What Does Better Look Like for Your Institution?

Debrief from the Resiliency Roundtable held on May 4, 2021

A discussion on diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as remote work, Title IX, cyber and mental health

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INTRODUCTION

Leaders in Illinois higher education were selected to participate in a roundtable discussion hosted by Gallagher's Higher Education practice. The target audience consisted of HR decision-makers. The discussion explored a number of hot topics in higher education, including the current state of higher education, and tomorrow's priorities and challenges. We asked: **What does better look like for your institution?**

To ensure that we focused on the most important topics, we shared a survey that allowed participants to rank various topics on a scale from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). The chart on the right shows the topics of most interest to this group, which framed our agenda. The chart shows the percentage of survey participants that ranked the topic as very important (4) or most important (5).

This 2021 Resiliency Roundtable was held virtually on May 4, 2021. We used the forum to create this whitepaper with the feedback and solutions discussed.

Be sure to look out for our companion piece exploring the risk management challenges making the greatest impact on institutions of higher education coming out soon.

Roundtable Participants

Moderator

- **Adam Wolff,** Gallagher Regional Vice President, Great Lakes Region

Gallagher's Higher Education Practice Attendees

- **Employee Benefits Brokerage & Consulting**
    - » **Dave Torri,** Area Senior Vice President
    - » **Nichole Johnson,** Area Vice President

- **Property & Casualty Brokerage & Consulting**
    - » **Bill Powell,** Area Executive Vice President
    - » **Hannah Adams,** Account Executive

Roundtable Participants

- Columbia College
- Highland Community College
- Illinois Valley Community College
- Kishwaukee College
- Lake Land College
- Lincoln College
- National Louis University
- Rosalind Franklin University
- The University of Illinois
- The University of Chicago

Agenda Selection

Top 4 Topics

- **100%** DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION
- **71%** REMOTE OR HYBRID WORKING
- **71%** TITLE IX
- **57%** CYBER PROTECTION

Additional Topics (Time Permitting)

- **43%** MENTAL HEALTH
- **43%** HR TECHNOLOGY

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

These trying times are uniting people, but also dividing them. Community unrest about social injustices have driven the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to the forefront of cultural dialogue once again. And this movement is empowering employees to candidly discuss workplace equality with colleagues, managers, HR and executive leadership.

Like many employers, colleges are increasingly promoting DEI. There is a focus on higher education to fully address the lack of racial diversity from student support, to faculty and staff representation, to the boardroom. Rather than being responsive to a student protest and/or public outrage, we must be resolute on our DEI stance and efforts.

In the Inside Higher Ed 2021 Survey of College & University Presidents, questions were posed on the state of race relations. College and university presidents are more optimistic about their own campus race relations than they are about race relations in the higher education industry in general.

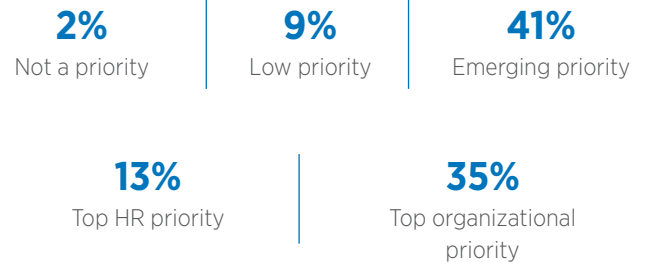| What is the state of race relations on your campus?			
7%	**56%**	**34%**	**3%**
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor

What is the state of race relations in higher ed?			
0%	**19%**	**67%**	**14%**
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor

In the Gallagher 2021 Workforce Trends Pulse Survey #2, we asked, "To what extent has DEI been integrated into your organization?" Only 7% of respondents answered, "Completely integrated—it's a top priority for the C-suite, leaders are held accountable for DEI objectives, and it's integrated into all talent strategies and business systems."

