The Blended Institution of Higher Education

A Model for a Sustainable Institution

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About the Organizations

The DETA Center (DETACenter.org) was established as the National Research Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements in 2014 with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. DETA conducts and supports rigorous research from the course level to cross-institutional studies for all educational institutional types (K-20), with a particular focus on traditionally underrepresented students. This enables DETA to help partners strategically ensure quality experiences and improve student access and success through thoughtful implementation, evaluation, and scaling of proven instructional and institutional practices and technologies.

The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) is a collaborative community of education leaders and innovators dedicated to advancing quality digital teaching and learning experiences designed to reach and engage the modern learner — anyone, anywhere, anytime. OLC inspires innovation and quality through an extensive set of resources, including best-practice publications, quality benchmarking, leading-edge instruction, community-driven conferences, practitioner-based and empirical research, and expert guidance. The growing OLC community includes faculty members, administrators, trainers, instructional designers, and other learning professionals, as well as educational institutions, professional societies, and corporate enterprises. Learn more at onlinelearningconsortium.org.

Every Learner Everywhere is a network of twelve partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies, curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. Our collaborative work aims to advance equity in higher education centers on the transformation of postsecondary teaching and learning. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institution practices and market trends. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit everylearnereverywhere.org.

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Executive Summary

The Blended Institution of Higher Education: A Model for a Sustainable Institution presents a vision for an innovative institutional model informed by research and analyses. It is a model that moves beyond the proven blended course and program models to an institutional-level model. Like blended learning, the blended institution of higher education (BIHE) positions students and their success at the center. It prioritizes equity to ensure success for all students — in particular, historically minoritized and other traditionally underrepresented students. The BIHE combines an array of technological and process elements to blend and thoughtfully integrate instruction, learning, support, and services for students. Blending these elements ensures relevant outcomes — or student success — align with the needs of the students while considering external factors, including needs of the evolving workforce and society.

The BIHE provides a vision and guides strategic planning for leaders for the future in developing their own version of the BIHE. This model was developed, in part, using systems thinking to analyze external (e.g., economics) and internal (e.g., organizational culture) factors informing the model of the blended institution of higher education. It provides academic leaders a broad view of factors and their influence as well as where internal shifts are needed to respond to these factors. Additionally, this view includes consideration of different components of an institution's core functions situated within the context of external factors while being informed by research (e.g., what works, what is needed). The model guides leaders in building sustainable institutions by performing systems thinking and implementing a responsive and proactive institutional strategy that can create conditions for stability even in uncertain times.

In guiding leaders beyond reactive management strategies to strategic leadership, this resource examines the relationship between an institutional system and its environment while considering the needed transformation of internal components and the interrelatedness of those internal components. It presents a vision for the BIHE, so leaders can successfully plan strategic efforts and carry out activities while considering a primary outcome of the institution, student success, as a key to sustainability. With attention to deconstructing barriers to student success and creating equitable experiences, academic leaders can catalyze strategic institutional change creating an environment for sustainability.

“The model guides leaders in building sustainable institutions by performing systems thinking and implementing a responsive and proactive institutional strategy that can create conditions for stability even in uncertain times.”

This guide:

- presents a new institutional model that is needed to support postsecondary leaders' strategic planning to effectively respond to the evolving needs during this pandemic and beyond,
- applies systems thinking to analyze external and internal factors and their relationship with existing models to postsecondary institutions,
- incorporates research-informed principles of blended learning (e.g., student-centered and carefully integrated while scaffolding the student experience), expanding them to the institutional level,
- advocates for leaders, faculty, instructors, and staff to center on the students to ensure quality learning and student success, and
- reduces barriers for students with prioritization for building systems to support equitable experiences.

Beyond presenting the new BIHE institutional model, this guide provides additional resources for leaders to consider in bringing these ideas into action.

Intended audience and purpose

The Blended Institution of Higher Education: A Model of Sustainable Institutions...

Serves as a resource for academic leaders in postsecondary education, including private or public, two-year or four-year, associates to doctorate-granting, and others, in guiding strategic activities focused on planning and supporting their institution's immediate and long-term digital future.

Provides a vision for a sustainable institutional model to guide academic leaders to transform their institutions. This guide supports the transition of leaders from reactively managing to strategically leading the development of their BIHE and offers leaders a sustainable institutional model that centers on student equity and success.

This resource is a collaboration among OLC, DETA, and Every Learner Everywhere. For more on blended or hybrid course-level considerations, see Planning for a Blended Future: A Research-Driven Guide for Educators, which provides concise guidance on rethinking instruction, pedagogy, design, and learning.

Introduction

> **“The promise of the blended institution is restorative and transformative. It provides a moment to create an orchestral arrangement of opportunities and experiences through strategic activities centering the student of our time and preparing for the evolutionary student of the future.”**

The time to act to develop a sustainable institution is now. For academic administrators leading institutions during uncertain times, the need to respond to rapid change arrives daily and serves as a reminder that education can only move forward, never backward. Amidst changes in student demographics and projected enrollment declines (see National Student Clearing Research Center, 2021) scattered across the backdrop of campus closures (see Alexander, 2021) across the United States, academic leaders in postsecondary education are aware of the urgent call to action to create conditions to support institutional sustainability. Correspondingly, in response to the long-term impact of emergency remote learning on student success, academic leaders are increasingly focusing their institutional efforts on meeting the needs of and better supporting students. A key to achieving institutional sustainability and student success, especially during these uncertain times, comes through strategic leadership and consideration of new institutional models that encapsulate some of these changes.

