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## INTRODUCTION

America's colleges and universities are at a crossroads. The number of schools closing their doors continues to grow driven by the declining number of students pursuing a bachelor's. This situation is expected to worsen because of a number of factors.

- Starting in 2025 the U.S. will face the so-called "enrollment cliff," in which the population of college aid students will drop by 15% over four years.<sup>1</sup> Colleges can expect to lose over 575,000 students over that four-year time span.
- The strong labor market has led more high school graduates to delay indefinitely their pursuit of a bachelor's degree.
- Young Americans have become increasingly skeptical of the value of a college degree.<sup>2</sup> The rising cost of college and the amount of debt students are required to take in order to graduate has re-enforced this viewpoint.

In the past when faced with funding shortfalls, colleges and universities have attempted to "grow their way" out of the problem. Many

offered new graduate programs, including terminal master's degrees (no doctoral option) and certificates. Purdue University, under former President Mitch Daniels, purchased the mostly for-profit Kaplan University in 2017 and turned it into Purdue Global, with approximately 30,000 online students paying full price.<sup>3</sup> Other colleges and universities also began increasing their online offerings to expand their access to a larger number of part-time graduate students. But unlike Daniels and Purdue — who used the revenue to hold undergraduate tuition flat for a decade — most schools simply used the funds to avoid making tough choices such as cutting expenses.

Other approaches included the recruitment of international students interested in pursuing a degree at an elite American college, particularly wealthy Chinese students. At present, there are around 290,086 Chinese students attending university in the U.S., with another 199,182 from India.<sup>4</sup>

But growth strategies won't work as effectively going forward. Most leading universities now have extensive online programs and in recent years the number of international students coming to study in the U.S. has begun to recede

as more options become available elsewhere. While some elite universities can increase the number of undergraduates they enroll, others, particularly those that are more tuition-dependent, will be forced to close or merge with other institutions.

There is another alternative, however, which is for schools to streamline their costs and pass some of the savings on to students in the form of increased scholarships, lower tuition, or a combination of both. Specifically, colleges could cut non-faculty positions by 1% per year over the next five years and use the savings to reduce tuition.

For several decades, higher education has experienced a significant upswing in administrative spending and it is projected to continue to grow by seven percent over the next 10 years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>5</sup> Non-instructional spending, which includes spending on administration and student services, outpaced instructional spending from 2010 to 2018, according to the Council of Trustees and Alumni. During that period spending on student services rose a sizable 29% and administrative costs increased 19%, while instructional spending only rose 17% by comparison.<sup>6</sup>

Not only did spending for administration and student services increase, so too did the number of employees in those areas. Between 1976 and 2018, the number of full-time faculty employed at colleges and universities in the U.S. increased by 92%, during which time total student enrollment increased by 78%. During this same period, however, full-time administrators and other professionals employed by those institutions increased by 164% and 452%, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

**"For several decades, higher education has experienced a significant upswing in administrative spending and it is projected to continue to grow by seven percent over the next 10 years."**

There is little evidence that the dramatic expansion in staffing for administrative and student services improved students' academic experience. In fact, some observers contend that the explosion in non-faculty has made it harder for faculty to educate students. In part, because many of these administrators have to justify their existence by creating more regulations and processes. As Todd Zywicki, a law professor at George Mason University has noted, "The interesting thing about the administrative bloat in higher education is, literally, nobody knows who all these people are or what they're doing."<sup>8</sup>

### **THE RISE OF NON-FACULTY AT AMERICA'S TOP UNIVERSITIES**

To gain a better understanding of this trend, the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) reviewed faculty versus non-faculty positions at the top 50 universities in the U.S. (based on the most recent rankings conducted by U.S. News and World Report).

On average, the top universities in the U.S. have only 1 faculty member per 11 students.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, these same institutions have 1 non-faculty employee per 4 students. Put another way, there are now 3 times as many non-faculty as there are faculty per student at the best schools in the U.S.

