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Colleges and Universities Rely on Search Firms to Find Leaders in Polarizing Times



Academic institutions continue to pump big fees into executive search firms nationwide. Many academic recruiting specialists say business, in fact, has never been better despite some sectors of executive search slowing over the past year. Even smaller recruiting outfits have multiple assignments running concurrently, all at the senior levels, and if there's any slowdown coming it is to be found at the talent identification stage. With so much activity, it seems, talent demand is far outstripping the supply. The hunt for interim academic leadership is also picking up pace.

In recent months, a number of top schools have announced they are looking for new, high profile leaders to take them into new eras of fundraising, digitalization, sports and, in some cases, globalization. And like many sectors, talent shortages have made it difficult to place senior executives in a timely manner.

Several universities haven't changed leaders in years or even decades, and their boards of trustees and search committees are finding an entirely new and highly competitive landscape as they set out. It's another good reason why they're calling in executive search firms to help out.

"Demographic shifts have created a talent shortage that will continue for some years," said Heather Ring, managing partner of our academic, non-profit, social enterprise & culture practice at **Caldwell**. "To attract and secure in-demand candidates in this market, higher education institutions need to find ways to be nimble while continuing to use inclusive, transparent processes and search advisory committees to ensure diverse views are considered in decision making. With functional leaders for non-academic roles, we can offer more options when committees are open to individuals from outside higher education, but with experience in complex, multi-stakeholder environments, and an ability to align with the organizational mission."

When discussing challenges facing university presidents today, Ms. Ring says that there is increasing pressure to take a position on challenging geopolitical issues, and in an increasingly polarized society, it can be difficult to find a middle ground while also remaining true to institutional values. "These roles are increasing in scope, including requiring massive amounts of time spent fundraising, partly to compensate for reduced government support for our public institutions," she said. "President roles also are increasing in public profile; leaders and their actions are much more exposed in the age of social media. Public figures are easily targeted and pilloried, and, as we have seen, sometimes forced to succumb to extreme public pressure to resign. And we are living in an era in which education is increasingly under attack and labelled as elitist or irrelevant."

BY THE NUMBERS

Universities Look Outward for Presidents

Three in four (**78%**) current college presidents were recruited externally rather than being appointed from within.

Source: WittKeiffer

"In response, institutions need to tell their stories authentically, demonstrate their value to society, and engage with the communities in which they operate," Ms. Ring said. "Maintaining and/or growing enrollment is a challenge for many but not all institutions. Many students have turned away from liberal arts and humanities programs, and institutions have responded by cutting programs. Balancing rising costs and higher student debt are other concerns, and many institutions are grappling with the challenge of recruitment, retention, and support for international students. There are no simple solutions."

Ms. Ring also notes that schools are experiencing high turnover rates. "This is because of a confluence of events, including the influence of geopolitical events on higher education communities, state-mandated changes based on political ideologies, demographics creating a talent shortage, competitive and tenacious recruitment of talent from underrepresented groups, employment insecurity for newer faculty, and reluctance to take on administrative leadership roles in the age of social media," she said.

University searches also typically take longer. "It takes time to consult with the University community and ensure that all constituents have a chance to weigh in on *(cont'd. to page 2)*

IN THE NEWS

Storbeck Search | Diversified Search Recruits President for Monmouth College

Higher education-focused **Storbeck Search**, part of the **Diversified Search Group**, has assisted in the recruitment of Patricia Draves as the 15th president of Monmouth College in Monmouth, IL. Julie E. Tea, Anne Koellhoffer, and Danielle Mebert led the assignment.

She succeeds Clarence R. Wyatt, who has been the College's 14th president since July 2014 and will retire at the end of this school year. "Monmouth had an impressive and deep pool of candidates who expressed interest in the presidency or were nominated for the presidency," said Monmouth board vice chair Ralph Velazquez, who led the 10-member presidential search committee. "Dr. Draves emerged as the clear choice for the presidency, and we are excited for the future of Monmouth under her leadership."

"We look forward to Dr. Patricia Draves' leadership as the 15th president of Monmouth," said Monmouth board of trustees chair Mark Kopinski. "Her groundbreaking work as a college president and academic leader, along with her track record of developing innovative student-centered programs, has distinguished her in higher education. The entire Monmouth community is excited that she is again embracing the college's tartan as our new leader."

the profile and the process, and for that input to be compiled, reviewed, and reflected upon by members of the search committee," Ms. Ring said. "The consultation feedback also informs the development of the position profile and of the desired criteria, which ideally should be completed before recruitment outreach begins. When it comes to recruitment, attraction is more challenging in this particular time and place, given the recent vilification and subsequent resignations of a number of university presidents. The weight of responsibility in these roles is increasing, not decreasing, particularly when one considers that university presidents may need to spend 50 percent of their time fundraising."

