

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

THE

INNOVATIVE

UNIVERSITY:

WHAT COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

THINK ABOUT CHANGE IN

AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The Innovative University: What College Presidents Think About Change in American Higher Education is based on a survey conducted by Maguire Associates, Inc., was edited by Jeffrey J. Selingo, contributing editor at The Chronicle of Higher Education Inc. and is sponsored by Blackboard. The Chronicle is fully responsible for the report's editorial content. Copyright © 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rarely in the histories of their institutions have college and university leaders in the United States been under such pressure to come up with imaginative solutions to a range of emerging challenges. These challenges stretch from declining enrollments and stressed budgets to incorporating new technology, especially online learning, into traditional educational structures.

Although presidents of public and private institutions have a separate set of concerns and anxieties on some issues, they share common ground on where they think American higher education is, and where they think it should be headed, according to an extensive survey of campus leaders conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education in January 2014. Where these leaders occasionally differ is interesting and instructive as well.

The survey, completed by some 350 presidents of four-year colleges, focused on innovations in higher education, including the role various constituencies play in advancing ideas, as well as their opinions on online learning, hybrid courses, and competency-based degrees.

Among the highlights from the 2014 survey:



World ranking: Presidents of both public and private institutions agree by an overwhelming majority that for now, higher education in the United States is either the best or one of the best in the world. Nonetheless, both groups believe that number one ranking will decline slightly over the next ten years. The heads of private institutions are somewhat more discouraged than their public counterparts about the ability of the U.S. to hold onto its lofty position.



Disruption: Well over half of all presidents believe that at least a moderate amount of disruption is needed in higher education. Years ago disruption to higher-education's business model was not something a college president was likely to promote. These days, disruption is sometimes a rallying cry from the president's office. This is a dramatic change from the way campuses have traditionally conducted their business, through evolutionary change.



New ideas: An overwhelming majority of presidents—three quarters at private institutions and even more at public campuses—think that hybrid courses that contain both face-to-face and online components will have a positive impact on higher education. They are more skeptical, however, about massive open online courses (MOOCs), at least in their current form. Half of the presidents surveyed suspect that MOOCs will have a negative impact on higher education.



Value: More than half of presidents of public institutions believe they and their peers are providing either excellent or very good value for the money spent by students and their parents. Their private campus counterparts are a little less persuaded about the value they are giving. Slightly under half rate themselves excellent or very good on value, although an additional third give themselves a grade of good.



Direction: Two-thirds of presidents of public institutions think that higher education is headed in the right direction, as do well over half of their private campus peers. In contrast, a survey by The Chronicle last fall concluded that faculty are significantly more pessimistic. Only a third think that higher education is headed in the right direction.



Focus: Presidents say that when it comes to innovation in higher education, reformers pay too much attention to cutting costs and not enough to changing the model of teaching and learning.



Change drivers: Two-thirds of public-institution presidents think that politicians are the most influential drivers of change in higher education and half of private-campus presidents agree with that assessment. The presidents on both types of campuses believe strongly that faculty should be the number one drivers of change.

*These are hardly the
best of times for
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INTRODUCTION

These are hardly the best of times for American higher education.

Overall, enrollment fell in 2013, for the second consecutive year as the number of high-school graduates continued to drop and adult students didn't return to classrooms as projected. The students who did show up demanded more financial aid in the face of higher tuition prices.

Most campuses are hardly flush with cash. Net-tuition revenue—that's the cash colleges have left after giving out financial aid to students—is essentially flat or declining at three-fourths of public colleges and three-fifths of private colleges. Two-thirds of the record \$33.8-billion in philanthropic dollars that were provided to higher education last year went to campuses with endowments over \$1-billion. And nearly half of small private and regional public universities missed their goals for either enrollment or net-tuition revenue last fall, according to a survey by The Chronicle.

At the same time, half of employers told The Chronicle and American Public Media's Marketplace that they have trouble finding qualified recent graduates to fill jobs. Nearly a third gave colleges just fair to poor marks for producing successful employees. And they dinged bachelor's-degree holders for lacking basic workplace proficiencies, like adaptability, communications skills, and the ability to solve complex problems. It's no wonder that families are increasingly questioning the value for the money spent on a higher education.

It is against this backdrop that college and university leaders are under constant pressure from trustees, lawmakers, and the public to change how they do business. But as leaders of institutions that have survived decades, and in some cases, centuries, they must balance these calls for rapid change with a history of shared governance and a culture that has long valued evolution, not revolution.

This research brief attempts to inform that struggle happening on many campuses. It is based on a survey of college and university presidents that explores their attitudes about the future of higher education and the innovations being tested to reduce costs, improve quality, and inject technology into how students learn and how faculty do their jobs.

