
- Source/supply innovation (e.g., open educational resource development or curation)
- Market/audience innovation (e.g., an emerging global middle class seeking free or low-cost professional development)
- Organizational innovation (e.g., academic innovation incubators)

Our research and analysis here considers the viability and potential of the specific organizational innovation emerging to develop, manage, and grow other innovations on behalf of a college or university: the dedicated academic innovation unit.

Can Dedicated Innovation Units Be a Productive Investment? ASU Case Example

“You have one year to accomplish lofty goals and to drive bold initiatives.” – Jacqueline Smith, Executive Director

Select early-career policymakers, analysts, researchers, communicators, designers, and leaders at the Arizona State University (ASU) Office of University Initiatives hear this as they prepare to participate in the Fellowship in University Innovation Program. Fellows in this program have 13 months to develop innovative initiatives and projects (e.g., social or community projects, ASU programs, partnerships, processes, policies, etc.) on behalf of the institution and report outcomes to the president’s office. Fellows are expected to define and manage their initiatives end-to-end: identifying opportunities, scoping a portfolio of projects, performing due diligence, providing project management and development support, and ensuring a smooth hand-off to the unit or organization that will house the projects post-launch.

ASU’s Office of University Initiatives is one of an emerging kind of innovation incubator in higher education—a unit that is dedicated to the identification, selection, and implementation of academic-program and service innovation at the institutional level. The Fellowship in University Innovation Program is itself an example of an academic innovation for ASU: a differentiated approach to the identification of potential talent for the institution and an onboarding that immerses this talent pool immediately into non-siloed, collaborative, dynamic, and outcomes-driven environments that foster design thinking and thoughtful experimentation. The resulting innovative projects and initiatives are an added bonus for the university. At a time when many institutions confront deeply-entrenched staff and faculty resistance to change, ASU has developed a steady pipeline of alumni of its Fellowship program, some of whom are now embedded across the campus and in partner organizations, acting as change agents with well-honed skills.

Staffing:	One director; three fellows; one research coordinator; one research specialist; one manager for special projects and operations; five student employees (mix of undergraduate and graduate)
Funding Source:	Centrally funded
Example Initiatives:	Changemaker Central, MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program, Center for Science and the Imagination

The Challenge: Moving Beyond Historical Approaches

Dedicated academic innovation units are not new. Historically, the development of transformative approaches to education design and delivery took place at the fringe of the industry: in continuing education and extension units, in earnest but isolated teaching and learning centers, in small and siloed pockets across campus at the program or individual faculty level, and inside a handful of institutions that were pioneers in such areas as prior learning assessment and competency-based education. Teaching and learning centers—located within the core of higher education institutions—have historically reflected some of the most traditional academic values and models. This visible and mainstream position thus limits their ability to push pedagogical boundaries into areas of potential discomfort for traditional academe. Instead, experiments in the design and delivery of education could more safely take place—from a brand and outcomes perspective—in a continuing education unit or a post-traditional higher education institution working often with adult learners who have some prior exposure to postsecondary education or a college credential. Despite great progress and success in terms of academic innovation and financial sustainability, these post-traditional units and institutions suffer from marginalization in higher education. As a result, this kind of academic innovation became one of the best kept secrets in higher education.

But are these historical models sufficient to address the range of needs and the scale required to effectively innovate in this era of intense competition and scrutiny? We believe the answer is increasingly no. The higher education industry owes much to these pioneers who identified marginalized audiences and built or deployed creative solutions to meet the specific needs of those audiences. However, the competition for finite audiences and resources is no longer at the academic program or unit level. In order to successfully compete for students and deliver the educational value and outcomes expected, postsecondary institutions must develop an institution-level mindset and a structure or set of processes to support organizational learning and continuous improvement in education design, delivery, and assessment.

