2026 TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

HANOVER RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

The Reinvention of Higher Education

In 2026, colleges and universities continue to navigate converging pressures that are reshaping how they operate and fulfill their missions, driven by sweeping policy changes and funding uncertainties.

In addition to political and economic volatility, higher education institutions across the U.S. and the globe continue to face uncertain enrollments, rising operational costs, and eroding public confidence in the value of a degree.

In this era of unpredictability, higher education's vulnerabilities have been exposed, leaving campus leaders with few easy options for moving forward. Yet within these challenges also lies unprecedented opportunity to respond with evidence-based innovation.

Through our partnerships with hundreds of public and private colleges and universities around the world, we see institutional leaders who are preparing their campuses and students for a different future, without losing sight of their values or holding tightly to outmoded practices.

Hanover's 2026 Trends in Higher Education report highlights **five trends our experts believe are at the forefront of the sector this year**. This report compiles data, recommendations, and case studies to help your institution address complex challenges and boldly reach for new opportunities.

2026 holds opportunities for higher education institutions to reinvent themselves to better serve students and communities. Use this report to help guide the way.

Get more industry-leading insights about the future with Hanover's Higher Education Research & Insights today.

READ MORE

KEY INSIGHTS

Our collaborations with hundreds of public universities, community colleges, and private institutions offer Hanover Research meaningful, evidence-based insights into the persistent challenges — and solutions — that uniquely apply to higher education.

Here are five trends shaping higher education in 2026.

TREND 1

Workforce skill building addresses employability and ROI concerns

As students demand degrees that pay off and legislators push for workforce readiness, colleges and universities are priming their programs for a new future of work.

TREND 2

Demand for AI policy and governance escalates

Artificial intelligence (AI) is not only changing teaching and learning, but also campus operations and research, requiring institutions to develop guiding frameworks for its proper use.

TREND 3

Financial realities and data realign strategic priorities

Colleges and universities are developing resilient strategic plans that can withstand ongoing external threats and account for organizational rightsizing.

