

2025 TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION



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INTRODUCTION

For higher education leaders, 2025 is a year of change.

At the time of this writing, sweeping changes in the U.S. federal government are upending the higher education sector. The move to pause and scale back federal agencies and operations has opened new questions and concerns about the future of college and university funding, research, grant activities, student support programs, and financial aid access.

In addition to potential shifts in funding, policy, or oversight, higher education institutions still face a host of persistent challenges. For campuses large and small, increased competition for a smaller pool of students combined with rising costs has set the stage for a new level of financial and enrollment pressures.

Compounding factors such as intensifying public scrutiny, a profound demand for career-connected outcomes, and a rising need for more complex student support leave institutions with the difficult task of doing more with less, without sacrificing academic quality or innovation. Undoubtedly, 2025 brings both challenges and opportunities for institutions.

While higher education's story continues to be written, it's clear that it has reached a new inflection point. In this moment, it's crucial for institutions to ride the wave of change while keeping a steady focus on student success and overall institutional health.

Hanover's **2025 Trends in Higher Education** report highlights five trends our experts believe are at the forefront in 2025. From rethinking academic programs and student support, to transforming financial models, brand perceptions, and student access, colleges and universities are striving to recognize opportunities, conceptualize novel solutions, and deliver results under heightened pressure.

This report's collection of data, recommendations, and case studies is intended to help your institution retain its boundless ability to seize opportunity in this academic year and beyond.



Learn more about Hanover's
higher education insights or
read **last year's trend report.**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through our partnership with hundreds of public and private colleges and universities in the U.S. and around the world, we see the many ways that higher education institutions are taking on complicated challenges without losing sight of students' academic, financial, and personal well-being. Here are five trends that are shaping higher education in 2025:

1

Academic Program Innovations Reflect the Demand for a Stronger Career-Aligned Return on Investment

As students, employers, and legislators increasingly demand career-connected learning, institutions are creatively repositioning programs, reimagining requirements, and retooling curricula to remain competitive.

2

Institutions Refine Strategies to Increase College Access and Aid for Students

Despite enrollment and financial aid obstacles and policy disruptions, institutions are creatively prioritizing strategies to reach a wider range of student populations.

3

Higher Education Leaders Face Stark Financial Realities and Significantly Reshape Budgets

With ongoing volatility in the sector, institutions are embracing data-informed practices to shore up their fiscal operations and strategic planning to achieve financial solvency.

4

Student Support Resources Evolve with a Deeper Understanding of Retention Challenges

As student support needs and political pressures escalate, institutions are investing in student development efforts designed to help more students stay on track toward completion.

5

Campuses Lean on Brand Strength in a Skeptical and Tight Market

Amid heightened political and public scrutiny, institutions are reiterating their relevance — and their differences — through nuanced branding efforts to appeal to shifting student needs.



TREND 1:

Academic Program Innovations Reflect the Demand For a Stronger Career-Aligned Return on Investment

As students, employers, and legislators increasingly demand career-connected learning, institutions are creatively repositioning programs, reimagining requirements, and retooling curricula to remain competitive.

TREND 1: ACADEMIC PROGRAM INNOVATIONS REFLECT THE DEMAND FOR A STRONGER CAREER-ALIGNED RETURN ON INVESTMENT



39%

The percentage of workers' skills projected to be disrupted by technological change by 2030



1 in 7

The ratio of provosts who say their institution has reviewed curriculum to ensure it will prepare students for the rise of AI in the workplace



4.6 M

The number of U.S. college students who wanted to complete an internship in 2023 but couldn't secure one



37%

The percentage of Americans who are critical of higher education because they believe institutions don't teach relevant skills or help graduates find employment

CAREER & LABOR MARKET EXPECTATIONS

The demand for skill-based learning in higher education is not new, but for students, hiring managers, and policymakers in 2025, it's now an imperative.