Is This Work Already Being Done on Campus? University of Connecticut Case Example

“We take our direction from an old adage, ‘form follows function,’ which practically translated suggests that organizational structure should follow organizational strategy. At the University of Connecticut we needed an organizational structure that would allow us to advance our institutional strategy of integrated and centralized resources for promoting and supporting teaching and learning across all modalities (face-to-face, hybrid, online). We wanted to ensure that whatever we did in the online and hybrid space reflected our same commitment to faculty and students in the more traditional face-to-face space. So we asked ourselves, how do we accomplish all of this?” – Peter Diplock, Assistant Vice Provost

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the University of Connecticut represents the integration of the former Continuing Education unit within the Institute for Teaching and Learning. It allowed for the creation of a full suite of faculty support, from course development to online and entrepreneurial program and marketing support. CETL works collaboratively with faculty and administrators to identify new program opportunities and emerging audiences; vets the programs; coordinates program approval; launches and administers the new program through a one-year incubation support period; grows academic unit capacity through coaching faculty leaders in marketing, program management, and program financial planning; and then hands the program over to the academic unit to run. “The metaphor we like to use... we drive the bus around the block for the first year and then we hand the keys off to school specific program staff,” said Diplock. The Center is now home to self-directed teams of instructional designers, educational technologists, and generalists who work closely with academic units and faculty.

The Center is an example of previously disparate academic innovation hubs being centralized or combined in order to provide institutional-level strategic service. Outcomes include strengthened market strategy with reduced risk, reduced cycle time in program approval, increased use of technology and analytics across campus, the reduction of academic unit silos through the cross-pollination of interdisciplinary entrepreneurial programs, and enhanced academic unit capabilities and capacity in an entrepreneurial space. This centrally mandated and funded model leverages the specialized expertise and experiences of two historical models (continuing/entrepreneurial education and teaching and learning excellence) in a partnership with the academic units. “We had a good track record of innovation but a poor track record of sharing/spreading

that innovation. Our new structure allows us to spur innovation, but more importantly be a force multiplier of that innovation in a way that ultimately benefits our students and key stakeholders,” said Diplock.

Staffing:	45 FTEs, including instructional designers, educational technologists, and generalist liaisons to academic units
Funding Source:	Centrally funded
Example Initiatives:	Blended and low-residency learning program designs; faculty institutes that promote innovation in teaching and learning across all modalities

Emerging Models: Leveraging Lessons Learned but Still a Work in Progress

Emerging models of dedicated academic innovation units differ significantly from historical models. Most emerging-model units are embedded at the core of an institution, reporting to the provost or president. The units tend to be centrally funded (at least to start) and represent an institutional-level agenda centered on student outcomes, capacity-building, and institutional transformation. Rather than staff, these units are often run by academic specialists/former faculty who have significant classroom experience, administrative experience, and research expertise, often in areas that complement academic innovation know-how such as cognitive science and pedagogical models. The units tend to be very lean, often with five or fewer salaried FTEs. The units tend to research, incubate, manage effective implementation, and then hand off innovative initiatives post-launch rather than provide ongoing daily management of innovative programs and projects. The mandate of many of these units comes from the top; thus, the work of these units often has a direct impact on how campus faculty members teach, how they design and develop their curricula, and what credentials they offer. In sum, these units overcome many of the challenges faced by historical-model units: not only do they have a seat at the table, but they also help set the institutional agendas for change.

Risks exist, however, as these models are relatively new and untested. Many academic innovation incubator units were created only one to two years ago. Institutions risk human and financial capital in support of a unit with an unforeseeable future and mandate. For some colleges and universities, many current forms of academic innovation may pose enough risk to the institutional brand that the efficacy of an academic innovation unit is severely constrained. And most concerning is the potential for an academic innovation unit to move an institution backward rather than forward, either through faulty analysis/mismeasurement of the impact of an academic innovation or through the mismanagement of the unit such that an academic innovation backlash results. Common mistakes have included:

- A lack of transparency across campus around the mandate, activities, and outcomes of this unit
- Missed opportunities to foster cross-campus dialogue regarding emerging research, best practices from outside of the institution, and the latest findings from current initiatives resulting in lack of campus engagement
- Misunderstanding the highly collaborative requirements of providing and supporting academic innovation research on behalf of faculty and staff stakeholders in order to avoid turf disputes and competition for resources

How to Determine the Best-Fit Model and Foster Campus-Wide Engagement? UMUC Case Example

“The (now) president and I realized that we needed some kind of R&D group who can take the best of the ideas for improving learning experiences for students, study those ideas, and implement them in a systematic and continuous way... But we’re still working on what is the right model. You have to have a model in mind. Then you try to do applied research, and then you debrief on how to do it better and more quickly.” – Marie Cini, Provost

The Center for Innovation in Learning and Student Success (CILSS) at University of Maryland University College partners with the graduate and undergraduate schools to provide A/B-style testing and evaluation of promising academic innovations in order to advise faculty and the institution on where to invest for greatest impact. Rigorous measurement of results using metrics such as course completion rates, reenrollment rates, and graduation rates not only allows the Center to determine recommendations for UMUC investment, but also supports regular contributions to industry-level research and conference presentations on academic innovation. Once an initiative is found to be significantly more effective to assist students in learning or to increase retention rates, the concept is implemented by the relevant school more broadly.

