

THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®



The Trends Report 2021

Illustrations by Harry Haysom for *The Chronicle*

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THE TRENDS REPORT 2021

5 The Great Contraction

Cuts alone will not be enough to turn colleges' fortunes around.

LEE GARDNER



13 Town-Gown Tensions Turn Existential

The rapport is more important than ever. One college learned that the hard way.

JACK STRIPLING



22 The Surveilled Student

New forms of monitoring student health and academic performance may last long after the pandemic subsides.

KATHERINE MANGAN



30 The Shrinking of the Scholarly Ranks

The pandemic may do lasting damage to the pipeline of academic researchers.

MEGAN ZAHNEIS



37 The Antiracist College

Is this a watershed moment in the history of higher education and race?

TOM BARTLETT



The Post-Pandemic College

TREND-SPOTTING is an exercise in informed speculation: Look at what's been happening, identify patterns, and factor in what else you know to try to discern what's to come.

Just a few weeks after we sent last year's Trends Report to press, though, the gale force of Covid-19 hit, upending everyone's plans and reshaping the landscape in ways that we continue to try to make sense of.

In many ways, the disruptions felt across the economy — not least by students and their families — have amplified trends we described last year, among them the rise of oddsmaking on colleges' survival and the embrace by college admissions officers of hard-sell tactics.

The pandemic has also accelerated other changes: the increased monitoring of

student behavior, the reduction in colleges' faculty and staff numbers, demands to reform graduate training. As if a global health crisis weren't enough, social and political upheaval over the past year has also buffeted colleges and universities, forcing them to confront their complicity in racial injustice.

With the arrival of vaccines, a return to some kind of normalcy seems more certain, if not imminent. But when the pandemic has finally passed, what will higher education look like?

Though the wealthiest institutions may look more or less the same, leaner public universities and small private colleges are likely to have trimmed their academic programs while ex-

panding their employees' job descriptions. Stronger town-gown relations will be not just desirable, but essential to the survival of both campus and community. Colleges will be called on to change — or justify — the ways in which they surveil students. Graduate programs will need to make a stronger case for themselves. And more institutions will be called upon to demonstrate that they are not just diverse and inclusive, but antiracist through and through.

Higher-education leaders will need to move from performing triage to considering the long view. As Lee Gardner writes in this issue, "Colleges may succeed in positioning themselves for a future in which they can grow, but that depends on the strategic decisions they make today."

We hope this year's Trends Report will help inform those decisions.

— JENNIFER RUARK, DEPUTY MANAGING EDITOR



CHRONICLE PHOTO

The Great Contraction

Cuts alone will not be enough
to turn colleges' fortunes around.

BY LEE GARDNER



INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA was already shrinking. As regional demographics ebbed and competition for the remaining students increased between 2011 and 2020, the public college lost a third of its enrollment. Leaders had little choice but to cut back, trimming about 150 faculty positions over several years, mostly through attrition — retirements or not filling vacant positions.

By the fall of 2019, the moves appeared to have worked. “We’re thinking, We’re going to be fine,” remembers Michael A. Driscoll, the president. It seemed as if the regional institution, about an hour outside Pittsburgh, would be able to continue as a smaller but more stable institution, one better able to make necessary strategic changes to compete in the 21st century.

Then Covid-19 hit. Overnight, the university faced immediate new budget strains from giving housing and dining refunds to students, and gained new enrollment worries for the fall. It could no longer count on short-term financial stability. It didn’t have the time to make the kind of gradual adjustments that leaders favored.



**For long-term financial stability,
“you have to find ways to grow.”**

Last fall Indiana rapidly settled on a strategy to emphasize five core academic areas, which were chosen based on student and employer demand, whether they were institutional strengths, and their potential for financial sustainability. Indiana also plans to lay off 53 tenured professors — 15 percent of the university’s tenured faculty — and to eliminate 47 additional faculty jobs through retirements or laying off nontenured professors. The final number and type of faculty jobs to be lost are still in flux, but along with layoffs among administrative personnel, the university will lose about 20 percent of its pre-pandemic work force.

With higher education facing average revenue losses of 14 percent or more due to Covid-19, the pandemic presents an existential challenge for the hundreds, maybe thousands, of colleges that entered last March with already-precious finances. Every week or so seems to bring new headlines about institutions making jaw-dropping cuts. Concordia University Chicago, a private institution, for example, announced in December that it would lay off 51 faculty and staff members, about 7 percent of its work force, and shutter 15 academic programs after a two-year “prioritization” process. Marquette University, in Wisconsin, announced in late January that 39 employees had been laid off, part of a larger goal to shed more than 225 by 2022 to fill a projected \$45-million budget gap. Many of those cuts were the result of continuing program evaluations meant to meet longstanding financial challenges, but their urgency was hastened by the pandemic.

But slashing budgets alone, experts agree, isn’t enough to survive. Struggling colleges must cut strategically and adapt to a new way of operating, in order to find a way to eventually grow and thrive.

When the chaos of the pandemic eventually subsides and the dust settles, American higher education as a whole may look very different: Wealthy institutions will remain relatively unchanged, but a stratum of even leaner public universities and smaller private colleges is likely to have moved further away from the classic spectrum of a higher education. Their academic offerings, taught by a faculty whose jobs are less secure, will be focused more tightly on job

outcomes. And in the aftermath of a crisis that has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable students, they may employ fewer student-support specialists and may call on faculty and staff members more often to fill those shoes.

Such shifts don’t have to mean that colleges become trade schools, or that the liberal arts are dead. But Covid-19 has narrowed the options for leaders, shortened the timeline for any changes, and raised the stakes for the outcomes. Colleges may succeed in positioning themselves for a future in which they can grow, but that depends on the strategic decisions they make today.

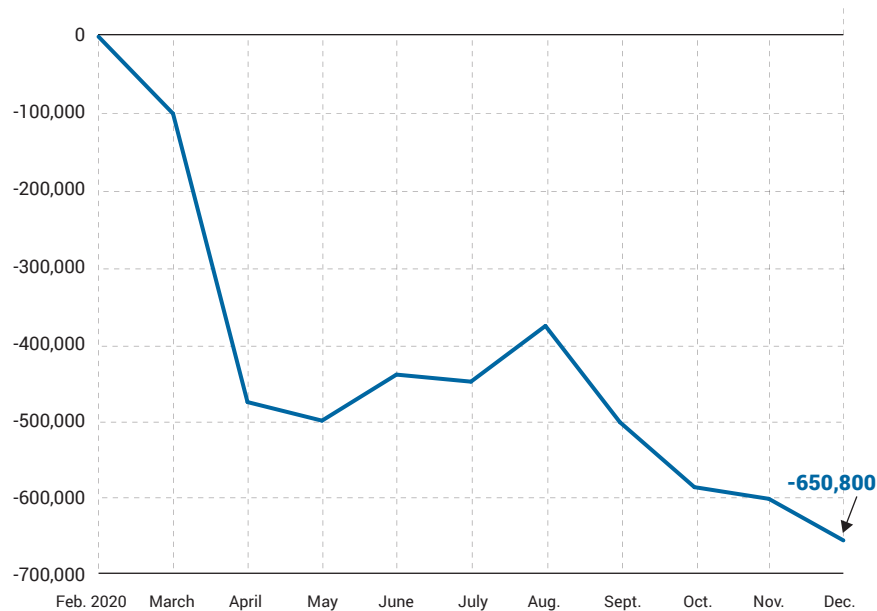
COLLEGES evaluating how to cut programs in a strategic way must determine two things about them: their costs and their revenue, or, more importantly, what they contribute back to the institution. That might seem obvious, but it’s not as common — or straightforward — as you’d think, says Robert G. Atkins, chief executive of Gray Associates, a consulting company.

It’s intuitive that college leaders looking to stanch financial bleeding would start by axing their smallest programs first, and that’s what many do. But a niche program with only a few graduates, if it’s inexpensive to run, may contribute revenue to the college, or drive enrollment in a modest way, “so when you cut them, your financial situation actually gets worse,” Atkins says. “One of the biggest, most important things here is that the analysis that underlies these changes is sound. It’s not a time when you can afford to make cuts that are the wrong cuts.”

The University of Vermont believes it’s making the right cuts by eliminating four graduate programs and 12 majors and 11 minors, including religion and classics. While the university will still offer courses in those subjects, “students are voting with their feet and walking away” from those areas of study, says Suresh V. Garimella, the president. The cuts will affect about 120 current undergraduates, about 3 percent of the total enrollment in the institution’s College of Arts and Sciences. While the cutbacks are taking place during the pandemic, Garimella says, they would have needed to happen eventually anyway.

Colleges Continue to Shed Employees as Covid-19 Rages

Cumulative job losses at public and private institutions combined since February 2020 total 13 percent.



Note: Values are seasonally adjusted. December 2020 estimate is preliminary.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Cutting or combining other programs or classes can create long-needed efficiencies and simplify the institution's pitch to prospective students. When Garimella arrived at Vermont, in 2019, it offered numerous programs for biology and environmental studies or environmental science, he says. "And I asked, If I were a student looking at UVM, how would I know which of those majors to pick?" He recently announced a plan to streamline the university's environmental-studies and environmental-science offerings.

Professors often balk at closing traditional programs such as classics, but they are simply living through changing times, says S. Georgia Nugent, president of Illinois Wesleyan University, which is eliminating eight departments, some of which are in the humanities, as part of a program review. She has served as a college president for nearly 20 years, and in that time she has watched students' view of higher education shift to be predominantly about "the outcome of being prepared for a job," she says. Looking out over a longer span of time,

Nugent, who trained as a classicist, points out that knowledge itself has changed. Colleges used to focus on teaching Greek and Hebrew to future pastors. Now there's more call for neuroscience and computer science, and "inevitably we need to change along with that."

Those sorts of moves often run into faculty opposition. At the University of Vermont, professors held an online "teach-in" last month to protest the proposed cuts, and have taken to social media to organize opposition. Julie Roberts, a professor of linguistics, president of the faculty union, and past president of the Faculty Senate, says administrators have been talking about the need for changes for decades, but the proposed department terminations seem "rather haphazard and don't seem to be part of a bigger strategic plan." She's concerned that they will damage the university's liberal-arts foundation. If the cuts keep, say, introductory Latin and eliminate upper-level courses or the ability to major in classics, "essentially, you've turned

a college field of study into high school. And there's nothing wrong with high school, but it should be different qualitatively than the college experience."

Some faculty observers worry that Covid-19 may simply be giving cover to administrators to make changes. Irene Mulvey, president of the American Association of University Professors and a professor of mathematics at Fairfield University, says that, while she understands that the pandemic has had financial impacts, they "may not be as bad as some institutions want to claim, because they might want to use the crisis to make cuts they've wanted to make all along."

And cuts alone will not be enough to turn around a college's troubled fortunes. For long-term financial stability, says Atkins, the consultant, "you have to find ways to grow." That often means new programs.

Most colleges typically offer new programs based on the interests of the faculty, or imitating the successes of other institutions. If a college's budget is tight and the stakes for its future are ex-

grams will perform best in enrollment and revenue and which might be worth re-evaluating, but he believes that a college "isn't supposed to be a vocational school — somehow or other, we have to transmit our culture from one generation to another." Departments with just a few majors, or that lose money but serve the institution's mission, can be just as important to a college's future as the biggest program on campus. "You've got to build the right web of cross-subsidies," Atkins says, "so the things that are big cover the things that are not."

CUTTING brings costs of its own — to human beings and to the institution itself. Payroll and benefits typically make up about 75 percent or more of a college's operating budget, so shifting departments or merging majors to create administrative efficiencies is not likely to save the kind of money necessary to survive Covid-19. If an institution is getting smaller strategically, some people will have to lose their jobs.

Many people already have. Colleges have lost about 13 percent of their workers nationwide during the pandemic, according to an analysis of Labor Department data conducted by *The Chronicle*. Most of those laid off were staff members, particularly in food services, maintenance, and other hourly wage jobs related to campus operations that were interrupted when classes moved online last spring. Some of those positions may need to be filled again when classrooms and dorms return to full capacity, though many may not.

Layoffs at a college can be especially complicated. Many higher-education labor forces are unionized, and job terminations are subject to negotiated conditions. And then there's tenure. Academic tenure ostensibly protects the professors who have earned it from losing their employment except in the most extreme circumstances of misbehavior or institutional distress, but it's eroding. In January the Kansas Board of Regents temporarily granted the state's six public universities expanded powers to fire tenured faculty members.

Mulvey, of the AAUP, says she gets that administrators want flexibility and nimbleness for hir-

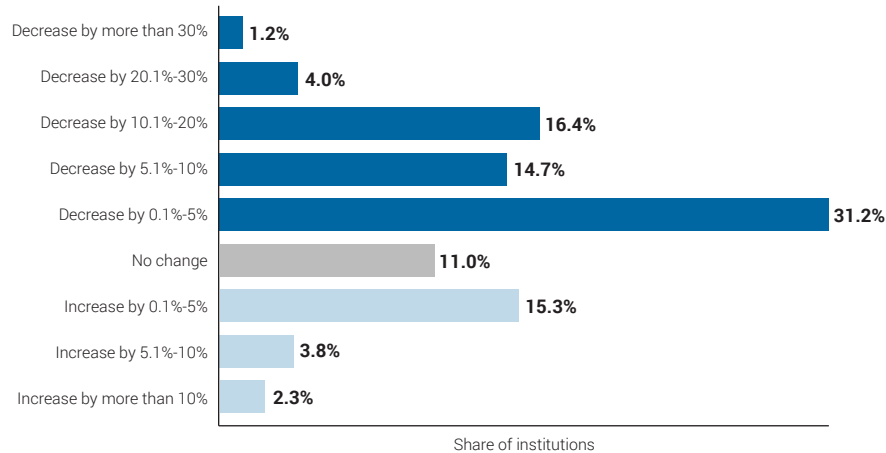
Many colleges will have to "direct resources to the students that need them the most, and away from students who need them the least."

istential, it has to introduce programs that data show will attract the most students and revenue — health care and tech are particularly attractive right now, for example — but that may not be the faculty specialty or the hot emerging program. That doesn't mean that every program a college ever considers is worth doing only if it's profitable. "If a struggling institution only has so many resources to reinvest to improve its fortunes, and you put it into something that doesn't take off," he adds, "then you just lit a match to the very scarce capital you have."

