

## In Changing Times, Higher Education Sector Seeks New Types of Leaders



Recruiting senior leaders in the higher education sector has become a dynamic and evolving process. As universities face numerous challenges, including financial constraints, enrollment declines, and the need to prioritize diversity and inclusion, the demand for visionary and transformational leaders has never been higher.

In recent years, the higher education sector has witnessed a significant increase in leadership turnover. Factors such as impending retirements, the impact of the pandemic, and financial pressures have contributed to this trend. According to data from The Chronicle of Higher Education, more presidents announced their resignations in 2022 compared to the previous year. This wave of turnover has resulted in a surge in executive-level searches, surpassing the numbers seen in the last decade.

When searching for senior leaders, universities are seeking individuals who possess a diverse skill-set and a keen business acumen. The ability to navigate complex financial landscapes, think innovatively to increase revenue, foster relationships, and develop strategic partnerships are highly valued. Moreover, leaders who can inspire and empower others while addressing the pressing needs of the institution are sought after. Institutions require leaders who can drive transformational change and adapt to the evolving higher education landscape.

### Challenges in Recruiting

Search consultants say that recruiting senior leaders in higher education presents its own set of challenges. Boards must engage in thorough pre-search discussions to identify the unique opportunities, challenges, and goals the new leader will face. Without this crucial groundwork, the search process can encounter significant hurdles later on. Moreover, the increasing demand for leaders who can champion diversity, inclusion, equity, and social

justice has led to the creation of new positions, such as chief diversity officers. Finding qualified individuals who possess the expertise to address these pressing issues while ensuring inclusivity across the institution is a critical challenge for recruitment.

In recruiting senior leaders for colleges and universities, there has been a growing emphasis on finding candidates who possess a blend of experience in both academic settings and outside education organizations, according to Tobin Anselmi, managing partner, head of interim and consulting services operations at **The Christopher Group**. "The goal is to identify individuals who can bring diverse perspectives and innovative approaches to address the complex challenges faced by higher education institutions today," he said. "While academic experience is crucial to understanding the unique dynamics of educational environments, the inclusion of leaders with outside experience helps bring fresh ideas, industry connections, and valuable insights from different sectors. This combination allows for the integration of best practices and cutting-edge strategies that can drive institutional growth, enhance student success, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and effectively navigate the evolving landscape of education."

### BY THE NUMBERS

#### Academic Leaders on the Move

Over half, or **55%** of academic presidents...

...plan to step down from their current positions  
within the next **5** years.

Source: American Council on Education (ACE)

Mr. Anselmi says that universities and colleges face several issues in today's evolving educational landscape. One is the rapid advancement of technology and the need to navigate the complexities of online learning, which has grown substantially due to the pandemic. "Institutions seek leaders who are tech-savvy, capable of leveraging digital tools and platforms to enhance teaching and learning experiences," Mr. Anselmi said. "Additionally, they value leaders who possess a deep understanding of the diverse experiences students bring, acknowledging the varied backgrounds, perspectives, and challenges they face. These leaders need to think beyond the traditional on-campus, in-class experience and bring innovative approaches to cater to the evolving needs of students in a digital age. By embracing technology, fostering inclusivity, and promoting alternative (cont'd. to page 2)

modes of education, these leaders can drive transformative change and ensure the success and engagement of students in a rapidly changing educational environment.”

“Schools should prioritize finding leaders who possess a wide range of experiences, are tech-savvy, and demonstrate a deep understanding of the social dynamics and challenges faced by the college-aged population,” said Mr. Anselmi. “With access to information being vastly different than in the past, leaders who can adapt to these changes and leverage technology while also understanding the unique needs and challenges of students today are highly sought after by schools.”

Mr. Anselmi also notes that The Christopher Group always casts a wide net to ensure the firm produces diversity in all searches. “In recent years, educational institutions, like many other organizations, have significantly increased their efforts to enhance DE&I,” he said. “Universities and colleges have often been at the forefront of these initiatives, recognizing the importance of fostering diverse perspectives, representation, and inclusivity within their leadership ranks. While progress has been made, it is important to acknowledge that there are variations among institutions, with some universities demonstrating more advanced DE&I efforts than others. Continued commitment and improvement in these areas are necessary to ensure that all schools effectively promote diversity and inclusion within their leadership teams and throughout their campuses.”

### More Senior Leaders Retiring

“More senior leaders are considering retirement, many are facing burn-out since COVID,” said Shahauna Siddiqui, a partner in Calgary with **DHR Global**. “All hires are requiring more skills in external relations, including government relations. Many colleges and universities are examining curriculum to ensure they are keeping up with the times and are more multi-disciplinary focused as well as adding in more opportunity for innovation and experiential learning. Institutions are facing the challenge of hybrid course offerings, as well as micro-credentials.”

Mental health for students, meanwhile, is still big issue, along with tuition costs, and housing. “The push is on to increase access to post-secondary for underrepresented groups such as low-income students, students whose parents did not attend postsecondary and students with disabilities, and indigenous students,” Ms. Siddiqui said. “Budgeting is increasingly a challenge for many institutions with lower government support/funding and the economy being unstable. Technology is also a big issue, with the increase of digitization required beyond learning/teaching. In Canada, international students are an increasing population and require different sources of revenue support and increasingly higher cost centers.”