The Center for Innovation in Learning and Student Success is not UMUC’s first attempt to develop an academic innovation incubator. Prior attempts suffered from siloed approaches that eventually caused them to stall out. The Center for Innovation in Learning and Student Success, however, is an exemplar of cross-campus collaboration. Faculty and administrators consider the Center a valued resource. Its director works closely with core faculty and academic support units throughout the research process, cross-pollinates ideas, and shares knowledge widely across campus, both from the Center’s work and from across the industry. Yet, UMUC describes even this successful model as a continuous work in progress. The Center continues to tweak processes

for opportunity identification, expectations regarding turnaround time of the research, research timetables (given the pace of innovation), and its own funding model to enable the hire of additional specialists.

Staffing:	One vice provost; three FTEs
Funding Source:	Centrally funded
Example Initiatives:	Adaptive technology, competency-based education, student tutoring

How to Determine the Best-Fit Model and Foster System-Wide Engagement? USM System Case Example

“After less than a year in my position, my role evolved significantly. Shortly after I started in June 2013, nearly every campus in the University System of Maryland created positions in the provost’s area or charged someone to coordinate academic innovation efforts across campus. My role at the system-level then transitioned from a faculty development coordinator to someone who helps create a path for these academic innovation efforts at the institutions by leveraging our ‘system-ness’ to create opportunities and remove barriers” – MJ Bishop, Director

The University System of Maryland’s Center for Academic Innovation works to enhance student learning at a lower cost by maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of campus-level academic innovation initiatives. The Center fosters collaboration among the Academic Innovation leaders at each campus and supports the coordination of R&D efforts. For example, the Center convenes monthly the Academic Transformation Advisory Council at which the Academic Innovation leaders (including Karen Vignare, vice provost for UMUC’s Center for Innovation in Learning and Student Success, discussed above) discuss not only individual campus initiatives but also how to outsource services and distribute resources across each of the campuses, based on institutional strengths, in support of those initiatives (e.g., exploring system-wide competency-based education and digital badging pilots, asking legal counsel on one campus to share its intellectual property expertise with the other system institutions). In addition, the Center advocates on behalf of the campuses to external stakeholders such as the state of Maryland for policy development in support of academic innovation (e.g., moving beyond the course as the only unit of measure in particular policies).

The University System of Maryland is a federated model that privileges the autonomy of institutions. Thus, rather than having a top-down quality, the Center adopts a service orientation toward the campuses: convening, cross-pollinating, aggregating issues for effective advocacy, and focusing energy of the campus innovation leaders on

collaborative problem-solving around common issues such as overcoming institutional silos and reexamining campus facilities investments in light of some of the academic innovation initiatives on the table. As a result, the campus leadership values leveraging the System rather than resisting System participation.

Staffing:	One director, one associate director
Funding Source:	Centrally funded by the state of Maryland/University System of Maryland, as well as by donations to the University System of Maryland Foundation
Example Initiatives:	Co-curricular badges to quantify outcomes for Student Affairs programming; long transcripts; learning object repository and open educational resources curation; learning analytics

The Bill & Melinda Gates and Lumina Foundations: Seeking Next Generation Models

While the progress made by these and other institutions around student success and academic transformation is laudable and promising, many stakeholders inside and outside of higher education seek even more fundamental shifts than already have been demonstrated. Rare are those universities that embrace transparency or openness to outside ideas in their consideration of how to best confront challenges and opportunities, according to the Bill & Melinda Gates and Lumina Foundations.

“Truly student-focused institutions are firing on lots of different cylinders. We don’t have any one institution that has hit it out of the ballpark entirely,” says Sheri Ranis, strategy director at Lumina Foundation. “However, we celebrate the first-generation innovation that some institutions have done.”