Atkins spends much of his professional life helping colleges determine which academic pro-

How Steep Was the Enrollment Slide?

More than one-third of colleges reported that their undergraduate enrollments in the fall of 2020 had dropped by more than 5 percent.



Source: Ad Astra/C2i/The Chronicle

ing, “but it’s tenured faculty with academic freedom that make a great institution.”

Layoffs also affect individual lives, families, and communities. They can crush morale, strain working relationships, and in some cases exacerbate larger inequities. The layoffs of hourly workers during Covid-19 carry a racial dimension that college leaders must bear in mind, says Shaun R. Harper, a professor of management and organization and executive director of the Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California. The higher-education work force is stratified by race, with people of color largely concentrated in food-services, custodial, groundskeeping, and clerical roles. The latter are often the first laid off in tough times, and they absorbed the brunt of job losses during the first weeks of Covid-19 — laid off by college leaders who are predominantly white, Harper says. That dynamic “creates even more racial inequity and more stratification in the workplace, if we don’t have a plan and a strategy for that.”

When college leaders contemplate big changes, they often focus on trying to minimize blowback. The college leaders Atkins works with typically see that as one of “their biggest challenges.” There is a relatively simple solution, he says: Bring data and involve the stakeholders in

the process. Good data are especially essential for confronting change with professors. “They’re researchers, they’re analysts, right?” Atkins says. “And if you come with a bad argument, they’re not going to be very receptive.”

It’s important for leaders to make it part of their message that the contracting university will, eventually, grow. That will mean new hires, new programs, and, hopefully, new students, new revenues, and a new tailwind for other projects and plans. “Being willing to talk about growth and cuts in the same breath, I think, is terribly important in this environment,” says Atkins. “It gives people some hope.”

IF THE CAMPUS that emerges from Covid-19 will be smaller, it will also have to be more adaptable.

Over the past decade or so, for example, many institutions have expanded the number of employees in student services, many of them highly specialized, to meet increased demand for advising, counseling, and other supports. With the financial pressures already bearing down on colleges before Covid-19, and now with the increased financial damages of the pandemic, many institutions “won’t have the resources to afford some of the kind of vertical

specializations that we have lived under in the last decade,” says Kevin Kruger, president of Naspaa, an organization for higher-education student-affairs professionals. Naspaa did a survey of student-affairs personnel in September, he adds, “and, not surprisingly, found that a majority of student-affairs folks have new responsibilities after the pandemic started. I think that’s the beginning of this trend.”

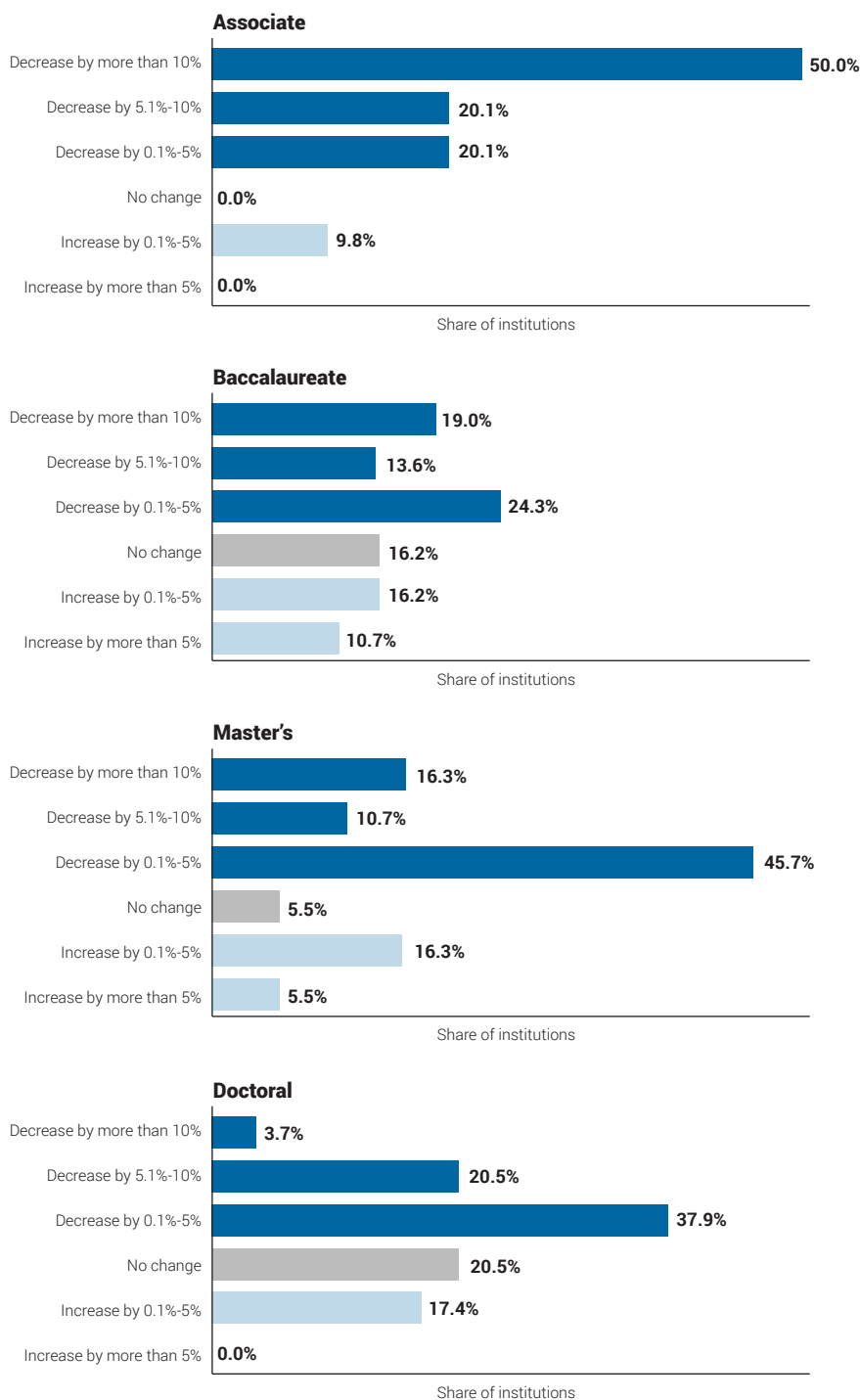
Colleges may spread some student-support work around. “We’re going to see more staff playing roles in coaching and mentoring and advising, and expanding the portfolio of ways in which we interact with students,” Kruger says. Faculty members advising students, for example, isn’t novel, but making advising and mentoring more of an official across-campus job rather than an informal happenstance is.

As part of a plan to become more student-centered, Indiana University of Pennsylvania started a program last fall in which each freshman is assigned a “guide” — one of more than 80 employees who volunteered to be students’ personal contact for questions and help with problems. “As we walked into the pandemic, it turned out to be even more important to have a single point of contact,” says Driscoll, the president. He likens it to when students call his office to ask him to talk to the bursar about a problem: “I’ve got my day job, but I’m here to help you be successful. I’m going to do whatever I can to make that happen.”

Not every job can be handled by non-specialists. Colleges trying to shrink their budgets face doing so in an era when demand for student mental-health services and other supports has never been higher, and during a crisis that has caused demand to spike while making it harder to deliver those services. The pandemic has “made it difficult to think about how we would find reason-

Enrollment Troubles

Last fall institutions across the board took hits to their enrollments, but two-year colleges suffered the most, with half seeing their numbers drop more than 10 percent.



Source: Ad Astra/C2i/The Chronicle

able ways to find efficiencies there to cut,” Kruger says.

But the pandemic has also helped bring some counseling efficiencies to light. Duquesne University, a private institution in Pittsburgh, was using videoconference technology for some of its counseling appointments before Covid-19 struck. Once all operations went remote last spring, counseling sessions went virtual, and administrators learned that “students actually like that as an option,” says David J. Dausey, the provost. “It’s more private.” He expects it will be a bigger part of the university’s approach in the future.

As leaders weigh where to prune from their operations, Kruger cautions against imposing across-the-board cuts and urges thinking about “where the investments in staff and resources are going to have the greatest payoff for the things that you care about the most.” It’s possible, for example, that student activities and campus programming might not be as busy as they were before the pandemic. “Not that we want to do away with it, but can we have some of those staff involved in other efforts?” says Kruger, who expects to see more small, non-revenue-generating athletic programs cut. That can be a risky move, since many small colleges recruit students in part through allowing them to continue their high-school athletic careers, but the expense of coaches’ salaries, equipment, and team travel can add up.

Few of these decisions will be easy to parse, or easy to carry out — it may be tough to cut the baseball team, for example, if a trustee lettered in the sport back when he was a student. But college leaders are going to be forced to make a series of critical calls about “what is nice to have,” Kruger says, “and what you’ve got to have.”

THE CONTRACTING UNIVERSITY may ultimately emerge from the pandemic on stronger footing, but it may also exacerbate inequality.

The pandemic has been hard on lower-income Americans and people of color, but it has been particularly brutal for the latter, including college students. The number of Black first-time freshmen this past fall dropped 19 percent nationwide, according to data compiled by

the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, while the number of Latino freshmen dropped 20 percent, and the number of Native American freshmen dropped 23 percent. The number of freshmen of color attending community college dropped by nearly a third.

Unless government officials and college leaders do something to actively counter those trends, they will only get worse, says Harper, of USC. “The institutions that involve the largest number of students of color are chronically underresourced,” he says. “When resources tighten, it’s going to be those institutions that are financially most devastated by that.”

With limited budgets and staff, Kruger says, many colleges will have to “direct resources to the students that need them the most, and away from students who need them the least.” Beyond basic health, safety, and wellness concerns, that may mean focusing on persistence and degree completion for first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color. That dovetails with Harper’s view that college leaders need to think about Covid-19 recovery for students of color in terms of reparations. Not lump payments for past harm, as is often the case in the larger national discussion of reparations, he says: “I’m thinking about giving extra support to institutions that, historically and chronically, have been neglected.”

Harper doesn’t believe that all discussions about institutional recovery have to be about race. “What I am suggesting, though, is that we are guaranteed to multiply the racial inequity that the pandemic produced if we attempt to do the financial recovery in a raceless way,” he says.

Inequity is one of many factors that contributed to the plight colleges have found themselves in during the pandemic, and it’s one of the many factors that leaders must be mindful of as they plan how to emerge stronger. The contracting university can hope and plan for a brighter future, but unless it tries to avoid past mistakes, it’s likely to repeat them — or make them worse. ■

Lee Gardner writes about the management of colleges and universities, higher-education marketing, and other topics. Follow him on Twitter @_lee_g.



Town-Gown Tensions Turn Existential

The rapport is more important than ever.
One college learned that the hard way.

BY JACK STRIPLING



GARY HERZIG was stunned.

It was March 2020, and the State University of New York's campus in Oneonta, where Herzig is mayor, had responded to the Covid-19 pandemic by abruptly shifting to remote learning while students were on spring break. Some students were expected to return to dorms or off-campus housing, and Herzig argued that they needed to be told about bans on gatherings and other Covid-related protocols.

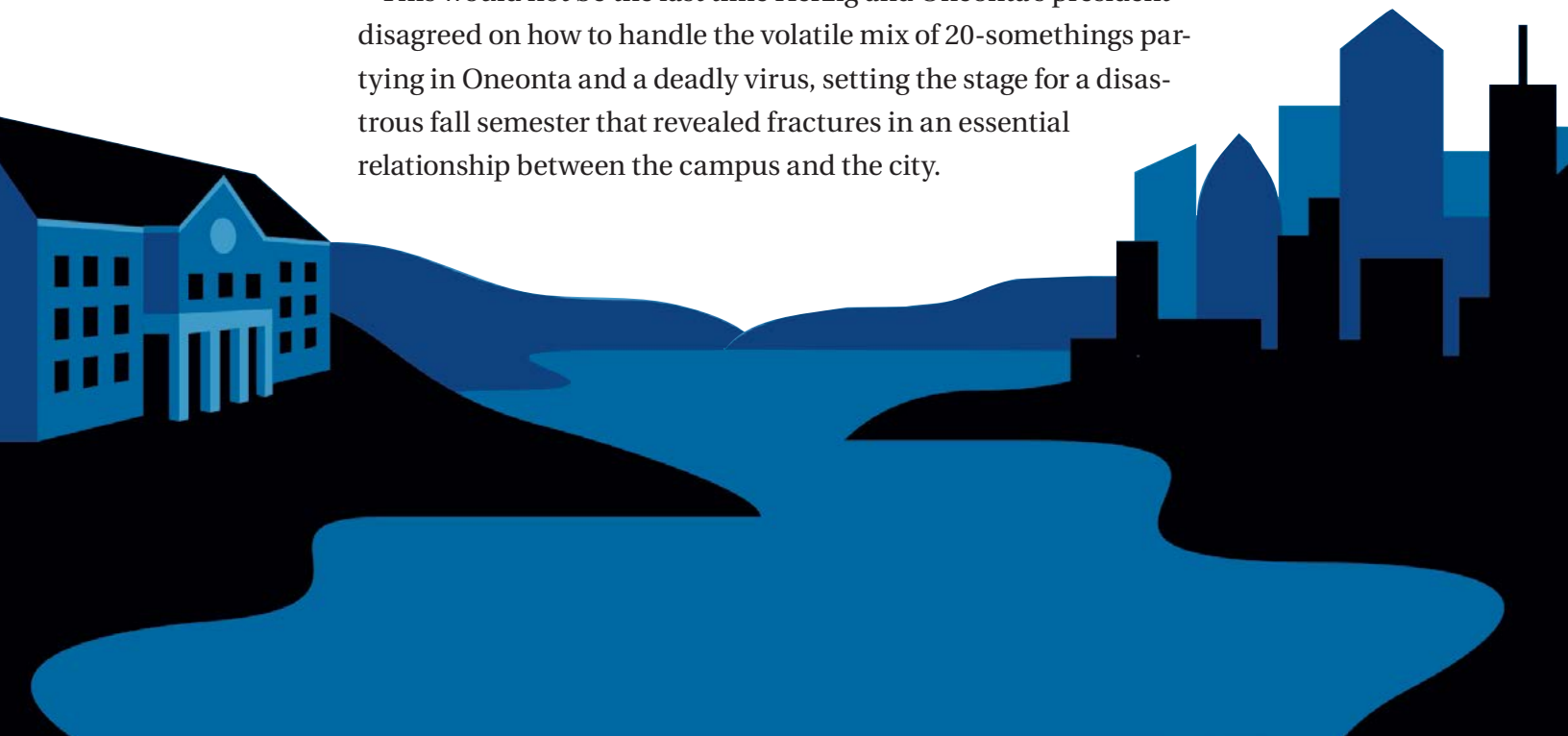
But Herzig and like-minded city officials were getting nowhere. Hal Legg, the campus's top communications official, had told them he feared sending a message to students would "add fuel to the fire," according to emails among city officials. Herzig elevated the issue to Barbara Jean Morris, who was then the campus's president.