“Leaders are pushing for more multi-disciplinary collaboration and research. Leaders require extensive influencing skills and external stakeholder management,” Ms. Siddiqui said. “They need to the skills to ensure their institution stands out amongst an increasingly competitive environment, and yet collaborates internationally on research.”

## IN THE NEWS

### Bryant Group Recruits AVP of Outreach and Innovation for Western Michigan University



Following a national search, Dallas-based executive search and talent development firm **Bryant Group** has placed Michael Carlton as the first associate vice president of outreach and innovation for Western Michigan University (WMU). Sarah Hempen, vice president, led the assignment. For more than 15 years, Mr. Carlton oversaw annual giving, alumni relations, special events, and donor relations for public universities and private non-profits. He most recently served as the director of annual giving and alumni engagement for the Peabody Institute of John Hopkins University.

Bryant Group specializes in advancement, fundraising, and leadership for universities, hospitals, and other non-profits. Its services include recruiting, talent development, and leadership coaching. The organization's higher education clients include Stanford University, Harvard University, Michigan State University, Baylor University, the University of New Mexico, and others.

Significant burnout challenges since COVID within faculties remain, and this has resulted in some senior leaders who might be ready to take on a new leadership challenge to hit pause and remain in their current role, according to Kenny Gregor, associate partner in Calgary with DHR. “Others who are more senior are also starting to opt for early retirement instead of a new challenge,” he said. “Additionally, since COVID, we have found that relocating candidates has become more challenging as many individuals are making more family-oriented decisions including wanting to stay closer to home with aging parents etc. Conversely, we have noticed a trend in Canadian ex-pats wanting to come back to Canada for senior leadership roles for these same reasons. Within Canada, some leaders who may have moved across the country earlier in their career, are becoming increasingly interested in coming back to their former institution closer to home if the right opening comes up.”

Many of DHR's clients have been talking about challenges of AI tools like ChatGPT which have really disrupted the post secondary space. “Senior leaders need to stay up to date on where things are going with this technology and be able to help create, adapt, and enforce policies to address it's use,” Mr. Gregor said. “That being said, many also view AI as an opportunity to transform the way we teach. Micro credentialing and applied research increasing student experience is also something we are seeing.”

DHR has also seen committees that start processes by saying that they are interested in diverse candidate pools that include those who may be earlier in their career and may have not been given the opportunity to take on key leadership roles. That said, at the end of the day when DHR goes to present candidates, committees continue to gravitate to those who are more experienced and those who have already held similar roles. The firm has seen institutions give more junior internal candidates the chance to compete for these senior positions in recent years however, and they view these processes as a learning and development experience for the individual even if they aren't the successful candidate.

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"The focus is clearly there with all of our clients and the results are starting to show in terms of the candidate pools and the successful placed candidates, but there is still more work to be done on this front," said Mr. Gregor. "The committees we work with are starting to become more diverse than they once were, and they are holding candidates to higher standards when it comes to EDI and indigenization. Candidates more and more need to bring with them tangible examples of initiatives they have led or played a major part in to help improve diversity and inclusion or indigenization efforts at their institution. Just talking about it is not enough and committees want to see action and accomplishments in the space."

#### **Seeking Candidates from Other Sectors**

"There are a variety of individuals who may show interest in higher education after working in another sector," said Shawn M. Hartman, senior vice president and COO of **Academic Search**. "Most often, these individuals may be former military leaders, those who have been in higher education earlier in their career as faculty or administrators and left for the corporate or non-profit world. Particularly when looking at the presidential role, those who serve as members of the board of trustees for colleges and universities (many being alumni as well) may turn to higher education. For public institutions where the state government plays a significant role in the appointment of trustees, the governor or state legislature could also encourage political appointees/state politicians to move into this sector."

"We also see individuals who have run major businesses being encouraged to apply for presidencies," Mr. Hartman said. "For example, if the board of trustees believes that they need to appoint a leader who can create greater efficiencies and help stabilize the institution's finances, they may look for someone outside of the higher education sector. The reason why these individuals are attracted to higher education varies significantly—those who have retired early from the corporate world may find a career in higher education appealing as it provides them with a new set of challenges, and they may believe that they have the skill set to contribute very positively towards the management and operation of an institution."

Those from the military come from environments where they build strong teams, and the higher education environment has a similar appeal, according to Mr. Hartman. "Trustees, particularly those who are alums, have a deep love and care for the institution and believe that their knowledge of the institution as a student and then as a trustee really provides them with a unique ability to strengthen an institution," he said. "Politicians who take office often do so as their political term of office has ended, and they are seeking the next iteration of their career."

"We know that in our work at Academic Search, there are times when it is helpful to look at other sectors when recruiting candidates during a search," Mr. Hartman said. "Individuals from other sectors may bring the right skill set and alignment with the mission of the institution, along with the desire to make a difference through their role, without having a background of working at a higher education institution."