TREND 4

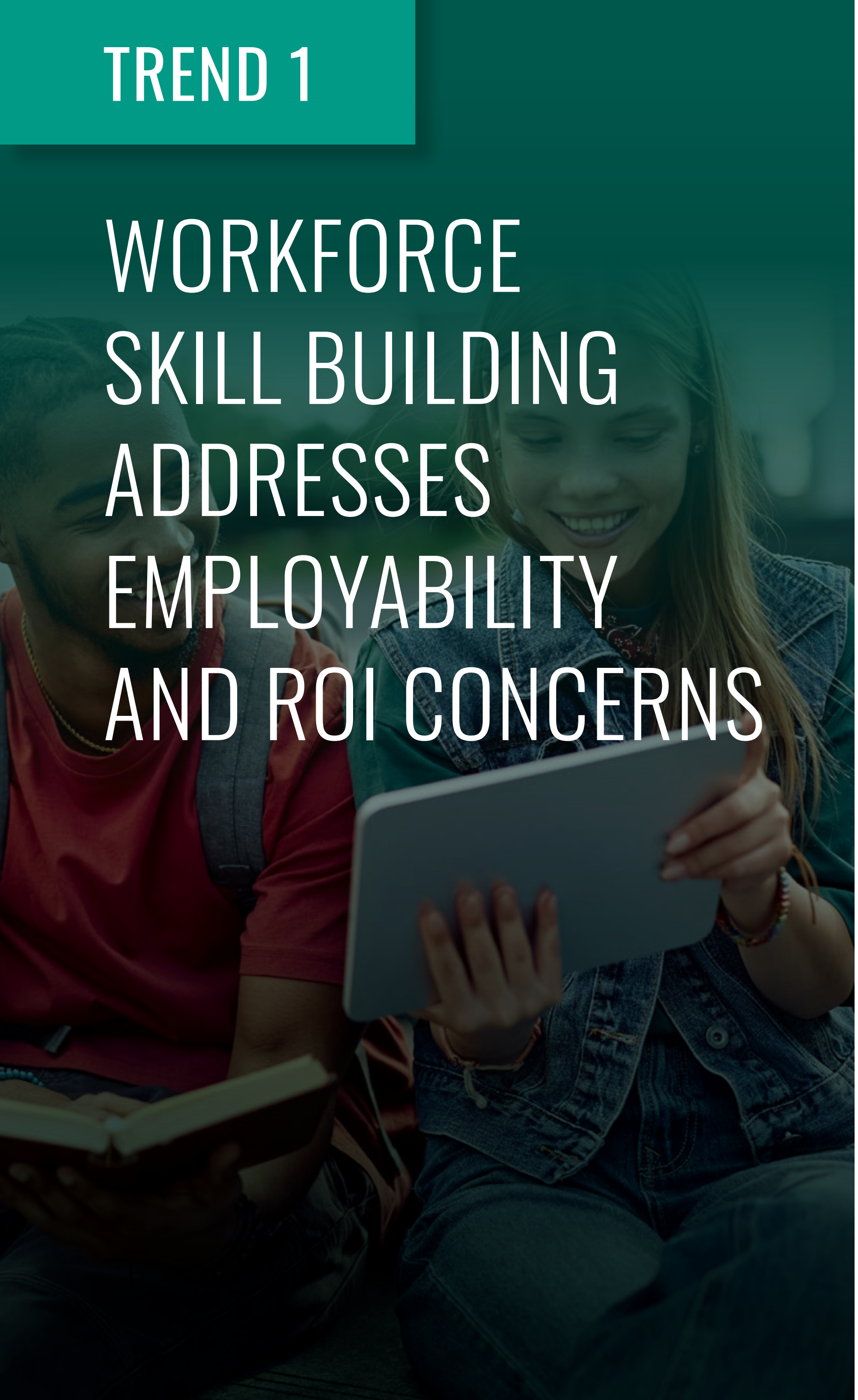
Program costs and contributions come into sharper focus

To address critical resource-allocation and cost-benefit questions, campuses are more accurately assessing the financial metrics of their academic programs and units.

TREND 5

Integrated student support systems magnify retention efforts

To deliver holistic, high-impact support to more students, departments are collaborating to reduce siloes, share data, and advance more effective service delivery practices.



TREND 1

WORKFORCE SKILL BUILDING ADDRESSES EMPLOYABILITY AND ROI CONCERNS

8 in 10

employers agree that high school graduates are less prepared to enter the workforce than previous generations

U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

As students demand degrees that pay off and legislators push workforce readiness, colleges and universities prime their programs for a new future of work.

SHIFTING DEFINITIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL VALUE

College graduates still enjoy greater lifetime job security and higher wages than their peers. But public confidence in the value of higher education continues to erode, and legislative pressure for institutions to improve career outcome performance is rising.

As workforce development policies proliferate and younger alumni face a weakened job market, students increasingly gauge institutional value based on job and career relevance over academic rigor or tradition. In turn, institutions are adapting and differentiating their academic programs to compete in a changing market.

IMPROVING DATA FOR BOOSTING ENROLLMENT AND VALUE

More campus leaders are using labor market data and employer insights to strengthen academic offerings across disciplines to position students for better career success and rebuild public perceptions of institutional value.

As rapid developments in AI rewrite workforce needs, applying market intelligence identifies opportunities to update outdated curricula, modernize learning outcomes, and develop competitive credentials to fill workforce skill gaps.

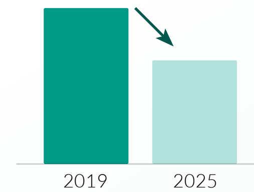
There is evidence that this approach is working. Enrollment in microcredential and short-term certificate programs continues to grow, with many employers reporting that skill-based credentials positively influence hiring decisions.

