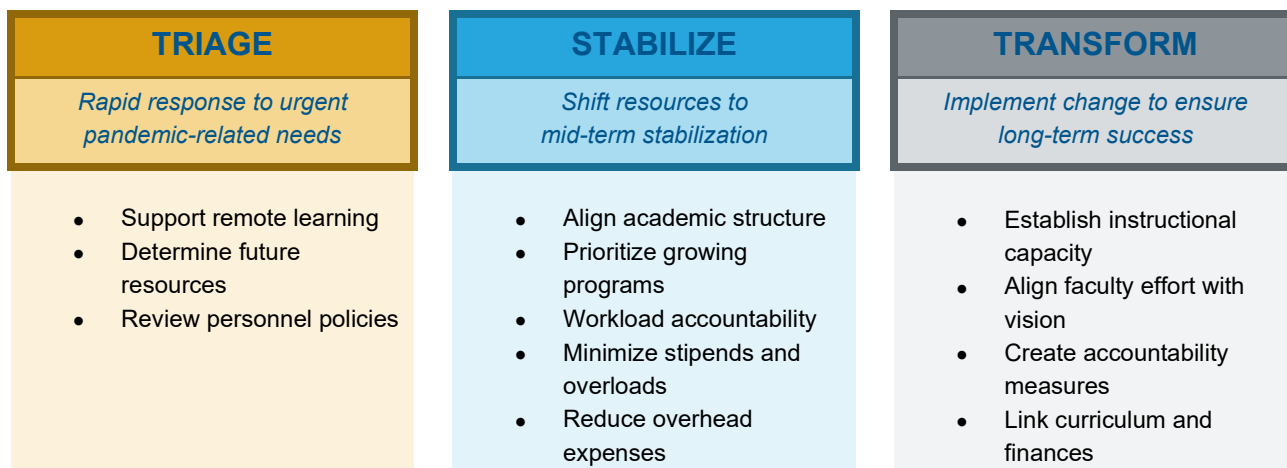


# HIGHER EDUCATION COVID-19 RESPONSE: FACULTY WORKLOAD, INSTRUMENT FOR TRANSFORMATION

During the early months of 2020, academic leaders, faculty, and students were settling into the final half of the academic year. Summer and fall 2020 course offerings had been finalized, regular faculty contracts were being issued and faculty committees were approving curriculum revisions and additions for the upcoming academic year. Soon afterward, the cyclical nature of this work was dramatically disrupted by COVID-19 as campus leadership teams across the globe sent students, faculty, and staff home for their own safety. At the same time, these institutions grappled with monumental tasks of transitioning a primarily face-to-face higher education model to a remote modality seemingly overnight.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt higher education, academic leaders and faculty have begun to consider the potential outcomes of an opaque future likely to be marred by budget reductions, enrollment declines, and endowment losses. As campus leaders gather information and establish strategies for addressing these challenges, Academic leaders are expected to identify opportunities to increase revenues and reduce expenses associated with delivering academic programming. One area being discussed on a national level is faculty workload and the accompanying compensation and support expenditures associated with the higher education model commonly found in the US.

In a [recent white paper](#), Huron outlined a three-phase framework for higher education's navigation through the pandemic and impending recession. Described by this framework, the sector enters first into a triage phase, then transitions to a period of stabilization while it begins to explore opportunities for fundamental transformation. When considering the framework, current faculty workload protocols must be leveraged to address the immediacy of remote delivery. Soon afterward, a thoughtful examination of faculty workload should be undertaken to address ongoing public concerns over increasing tuition costs and the long-term financial impact of COVID-19.



## Triage: COVID-19's Impact on Resource Availability

Academic leaders should continue to support the transition to remote learning and establish assessment tools to identify strengths and opportunities within this modality. Additionally, academic and administrative leaders should monitor and refine scenario models to forecast enrollment changes, government support, and endowment impacts to determine necessary strategic and operational changes likely to occur for the upcoming academic year. Academic leaders will also need to conduct a thorough review of academic and personnel policies, especially as they relate to faculty workload since these policies will be important when entering the stabilization period.

## Stabilize: Use Data to Establish Accountability

Over the next 12-18 months, Academic leaders will be faced with difficult decisions regarding curriculum and accompanying expenses necessary to maintain the current state. Over the past several years, Huron has worked with more than 30 institutions to establish faculty workload models useful in quantifying effort, maximizing resources, and establishing accountability. Over this period, we identified five key components necessary for establishing a robust faculty workload monitoring system.

- **Academic Alignment** – Academic disciplines are often the basis for the academic organizational structure consisting of key units such as colleges, schools, departments, programs, etc. Leveraging this structure to align the entirety of the institutions curricular and co-curricular activity is necessary as academic leaders consider the impact of faculty workload on the institution's financial resources.
- **Coursework and Program Outcomes** – Measuring discipline level credit hour production and degree outcome trends is an important aspect to consider when planning for a decrease in student enrollments and resource availability.
- **Instructional Workload** – Faculty work has been traditionally described as teaching, research, and service. To assess this, institutions often quantify teaching requirements, but research and service tend to be more fungible in nature. Huron recommends this information be quantified at the discipline level in collaboration with Deans and the Chief Academic Officer to assure alignment to institutional priorities.
- **Administrative Stipends and Overloads** – Internal economies of colleges and universities often provide for an environment in which course reassignments and overload pay are significant portions of the institution's compensation plan. Monitoring these activities is critical to understanding the true cost of delivering the curriculum and identifying opportunities to reduce expenses.
- **Academic Support** – Departments, centers, and colleges require levels of administrative support with the cost associated with this support variable across academic discipline and unit affiliation. Isolating such expenses and determining their impact on the cost to deliver the curriculum often provides an opportunity to reduce academic support expenses.

## Transform: Align Faculty Workload with Mission

As the impact of COVID-19 continues to evolve, many institutions will be required to assess their current academic program delivery structure and make decisions necessary to maintain quality and assure financial viability. As the conversation focuses on faculty effort, it is important to keep in mind the discussion is not likely to benefit from a "work harder" perspective. Rather, this conversation would be best served by clearly defining the work necessary to achieve the institutional mission and vision with the current resources available. As a result, clear expectations and appropriate incentives may be developed in collaboration with faculty as efforts shift toward a new normal in US higher education.

**Authored by** Andrew Laws and Mike Cogan

Access other educational resources on our [COVID-19 resource page](#). For more information, [contact us](#).