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Colleges and universities today face various challenges, and the leadership they seek must address these issues, according to Michael J.R. Wheless, co-founder, principal and consultant at **Anthem Executive**. “Financial sustainability is a pressing concern, requiring leaders who can develop innovative revenue streams, optimize resource allocation, and ensure long-term viability,” he said. “Student success and retention are also paramount, necessitating leaders who can implement evidence-based practices, leverage data analytics, and foster a student-centered culture. Institutions also grapple with demands for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion. They seek leaders who can advance these goals through inclusive policies, practices, and initiatives.”

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Mr. Wheless also points to technological advancements and the demand for online and hybrid learning present ongoing challenges. “Leaders must harness technology to deliver innovative educational experiences, expand online offerings, and address cybersecurity concerns,” he said. “To address these challenges, universities seek leaders who possess a clear vision, strategic thinking, and innovation. Collaboration, diversity, and sustainability are also crucial. Leaders must foster a culture of innovation, build strong partnerships, and integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations.”

### Younger Candidates

Mr. Wheless notes that a significant factor contributing to the appointment of younger leaders is the population trend and the ongoing mass retirement phase until 2035. “This demographic shift necessitates the consideration of younger candidates due to the scarcity of experienced professionals available for leadership positions,” he said. “While there may be inherent risks in selecting untested candidates, it becomes crucial for institutions to partner with search firms that have expertise in identifying and assessing the potential of these individuals. This population trend is a driving force behind the search for younger leaders who can step into key roles and provide continuity in leadership as experienced professionals retire. With a diminishing pool of seasoned leaders, colleges and universities recognize the need to cultivate a new generation of talent capable of guiding institutions into the future.”

However, appointing younger leaders does come with certain risks. “They may have limited experience and face unique challenges as they navigate complex organizational structures and industry dynamics,” said Mr. Wheless. “To mitigate these risks, institutions must work closely with search firms that have the expertise to

identify and assess the potential of these younger candidates. These firms possess a deep understanding of the skills, qualities, and leadership potential necessary for success in senior positions.”

Colleges and universities have made significant strides in upping their diversity and inclusion efforts, but there is still work to be done. “Recognizing the importance of fostering inclusive campus environments, institutions have placed a greater emphasis on diversity in their leadership recruitment efforts,” said Mr. Wheless. “However, achieving true diversity and inclusion requires ongoing commitment and intentional actions. Efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion have been crucial in creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for students, faculty, and staff. While some states have implemented restrictions on DEI initiatives, colleges and universities can focus on promoting an inclusive culture and fostering equal opportunities within the legal parameters.”

Mr. Wheless also notes that recruiting and attracting the best candidates is a shared responsibility between search firms, search committees, and the institutional community. “It is important to implement inclusive search processes that mitigate unconscious biases and provide fair consideration to diverse candidates throughout the selection process,” he said. “While progress has been made, diversity and inclusion efforts should be viewed as an ongoing journey rather than a destination. Colleges and universities must continue partnering with stakeholders to further enhance their diversity and inclusion initiatives. Together, we can build leadership teams that reflect the diverse communities served by these institutions and create inclusive environments where all students and faculty can thrive.”

“Many universities are continuing to see a large amount of turnover in some senior leadership roles,” said Jane Griffith, managing partner and founder of Griffith Group. “We are seeing a new trend that seems to indicate that many individuals who took on new roles during COVID, a time of high stress and change management, or leaving those roles as we see more stability coming back into the sector. We are continuing to see a high demand for senior student leaders, who have an appreciation and capability to manage those complex portfolios. In Canada, we are also seeing the prioritizing of indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (I-EDIA) across all campuses and with hiring committees. We continue to see in Canada that there is a greater focus and appreciation on recognizing barriers that have systematically excluded certain identities and ensuring anti-bias measures are integrated at every step of the process.”

No two universities are the same, and so the challenges from institution to institution will vary. “That being said, search competition is at its peak, given its height by global financial instability, increasing costs globally, and major recruitment competition,” Ms. Griffith. “Additionally, and what some call ‘the Great Realignment,’ many professionals are prioritizing remote work given the shifting labor status quo in certain industries over the past few years. Institutions of higher education will need leaders who can successfully navigate and steer through the complex and shifting terrain of higher ed, all the

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## IN THE NEWS

**Myers McRae Recruits 19th President for Kentucky State University**

Following a national search, Macon, GA-based **Myers McRae Executive Search and Consulting** has assisted in the recruitment of Koffi C. Akakpo as the 19th president of Kentucky State University, a historically black college and university. Kenny

Daugherty, the search firm's president, led the assignment. University officials noted that Dr. Akakpo quickly rose to the top of an esteemed candidate application pool, and his life's work, 16 years in leadership roles in higher education with a proven record of success in strong fiscal accountability, student-first philosophy, and strategic planning.

Myers McRae Executive Search and Consulting serves colleges, universities, independent schools, and other not-for-profit institutions. Nearly all of its search professionals have a minimum of 20 years of experience in higher education. The majority of the firm's searches have been for presidents, chancellors, provosts, vice presidents, deans, and other senior academic and administrative leaders.

while prioritizing their institution's vision through strategic leadership, collaborative partnerships, and just sense of purpose."