Additionally, data show that experiential learning opportunities — such as paid internships, apprenticeships, practicums, project-based learning, field study, and research experiences — lead to better job offers, higher salaries, and faster career progression.

STRENGTHENING DURABLE SKILLS AND EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS

To extend career-aligned innovation, institutions are engaging employers in deeper conversations and collaborations beyond advisory boards or occasional surveys.

More than ever, business and campus leaders are coming together to exchange knowledge and design partnerships that deliver leading-edge credentials that account for industry outlook, skill demand, and novel revenue models. These alliances, when driven by research and evidence, can result in compelling outcomes for students.



18 point drop

in Americans who rate higher education as very important in 2025 (35%) compared to 2019 (53%)

GALLUP

5 point drop

in admitted students who agree that a college degree is very or extremely valuable in 2025 (70%) compared to 2024 (75%)

HANOVER RESEARCH

of employers are more likely to consider hiring graduates who have held internships, apprenticeships, or leadership roles

AAC&U

TAKE ACTION

COLLABORATE WITH INDUSTRY

Establish closer partnerships with employers and accreditors to dial in future-ready learning outcomes and credential requirements.

RAMP UP CAREER SUPPORTS

Help students navigate future job requirements with personalized advising, goalsetting and planning tools, alumni networks, and internships or job shadowing opportunities.

SYSTEMATIZE MARKET RESEARCH

Streamline academic market research practices by tracking and analyzing labor market data, industry growth, employer demand, skill gaps, alumni outcomes, and student interest.

SHOW STUDENTS THE DATA

Ensure prospective students and families learn about alumni outcomes and the long-term earnings differential for college graduates.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about workforce skill building with these Hanover resources:

INFOGRAPHIC >

Top Career Skills for New Grads, an infographic tracking the fastest-growing careers and skills for bachelor's and master's degree holders

WEBINAR >

Thinking Strategically About Workforce Alignment in Higher Education, a recorded webinar on aligning education and industry needs

REPORT >

Best Practices in Implementing Career Readiness, a research report on developing career readiness competencies

(member-only access)

REPORT >

Communicating the Value of a College Degree, a research report exploring perceptions about higher education's return on investment

(member-only access)

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:
MARKET-DRIVEN PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

UF
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

INSTITUTION
University of Florida

LOCATION
Gainsville, Florida

Hanover worked with University of Florida's Office for Strategic Initiatives (OSI) to provide a one-stop platform that allowed OSI leaders to easily explore their existing academic program data and growth trends, uncover potential high-growth programs, and access detailed data related to the viability of specific program proposals.

The dashboards and data visualization tools allow users to dynamically investigate a variety of market factors for any program area, without each department having to rely on different external consultants or time-intensive university resources to understand data related to:

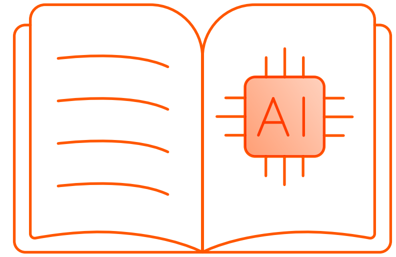
- Student demand
- Labor market trends
- Online program search trends
- Competitive benchmarking comparisons

With the right tools and support in place, the Office for Strategic Initiatives enhanced its ability to make informed, data-driven decisions about new academic programs that align with a rapidly changing market.

LEARN MORE ABOUT UF'S USE OF MARKET DATA >>

TREND 2

DEMAND FOR AI POLICY AND GOVERNANCE ESCALATES



14%

of provosts report having comprehensive AI governance policies

INSIDE HIGHER ED WITH HANOVER RESEARCH

Artificial intelligence (AI) is not only changing teaching and learning, but also campus operations and research, requiring institutions to develop guiding frameworks for its proper use.

GOVERNANCE GAPS AMID RAPID ADOPTION

As students, faculty, and administrators increasingly integrate AI into their daily work, colleges and universities are confronting critical questions about academic integrity, data privacy, potential bias, and ethical use.