The numbers at some universities are

## "Three schools on the list have more non-faculty employees than students."

particularly striking. The Georgia Institute for Technology (Georgia Tech) has only 1 faculty member per 37 students. Meanwhile, they have 1 non-faculty member per 11 students. It should be noted that Georgia Tech has been a leader in offering Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) at a much lower tuition level, so its student-to-faculty ratio is not completely unexpected. But, the number of non-faculty at Georgia Tech is still 3 times greater than faculty.

Three schools on the list have more non-faculty employees than students — California Institute of Technology (Caltech), Duke University, and the University of California at San Diego. Another 8 schools have between 1 to 2 non-faculty per student.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) had almost nine times more non-faculty employees than faculty, followed by Caltech at eight times. Johns Hopkins University had 7.5 times more non-faculty compared to faculty, and this figure does not include employees of the university's famed hospital.<sup>10</sup>

As Table 1 highlights, post-secondary schools could reduce the number of non-faculty positions without a major disruption in services and other functions. Much of this reduction could be achieved by cutting administrative positions, which have grown disproportionately over the last 20 years.

### WHY HAVE ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS AND COSTS EXPLODED?

Most organizations, as they get bigger, tend

to experience a spike in administrative bloat. Universities and colleges are no exception. But there are some unique reasons why the explosion in administrative expenses and personnel at post-secondary schools has been so dramatic.

**One**, is the battle to attract potential students with the "biggest and newest" facilities and the most striking opportunities, including study abroad, internship programs, speaker series, field trips to exciting locations, and other extracurricular activities. Colleges are also expected to provide a ready-made social life for students, with opportunities to join clubs and organizations of all types and host entertainment events to keep students engaged.

College and university presidents have also invested large sums in building cutting-edge dormitories and amenities like "lazy river pools" to attract more paying customers, rather than modernizing and innovating their school's outmoded model of higher education. As a result, universities have had to beef up the ranks of employees who manage facilities and properties.

**Two**, in an effort to justify the exorbitant cost of a college degree, post-secondary schools have become high-end job placement centers that connect students with top employers, help them polish their resumes and write cover letters, and teach them how to "ace" job interviews. Some schools, like the University of Tulsa, have gone as far as guaranteeing a job offer or graduate school admissions within six months after graduation if students participate in its online

professional development program.<sup>11</sup>

**Three,** colleges and universities are expected to provide an array of student support services to help undergraduates overcome issues that might impair their ability to succeed academically. This includes mental health services, financial aid advisers, and writing centers for international students who are not native English speakers, or American students who want to improve their writing skills. It also includes offices that focus on important issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Fourth,** schools experienced have experienced an explosion in regulation and red tape, which is driven partly by federal and state governments, and partly by university and college accreditors. A Vanderbilt study of 13 colleges and universities found that regulatory compliance comprises 3% to 11% of schools' non-hospital operating expenses, taking up 4% to 15% of faculty and staff's time.<sup>12</sup> To earn academic accreditation at subject area organizations like the American Bar Association (ABA) or the Network of Schools of Policy, Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), programs and schools spend years collecting data and information, conducting self-studies, and preparing for site visits, which for the most part, has not been shown to improve teaching quality nor the academic performance of students in a measurable and meaningful way.

But external pressures are only partly to blame for the proliferation of college paperwork and procedures. The schools themselves also are responsible for the proliferation of red tape and rules.

For example, at Johns Hopkins where I teach,

faculty can no longer issue a grade of incomplete without filling out a legal agreement to be signed by the professor and the student, and then submitted to the enrollment office for approval. And many colleges and universities now require faculty to include pages of school policies and disclosures that few students bother reading, as well as program learning objectives aligned to course learning objectives, aligned to grading rubrics, aligned to assignments, aligned to readings, aligned to lectures, and so forth.

### POSSIBLE POLICY SOLUTIONS

As the largest source of financial assistance for college and graduate school, the federal government should be concerned by the massive growth in non-faculty positions at schools, given it is a major driver of higher tuition. Unfortunately, both Democrats and Republicans have generally ignored developing and implementing cost containment proposals as a means to increase college affordability.