The purpose of the blended institution of higher education (BIHE), the proposed institutional model, conceptually moves beyond the sprint to launch academic continuity plans and centers the students to integrate students’ experiences throughout the institution strategically. It creates new opportunities for students to meet their needs through experiences — courses and programs, services, and community — that rely on on-site and online interactions that thoughtfully consider students’ time and provide flexibility. The promise of the blended institution is restorative and transformative. It provides a moment to create an orchestral arrangement of opportunities and experiences through strategic activities centering the student of our time and preparing for the evolutionary student of the future.

Leaders' planning efforts can rapidly and thoughtfully evolve as they work toward a blended future to develop sustainable postsecondary institutions, a change many institutions appear poised to make. As research indicates, a majority of leaders report the pivot to emergency remote learning caused a change in their institutional identity, shifted their institution's strategic priorities, or prompted a reexamination of institutional identity or strategic priorities (Garrett, Simunich, Legon, & Fredericksen, 2021). The BIHE model guides academic leaders as they respond to this change and develop new strategic priorities and directions.

The new model provides vision and creates an opportunity for academic leaders to apply systems thinking to analyze their new environment while reflecting on what they have learned during the pandemic about remote work, services, instruction, and learning. By examining student and institutional data and collecting new, relevant data, leaders can identify what worked well and what needs attention to guide strategic planning and incorporate into their new and emerging institutional model.

RESOURCE ALERT

Garrett, R., Simunich, B., Legon, R., & Fredericksen, E. E. (2021). *2021 CHLOE 6: Online learning leaders adapt for a post-pandemic world.* Quality Matters. qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/resource-center/articles-resources/CHLOE-project

Why systems thinking?

Systems thinking has many noted benefits — it provides leaders with perspective, can be used as a vehicle for analysis of organizational functioning, can improve institutional outputs, can be used to manage strategy or strategically plan for the future, useful in understanding complex systems with related parts and multiple levels, results in quicker and more efficient progress forward, can be used to manage organization change, and is relevant for use in higher education (see Cabrera, Cabrera, Power, Solin, & Kushner, 2017; Furst-Bowe, 2011; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Meadows, 2008; Moore, Trust, Lockee, Bond, & Hodges, 2021; Poole, 1997; Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

In leading campuses into the future, a systems approach provides practicality and utility in the wake of the tremendous change to university and college, global, and societal systems.

RESOURCE ALERT

Moore, S., Trust, T., Lockee, B.B., Bond, M.A., & Hodges, C.B. (2021, November 10). One year later . . . and counting: Reflections on emergency remote teaching and online learning. *EDUCAUSE Review.* https://er.educause.edu/articles/2021/11/one-year-later-and-counting-reflections-on-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

This resource encourages leaders in adopting a broad view to analyze their institutions' priorities, structure, and operations with consideration for different changing factors, external and internal, and their relatedness to inform a renewed vision. While the model is novel, most institutions have been contemplating the influence of social, economic, technological, political, and legal external factors for years. However, the pandemic has created a new urgent, pressing, and immense external factor, that of environment or health, with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus and its variants, which has accelerated institutions' need to shift in the continuously changing environment.

This shift includes efforts to ensure sustainability by focusing on students' needs and success while providing ubiquitous support, services, and learning experiences for all students through thoughtful integration of modalities (technological, spatial, and temporal). Just as blended and hybrid learning is a potential solution to a pandemic at the course or at a micro-level of an institution (see Joosten, Weber, Baker, Schletzbaum, & McGuire, 2021), the blending of an institution while focusing on a student and their success has considerable potential to enhance the student experience and their success in return creating sustainability for an institution. The proposed BIHE is an institutional model that considers how to sustain in this urgently changing environment. The key is the student.

RESOURCE ALERT

Joosten, T., Weber, N., Baker, M., Schletzbaum, A., & McGuire, A. (2021). *Planning for a blended future: A research-driven guide for educators*. Every Learner Everywhere. https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/

"This resource encourages leaders in adopting a broad view to analyze their institutions' priorities, structure, and operations with consideration for different changing factors, external and internal, and their relatedness to inform a renewed vision."

Vision for a New Institutional Model

> **“Designed in a way that centers students’ needs and success, the BIHE values students and asserts that their needs should be met on or off campus and experiences should be equitable.”**

The BIHE is an innovative model where the institution is developed around the student in consideration of the fact that each student comes with different experiences. It centrally positions students and their success, including student outcomes. Access, equity, and success are tightly woven together. While the desired outcomes drive the shift in the organizational model, they also are used to evaluate its effectiveness. Additionally, the desired outcomes are relevant to the external and internal factors in which students, institutions, and society find themselves in the wake of a pandemic. A shift in pertinent outcomes responding to student and societal needs may be required.

Leaders can analyze how external and internal factors are influencing their students’ needs, experiences, and outcomes. Rapidly evolving **external factors** influence students’ needs coming to the institution (e.g., social and business technology interactions, sociocultural influences, economic pressure), their expectations for what they will get in return from the institution (e.g., altered economic status, ability to contribute to society and solve societal problems), and their experiences within the institution (e.g., inclusive, relevant, informed, involved, and fun). Leaders and institutions can examine **internal factors** that are influencing students’ experiences and success (e.g., structures, policies, procedures, resources, and interactions).