As public expectations about the value and purpose of a college degree change, postsecondary students across all disciplines seek an education with real-world applicability and a clear return on investment (ROI). At the same time, employers are interested in upskilling their workers, and legislative interest in workforce development policy and funding is growing.

ACCELERATED LEARNING & COMPRESSED TERMS

Some institutions are eyeing three-year bachelor's programs or accelerated graduate or professional degree programs, particularly in business and health care areas. This approach aims to diversify the prospect pool, make degrees more affordable, and prepare students to enter the workforce faster. But accreditation hurdles and faculty resistance are concerns on many campuses.

A more common approach to accelerated learning is compressed academic periods, with shorter 1–12-week terms, flex terms, and other condensed offerings for internships, fieldwork, or study abroad that allow students to complete (or make up) credits in less time, which can aid completion rates.

DEGREES & CERTIFICATES EVOLVE

To demonstrate academic program ROI, institutions are actively retooling offerings to better align with workforce needs and student demand. They're using labor market data in the program planning process to assess viability, understand job and salary outlook, and develop employer partnerships.

Even while some program cuts continue, institutions are reformulating or repackaging existing programs and launching new interdisciplinary degrees, microcredentials, stackable certificates, online programs, and short credentials designed to complement degree programs.

MODERNIZING REQUIRED LEARNING

To retain relevance, many institutions are redesigning undergraduate general education requirements to expand skill-based learning and simplify paths to graduation. This typically involves reducing the number of required credits or giving students more choice and flexibility in how to fulfill core requirements such as math and English.

Additionally, as some colleges and universities reclassify humanities or arts course requirements as electives, institutions are promoting enrollment in those areas by emphasizing the transferability of key soft skills gained through a comprehensive liberal arts degree.

TAKE ACTION

- Monitor workforce needs and changes by investigating labor market data, including real-time job postings and economic forecasts for various industries.
- Develop a strategic microcredential framework that includes a data collection plan and time to consult with employers and build stakeholder buy-in. Identify courses for targeted audiences that focus on specific skills in six months or less and ideally stack toward a for-credit credential.
- Consolidate experiential learning opportunities under a central hub on your website that emphasizes career readiness and job-related outcomes. Provide a consistent point of contact for students and prioritize funding for workforce-preparation learning experiences.
- Consider 42–47-credit undergraduate general education structures that allow fulfillment of multiple course requirements and include skills-focused categories.
- Ensure accelerated academic terms support student success with clear scheduling policies, specialized advising, robust academic support, and faculty training.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about modernizing academic programs with these Hanover resources:

- [Academic Program Development Handbook](#), a guide to making academic program decisions with data, evidence, and confidence.
- [Top Career Skills for New Grads in 2024](#), a detailed infographic with strategies to foster positive alumni outcomes.
- [Thinking Strategically About Workforce Alignment in Higher Education](#), a pre-recorded webinar with best practices for orienting academic programs toward future employment opportunities.
- [Data-Informed Academic Portfolio Review in Higher Ed](#), a blog with tips for improving academic program offerings, identifying gaps, and making data-driven program decisions.



SPOTLIGHT: Vancouver Community College

Vancouver Community College (VCC) in Vancouver, British Columbia, has partnered with Hanover Research for over five years to expand its capacity to assess academic programs and conduct market research to ensure programs align with emerging labor market needs across Canada.

In 2022, VCC leaders were interested in exploring the viability of launching a cybersecurity program. Applying an academic program assessment framework, Hanover analyzed recent degree completion data, labor market demand, and competitor programs to recommend a credential that would address provincial and national skill gaps, be distinguished from other institutions, and prepare students for future job success.

With this data, VCC approved a two-year, post-degree diploma in Cybersecurity Governance, Risk, and Compliance in 2024. Not only does this partnership free up faculty and staff time for other endeavors, but it also provides an objective and efficient process for college leaders to make more confident academic program decisions that benefit students and the institution.