In addition, when asked, "Which statement best characterizes your organization's view of developing or maintaining a DEI strategy?" the vast majority (89%) indicated it was a priority.

2%	**9%**	**41%**
Not a priority	Low priority	Emerging priority

13%	**35%**
Top HR priority	Top organizational priority

Actualizing leadership's stance on diversity and inclusion sets behavioral expectations for these defining cultural values and should authentically align with the organization's unique character. Supporting communication is important because it helps affirm a commitment to enforcing anti-discrimination policies and adhering to equal employment guidelines. Email, video and teleconferencing can be effective in conveying the mission and values that guide operational decisions.

Current State

DEI is a top priority for our roundtable participants and an integral part of strategic plans. Within higher education, many campuses have been providing DEI support for students for years. Now it's time to extend those resources to the full campus, including faculty and staff.

Reaching candidates with greater diversity comes with its challenges. Kwang-Wu Kim, president of Columbia College, states in his position paper:
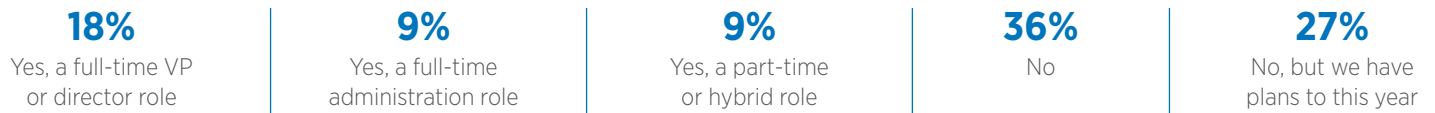
"We have reoriented our thinking about faculty and trustee recruitment around the notion that every hiring decision and trustee nomination is an opportunity to expand the college's diversity. Our challenge is to broaden our curricula so that our students can engage with those alternative traditions as they develop and refine their own practices. Here too, our faculty have made progress, including an assessment model for a new DEI course designation, an exploration of DEI-specific pedagogy, and crucially, the recruitment of new faculty with DEI expertise."

Our roundtable discussion dissected the difference between the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion. Feedback from our participants was insightful and is included in the following table.

DIVERSITY	EQUITY	INCLUSION
Reaching diverse candidates is the easy part, thanks to the accessibility of job postings on various job boards and LinkedIn. Colleges have revamped their selection committee and process for faculty and staff hiring to analyze the diversity of the candidates and new hires. The struggle is acquiring and retaining the diverse talent. Many employers are all going after the same job pool and there is a high demand. It's easier to diversify a student population than the faculty and staff population. The student population turns over every two to four years, yet we see low turnover with faculty and staff. How do you diversify a workforce when the workforce is not turning over? Some colleges have offered early retirement incentives to open up key positions to new, diverse talent.	We must track how equitable we really are. How equitable is our pay? Are our employees treated fairly? Do we provide equal opportunities for advancement? This is where your DEI committee, task force or staff step in to list goals, desired outcomes and measurements for success. Many employees are interested in getting involved in these various DEI committees and task forces. Tracking metrics, monitoring outside feedback and constructively responding are also important. Clear, consistent communication about the organization and its values is key to perpetuating an employers' stance on equity.	Inclusion is driven by one thing: culture. How do we shift our culture to focus on human values? Drawing a blueprint for cultural values helps keep them sustainable. It should be guided and embraced by top management, and then vetted by middle management to ask questions and raise concerns. Based on this feedback, leadership reevaluates the blueprint. Once an agreement is reached, middle management shares these values with employees and demonstrates them through their actions. The door remains open for the workforce to keep the culture in check by expressing their opinions to management and leadership.

To improve race relations, colleges are starting to create DEI committees/tasks forces or even hire full-time positions dedicated to DEI efforts. For example, Southern Illinois University hired their inaugural VP for anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as a chief diversity officer. The authorization of these positions will ensure that campus DEI strategies are documented, measured and effective. One of our roundtable participants has an open position for a chief diversity and inclusion officer. This would be a cabinet position reporting to the president and responsible for DEI through all the different areas of the college. They are also opening several positions under this officer.