Leaders can take action. They can identify what is working and what barriers exist for students to learn and develop, use services, and get support. While identifying what is working at their own institution, through research or by using tools (e.g., OLC Quality Scorecard for Blended Learning Programs), leaders can scale proven practices, such as those found in blended learning programs.

The BIHE model scales a model that has been proven at the course and program levels to the institution level in response to external factors, while demanding some shifting in internal components, their structure, and their interconnectedness within universities and colleges. Centering the student in courses, programs, and institutions is critical. Designed in a way that centers students' needs and success, the BIHE values students and asserts that their needs should be met on or off campus and experiences should be equitable. As a proven approach to learning, student-centered and active learning leads to equal or better outcomes for students and for racially minoritized students (Joosten et al., 2021; Joosten, Harness, Poulin, Davis, & Baker, 2021). Improving student outcomes can be accomplished by scaling up a blended model, including strategically and intentionally integrating modalities to better align with the requirements of students to enhance their potential to achieve success across the institution (Joosten & Picciano, 2021).

RESOURCE ALERT

Joosten, T., Harness, L. Poulin, R., Davis, V., & Baker, M. (2021). *Research review: Educational technologies and their impact on student success for racial and ethnic groups of interest.* WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technology. https://wcet.wiche.edu/initiatives/research

While driven by research and experience, the scaling of proven blended learning models to the institutional level remediates reactions to the external factor of rapid changes in environment and health while leveraging another external factor of technological advancements. For example, emergency remote teaching or a shift of instructional delivery involving the use of online solutions led to lower quality courses in some cases because of the lack of resources to develop these courses using the appropriate research-based practices (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2021). These online solutions are available due to technological advancements in industry and have been applied to educational settings to provide new and reliable video solutions, such as Zoom. By strategically responding to this reactive shift within universities and colleges, new models will improve quality processes and outcomes.

RESOURCE ALERT

Hodges, C. B., Moore, S., Lockee, B. B., Trust, T., & Bond, M. A. (2020, March 27). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *EDUCAUSE Review*. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

As a global health pandemic pushed institutions to remote teaching and instruction, internal factors within the institution needed to quickly respond through the existing capacity to offer instruction, learning, and services at a distance. In many cases, institutional capacity needed for the transition to emergency remote operations was unavailable. Yet, while internal factors such as prior investments in faculty development and preparedness, technology infrastructure and experience, instructional and student support staff, and student social involvement influenced quality or highlighted weaknesses across institutions, students reported that they desired the flexibility that digital learning, including online and blended, offered and hoped to continue to be able to complete learning activities off campus (Joosten, Pfeifer-Luckett, Baker, Schletzbaum, & Craig, 2021; Kelly, 2021). A conclusion is to center the students and their needs and more thoughtfully scale a blended approach to the institutional level in order to build capacity, achieve quality and success, and ensure sustainability.

When discussing student success as traditionally measured by their outcomes (persistence, degree completion), changing external factors such as economics and sociocultural factors are also influencing not only the construct of success from a student's perspective but also their pathway to success. A reconsideration of obtaining a degree as success for students or moving through a traditional degree program is needed, as these standard outcomes and pathways are quickly evolving as economic changes were experienced prior to the pandemic and even more so due to the pandemic.

For instance, due to skills demand and labor shortages, some employers are changing or dropping their degree requirements. Some nontraditional students with years of career experience are seeking flexible, self-paced options to a degree to ensure credentialing and retain their job in their field and may benefit from an alternative pathway to a degree, such as blended competency-based education. Alternatively, external changes in labor demands are opening up jobs for students with skill-based training. Therefore, success may be a blended alternative degree pathway, such as micro-credentialing or badging programs that are non-degree or have a pathway to credit at a later date.

RESOURCE ALERT

Joosten, T., Pfeifer-Luckett, R., Baker, M., Schletzbaum, A., & Craig, K. (2021). *The digital learning environment experience: A University of Wisconsin System study.* The National Research Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements. https://www.detaresearch.org/news/publications

While the government and institutions have deemed success as retention and graduation rates, and while students want to graduate as well, students' view of success is to gain employment, move beyond their financial circumstances, feel included (socially and academically) in their college experience, enjoy their experience and have fun, have little debt after graduation, and live a fulfilling life where they can positively contribute to solving societal problems. These measures of success are not typical to the institution or the government, but yet they are important to students and should be considered in new models.

Nimbly responding to students' views of success and external changes in labor demands is crucial to institutional sustainability efforts. As leaders design and redesign programs as a part of their overall strategy, they must understand student and market needs. For instance, a market analysis can be conducted to gauge the demand for degree programs by understanding the external market conditions (Pedrick & Joosten, 2014). Some institutions use new reports from companies (e.g., EMSI Burning Glass) and organizations (e.g., Business Higher Education Forum) that provide reporting of labor demands for skills (Markow, Hughes, & Bundy, 2018), while some institutions and programs contract with market research firms to examine the demand for new programs. Similarly to the design and redesign of programs, the BIHE thrives on understanding market trends, gathering student needs, and responding efficiently and effectively.