Yet only a small share of U.S. institutions has implemented comprehensive AI governance policies or institutional strategies to date.

With little oversight in place, the absence of clear institutional guidance for AI poses a growing risk. While most campuses are prioritizing AI literacy efforts to some degree, they've hit challenges in developing AI policies due to its rapid evolution, uncertainty around best practices, limited internal expertise, and legal and privacy complexities.

LEVERAGING AI FOR OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

In 2026, there's an opportunity for campus leaders to not only establish clear policies but also transform their internal operations using AI-enabled innovations and efficiencies.

For example, AI can be leveraged to upgrade academic advising strategies by automating routine tasks, such as answering common student questions and connecting students with next-step tools like degree audits.

It can also be used across campus units to streamline data analysis, manage class scheduling, create content, and more.

BUILDING A CAMPUS CULTURE FOR AI

To fully leverage AI's human-centered decision-making across campuses, many higher education leaders recognize they must do more than simply teach students about appropriate AI use. They must also consider how AI fits into their institution's vision for strengthening student outcomes and advancing strategic improvements.

This begins by proactively leading with an AI governance framework, followed by evidence-based policies and training to deepen faculty and staff expertise.

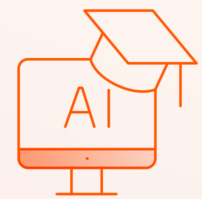
70%

of higher education staff say they need to find new operational efficiencies

SALESFORCE

of institutions report increased spending on personnel, hardware, and software for AI integration

AAC&U



9 in 10

employers say it is important for graduates to have developed AI-related skills while in college

AAC&U

TAKE ACTION

CREATE ITERATIVE POLICIES

Develop AI governance frameworks that begin with clear academic integrity and ethics guidelines and evolve into comprehensive institutional policy.

PILOT USE CASES

Encourage staff and faculty to test AI applications in targeted areas to build evidence-based policies through controlled implementation.

BUILD STUDENT SKILLS

Integrate AI competencies across all programs and curricula to prepare students for an AI-enabled workforce.

EMPOWER EMPLOYEES

Invest in faculty and staff professional development on AI literacy, ethics, and promising pedagogical practices. Explore custom generative AI tools based on institutional needs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about developing campus AI guidance with these Hanover resources:

WEBINAR >

Artificial Intelligence Policies Among Federal Grantmakers, a recorded webinar examining AI use in federal grant proposal development

REPORT >

AI in Academic Advising, a research report on the use of AI tools in student-centric advising and guidance *(member-only access)*

REPORT >

Benchmarking AI Programming Initiatives, a research report highlighting trends in campus AI programs, research, and partnerships *(member-only access)*

REPORT >

AI Competencies for Non-STEM Students, a research report on developing students' AI literacy *(member-only access)*

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:
DESIGNING HUMAN-CENTERED AI POLICIES

Like any new technology integration, there are both compelling advantages and challenges to AI use in higher education. Understanding both sides can help institutional leaders thoughtfully approach campuswide AI guidance and the development of AI literacy skills that preserve human decision-making, critical thinking, and ethical values.

	AI BENEFITS	AI PITFALLS
FACULTY	• Assist with research • Streamline curricula development • Deepen student understanding and inquiry-based learning in place of rote memorization • Facilitate assessments of student work	• Hinder student learning if instructional changes lag • Introduce misinformation or bias • Contribute to data privacy, legal, copyright, and academic integrity concerns
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF	• Create workflow process efficiencies and time or resource savings • Automate and scale support services • Rapidly compile and analyze data sets • Evaluate applicants more efficiently • Predict enrollment, budget, or success scenarios	• Depersonalize student interactions with staff • Make decisions based on biased or incorrect data that disadvantages specific groups • Contribute to data privacy, legal, copyright, and academic integrity concerns
STUDENTS	• Receive more personalized and immediate support for learning, tutoring, and advising • Access efficient study aids and tools to summarize or translate information, begin drafts, generate ideas, and self-test • Gain exposure to AI technology that will be used in their future careers	• Develop an overreliance on technology that undermines intellectual growth or hinders creativity • Rely on biased or incorrect information and uncited sources • Contribute to data privacy, legal, copyright, and academic integrity concerns