▶ **ROUNDTABLE POLL #1:** Do you have someone on staff devoted to your DEI efforts (i.e., chief diversity officer, VP of DEI)?

18%	**9%**	**9%**	**36%**	**27%**
Yes, a full-time VP or director role	Yes, a full-time administration role	Yes, a part-time or hybrid role	No	No, but we have plans to this year

Tomorrow's Priorities

Moving forward, affirmative action will be required to support diversity from faculty and staff to the boardroom. These DEI committees and task forces will be met with structural inequity. As we learned in our discussion, there were comments such as:

"We had a strong start—but our focus moving forward is being fiscally responsible and prudent."

"It's challenging for all of us because it requires a great amount of effort and support from the president and cabinet. This is a very heavy challenge and burden for people with limited resources. (Do I invest in current staff/faculty or future talent?)"

"We have carved out a fund to allocate to our efforts moving forward to fund the resources that are needed."

"As we look for solutions, one to two training programs isn't the answer. You really have to institutionalize your procedures and practices to make this part of your culture. The challenges lie in trying to figure out how we can do that."

DEI goals may also be achieved by giving the workforce time off for reflecting on personal values or observing national holidays such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Likewise, honoring months dedicated to celebrating women; the LGBTQ community; racial, ethnic and cultural heritages; and other diverse affiliations help create unity. Inviting feedback from employees on the effectiveness of DEI efforts allows them to contribute individually to a cause they care about, and helps employers assess, adjust and improve their strategies.

Surveys, Q&A opportunities and one-to-one interactions between employees and HR or leadership are just a few methods for gathering insights. What's most important is continued progress in creating a safe environment that allows employees to be who they are, which builds trust and increases engagement.

In the Gallagher 2021 Workforce Trends Pulse Survey #2, respondents indicated that some initiatives are currently in place, but that there is a lot of work left to reach desired status. Which of the following do you have in place or are you considering to support DEI?

	ALREADY IN PLACE	NOT IN PLACE BUT CONSIDERING	NOT IN PLACE AND NOT CONDSIDERING
Expanded paid holidays and religious observances	41%	19%	40%
Parity between benefits available for employees, spouses and partners	67%	15%	18%
Equal health coverage for transgender individuals without exclusion for medically necessary care	50%	21%	29%
Diversity training for managers	48%	45%	7%
Soft skill training for managers that includes leading with empathy, compassion and authenticity	37%	56%	7%
Inclusion of diversity metrics in executive performance/ compensation evaluations	11%	50%	39%
Diversity council	34%	25%	41%
Employee resources groups or affinity groups	26%	37%	37%
Supplier diversity program	14%	35%	51%
Hiring a diversity leader	18%	17%	65%

We'll close with some final thoughts from Kwang-Wu Kim's position paper:

"As we push forward, we must be bolder still. We must develop a comprehensive, better coordinated approach to the wider project, supported by a robust infrastructure, and establish measurable outcomes in order to gauge and evaluate our progress. We must also determine how we hold ourselves accountable to the work and how we reward those who advance it. There are other questions we have yet to answer. How do we sustain anti-racism training and an ongoing collegewide discussion about DEI? Who supports the staff in this work? How can we better integrate the office of student DEI into the college's diversity efforts?"
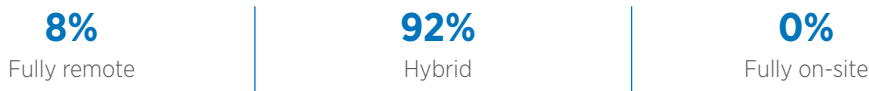
REMOTE OR HYBRID WORKING

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on higher education, students, faculty and staff, and their collective need to feel safe, cared for and valued. We have all experienced the pros and cons associated with working remotely. Good has come out of the abrupt shift to remote working. According to the Inside Higher Ed 2021 Survey of College & University Presidents, **90%** agree (46% strongly) that they'd been able to "implement some positive, long-lasting institutional changes during the pandemic."