Many academic leaders (and students) have realized through the experiences of the pandemic that their institutional models lacked the capacity to respond to the demands or needs of students and did not possess the ability to strategically integrate multiple modalities across the institution to align with those. No one thinks about whether or not a Fortune 500 company should be using online technologies to work and connect with each other and their clients. Yet, some postsecondary institutions had been less convinced prior to the pandemic that their organizations should be effectively operating more virtually and online. Now is the time for institutional leaders to respond to these factors and transform their institutional model, so that they can sustain.

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Consequently, the pandemic has broadened discussions and understandings about shifting to more quality interactions and experiences for students, with a focus on equity and inclusiveness and guarantees of success. For instance, faculty report that their primary instructional priority is improving equity and access (Fox, Khedkar, Bryant, NeJame, Dorn, & Nguyen, 2021). Leaders have inherent potential to employ a blended institutional approach, the BIHE, to shift to a more effective institutional model that focuses on the experiences of students. The BIHE offers academic leaders a path forward for creating institutions that can weather external factors and leverage institutional strengths to ensure their immediate and long-term success.

RESOURCE ALERT

Fox, K., Khedkar, N., Bryant, G., NeJame, L., Dorn, H., Nguyen, A. *Time for class – 2021*. Tyton Partners. https://tytonpartners.com/library/time-for-class-2021-the-state-of-digital-learning-and-courseware-adoption/

Specifically, the vision of the BIHE **focuses on centering students' needs and success, ensuring equitable and inclusive experiences, and intentionally integrating modalities throughout an institution for a quality postsecondary education.** Core to this, the BIHE accomplishes the following:

- **Promotes institutional sustainability and growth.** BIHEs and the framework for implementing them leverage systems thinking to drive understandings of institutional inner workings and how to shift them to weather evolving conditions and create potential for growth.
- **Strengthens students as the focus of the postsecondary experience.** BIHEs recognize that students' needs have never been more critical and are ever-transforming due to external factors. BIHEs also ensure students' academic and social involvement remain at the center of an institution's mission, vision, and purpose.
- **Meets students where they are.** BIHEs cohesively integrate an array of modalities (e.g., technologies, locations, times) in providing support, services, courses, and programs to provide greater flexibility while reducing barriers for students for a quality and effective education.
- **Prepares students and promotes their success.** BIHEs prepare students for their job, career and profession, role as global citizens, and a life of learning through thoughtfully designed learning, support, and community.

> **“The BIHE offers a thoughtful compilation of opportunities for learning and support through digital, blended or hybrid, and fully online experiences within and outside the classroom.”**

So what will it look like?

The vision for the BIHE is important for leaders to better understand where they may be going while employing systems thinking to identify where to shift from where they are.

Three key elements of the BIHE model include:

1. **centering student needs and success,**
2. **ensuring equitable and inclusive experiences, and**
3. **integrating modalities across the institution.**

These three elements inform opportunities throughout an institution.

BIHE leaders advance innovation in technology and practice (e.g., business services, academic services, instruction and teaching, research). Leaders also leverage modalities (e.g., digital practices and technologies) to meet students' transforming needs through all interactions with the college or university. Students receive ubiquitous support and services whether on campus or remote. Moreover, while a university or college offers programs and courses, they respond to new digital advances and also offer alternative pathways. A shift in programming, services, and instruction as well as in infrastructure (e.g., technology, human, resources) may be needed.

In addition, BIHE leaders ensure quality in student experience, learning, and success through their certificate or degree, or through their lifetime. Institutions may offer an array of programming opportunities from the nontraditional to the traditional. The program opportunities include activities to progress or document knowledge, skills, and abilities through strategies such as credit transfer, prior learning assessment, competency-based education, credentialing, badging, certificates, and traditional degrees. Programming may blend the traditional campus experiences with innovative approaches to developing experiences with varied experts and partnerships with organizations and corporations regionally and globally. A shift in lifelong equitable and inclusive programming may be needed.

Furthermore, BIHE leaders ensure the BIHE provides quality, flexible, and relevant learning experiences to students that will provide them with the credentials, experiences, and abilities to potentially excel at their career and in life. While focus is typically on a blended model of a course or program (e.g., Joosten et al., 2021), the BIHE expands on those benefits, advancing them a step further to the institution level. The BIHE offers a thoughtful compilation of opportunities for learning and support through digital, blended or hybrid, and fully online experiences within and outside the classroom.

As students are centered to ensure their needs are met through their postsecondary experience, institutions must serve all students where they are. Taking an equity-minded lens, institutions must consider that students are coming to campus with different experiences and from different places. Students are participating in learning activities from various locations (libraries, classrooms, dorm rooms, parent's house, crowded apartments, cafes, or workplaces). Students appreciate the flexibility to better organize their lives and improve the quality of their learning through digital, blended, and online learning opportunities. To ensure students' success, institutions will create experiences to meet their needs no matter where they choose to participate in their learning taking into account their previous experiences and potential for growth. Moreover, institutions need to provide ubiquitous support, services, and opportunities across modalities - onsite or online, real-time or over time, through lean and rich technologies - or a blend of temporal, spatial, and technological modes (see Joosten et al., 2021).