Many of the senior academic positions are broad in scope and scale and Ms. Griffith is seeing that as a response to the size of these portfolios, which have grown to maintain the commitment, and interest, of senior leaders. "As a result, the next cohort of leaders are inside unit specific roles, which disadvantages many in a competitive search as they do not hold knowledge or experience across the breadth of portfolio," she said. "We are also seeing many search committees manage risk mitigation with hires, which means opting for candidates who have succeeded in similar roles in the past. However, we do see that universities are promoting internal talent into more senior roles, and supporting them as they grow into those large portfolios. Their internal status removes some of the risk, as they know the institution, its culture, and their values align."

**More Work to be Done**

Though there is still much work to be done to improve diversity in the higher education sector, Ms. Griffith has seen it moving in the right direction in Canada. "I-EDIA are at, or near, the top of every search conversation," she said. "There is far more dialogue in early stages of the process to ensure opportunities are advertised in a way that would attract a diverse pool of talent. Furthermore, we are seeing an increase in reflective thought as committees consider candidates at various stages of the process, to ensure unconscious and implicit bias is minimized and all candidates are given equitable opportunity for consideration."

"I have been seeing an emphasis on DEI both in candidate pools and in candidates' experience advancing the principles of DEI," said Gordon Lobay, regional managing partner, Americas at **Perrett Laver**. "This naturally looks different for every institution and universities are grappling with what diversity, equity and inclusion really mean for them and their unique situation. I have also seen reduced government funding everywhere leading to a desire for leaders with U.S.-style approaches to advancement

and philanthropy. Candidates who have demonstrated success as fundraisers, or with experience in innovative approaches to revenue diversification, are highly sought after.

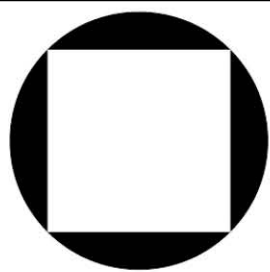
"Senior administrators are facing many trends impacting senior hiring in academia including, a more intense focus on DEI, anti-racism, and indigenization," said Erik Jackson, managing partner U.S. at **Perrett Laver**. "Further to these are debates and challenges surrounding academic freedom, freedom of speech, and the place of universities within society to protect the necessary freedoms essential to a democracy. While COVID-19 restrictions have eased in most jurisdictions the influence of the pandemic is still there particularly in the fatigue apparent in potential candidates. Other recent factors include energy prices, global food insecurity, rises in inflation and interest rates, war and destabilized global geopolitics. Replacing the pandemic, these global challenges are influencing candidates' decisions in making potential moves."

"Today's higher education president is individually held up more and more as the personification of the values and ideals of the institution – and this in the face of unpredictable, rapidly changing, and often threatening challenges from all possible angles and perspectives on all manner of issues and interests," said Dr. Lobay. "Trust in public institutions cannot be assumed, and the president of any university will be tested repeatedly for the values they espouse and their shaping of the tone, message and values of the university. Senior leaders must also be effective in working with collaborators from industry, government, Indigenous communities, and the civil/social sector. Universities can no longer operate in isolation and funders are seeking to invest in 'multi-partner' platforms that are larger than any one institution, yielding social, academic, and economic dividends. The emergence of digital innovations within global higher education are also starting to 'disrupt' models for education and research within universities. The pace of change is fast and many institutions feel behind the curve."

Higher education institutions are discussing DEI regularly in media, internally, and in search committees, according to Mr. Jackson. "The issue is more salient than ever before which is a great thing for the sector," he said. "There is an increased emphasis on equity in search processes – committees taking issues like accessibility much more serious. Despite this, we still continue to see conservatism in making diverse appointments at the many senior levels. Diversity within recruitment panels, unconscious bias training and the traditional job interview format becoming less of a focus have all benefited addressing diversity in recruitment. Our approach is one of creativity and persistence – using the networks that we have but also going out and finding people that you don't know otherwise will help deliver on diversity."

We are in a highly competitive talent market right now, and colleges and universities are beginning to recognize that to recruit top talent they need to be more flexible in how they structure executive level and senior leader positions, according to Susanne Griffin, VP and managing director at **Greenwood Asher & Associates**. "For example, they may need to be more creative with titles, compensation packages, hybrid

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work options, health and wellness perks, and consulting flexibilities. When attempting to attract talent, colleges and universities must recognize that the strength of the leadership team and internal culture matters. Candidates have employment options, and they will do their homework to determine if the institution's current context will set them up for success."

"Because of the highly competitive talent landscape, we are being asked to support searches for positions that were often handled by the institution in the past," Ms. Griffin said. "More and more, we are being contacted to assist with filling director, chair, and faculty roles, particularly in contexts where there may be additional circumstances that make recruiting challenging. When budgets are tight, finding resources to support expanded use of search firms can be a difficult decision. However, most colleges and universities recognize that, in the long run, finding quality talent is worth every penny spent."

"A major issue for state systems--especially where demographic forces are resulting in declining enrollment and associated tuition revenue in rural areas--is how to maintain some access to higher education in those locations with fewer resources," said Jim Johnsen, VP of executive search at Greenwood Asher. "In response, schools are seeking leaders who have a stomach for making decisions that involve tradeoffs between competing public good where some in the community might experience loss in the pursuit of what others see as a sustainable path forward."