The activity for recruiting senior level college and university executives is at a high level, according to William Funk, founder and president of **R. William Funk & Associates**. "Currently, among others, there are president/chancellor searches in various stages at Harvard, Yale, Penn, UNC Chapel Hill, New Mexico State, UCLA, West Virginia, et al. Stanford, Berkeley, Colorado-Boulder, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Temple have just recently concluded searches or have narrowed their choice to one finalist," he said. "Similarly, there is significant movement at the provost, VP, and dean levels."

"Presidents and chancellors face a myriad of challenges today," said Willie Funk, managing vice president of the firm. "Always one of the most complex, multi-constituent leadership roles, the presidents we interact with cite campus safety, declining public trust, increased campus unrest, declining enrollment, financial pressures, and no disruptions as some of the issues that keep them awake at night."

Mr. Funk also notes that boards expect turnover rates to continue at their current higher rate. "The decreasing tenure of university presidents naturally boosts the turnover rates at the highest

levels," he says. "And, whenever there is turnover at the top of the administrative structure, there is a ripple effect throughout the organization. Hence, we do anticipate a continuing level of high activity in these demanding jobs."

R. William Funk & Associates has noted that there is a bit of a trend to hire internal candidates or candidates who have ties to the hiring institution, perhaps to a higher degree than previously. "Some schools are forgoing full-fledged searches when hiring internally and others are not using outside search firms in these instances," said Mr. Funk. "Interest in women and underrepresented candidates continues to be high. Boards are being more active and taking a greater interest in the search process."

A Look at One Firm's Work

AGB Search notes colleges and universities are searching for leaders who have expertise in multiple areas. This has kept the search firm busy in recent months helping schools of all sizes in finding senior leaders. AGB is currently leading president searches for Utah Tech University, Wilbur Wright College, Dominican University New York, Northeastern Illinois University, Salt Lake Community College, Metropolitan College of New York, and Mount Saint Mary College just to name a few.

AGB explains that 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.

AGB recently assisted in the recruitment of Jack Warner as the president of Rhode Island College. "The quality of the individuals that had applied for this position was impressive, making it a very difficult decision," said David Caprio, chair of the Council on Postsecondary Education, who worked with AGB on the search. "There's certainly demonstrated momentum by the state of Rhode Island and its leadership's focus on education from K-12 through the college years. This search attracted a highly competitive pool of candidates for the Rhode Island College presidency, and we are confident that Jack Warner is — and remains to be — the best person to lead Rhode Island College at this moment in its history."

After a national search, AGB also helped the University of Dubuque in the recruitment of Travis L. Frampton its 12th president. The search firm was tasked with finding candidates with demonstrate compassion, empathy, and humility. They also sought a strategic thinker and innovator, particularly when it comes to identifying opportunities to improve the University's enrollment, culture, and financial sustainability. "Travis brings a wealth of academic and administrative knowledge," said trustee Suzanne Preiss, presidential search committee chair. "We are confident that his 20 plus years of experience will continue to guide University of Dubuque into the next phase of transformational leadership."

Both of these assignments called for AGB to present candidates with a wide scope of skillsets and the firm delivered senior leaders that fit the bill. Many of AGB consultants have served in college and university leadership positions using the past experiences to provide college and universities with top talent. *(cont'd. to page 3)*



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Financial Challenges

“Higher education recruiting is contracting to some degree because of the financial challenges facing many institutions,” said Carrie Coward, president of **Summit Search Solutions**. “However, that is being offset in many cases by the sheer volume of positions that are open due to retirements. Some of these searches do require a national search effort and so firms remain robust overall. So, there are many obstacles, but primarily financial challenges due to turnover, enrollment challenges, stimulus money running out, political unrest, and culture wars,” she noted.

“Jobs that require relocation to high cost of living areas or areas where there are housing shortages are especially challenging,” Ms. Coward says. “Colleges and universities that offer any type of remote, hybrid, or flexible position are seeing three times as much interest vs. jobs that firmly require a relocation.”

Ms. Coward also notes that many senior level academics and professionals in academia are opting to leave or to retire if they can manage it financially. Why? She says that “the same reasons that make being a university president challenging also impact the morale of faculty, staff, and administration – finances are tighter than ever, enrollment challenges, political and social unrest. People in academia feel like they are a bit under fire.”

Research has shown that filling president positions for university generally takes longer than typical searches. “Presidential searches are tremendously complex and take more time because there are so many stakeholder groups to involve and to satisfy,” Ms. Coward said. “Some have conflicting interests, so there is a lot to navigate to get to general agreement.” Generally, Ms. Coward explains that traits universities look for include: Grit, positivity, poise, wisdom, creativity, resourcefulness, transparency, political savvy, presence, and credibility.

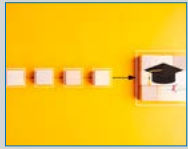
“The culture, governance, and norms in an academic setting are unique as compared to other industries,” said Ms. Coward. “Academia is more collaborative and inclusive in its hiring practices; thus, you will see search committees in many instances where you would not in another industry. The value proposition of higher education is also broader, as the value of an education goes far beyond the obvious variables, and thus the bottom line is harder to manage to.”