Since students come from everywhere and with different experiences, social (and life) involvement is critical to meeting students' needs and their development. The pandemic highlighted the basic needs gaps for students and the importance of social connection. Institutions need to ensure security including housing, food, jobs, transportation, and technology through appropriate funding and support, including emergency loans, affordable tuition, and free texts and course materials.

Institutions must create opportunities for networks beyond the traditional walls of the institution using new and emerging techniques and technologies. These opportunities will help support students within school and beyond. They should have access to laptops and broadband as well as safe places to study. Also, they should know how to effectively use technology, manage their time, stay organized, communicate online, build online networks, and prioritize care for themselves. These skills will help students far beyond the university and college walls.

Importantly, students have family and health needs that need to be considered. The pandemic illustrated the role of family in students' lives and the importance of urgent physical and mental health services. Students should have ubiquitous access to care when needed across modalities. The pandemic has shown this is possible. Students should be able to have standard needs met in order to pursue their learning and development preparing for their profession and future contributions to society during a pandemic and beyond.

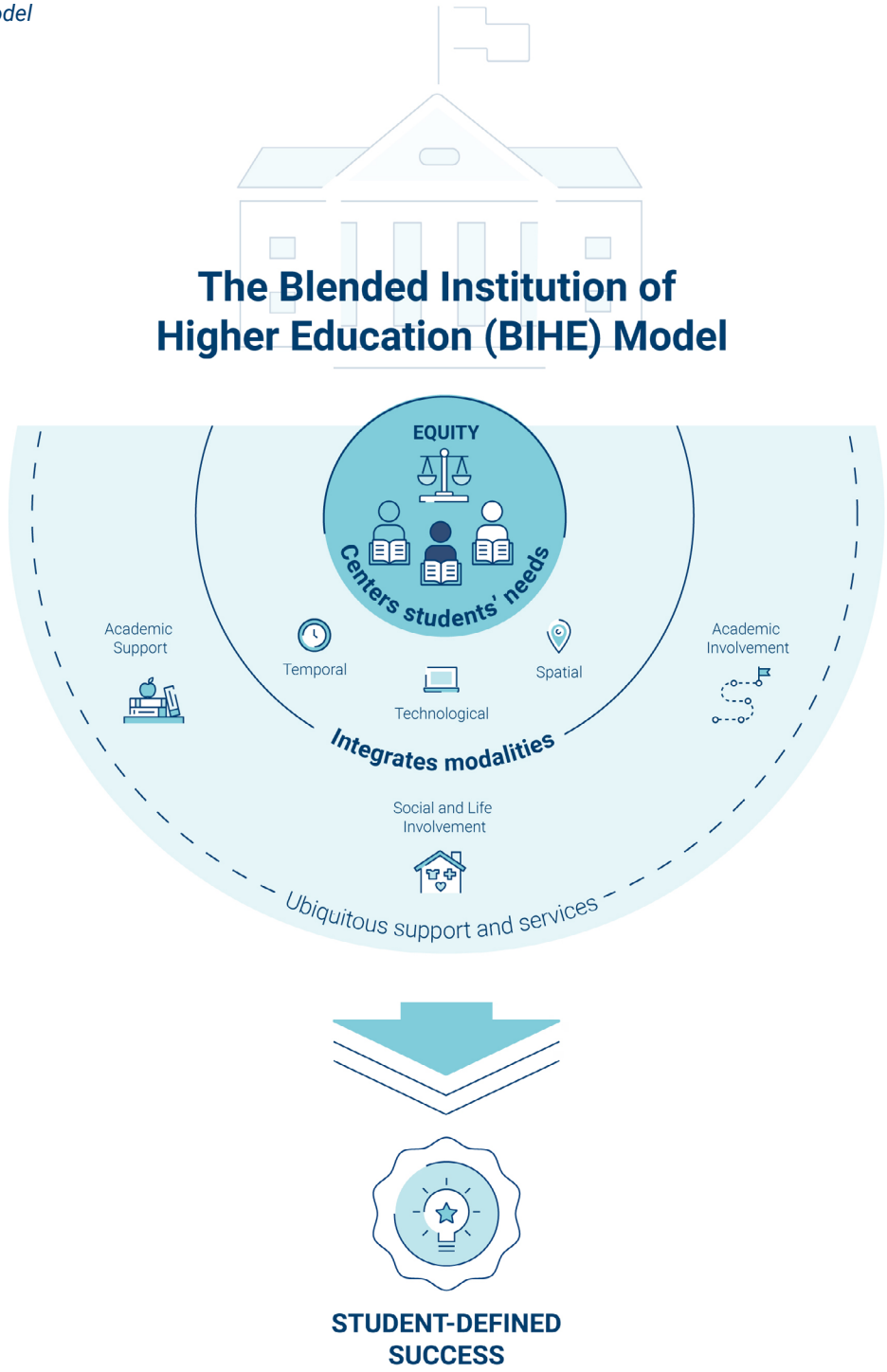
Student academic and social involvement within the institution creates an experience for students to learn, get support, and connect with others. To be responsive to changing external factors, academic and social involvement will shift as well. Academic support offered by advisors, tutors, librarians, and librarians or through supplemental experiences (e.g., research or internship) will need to consider these new modalities creating equitable opportunities, reducing barriers, and providing more flexibility to ensure success. Academic student support staff have shown great promise in these areas already due to their daily interactions with students and understanding of their needs, however, students need to feel that these staff are their first stop to support even when instincts may pull them to family and friends, especially for poverty affected, first generation, and racially minoritized students.