“There are perhaps a few types of institutions and centers that truly play in the space of innovation centers,” notes Suzanne Walsh, deputy director at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (henceforth referred to as the Gates Foundation). “Institutions that seem to be making the most notable strides in academic transformation are those for which a research mindset and design thinking are built into the institutional culture. This may be the more sustainable approach—the one that permeates all levels of the organization—rather than investing in a stand-alone unit.”

But for those institutions whose cultures do not reflect a “design-thinking” mindset, there may be benefits to considering a stop-gap measure, such as a dedicated academic innovation unit.

“Many institutions focus on what is currently problematic in pedagogy and curriculum—what is currently in the institutional DNA,” notes Ranis. “They take a measured approach in the spirit of ‘small i’ innovation—a step in a direction, rather than throwing open the doors to source new ideas or to completely start over. That kind of chaotic, free-flowing approach does not work well for most higher education institutions. Instead, what becomes path-breaking is simply the design approach itself: plan, do, study, and adjust.”

Lumina Foundation cites competency-based education, prior learning assessment, and the evolving alignment at the state level of the K–12 sector with higher education as among the most exciting developments in higher education. “These ideas help us to attack problems in ways that are old and new, and sensitive to how students use higher education today,” says Ranis. “The emerging models of academic innovation units help to open dialogue with faculty around how to match aspirations of creativity and change with a culture and set of traditions often wary of that. They serve to help institutions transition from pockets of innovation activity to an institution-wide approach.”

Academic Innovation Incubators: Long-Term Trend or Flash-in-the-Pan? Miami Dade Case Example

“Now we have to decide: Once we have all these innovations in place, do we need to maintain the academic innovation center? Or maintain a reduced version of it? Or dismantle it entirely?”
— Rolando Montoya, Provost

Miami Dade College’s Student Achievement Initiatives is a grant-funded unit with a mandate to design an integrated and comprehensive model that increases and accelerates student success and completion across the student life cycle, from early intervention in high school to college admission, onboarding, pathways, and placement. To accomplish this, the Student Achievement Initiatives unit facilitates transformative change by guiding Miami Dade’s decision making through a multi-campus, cross-functional, and cross-disciplinary dialogue among faculty and key staff stakeholders (e.g., recruitment, admissions, student advising, etc.). In approximately three years, the college has accomplished a complete redesign of developmental education, alignment with high school curriculum, strengthened onboarding through summer boot campus, mandatory orientations, and intrusive advising, restructuring and streamlining of academic pathways, increased focus on internship and job placement, and a complete review of all academic policies (e.g., course registration, course transfer, etc.) to remove barriers to completion. The college describes its outcomes so far as “a revolution in Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Student

Services” and a movement toward ensuring “everything we do is college-wide and is able to be scaled that way.”

Miami Dade has hedged its bets on whether dedicated academic innovation units will be a long term solution. Unsure of funding beyond the initial grant period, the college decided to use the external funds to support a special unit staffed by temporary employees. These employees take an institutional-level view and act as internal consultants to promote change and innovation, guide and facilitate the change process, and develop and train faculty and student services staff to continue this work. The college ensures that final decisions remain with permanent Miami Dade faculty and staff, and that all of the resulting knowledge remains within the college. Miami Dade reallocates its own resources for the funding of any structures and positions that must be sustained beyond the grant period (e.g., investments in new student advisor positions, reengineering of current student advisor positions, major technology purchases, etc.).

Staffing:	Eight FTEs, including one director and subject matter experts in student services, curriculum and student pathways development, cost control and cost measuring, training and development, and PR/media
Funding Source:	Completion by Design grant from the Gates Foundation and some support from Lumina Foundation
Example Initiatives:	Prescribed student pathways; prioritized course registration periods; accelerated and modularized developmental education; new enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation to support outcomes analytics

Setting the Bar: Institutional Readiness Thresholds

Academic innovation units require a certain minimum threshold of institutional competencies to be in place before they can begin to be effective. Careful planning and thoughtful design are wasted if solutions cannot be meaningfully implemented and adopted.

