

What is being done to control costs? Trustees need actively to advance specific strategies for reducing administrative and curricular bloat as well as underutilized capital facilities. Higher education's greatest budgetary challenge is not a reduction in state funding, but inefficient spending. In *The Cost of Excess: Why Colleges and Universities Must Control Runaway Spending*, ACTA found that schools that increase spending are likely to pass this cost on to students in the form of higher tuition and fees, yet this spending does little to help students graduate on time.

Are budget priorities in line with the mission? Insist on full access to accurate financial reports, including balance sheets, income statements, records of cash flow, and audit reports. Make sure this information comes well ahead of any budget votes.

Are we maintaining rigorous academic standards? Request a copy of your institution's results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Find out how much reading and written work are typically assigned to students. Ask for the percentages of A, B, C, D, and F grades awarded to students over time in each department and program and determine whether there is evidence of grade inflation. Call for use of a nationally normed instrument such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) to evaluate the value-added factor of your school's education relative to other institutions.

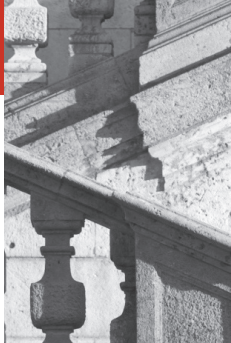
What is our building utilization, Monday through Saturday, and during the summer? Trustees should demand that the academic week reflect life in the working world. Require a study to examine the level of utilization of existing buildings before considering any major capital expenditure.

Improving Presidential Selection and Evaluation

Will trustees control the selection process? Selecting a president is a board's most crucial responsibility, and trustees must not delegate this task by allowing themselves to be underrepresented on a search committee.

How will the board ensure an excellent group of applicants? Boards should resist the temptation to use executive search firms, which often eliminate promising nontraditional candidates. They should insist that the full board be presented with multiple finalists for its consideration.

Do we have to use a headhunter? Boards should consider using an expert consultant instead of a search firm to organize the presidential search. Such an approach can significantly lower costs and ensure more direct involvement of board members in



decision-making. For further information, see ACTA's *Selecting a New President: What to Do Before You Hire a Search Firm*.

What metrics should we use to assess presidential performance? Metrics should be directly tied to institutional priorities in the board's strategic plan, including academic growth, the integrity of the tenure process, responsiveness to requests for information, assurance of intellectual diversity, and efficient and productive use of institutional resources. The board should tie presidential compensation to key performance metrics. See ACTA's *Assessing the President's Performance: A "How To" Guide for Trustees*.

Strengthening Trustee Education

What are we doing to educate ourselves about higher education issues? Being well-informed is a prerequisite to thoughtful policy-making. Effective boards recognize the difference between information generated for public relations and the objective information they need for decision-making. *The Basics of Responsible Trusteeship* offers an overview of the core issues trustees need to be aware of.

Do we have contact with students, faculty, and staff? Trustees should develop intermediate levels of discourse at their institution. Read the school newspaper and website regularly, host town halls, and visit classes and school dining halls. Let the president know you intend to do so.

Do we have independent information and resources? Informational and organizational resources should go beyond those provided by the president and organizations selected and funded by the president. If you are a public trustee, demand a line item for these resources; private boards can provide for such resources in their bylaws.

Are we protecting our institutional autonomy? Be prepared to push back publicly against accreditors that encroach upon the management and governance of the institution. See ACTA's guide *Accreditation: A Call to Action for College Trustees*.

Read the full *Governance for a New Era* report on GoACTA.org.

Implementing Governance for a NEW ERA



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An Action Plan for Higher Education Trustees



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An Action Plan for Trustees

"Too many [trustees] have seen their role narrowly defined as boosters, cheerleaders, and donors. . . . They must not be intermittent or passive fiduciaries of a billion dollar industry critical to the preparation of America's next leaders."

—Benno C. Schmidt in *Governance for a New Era* (2014)

Articulating the Mission

How can we best serve the nation, the state, and our students? Trustees must define the special role their institution plays and lay out strategic goals. A lack of clarity—and mission creep—are major contributors to institutional ineffectiveness and to the rapidly rising cost of higher education.