Finding New Sources of Income

“Nearly all higher ed institutions are dependent on tuition as their main source of revenue for the operating budget,” said Meredith Rosenberg, partner and co-founder, **NU Advisory Partners**. “Amidst declining enrollments of traditional students due to demographics and questions about ROI, some colleges and universities increasingly are recruiting a new type of leader to identify new sources of revenue to supplement tuition and reinforce their brands among constituents,” she added.

“More and more, institutions are creating senior positions with responsibilities for areas including developing programs for new audiences, expanding online or hybrid learning, building immersive off-site learning experiences, forging creative (cont'd. to page 4)

IN THE NEWS

AGB Search Recruits 22nd President for Seton Hall University

Washington, D.C.-based recruitment firm **AGB Search**, which specializes in higher education leadership assignments, has assisted in the recruitment of Monsignor Joseph R. Reilly as the 22nd president of Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ. Melissa K. Trotta and Matthew J.

Kilcoyne led the assignment. “There is no one better suited to leading the university at this moment — a time when Seton Hall stands at the cusp of extraordinary progress,” said Hank D’Alessandro, chair of the board of regents and the presidential search committee. “Monsignor Reilly was the ideal choice. He possesses a deep faith in god and a demonstrable commitment to nurturing our students to greatness as we advance among the nation’s foremost Catholic universities.”

Monsignor Reilly was selected after an eight-month search by a subcommittee of the board of regents with input from a diverse cross-section of the university community. Seton Hall received additional guidance from AGB Search. This appointment marks the return of a priest-president to Seton Hall, which has been a hallmark of the university for 146 years of its 168-year history.

partnerships, and creating fresh approaches to marketing,” Ms. Rosenberg said. “Titles vary institution to institution but the responsibilities are similar. Examples include chief transformation officer, vice provost for innovation, chief partnerships officer, and vice president for new ventures. The ideal candidates for these roles typically know how to work within a higher education environment and must be mission-driven around student outcomes, but aren’t necessarily from academia.”

“They should bring to the institution skills around growth and innovation,” she said. “They can come from the private sector if they have a track record of implementation across similarly complex, large-scale organizations. To be successful in higher ed, they need the patient-yet-tenacious gene. They know how to influence and work with their colleagues and be collaborative, but still be driven to get things done.”

What it means to be a leader has been redefined in this current era, according to Ms. Rosenberg. “We also can’t overlook the current climate on university campuses,” she said. “Presidents are now under much more scrutiny than ever and are viewed through a much broader lens. Today, it is critical for presidents to be very savvy politically and also be exceptional communicators. If they had to see ten steps ahead previously, now they must look even further into the future and think through implications from so many different angles.”

Driving Innovation

On top of the long list of challenges facing university presidents, Ms. Rosenberg explains that one that often gets overlooked is the need to drive innovation. She says that universities need to move beyond the traditions of academia and serve new audiences in new ways. A university president today can’t be afraid to ask tough questions: What are we really good at? How do we deliver our capabilities to different constituents? How do we communicate what differentiates

our brand? How do we think about teaching and learning beyond lecturing students in a four-year residential environment?

“When universities conduct a search for a new president, they need to look for candidates with a track record of driving innovation and growth,” Ms. Rosenberg said. “That means attracting people who have launched successful initiatives around new programs, audiences, or modes of instruction. And just as important, they need a track record of engaging with their communities and stakeholders to embrace these initiatives. Finally, a university president also has to think about talent in a new way. They need to break the traditional models and bring in people from unexpected places to add some entrepreneurial DNA to their institutions.”

“The academic sector is currently facing significant disruption and while there is a steady stream of opportunities available we have noticed reduced volume in certain jurisdictions globally, which are offset by both significant movement in other regions,” said Gordon Lobay, regional managing partner, Americas at **Perrett Laver**. “The general rhythm to senior searches is also shifting with many searches starting at various points throughout the academic calendar.”

“University presidents today are facing times of considerable disruption from high inflation and interest rates coupled with historic challenges around costs of deferred maintenance, to labor disputes, research security issues, executive compensation freezes in certain jurisdictions, enrolment issues in certain disciplines combined with caps on international student numbers in others,” Dr. Lobay said. “All of this amidst major geopolitical conflict; tensions on campus in areas related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), anti-racism and Indigenization; student experience; significant elections on the horizon in many major markets, and questions from the public on the role of the university and value of university degrees in contemporary society. There are many other issues at play, but at the same time, great opportunities to make hugely positive impacts in the world.”