Rethinking academic involvement includes considering the external factors that influence where students come from and where they are going. The world has changed and so have students. There must be more alternative pathways and credit to job and degree for students for their future, including non-credit, prior learning assessments (PLA), micro credentialing, competency based education (CBE), bridge to credit, and badging. With the needs of the labor market quickly evolving, students must experience relevant curriculum that is inclusive, gain skills of the future and now, and be provided experiential learning opportunities while institutions consider industry's quickly changing job requirements and labor needs.

While the world has changed, students' idea of success is changing as well. Driven by their own seeking of peace and safety, fighting for social justice, or becoming a helper in solving the world's problems, success may be more than a degree and job placement. Institutions need to create spaces for students to achieve their definition of success.

"While the world has changed, students' idea of success is changing as well. Driven by their own seeking of peace and safety, fighting for social justice, or becoming a helper in solving the world's problems, success may be more than a degree and job placement. Institutions need to create spaces for students to achieve their definition of success.

FIGURE 1
The Complete BIHE Model



Essential Elements

> “Institutional leaders need to consider student needs holistically — how they learn, get support, socialize, and conduct business.”

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE BIHE

Centers on students’ needs and success

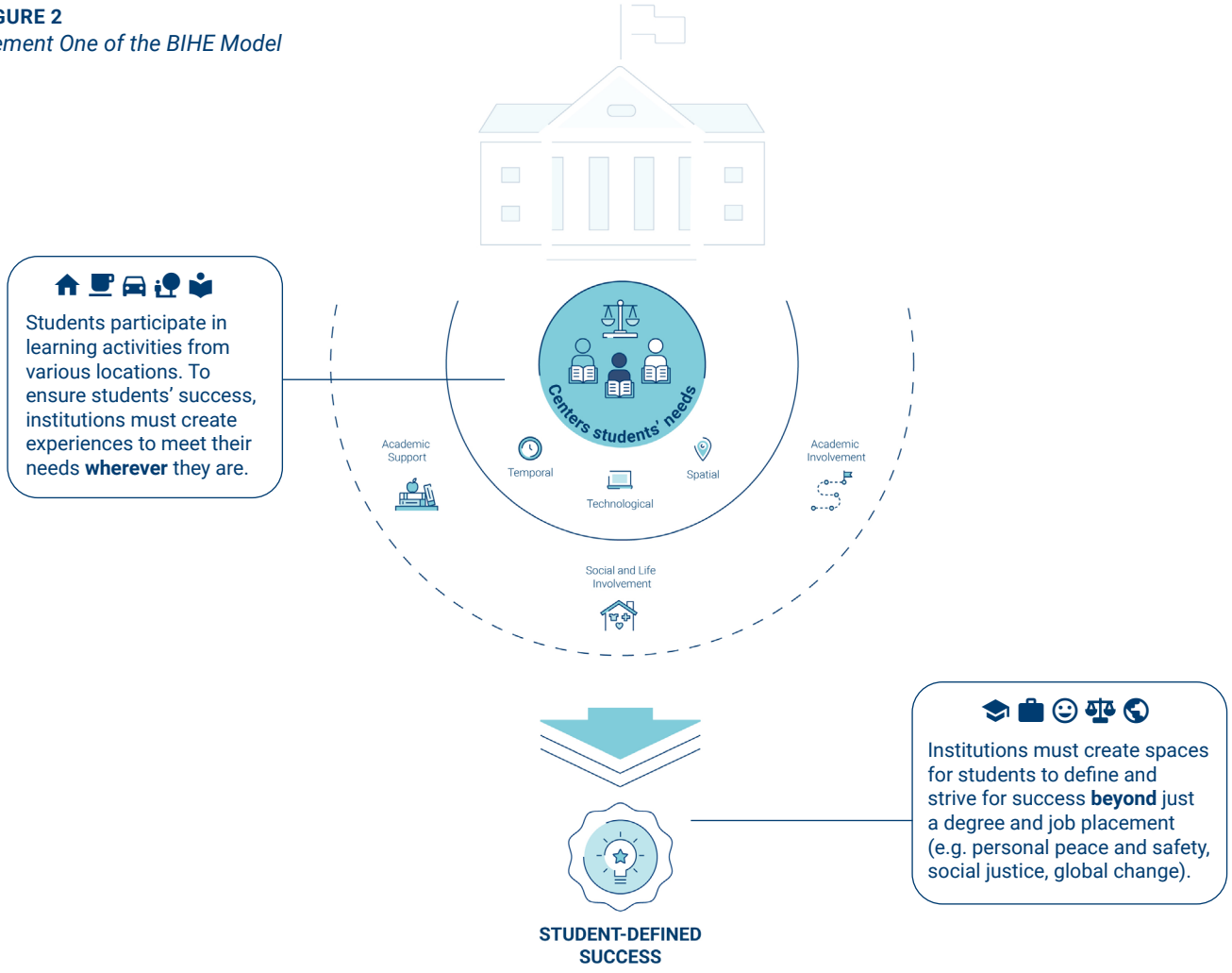
Ensures equitable experiences and outcomes

Integrates modalities across the institution

ELEMENT 1

Centering Students' Needs and Success

FIGURE 2
Element One of the BIHE Model



The **first element** of the BIHE vision focuses on centering **students' needs and success**. Students are the nucleus, the central and most valuable part of the institution, forming the basis for its activity and growth. As Brooks & Gierdowski (2021) implored, "Put students at the center (para 11). A student-centered institutional model guarantees central tenants of the mission of a university or college will be realized.