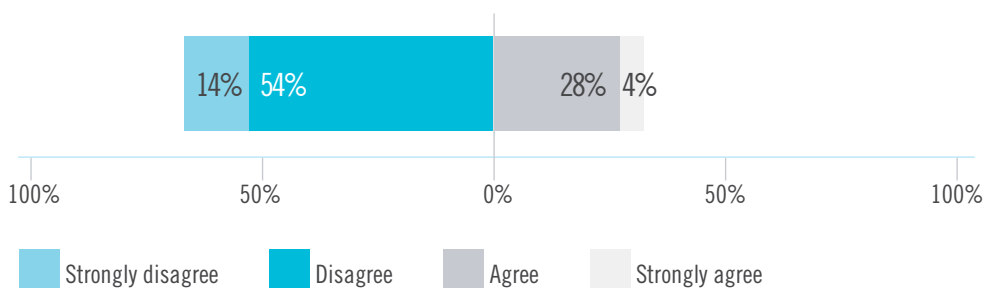
THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The subject of higher education's future is an anxiety-filled topic for college leaders. Many feel adrift as they navigate a rapidly changing world and attempt to position their institutions for a sustainable future. The high-profile votes of no confidence in presidents in the last year and continued turnover in the top spot shows that questions remain about the pace of change in higher education.

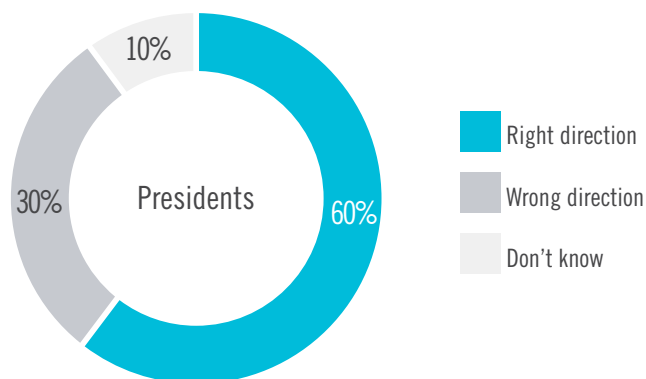
The challenges to the status quo brought on by financial pressures, a more complex student body, growing disenchantment with the rewards of a diploma, and the shock—and the promise—of new technology are enough to convince presidents surveyed by The Chronicle that colleges and universities are definitely in for a sea change. While presidents are mostly optimistic that American higher education is headed in the right direction, two-thirds of the respondents still say that the system will look very different ten years from now than it does today, and by then, many leaders think it will not be the world leader it is now (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Presidents' opinions about whether higher education will be similar to the way it is today, ten years from now



Presidents' opinions about whether the US higher-education system is generally going in the right direction or the wrong direction



Presidents' ranking of the US higher-education system

Now



10 years from now



Only about half of presidents believe that the higher-education system is providing good or excellent value for the money spent by families (see Figure 2). For the most part, college leaders welcome change. Indeed, they welcome substantial change. Only 3 percent of their private campus executives think that the system is functioning smoothly. When given the options of evolutionary change or disruptive change, two-thirds of the presidents favor for massive or moderate disruption (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 2
Presidents' rating of the value that the US higher-education system is providing to students and their families