"I have observed groups of students in backyards today playing beer pong seemingly unaware that life has changed," Herzig wrote to Morris on March 20.

"This is serious," Herzig wrote. "We are all sacrificing and isolating. Our students need to be told to do so as well."

"Please," he added, "— why resistance to sending a message?"

This would not be the last time Herzig and Oneonta's president disagreed on how to handle the volatile mix of 20-somethings partying in Oneonta and a deadly virus, setting the stage for a disastrous fall semester that revealed fractures in an essential relationship between the campus and the city.



Tucked in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains, Oneonta is a town of about 14,000 people, half of whom are students at either the SUNY campus or Hartwick College. As in so many college towns, peace in Oneonta rests on subtle truces between year-round residents and students. Covid-19 is putting those fragile compacts to a new and tougher test. This test comes at a critical moment, when the safety and long-term prosperity of both colleges and the towns they call home are acutely dependent on strong partnerships between local officials and campus leaders.

In the fall, Oneonta residents braced for the reality that a few partying college students could become viral superspreaders. Their trepidations proved to be warranted. The weekend before classes began, house parties popped up across town, spawning an outbreak that forced the campus days later to move instruction online for the duration of the semester. The fallout was significant, bringing SUNY-Oneonta national notoriety as an example of a failed reopening, straining relationships with local leaders and ending Morris's presidency.

Notable as SUNY-Oneonta's case may have been, the crisis can be traced in part to a very common problem in higher education: The campus's relationship with the community was not as strong as it needed to be, allowing tensions to fester over who was responsible for off-campus students at the intersection of town and gown.

Confronting the pandemic requires a level of coordination between civic officials and college leaders on multiple fronts. Enforcement, public messaging, transportation, and Covid testing are joint challenges for municipal and campus leaders who will have to set aside their differences to navigate an enduring crisis unlike any they have encountered before.

Nationally, the conversation around Covid is shifting from how colleges can make their campuses safe to how they can keep their surrounding communities safe, too. The University of California at Davis, for example, has taken a particularly expansive view, offering free coronavirus testing and other resources to tens of thousands of people who live in Davis or work in town, irrespective of whether they're affiliated with the university.

Davis's approach has a hefty price tag, but oth-

er colleges are making less costly changes. The University of Colorado at Boulder, for example, has updated its student conduct code to include public-health orders, requiring students to follow them whether they are on or off campus. Last semester, the SUNY-Oswego campus helped its local mayor establish testing for the city's essential workers, including police officers and firefighters.

The alternative to stronger collaboration, as Oneonta found out, isn't pretty. What happened there, as related through public documents, as well as interviews with local officials, professors, students, and administrators, is a cautionary tale for college leaders who will have to navigate newly fraught dynamics in their communities.

HINTS OF FRICTION between the mayor and campus president, which had been visible in the spring, came more clearly into focus by August, as SUNY-Oneonta prepared to resume in-person instruction. Herzig again approached Morris, the president, about sending a Covid-related message to students — this time, from him — and again she rejected him.

Singling out the students, rather than the whole community, Morris said in an email, risked “perpetuating an us vs. them mentality.”

Morris declined an interview request.

The email exchange is among 55 pages of communications related to Covid-19 that the City of Oneonta provided to *The Chronicle* in response to a public-records request. *The Chronicle*, in early December, filed a similar request with SUNY-Oneonta, but the university has yet to provide any responsive documents.

What can be discerned from even this limited batch of emails are critical moments in which the city and the campus either outright disagreed on matters of tone and strategy or simply appeared to talk past each other. Ideally, according to one expert, mayors and college presidents would issue joint messages about the pandemic.

“That’s half the battle, right?” says Stephen M. Gavazzi, a professor of human development and family science at Ohio State University, who consults with colleges on community relations. “If you’re issuing joint messages, that means that you’re talking.”

For all of his concerns, Herzig needed the stu-

dents back. The City of Oneonta, which has a \$15-million annual budget, stood to lose about \$2 million a semester if the campus were shut down in the fall and spring. Economically speaking, an Oneonta without SUNY doesn't work.

At the same time, the campus's testing plan for its 6,000 returning students struck many in Oneonta as flawed. Unlike Hartwick, SUNY-Oneonta did not require returning students to present evidence of a recent negative Covid-19 test or to be tested upon arrival. The campus, which had the capacity to test only 12 to 14 students a day, had planned to test wastewater to spot outbreaks in residence halls.

Gina L. Keel, a political-science professor at Oneonta, says the decision not to test students "seemed crazy and seemed to be driven by money. "That was a fatal decision," she says. "I thought it

was negligent, frankly."

SUNY-Oneonta has taken a lot of criticism for its testing plan, but it was hardly alone in its approach. All of SUNY's 64 campuses resumed some form of in-person instruction in the fall, and only six required testing upon arrival or shortly before, says Holly Liapis, a SUNY spokeswoman.

SUNY's central office approved Oneonta's plan, and it didn't initially mandate that any campuses test students.

"I'm also one to point the finger at the SUNY system and their approval of a plan that wasn't much of a plan," Keel says. "Why are 64 campuses figuring out how to track and control with not much 'systemness'?" Collaboration has always been desirable, Gavazzi says, but the pandemic has made it mandatory. "If they weren't doing this kind of work before, they had better do this work now."

New Cases of Covid-19, Fall 2020 vs. Spring 2021

The seven-day average of new Covid-19 cases reported nationwide has increased alarmingly since the fall, when students traveled back to many college campuses.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

In response to this critique, Liapis said in an email to *The Chronicle*: “Any plan is only as good as its implementation, and this is when you need leaders who can review the evidence in front of them, engage key stakeholders, and take swift action when problems arise. Some similar plans on other campuses did not have the same result as at SUNY-Oneonta.”

In total, five SUNY campuses paused in-person instruction for a period of time during the fall due to Covid, but only SUNY-Oneonta sent students home, Liapis confirmed.

Diane M. Georgeson, Oneonta’s city health officer, says she does not fault the campus for its lack of testing early on, which was about resources and availability.

“They tried as best they could,” she says. “Trust me, they really tried.”

SUNY-ONEONTA’S approach to testing revealed a deeper philosophical disagreement between city and college leaders about who was responsible for students living off campus. Even as the college ramped up testing to manage the outbreak, Morris, the president, stuck to the position that she did not have the authority to mandate testing for off-campus students who did not use campus facilities. (SUNY’s legal office does not share this view, Liapis said.)

“What I would be critical of,” Georgeson says, “was the campus administration’s attitude that the off-campus students weren’t necessarily their problem or their responsibility.”

City officials were concerned about what they saw as a very likely scenario: Throngs of unsupervised students living and partying in the city, who were effectively the city’s problem. The local police force, just 25 strong, was no match for the thousands who might descend on downtown bars or house parties. And help wasn’t coming.

Herzig pleaded with Morris to deploy the campus police force, which has 11 officers, to assist local law enforcement. She wouldn’t do it, saying she was hemmed in by jurisdiction.

“We are limited in how, when, and where we can assist other jurisdictions. We are not simply denying requests from the city,” she wrote in an email to the mayor on August 6.

The debate over policing revealed another crucial difference in how the city and the campus viewed the pandemic. From a legal standpoint, Herzig saw Covid-19 as an “emergency,” which would allow the Oneonta Police Department and the campus police to work together as prescribed by a memorandum of understanding. SUNY-Oneonta’s response suggested its leaders viewed the threat differently.

“I understand that they can certainly decline our OPD’s request in this case as they do not see the current pandemic threat as an emergency,” Herzig wrote to Morris. “In talking with both attorneys, mayors and other SUNY presidents, I find that this is more a cultural issue than a legal issue. There are UPDs that provide much off-campus assistance for policing their students while others refuse to do so.”

Hoping to stem the tide of students pouring into downtown, the city decided to limit local bus service from the campus, cutting it off at 6 p.m. The mayor did not have the authority to close bars — that would have to come from the governor, he said — but he could make it harder for students to get to them.

This, too, caused friction with the university.

The conversation is shifting from how colleges can make their campuses safe to how they can keep their surrounding communities safe, too.

The Student Association began exploring alternative nighttime transportation options, a move that Bill Harclerod, director of campus activities and leadership, defended as necessary to facilitate shopping — not barhopping.

“This all could have been avoided,” Harclerod wrote in an email to the mayor and other city officials, on August 20, “if the City of Oneonta would just have asked instead of trying to play various campus folks off each other and stoking/reflecting fears of the students.”

Students, he added, “know where they feel wel-

come and where they don't. This whole process just reinforces their perception that they are not considered to be Oneontans but outsiders."

Harclerod declined an interview request.

By this point, students were already moving into residence halls. The relationship between the city and the campus was on the cusp of a much bigger test.

ON AUGUST 22, the Saturday before classes were set to resume, the mayor's fears came to fruition. Student revelers blanketed the city, overwhelming the local police and, as it turned out, spreading Covid-19.

Reports from sergeants on duty, which Herzig shared with Morris, painted a frightening picture: An "ABSOLUTE EXPLOSION of house parties" throughout the city involving "hundreds or even thousands" of students, none of them wearing masks.

"A quick and easy solution to that would be to increase arrests for such parties," a sergeant reported, "however, we simply cannot keep up."

"The students are not heeding the warnings," another dispatch said, "and it seems that going away to college is more their 'escape from Covid.'"

On August 25, a day after classes began, SUNY-Oneonta reported its first two positive cases. Georgeson, the city health officer, pressed campus leaders for more information about testing off-campus students, expressing frustration that responses weren't coming.

"I feel this was not an unreasonable request," Georgeson wrote in an email on August 27 to Colleen Brannan, chief of staff at SUNY-Oneonta. "I am disappointed," she added, "that I have received no information from you."

All the while, partying continued. The local police relayed the names of offenders to university officials, who promised to adjudicate swiftly. Suspensions were rare: just five students after the first weekend and three campus organizations. Warnings, which were the most common sanction, were issued to 168 students, according to data the campus provided to *The Chronicle*.

On August 30, Jim Malatras, chancellor of the SUNY system, directed Oneonta to shift for two weeks to online-only instruction, citing 105 confirmed Covid cases, or 3 percent of the campus

population. Assisted by a team from SUNY Upstate Medical University, Oneonta escalated testing for students. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said he would deploy a "SWAT team" to test local residents.

Speaking from a podium on a campus lawn, Malatras said, "Today is a difficult day for SUNY-Oneonta, but hopefully it serves as a wake-up call that Covid-19 is not done yet, that it can rear its ugly head and it can rear its ugly head quickly."

The chancellor was flanked by a few officials, masked at a distance. The mayor stood on one side; the president on the other.

THE SITUATION was swiftly deteriorating by the next day, as members of the "Control Room" gathered, their faces appearing in rows of boxes on a Zoom screen.

Designed by the mayor as a space for college leaders, city officials, and students to share information, the group convened on August 31 for what turned out to be a gloomy proceeding. Oneonta's president acknowledged that Covid was "coming on fast and hard," citing more than 200 positive cases — double what had been identified the day before.

By the next day, as more test results came in, Morris said she expected to see "a very big number."

University officials had traced the outbreak to an off-campus party thrown by three athletic teams the weekend before classes started.

The mayor, presiding over the meeting, gave the floor to Margaret L. Drugovich, who had been Hartwick's president for 12 years. Drugovich emphasized her college's strict conduct code and early testing as vital to its strategy. In Oneonta, Drugovich had come to be seen as something of a foil to Morris, a president of two years who some saw as reluctant to play the heavy.

On the advice of the Otsego County Health Department, Drugovich said, Hartwick College had directed its students "to refrain from contact with members of the SUNY-Oneonta community."

Hartwick was walling itself off from a population presumed to be riddled with infection. If Oneonta students came onto the Hartwick campus, as they sometimes had at the invitation of Hartwick students, they were issued trespassing citations, Drugovich later told *The Chronicle*.

Hartwick, though, had the luxury of retreating into its own borders in a way that SUNY-Oneonta could not. Not only is Hartwick's typical enrollment of about 1,200 much smaller, but about 87 percent of the students live on campus, Drugovich said. The only exceptions are students in fraternity and sorority housing and local commuters.

Locking down SUNY-Oneonta would have been like playing Whac-A-Mole across the city. Not that the campus even knew where to look. When city officials, in several email exchanges, pressed Morris for information about the off-campus population, the president told them she did not know where students lived locally or how many there were in the area.

"I think the best way to gauge this information is to ask landlords regarding housing capacity and vacancy rates," Morris wrote in one email.

Over the course of the semester, Hartwick had 73 positive Covid-19 cases, and never had more than 31 at a given time, Drugovich said.