Like other recruiters, Dr. Lobay says that searches for university presidents do typically take longer due to the need for significant consultation with both internal and external constituencies at the outset of processes. “Universities are collegial environments where consultation is an expectation,” he says. “These often range from a series of individual, small group, large open fora, to requesting written feedback from many, often external, groups, as well as administering surveys. These engagements aim to learn what different constituencies feel are the key opportunities, challenges, priorities for the institution at present and into the future – and based upon that context, what they feel are the key qualities, characteristics, and qualifications of the ideal candidate.”

“In addition to consultation, search committees are often large, ranging from 15 to 25 individuals, and in some cases even larger,” Dr. Lobay said. “Scheduling these meetings and the time it takes to run them do require more time.”

“The current state of recruiting senior executives for colleges and universities is in distress. In a post pandemic, higher ed world that is rift with governmental oversight, critical
(cont’d. to page 5)

challenges in enrolment, financing, and world affairs – it is increasingly more difficult to recruit and retain higher ed executive leaders,” said Karen Whitney, senior consultant with **The Registry**, part of **ZRG**.

“College presidencies have always been 24/7 and 360 degree jobs but now there seems to be more competing pressure from competing interest groups almost all of the time, and these pressures always roll upwards,” said Lucille Sansing, senior consultant with The Registry. “Just to name a few: declining trust in higher education as an essential component to success; political and religious schisms that don’t seem to have language to find common ground; intrusion into campus life by outside political and social interests (e.g. erosion of campus DEI work); demographic cliff of 18-22 year olds risking decline in enrollment and cost in tuition discounting.”

Interim Leaders Sought

Since 1992, The Registry has helped colleges and universities across the U.S. and abroad during times of transition with experienced and diverse interim leaders. Presidents have always faced challenges as they interact with their several stakeholders, including boards, alumni, faculty, students, governments and external supporters, funders and agencies, according to Ian Newbould, senior consultant with The Registry. “That said, there are some unique newer challenges that presidents face,” he said. “Social media is pervasive. Difficulties and criticisms can go viral to hundreds of thousands or millions of people around the world in a split second. Boards react to these viral onslaughts, and presidents can be caught in the middle for doing something, or for doing nothing.”

“The unusually divisive political discord in the nation can make it extremely difficult for presidents to avoid,” Dr. Newbould said. “State regulations and interference in university affairs is becoming endemic. Presidents become the focus of attention, with both intended and unintended consequences. If the meme of a college president sitting in a chair with pipe in hand dispensing wisdom was perhaps never true, it certainly is not today. In many respects the job has never been more difficult, and the reduction in presidential average tenure the result.”

As documented recently in both *Inside Higher Education* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, it is becoming more and more difficult for presidents to identify and hire quality administrators and faculty members for their institutions.

“The challenges of competitive salaries, career mobility and decreased institutional loyalty, uncertain budgets, and complex student expectations, make it far more difficult for new or experienced CEOs to maintain coherence and commitment across their institution,” said James Martin, senior consultant with The Registry. “Additionally, strong demands for accountability not only from trustees, but also state and federal legislators, activist alumni and donors, and engaged parents, can distract even talented, qualified leaders from the reasons they sought the position originally.”

Hard Work

Presidential searches are hard work, and those on and off campus who need to be involved are already over-worked in many cases, and the vetting process for top-quality candidates can be exhausting since all major campus groups want a piece of the pie in this process, and a good-sized piece at that,” said James Martin, senior consultant with The Registry. “Search committees and professional search firms learn that the goal of campus consensus can be futile, so institutional leaders increasingly turn to organizations that can provide experienced leaders who can serve as an interim president for a year and keep all the trains running efficiently as the college or university steadies itself and clarifies the characteristics and accomplishments it finally seeks in its next leader.”

“Both public and private institutions contend with increasingly more complex environments due to governmental policies such as student aid and free speech, a lack of general trust in higher education from the public, and technological advancements that may affect both teaching and working environments.”

The difficulty of recruiting senior executives for colleges and universities is directly proportional to the challenges faced by the higher education sector, according to Shawn M. Hartman, SVP and COO of **Academic Search**. “Both public and private institutions contend with increasingly more complex environments due to governmental policies such as student aid and free speech, a lack of general trust in higher education from the public, and technological advancements that may affect both teaching and working environments,” he said. “Higher education leadership is also impacted by internal forces like budget constraints and answering to a wide range of stakeholders. It’s also important to note that the more current leaders and institutions are attacked by the media, the public, or even members of the institution itself, the harder it is to recruit candidates to roles at those institutions.”

Mr. Hartman also explains that at the most senior level of campus, presidents and chancellors have been seeing shorter tenures, which can be attributed to a variety of factors including burnout from the pandemic as well as new challenges stemming from cultural changes on campuses. “As leadership tenure shortens, there will be more opportunities for executive leadership roles within higher education that will need to be filled,” he says. “While it remains a challenge on some campuses, we continue to work toward advancing the cause of equity and inclusion. Part of those efforts starts with the recruitment and selection process of leaders at institutions. We understand that to increase equity and inclusion in higher education leadership, we need to look beyond just recruitment and identify ways in which we can support emerging leaders from all demographics through programs offered in partnership with other higher education organizations.”