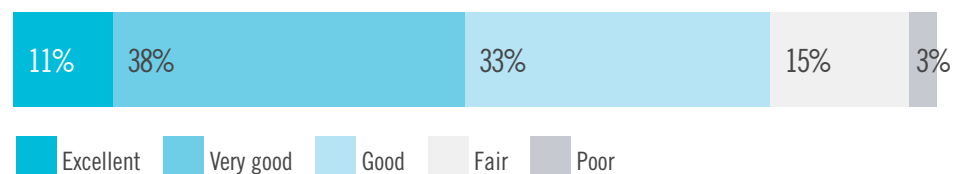
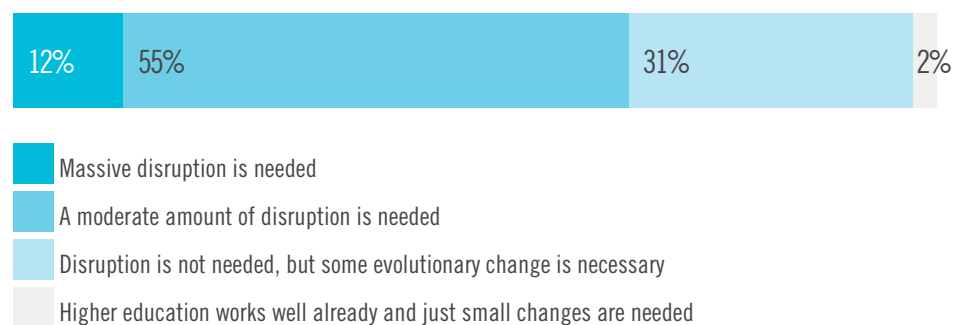
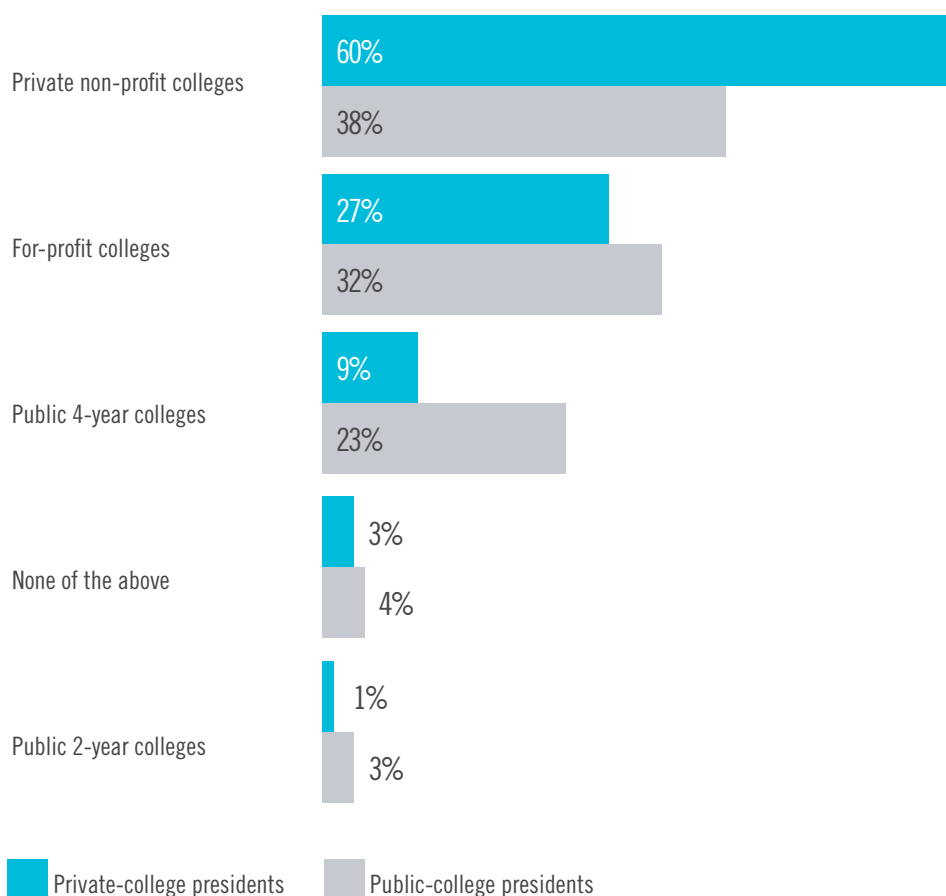


FIGURE 3
Presidents' thoughts about how much change American higher education needs to undergo in the next 10 years



The sustainability of higher education's financial model has been much discussed in the last year. Among survey respondents, there is a much greater concern about the future of private institutions, which tend to be tuition dependent. When asked which sector of higher education is most at risk in the next decade, 60 percent of private-college presidents chose their institutions, while only 23 percent of the heads of public four-year colleges thought campuses like theirs were in danger (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
Presidents' beliefs about the sectors that are most at risk in the next 10 years



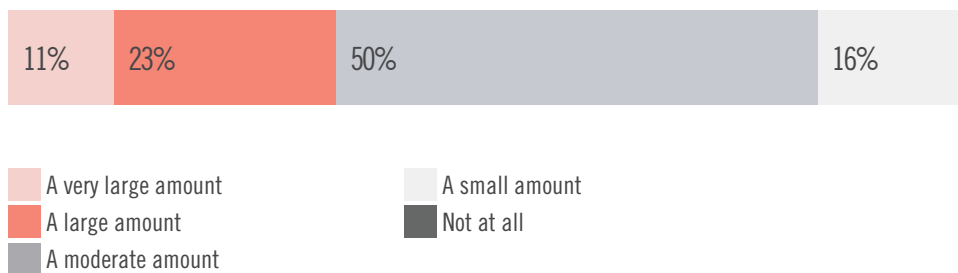
THE INNOVATIVE LEADER

Innovative ideas for reforming higher education are being tested, and in many places, delivered with measurable results by researchers, professors, entrepreneurs, and college presidents. But much of that work remains unfamiliar to many leaders interested in the vibrancy of higher education, and as a result, detached from their conversations and strategy about the future.