TREND 3

FINANCIAL REALITIES AND DATA REALIGN STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

of provosts

say that federal funding to their institution has decreased since 2024

INSIDE HIGHER ED

Colleges and universities are developing resilient strategic plans that can withstand ongoing external threats and account for organizational rightsizing.

CONVERGING POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL PRESSURES

The rapid pace of political and legislative change in the last year is forcing many U.S. institutions to reevaluate significant elements of their strategic plans, from enrollment expectations to diversity initiatives and research endeavors.

On top of heightened oversight, institutions face many converging financial pressures. As costs rise and government funding becomes less reliable, colleges and universities are contending with depleting cash reserves, potential endowment tax changes, and added enrollment constraints, amplified, in part, by new student loan and student visa restrictions.

To establish relevant strategic improvement goals in a difficult financial landscape, higher education leaders are seeking new ways to balance responsibilities without sacrificing academic quality, innovation, or institutional values.

ADAPTING INSTITUTIONS TO INCREASE RESILIENCY

As constrained budgets lead to difficult choices, complex financial realities are also reshaping how higher education leaders approach their strategic planning, goal setting, resource allocations, and operational structures.

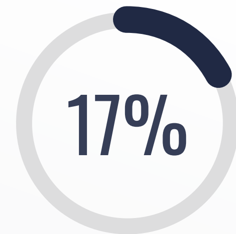
Traditional long-range plans are built on assumptions of steady growth and stable funding. However, in 2026, leaders are updating strategic outlooks to be more nimble and responsive to shorter-term fluctuations.

USING DATA TO IMPROVE STABILITY AND MITIGATE RISK

Colleges and universities are pursuing a range of resilient frameworks to track key performance indicators, control costs, improve operational efficiencies, and seek alternative revenue, including private donors and industry partnerships.

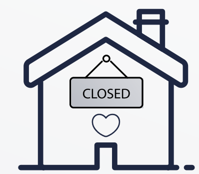
While some are exploring collaboration and resource-sharing models between institutions (such as practice-sharing cohorts, joint ventures, and mergers), others are taking more aggressive budget balancing steps with organizational restructurings, program cuts and consolidations, and campus reorganizations.

Although there's no one right way to balance immediate financial challenges with longer-term strategic goals, institutions that use data and collective feedback to inform decision-making are better positioned to mitigate risk, make measurable progress on outcomes, and improve long-term viability.



fewer new international students enrolled in U.S. institutions in 2025, compared to 2024

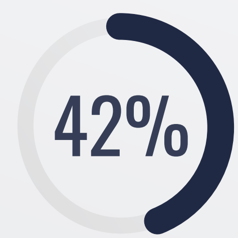
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION



15+

nonprofit higher education institutions permanently closed in 2025, and another seven merged or were acquired by another institution

INSIDE HIGHER ED



of U.S. college presidents say long-term financial viability is their most pressing concern

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

TAKE ACTION

STRESS-TEST PLANS FOR AGILITY

Develop scenario-based financial models that weigh strategic plans against varying enrollment and funding projections.

UNITE GOAL PLANNING WITH RESOURCES

Integrate financial sustainability metrics into strategic planning frameworks, so budget decisions align with institutional goals.

KNOW WHEN TO RIGHTSIZE

Consider personnel or program cuts only when long-term financial trends are unlikely to improve and data suggests selective reductions can enable growth, so resources can be reinvested elsewhere.