(cont'd. to page 6)

To better recruit leaders at colleges and universities, Academic Search believes that it is important to set a strong foundation for the search process where we gain a deep understanding of each institution's unique culture, mission, and challenges. "This allows our senior consultants at Academic Search to identify and recruit leaders who not only possess the requisite skills and experience but also align closely with the institution's values and aspirations," Mr. Hartman said. "As leading institutions becomes more daunting and challenging, finding diverse leaders who have the skill set to lead an institution, while aligning with the mission of the institution may become more challenging. This is why the work we do is so important in identifying and developing the next generation of higher education leaders to fill these critical roles."

"When universities conduct a search for a new president, they need to look for candidates with a track record of driving innovation and growth."

Challenging Period

Mr. Hartman also explains that presidents of colleges and universities today are at the helm during one of the most challenging periods in higher education as the sector faces a multitude of pressures and expectations that require not just administrative expertise, but visionary leadership. "Many institutions face financial constraints, with presidents needing to navigate diminishing public funding, rising operational costs, and the need to keep education accessible and affordable," he said. "Institutions are also facing the rapid pace of technological advancement, which was particularly heightened during the pandemic. But although institutions made major changes to adapt to distance learning during that time, many were also quick to revert to the former model of education in the post-pandemic world. Presidents are now facing the challenge of moving their institutions into the future with more lasting technological changes and course offerings that allow for more equitable access to education."

The changing demographics of the student body present another layer of complexity, requiring presidents to lead institutions that are responsive and inclusive to a wide range of student needs and backgrounds, according to Mr. Hartman. "Mental health and well-being have also become more prominent, and students have greater expectations to receive support in this area from their institution," he says. "Along with that, the push towards greater diversity, equity, and inclusion has placed additional responsibility on university presidents to lead by example, fostering environments where everyone feels valued and supported. Amid these challenges, presidents must also contend with the evolving landscape of higher education itself, including shifts toward online learning and the need to demonstrate the value of higher education in tangible outcomes. Leading an institution through these complexities requires not just managerial skills, but a deep commitment to the mission of higher education and the resilience to guide their communities through change."

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SPOTLIGHT

Finding Senior Leaders for Higher Education Institutions



Paula Fazli is senior vice president at Lindauer and co-lead of the firm's higher education practice. Ms. Fazli has partnered with hundreds of higher education institutions, non-profit organizations, and foundations to recruit individuals for a variety of leadership positions,

from provosts, deans, and department chairs to senior leaders in human resources, finance, diversity and inclusion, academic affairs, student affairs, research administration, educational development, and enrollment management.

"Throughout her respected career in executive search, Ms. Fazli has helped some of the most prestigious institutions in the country navigate periods of change and bring in leaders who shape future generations," said Deb Taft, CEO. "Her commitment to serving as a trusted client partner in every aspect of an executive search aligns strongly with Lindauer's own philosophy."

Ms. Fazli recently sat down with Hunt Scanlon Media to discuss the ever-changing climate for higher education institutions today and how search firms are stepping up to fill senior positions.

What are some challenges facing university presidents today?

It's clear that over the last decade, university presidents have had to address a slew of growing internal challenges—things like shrinking budgets, declining enrollment, and faculty and graduate student unionization drives—that are connected to the operations and the unique structures of higher education systems. Presidents today need to be able to address and engage with a range of complex, often divisive external challenges—such as global conflict and intense scrutiny from Congress—that are having increasingly greater impact on the culture and climate on campuses. Leaders who came up through the traditional career pipelines of higher education and who are equipped to manage the former, internal challenges are not always exhibiting the kind of crisis management skills needed to weather the latter, external ones.

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

From a recruiting perspective, it can be challenging to find candidates who are able to manage these two very different sets of high-level challenges. To adapt to a rapidly evolving landscape, universities are reconsidering their criteria for top leadership and opening themselves to candidates who may not necessarily fit the traditional profile of a university president. As part of this reevaluation, institutions may become more receptive to transformational leaders with experience managing change in industries outside of higher education.

As recruiters how can you assist?

This kind of paradigm shift is never easy, but as the crises facing presidents grow more common and more complex, I think universities are ready to have this conversation. There are

a few ways we as recruiters can help search committees think more flexibly about their future leaders; one of the most effective measures is simply to give leaders and search committees an example. I think it is incredibly helpful for a professional who has made the transition from another industry to higher education leadership to share their story with a search committee at the very beginning of the succession planning process. It can provide a proof of concept for otherwise skeptical committees. Exposure to a greater diversity of professional backgrounds is critical to building more resilient institutions and addressing increasingly multi-faceted challenges.

Are schools expecting higher turnover rates?