While many have experienced freedom, it is difficult to merge our professional and personal lives. In the last year, we've seen employees struggle with mental health, stress and collaboration, all while trying to provide high-quality instruction to students. In addition, there is a significant gap in the preferences expressed by faculty and staff. *Duke Today* from Duke University published a study that indicated a majority **(74.2%)** of their survey respondents would "prefer to work remotely three to five days per week when COVID-19 is no longer a threat." While we want to oblige those who want to stay remote, we're faced with the reality of resetting policies to address the expectations of students and the need to return to on-site in-person learning. Identifying which positions are appropriate for remote work, how to engage this remote workforce, how to manage and lead them, and how an institution maintains and builds comradery and culture are just a few of the many questions our participants raised.

Current State

Many of the roundtable participants are currently in a hybrid model, with essential workers being those on-site.

▶ **ROUNDTABLE POLL #2:** What is your current state for faculty/staff?

8%	**92%**	**0%**
Fully remote	Hybrid	Fully on-site

How do we keep our faculty and staff engaged while being remote or hybrid? Engagement is affected by resiliency (ability to manage stress and adopt job changes), burnout (the inability to cope with work demands) and support from leadership. Not all managers and leaders were equipped to support their employees in a remote or hybrid setting. When an employee is not resilient, suffers from burnout and doesn't feel support from their peers or leaders, we see them grow less enthusiastic about their job. By focusing on the individual employee experience, we can best support their needs.

A large portion of our conversation focused on the vaccine, as the vaccine is a critical piece in the ability to return to work. There is a lot of variation in the approaches to vaccinations. Like the DEI committees mentioned in the previous section, we learned that many of the participating roundtable institutions have created vaccine committees. These committees must grapple with the hard questions. Do we mandate vaccines in order to come back to work? If we make a mandate and someone chooses not to return to work, do we fire them?

Many of the roundtable participants shared that they will not mandate the vaccine. One of the participating roundtable institutions shared that they are not mandating vaccines because of their pro-vaccine workforce. In conducting a poll of faculty and staff, this institution learned that 97% of respondents are vaccinated or planning to be vaccinated prior to returning to work.

Another institution shared that their faculty and staff needed some encouragement to get the vaccine, so they are offering on-site vaccinations. If someone is not vaccinated, then the individual will have to go through weekly or biweekly testing.

What can compliance tell us? Gallagher's Employee Benefits Compliance team has created a range of resources on how to approach the vaccine for your workforce. We encourage you to review our COVID-19 Employer Vaccine Considerations and Checklist and watch our webinar, The Vaccine and Your Organization. For more information, please visit our COVID-19 Pandemic Hub.

Tomorrow's Priorities

We're all at various stages on route to the new normal. Our roundtable participants identified very important questions. If we don't have the ability to provide services and presence to students, then how will we maintain our student population? What positions need to be on-site to sustain our community? **"The new normal will look new, not normal."**

Data suggests there is a sweet spot to maximize engagement for remote workers. Highest levels of engagement are when working remotely three to four days and in the office one to two days. Lowest levels of engagement come from those working remotely none of the time or all of the time. As employers think about reopening workplaces and revisiting policies related to remote work, consider the value of continuing with a remote work policy, but also the impact of in-person contact and quality social connectedness on loneliness and overall engagement.

▶ **ROUNDTABLE POLL #3:** What is your plan for faculty/staff this fall (2021)?

0%	**50%**	**33%**	**17%**
Fully remote	Hybrid	Fully on-site	Unsure or still deciding

Many of our roundtable participants indicated that they are planning on being fully on campus this fall, but know they can't with social distancing requirements. Others want to get a majority of employees back safely to serve our students on campus. One institution indicated that basing some staff positions from home could be an **opportunity**—an opportunity to provide better service for our students by expanding hours of service (early hours, midday, late hours, etc.).