"Higher education, including searches for senior leaders, is being impacted by political intervention well beyond what has been the norm," said Robert Caret, VP for executive search at Greenwood Asher. We need leaders who can champion the important role that higher education plays in our society while, at the same time, have the political acumen and internal strength to deal with the challenges and opportunities presented by this complex environment."

Despite their commitment and effort, our clients are still working to achieve the goals they established related to diversity and inclusion, according to Ms. Griffin. "They are recognizing that diversifying the workforce, specifically the leadership team, is necessary but not sufficient in creating a diverse and inclusive campus," she said. "The national conversation regarding DEI has underlined the complex nature of these efforts. Moving forward, many of our clients are re-evaluating their efforts and determining whether they continue on their current path, alter their path, or seek a new path altogether to make the changes necessary to yield meaningful results."

"Like most efforts at changing human behavior, the results are mixed and will take time to sort out," Dr. Johnsen said. "Yes, pools are increasingly diverse, but hiring committees still tend to select candidates who are like them. So, if the selection committee reflects diversity (in racial, gender, or ideological terms), there is a better chance the candidate pool and the ultimate selection will too."

With the release of [ACE's 2023 American College President Study](#), which reports on the trends of the higher education presidency, **AGB Search** can see evidence of increasing turnover in higher education leadership. In executive search, there has been a shift in the expectations of presidential searches and timelines.

Respondents to the survey indicated that they (cont'd. to page 7)



had been in office for 5.9 years; that number has fallen steadily according to each of the last three surveys, down from 6.5 years in 2016, seven years in 2011 and 8.5 years in 2006. Responses also show that presidents are leaving their positions for a multitude of reasons including crisis fatigue and strife with governing boards. “Regardless of circumstances, the news of the departure of a president sets the search timeline in motion,” said Rod McDavis, managing principal at AGB. He notes the expectations of the timeline have shifted from historical norms. “Searches traditionally used to begin at the start or end of an academic year,” said Dr. McDavis. “Yet given the varying circumstances of departures now, searches are starting at varying times throughout the year. Similarly, the duration of many searches has been compressed, and some institutions ask that appointees start their roles immediately as opposed to coinciding with the start of the academic year.”

*“With a diminishing pool of seasoned leaders, colleges and universities recognize the need to cultivate a new generation of talent capable of guiding institutions into the future.”*

“Institutions today are searching for leaders who have expertise in multiple areas,” Dr. McDavis said. “A new president’s job has never been more complex, considering today’s challenges including declining enrollment, escalating costs, cybersecurity threats, and the ongoing need to defend the value of higher education. Ideally, an institution would select a leader who has experience with a wide array of the institution’s activities, with a focus on both financial sustainability and student success. A leader who can maintain a positive, collaborative relationship with their board of trustees through the principles of shared governance is poised for even greater success.”

AGB has seen the overall age of higher education presidents averaging about 60 years, according to the ACE President survey, with many candidates taking their first steps on the pathway to the presidency between the ages 40 and 50. “Beyond age, however, there are several notable factors that should be emphasized when considering the experience of incoming presidents,” said Dr. McDavis. “One is the difference in time from aspiration to appointment between men and women, including men and women of color: on average, the time between aspiration and appointment is significantly shorter for women and women of color, with these two groups aspiring, applying to, and achieving their appointments presidencies within one and a half years of applying 5.9 years. For men and men of color, that time horizon is about two years 7.4 and 8.9 years, respectively.

On the other hand, women and women of color, in particular, were more likely to feel unprepared or provided with an unrealistic assessment for the expectations of the office to which they were appointed and/or the institution’s current challenges. The disparity between these responses, from ambition to preparedness, should prompt discussion of the information that is shared during the search process with all candidates who advance in the search.”

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## SPOTLIGHT

## Leadership Changes Underway at Many Leading Universities



*Faith Montgomery brings over 25 years of deep experience, passion, and expertise in both the non-profit and for-profit sectors to **Lindauer**. She serves as vice president and managing director at the firm and has completed major executive level searches for institutions such as Howard University, Princeton University, Stanford*

*University, Harvard University, University of Minnesota Foundation, Babson College, University of Texas Austin, St. Paul's School, Lawrenceville, among many others. Ms. Montgomery recently sat down with **Hunt Scanlon Media** to discuss some trends she is seeing within the higher education sector and what type of leaders schools are looking for.*

**Faith, recent reports say that a large number of university presidents have been stepping down in recent months. Have you seen this as well?**

Yes, we're seeing more leadership transitions at the presidential level of colleges and universities. This is consistent with the American Council on Education's most recent American College President Report. The report found that more than half of presidents plan to step down from their current roles within the next five years – and yet fewer than 30 percent of institutions have a succession plan in place to guide them through a presidential search. I advise institutions to be as proactive as possible, not only to lay the groundwork for a successful presidential search but to anticipate building a leadership team that can support the new president and execute their vision. Transitions are an opportunity to take a 360-degree view and find alignment across strategic priorities, roles, and responsibilities.