RESOURCE ALERT

Brooks, D. C., & Gierdowski, D. C. (2021, April 5). Student experiences with technology in the pandemic. *EDUCAUSE Research*. https://library.educause.edu/resources/2021/4/student-experiences-with-technology-in-the-pandemic

A goal of postsecondary education is to promote quality educational experiences that are equitable and to encourage student success within their courses and programs, including persistence and academic achievement, within each educational institution (see Higher Education Opportunity Act). The pandemic caused challenges for institutions in ensuring access and quality for students, yet some findings indicate that there are new and renewed opportunities based on student experiences (Hodges et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2021). By focusing on students' needs and success, new strategies can create opportunities for sustainability.

While students' success in college can come through learning, progressing through courses, and through a program of study, there are also notable experiences and successes from college that may not be included on the college transcript. These may include competencies and skills such as networking skills, self-esteem, independence, activism, worldliness, technology and digital literacy skills, organization, online work skills, online communication, and self-directedness (Shaffir, 2018; Joosten & Cusatis, 2020). These socioemotional needs and outcomes have been significantly highlighted due to the pandemic and notice of racial injustices. These factors must be considered in future institutional models. BIHE looks to blend the traditional construct of institutional success based on student persistence and completion with emerging constructs of success for students by students that include an array of competencies and societal impacts.

The documented outcomes of postsecondary education are important both today and tomorrow as the changes in our economic, sociocultural, and political systems have led to a critical time in our history. Students' success beyond their time at an institution is students' financial security through a job and career, and institutions are being held more accountable for this measurable outcome. Students need to be prepared for the demands of a rapidly evolving workforce to ensure their success beyond college. Evolving workforce needs will require students to develop enhanced competencies focused on digital building blocks, human skills, and business enablers (Markow et al., 2018). To respond to this gap, institutions will need to make significant investments in educational experiences that develop digital literacy, cultivate problem-solving skills, and integrate technologies effectively within an occupation to advance in their careers (Bashay, 2020). However, students are also looking beyond their economic goals to ensure that their socioemotional needs are met and that they are making a global contribution to society, such as advancing social justice. Student success guides the vision and involves measurable goals to evaluate progress continuously. The accuracy in capturing how students perceive student success needs to be performed and built into metrics and evaluation of progress.

Beyond the shift in the definition of students' success and desired outcomes due to the pandemic and other external factors, the BIHE also considers internal factors, such as student interactions throughout the institution and how those experiences influence their success and outcomes. Traditionally, the inner workings of the institutional systems were not engineered to create optimal student experiences but focused on inputs and outcomes of those with the potential or ability to persist. Institutions were primarily black boxes where students paid tuition and did or did not graduate. However, as there are fewer traditional-aged students, less tuition dollars, and greater insupportable budget models, more attention has been given to determining what works and what doesn't work in retaining students, all students, and helping them graduate without a heaping amount of debt.

By building the BIHE centering students, strategic activities can be performed to analyze students' interactions throughout the institution (faculty, instructors, staff, and other students) and design new experiences for students without the barriers to success — their idea of success. This analysis goes beyond the typical intervention of adding a student support service to help those who are not achieving or not achieving at an acceptable rate. It requires a rethinking of the internal systems, with student needs and success at center.

More than ever, these interactions must not be just exchanges of information based on logic alone but exchanges of care and empathy. BIHE leaders must not only fix broken systems of communication, information exchange, or business transactions by removing the burden from the students (e.g., due to poor institutional procedures and practices that lack digitization or efficiency) and place it on the institution. But leaders will need to ensure students receive care in their interactions inside and outside of the classroom.

Recent guidance exists to inform these analyses of interactions while centering students and the development of new strategic goals to improve student experiences with individuals throughout the institution. For instance, recommendations for leaders include:

- placing students at the center, focusing on their interactions, and providing consideration for empathy and care (Brooks & Gierdowski, 2021),
- understanding student needs through conducting departmental equity audits, interpreting data with students, and implementing findings into the course teaching practices (Gable et al., 2021),
- implementing practical strategies for centering students and their care in course design and teaching practices (e.g., Adams et al., 2021a; Gunder et al., 2021), and
- design, organize, and support students' learning experience focusing on active learning pedagogies to improve their learning and satisfaction, especially to ensure equity (Joosten, Cusatis, & Harness, 2019).

RESOURCE ALERT

Adams, S., Bali, M., Eder, Z., Fladd, L., Garrett, K., Garth-McCullough, R., Gibson, A. M., Gunder, A., Iuzzini, J., Knott, J. L., Rafferty, J. & Weber, N. L. (2021). *Caring for students playbook: Six recommendations for caring for students*. Every Learner Everywhere. https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/

RESOURCE ALERT

Joosten, T., Cusatis, R., & Harness, L. (2019). A cross-institutional study of instructional characteristics and student outcomes: Are quality indicators of online courses able to predict student success? *Online Learning, 23*(4), 354-378. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i4.1432

Leaders will need to commence strategic activities to alter and leverage existing internal structures. Brooks and Gierdowski (2021) noted, "The worst student experiences were inevitably linked to policies, practices and approaches...that were designed without the student experience in mind" (para 11). By focusing on students and their care in developing new goals, internal systems can be transformed and created to ensure success.