In order to help guide senior leadership in the consideration of how to grow academic innovation and transformation efforts at their own institutions, we discussed with key leaders of the Gates Foundation some of the enabling institutional characteristics and readiness criteria that are critical to have in place prior to making significant investments in dedicated academic innovation units, staff, and solutions.

“There is no cookie-cutter approach,” says Daniel Greenstein, director of education in the Postsecondary Success in the United States Program at the Gates Foundation. “However, we do see certain commonalities among those institutions we believe are ready to move forward.”

Gates Foundation-Suggested Readiness Thresholds

1. Clarity of purpose and direction

An institution that is ready to engage in effective academic transformation understands and is clear about where it is now (e.g., its value proposition and market segments currently served), where it is headed, and how its business model may need to change in order to be effective. This clarity concerning purpose, direction, and milestones drives its focus and the choices it makes. For example, one institution might decide to be the economic development engine of its state, while another might target its programming for a percentage of the population with credentials in particular areas.

2. Effective and aligned governance

A “ready” institution has leaders who can get things done. This circumstance can arise in a number of ways. Some institutions have a president or chancellor who has been in place for 10 or more years and who can be innovative in the 10th year because of capacity-building in all the prior years. Some institutions hire new leadership with a specific mandate to envision, design, and oversee widespread change. In general, however, the president or chancellor cannot make everything happen alone. The institution benefits most from having the governance structure to accomplish what it sets out to do, and buy-in from both the board and the faculty senate to move institutional projects ahead. Board and faculty buy-in allows for a chancellor to sequence investments in such a way as to build toward particular outcomes over time, for example. Without the trust, engagement, and buy-in from the board and the faculty, many institutions end up with toothless strategic agendas, standalone projects, and eventually with project fatigue.

3. Data integrity

In order to see results from investment and commitment to academic innovation and transformation, an institution must be able to access and understand its own data (i.e., institutional research) and draw implications from that data in order to decide where to focus academic transformation for the greatest impact. An institution must know exactly where it is failing in order to address the root causes and show progress. An institution with data showing the greatest attrition among those in developmental education may choose to focus on crafting well-defined, highly constrained degree pathways for these students. An institution with data showing that low-income, underrepresented minority students fail out in great disproportion may focus on predictive analytic and student interventions. An institution seeking to reach a specialized

student demographic unable to come to campus will leverage data in the design of its virtual student services customized to that target segment, rather than to any potential online enrollee.

4. *Command over cost*

Many institutions lack a complete understanding of their costs and/or lack optimal organizational structures that enable decision makers to allocate and re-allocate funding across silos with ease. An institution that is making a commitment to student outcomes through academic innovation has the ability to discern where cost savings are possible across campus or as a result of leveraging academic innovation technology or programming, and to direct funding where it will have the most impact in support of the initiative. Revenue flows and cost transparencies are often important parts of gaining and keeping faculty buy-in and engagement with academic transformation.

5. *Effective academic program management*

A final signifier of “readiness” for academic transformation is the willingness of senior and academic leadership to work together to determine how to manage academic programs effectively (e.g., how to rationally develop section sizes to reduce the number of very small courses, how to perform due diligence for new program initiatives, how to ensure intentionality around programs that require subsidization from the institution). Without this commitment to a disciplined and transparent review, the institution may continue to require more money to compensate.

“If an institution is not mission-driven, does not have a vision of where it is going, cannot govern for results and drive to outcomes, and cannot measure costs, finance initiatives, or understand how to measure success, then internal obstacles may impede the impact of academic innovation investments,” cautions Greenstein.

Call to Action and Recommended Approach

As senior leaders weigh options regarding how best to engage in academic innovation and transformation, two major shifts in recent years serve to underscore the urgency in developing some kind of an academic innovation strategy:

- Universities are no longer fully in charge of their own destinies.

Special interests, the general public, and the federal government, through policy means such as the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, now hold as much sway in the discussions around where higher education is going as the institutions themselves. These discussions

will, for better or worse, greatly impact exactly how and to what degree higher education institutions can innovate. Developing the ability to articulate to an ever-widening pool of external stakeholders has never been more important for colleges and universities. Academic innovation units can speak directly to needs for shifts in policies and resources to support student success, as well as present evidence of progress made through academic innovation engagement.

- Consumer power in higher education has never been stronger or more discerning.