TREND 2:

Institutions Refine Strategies to Increase College Access and Aid for Students

Despite enrollment and financial aid obstacles and policy disruptions, institutions are creatively prioritizing strategies to reach a wider range of student populations.



The percentage of first-generation college students who were unable to complete their initial FAFSA submission in 2024



The percentage of students who chose to enroll at their institution because of a positive experience with the application process



The number of Americans under 65 with “some college, no credential” in 2022, an increase of 2.9% from 2021



The increase in accredited dual-enrollment programs at U.S. institutions between 2021–2024

COUNTERING ENROLLMENT BARRIERS

In the face of birthrate declines, public distrust, affordability challenges, and federal policy changes, institutions are finding ways to work around complicated enrollment and funding bureaucracies to prioritize access for more learners, including students who are academically underprepared, English language learners, transfer, “some college no credential,” working professionals, or graduate-level.

At the same time, U.S. institutions are navigating large-scale political shifts affecting funding and aid, DEI programs, research activities, and student enrollment.

MEASURES TO INCREASE FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Learning lessons from the rocky 2024 FAFSA rollout, U.S. institutions have also prepared ways to reduce application challenges and avoid aid packaging delays.

As they continue to escalate financial aid messaging (in multiple languages) and provide targeted FAFSA events, support, and incentives, they’re also streamlining antiquated policies and procedures, re-evaluating aid calculations, increasing cost transparency, and building tuition assistance pipelines.

To address affordability concerns, some institutions are expanding scholarship and grant opportunities, increasing aid eligibility for middle-class families, or automatically guaranteeing free tuition for low-income families.

BROADENING THE PROSPECT POOL

Institutions of all types are working to reduce enrollment barriers for younger and older students, noting successes with dual enrollment, transfer, and adult learners. Most often, institutions recruit and retain these student groups through specialized messaging, high-touch outreach, expanded credit for prior learning, dedicated admissions and advising support, coaching, and wrap-around services.

As transfer student outcomes have remained largely stagnant for a decade, community colleges and four-year institutions are also partnering to share data, completion strategies, and formalized agreements.

INCREASING STUDENT YIELDS

To engage, admit, and enroll more students, admissions policies and practices continue to evolve. Direct admissions and promise programs show some positive impact, and institutions are increasingly leaning into early decision, early action, and rolling admissions programs, as well as some continued testing flexibility to reduce barriers and lift acceptance rates.

Recognizing there’s no one single student journey gives institutions the ability to rethink rigid systems and outmoded entry points. It’s possible to increase yields when campus leaders work together and apply student feedback to prune the application process, provide sequenced and personalized communications, and enhance engagement opportunities.

TAKE ACTION

- Help students navigate the financial aid process as early as possible with accessible resources and support — and be ready to quickly adjust policies or procedures as new circumstances or regulations demand.
- Evaluate your institution's transfer policies to ensure alignment with best practices and clearly communicate transfer pathways in campus messaging.
- Analyze non-matriculant enrollment data to learn which student groups are not enrolling at your institution — and where they go instead — to pinpoint recruitment and onboarding improvements.
- Leverage AI tools to automate and personalize recruitment-related communications, user-experience analysis, and application processes.
- Connect with middle and high school students and families as early as possible in key recruitment markets. Consider offering pre-college or enrichment programs to younger high school students and increase dual-enrollment outreach by strengthening partnerships with K-12 staff.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about student enrollment innovation with these Hanover resources:

- [5 Ways to Enhance Strategic Enrollment Management with Data](#), a toolkit for leveraging data to improve student recruitment and retention strategies.
- [2024 National Prospective Student Survey](#), a report with key findings and recommendations about the evolving needs of U.S. prospective students.
- [We Asked 1000 U.S. High Schoolers About Their Ideal College Experience](#), a blog detailing prospective student insights and how to make the most out of qualitative and quantitative enrollment data.
- [Best Practices in Recruiting Adult Learners](#), a research brief with best practices for increasing access and aid to non-traditional students (*member-only access*).