Gallagher's recent webinar, The Vaccine and Your Organization, brought visibility to how almost 2,000 employers are approaching their vaccine strategies. **How are organizations approaching the vaccine?**

83%	**41%**	**32%**	**27%**	**8%**	**9%**
Communicate the importance of the vaccine for population health	Establish HR policies related to the vaccine	Give employees paid time off to vaccinate	Provide employee incentives for vaccinating	Mandate employee vaccination for return to work	None of the above

When it comes to vaccinations, only 8% of employers planned to mandate vaccination for employees returning to work. Such a low rate suggests the implementation challenges and potential liability that flow from this decision are giving all types of employers pause.

While many are not requiring the vaccine for faculty and staff, it is a more common requirement for students. As of May 14, 2021, T*he Chronicle of Higher Education'*s tracking indicated that out of 375 institutions requiring students to be vaccinated next fall, only 127 of them are requiring employees to be vaccinated. How can we require vaccines for students yet not faculty and staff? This is a question that many are still facing. It's easier to require vaccines for students, amongst the other vaccine requirements.

If employers make the difficult choice to mandate vaccination, they'll want to plan ahead to address resistance. It's important to pay special attention to meeting reasonable accommodation requests from employees who qualify based on health conditions or religious beliefs. It may be more broadly helpful to identify measures that can increase participation and ensure safe interactions with those who are not vaccinated.

TITLE IX

In May 2020, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced guidance that narrowed the definition of sexual misconduct. It granted accused students the right to a representative who could cross-examine accusers in a formal proceeding. Since then, the Biden administration has announced steps in revamping these rules.

The insurance market has changed along with the presidential rulings. Changes have been made in the insurance market for Title IX, such as broadening the definition of sexual abuse/molestation and reporting officers, and adding coverage for the respondent's representative. The Title IX respondent-to-victim ratio is approximately 50/50.

▶ **ROUNDTABLE POLL #4:** Have you made 2020 reforms to your Title IX processes?

50% = Yes	**50% =** Yes, and now we're waiting to see what the Biden administration does for further adjustments

Current State

Even after the May 2020 rules became effective, about half of claims come from victims and half from respondents. Many institutions got tied up in negligence and failed to properly respond to Title IX claims. This emphasizes the need to properly respond to reports of abuse.

Our panelists expressed a lot of frustration with comments such as:

- "As soon as we made updates to our old policies and procedures, we get notified of new updates."

- "We are in compliance with recent rules and are waiting to see what changes will come with the Biden administration."

- "It seems that the 2020 Trump rules put a chilling effect on victims, as we saw less people report."

- Trump's Title IX ruling "was discouraging people from making complaints because they had to physically face the respondent/abuser. I'm not sure if that affected our reporting numbers, since maybe being remote affected the number of incidents to report."

Tomorrow's Priorities

The Biden administration has announced next steps in overhauling Title IX campus sexual assault rules. They're allowing for the public to weigh in on how schools should respond when a student reports sexual misconduct. Since we don't know the extent of the Biden administration's changes, many are going to wait and see.

Are you taking the appropriate steps? Title IX claims are unique because there are two types of policies: bodily injury (general liability) and allegations of harassment. For these types of claims, you would want one insurance company covering both. An improper adjudication of the claim falls under your D&O review.

CYBER

Current State

There has been an increase in frequency and severity of cyber attacks in higher education in the past year. Paul Davis from Gallagher's Cyber practice said, "The rapid shift to distance learning and remote work dramatically increased the attack surface... Many more devices were logging in remotely, and not every institution had the proper controls in place to manage access." Core cyberthreats include:

Hacking

Use of a computer to gain unauthorized access to data in a system.