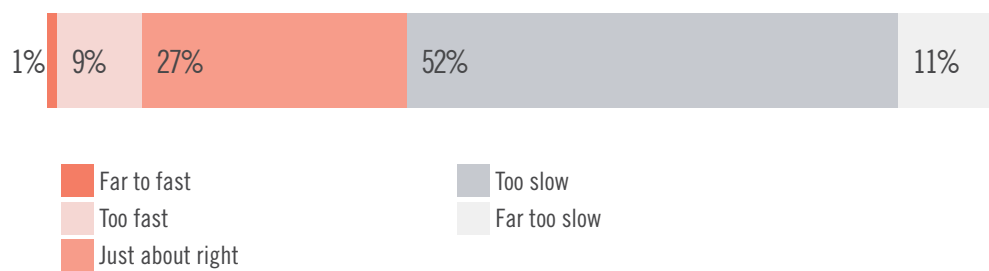
Although colleges and universities are often perceived by outsiders as stagnant institutions, presidents say in the survey that their campuses are more innovative than the public gives them credit for being. Four out of five presidents say that colleges foster at least a “moderate amount innovation.” And two-thirds of presidents say that the pace of change is too slow (see Figure 5).

*Two-thirds of presidents
say that the pace of change
is too slow.*

FIGURE 5
Presidents' beliefs about the amount of innovation American colleges and universities foster



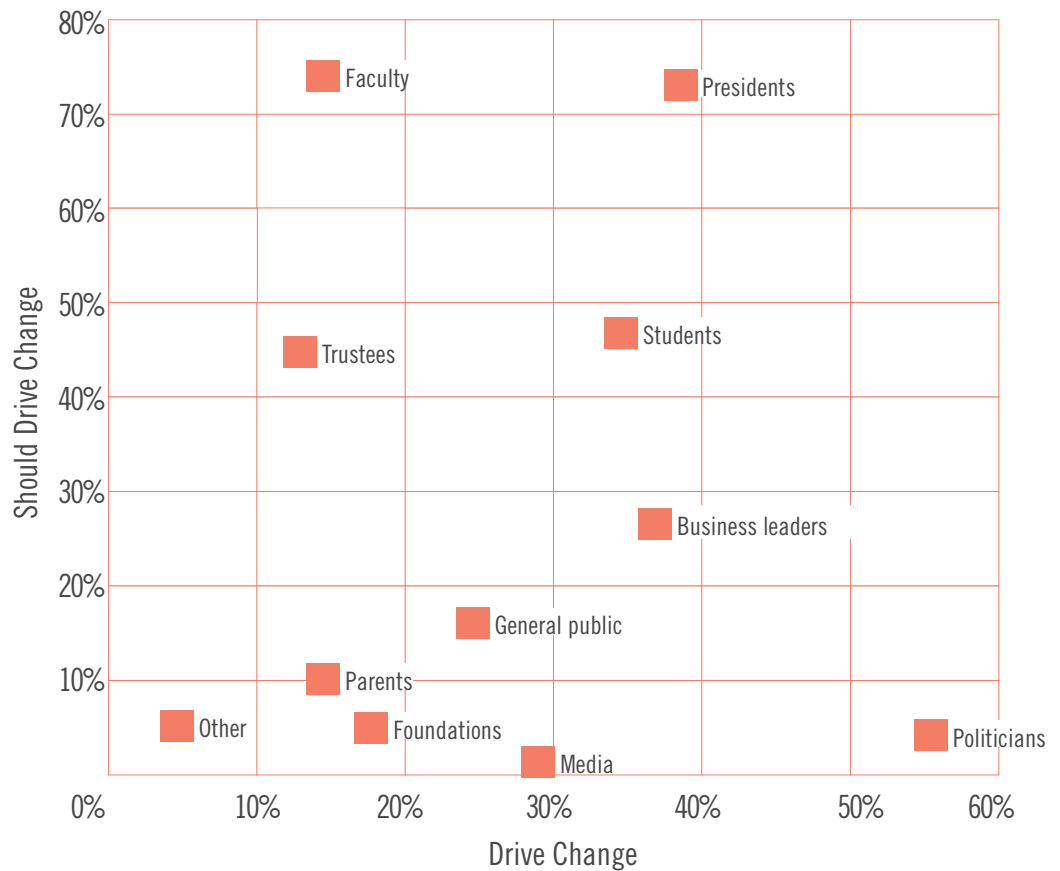
Presidents' rating of the pace of change in American higher education



Higher education and healthcare are seen as the last two big American industries that have yet to undergo substantial change. As a result, everyone has an opinion about what college and university leaders should do to bring change to their campuses, and college presidents are often the ones trying to balance the demands of those various constituencies.

As presidents view the matter, politicians are driving change, but should in fact have little say, if any. They also maintain that business people have too much influence. Faculty, on the other hand, are failing to step up to the plate, according to the presidents (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6
Presidents' beliefs about who drives change and *should* drive change on campus



In the survey, respondents were shown a list of ten participants in the national discussion of higher education (politicians, business leaders, trustees, presidents, media, foundations, faculty, students, parents, and the general public) and asked to select the top three driving forces. Presidents of public institutions gave the most votes, and therefore ascribe the most influence, to politicians, business leaders, and presidents in that order. The private campus presidents ascribed the most power to politicians, presidents, and the media.