SPOTLIGHT: Columbia College

Columbia College in Missouri wanted to counter declining enrollment trends with data-driven insights to improve student recruitment and enhance the student experience for their online, in-person, military, and civilian learners.

The Enrollment Management & Marketing office partnered with Hanover researchers to conduct a series of mixed-methods research projects to analyze enrollment funnel data, benchmark competitors, survey students about tuition and support needs, identify marketing and admissions improvements, and assess academic offerings.

From this broad analysis, Hanover shared a set of findings and recommendations that are helping Columbia College administrators make strategic changes to tuition and fees, the admissions application process, marketing messaging, and service delivery models. While campus leaders are still implementing additional aid and access initiatives, they've already seen a 5% increase in student enrollment after launching these changes.



TREND 3:

Higher Education Leaders Face Stark Financial Realities and Significantly Reshape Budgets

With ongoing volatility in the sector, institutions are embracing data-informed practices to shore up their fiscal operations and strategic planning to achieve financial solvency.



The number of American states projected to see a decline in high school graduates by 2041



The decrease in the total number of U.S. higher education institutions in 2023-24 compared to the previous year



The increase in operating costs for U.S. colleges and universities in 2024, which outpaced tuition increases



The percentage of U.S. institutions that increased their online learning budget in 2024

TOUGH FINANCIAL RECKONING

After a record number of closures and cuts in 2024, most institutions continue to battle enrollment concerns, rising costs, and shifts in policy and oversight that could further impact their bottom lines.

As U.S. institutions brace for possible federal or state reductions in institutional funding and/or student aid, they are also aware that budget reductions to programs and services can significantly affect student retention and recruitment, setting up a potential cycle of fiscal distress.

To reduce large-scale upheaval, college and university leaders are wrestling with ways to rein in spending and increase non-tuition revenue — while also investing in strategic planning to create a roadmap to long-term sustainability.

SPENDING SHIFTS & DIVERSIFIED REVENUE

To combat enrollment and financial pressures, some state systems and institutions are exploring restructurings, alliances, partnerships, mergers, and acquisitions. Some consolidations may have the potential to strengthen economies of scale and reduce administrative costs. However, research indicates they rarely significantly decrease overall costs, and thus, the rationale for these collaborations should not be financial in nature only.

More commonly, colleges and universities are focused on evaluating their budget and tuition models, reining in operational costs, streamlining their offerings, and expanding revenue sources through employer partnerships, philanthropy, and grants (particularly non-federal sources). Some are also looking at creative compensation practices for faculty and staff, such as housing or childcare assistance.

LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS

Higher education leaders are sharpening their data literacy, financial literacy, and grantseeking skills to make more evidence-based decisions about resource allocations and operational optimizations.

Institutions are also benchmarking their performance and practices against peers and gathering baseline data to better understand their current state and set strategic goals for longer-term improvements. They're thoughtfully using data and research to communicate the rationale for large-scale changes and bolster internal buy-in.

Additionally, more colleges and universities are reaching out to each other to exchange resources and tackle shared issues collaboratively, such as enrollment strategies, academic collaborations, research initiatives, or resource sharing agreements.

TAKE ACTION

- Convene diverse cross-functional campus groups to share feedback for addressing various institutional financial challenges.
- Practice transparent communication and information sharing around any budget or tuition model changes, with data to explain decision-making rationale and adequate feedback periods.
- Look for opportunities to use internal seed grants and funding to pilot initiatives that will strengthen applications for external funding sources.
- Offer training and support to faculty and staff taking on new grantwriting and revenue-generating endeavors.
- When considering collaborating or integrating with a peer institution, outline each institution's strengths, differences, and needs to determine the extent to which any alliance makes sense.
- Consider implementing appropriate AI tools to extend internal capacity and add efficiencies that reduce manual tasks, streamline processes or analyses, and improve automated communications.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about financial data best practices with these Hanover resources:

- [5 Strategies to Boost Grant Funding](#), a toolkit for expanding your higher education grantseeking endeavors.
- [6 Alternative Budget Models for Colleges and Universities](#), a blog defining common higher education budget models and their applications and best practices.
- [A Year in Review: How Large Universities Evolved in 2024](#), a pre-recorded webinar reflecting on a dynamic year within the higher education landscape.
- [Best Practices in College and University Mergers](#), a research brief with effective strategies for managing sweeping organizational changes (*member-only access*).