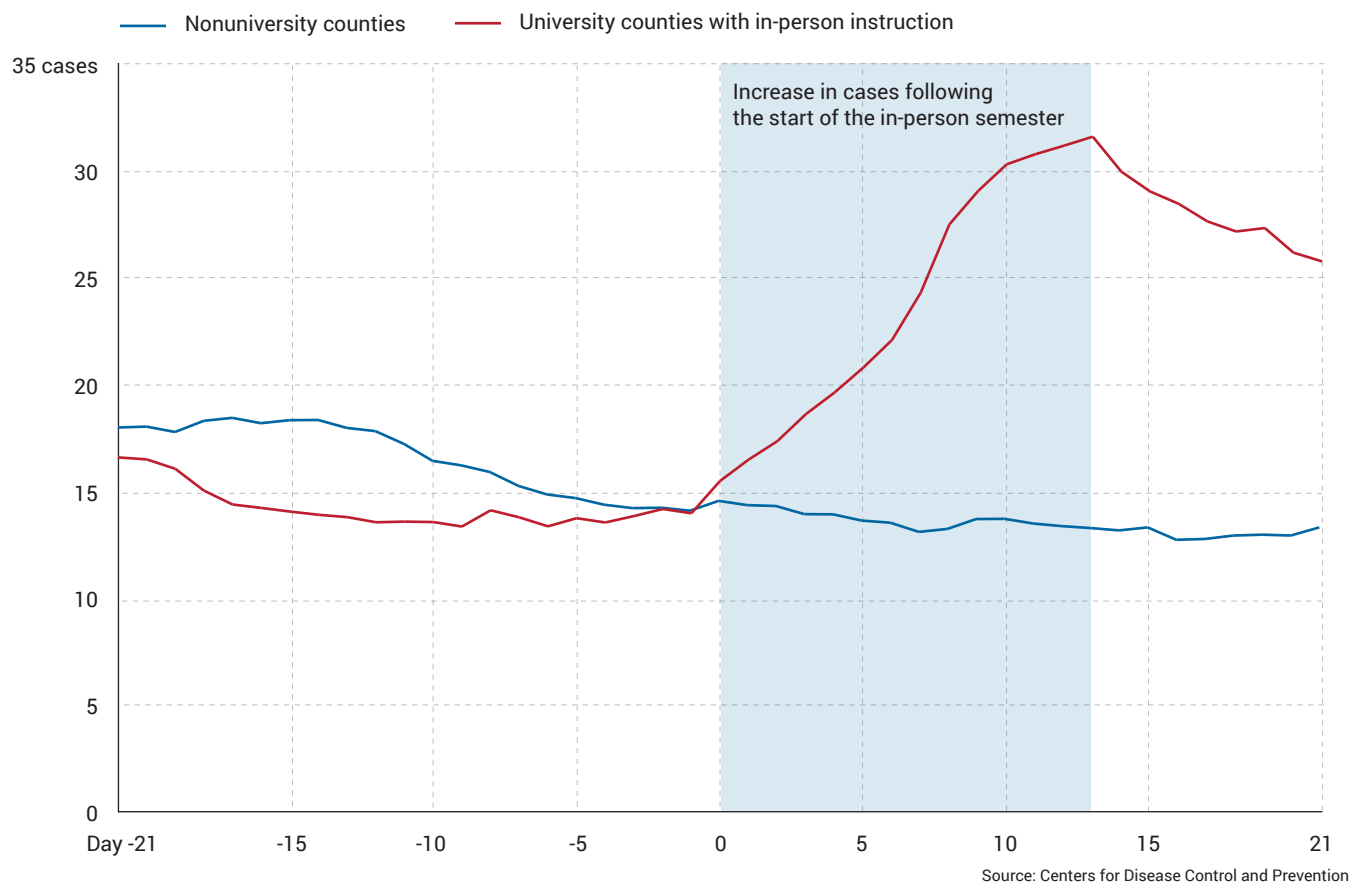
"The one conclusion that fits the evidence: Her draconian measures worked," says Ronald E. Bishop, vice president for academics with Oneonta's chapter of United University Professions, a union that represents faculty and professional staff members.

As members of the Control Room deliberated, students back on the Oneonta campus were recording on social media what resembled life in a science-fiction film. Video on Twitter showed students who had tested positive for Covid-19 being escorted from the dorms in the dark of night by someone in a hazmat suit.

On September 3, three days after the Control Room meeting, the chancellor announced that the

Campuses' Impact on Their Communities

The seven-day average of Covid-19 cases per 100,000 residents initially spiked when large universities reopened but dropped in similar counties that did not contain large colleges.



campus would move online for the rest of the semester, citing nearly 400 cases.

“DO YOU SEE the issue here?” the officer asked.

It was September 4, the night after Oneonta had moved online for good, and the local police were responding to a noise complaint at an off-campus student rental property.

By college standards, this wasn’t a rager. Even so, there was plenty of evidence by now of what this group of 15 or so unmasked students, packed into a garage, and yelling over music that was loud enough to hear from the street, could do. One of the hosts, though, said he still didn’t get it.

“Can you explain the issue to me?” he asked the officer.

A body-camera recording of the incident, which the city provided to *The Chronicle* in response to a public-records request, illustrates the frustrations that both local law enforcement and students experienced navigating the crisis.

Some of the students who had tested negative for Covid told the police that they assumed they could now congregate. The police officers, in turn, were left to explain the finer points of Covid protocols, assuming the students had all signed conduct codes that they had chosen to ignore.

Here’s how that played out:

Student: “No, I didn’t sign any waiver.”

Officer: “Well, you’re lying then.”

Student: “I’m not lying.”

Officer: “You are.”

Student: “I promise you, I did not sign a single thing, and I go to this school.”

Second Officer: “I’m not going to debate it with you.”

The student wasn’t lying, and the officers weren’t wrong. State guidelines would not have blessed the gathering, but the student had not “signed” anything. Students were provided, but not required to sign, an “Actions for Safety Plan,” which contained 16 bullet points directing them to follow state and local guidance on masking and social distancing. It said nothing of what would happen if the students didn’t comply.

“It was not as clear and specific as I think it

should have been,” Herzig, the mayor, says.

As the police cited the students for noise violations that night, interactions steadily devolved. One student mocked an officer for not having attended college. (The officer said he had served in the military.) Twice, a student joked that an officer’s flashlight resembled a “dildo.”

At one point during their protracted dialogue, an officer stated, “You guys aren’t the only people that live in this town.”

That same night, a photo began circulating on social media that would become the defining image of SUNY-Oneonta’s semester-gone-wrong: a group of students partying in a quarantine dorm, mugging for the camera and appearing to be having the time of their lives.

Malatras, the chancellor, told *The New York Times* that his “blood boiled” when he saw it. Three weeks later, he introduced a “uniform sanctions policy,” standardizing punishments for violations related to Covid-19.

Then, on October 15, Malatras announced that Dennis Craig, who had been interim president of the Purchase campus, would take the reins as acting president of Oneonta. Buried deep in a news release about the appointment was an acknowledgment that Morris had “transitioned from her position as president to pursue other opportunities.”

Morris has a “six-month engagement” with the SUNY system, Liapis, the SUNY spokeswoman, said in an email to *The Chronicle*. In this role, the former president will work on the “general education framework to empower students to meet the changing demands of a 21st century,” Liapis said.

Morris’s departure was a standard crisis response, signaling a new start. But it did not land that way for a lot of people on the campus. Had Oneonta really grappled with what went wrong? Had the SUNY system accepted any responsibility for its role? Emma M. Sarnacki has her doubts.

“SUNY-Oneonta was a convenient scapegoat as a campus, and she was a convenient scapegoat as a person,” says Sarnacki, a graduate student in museum studies. “The vengeful part of human nature wants to see that person gone, and when there’s new leadership people tend to assume everything has changed and we can move on.”

Sarnacki, who advocated unsuccessfully in the fall for a better system to report Covid-related vi-

olations, says she has found the administration more collaborative in recent months.

“Even though I’m disappointed that the failures placed an enormous strain on the community,” she says, “I’m looking forward to the opportunities of the improved relationship going forward.”

THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE of what happened at SUNY-Oneonta is laid out in a 31-page “Retrospective on Fall 2020” that leads off each section with “What Worked Well.” There are also “Lessons Learned.”

The document is generally lacking in specificity about how the outbreak actually happened, what the tensions were between city and university officials, or who made which decisions. It is a master class in “strategic ambiguity,” says Kristen C. Blinne, an associate professor of communication studies.

“It reads like it went through a legal team and was sanitized for public consumption,” Blinne says.

Some professors believe that an unvarnished draft of the retrospective, composed by a committee that included faculty members, was more candid than the final product. *The Chronicle* filed a public-records request for the draft, but the campus withheld the document, citing an exemption in state law for records that are not “final agency policy or determinations.”

Still, changes have been made that speak directly to problems that came to the fore between the city and the campus. Craig, the new acting president, has created a cabinet-level position: The vice president for external affairs will serve as a liaison with the city and students who live off campus.

In another change, the campus police chief will report directly to Craig. Unlike in the fall, he says, the campus force will assist the local police as needed.

Craig says he does not want to “Monday morning quarterback” his predecessor’s approach. That said, Craig emphasizes the importance of “high-touch types of interactions” with city officials that, he hopes, “soften the environment overall.”

“All of these people have my direct contact information,” Craig says of the mayor and others. “They’ve got my mobile number — after hours. These are ways to build a rapport and trust so that we’re serving our institutions well in both good

times and in bad times.”

As Craig sees it, his job is “getting people to move forward beyond the hurt, beyond the fear.”

Students are now required to sign a “Statement of Shared Responsibility” that includes a behavior pledge and states that noncompliance could result in sanctions. The spring plan requires that students living in the Oneonta area provide local addresses, and each week 10 percent of those students will be selected for randomized surveillance testing. (Students on campus will be tested weekly).

Sustained communication and collaboration with the local community is crucial, says Amanda L. Finch, associate vice president for student development.

“It’s not something that we can just establish and then walk away from.”

There is still a chasm, though, between the upbeat narrative coming out of the SUNY-Oneonta administration and faculty members who remain

The local police force, just 25 strong, was no match for the thousands who might descend on downtown bars or house parties. And help wasn’t coming.

skeptical. More than 700 people have signed a petition opposing what some professors see as an implicit mandate to return to in-person instruction. The campus says it is offering 20 percent of courses in-person this spring, up from 3 percent in the fall.

There is a sense in Oneonta that the campus and the city have just one more chance to get it right. Thus far, the mayor likes the changes he sees. Finding a way to work together isn’t an option, Herzig says. The stakes are too high.

“It takes us all down — the college, the broader community, our business community,” he says. “We all succeed together or fail together on this.” ■

Jack Stripling is a senior writer at The Chronicle, where he covers college leadership, particularly presidents and governing boards. Follow him on Twitter @jackstripling.



The Surveilled Student

New forms of monitoring health and academic performance may last long after the pandemic subsides.

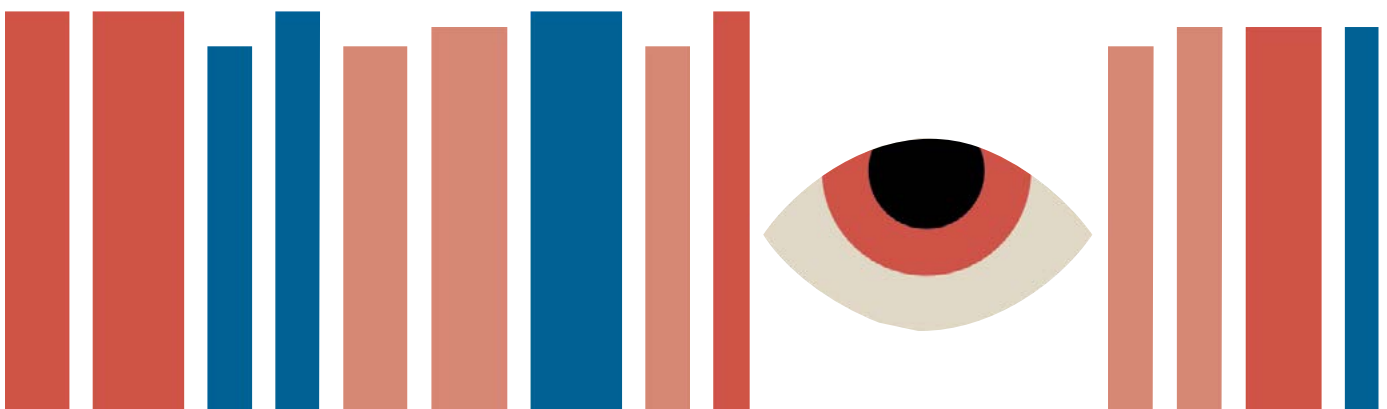
BY KATHERINE MANGAN

THE MESSAGE, tucked in a routine fall-planning email to Oakland University students, took Tyler Dixon by surprise.

Along with wearing masks and social distancing, students living on campus would be expected to wear a coin-size “BioButton” attached to their chests with medical adhesive. It would continuously measure their temperature, respiratory rate, and heart rate, and tell them whether they’d been in close contact with a button wearer who’d tested positive for Covid-19. In conjunction with a series of daily screening questions, the button would let them know if they were cleared for class.

Dixon, a senior and resident adviser, said the late-July email was the first he and any of his friends at the university north of Detroit had heard of the BioButton. “No one I spoke to liked the idea of having to wear something on their body to be on the campus,” he said. “They wondered how secure the information was and who would have access to it.”

A friend worried about what would happen if he went to a Black Lives Matter protest where violence broke out. Would he be tracked down and disciplined? Would sleeping on the opposite side of a thin dorm-room wall from an infected student force someone unnecessarily into quarantine?



Dixon posted a petition on Change.org urging Oakland to give students the choice to opt out. Angry responses to the BioButton requirement flooded in from students and parents. The college was invading their privacy, they wrote. They'd rather quit than wear the button; the college was turning Communist.

"I went to bed with 100 signatures, and when I woke up, it had blown up, and a guy from a far-right talk show wanted to give me an award," Dixon says.

Oakland isn't the only institution seeing that kind of pushback. The pandemic has prompted many colleges to quickly roll out surveillance tools that could help limit the spread of the virus, or mitigate its effects on learning, as students are sent out of the classroom and into private quarters. Some students, required to flash Covid-free badges to enter classrooms or to rotate their lap-

"Surveillance is really about power and control, and universities are looking for certainty in very uncertain times."

tops for online test proctors to scan their bedrooms, have grown weary of feeling watched. And some are leery of how the information that's being collected will be used, whether it could leak out, and whether there's a process to destroy it when the pandemic is over.

That wariness isn't limited to students. Colleges scrambling to keep students healthy and educationally on track have erected a mass-surveillance structure that won't just disappear, and may have lasting effects on the student experience. "There's a tendency with tracing technologies for them to linger after their initial purpose fades," says Sarah E. Igo, a professor of history at Vanderbilt University who studies surveillance and privacy. "It should be clear that these are temporary, extraordinary measures. We have to pay as much attention to how we kick them off as put them up."