Both groups of presidents scored the faculty influence quite low, well below that of students. When the question was shifted to who should be the driving forces for change, public-college presidents voted by a clear margin for faculty, followed by themselves, and then students. Private-college presidents voted for themselves, just a hair ahead of faculty, followed by trustees.

Politicians are driving change, while as far as the presidents are concerned, politicians should have little say, if any.

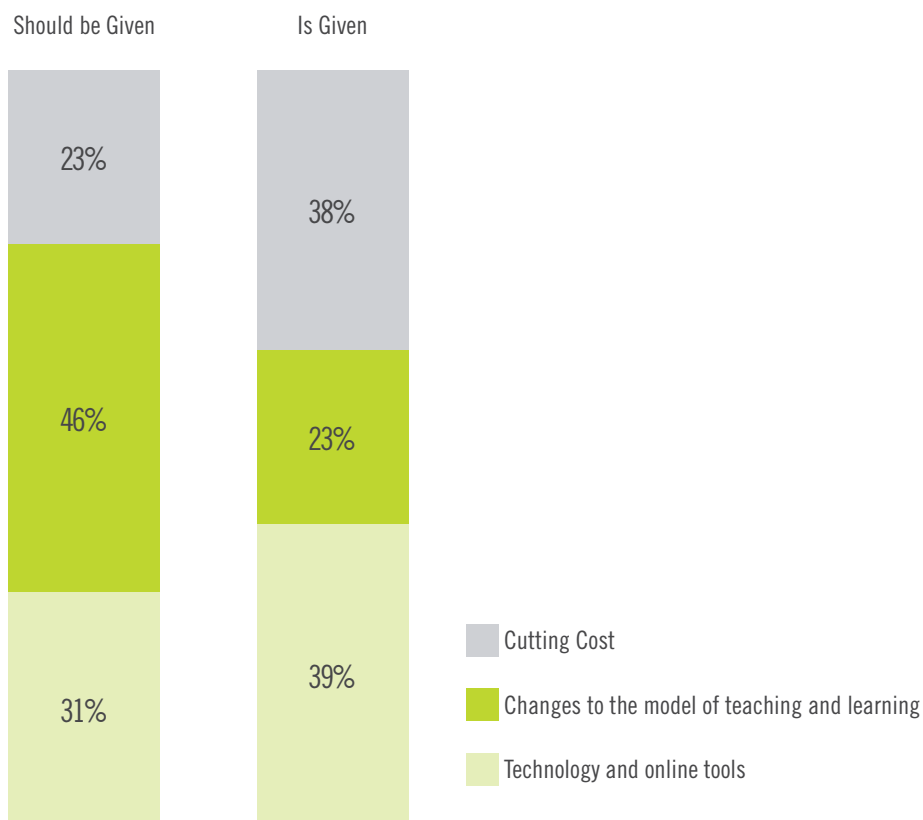
HOW HIGHER EDUCATION SHOULD CHANGE

Ideas for change in higher education are everywhere. Not a week goes by where there isn't a conference about the future of colleges and universities. MOOCs and competency-based degrees are on the front pages of major daily newspapers. And faculty members are wondering what their jobs will look like in a decade.

Presidents believe that the focus right now should be on changes to the model of teaching and learning.

So what new approaches should presidents and others think about as they contemplate the next ten years? Significantly, presidents complain that critics are paying too much attention to cutting costs. They agree that technology should be given its due. Still, they believe that the focus right now should be on changes to the model of teaching and learning (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7
Changes that higher-education presidents believe are, and *should be*, given emphasis