SPOTLIGHT: Michigan State University

MSU's Office of University Advancement partnered with Hanover Research to improve the quality and consistency of alumni and donor relationships to facilitate giving and renewed support for several MSU colleges.

Needing a more comprehensive understanding of alumni and donor needs and preferences, campus leaders from University Advancement and four colleges worked with Hanover's team to launch a survey to help them connect and engage more effectively with these audiences – while streamlining operations and conserving financial resources.

The survey revealed powerful insights that multiple MSU marketing and advancement teams could apply to build more efficient communications and streamline operations. The teams were able to determine which communication channels yield greater donor and alumni engagement, allowing them to shift resources to higher-performing strategies and let go of underperforming ones.

These strategic resourcing insights, in turn, will help MSU's colleges prepare for a more stable and successful financial future through increased donations and renewed alumni and donor enthusiasm for all MSU has to offer.



TREND 4:

Student Support Resources Evolve With a Deeper Understanding of Retention Challenges

As student support needs and political pressures escalate, institutions are investing in student development efforts designed to help more learners stay on track toward completion.



The ratio of current undergraduates at risk of non-completion



The percentage of students who think college mental health counselors can't meet their specific needs



The percentage of admitted students who are concerned about their level of discipline, self-motivation, and study skills



The percentage of student success leaders who say their institution is effective at analyzing student success data

COMPOUNDING RETENTION FACTORS

Today's college student experience is complex. Many more students not only face economic hardship but also must juggle school with work, family care, feelings of academic unpreparedness or disengagement, and mental or physical health challenges.

Research shows that investing in student services can have a positive impact on persistence and graduation rates. To keep more students enrolled and on track, institutions are providing a deeper and wider array of student support services that bolster their academic, personal, and financial well-being.

DATA-INFORMED CHANGE

Colleges and universities commonly invest in student services but haven't always had good data on how their investments affect outcomes. In 2025, higher education leaders are collecting and evaluating more retention, stop out, and support data to evaluate service utilization, assess emerging needs, and establish frameworks to increase effectiveness.

ROLLING BACK AND TRANSFORMING DEI INITIATIVES

With the sharp rise in U.S. federal and state restrictions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices, some institutions are reframing DEI-related student initiatives as success interventions that prioritize opportunity, economic

and professional development, and personal well-being for all students.

Many campuses are doubling down on universal academic, career, financial, and wellness support while continuing to find policy-compliant ways to serve and support historically marginalized or vulnerable student groups (with a renewed focus, for example, on first-generation, military-affiliated, English language learning, or neurodivergent students).

Initiatives that help students explore their purpose and life goals, experience belonging, foster resilience, and build practical job-readiness skills lead the way in current retention efforts.

RESTRUCTURING SERVICES

As student needs and expectations shift, many colleges and universities are designing a more responsive, student-centered care model with networked personal and academic support rather than disconnected services that are harder for students to self-select or access.

In addition to expanding mental health counseling, coaching, mentoring, emergency aid, and basic needs support, some campuses are championing new success team models, integrated service units or spaces, or guaranteed income programs. Others are embedding career planning into academic programs, increasing college-transition support, and boosting high-impact experiential learning experiences to keep students engaged.