DIXON KNOWS NO ONE at Oakland has any reason to misuse his health data. But even seemingly secure government and business systems can be hit by sweeping cyberattacks, he says. "We're living in insane times."

Oakland officials say they regret that the information about the BioButton was shared before they could educate people about what it did and didn't do. Only the wearers would have access to their specific data, and the close-contact alerts were based on Bluetooth recognition, not GPS location tracking. In other words, the device doesn't track a student's specific location. It just monitors whether it is within Bluetooth distance (about 15 feet) from another BioButton device. Given the backlash, the university agreed to "strongly encourage" rather than mandate its use.

David A. Stone, a professor of philosophy and chief research officer at Oakland, led the team that selected and evaluated the BioButton. As he sees it, handing over health information is a relatively small price to pay if it means halting the spread of a virus that has ravaged the nation.

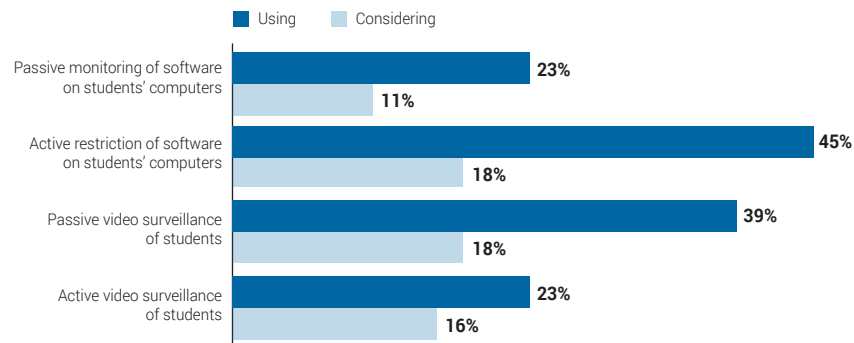
"When you consider the hundreds of thousands of people who have died in this pandemic, is it too much to ask to share your heart rate or temperature?" he asks. He says the wearable technology seemed the least invasive way to catch symptoms early and give students tools to know if they might have early signs of, or potential exposure to, Covid-19.

Other campuses, fearing the kinds of privacy objections Oakland faced, have concluded that the solutions heavily marketed in the early months of the pandemic could create more problems than they solve. The University of Maryland at College Park considered, but decided against, using technologies that track someone's temperature or location. One company offered an internet-connected thermometer that could help the campus predict where the virus was spreading, but some faculty members feared that the company would sell the personal data it collects.

"Heaven forbid that the thermometer notices you're spiking a fever," and all of a sudden you start getting direct mail about Nyquil or Clorox

The Spy in the Machine

A poll of more than 300 institutions last spring found that most of those that had adopted online proctoring were using more than one kind. Active restriction of software and passive video surveillance were the most widespread types.



Source: Educause Covid-19 QuickPoll

wipes, says Neil Jay Sehgal, an assistant professor of health policy and management at Maryland.

SOME MIGHT WONDER why Gen-Z college students, who post the minutiae of their daily lives on social media, are concerned about privacy.

There's a difference between posting information yourself — often the carefully curated version of a life you want to convey — and having a proctoring service require you to scan your bedroom before a test for cheat sheets or open books, says Chris Gilliard, an English professor at Macomb Community College, in Warren, Mich., who studies privacy and inequality.

"For a long time, we've believed the myth that students didn't care about these issues. Now, it's impossible to ignore the way they're pushing back," he says.

At some colleges, including the City University of New York and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, students have circulated petitions demanding that online proctoring systems be kicked out of their classrooms.

After about 1,000 students at Urbana-Champaign protested the systems, the university announced last month that it would no longer use Proctorio software after the summer-2021 term. That doesn't mean anti-cheating software is out the window. A spokesman for the university says that the short-term license it signed with Procto-

rio last March as a Covid-related emergency isn't being extended, but that it will be looking at other remote proctoring options.

Some colleges have argued that remote learning has left them no other way to safeguard the integrity of exams. But critics say that's a cop-out.

"A lot of the technology being implemented are things schools did in the past or wanted to do but didn't have license to," Gilliard says. "The pandemic served as a convenient excuse to supercharge these technologies."

And they have a particular incentive now, he says. "Surveillance is really about power and control, and universities are looking for certainty in very uncertain times. There wasn't a safe way to return students to campus." But instead of keeping campuses closed and taking the political heat, Gilliard says, "institutions have looked for a technological fix where there isn't one."

Menlo College, in Atherton, Calif., isn't claiming that its latest technology tool is such a cure-all. But it hopes to help students with a smartphone app that listens for signs of anxiety and depression.

With fewer than 900 students, the private college in Silicon Valley prides itself on its ability to offer personal attention, but Covid-19 left students dispersed and feeling isolated. So Menlo collaborated with a start-up, Ellipsis Health, to encourage students to try an app that uses

machine learning to flag people whose speech matches the vocal patterns of people who are depressed. Students start out by recording themselves speaking for two to three minutes. Then, each time they log in to the app, they're asked a series of questions. Based on how they're scored for anxiety and depression, they might be urged to unwind with a meditation tape or to call a crisis hotline.

College officials stress that a machine, not a person, is listening in, and the student is the only one who gets the individual feedback.

Ellipsis and the college worked with student leaders to fine-tune an approach that raised as few privacy flags as possible. "They were really receptive to what students wanted and felt comfortable with," says Lina Lakoczky-Torres, an entrepreneurship major who serves as wellness representative for the college's student government. "It makes it feel like it's our baby as much as theirs."

Students didn't want any mental-health counselors listening in, she says, and they wanted to add their own questions to assess their mental health, like to what extent they were stressed by posts and "likes" on social media. "There's a lot of fear-mongering about technology, but this comes from a place of wanting to help," Lakoczky-Torres says.

Students have bought in to the technology, she says, because they played a role in developing it and felt they were in control of the data it was collecting. When that's not the case, and students suspect that their personal lives are being probed by companies more concerned about profit than their well-being, they're likely to rebel.

ONE OF THEIR BIGGEST TARGETS is automated online proctoring — also one of the fastest-growing forms of student surveillance. The technology, used on many campuses well before the pandemic struck, has ballooned since then with the mass migration to online classes. In April an Educause poll found that 54 percent of higher-education institutions were using online or remote proctoring services, while 23 percent were planning on, or considering, using them. And recently, McGraw-Hill, a major academic publisher, bundled remote proctoring and browser-locking capabilities with its digital textbooks.

The software, which faculty members can customize, typically scans students' rooms, locks their computer browsers, and monitors eye and head movements through their webcams as they take tests.

Critics complain that using such software signals to students that faculty members don't trust them. Some students also say the possibility of being flagged for "suspicious" activity adds to the stress of taking a test, sometimes causing panic attacks.

"I got flagged quite a few times for moving, or taking a second and looking away while thinking," says Olivia Eskritt, a second-year student at St. Clair College, in Windsor, Ontario, whose class used the software Respondus.

Before beginning a test, students had to pick up their laptops and rotate them around their rooms to show that they hadn't posted cheat sheets on the walls, she says. They also had to record



themselves talking so the system would recognize if someone else began feeding answers to them. “My mom has walked into the room while I’m in the middle of the test, and I’m like, ‘Oh no, you’re going to get me in trouble!’” Escritt worried, meanwhile, that her dad would set off the cheating software with his booming, ex-military voice while Zooming into a work call nearby.

Black and brown students face even more concerning barriers, critics say — one of the complaints made by students protesting at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Studies have shown that facial-recognition software sometimes has trouble identifying the faces of dark-skinned students.

Alivardi Khan, who recently graduated from Brooklyn Law School, found that out the hard way.

Khan says he spent much of the week before the New York State Bar Exam was administered trying to get ExamSoft, the proctoring system, to recognize him. “I tried sitting in front of a window when the sun was shining in, then I went into a bright bathroom with light shining off white tiles,” he says. Eventually, after he got help from a customer-service rep, the system recognized him.

Even though Brooklyn Law School gave him a room in which to take the bar exam, Khan took along a lamp just in case. Being forced to sit still for so long caused the room’s automated light to turn off. “I had to flail my arms to make it come back on,” he says, creating another potential flag for cheating. “We had a 15-minute break between sections, and I used it to call ExamSoft’s customer service.” All in all, he says, it was a pretty stressful experience.

Britt Nichols, ExamSoft’s chief revenue officer, says that poor lighting can cause problems in recognizing anyone’s face, but that there’s no evidence the problem is worse for those with dark skin.

“Every once in a very small blue moon it doesn’t recognize your face,” he says. “Some people assume there is something nefarious at play” when the problem could just be a weak internet connection, he adds.

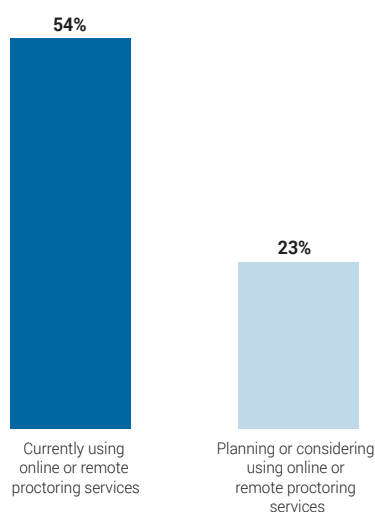
Students with disabilities, too, have complained that something like a facial tic or oth-

er unexpected movements could cause them to be flagged. Some have reported that the browser-lockdown feature can limit the use of tools that convert text to speech.

Proctoring services say instructors have the option of accounting for special needs by, say, turning off the camera or by allowing students a short break during an exam. But realistically, faculty members who are struggling with the technological demands of online courses might find it diffi-

Surveillance on the Rise

More than 75 percent of institutions said they use or might use anti-cheating software.



Source: Educause Covid-19 QuickPoll

cult to make such individual accommodations.

Some faculty members have made it clear that they have no intention of using anti-cheating software.

Derek A. Houston, an adjunct professor of educational leadership at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, says he was alarmed to learn that the state’s Public Higher Education Cooperative had published a request for a proposal to spend \$44 million over five years on two online proctoring programs. Houston wanted to signal to his employer, his students, and higher education more broadly that he feels online proctoring sets the wrong tone.

His message on Twitter: “You will not have to worry about this sort of unnecessary surveillance. We will build within the classroom mutual trust and expectations. My goal is collective growth, and surveillance is the antithesis of that.”

Students and faculty members aren’t the only ones resisting. In December a group of Democratic senators wrote to three online proctoring companies, demanding to know how they were protecting student privacy and

duces too much risk of cheating. That also raises equity concerns because disadvantaged students with spotty Wi-Fi are more likely to have prolonged outages.

Fairness challenges will arise even without his software, Olsen says. Some students get upset when their professors tell them they’re using the honor system, he says, because they know that some of their classmates will intercept the answers from online tutoring tools, such as the subscription-based Chegg, that not everyone can afford.

He advises instructors to explain to students if they need to use certain features, such as cameras, that might make some uncomfortable. “Maybe accreditation requires a certain level of exam security — communicate that. Students just want to know why.”

“Institutions have looked for a technological fix where there isn’t one.”

ensuring that students, including those with disabilities or dark skin, weren’t falsely accused of cheating.

In response to such concerns, the proctoring companies have argued that doing away with their tools will cause widespread cheating.

In an interview the founder and chief executive of Proctorio, Mike Olsen, says much of the criticism of proctoring software is based on misconceptions.

“We don’t kick anyone out of an exam if anyone’s talking or they get up” to go to the bathroom, he says. The system will just flag the interruption for a faculty member to review later. If students have a shaky internet connection, they can be disconnected for up to two minutes and return to the exam, but allowing someone to be offline for longer than that, he says, intro-

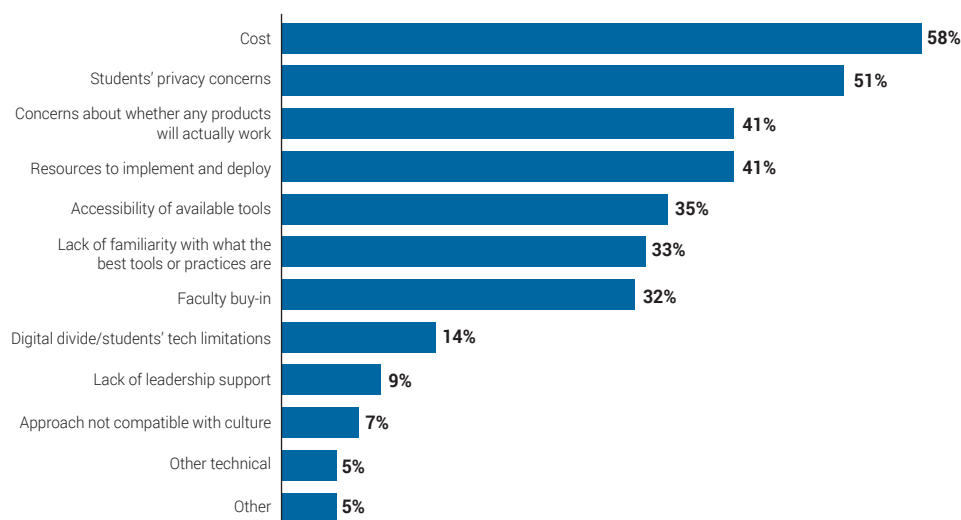
OF COURSE, many of the tools that colleges are using today to keep close watch on their students long pre-date the pandemic and are likely to outlive it. Data analytics allow colleges to track students’ movements across campuses: how many times they visit the library, how often they skip meals, what time of day they typically do their homework. Bluetooth sensors in some classrooms connect with apps on students’ phones, marking them as present.

In a 2018 opinion piece for *The Washington Post*, Mitchell E. Daniels Jr., president of Purdue University, pointed out that the university’s technology infrastructure, designed to support student success, campus services, and research, produces, as a byproduct, “a massive amount of fascinating information.”



Hurdles to Remote Proctoring

More than half of institutions surveyed said that cost and concerns about students' privacy were among the challenges of remote proctoring.



Source: Educause Covid-19 QuickPoll

"Forget that old ominous line, 'We know where you live,'" he wrote. "These days it's 'We know where you are.'"

The quandary Daniels then posed is one many more are pondering now: "Many of us will have to stop and ask whether our good intentions are carrying us past boundaries where privacy and individual autonomy should still prevail."