I would venture to say that yes, turnover rates are expected to increase; but like so much in higher education, the rates vary immensely from institution to institution. Large public universities and smaller, regional colleges experience different challenges. Some turnover, of course, is healthy as it creates opportunities for new talent to bring fresh energy and ideas to the table. Too much turnover, however, can make it difficult for institutions to fulfill their missions.

"Exposure to a greater diversity of professional backgrounds is critical to building more resilient institutions and addressing increasingly multi-faceted challenges."

Why is this occurring?

It's not a groundbreaking insight, but I think a primary reason is the growing pay disparity between roles in higher education and equivalent positions in the corporate world—particularly for early-career professionals. This puts the overall talent pipeline at risk. Whereas in the past, the mission of higher education may have been enough to level the playing field in the pursuit of top talent, the job market has become more and more competitive. As universities address student concerns about the value of a college diploma, they are finding it necessary to think more holistically and transparently about their employee value proposition and what professionals need in order to choose this career path. This reevaluation will help improve institutions' ability to retain existing talent and recruit new talent for open leadership positions.

You recently joined Lindauer to co-lead the firm's higher education practice, can you reflect on this move?

I'm delighted to carry on the legacy of Sage Search Partners, the search firm I co-founded, with Lindauer, a firm that I have long admired in the non-profit executive search field. Lindauer consultants serve many of the world's leading causes and offer their personalized, values-aligned solutions to an impressive array of clients. Behind every Lindauer search is an expert infrastructure of research, data, marketing, and administrative support that drives client success. I'm looking forward to bringing Sage Search Partners' 25 years into this exciting next chapter with Lindauer.

SPOTLIGHT

How to Engage Candidates in an Evolving Higher Education Landscape



*Jennifer Muller is managing director of **Academic Career & Executive Search (ACES)**. She has more than 20 years of research and development experience in higher education and Fortune 500 companies. She has led over 70 higher education searches both domestically and internationally*

spanning presidents, vice presidents, associate chancellors, deans, directors, chairs, and faculty level positions. She is former vice chair of the American Council on Education (ACE) Executive Search Roundtable and serves as an advisor in the numerous ACE leadership development forums.

*Ms. Muller recently sat down with **Hunt Scanlon Media** to some challenges she is recruiting senior leaders for the higher education sector and how her firm has adjusted.*

Jennifer, what are some of the challenges facing executive search firms today within the higher education sector?

There are a number of challenges occurring simultaneously. High turnover equates to more opportunities. Candidates have numerous options and can be discerning in their job search. Most often, they are also in multiple searches. The frequent turnover (retirement/job changes) of presidents and other key leaders creates uncertainty. When appropriate, part of our candidate marketing strategy is emphasizing strong, stable leadership along with institutional strength and the potential of the role. However, the high turnover rates at the presidential and provost levels pose a significant challenge for candidates, they want stability. Of course, as folks leave voluntarily or transition from administrative roles back to faculty, one could argue that this change presents opportunity for search firms. This is also true. Program cuts and shifts in strategic direction are also an issue. This dovetails with the above challenge. Changes in senior level positions can impact the vision and strategic direction of an institution and its programs. Seemingly overnight, focus areas can be shifted jeopardizing the candidate's alignment with leadership or their role. Candidates are more cautious about where they're applying.

Many recruiters have suggested that there are concerns over financial stability. Have you seen this?

We frequently deal with this. While it was once more common in enrollment driven private institutions (14 closed in 2023 and seven slated to close spring 2024), more and more, we are now seeing layoffs and consolidation affecting public institutions. These concerns deter good candidates from pursuing positions. Our responsibility lies in getting accurate information and, when we can, promoting the good health and stability of an institution or college by talking about enrollment strength, program growth, capital investments, and other indicators of good fiscal management and stability. Property values and high interest rates are also a concern. Property values have increased nationwide, particularly in certain regions where they have experienced exponential growth. While

many have benefited from this rise, it has not been uniform across the board. Since 2020, at least 10 states have seen home prices increase between 47 percent – 60 percent. If you are relocating from a state that hasn't experienced the same increase, bridging this gap can pose significant financial challenges. We could be asking someone to double their mortgage rate on a significantly higher priced home. Financially that may not be possible.

How does this impact the search firms' behavior?

Candidates know they have more options for job opportunities right now. They are doing their homework and are better prepared. They've researched the institution, reached out to colleagues, and reviewed financial and enrollment data. They've reviewed their peer salaries, evaluated the cost of living, assessed school systems, and considered housing costs. They're often in multiple job searches and come prepared to negotiate. Candidates are also juggling more personal factors that influence their professional decisions. These can range from proximity or caregiving responsibilities for aging parents, children, and/or grandchildren, to logistical considerations such as accessibility to airports and the ease of travel. Despite their professional goals, these factors can cause candidates to decline positions.

How does this impact executive search firms' behavior?