The shift in power from higher education institutions to their consumers (e.g., students, employers, and states) has a significant impact on how institutions organize and position themselves. This new context drives the current urgency around outcomes data collection and analysis, market responsiveness, performance, and more. Institutions must consider how best to meet an empowered external community that is demanding and impatient. Institutions that do not yet meet the academic innovation readiness criteria but believe that they can weather all of these changes and demands alone may find themselves in jeopardy.

“Postsecondary education is the ticket to a healthier life and we cannot fuel economic development without it,” says the Gates Foundation’s Greenstein. “So, whether we want to discuss equity or fueling the economy, we are discussing the same solution for both—high-quality, successfully credentialed people.”

For institutional leaders considering how to develop a strategy for academic innovation management, we recommend a two-pronged approach:

- Instituting a cross-functional strategic initiatives committee that uses a data-driven, objective, and transparent process for academic innovation opportunity identification, due diligence, selection, and prioritization. As the responsibility for strategic initiatives identification and selection should not reside with a single employee or unit, this committee can serve as a platform for thoughtful discussion and debate. The committee can consist of standing members who represent positions that can provide institutional-level perspectives on a variety of academic, regulatory, and administrative perspectives, including: market research; financial planning; IT planning; communication planning; academic program design, assessment, and quality assurance; federal, state, and program-level accreditation and regulation; and institution-specific policy and governance procedures. The committee can report to the provost and include deans, key leaders of the faculty senate, critical senior staff (e.g.,

finance and administration, IT, enrollment management, external relations), and two-year-term rotating members of the regular faculty and staff. We recommend an early fall session for strategic initiative identification. Opportunities should be scored in order to place them in priority order for due diligence and for further research and analysis. Due diligence can be performed through the remainder of the fall semester and can include market research, benchmarking and peer comparisons, vendor presentations, assessment of cost, alignment with overarching institutional strategy, internal polling, and more. Presentation of research and discussion can take place in early spring. We recommend that voting and final selection take place by mid-spring for budget and communication planning for pilot efforts in the coming year(s). Voting can be weighted to ensure institutional priorities and perspectives are appropriately represented in this process. Once the committee's recommendations have been finalized, the committee can appoint an internal project manager for each initiative who is accountable to the committee for implementation oversight and reporting. While not every year may yield the same number of sufficiently compelling ideas, an institution can—through the deliberative rigor and process of this committee—begin to create capacity for dialogue and decision-making across the academic-administrative divide and across academic units.

- Conducting thoughtful experimentation with a small academic innovation incubator unit or a position that reports to the Provost and works closely with the strategic initiatives committee by facilitating opportunity identification, providing project management, convening subject matter experts, disseminating current and best practices, augmenting due diligence, and making recommendations to the committee.

Through this two-pronged approach, senior leaders can grow internal capabilities and seek early wins while determining how best to structure academic innovation management efforts within the context of the institution's mission, current DNA and culture, path forward, and resources.

About Huron Education

Huron Education is dedicated to serving the higher education industry. We have a large team of professionals with extensive knowledge and experience in the business of higher education and academic medical centers. We deliver the most comprehensive services to the industry and partner with institutions to improve business performance across the enterprise.

About ACE

Founded in 1918, ACE is the major coordinating body for all the nation's higher education institutions, representing more than 1,600 college and university presidents, and more than 200 related associations, nationwide. It provides leadership on key higher education issues and influences public policy through advocacy. For more information, please visit www.acenet.edu or follow ACE on Twitter @ACEducation.

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Appendix A: Readiness Test for Institutions

The following diagnostic is designed to help leaders of colleges and universities determine how to begin to respond to the challenges and opportunities of academic transformation and student success. This set of strategic questions can be used as a framework for discussions with faculty, deans, provosts, senior administrators, and the board of trustees.