It's a question that frequently comes up when discussing location tracking and facial-recognition tools. Last September some Brown University students were alarmed to receive emails from the administration incorrectly accusing them of living in Providence, R.I., when they had said they'd be attending remotely. The students were accused of violating the code of student conduct, which requires campus residents to adhere to strict Covid-19 testing requirements, and were threatened with disciplinary measures.

The factors used to locate the students included "evidence of having accessed private university electronic services or secure networks from the Providence area; indications of having accessed buildings on our campus directly; and/or reports from other community members," a

Brown spokesman, Brian E. Clark, wrote in an email to *The Chronicle*. When more details the next day revealed that the students weren't, in fact, nearby, the university withdrew the accusations and apologized to the students.

The pandemic isn't the first crisis that has unleashed a flood of security technologies. After a series of school shootings, "there was a rush and urgency to deploy new technology to prevent mass violence," says Elizabeth Laird, director of equity in civic technology at the Center for Democracy and Technology. She's seeing a similar response to the Covid pandemic, when tools that otherwise would have been considered too intrusive are being tolerated, if not exactly welcomed. But what happens, she asks, when the urgent need for them is over?

"It's in moments of crisis that you're most likely to sacrifice your civil rights," she says. "But the problem is that once you sacrifice them, it's hard to get them back." ■

Katherine Mangan writes about community colleges, completion efforts, student success, and job training, as well as free speech and other topics. Follow her on Twitter @KatherineMangan.

The Shrinking of the Scholarly Ranks



The pandemic may do lasting damage to the pipeline of academic researchers.

BY MEGAN ZAHNEIS

WHEN a smattering of doctoral programs announced last spring that they wouldn't admit an incoming class in the fall of 2021, the idea felt drastic. To some, it felt desperate.

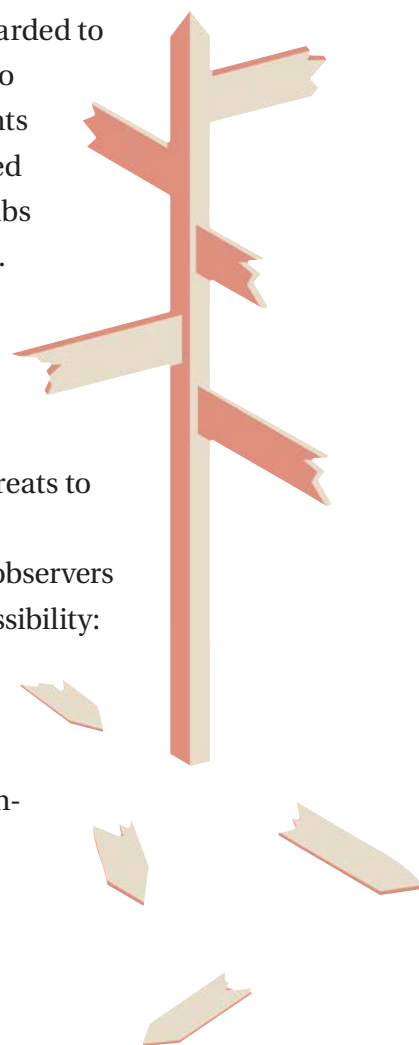
But as the summer and fall wore on, more departments announced that they, too, would close their application portals. Nor were the pauses limited to small programs at less-wealthy institutions; doctoral programs at seven of eight Ivy League colleges and a coterie of other high-profile institutions decided to forgo new cohorts. A list of admissions suspensions maintained by *The Chronicle* since September now includes 131 programs. Still more programs admitted smaller cohorts than normal.

The rationale for the moves was nearly universal: Administrators wanted to use the funds they would've awarded to prospective new students in admissions packages to ensure current students could stay on track. Students already working toward their degrees, after all, faced myriad disruptions in their education: locked-up labs and libraries, canceled travel, frozen grant funding.

These twin phenomena — an admissions standstill and a shaken-up research enterprise — might seem relatively minor when set against what else the pandemic has wrought. Budgetary carnage. Possible college closures. Downstream threats to college completion.

But, surveying the years following the pandemic, observers of graduate education acknowledge an alarming possibility: that, in the United States, frozen admissions, curtailed graduate cohorts, and stalled-out research could severely squeeze the ranks of professional researchers for at least the short term, and maybe longer.

In other words, the pandemic may have set about a shrinking of the scholar class.



WAIT, HOLD ON. Aren't the admissions pauses temporary?

It's not that simple. Though shaving spots off a doctoral program's admissions target might be intended as a temporary measure, building programs back up to pre-pandemic levels could be unrealistic in some cases.

That's because belt-tightening across the academy has left administrators "feeling that their hands are tied," says Joy Connolly, president of the American Council of Learned Societies. Program leaders, she predicts, are "going to have just a hugely hard row to hoe in justifying up the administrative ladder, or to their fellow deans, that there is real, strong justification for keeping up the numbers."

For public universities, whether they can make that case will depend, in part, on state-budget plans that will become final this spring, says Suzanne T. Ortega, president of the Council of Graduate Schools. Reductions in state funding could result in the loss of teaching assistantships or other forms of university-provided support for doctoral students. But by and large, "any program that depends on institutional resources to support students is likely to have downward pressure on class size," Ortega says. She speculates that programs could feel that pressure for two more years.

If and when graduate programs declare themselves open for business, attracting students who've put their education on hold is no cinch. Suzanne Barbour, dean of the graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says she expects schools, like hers, that historically haven't had to compete too hard for classes may find that shifted by the pandemic. Programs may need to "change their recruiting strategies, their advertising strategies to some extent, to make it clear to potential applicants that our programs are viable," she says. And even well-resourced institutions like her own may have to change their tune. "Sometimes we can get a little bit complacent because the students just come," Barbour says. "We may have to work a little bit harder for them in the future."

Data collected by the Council of Graduate Schools indicate that undergraduate students

who'd planned before the pandemic to pursue a Ph.D. still plan to do so, but say they'll have to wait a while. Maintaining contact with those students, Ortega says, is crucial. "I worry that if we're not smart about staying in touch with them, we will lose them."

That may be particularly challenging when it comes to international students, who, Barbour says, have deferred fall admission at a higher rate than usual. Their reasons for doing so were obvious — an inability to travel because of the pandemic, difficulty obtaining visas, concern about the political situation in the United States. Some who deferred for fall-2020 admission asked to do so again for January 2021. "At some point, students are going to stop deferring and say, Forget it, I'm not going to the U.S. to do my Ph.D.," says Barbour. "I think that we have to worry about that."

Whether by cohort reductions or would-be students leaving the pipeline, graduate education will reach an eventual new equilibrium that may not match the graduate-student populations of the last decade, says Earl Lewis, who was president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from 2013 to 2018 and is now director of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor's Center for Social Solutions.

"By the time we get to '25 or '26, we may look back and realize that we've reached a new plateau, that it was not as high as it was in 2010, let alone 2015," Lewis says.

EVEN THOUGH they were the supposed beneficiaries of admissions pauses, current graduate students face disruptions that could affect their professional prospects.

Traditionally, graduate students' trajectory hinges on their funding — particularly in the hard sciences, where federal grants often bankroll the work that forms a dissertation. The pandemic exposed the inextricability of degree progress and funding when labs shut down in 2020.

"If the grant is paused, but the grant has to keep paying the students, but the science hasn't gotten done, how is that going to work?" asks Chris M. Golde, a longtime scholar of graduate education who works as a career coach at Stanford University's career-education center.

Federal agencies will shoulder much of the

pressure to end that cycle, say Golde and Debra W. Stewart, a senior fellow at the research organization NORC at the University of Chicago. “Whether this is a 12-month or 10-month delay, or whether it is a five-year delay, is in part a question of money in federal investment,” says Stewart, who is a president emerita of the Council of Graduate Schools.

Ortega, Stewart’s successor at the council, says funding agencies have taken important strides to create flexibility for primary investigators, but uncertainty remains for early-career researchers seeking grant funding for new projects because in many cases, agencies are putting a priority on funds requested to finish existing projects.

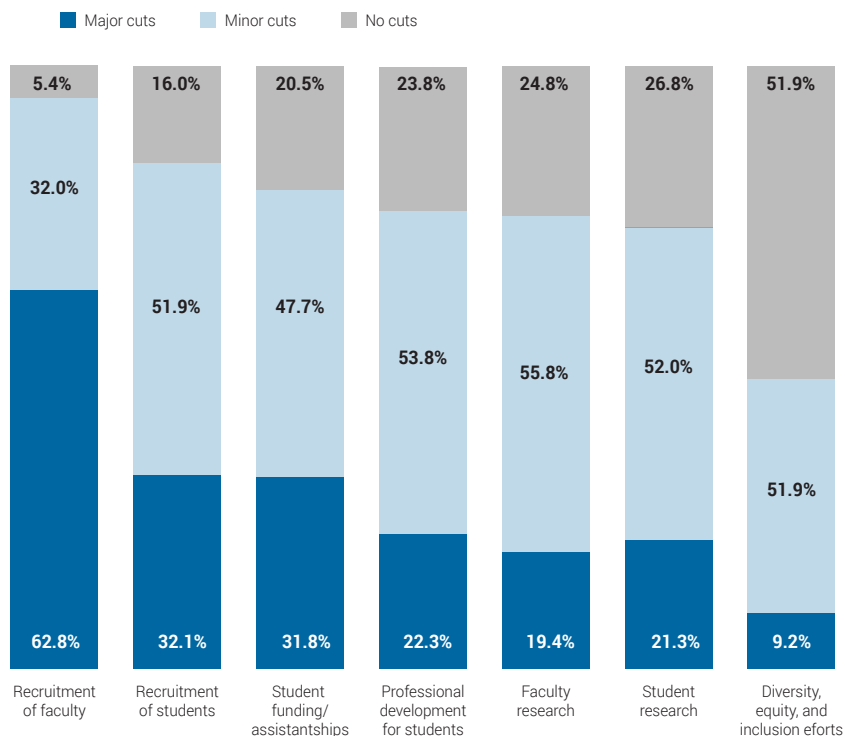
The future trajectory of that all-important federal investment is uncertain. Covid-19, Ortega says, is also likely to increase the rate at which other countries outspend the United States on research and development.

That’s because other nations have been able to reopen their labs and rebound more quickly from Covid-19 closures than the United States has, giving them a jump on American researchers, says Holden Thorp, editor in chief of the *Science* family of journals, citing China, Singapore, Australia, and Germany as examples. “All of these places are getting more research done in the same amount of time that we are, and so, yeah, that probably is a big threat to the United States’s hold on the research enterprise,” Thorp says.

Countries that have managed to control Covid-19 — Taiwan and New Zealand among them — may also make more-attractive destinations for young scholars, says Luis A. Echegoyen, the 2020 president of the American Chemical Society. “If I had a choice and I was a postdoc now, I definitely would not come to the U.S., not at this point, until things somehow clear up.”

Cost-Cutting in Graduate Programs

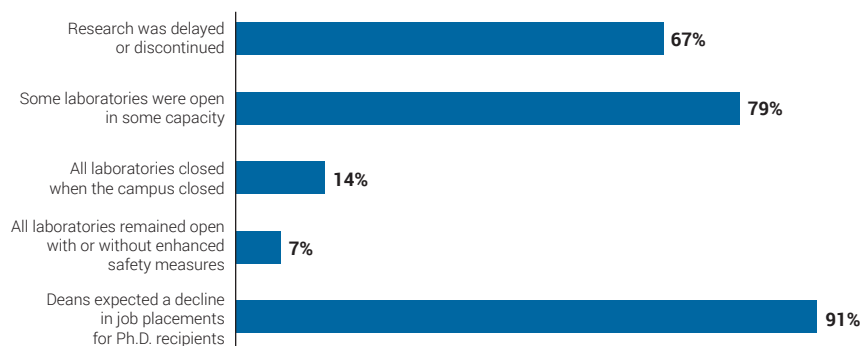
To trim expenses as the pandemic hit their budgets, graduate STEM programs scaled back recruitment, funding, and research.



Source: NORC survey of 300 programs

Effects of Covid-19 on Graduate Training

The pandemic took a toll on STEM research and job placement last summer.



Source: NORC survey of 300 programs

On average, 67 percent of institutions' STEM research was disrupted by the pandemic, according to a survey of 300 graduate-school deans conducted by NORC. "One thing that we don't know is, Will the federal government do anything to try to make up for all of that lost research?" Thorp says.

SOME STEM PROGRAMS are managing to thrive amid the uncertainty. Take Emory University, which has a strong reputation in public health. In the past year, Emory has seen an 11-percent increase in the volume of grant submissions, racking up a record \$831 million in research funding. At the same time, graduate-school applications are up, particularly in the sciences — Emory's nursing program fielded a 60-percent increase in applications — marking what Deborah Watkins Bruner, Emory's senior vice president for research, calls a "halo effect" highlighting researchers' work during the pandemic.

But Bruner sees past the halo. "Adrenaline and opportunity," she says, may account for some of that productivity. "But," Bruner says, "what we know about human stress is that adrenaline cannot sustain us over the long run."

Applications, too, could slow as the lingering stresses of the pandemic discourage students from traveling for a doctoral education, Bruner says. That concern may be most acute for international scholars, who make up 46 percent of Emory's postdoctoral population.

The University of Texas at El Paso's chemistry department is seizing on the flagging job market to hire four new faculty members, says Echegoyen, a chemistry professor there. "You have to be very opportunistic, in a way."

Echegoyen's team has been opportunistic in other ways, too, using time outside the lab to catch up in writing papers and review articles. That proved a welcome way of coping with pandemic life. "People don't have anything to do better than actually do some work as they just sit at home," Echegoyen says. "It's really the only useful thing to do."

But during the two months they were locked out of their lab, Echegoyen made sure to keep in regular touch with his team. He wanted to ensure that his students were "not mentally disconnected from reality and depressed," and that they knew he supported them.

Without such support and mentoring, early-career scholars could flounder. Several doctoral students who participated in focus groups for a joint report from the American Educational Research Association and the Spencer Foundation reported delays in their work. One student had to put his dissertation on hold because he was unable to get access to restricted data at his university during campus shutdowns; another reported altering the scope of a dissertation, shifting from a practical framework based on data collected in the field to a more theoretical approach.