Ransomware

A form of malware designed to allow hackers to take data hostage and demand ransom payment in return.

Social Engineering

The psychological manipulation of people into performing harmful actions or divulging confidential information that would result in extortion demands for money/cryptocurrency.

Human Element

These can be errors, mistakes or malicious actions. While these threats may lack malicious intent, the human element is uncontrollable and results in business email compromise (BEC).

One roundtable panelist shared, **"it's happening to us right now."** This institution had the appropriate software in place to protect against the various cyberthreats mentioned above—but then there's the human element. An employee responded to a phishing email, which caused the encryption software to kick in and shut all systems down. This roundtable participant shared, "you can have all the best software in the world, but if an employee gives up a password, what do you do?"

▶ **ROUNDTABLE POLL #5:** Do you have a post-incident response ready (business disruption, economic loss, claims, etc.)?

50% Yes	**40%** Unsure
10% No	**0%** No, but we're working on it this year
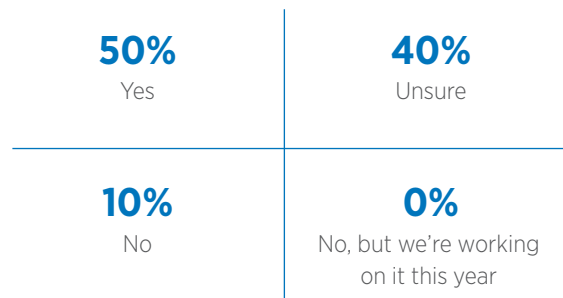
Higher education industry data is extremely valuable and remains a high-priority target for hackers. Identifying and addressing cyber exposures minimizes threats that can result in:

- Unauthorized access to confidential information (account numbers, credit cards/debit cards/loan information)
- Hacking, misconfiguration or failure of technology including mobile devices, mobile platforms, cloud services and ATM machines
- Damage to information assets
- Disruption to critical first- and third-party information processing systems
- Unauthorized access to employee personally identifiable/ health information
- Business email compromise (BEC)
- Theft of funds as a result of social engineering
- Theft of intellectual property/research

For more information on cyber risk, access Gallagher's library of educational webinars: https://www.ajg.com/us/cyber-webinars/

Tomorrow's Priorities

As we are seeing an increase in claims, prices are going up for cyber insurance, with best practice recommending that you have a call with your insurance carrier before an incident occurs (forensic, legal, etc.). Here are Gallagher's recommendations for cyber risk management due diligence. Prioritize key cyber risk concerns and understand your exposures.

1. Identify critical assets, vulnerabilities, gaps and cyber preparedness.

2. Test and remediate endpoint risks.

3. Enhance security governance, incident detection and protocols.

4. Predetermine financial impact due to a cyber incident.

5. Explore risk transfer solutions to minimize balance sheet risk.

6. Limit business disruption, minimize economic loss and expedite claims.

MENTAL HEALTH

According to the Inside Higher Ed 2021 Survey of College & University Presidents, 96% of presidents are very or somewhat concerned about student mental health and 94% are very or somewhat concerned about employee mental health.

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST STRUGGLE WITH WORKING REMOTELY?

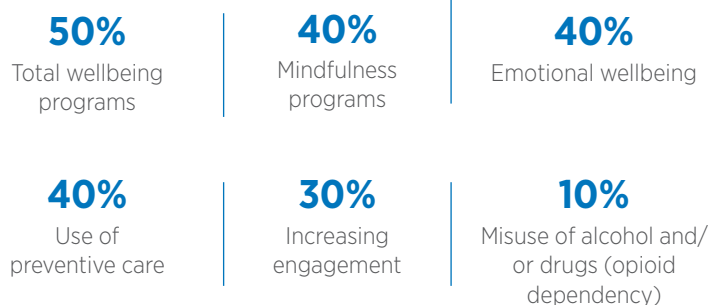| **20%**	**20%**	**18%**	**12%**	**10%**	**20%**
Collaboration and communication	Loneliness	Not being able to unplug	Distractions at home	Being in a different time zone than teammates	Other

Source: Gallagher Better Works Insights Report, COVID-19: Returning to the Workplace in a New Reality

Current State

Employers are doing more to support employee mental health. Our roundtable participants shared the various efforts they've made in regards to mental health resources, such as sending COVID-19 care packages, having speakers from student health talk about stress/burnout, and offering online meditation classes and monthly sessions with their employee assistance program (EAP). But is it enough? Are those the most effective resources that employees need?