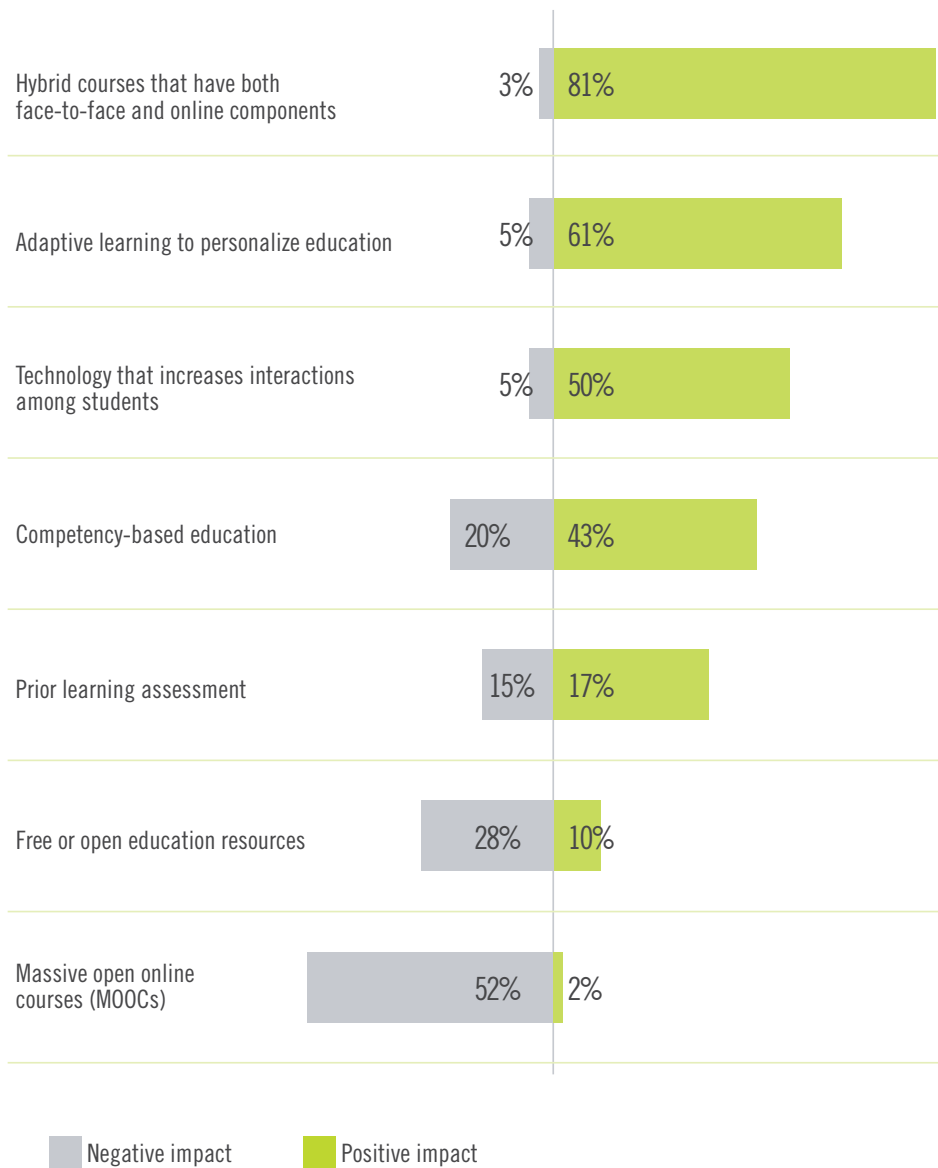
Among presidents, there are clear winners on the innovations they think will have the most positive influence on American higher education in the future. Among the favorites: hybrid courses that blend face-to-face learning with online learning, and adaptive learning that uses technology to adjust lessons based on the needs of the student. Among the innovations least favored by presidents: open courses and MOOCs.

College leaders seem undecided about competency-based education—an alternative way to reward credits to students based on a demonstration of competency in a subject rather than the number of hours spent in class. What’s more, few presidents think that prior learning assessment is worth considering, a nod to the many older students who believe they should receive credit for what they have learned in the workplace and outside the classroom (see Figure 8).

Presidents believe hybrid courses that blend face-to-face learning as well as adaptive learning will have the most positive influence on the future of higher education.

FIGURE 8

Presidents' beliefs about which innovations will have the most positive or negative impact on American higher education in the future



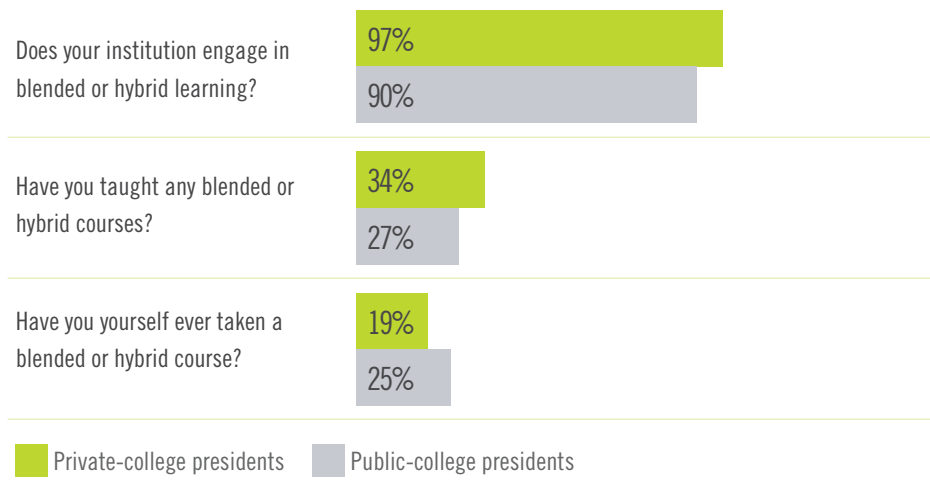
Almost all institutions represented by the surveyed presidents offer hybrid courses. Only about one-third of the presidents have taught a hybrid course, however, and fewer have taken one.