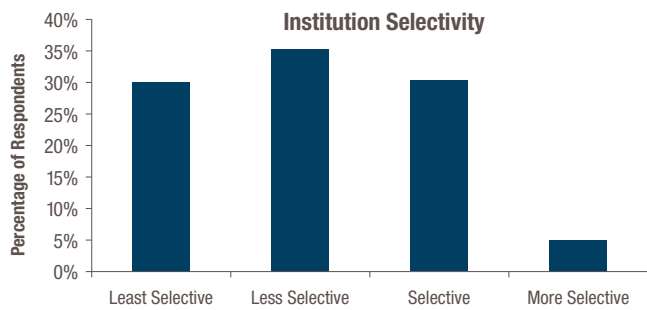
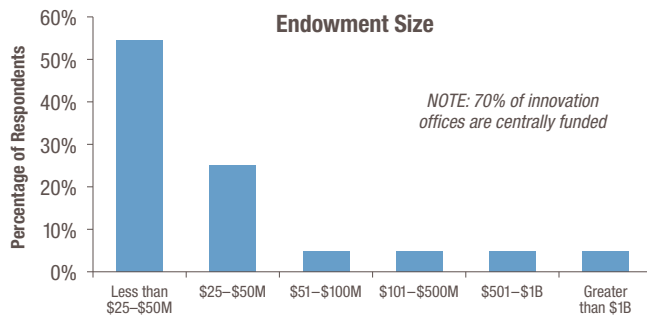
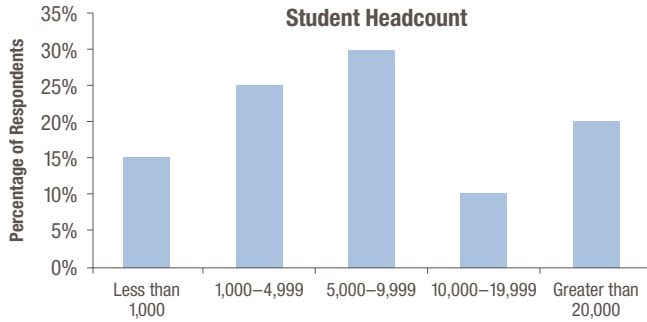
Scoring: Calculate the mean of responses across the group and the standard deviation. If the mean is below average, the institution is less than ready or has certain high risk areas to address. If the standard deviation for a particular category is high, there is wider disagreement among the group regarding the score, which may be cause for further discussion.

Category	Scoring
Clarity of institution's current value proposition (e.g., stated mission vs. what types of learners are currently and primarily served)	1 – No clarity of value proposition 2 – Attempts at building clarity underway 3 – Clarity for small pockets of stakeholders 4 – Cross-functional clarity at certain levels 5 – Widespread clarity cross-campus
Clarity of vision of where the institution aims to be in 20 years	1 – No clarity of vision 2 – Attempts at building vision underway 3 – Clarity for small pockets of stakeholders 4 – Cross-functional clarity at certain levels 5 – Widespread clarity cross-campus
Clarity of strategic and tactical plan to reach future vision, including milestones	1 – No clarity of plan and milestones 2 – Attempts at building plan and milestones underway 3 – Clarity for small pockets of stakeholders 4 – Cross-functional clarity at certain levels 5 – Widespread clarity cross-campus
Maturity of processes for identification and evaluation of enrollment strategy	1 – None 2 – Ad hoc 3 – Informal processes 4 – Formalized processes in silos 5 – Formalized and integrated processes
Degree of alignment of faculty senate with senior administration vision and plans	1 – None 2 – Occasional alignment 3 – Consistently aligned 4 – Fully aligned 5 – Fully aligned with integrated agendas
Degree of alignment of board with senior administration vision and plans	1 – None 2 – Occasional alignment 3 – Consistently aligned 4 – Fully aligned 5 – Fully aligned with integrated agendas
Degree of transparency around how decisions are made at the institutional level concerning institutional priorities and areas of focus	1 – None 2 – Selective transparency 3 – Majority transparent 4 – Fully transparent 5 – Fully transparent with stakeholder engagement processes
Degree of transparency around budgeting, revenue flows, and costs for unit and program decision makers	1 – None 2 – Selective transparency 3 – Majority transparent 4 – Fully transparent 5 – Fully transparent with stakeholder engagement processes