▶ **POLL #6:** Which of these issues have you addressed on your campus? (Select all that apply.)

50%	**40%**	**40%**
Total wellbeing programs	Mindfulness programs	Emotional wellbeing

40%	**30%**	**10%**
Use of preventive care	Increasing engagement	Misuse of alcohol and/ or drugs (opioid dependency)

A profound shift in this last year was the adoption of telemedicine for both medical and behavioral health. The immediacy and privacy of telemedicine works especially well for mental health counseling, and adoption has been strong thanks to the widespread availability of mobile devices. Since telemedicine behavioral health support will continue to be a priority, Gallagher has partnered with Teladoc Health, an international leader in virtual visits. Now you can offer virtual primary care and behavioral health services to all your students. For more information, contact your Gallagher representative.

Tomorrow's Priorities

Accessibility to mental health resources is a key objective. Per the Columbia College position paper:

"One alarming national trend in recent years has been the ever-increasing prominence of student mental health issues. As an example, suicide rates nationally increased 35 percent over the years 1999–2018; suicide ideation has also been on a steady rise. In recent years we have devoted additional resources to respond to students' mental health needs; this will remain an institutional priority for the foreseeable future. Ironically, the COVID-19 pandemic-inspired shift to tele-mental health counseling may prove to be a beneficial and lasting innovation in mental health intervention."

The whole person comes to work each day. One's overall wellbeing has many dimensions: **physical, mental, financial, community and career wellbeing.** If even one area of wellbeing is off, it can affect an employees overall wellbeing and engagement. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 60% of Americans are living with at least one chronic medical condition and 50% of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness during their lifetime. These conditions effect an employee's individual and organizational performance.

It's important that managers and campus leaders build a safe and supportive work environment that addresses each of these areas of wellbeing to best support employees and increase engagement. In order to deliver the appropriate resources to employees, we must provide the appropriate resources and training to managers. Whether you're fully on-site, fully remote or in a hybrid setting, managers need to adequately address their employees. If an employee is experiencing a mental health issue, managers need to know how to identify the issue and respond with appropriate resources.

DATA SOURCES

Internal Sources

- Gallagher Better Works Insights Report 2020 Volume 3—COVID-19: Returning to the Workplace in a New Reality

- Gallagher Better Works Insights Report 2020 Volume 4—Thinking Differently: Culture, Costs & Community

- Gallagher Better Works Insights Report 2021 Q1—The Path Forward

- Gallagher Better Works Insights Report 2021 Q2—Adapting for Tomorrow

External Sources

- *Inside Higher Ed:* Antinomies in the Concepts of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- *Inside Higher Ed*: 2021 Survey of College & University Presidents

- NBC News: Biden Administration Announces Next Steps in Overhauling Title IX Campus Sexual Assault Roles

- *The Chronicle of Higher Education:* Cyberattacks Are Spiking. Colleges Are Fighting Back

- *Duke Today*: A Remote Work Future at Duke

- Columbia College, President Kwang-Wu Kim Position Paper: Distinctiveness, Value and Purpose: Building Our Brighter Future