While a large majority of presidents believe that hybrid courses will have a positive impact on higher learning, there seems to be a little uneasiness about whether professors have a full grasp of how to integrate online elements into their courses.

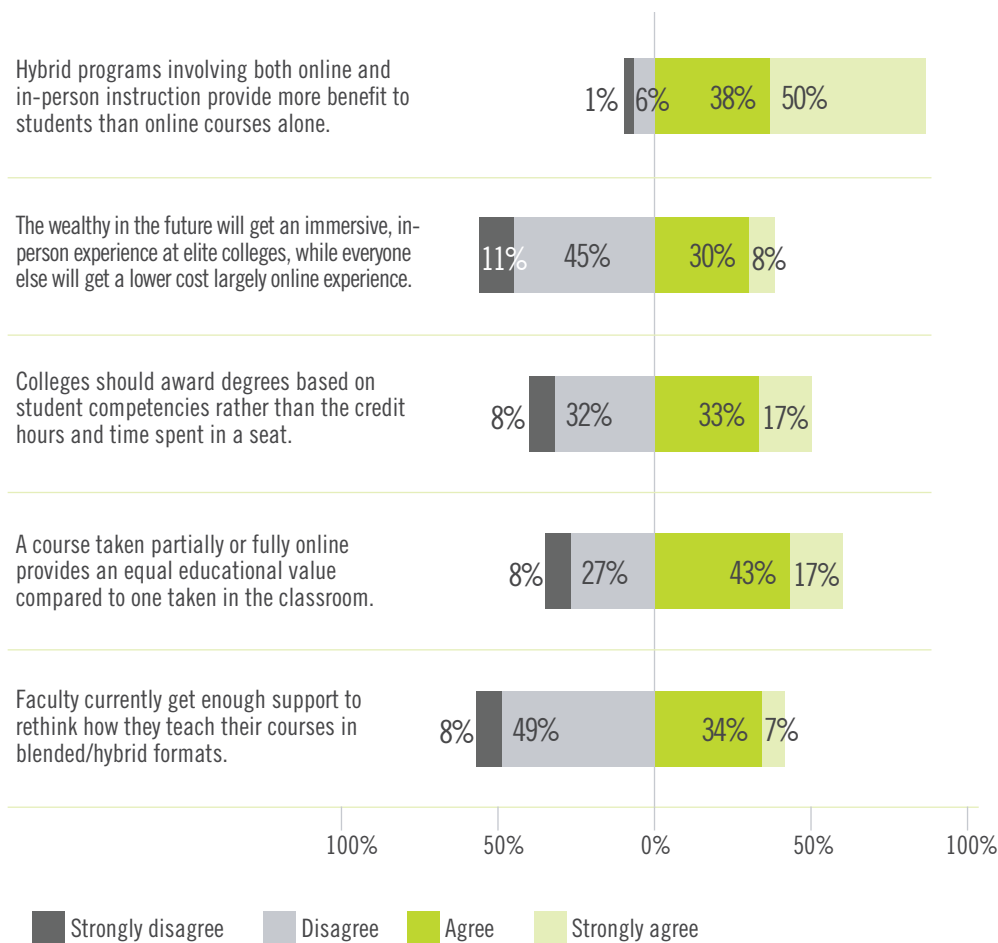
Well over half the presidents suspect that faculty don't get enough support in rethinking how to teach their courses in hybrid formats. Moreover, 38 percent of presidents are concerned that in the future only wealthy students will get immersive, in-person experiences at elite colleges while everyone else will get a lower cost, largely online experience (see Figure 9).

Presidents are concerned that in the future only the wealthy students will get immersive, in-person experiences at elite colleges.

FIGURE 9
Presidents' experiences with blended and hybrid learning



Presidents' attitudes about hybrid learning

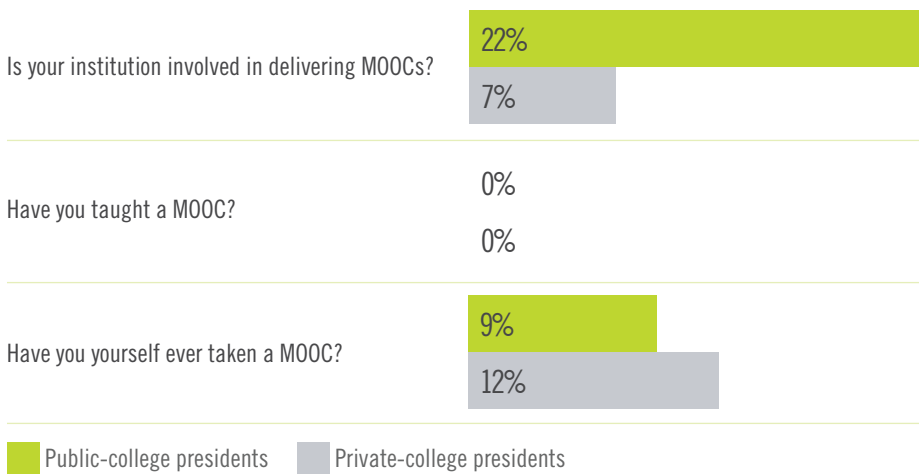


In sharp contrast to their acceptance of hybrid learning the presidents are largely hostile toward MOOCs, even though almost none have had any experience in teaching or taking a MOOC.