Level of commitment of decision makers to evidence-based decision making (e.g., engaging in robust cross-functional and cross campus discussions; consulting external sources of evidence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – None 2 – Attempts to create commitment underway 3 – Selective commitment 4 – Cross-functional commitment at certain levels 5 – Widespread commitment
Accessibility of institutional data to decision makers of units and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – No accessibility 2 – Limited or cumbersome accessibility 3 – Consistent accessibility 4 – Widely accessible 5 – Widely accessible and integrated into daily management tools
Degree of accuracy/reliability of institutional data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – None 2 – Attempts to address accuracy issues underway 3 – Accuracy limited to selective areas 4 – Consistently accurate in a majority of areas 5 – Accurate and reliable campus-wide
Degree of alignment of campus culture to an analytics mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – None 2 – Attempts to create culture underway 3 – Small pockets of alignment 4 – Cross-functional alignment at certain levels 5 – Widespread alignment
Degree of accountability of faculty leaders for academic program financial performance (e.g., meeting enrollment or financial targets, cost effectiveness, self-sustaining)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – None 2 – Attempts to create culture of accountability underway 3 – Small pockets of accountability 4 – Accountability in place for majority of programs 5 – Full accountability campus-wide
Degree of accountability of faculty leaders for academic program learning outcomes performance (e.g., student onboarding, retention, and completion outcomes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – None 2 – Attempts to create culture of accountability underway 3 – Small pockets of accountability 4 – Accountability in place for majority of programs 5 – Full accountability campus-wide
Maturity of processes for evaluation of academic programs and formats (e.g., opportunity selection, due diligence, evaluation of whether to grow, overhaul, or sunset programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – None 2 – Attempts at building processes underway 3 – Informal processes 4 – Formalized processes in silos 5 – Formalized and integrated processes

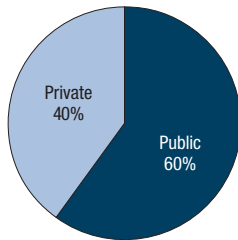
Appendix B: Survey Summary Data

For those 10 percent of institutions responding to the survey that indicated they had dedicated resources to academic innovation development, we provide the institutional characteristics. “Percentage of Respondents” refers to the portion of the 10 percent of institutions with academic innovation units.

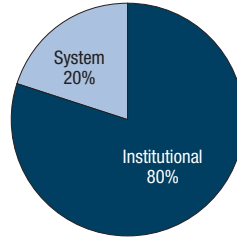


Reports To:	
President or Chancellor	8
Provost	5
Academic Affairs Office	6
Joint Unit Student Affairs and Provost	4

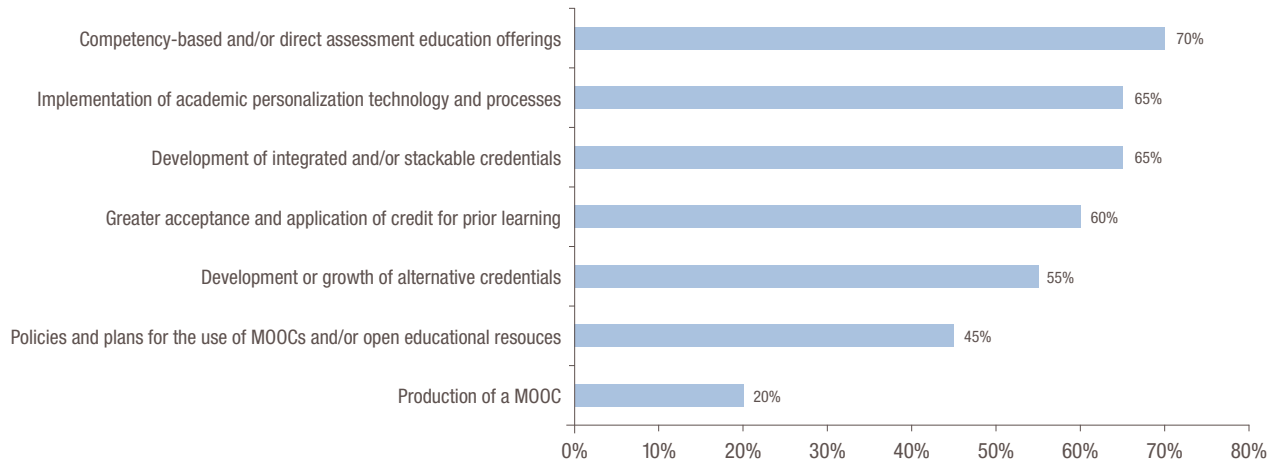
Type of Institution



Individual Institution vs System Office



Academic Initiatives



Challenges to Innovation