PLAN FOR MERGER SUCCESS

Before committing to a merger, fully explore collaboration models and motivations. Carefully consider goals, capabilities, portfolios, demographics, campus culture, governance, and geography.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about improving strategic and financial planning with these Hanover resources:

GUIDE >

5 Ways to Enhance Strategic Enrollment Management with Data, a guide to strengthening enrollment planning

BLOG >

6 Alternative Budget Models for Colleges and Universities, a blog article surveying different approaches to institutional fiscal practices

REPORT >

Best Practices in College and University Mergers, a research report on considerations for mergers and acquisitions *(member-only access)*

REPORT >

Benchmarking Analysis of Strategic Plan Messaging, a research report focused on trends in strategic plan communication practices *(member-only access)*

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:
A PLAN FOR ENROLLMENT RECOVERY

INSTITUTION
Community College of Rhode Island

LOCATION
Newport, Rhode Island

Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) partnered with Hanover Research to reestablish its Newport campus as a vital educational and economic anchor for Aquidneck Island. To provide CCRI with a data-backed revitalization roadmap, Hanover launched a comprehensive market analysis that blended labor data, competitor insights, and stakeholder input to identify high-demand academic programs tailored to local industry needs.

Within a year, CCRI's Newport campus secured nearly $850,000 in state funding to jumpstart two new offerings in the culinary arts.

The Rhode Island Hospitality Association established a satellite office on campus, offering food and beverage safety training and certification, further connecting students to real-world career pathways and strengthening local industry ties.

Looking ahead, CCRI Newport plans to expand into computer science, cybersecurity, and non-credit workforce development programs, all guided by informed research.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CCRI'S REVITALIZATION EFFORTS >>

TREND 4

PROGRAM COSTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS COME INTO SHARPER FOCUS

3.6% increase

in inflation for U.S. colleges and universities in fiscal year 2025, surpassing the previous year's rate of 3.4%

COMMONFUND

To address critical resource allocation and cost-benefit questions, campuses are more accurately assessing the financial metrics of their academic programs and units.

DEMONSTRATING THE TRUE COST OF INSTRUCTION

College and university leaders want to better understand what it takes to deliver education to students and where strategic investments should be made to increase program sustainability and organizational longevity.

However, traditional net revenue-cost analyses often fall short, overlooking critical factors such as shared revenue from general education courses, cross-departmental instructional costs, and graduates' career outcomes, leaving institutions with a murky understanding of their true financial underpinnings.

BUILDING CONSENSUS THROUGH FINANCIAL CLARITY

Without data-informed insights to account for the full complexity of academic program offerings, institutions risk flawed conclusions about which programs are driving growth, require additional investment, or need significant changes.

At a time of steep financial pressure, institutional leaders simply cannot afford to make academic portfolio decisions based on an imprecise or incomplete understanding of cost drivers.

As a result, institutions are fine-tuning how they assess academic-related costs and benefits, exploring margins and shared costs across units and offering greater transparency around budget and investment decisions. Often, course-level adjustments or departmental consolidations offer a more creative path to fiscal health without resorting to wholesale cuts or increasing tuition.

THE SHIFT TO DATA-DRIVEN PROGRAM COST MANAGEMENT

Many colleges and universities are moving beyond intuition and budgetary convention in 2026–27 to embrace more sophisticated cost-attribution methodologies for cost containment and pricing accuracy.

Tracking program costs accurately can detect surpluses, subsidies, and resources flowing across a complex academic landscape. Leaders can leverage granular data on course-taking behavior, faculty teaching assignments, and actual revenue generation to spot risk areas and growth opportunities. Insights may also lead to alternative tuition models, informed reinvestment in mission-aligned programs, and greater financial transparency overall.

Ultimately, an evidence-based approach can lead to programming changes that not only improve institutional financial health but also preserve academic breadth and excellence.