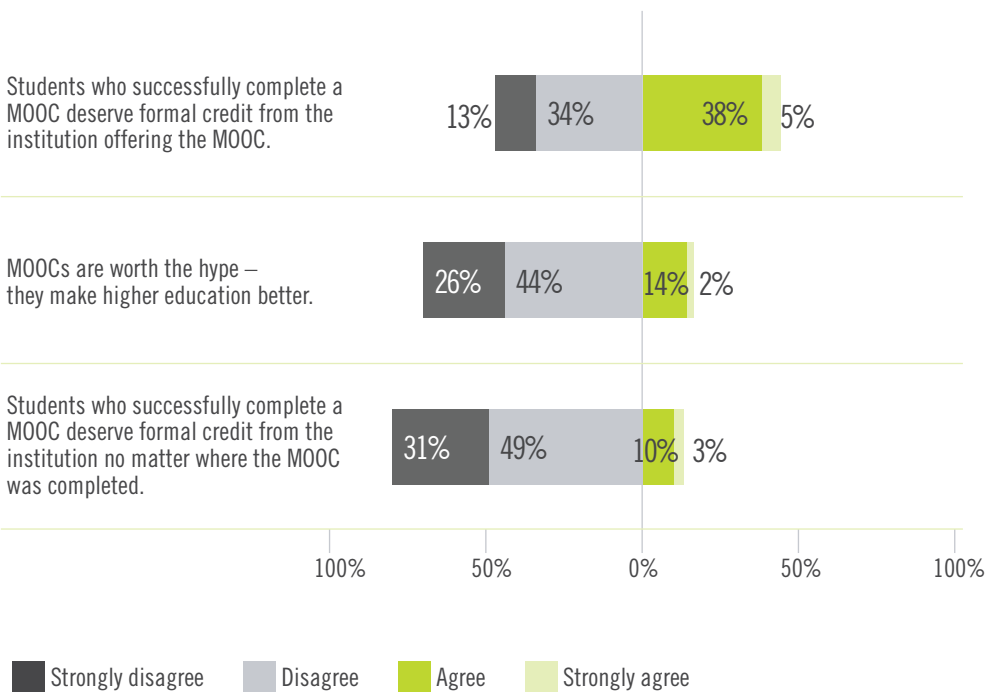
MOOCs created considerable excitement when they were introduced a few years ago, raising hopes they would be an inexpensive way of effectively educating huge numbers of students with limited means. But some disillusionment has set in. Large numbers of students have failed to finish their courses. Even with online mentors, students in one experiment of using MOOCs at San Jose State University performed much worse than students who took classes on campus. As the presidents view them, MOOCs have not yet evolved into a useful tool. A bare 16 percent of presidents think such courses are making education better. As a result, most presidents don't think MOOCs are worth the hype or that students who complete the courses deserve credit from the institution offering the course (see Figure 10).

Presidents are largely hostile toward MOOCs, even though almost none have had any experience in teaching or taking a MOOC.

FIGURE 10
Presidents' experiences with MOOCs



Presidents' beliefs about the value of MOOCs



CONCLUSION

College and university presidents are an understandably optimistic group, confident that the institutions of higher education they preside over are either the world's best, or among the best. An overwhelming majority of presidents feel they provide good, very good, or excellent value to students and their families, skepticism on the part of much of the public notwithstanding.

These presidents are confident but not hidebound or defensive. They recognize that higher education is under the stress of economic, demographic, and technological forces that will reshape campuses substantially in the coming years. The presidents not only welcome that future but advocate disruptive change rather than simply evolutionary change to bring it about.

They are open-minded about new ideas. They are enthusiastic about hybrid learning that includes both face-to-face and online instruction, but remain very dubious about MOOCs. What is clear from the survey is that presidents know that innovation is taking hold in higher education, but that they want to have more control over how, when, and where that change happens.

METHODOLOGY

The results of *The Innovative University: What College Presidents Think About Change in American Higher Education* are based on responses from presidents of four-year public and four-year private, not-for-profit colleges and universities that fall into a selected group of classifications developed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Maguire Associates, of Concord, Mass, which conducted the online survey for The Chronicle, identified 1,728 institutions that met the survey criteria. Presidents of these institutions were invited to respond, and 349, or 20 percent did. The data collection took place in January 2014.

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