- CDC: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

- CDC: Learn About Mental Health

Roundtable Participants

- Columbia College: Norma DeJesus, Human Resources Executive

- Highland Community College: Karen Brown, Director, Human Resources

- Illinois Valley Community College: Leslie Hofer, Director, Human Resources

- Kishwaukee College: Cindy McCluskey, Executive Director, Human Resources

- Lake Land College: Dustha Wahls, Director, Human Resources

- Lincoln College: Kristen Robinson, Vice President, Human Resources

- National Louis University: Tom Bergmann, Vice President, Human Resources

- National Louis University: Holly Battaglia, Director, Human Resources

- Rosalind Franklin University: Sally Madden, Associate Vice President, Human Resources

- Rosalind Franklin University: Mary Tell, Director, Human Resources

- The University of Illinois: Katie Ross, Assistant Vice President, System Human Resources
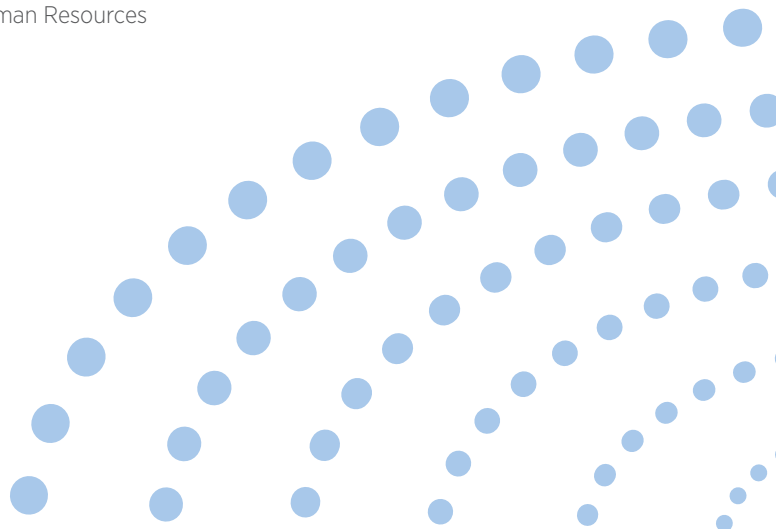
CLOSING REMARKS

We are pleased to bring you the insights and resources featured at the 2021 Resiliency Roundtable. As we all tackle the challenges this new normal will bring, we should also look at the opportunities that have presented themselves during this year of change. A strategic review of your policies, philosophies and positions on the topics discussed here allows us to gauge your strategic place among your peers. The stakes are high in academia, in needing to be competitive in both the local market for staff and the higher ed market for faculty. A strong focus and position in the areas of DEI, remote work options and mental health will allow you to better attract and retain your desired competitive workforce.

Repositioning existing Title IX and cyber protections and policies, as well as a renewed look at newer options, can provide cost-effective solutions to reduce the risks your institutions face.

Total rewards form the backbone of a culture that promotes affinity. The more closely they align with workforce demographics and job types, the more strongly they appeal to employees and serve as reliable attachment points to the organization. Communication is key to perception: Strong values and a compelling vision for the future need to be shared with the workforce and aligned with their incentives. Key drivers of engagement include career wellbeing opportunities and personalized, consistent and comprehensive communications that reach employees with the right message at the right time. Transparent commitments to diversity, social responsibility and a respectful workplace are often top selling points for both attracting and retaining employees. A strong culture can also be reflected in a strong employer brand, instilling pride in current employees, and capturing the attention of future faculty and staff.

There is no single solution for attracting and retaining employees that works equally well for all employers, but there is a singular process for filling that void. Coordinated changes in the employee wellbeing investment portfolio, including the physical, emotional, financial and career dimensions, can help resolve current challenges and promote the growth of the entire institution. These investments are essential to remaining relevant and gaining ground in the markets for both business and talent. And they need the support of strong HR technologies, solid compliance frameworks and effectively targeted communications.

We hope that this report has provided you with thought leadership and resources, while also providing you with actionable steps to improve upon those areas that are straying. From any starting point, any employer can drive progress toward better total rewards outcomes by promoting innovative, aligned programs.

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