

U. S. HIGHER EDUCATION -- A WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Introduction: For employees who have not previously worked in higher education, it is helpful to have an overview of colleges and universities as a workplace. This document outlines certain facts and figures in the university workplace and focuses on the major components of higher education as a system:

- A. Students
- B. Student Life and Athletics
- C. Curriculum and Degrees
- D. Faculty and Their Appointments
- E. University Administration (Staff)
- F. Finance
- G. National Outlook (philosophy, size, governance)

A. STUDENTS:

- Student population attending higher education continues to grow rapidly in size and diversity (age, race / ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and academic interests)
- Majority of undergraduates are women and 1/3 are racial or ethnic minorities
- 3 out of 4 college students are *nontraditional* – they possess one or more of the following characteristics:
 - Age 25 or older
 - Delayed entry into higher education after earning high school diploma
 - Married
 - Attend part time
 - Work full time
 - Have children
- 60% of bachelor's degree recipients attend more than one institution (the most common transfer is from a community college to 4-year institution)
- Students earn credit toward their degrees by completing courses
- Students compete for admission to more selective colleges and universities; institutions compete heavily to attract the most talented students

B. STUDENT LIFE AND ATHLETICS

- Most four-year colleges and universities provide housing, food service, academic and social programs as well as student support services such as career placement, tutoring and personal counseling
- Colleges and universities host various student organizations and clubs; academically focused, athletic, cultural and religious, as well as social such as fraternity or sorority
- Student government is generally the recognized student advocacy body on campus
- Student athletics involve both revenue generating sports (e.g., football) and non-revenue sports (e.g., golf)

C. CURRICULUM AND DEGREES

- 5 types of degrees exist in the U.S.
 - Associate degree (community colleges and some 4-year institutions)
 - Bachelor's degree (most common type)
 - Master's degree (graduate degree that has a professional or theoretical focus)
 - Professional degree (e.g. law, medicine)
 - Doctoral degree (highest academic award and recognizes ability to conduct independent research)
- Undergraduate curriculum
 - General education (core classes) – broad knowledge and preparation to be engaged and informed citizen
 - Major field of study (the major)

D. FACULTY AND THEIR APPOINTMENTS

- More than 1 million academic faculty work at U.S. colleges and universities
- May be full time or part time
- May be tenured / tenure-track or non-tenure track
- Tenure is an academic employment arrangement, granted after a probationary period – ensures academic freedom and participation in institutional governance and implies continuous employment barring dismissals for cause or financial crisis
- Faculty responsibilities typically fall into three categories: teaching, research and service to the campus/ community
- Approximately half of all faculty are employed in part time and/or non-tenure track positions

E. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION (STAFF)

- Lay boards of trustees, who tend not to be academics, govern many colleges and universities. Responsible for ensuring and monitoring the institution's financial health, setting strategy to fulfill mission and evaluating institutional and presidential performance. Board members can be elected or appointed and their terms vary from four years to as long as 12 years.
- Boards hire and delegate much of the administrative responsibility for managing the institution to the president (sometimes called a chancellor)
- The president provides overall leadership and advocates for the institution's needs and seeks support from external sources including alumni, prospective students, corporations and community groups. The president provides the public persona of the institution and serves either at the pleasure of the board or on a fixed-term contract which may be eligible for renewal
- Most presidents rely upon a system of shared governance between faculty and administrators, often using a faculty senate which recommends academic decisions and policies such as those affecting curricula, degree requirements, and academic hiring and workloads.

F. FINANCE:

- Major sources of revenue include:
 - Tuition and fee payments from students and families,
 - Appropriations, grants and contracts from federal, state, and local governments,
 - Private gifts,
 - Endowment and other investment earnings, and
 - Sales from auxiliary enterprises and services.
- Private gifts contribute 14 % of revenue to private not-for-profit institutions
- Significant set of expenditures at many private not-for-profit institutions is institutional financial aid
- Operational costs are rising: technology, equipment, health care for employees, building maintenance, small class sizes, world-class academic and recreational facilities

G. NATIONAL OUTLOOK

Essential underlying philosophy:

- Protected from levels of government control seen in most countries
- Freedom of expression
- Compete for students, faculty and funding
- Committed to equal opportunity and social mobility

Size & Composition:

- 4,200 colleges and universities that award degrees
 - 1,100 public 2-year institutions (largest share of undergraduates)
 - 630 public 4-year colleges and universities
 - Variety of private not-for-profit institutions 1,941
 - Research
 - Liberal arts
 - Faith-based
 - Historically black
 - Specialized focusing on a single field (e.g. nursing)
 - For-profit institutions primarily offering vocational programs
- 2,300 institutions that award vocational certificates

Governance:

- 50 states each govern public colleges and universities (75 % of students) through various public boards appointed by governor and/or legislature
- Accrediting organizations – evaluation of academic quality through peer review on such topics as curricula, faculty qualifications, student learning outcomes, co-curricular student services, and financial health
- Private colleges are governed by board of trustees