In a project as all-important as the disserta-

tion, those sorts of pivots can be devastating, says Golde, the Stanford career coach.

"I think there is a lot of loss there of people's projects that were two-thirds of the way finished or conceptualized" for researchers who haven't yet gone into the field and fear they never will, Golde says. "I don't know how one tallies that up, but I think there's definitely loss there."

The already-solitary experience of being a doctoral student, too, has become all the more isolating. One doctoral student in the AERA/Spencer report described something called "fake working."

"The other day, I was at my computer almost from 9 to 9," the student said. "I would have never done that under normal circumstances, but I had to get things done. But my brain was everywhere."

The pandemic's stresses take an added toll on international doctoral students, who are more likely than their domestic peers to have to abandon their studies. While 32 percent of respondents in the NORC study expected a moderate decrease in domestic-student retention, more than three-quarters anticipated either a moderate or large drop in international-student retention. Those figures don't bode well for STEM fields, where international students make up a "very significant portion" of the research enterprise, Stewart says.

Many doctoral students are balancing current stresses with uncertainty about the next steps in their careers. "One of the conversations that I have been having with mentors just in the last couple weeks is about, 'Am I going to try to potentially extend my time in the doctoral program for another year, so as not to graduate into what is bound to be, like, the worst job market ever?'" one student in the AERA/Spencer report said.

The academic-job market has suffered for years, but austerity measures imposed by the pandemic promise to worsen that crisis at many institutions. Stewart notes recent news from William Paterson University of New Jersey, which is considering eliminating a quarter of its full-time faculty members' jobs to ease a budget

deficit, and Ithaca College, in New York, where a proposal calls for eliminating more than 100 employees.

"When you slash faculty numbers at that level, that's going to have an impact if it becomes a trend across the country," Stewart says.

Graduate-program leaders, too, anticipate having to cut costs. Two-thirds of graduate deans in the NORC survey, for which Stewart served as primary investigator, expected budget reductions in their programs. Faculty-recruitment efforts were most likely to absorb those losses, the deans said, with 63 percent saying they'd need to make major cuts in that area.

For students hoping to land one of those coveted professorships, setting their work apart could be a more difficult task in the pandemic era. As some students are forced to delay completion of their dissertations, a publication bottleneck could manifest itself in the next several years, says Lewis, the former Mellon Foundation president. He envisions "all of a sudden, this big bulge of people, particularly in trying to get manuscripts out."

Lewis and Thorp hope allowances will be made for situations like those. Flexibility and understanding, Thorp says, will be key for academic gatekeepers of all sorts — whether hiring committees weighing a candidate's delayed graduation date or grant funders' willingness to overlook a potentially yearslong gap in a scholar's productivity.

SUCH FLEXIBILITY has been one bright spot amid all the upheaval in graduate education. For example, the shift to remote work has prompted archivists to open more digital access to materials. At Chapel Hill, Barbour says, librarians have worked feverishly to scan and digitize materials for students who couldn't hit the stacks in person.

"Before that, to do that kind of research, you had to be the kind of person who could basically drop everything else in your life and jump on a plane and fly to wherever to access the archive," Barbour says. Those access improvements will be especially useful in the long run, she says: Demographic shifts point to an older graduate-student population whose day-to-day lives may make travel-based research unrealistic.

The nature of scientific research makes that



kind of digitization more difficult, but Stewart notes a similarly positive development in laboratory science: a movement away from equating student quality with the number of hours that students logged at the bench. In Stewart's time as graduate dean at North Carolina State University, she says, many faculty members believed that "the very best students were those who were there when the faculty arrived and there long after the faculty left." That notion is problematic, Stewart says, because it disadvantages entire populations of students — under-resourced students who hold down a second job, for instance, or those who have families.

Lately, though, limited access to labs has dismantled that concept. Lab spaces have had to operate at reduced density and with more "intentionality," Stewart says; students who didn't need to actively use lab resources might instead work from home on data analysis or writing.

Universities' pivot to remote work — and ubiquitous use of videoconference software like Zoom — could ease the way to increased collaboration, says James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association. Grossman envisions regional consortia of four or five doctoral programs, each of which would admit smaller cohorts to ease their tight budgets. Those programs' students could meet virtually for joint graduate seminars, perhaps augmented by in-person meetings once or twice in a semester. Grossman doesn't know whether such a model would work, but, he says, "it's at least thinkable, and it was not thinkable a year ago."

Global cataclysm makes many things "thinkable," including the ever-elusive prospect of wholesale reform in graduate education.

Advocates of such reform have often met with disappointing results, as their efforts have "dwindled or fizzled out," write Leonard Cassuto and Robert Weisbuch in their book *The New Ph.D.: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*. They and other experts are quick to rattle off a list of systemic issues that have plagued graduate education for decades: a dwindling academic-job market, a disregard for nonacademic positions that could employ doctorates, nebulous degree-completion timelines.

"There were people writing about it in the '90s,

the '80s, the '70s, the '60s," Golde says. "Like everything, the ratchet just keeps getting tighter."

The tumultuous events of 2020 and 2021 may have tightened that ratchet irrevocably.

"At some point, something has got to give. And I think we may be at that point," says Maria LaMona Wisdom, director of graduate-student advising and engagement for the humanities at Duke University. "If a global pandemic doesn't do it, maybe nothing will."

But reimagining doctoral education is a daunting task, even without a pandemic raging, and not many are willing to take it on.

During his five years as president of the Mellon Foundation, Lewis says, he'd welcome presidents, provosts, and chancellors to the foundation's of-

Global cataclysm makes many things "thinkable," including the ever-elusive prospect of wholesale reform in graduate education.

fices, on the East Side of New York City. "I would say, I'll give you all the money you need if you will engage in a whiteboard exercise, if you go back to your school and say, We want to redesign this institution for the second half of the 21st century, and everything is on the table," Lewis recalls.

But he got no takers. It was, he says, "the hardest dollar I ever tried to give away as president of the Mellon Foundation."

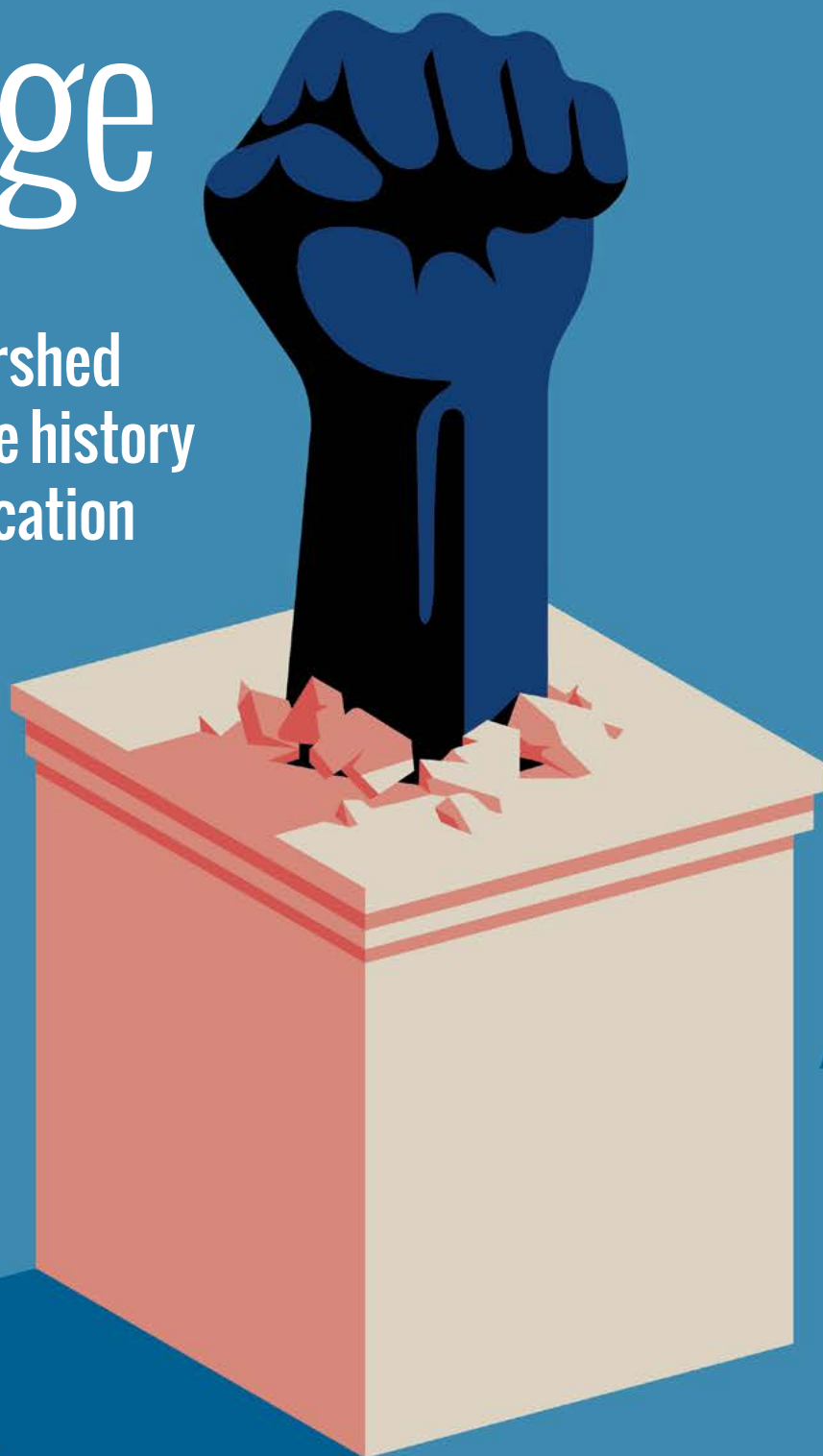
"I'd be second," Lewis says several friends told him. "But no one was willing to be first."

Sure, Lewis would like to be optimistic about the changes the pandemic could spur in doctoral education. But, he says, "I'm not so sanguine. I've run this experiment now long enough to know that we are guardians of the status quo." ■

Megan Zahneis, a staff reporter at The Chronicle, writes about graduate-student issues and the future of the faculty. Follow her on Twitter at @meganzahneis.

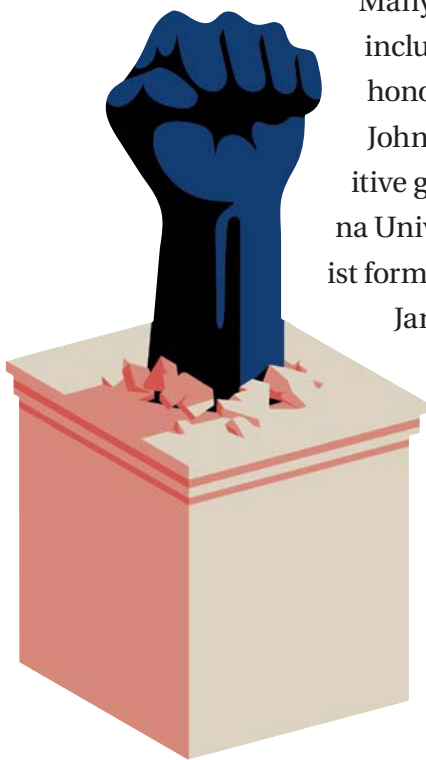
The Antiracist College

Is this a watershed moment in the history of higher education and race?



BY TOM BARTLETT

THE STATEMENTS from college presidents came in flurries, bullet-pointed and chock-full of promises. Most were issued last summer in the aftermath of George Floyd's death at the hands of the Minneapolis police. There were announcements of new committees, initiatives, and task forces. There was talk of transformation, roadmaps, and "action steps." Many nodded toward sweeping curricular reforms. The president of Duke University wrote that the institution would "assess and remediate systemic biases in the design of our curricula." Castleton University's president pledged a review of courses that would seek to "combat systemic racism and implicit bias." The president of Bates College assured members of the community in bold type that there would be "structural change across the entirety of the student experience."



Many of the actions were geared toward symbolism, including rethinking who had been historically honored. Clemson University removed the name of John C. Calhoun, who held that slavery was a "positive good," from its honors college. Western Carolina University dropped the name of the segregationist former governor Clyde R. Hoey from an auditorium.

James Madison University announced it was rechristening three campus buildings named for Confederate military leaders — though administrators did not consider renaming the university itself, despite Madison's having owned slaves, explaining that "we recognize his flaws as well as his virtues."

A slew of colleges declared they would require some form of diversity training. Brandeis University's president proposed "workshops, symposia, speakers, programs, conferences, and events." Amherst College announced it would require such training "at all levels" and "reporting annually on the form that work has taken and the difference it has made." Lafayette College signaled that it would institute regular anti-bias training for faculty members, staff, and students in order to "keep us all engaged in ongoing and up-to-date conversations about racism and racial injustice."

It would be easy to downplay the significance of any particular announcement: a renamed auditorium here, a workshop there. After all, nearly all the topics highlighted in these many statements — diversifying the faculty, improving graduation rates for students of color, examining bias in the curriculum — have been bandied about on college campuses for decades. At the same time, the number of changes and the scope of the commitments made in recent months are striking. Some critics see these moves as pandering to student activists, or perhaps buying into a particular ideology. But supporters and detractors alike may come to see the summer and fall of 2020 as a watershed moment in the history of higher education and race.

Shaun R. Harper, executive director of the Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California, tends to be skeptical of such statements, but he has been heartened by much of what he's heard in recent months. "We've seen many more campus leaders actually lay out a specific set of actions," says Harper, who is a co-editor of *Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education*. "There are some places that have taken bold, swift action. They've moved faster than I've ever seen them move before."

ONE OF THOSE MOVES has been for presidents to declare that their institutions will strive to become antiracist, a term whose popularity has been driven in large measure by the best seller *How to Be an Antiracist*, by Ibram X. Kendi, the historian and activist who moved his research center from American to Boston University in July; the following month, the center received a \$10-million gift from Jack

Dorsey, CEO of Twitter. That book was quoted repeatedly in statements by presidents and was selected as a summer read by any number of colleges.