TAKE ACTION

- Conduct campus climate surveys and student services surveys to monitor student needs, barriers, and perceptions, and set meaningful goals for improvement.
- Develop a re-engagement plan for dropped or stopped-out students based on enrollment likelihood data that includes academic and financial incentives, dedicated advising and support, faculty training, and a marketing and communication plan.
- Increase support for students with learning challenges, learning differences, or neurodivergence without requiring documented diagnoses, which can create unintended barriers to students receiving formal diagnoses in the first place.
- Monitor immigration policy changes and compare them against campus policies and security practices, provide training on immigration-related rights and responsibilities, and share transparent campus messaging about guidelines and student resources.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about student retention changes with these Hanover resources:

- [2024 National Admitted Student Survey](#), a report with key findings about the evolving needs of students who have been accepted into college.
- [Snapshot of Higher Education Campus Climate](#), a pre-recorded webinar delving into key findings on the current state of campus climate and belonging.
- [2024 National Mental Health Survey](#), survey findings and recommendations for improving student well-being on campus (*member-only access*).
- [Best Practices in Increasing Engagement with Student Services](#), a guide to improving student access to support services (*member-only access*).



SPOTLIGHT: State University New York Old Westbury

In 2023, SUNY OW leaders committed to improve their student enrollment, engagement, and inclusion efforts. Facing capacity challenges, they turned to a strategic partnership with Hanover Research to refresh their approach to engaging and retaining diverse students across New York.

Hanover Research conducted a custom non-matriculant data analysis to determine which SUNY OW prospects and applicants did not enroll and where they went instead, including those who didn't enroll anywhere. From this national dataset, the team built an interactive tool to enable campus leaders to investigate student demographic and competitor details.

Hanover provided recommendations to increase SUNY OW's enrollment yield across different student groups and departments, leading to changes in academic program messaging, support interventions for historically marginalized students (including those with unprotected immigration statuses), career development initiatives, and personalized outreach. The project enabled SUNY OW to gain a more nuanced understanding of how to best engage and serve vulnerable student populations.



TREND 5:

Campuses Lean on Brand Strength in a Skeptical and Tight Market

Amid heightened political and public scrutiny, institutions are reiterating their relevance — and their differences — through nuanced branding efforts to appeal to shifting student needs.



56%

The percentage of U.S. teens who say real-world, on-the-job experience is more beneficial than obtaining a college degree



17%

The percentage of prospective students who consult college rankings sites when starting to apply to college



28%

The percentage of institutions that include competitor analysis in their social media strategies



47%

The percentage of higher education marketing departments that track brand strength over time

AUTHENTIC BRAND VALUE

As more people question the purpose and value of higher education, institutions are showcasing their merit and strengthening their brands to increase recognition, inspire confidence, and communicate value.

A cohesive brand and a solid brand presence can give an institution an edge over the competition and provide an opportunity to illustrate how it's aligned with current expectations and preferences. However, to build public trust, branding and messaging claims must always be backed by action and authenticity, not empty promises.

For many campuses, modernizing their identity and image means playing to their individual strengths and leaning into their mission and values to find a unique way to speak to market needs.

IMPROVING BRAND HEALTH

For decades, many colleges and universities used external rankings performance as a proxy for evaluating and measuring overall brand health. While rankings and brand are linked, they are not synonymous.

In 2025, more institutions are invested in using data, research, and proven best practices to enhance their branded efforts to increase awareness, develop brand cohesion across various platforms, and broaden their appeal.

Many are carefully tracking key metrics related to brand awareness, perception, preference, and loyalty to capture the full picture of institutional reputation and performance.

Campus leaders can then use these insights to assess existing brand promises, understand points of differentiation against peer institutions, make strategic marketing investments, test branded messaging, and identify favorable new enrollment markets.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MEASURES

To accelerate operational effectiveness and increase enrollment results, many colleges and universities are also realigning key campus units around enrollment priorities.

For example, offices of enrollment management, marketing, and academic affairs are increasingly collaborating and sharing data to broaden institutional geographic impact, explore changes in program demand, and implement new recruitment strategies to reach more student populations.

Learn the steps to implement a clear brand tracking strategy with our guide, [Brand Health Tracking 101](#).