Finding and engaging candidates now requires more effort on our part. We do a lot more proactive engagement to get candidates attention and engage them. ACES has always been high touch and it's paying off. Maintaining continual communication and engagement is critical. We need to address and remove potential barriers throughout the search. ACES has also prioritized additional investment in our research and outreach team, we are continually expanding this area. We do our homework. As candidates have done their research, we are ready and anticipating objections and presenting alternative perspectives for them as they look at opportunities. Listening more carefully to better discern their true drivers and motivations is critical.

Discuss how ACES supports candidates?

An additional priority for ACES is our approach to candidate care. We have always upheld a standard of treating candidates with the highest degree of respect and consideration, ensuring they feel valued. This creates a foundation of trust enabling us to build solid relationships with the candidate. It's important for search firms to adopt this perspective. Candidate loss is a significant issue. Five years ago, 50 percent of candidates may have been involved in one or rarely two other searches. Now, candidates are concurrently engaged in three, four, and five searches. This impacts how we run searches. We continually adjust, becoming more efficient without compromising the quality of our candidate pools or putting too much stress on our search committees. We've also increased the number of finalists we bring forward. The days of having three finalists is behind us.

Why Colleges and Universities Are Hiring Interim Leaders

WittKieffer has increasingly fielded requests from higher education institutions for interim leaders to fill critical open positions or to supplement the current leadership team. “This trend is gaining momentum as colleges and universities must move ahead with key initiatives while the process of hiring a new, permanent leader plays out,” the search firm said. “Due to evolving variables in the hiring process, it often takes longer than expected to execute a search and onboard a new permanent leader.”

A major factor driving institutions to hire interim leaders from outside their campuses is related to the frequency and severity of challenges institutions face on a day-to-day basis, according to WittKieffer. In many cases, the firm explains that there is significant risk in reassigning an executive from inside the organization who hasn’t previously held the role of president. “This applies to other key administrative positions as well. In some cases, financial challenges have evolved to become budgetary crises that threaten the sustainability of the institution,” WittKieffer said. “Furthermore, nationwide enrollment challenges require a deep skillset that only experienced administrators know how to manage effectively. Fundraising has also become a critically important skill as philanthropy often funds new programs and areas of excellence across campus.”

WittKieffer notes that these scenarios often require a fresh perspective and proven expertise from an interim leader who has lived through similar challenges. “External interim leaders provide unique knowledge and experience that can help lay a strong foundation for a future permanent leader,” the firm said. “Moreover, the traditional practice of asking a sitting administrator to fill a leadership void only creates additional leadership voids elsewhere in the organization. More often than not, asking current cabinet members to take on interim roles taxes executive bandwidth and lowers productivity as they tackle two jobs at once.”

In the past year, WittKieffer has helped numerous institutions find interim leaders in situations in which their current leadership capacity and capabilities were strained. The firm provides the following examples demonstrate how interim executives support today’s colleges and universities:

Maintain momentum for key strategic and operational goals and objectives. Recruitment for a new college president or other key cabinet member can take up to a year, and in some extreme cases, it can take longer. Institutions need to put strategies into practice regardless of a leadership vacancy. An experienced interim president, VP, or other leader helps keep critical projects and initiatives moving ahead until a permanent replacement can be found.

Access specific expertise. Higher education institutions increasingly face extraordinary challenges that require a deep set of skills to manage. Some of these challenges include a major technology implementation, a revamp of enrollment or student retention strategy, cultivating donors for an

(cont'd. to page 11)

Experts in Higher Education Search

The AGB Search team is led by veterans of higher education and executive search. We are committed to assisting every client in finding the right leader for their institution and building highly effective, diverse leadership teams.



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important fundraising campaign, or a review and implementation of new academic programs, among others. An interim leader can leverage highly specific experience directly aligned to tackling those challenges.

Mentor a new leader. Institutions frequently hire key leaders based largely on potential with the understanding they'll need time to adapt and grow into their role. Interim leaders can serve as mentors and coaches to newly hired campus leaders to streamline onboarding, establish priorities, build confidence, and help the permanent executive successfully transition into their new role.

Deploy a change agent to make tough decisions. With vast management and leadership knowledge and experience, interim leaders can be agents of change. They can make tough, necessary decisions without fear of repercussions, that protect the existing leadership team and permanent hire from the fallout of decisions that can be unpopular with some constituents. Interim executives can challenge the status quo and develop action steps needed to bring important and necessary change when needed.

“With higher education experiencing intermittent crises and frequent turnover among leadership teams, employing interim leaders from outside one’s institution becomes an important talent strategy.”

“With higher education experiencing intermittent crises and frequent turnover among leadership teams, employing interim leaders from outside one’s institution becomes an important talent strategy,” WittKieffer said. “Interim leaders can provide support and expertise to keep an institution running smoothly until a permanent hire can be made or until a crisis has been averted or successfully navigated.”