**Is this opening doors for diverse candidates?**

More candidates from diverse lived experiences are pursuing and being hired for presidential positions at a range of institutions in higher education. The higher turnover rates at the very top of colleges and universities are creating an opportunity for these institutions to think deeply about how they might find, attract, and retain qualified women and people of color for leadership positions. Building a diverse pool of candidates requires intentionality. It won't happen organically. When institutions turn to their traditional talent pipelines, they're more likely to appoint a leader who matches the profile of the people who have held the position in the past. Look at the career paths of today's presidents: a majority rise from faculty and academic positions, which has the effect of limiting opportunities for diverse candidates. What might happen if more institutions opened their presidential searches to candidates who followed different career paths? I also have to point out that recruiting diverse candidates for leadership positions is one thing; creating the conditions for them to succeed in their new role is another. This means dismantling systemic obstacles to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) at the board and executive

levels. People of color are doing their due diligence to determine if an institution is ready to support their vision. They're asking boards and search committees tough questions related to an institution's commitment to DEIB. For example, they want to know about recruiting efforts for diversifying faculty and the student body, retention strategies for students of color, financial aid, and the general allocation of funds to create a climate of belonging for people of all backgrounds.

**What are some traits schools are looking for in incoming leaders?**

Schools are looking for leaders who can lead and manage complex institutions with both head and heart, who bring proven experience and emotional intelligence to working with people and advancing the goals of their institutions. The leaders who embody this type of leadership encourage risk-taking, creating a climate in which people have room to experiment and innovate. By focusing on rewarding success rather than punishing failure, these leaders motivate their teams while connecting them to a larger sense of purpose. There's also an emphasis on leaders who have an understanding and compassion for their staff as people. The most successful leaders today are sensitive to what is happening in the world and the resulting impact on colleagues individually and collectively at work. In recent years, we've seen a groundswell of such ugliness — in the form of police killings and mass shootings, for instance — that has shaken most of us to our core. Many employees struggle to leave that at the door when they go into the office or participate in a Zoom meeting. Modern leaders pause and are willing to address these moments head on. They understand that different people experience these events differently, and they take an equitable approach to ensuring each person has what they need to be supported. Recruiting for these traits is important. They may not necessarily come through in a resume or cover letter. Interviews are an opportunity to ask for concrete examples of how candidates have exhibited these qualities in the past. For example, "In the wake of George Floyd's murder and the national racial reckoning that followed, how did you support your team? How have you used a lens of equity to engage marginalized groups and bring them forward? What history have you brought into conversations regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging?"

**What are some current trends that you are seeing for recruiting senior leaders for colleges and universities?**

The higher turnover rates are creating opportunities for candidates of diverse lived experiences. However, it is not enough to build diverse pools of candidates and commit to finding qualified women and people of color for leadership positions. Institutions must also create the conditions for them to succeed. Women and people of color profoundly understand this, and they are evaluating institutions to gauge their commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

## SPOTLIGHT

## How Executive Search Firms Are Currently Filling Top Higher Education Positions



For over four decades, **Academic Search** has been a leader in designing and implementing search processes for leaders of colleges and universities across the country. The firm has completed hundreds of executive searches for higher education institutions and related organizations, for roles ranging from presidents to provosts to deans. Dr. Jay Lemons became president of Academic Search in 2017, after serving for 25 years as a college president in both public and private higher education. He recently sat down with **Hunt Scanlon Media** to discuss how his firm fills roles for top schools and what types of leaders are currently in demand.

### What is Academic Search's approach to finding senior talent for universities? Can you take us through the search process?

At Academic Search, we pride ourselves on the work we do at the start of every search. We take the time to get to know the true mission and culture of each institution, which aids us in recruiting leaders who most closely align with that particular college or university. Not only do we grow to have a deep understanding of the college or university we are partnering with, but our senior consultants also have myriad experiences as leaders in the sector. They have the knowledge of what it takes to lead higher education institutions, which includes the challenges these leaders will face. We have a vast network that we connect with to build a pool of qualified, diverse candidates. We share all applicant materials with the search committee and work closely with them to narrow down the candidate pool for the first-round interviews. Our role is to not only recruit qualified candidates but aid the search committee in selecting a diverse set of finalists who are the best match for the institution. We also conduct deeper background checks and perform reference calls. Once the search has been completed, we also aim to help institutions work through their transition and onboarding plans to ensure the leader and the campus can come together for a successful tenure of the candidate.

### What roles are toughest to fill?

Identifying and recruiting highly qualified candidates for certain roles within educational institutions can be challenging. While every search presents its unique set of difficulties, there are specific positions that tend to be tougher to fill than others. One area where institutions often encounter recruitment challenges is in the health professions, particularly in roles such as directors/deans of nursing or occupational therapy. These positions often require individuals who possess a blend of academic and professional expertise, leadership skills, and a commitment to advancing their respective fields of study. Additionally, to be qualified for these types of positions, the individuals need to have the ability to manage and collaborate with faculty, students, external stakeholders, and regulatory bodies. It is our goal at Academic Search to build diverse, strong pools for all searches, even those that may be in a challenging field to fill.

### Is there a new generation of senior leaders emerging in the sector?

During the past 15 years, higher education has done a better job of intentionally nurturing the next generation of leaders. Academic Search is very proud to be wholly owned by a mission-based non-profit organization, the American Academic Leadership Institute (AALI) whose mission is to help develop the next generation of leaders through a series of programmatic offerings. AALI also has a clear focus on opening the doors much wider for leaders who come from backgrounds that have been underrepresented in higher education in the past. Our partnership and synergy with AALI gives us a significant competitive advantage as we grow our network of strong, prepared candidates through these leadership programs.