TAKE ACTION

- Conduct a brand profile analysis to understand how your competitors are branding and positioning themselves, and assess your institution's position in the market relative to these competitors.
- Run an internal brand identity survey to understand why students come to your institution and what they identify as your value proposition.
- Conduct brand awareness and perception surveys of external audiences to track awareness, familiarity, and perception metrics related to your brand and your competitors', as well as advertising perception and recall.
- Develop a brand health tracking strategy to measure brand health metrics over time and identify changes and progress toward goals. Use a mix of survey research, competitive benchmarking, and qualitative feedback to understand how stakeholders perceive your brand.
- Assess the efficacy of potential branded messaging, advertisements, or taglines by conducting surveys that ask key audiences to react to sample concepts. Maximize impact by investigating which messages relay key information most effectively and how likely respondents are to act after seeing your materials.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about brand effectiveness with these Hanover resources:

- [Brand Health Tracking 101](#), a guide with strategies to develop, monitor, and analyze an effective institutional brand tracking strategy.
- [4 Ways to Measure Marketing Effectiveness in Higher Education](#), a toolkit to help institutional leaders track the performance of their marketing strategies.
- [Utilizing Research to Enhance Marketing Strategies in Higher Education](#), a pre-recorded webinar with practical ideas for leveraging data to improve higher education marketing strategies.
- [Impact of Athletics on Institutional Image and Enrollment](#), a research brief that explores the role of athletic programs in higher education branding (*member-only access*).



SPOTLIGHT:

The Olin Business School
at Washington University
in St. Louis

WashU Olin in Missouri partnered with Hanover to gain a deeper understanding of student perceptions to increase its competitive edge in a fluctuating graduate business school landscape.

To assess brand awareness among prospective students, the Hanover team crafted a custom longitudinal survey to understand WashU Olin's perceived strengths and weaknesses and determine how the school could differentiate its academic programs from peer institutions.

The brand perception survey has provided three years of insights and recommendations to strengthen the school's programs, marketing, and branded messaging. Notably, the findings informed WashU Olin's decision to launch a flexible hybrid Master of Business Administration program in 2024, which allows working and non-traditional students to study in their preferred modality while maintaining strong faculty and peer relationships.

By investing in programs that align with student needs and preferences, WashU Olin is attracting a wider pool of MBA students to fuel its future success.

CONCLUSION

Times of change require new approaches, and higher education leaders must lean into shifting conditions.

In 2025, while some campuses are closing their doors, deepening budget cuts, or bracing for large-scale legislative changes, there are also cautious signs of optimism. Enrollment bright spots are appearing, especially with first-year enrollment, dual enrollment, and at HBCUs. A smoother FAFSA rollout shows promise for more students being able to navigate the financial aid process, and institutions are marshaling more aid options than ever before. Employer partnerships are also opening new doors to funding and student populations.


DEFYING THE ODDS

Although a shifting landscape can feel unsteady or disorienting, we're seeing colleges and universities recognize this year as an opportunity to address chronic challenges with pioneering approaches. Many institutions are defying enrollment and aid limitations, making strategic resource decisions, prioritizing programs and support that deliver strong ROI, and refreshing their messaging to reflect their intrinsic and unique value.

INNOVATION OVER TRADITION

While hard effort drives some impact, for continued success, it's also up to institutional leaders to double down on strategies they know are working and fearlessly welcome opportunities to confront and change what isn't serving students.

Institutions that favor innovation over tradition will be primed to flourish in this era. But being more responsive also relies on knowing how to purposefully access and apply data and research to address systemic challenges. With dedication and analysis, colleges and universities can transform long-held practices to pave a wider path for more students to attain their educational goals.



Learn how [Hanover Research](#) can help your institution use the power of qualitative and quantitative data to thrive in 2025 and beyond.

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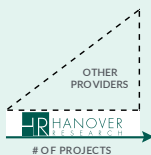
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