Rather, the federal government has focused its efforts to make college more affordable through increased aid to students in the form of grants, tax incentives, and loans. While this has expanded access, it has, ironically, also encouraged colleges and universities to raise costs faster than tuition. Thus, only a portion of the aid provided to students has actually reduced the price of a degree. The rest (60 cents on the dollar according to the New York Federal Reserve Bank) has been absorbed by schools for salaries and other expenses.

The federal government should shift its focus from increasing financial aid to using its

significant leverage to encourage colleges and universities to reduce costs and cut the price of earning a degree. To do this, the government should be given the authority to negotiate the cost of tuition and fees with any post-secondary institution that accepts students who have received grants, loans, or tax incentives from the federal government. Schools could opt-out, but by doing so would not be allowed to enroll students who need to pay a portion of their tuition with federal aid or loans. Schools found in violation of this policy would be subject to fines in an amount equivalent to the aid provided by the government.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research underscore that non-faculty employees at universities, both public and private, have grown considerably and without necessary oversight, under college presidents and their boards. This is in part the result of greater demand from students for services, increased technological needs including the shift to online courses (particularly at the graduate level), the growing demands of regional and subject area accreditors, the myriad of financial aid advisers helping students get loans they may never pay back, and growing tension between administrators and faculty. While some of this growth may have been necessary, there is no doubt that much of it has not.

**TABLE 1: FACULTY AND NON-FACULTY POSITIONS AT AMERICA'S TOP UNIVERSITIES**

	University	Faculty Positions (full-time)	Non-Faculty Positions (full-time)	Undergraduate Students	Graduate Students	Total Students	Student to Faculty Ratio	Student to Non-Faculty Ratio
1	Princeton University (Princeton University "Facts and Figures")	1,285	6,015	5,548	3,157	8,705	6.77:1	1.45:1
2	MIT (MIT Report of the Treasurer 2022)	1,069	8,041	4,638	7,296	11,934	11.16:1	1.32:1
3	Harvard University (Office of Institutional Research and Analytics)	2,475	12,949	7,100	14,100	21,200	8.57:1	1.64:1
3	Stanford University (Stanford Factbook)	2,288	13,763	7,845	9,292	17,137	7.49:1	1.25:1
3	Yale University (financial report Yale University 2021 to 2022)	5,086	10,328	6,536	6,808	13,344	2.62:1	1.29:1
6	University of Chicago (University of Chicago data)	2,859	8,139	7,011	10,459	17,470	6.11:1	2.5:1
7	Johns Hopkins University (Report on staff Composition 2020 & Fast Facts)	1,459	10,612	5,318	20,088	25,406	17.41:1	2.39:1

7	University of Pennsylvania (Penn Facts)	5,094	12,906	10,106	12,924	23,030	4.52:1	1.78:1
9	California Institute of Technology (Caltech at a Glance)	393	3,500	982	1,419	2,401	6.11:1	0.69:1
10	Duke University (Financial Statements 2021-2022)	3,983	25,873	6,543	10,612	17,155	4.31:1	0.66:1
10	Northwestern University	3,334	7,450	8,000	14,000	22,000	6.6:1	2.95:1
12	Dartmouth College (Dartmouth College Fact Book)	946	2,154	4,566	2,205	6,771	7.16:1	3.14:1
13	Brown University (Brown University Fact Book)	1,603	3,162	7,222	2,689	9,911	6.18:1	3.13:1
13	Vanderbilt University (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	1,259	4,470	7,057	6,480	13,537	10.75:1	3.03:1
15	Rice University (Office of Institutional Effectiveness)	887	2,692	4,240	3,970	8,210	9.26:1	3.05:1
15	Washington University of St. Louis (University Facts)	1,765	3,751	7,707	8,350	16,057	9.1:1	4.28:1
17	Cornell University (University Facts)	1,729	8,750	15,735	7,256	22,991	13.3:1	2.63:1
18	Columbia University (Statistics and Facts 2021)	1,657	9,678	8,148	21,987	30,135	18.19:1	3.11:1
18	Notre Dame University (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	1,243	4,467	8,874	3,935	12,809	10.3:1	2.87:1
20	University of California at Berkeley (Office of the Vice Chancellor for Finance)	2,675	8,514	30,853	11,666	42,519	15.89:1	4.99:1
20	University of California at Los Angeles (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	4,127	17,008	32,121	15,397	47,518	11.51:1	2.79:1
22	Carnegie Mellon (Institutional Research and Analysis)	1,483	4,821	7,308	8,393	15,701	10.59:1	3.26:1
22	Emory University (Office of Planning and Administration)	1,416	9,983	7,850	7,364	15,214	10.74:1	1.52:1