WittKieffer first launched an interim search practice in 2018 to provide interim leaders to the firm’s healthcare industry clients. In 2020, the firm expanded it to serve clients in academia that are seeking temporary executives to ensure leadership continuity. WittKieffer’s higher education interim services are overseen by Brian Krehbiel, managing partner and head of the interim leadership practice. The practice supports the placement of interim presidents, provosts, academic deans, CFOs, CHROs, advancement officers and enrollment management leaders. Clients may also request support for interim placement of other senior-level roles.

WittKieffer’s education recruitment team identifies higher education and college preparatory school leaders who understand complex issues facing both public and private institutions: resource constraints, shifting national policy and increased scrutiny by boards, faculty, students and families. The education roles it recruits include presidents, provosts, deans, and officers for business and finance, advancement and development, student affairs, enrollment, IT and more.

Top Higher Education Searches...

RH Perry & Associates Recruits 12th President for Saint Martin's University



Following a competitive nationwide search, **RH Perry & Associates** has assisted in the recruitment of William Brownsberger as the 12th president of Saint Martin's University in Lacey, WA, to lead in its

search for a new president. "We look forward to this next chapter for Saint Martin's with Dr. Brownsberger's leadership," said Medrice Coluccio, chair of the university board of trustees. "With leadership transition comes a spirit of potentiality and opportunity to reimagine our future while honoring our Catholic Benedictine tradition in service of today's and tomorrow's students." The presidential search committee consisted of 15 representatives from the Saint Martin's community, spanning Saint Martin's Abbey, faculty, staff, students, board of trustees and the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Anthem Executive Seeking Chief Information Officer for Texas Woman's University

Anthem Executive was recently retained by Texas Woman's University (TWU) in Denton, TX, to lead in its search for a chief information officer. Michael Ballew, Scott Watson, Mike "JR" Wheless, and Florene Stawowy are leading the assign-



ment. Candidates should have a minimum of 15 years of experience in a technology-related position as well as a minimum of five years of leadership responsibility managing multiple, large, cross-functional teams or projects, and influencing senior-level management and key stakeholders. They must have extensive knowledge of technology planning and operations, design, and deployment, as well as system life cycle management. The CIO is responsible for advancing the university's curriculum, providing leadership for the faculty, overseeing research, and developing strategic, innovative programs that complement Texas Woman's mission and strengths.

Academic Career & Executive Search Seeking CHRO for Massachusetts College of Art and Design



Academic Career & Executive Search (ACES) was recently selected to recruit the next chief human resources officer for Massachusetts College of Art and Design. The search is being led by managing partner

Jennifer Muller. This is a vibrant period for the school and a unique opportunity to lead at a distinguished institution as the college commemorates its 150th anniversary. The successful candidate will be an informed decision maker who capitalizes on opportunities to promote the organization's mission, vision, and values actively. The CHRO plays an integral role in driving the organization's commitment to strengthening its position as a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.



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...More Higher Education Searches

Myers McRae Executive Search and Consulting Recruits Chancellor for Southern Arkansas University Tech



After a comprehensive search process, Macon, GA-based **Myers McRae Executive Search and Consulting** has assisted in the recruitment of Jerry Thomas as the new chancellor of Southern

Arkansas University Tech (SAU Tech). Jennifer Barfield, executive vice president, led the assignment. "We are extremely pleased that Dr. Thomas will be our new chancellor at SAU Tech," said David Rankin, SAU Tech president emeritus. "His impressive accomplishments and background have prepared him well for this outstanding leadership opportunity." With a proven track record of leadership and dedication to higher education for the past 29 years, Dr. Thomas previously served as vice president for academic affairs at National Park College.

Bryant Group Recruits President and CEO for Wichita State University Foundation and Alumni Engagement

Following a nationwide search, Dallas-based **Bryant Group** has assisted in the recruitment of Telly McGaha as president and CEO at Wichita State University Foundation and Alumni Engagement



(WSUFAE). In May 2023, Elizabeth King announced her plans to retire as the WSUFAE president and CEO after 33 years of leading these efforts. The search committee was led by Lynn Nichols, chair of the WSUFAE board of directors, and Jay Smith, chair-elect, with guidance from the Bryant Group as well as additional advisory members. "Over the course of this search, we met with many candidates from across the country to find the best fit for this position, and we truly believe that Telly is the right person," said Ms. Nichols.

Greenwood Asher & Associates Seeking President for Milwaukee Area Technical College



Miramar Beach, FL-based executive recruitment firm **Greenwood Asher & Associates** has been selected by Milwaukee Area Technical College to conduct a national search for their next

college president. Tracey Weldon, Jim Johnsen, and Itza Walters are leading the assignment. "We are honored to have been selected by the Milwaukee Area Technical College board to support their search for the college's next president," said Ms. Weldon. "Milwaukee Area Technical College plays such a pivotal role in providing affordable access to those seeking higher education and career advancement opportunities in the region. We look forward to partnering with them in their search for a transformative and visionary leader to usher them into the next era in the college's impactful history."