### What is different about leading a university opposed to a non-profit or for-profit?

Not only are there many differences in leading in the social sector vs. the corporate sector, but there are also great differences within the social sector itself. In higher education, the true measure of an organization is about impacting the public good through education and research. In the for-profit sector in particular, the focus can be very much driven by the financial bottom line. Colleges and universities typically have large and complex boards and one of the fundamental tenets is the practice of shared governance whereby authority is delegated from boards to presidents, but with significant responsibility also being vested in faculty to determine who will teach, what can be taught, how it is taught, and who will be admitted for study. Leadership is challenging in all sectors, but there is a complexity to leading in the higher education space that is not found in other sectors.

### At Academic Search, you seem to have a lot of former university leaders. What is the benefit of that?

We were founded in 1976 at a time when only about one percent of colleges and universities used search organizations to look for leaders. Today, 99 percent of institutions turn to search organizations when they are seeking presidents. I often refer to Academic Search as the original disrupters, as the founding by our predecessors at Academic Search opened the world of higher education to the benefits of focused expertise in the recruitment of new leaders. Our predecessors established many of the best practices for search in higher education, many of which remain today. Their founding insight was that former leaders in higher education would bring knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and insight to the practice of search along with very strong personal networks. During my first year at Academic Search after 25 years in two presidencies, I came to fully appreciate how right they were. One of my colleagues, Dr. Shirley Robinson Pippins, put it this way to me a few years ago: "I love this work. It draws on every experience I had as college president and I am able to share my experience with our institutional partners."

## The Inclusive Way to Hire an Athletic Director

A few decades ago, collegiate athletic directors – unlike other university administrators – were often hired through back-room conversations that excluded the general campus community. Oftentimes, if the head football or men's basketball coach expressed interest, they were often tabbed as the next AD without much consideration of other potential candidates.

"Today, as the athletic director role has become more visible and valuable to the institution and its mission, the process of selecting a new AD must be comprehensive and inclusive," according to a report from **WittKieffer's** Jeff Compher. "Conducting a search from a recycled, hand-picked list of potential candidates is no longer acceptable, and does not result in the strongest candidate pool. Today's athletics departments have grown in complexity and influence, and require a thorough search process that uncovers the very best candidates available in the market."

The AD role has developed into one that transcends the athletics department and is now considered an ambassador for the entire university, says WittKieffer. A competent and effective AD should have the ear of the president and be able to speak to the vision and direction of the entire university as context for the role of athletics. ADs at all collegiate levels engage with VPs and vice chancellors from across the institution and must be true collaborators.

To ensure that a search for a new AD is as inclusive as possible and has the buy-in from key campus constituents, WittKieffer offers four simple best practices institutions should follow:

### 1. Create A Broad, Inclusive Search Committee

The composition of an AD search committee should be similar to a chancellor or president search committee. There are many critical factions on campus that want, and deserve, a say in who the next athletic director will be. They include: students, coaches for men's and women's sports, faculty, someone from student affairs or student success, a representative of advancement and/or alumni relations, and even one or two alums or major donors. It also helps to have a current athletic administrator, who can be an invaluable resource on the state of the department for the rest of the committee. It is not unheard of to have a trustee, particularly if the institution's board has an athletics subcommittee. Finally, WittKieffer says that a campus leader on diversity, equity, and inclusion can be a key addition. All told, the committee may have at least a dozen members, though an even larger committee is possible and may be advised based on the campus culture.

### 2. Listen Carefully

In the Zoom era, virtual listening sessions are replacing or supplementing the in-person "start-up meetings" that take place across campus as a search begins. To hear from varied constituents, multiple meetings are necessary to get input on what kind of person would make a great AD for that particular institution. What should be on the AD's agenda? What kind of qualifications, qualities, and leadership philosophy are required? What type of athletics culture are we creating? Many key constituencies – *(cont'd. to page 12)*

# Let's find your next great leader

A portrait of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue blazer over a dark top, looking slightly upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a solid blue color.

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faculty, students, coaches, and alums included – want to be heard, and should be heard. The search committee and search consultants will track the major themes and topics from these sessions and use them as the foundation for the written leadership profile for the position, and ultimately to assess potential candidates.

### 3. Remember that Confidentiality Doesn't Sacrifice Inclusivity

The campus community would like the AD search process to be as open and consensus-driven as possible. That said, they usually understand the need for confidentiality regarding top candidates. Given the high-profile nature of the position and the often intense media coverage that follows the AD, few candidates want their home institutions to know they are considering another job – this could seriously undermine their reputations and effectiveness in their current roles, says WittKieffer. If confidentiality can be maintained through to the finalist stage, the pool of candidates will be much broader and stronger.

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*“The composition of an athletic director search committee should be similar to a chancellor or president search committee.”*

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Therefore, WittKieffer notes, it is essential that the search committee and search consultants communicate clearly to campus stakeholders why candidate confidentiality is important, and how their input will be used to inform the committee's work in moving candidates forward despite the fact that the process cannot be fully open to all parties across campus.