22	Georgetown University (Office of Assessment and Decision Support)	1,162	3,848	3,774	3,073	6,847	5.89:1	1.78:1
25	New York University (NYU at-a-Glance)	5,050	9,181	29,700	18,300	48,000	9.5:1	5.23:1
25	University of Michigan Ann Arbor (Office of Budget & Planning))	7,316	15,795	32,282	15,377	47,659	6.51:1	3.02:1
25	University of Southern California (About USC)	4,674	6,130	21,000	28,000	49,000	10.48:1	7.99:1
25	University of Virginia (Facts and Figures)	2,479	6,989	17,000	8,700	25,700	10.37:1	3.68:1
29	University of Florida (University of Florida Facts)	5,937	12,378	34,931	15,663	50,594	8.52:1	4.09:1
29	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC By the Numbers)	4,085	9,023	19,743	11,796	31,539	7.72:1	3.5:1
29	Wake Forest University (Facts & Figures)	932	1,936	5,472	3,478	8,950	9.6:1	4.62:1
32	Tufts University (financial report)	1,288	3,264	6,559	3,883	10,442	8.11:1	3.2:1
32	University of California at Santa Barbara (Facts and Figures)	1,248	3,968	23,185	2,983	26,168	12.53:1	6.59:1
34	University of California at Irvine (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	2,089	6,166	29,449	6,570	36,019	17.24:1	5.84:1
34	University of California at San Diego (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	2,843	10,920	3,182	6,938	10,120	3.56:1	0.93:1
36	Boston College (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	880	2,619	9,532	2,542	12,074	13.72:1	4.61:1
36	University of Rochester (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	1,386	8,874	6,767	5,340	12,179	8.79:1	1.37:1
38	University of California at Davis (aggie data)	1,555	6,807	31,532	4,928	36,460	23.45:1	5.36:1
38	University of Texas at Austin (Fast Facts)	3,919	11,645	41,309	11,075	52,384	13.37:1	4.5:1

38	University of Wisconsin (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	5,072	14,143	35,184	9,993	45,177	8.91:1	3.19:1
41	Boston University (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	4,187	6,281	17,590	17,937	35,527	8.49:1	5.66:1
41	University of Illinois (About University of Illinois)	5,530	8,209	34,500	20,500	55,000	9.95:1	6.7:1
41	William & Mary College (IPEDS Data Center/NCES)	672	1,673	6,117	2,582	8,709	12.96:1	5.21:1
44	Brandeis University (About/Facts)	394	1,314	4,584	2,342	6,926	17.58:1	5.27:1
44	Case Western Reserve University (Office of Institutional Research)	1,097	2,777	5,584	6,410	11,994	10.93:1	4.32:1
44	Georgia Institute of Technology (Institutional Research and Planning)	1,279	4,293	17,988	29,799	47,787	37.36:1	11.13:1
44	Northeastern University (Common Data Set)	1,544	3,146	20,307	10,817	31,124	20.16:1	9.89:1
44	Tulane University (Facts and Figures)	1,200	2,900	8,781	4,200	12,981	10.82:1	4.48:1
49	Ohio State University (Facts OSU)	5,034	20,813	47,106	14,503	61,609	12.24:1	2.96:1
49	University of Georgia (UGA Factbook)	2,648	7,749	30,166	11,833	41,999	15.86:1	5.42:1
51	Lehigh University (Lehigh Catalog)	566	1,861	5,451	1,032	6,483	11.45:1	3.48:1

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