It's not as if Kendi invented the word, or the ideas behind it, but as college leaders were crafting statements and making promises, it was his language they tended to echo. It "became a more tangible and consumable way to process a lot of the deep thinking that had been going on for decades," says Davarian L. Baldwin, a professor of American Studies at Trinity College and author of the forthcoming book *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities*. "Among critical thinkers, there's been a long-term dissatisfaction with the use of terms like diversity and multiculturalism," he says, which tend to mean "we have this existing institution and we're

"There are some places that have taken bold, swift action. They've moved faster than I've ever seen them move before."

just going to diversify the demographic that exists therein and not have any alteration of the infrastructure of the institution itself."

How exactly should an institution's infrastructure be altered? A recent paper, "Anti-Racism in Higher Education: A Model for Change," published in *Race and Pedagogy Journal*, calls for colleges to "dismantle systems of White supremacy" and to embrace "shared power across racial lines." The paper argues that chief diversity officers too often function as "chief absolution officers" — that is, they allow an institution to give lip service to diversity without supporting more substantive, and potentially controversial, change. Instead, the authors write, chief diversity officers must "hold presidents accountable for their racist mind-sets and actions."

In a blog post last September, Robert O. Davies, president of Central Michigan University, wrote about the influence of Kendi's book on

how he thought about his university's mission. He was not just reading, he wrote, but "re-reading, underlining passages, and absorbing the advice I found within its pages." Davies came to the conclusion that "CMU must become an antiracist institution." He points to a variety of efforts that Central Michigan is undertaking, among them an attempt to figure out why graduation rates are not equal across racial groups at the university. "Why not? They need to be," he says. "We're working diligently to make sure that the graduation rates are within a range of each other." He notes that the university has a need-based financial-aid program that stops after a recipient's sophomore year, a cut-off that might lead vulnerable students to drop out. "That was put in place decades ago," he says. "We're looking to change that."

In his post, he wrote about attempting to diversify the faculty by looking at how open positions are advertised and the "criteria we use to determine qualification for a position." According to the most recently available data, Central Michigan's percentage of faculty of color is slightly above the national average. He also wants to expand the pool of students who are selected as so-called ambassadors — that is, those who are sent out to recruit applicants. "Our ambassadors are our honor students and that's not reflective of the population," he says.

Like Davies, Neeli Bendapudi, president of the University of Louisville, has embraced the mantle of antiracism. Indeed, the university announced that it would seek to become "the premier antiracist metropolitan university" (that's since been softened, Bendapudi says, to "an" antiracist metropolitan university).

"I know it's risky to put yourself out there and say we will be a premier antiracist university," she says. "To me, it's about inclusive excellence. In every sphere we see that the more diverse the leaders are, the better outcomes you have. That was what motivated me." An additional motivation for Bendapudi is that Breonna Taylor, who was shot and killed by the police during a botched raid last March, was an emergency-room technician at the university's medical center (Louisville has set up a nursing scholarship in Taylor's name). Bendapudi, too, echoes one of Kendi's now-famous admonitions. "It's not enough to say, 'I'm not racist,'" she

has stated. "We must become antiracist."

In service of that goal, Bendapudi has said that Louisville will be "building intentionally anti-racism curriculum across all disciplines," which she sees as necessary progress for the university as a whole. "People think that an antiracist agenda is only for making sure that our Black and brown students are successful," she says. "I think that increasingly a Caucasian student that's coming here is going to be looking for a job and people are going to say: 'How comfortable are you working with diverse teams? What's your cultural competence?' So I think the agenda benefits everybody."

Louisville calls its plan the Cardinal Anti-Racism Agenda. The website for that agenda lists a wide range of programs, including the Black Male Initiative, which seeks to "increase the retention, graduation, and engagement of Black males" and a consortium for social-justice-related research intended to address "intransigent social problems and systemic inequalities." The university is "enhancing programming related to structural racism" and putting together a "curated list of resources on the Diversity and Equity site for the campus community to engage with." It is also "revamping the Bias Incident Response Team" in order to "counteract incidences of bias, microaggression and racism."

THOSE STEPS, though, haven't satisfied some student activists. In a response to an email outlining the plans, a student tweeted that Louisville is "nowhere near" its goal of being antiracist, and that if the university failed to cut ties with the local police department "your sentiments are performative." Bendapudi doesn't think cutting ties would be possible even if the university decided it was a good idea. "We are in a metro area. You still have to cooperate. It's a public university," she says. "I did consider it, but I don't think the scales really tipped at any point."

At Portland State University, campus policing has been at the center of a conflict between activists and administrators. For several years, a group of students, staff, and alumni calling themselves DisarmPSU have argued that campus police officers shouldn't carry guns. Those calls intensified in 2018 when two Portland State officers

were investigated, and later cleared, following the shooting death of Jason Washington, a Black man, outside a bar in downtown Portland (in 2019, the university agreed to pay Washington's family \$1 million). After weeks of intense protest last summer, the university announced that officers would start going on their patrols without firearms, and would carry Tasers. Willie Halliburton, chief of the university's public safety office, said that "we need to heal, and this is the first step in healing."

In a message welcoming students back after the winter break, Portland State's president, Stephen Percy, wrote that his "highest priority is sustaining and amplifying our commitment to racial justice." In a recent interview, Percy said that his statement came after a personal reckoning that he's undergone in the wake of national protests over the summer and after listening to students. "I needed to help a whole institution move," he says. "But at the same time I'm learning and growing myself, learning more about white supremacy and learning more about the privilege I've had that has allowed me to achieve what I've had in my life." His office put out a list of strategic priorities, among them the notion that the university would apply "an antiracist lens to every signal we send, every model we create, and every policy we enact."

Sometimes, however, signals can get crossed. Several college presidents had to scramble after issuing statements that were deemed insufficient. In a June statement, Boston University's president, Robert A. Brown, referred to the "grim reality of systemic racism" and recent police killings. He also wrote that "we rely on our police more than ever," but that some officers break that trust "in most egregious ways." One Instagram user described the statement as "performative allyship at its finest" and another called it "hollow, empty and unhelpful." Brown sent a follow-up to that statement, writing that in his first letter he "spoke like the engineer I was trained to be" but that this one was "from my heart, and my heart is with all of you who feel the dehumanizing sting of racism."

Middlebury College's president, Laurie Patton, also sent a second message apologizing for being overly general in her first message. "I needed to name the specific and systemic violence experienced by Black people," she wrote. Paul Trible

Jr., president of Christopher Newport University, walked back his initial response to the death of George Floyd, a response that included criticism of destructive protests (including mentioning that his son's clothing store had been burglarized) and a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. about the need to "transform suffering into a creative force." In the follow-up, he apologized and wrote that "Black lives matter to me and always have and always will."

Princeton University's statement ran into a different kind of blowback. Issued in September, the sentiments and language were similar to what appeared in other college's statements. The president, Christopher L. Eisgruber, wrote about the institution's history of excluding women and minorities from its ranks. "Racism and the damage it does to people of color nevertheless persist at Princeton as in our society," he wrote, "sometimes by conscious intention but more often through unexamined assumptions and stereotypes, ignorance or insensitivity, and the systemic legacy of past decisions and policies."

That led to a letter from the U.S. Department of Education accusing Princeton of possible violation of the Civil Rights Act for supposedly admitting that its "educational program is and for decades has been racist." The letter also raised the possibility that the university might face financial penalties, threatening that the "Secretary of Education may consider measures against Princeton ... including an action to recover funds."

The letter was widely interpreted as a partisan jab, one that was designed to poke fun at the liberal leanings of elite higher education, though in the letter the department requested university records including "a spreadsheet identifying each person who has, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, been excluded" from any program at Princeton. (Last month, a week before Joe Biden took office, the Education Department told Princeton it was closing its investigation.)

WHILE that letter may have been a political stunt, it did generate applause from those suspicious of the ideological underpinnings of antiracist training programs and proposed curricular reforms.

In an essay for *National Review*, Sergiu Klainerman, a professor of mathematics at Princeton, argued that the university is not racist, but race-obsessed. He wondered whether Eisgruber really believes in antiracism or was “just using it as a virtue-signaling ploy to delay the present pressures coming from the justice-warrior activists on campus.”

In a similar rebuttal, Glenn C. Loury, a professor of economics at Brown University, objected to a message from Brown’s senior leadership that promised the university would “leverage the expertise of our faculty, staff, and students” to “promote essential change in policy and practice in the name of equity and justice.” Loury wrote that the message contained “no reasoned ethical reflection” and instead was intent on “indoctrination, virtue-signaling, and the transparent currying of favor with our charges.” Both Klainerman and Loury are alleging that their universities are

“We’re in a period of increased momentum, but also reckoning and of recognizing the magnitude of the issue.”

putting out statements for show — more or less what student activists are saying when they accuse administrators of being performative.

Like those students, USC’s Harper is more concerned about follow-through from administrators. “If nobody’s watching and holding these leaders accountable, we will see the same thing happen with those commitments that we made back in the summer of 2020 that we’ve seen happen to commitments that were made to student activists in prior eras,” he says. “I think we need public transparency and an accountability tool that helps ensure that these institutions stay on track.”

On the opposite coast, at the University of North Florida, Whitney Meyer has been pushing the

campus to have what she calls “honest conversations.” Meyer was selected as the university’s chief diversity officer in June. It wasn’t as if North Florida didn’t have diversity-related efforts in progress before then, but “everything was siloed,” she says. In the wake of the national protests, Meyer’s position was created in recognition that “we need something universitywide that brings everyone together.” Among other actions, North Florida now requires all incoming students to participate in an antiracist training program, and Meyer is working with faculty members to integrate some of those ideas into the classroom. And she says she has the ear of the university’s president, David Szymanski. “He’ll say, ‘I just want you to go and do what we need to do. I trust that you will do what’s right,’” Meyer says.

Like North Florida, this fall Duke University held its first antiracism training program for freshmen. That was one of the more than two dozen diversity-related efforts outlined in a 2,300-word statement in October from the university’s president, Vincent Price. Duke plans to expand its diversity hiring program and provide funding for research on slavery and the history of the South, among other initiatives. It is also removing the name of a former North Carolina governor and white supremacist from one of its residence halls. “These are only first steps as we chart our antiracist course at Duke,” Price wrote.

First steps — that’s also how Kimberly Hewitt, Duke’s chief diversity officer and vice president for institutional equity, sees it. “We’re in a period of increased momentum, but also reckoning and of recognizing the magnitude of the issue,” she says. “We have a lot of conversations about how we want to keep things moving and we want to be thoughtful. We recognize we are not going to solve this problem in a few months.” That said, she’s more hopeful about that prospect than she was when she took over the position a year and a half ago.

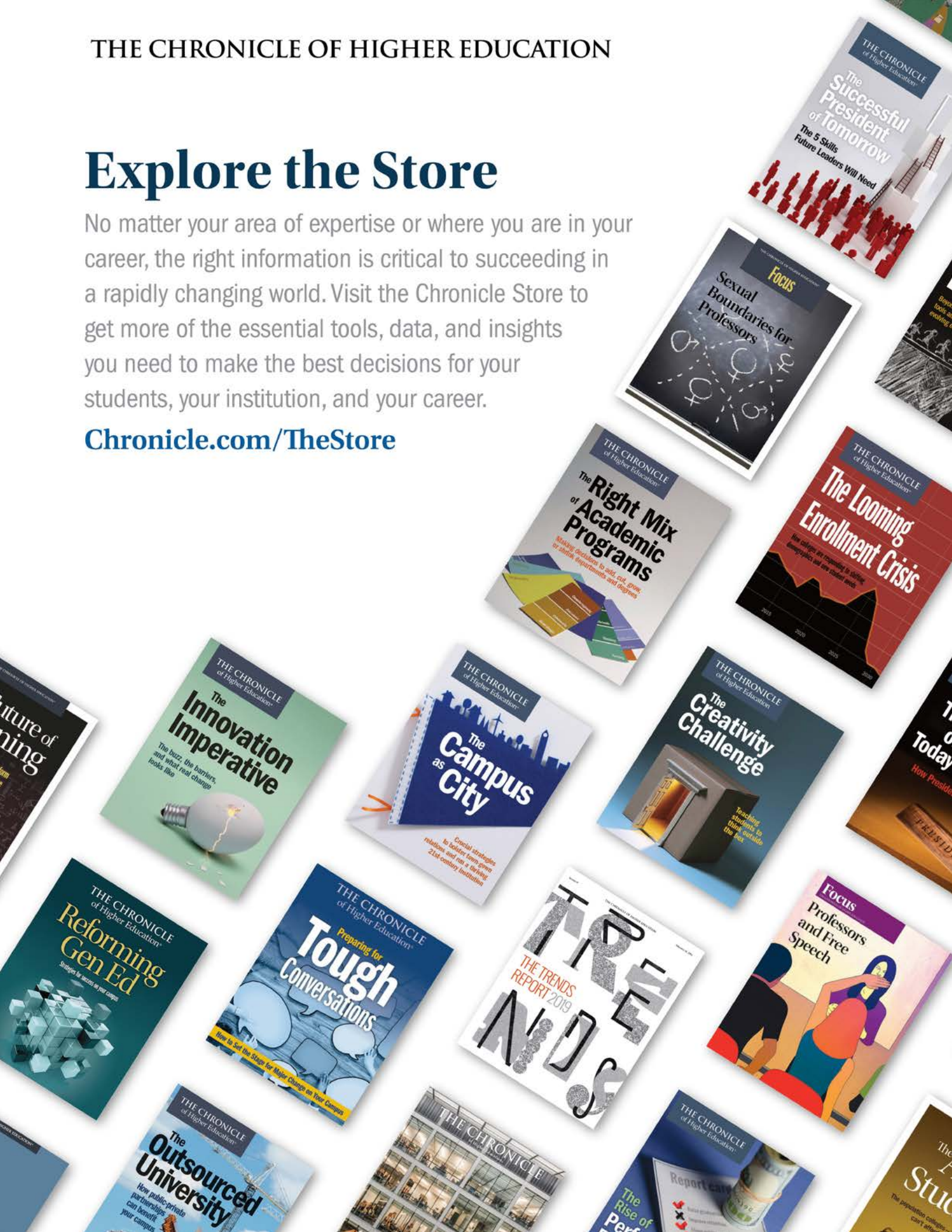
“I think many people probably experienced the feeling from the summer of a sort of shift,” Hewitt says. “It’s like the choir got bigger.” ■

Tom Bartlett is a senior writer who covers science and ideas. Follow him on Twitter @tebartl.

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