Whom do we represent? Trustees are fiduciaries, meaning that you stand in trust for your institution and the public. You must be accountable to the entire campus community. This includes students, parents, staff, the faculty, as well as taxpayers and donors. Trustees cannot simply represent a single constituency, but instead must serve as guardians of the public interest; accountable to all, but beholden to none.

To what degree should our school engage in scholarly research? Define and understand the significance of research for your institution with respect to its mission. With very few exceptions, the teaching mission must always come first.

What role should athletics play? Withstand pressure to grow athletic programs that are a net drain on resources. Have your president report in detail the revenues of your athletic programs and the degree to which they rely on institutional resources and student fees to operate.

How do we know we are achieving our goals? Set clear goals in writing with benchmarks against which to measure all senior managers. Board meetings should be structured around major goals, with appropriate performance measures tracked regularly. Become acquainted with tools that allow you to benchmark your school's academic and financial performance. ACTA's *Asking Questions, Getting Answers* highlights key information the board must be aware of.

Protecting Academic Freedom and Intellectual Diversity

Are we protecting the free exchange of ideas on campus? Establish policies and procedures that aim to build a campus culture that respects free speech and civil discourse. Ensure that the institu-

tion's commitment to academic freedom appears prominently on official materials, including the institution's website, faculty and staff handbooks, student codes of conduct, and freshman orientation handouts. Formally adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression or a similar strong commitment to the free exchange of ideas.

What evidence do we have that students and faculty feel comfortable expressing themselves on campus? Institute a bi-yearly campus climate survey to ensure that the free exchange of ideas is welcome on campus and consider using the results of this survey as part of your president's performance evaluation. Work with administrators to ensure that action is being taken to address any issues these surveys reveal. ACTA's series on *Building a Culture of Free Expression* highlights additional best practices for trustees both on campus and in the online classroom.

How do we ensure that students are exposed to an appropriate range of disciplines and viewpoints? Insist on receiving an annual report from the president or provost that outlines a description of new hires and tenure and promotion decisions in each department. Insist on clear answers. In rare but urgent circumstances, demand action if you believe a department places limitations on the range of academic fields and viewpoints.

Do we have policies regarding campus speakers? Work with administrators and faculty to develop policies to deter the disinvasion of college speakers. Ensure that students and staff understand the rights of speakers on campus and establish clear sanctions for actions that disrupt scheduled events. A model policy, the C. Vann Woodward Committee Report, adopted by Yale University in 1975, can be found in ACTA's *Free to Teach, Free to Learn: Understanding and Maintaining Academic Freedom in Higher Education*.

Setting the Educational Strategy

What skills and knowledge do we expect our graduates to have? Trustees do not create course content, but it is essential that you help establish the expectations and benchmarks for student learning. Does the board want every graduate to acquire an accurate and fluent command of written English and a college-level ability in mathematics and science? Do you want graduates to gain

proficiency in a foreign language, or be familiar with American history and Western Civilization? If so, the board should make those guidelines clear. In this way, you help to signify to employers and others the value of a diploma from your institution.

What courses fulfill our core or general education requirements? Board members should regularly review the list of general education offerings and requirements. When a large number of courses satisfy the core requirements, then there is no real core. See how ACTA's What Will They Learn?® project rates your school's core curriculum on WhatWillTheyLearn.com.

What criteria govern the introduction of new courses and programs? Proliferation of courses is a major cost driver. Ask your president annually to provide a list of the courses and programs added and subtracted and the criteria for determining course viability. Trustees need to ensure that students are being prepared for success in career, community, and citizenship. *The Cost of Chaos in the Curriculum* shows how bloated undergraduate course offerings can lead to increased costs and lower graduation rates.

Which of our majors graduate fewer than 10 students each year? While the number alone is not dispositive, this information can provide a threshold for further board review as to whether programs are still viable and cost-effective. For more information, see ACTA's *Setting Academic Priorities: A Guide to What Boards of Trustees Can Do*.

Demanding Transparency in Performance and Results

How are we spending student and taxpayer money? Demand a list of specific metrics benchmarked against your institution's peers before approving any increase in spending. ACTA's HowCollegesSpendMoney.com allows trustees to perform an analysis of spending patterns at their school, with nearly a decade of data on:

- Per-student spending on administration, instruction, and student services
- The ratio of administrative to instructional spending
- Inflation-adjusted tuition
- Tuition as a percentage of state median household income
- Four-year graduation rates