4.3% increase

in faculty salaries between 2022–23 and 2023–24, which exceeded the inflation rate

NEA

2.9% increase

in tuition and fees, on average, for undergraduates at public universities in 2025–26 *($12,290 compared to $11,950 in 2024–25)* before adjusting for inflation

COLLEGE BOARD

of tuition and fees at private institutions were covered by institutional grant awards for first-time undergraduates in 2024–25, compared to 61.2% in 2023–24

NACUBO

TAKE ACTION

STREAMLINE BUSINESS PROCESSES FIRST

Before making large-scale program changes, examine and redesign work processes using business process improvement strategies to reduce as many overhead costs and manual inefficiencies as possible.

TRACK AND ANALYZE PROGRAM COSTS

Get a complete view of complex costs across courses, programs, departments, or institutional levels, including per-course and per-student costs and cross-departmental expense sharing.

USE FINANCIAL DATA TO BUILD CONSENSUS

Establish transparent financial metrics to provide objective data for campus discussions on program viability and improvement opportunities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about assessing institutional costs and returns with these Hanover resources:

WEBINAR >

Turning Financial Insight into Strategic Impact, a recorded webinar outlining UVA's experience with academic program cost tracking

GUIDE >

Positioning Programs for Growth, a guide to assessing an institution's academic program portfolio

REPORT >

KPIs for Tracking Administrative Division Effectiveness, a research report on establishing key performance indicators for various campus units *(member-only access)*

REPORT >

Best Practices in Academic Restructuring, a research report examining approaches to consolidating and strengthening departments *(member-only access)*

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS BUILT FOR THE FUTURE

INSTITUTION
University of Virginia

LOCATION
Charlottesville, Virginia

"At UVA's School of Education and Human Development, we wanted to know if some of our long-standing programs are built for the future, or if they needed continued innovation.

When we started working with Hanover on program cost tracking, one of our main questions was how do programs and schools know when they have the right size faculty and staff? We wanted to bring some objective elements to understand the revenues and costs associated with a program — and learn which ones may need additional study.

Our faculty, staff, and students feel strongly about our programs. Absent those data, those conversations are really difficult. Being able to enter conversations with a more informed perspective ensures we can progress in a productive way.

The most important first step we took was acknowledging that this is not solely an analytical or financial process. It's an academic and administrative process simultaneously."

— Dr. Justin Thompson, Senior Associate Dean for Management and Planning

LEARN MORE ABOUT UVA'S PRACTICES IN OUR WEBINAR >>

TREND 5

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS MAGNIFY RETENTION EFFORTS

82% of students

need more proactive and personalized support from their college or university than they did five years ago

SALESFORCE

To deliver holistic, high-impact support to more students, departments are collaborating to reduce silos, share data, and advance more effective service delivery practices.

REIMAGINING STUDENT SUPPORT

While student retention has rebounded slightly since the COVID-19 pandemic, student attrition continues to plague campuses, driven by overlapping, compounding factors, including part-time status, financial strain, emotional stress, employment demands, and loss of academic motivation.

Facing complex challenges, struggling students need coordinated support to persist. Yet traditional student support models were built for administrative efficiency, with most services operating independently. By the time an intervention occurs for a student interacting with multiple offices, it's sometimes too late.

ENABLING EARLIER, TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

Institutions are breaking down these silos by connecting data across departments to respond with targeted and coordinated interventions that address students' academic, financial, and personal well-being.

For example, integrated data systems can track key academic performance indicators, so staff can identify at-risk students earlier, activate alerts, and provide proactive support before a student disengages entirely.

This approach benefits everyone. While integrated systems provide immediate, critical safeguards for vulnerable populations — including low-income, first-generation, transfer, and stop-out students who face disproportionate challenges in degree completion — the systems also strengthen the overall campus climate.

IMPROVED MODELS OF SUPPORT

Colleges and universities are improving both time-tested and new retention strategies to cultivate students' academic purpose, build peer connections, and address stressors.

They're also hiring chief retention officers, improving engagement initiatives and tools, enhancing students' financial literacy skills, centralizing wraparound support services, and offering more accessible online services and extended hours.