### 4. Keep Diversity Front and Center

Issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion; social justice; and cultural sensitivity are central themes that permeate campus conversations, and are equally important to the lives of student athletes. Institutions seeking a new AD expect to see and consider a diverse slate of finalists. For these reasons it is critical that the search committee include broad and diverse representation, and that it conduct a fair and equitable recruitment process—including being conscious of how implicit bias impacts discussions and decisions about candidates. Finally, WittKieffer says that it's important to develop interview questions that allow for candidates to demonstrate their commitment to and past successes in diversity, equity and inclusion. Top candidates will want to know that the search committee is fluent on matters related to diversity and that the institution itself is a progressive, collaborative and inclusive environment within which new hires will flourish.

WittKieffer assists hospitals, health systems, academic medical centers, medical schools, and physician groups; biotech, pharmaceutical, diagnostics and medical device companies; colleges and universities, and not-for-profit community service and cultural organizations with senior administrative recruiting assignments. With more than 100 search professionals nationwide, its consultants recruit CEOs, CFOs, COOs, CNOs, physician executives, and other leaders.



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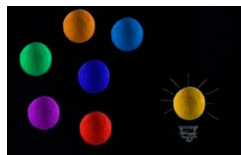
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## Top Higher Education Searches...

### Diversified Search Group Recruits Chief Diversity Officer for SUNY



**Diversified Search Group (DSG)** has assisted in the recruitment of Ricardo Nazario-Colón as senior vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion and chief diversity officer of the State University of New York (SUNY). Euris Belle, managing director, and Nancy Helfman, senior associate, led the assignment. "Diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamental to the long-term success of SUNY, higher education, and our nation," said John B. King, chancellor. "Dr. Ricardo Nazario-Colón is an exceptionally talented individual who will fill this important role as we strive toward our goal of inclusivity. With Ricardo's assistance, we will ensure that justice and equity run through all decisions we make at SUNY."

### Anthem Executive Seeks CFO for UNLV

Executive recruitment firm **Anthem Executive**

has been enlisted to find the next vice president, business affairs, and chief financial officer for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Leading the assignment are Scott Watson, Michael Ballew, Mike "JR" Wheless, and Florene Stawowy. The CFO will be expected to provide vision, leadership, and strategic direction and responsibility for administrative services; facilities management; financial services; financial planning, budget and analysis; planning, construction, and real estate; and support services (compliance, communication, change management, and project management), said the search firm. This leader also represents UNLV on the Nevada System of Higher Education Business Officers Council. The CFO will lead an organization of approximately 500 employees that deliver essential infrastructure services for the institution, said Anthem Executive.



### Greenwood Asher & Associates Seeks New Leader for Stillman College



Miramar Beach, FL-based executive recruitment firm **Greenwood Asher & Associates** is seeking a new president for Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, AL. Cynthia Warrick, the first woman to hold the position at the college, will retire from the presidency

at the end of her contract term on June 30. The search is being led by Marion Frenche and Lauren McCaghren. The president is the CEO of the college, reporting to the board of trustees with broad delegated responsibilities for all operations of Stillman, including overall leadership and operations to achieve a sustained growth, high level execution, and fiscal efficiency in its academic and associated programs. The president evaluates, manages, and promotes existing programs; and identifies new and expanding opportunities to resource and strengthen the institution for the future while always mindful of Stillman's past.

## ...More Higher Education Searches

### Buffkin / Baker Leading President Search for Chowan University



Partner-led executive search firm Buffkin / Baker was recently selected by Chowan University to lead its search for a new president. Kirk Peterson recently stepped down from the role to spend more time

with his family. Partner Ken Carrick is leading the assignment. The president serves as the chief executive officer of the university with responsibility for ensuring the success of Chowan's mission, academic integrity, fiscal stability and sustainability, enrollment management, fundraising efforts, personnel development, and physical plant management, according to Buffkin / Baker. In doing so, the president works closely with the board of trustees in developing, communicating, and executing a strategy consistent with the overall mission and vision of Chowan.

### Academic Career & Executive Search Recruits CHRO for Boise State University

Academic Career & Executive Search (ACES) has helped to place Bill Brady as chief human resources officer of Boise State University in Idaho. "I am delighted to welcome Bill Brady to Boise State



University," said Marlene Tromp, president. "An innovator with rich experience, Bill is well prepared to lead our HR operations into the future and to support the university as a whole. I look forward to having him join our leadership team." Mr. Brady joins Boise State from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst where he has served since 2017 and been promoted through the ranks as assistant, associate, and now vice chancellor and CHRO.

### Education Executives Seeks President for The Ohio State University



Santa Barbara, CA-based Education Executives has been chosen to find the next president of The Ohio State University in Columbus. Former president Kristina

Johnson announced in November that she would be stepping down from the role at the end of the academic year, in May. She later said that her resignation was fueled by conflicts with the university's board of trustees. "The role of president provides an extraordinary platform to refine, advance, and implement a shared vision for the university," said Education Executives. "The president will work with constituents across the university, nation, and world to enhance academic excellence, drive a culture of innovation, and ensure access and affordability to students and families of all backgrounds."

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