In 2026, higher education leaders understand that creating campus environments that enable all students to thrive, combined with responsive and coordinated support strategies, will sustain more students' momentum toward completion.

$4,800

is the median amount four-year institutions spend per student on support services, in addition to nearly $3,000 on academic support

INSIDE HIGHER ED

64%

of students said they didn't know whether their college offers emergency financial aid

INSIDE HIGHER ED

60% of stop-outs

indicate they would likely return if their institution proactively provided clear program completion details

ELLUCIAN

TAKE ACTION

ESTABLISH RETENTION GOALS

Set measurable goals for retention, refine approaches through student surveys, focus groups, and institutional data, and share results and best practices across departments.

INTEGRATE FINANCIAL AID COUNSELING IN THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Help students navigate financial stressors as early as possible with additional support throughout their first year.

DEVELOP PREDICTIVE MODELS OF ATTRITION RISK

Use institutional data to conduct a success and retention analysis to learn which student factors may be associated with a likelihood to underperform or withdraw.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about delivering effective student support with these Hanover resources:

INFOGRAPHIC >

5 Student Retention Strategies in Higher Education, an infographic with data-driven recommendations to support students

INFOGRAPHIC >

How to Improve Campus Climate, an infographic highlighting best practices for fostering a more positive campus climate

GUIDE >

Drive Higher Education Enrollment with Cross-Departmental Collaboration, a guide to increasing collaboration between key campus departments

REPORT >

Best Practices in Improving Retention at Community Colleges, a research report highlighting practices that improve student belonging and success *(member-only access)*

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:
COMBINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RETENTION RESEARCH

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY IRVINE

INSTITUTION
Concordia University Irvine

LOCATION
Irvine, California

Concordia University Irvine (CUI) had leveraged a federal grant to enhance its student support services but didn't have a way to track the effectiveness of those interventions, especially among provisionally admitted students.

Hanover designed a mixed-method evaluation combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with key student groups to assess awareness, engagement, satisfaction, and unmet needs related to support services.

This multi-modal approach provided CUI with deeper insights and actionable recommendations to enhance its support initiatives, leading to improvements, including:

- Increased communication efforts and channels to improve student awareness of services
- Expanded tutoring services and staff to meet student demand
- Enhanced workshops and activities for students to develop soft skills and build a deeper sense of belonging and connection

Moving forward, CUI plans to further refine and expand its support services and guide its strategic success and retention decisions.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CUI'S STUDENT SUPPORT >>

CONCLUSION

In 2026, higher education leaders around the globe are using data and research to keep their institutions evolving.

As financial and political pressures continue or intensify in 2026, we see examples of higher education institutions of all types using data to optimize existing resources, integrate new technology, and prepare students for the challenges of today and tomorrow. Meanwhile, employers continue to eagerly await tomorrow's graduates.

INSTITUTIONS IN FLUX

Colleges and universities are fearlessly adapting to a destabilized ecosystem of shifting public perceptions, financial pressures, and rapid technological change, often arriving simultaneously and at unprecedented speed.

Leaders who address underlying, chronic issues and prioritize long-term planning through data-informed, thoughtful approaches increase financial resilience, stakeholder support, and long-term institutional success.

MEETING THE MOMENT

While institutions are well versed in leading students through transformative experiences and evidence-based learning, they must also be willing to follow their own example and be equally ready to innovate, learn new practices, and reinvent themselves to meet the moment.

3.5% increase

in undergraduate enrollment in spring 2025, compared to 2024

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE RESEARCH CENTER

70%

of employers have either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in U.S. higher education

AAC&U

25%

of registrars and admissions officers are using AI in their operations

AACRAO

Data empowers institutional leaders to adapt swiftly, allocate resources wisely, and turn uncertainty into a strategic competitive advantage.

Learn how Hanover Research can help your organization use the power of data to thrive in 2026 and beyond.

SEE OUR HIGHER ED SOLUTIONS

SOURCES

TREND 1:

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