While most guidance is specific to interactions in the classroom (see Moore, 1989), moving beyond individual instructional and programmatic practices is necessary. Institutional leaders need to consider student needs holistically — how they learn, get support, socialize, and conduct business.

Students require ubiquitous digital opportunities to interact with other students, staff, faculty, instructors, and administrators across modalities (on-site or online, real-time or over time, and via text, audio, video, or a combination). These interactions can be individualized and flexible, empathetic when appropriate, and improve quality to positively influence students' experiences and success.

In order to ensure equitable student access and success, BIHE leaders should remove the burden of interaction with faculty and staff from the student and shift the responsibility to the institution. As such, academic leaders should recognize the system that surrounds a student is tied together by numerous interactions and analyze and identify new opportunities. For instance, some institutions (e.g., Portland State) have used design strategies to redesign the student experience from the student standpoint, leading to changes throughout the institution, units, staffing, procedures, and more. Developing strategic efforts can include centering on students, gathering their voices, defining success from their perspectives, identifying challenges through their experiences and interactions, and creating strategic activities to improve the internal system.

Student access and success are often a feature of blended learning courses and experiences (as well as digital and online). Due to the flexibility in time and location, students are able to better balance their lives because they can complete a portion of their learning activities online or at their own pace. During the pandemic, this integration of modalities provided flexibility and allowed for safety. This flexibility has had a lasting impact on students as they have expressed how much they appreciated this flexibility during the pandemic and would prefer a blending of on-site and online learning for their experience in future terms (Brooks & Gierdowski, 2021; Joosten et al., 2021; Kelly, 2021).

In addition to leveraging the strengths of the system and embracing flexibility in time and location, BIHE leaders must realize equity is a critical centerpiece of the student experience. Students' needs and success are the center of the system of the BIHE model on which all other interactions with staff, faculty, administration, and other students — through services, procedures, processes, and experiences, mediated by technology and moderated by resources — are built and are a key to the model's survival. The next section features a discussion of equity as a core institutional value of the BIHE; the shift that may be needed in institutional policies, strategies, planning, and resources; and potential strategies to jump-start developing an equitable organizational culture moving beyond the demographic numbers of access.

ELEMENT 1

Summary: Centering Students' Needs and Success

KEY REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How does your institution define student success? Do different groups (e.g., students, staff, instructors, administrators) define it differently? If so, how can you bring these together in your institution's vision?
- What external factors are influencing student success for your campus? How has the labor market in your region changed? What skills or competencies are your industry partners telling you they need?
- How is your institution currently engaging students academically and socially both on-site and online? What do you do well? What might you be missing? Are there barriers?

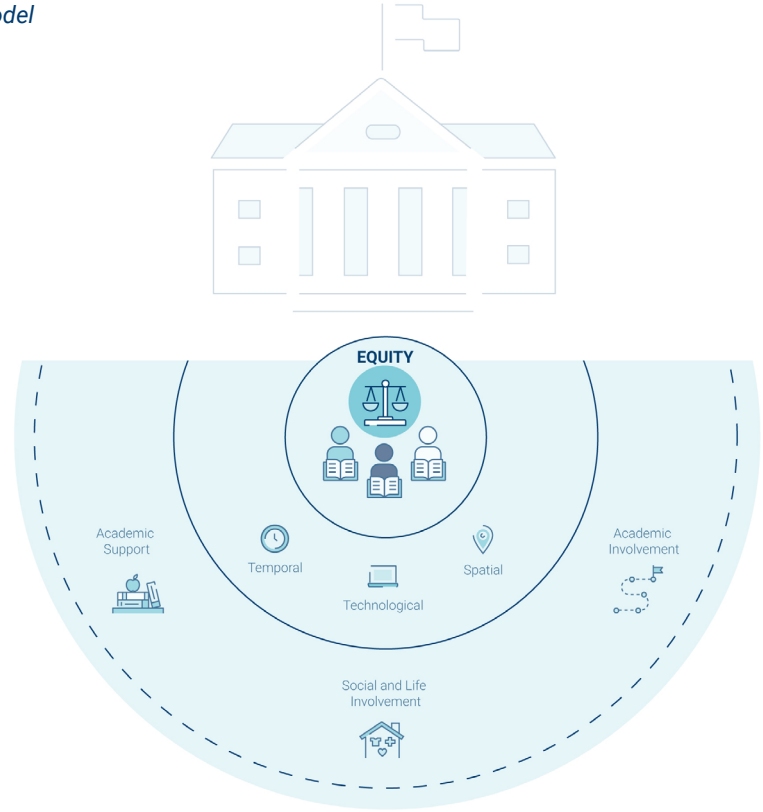
KEY POINTS

- BIHE leaders identify what success looks like for the student, considering external factors such as economic, political, and sociocultural factors.
- BIHE leaders focus on experiences and interactions that lead to success across the institution, as illustrated in proven methods of blended learning course design.
- BIHE leaders prioritize student engagement through on-site and online academic and social involvement to improve student, program, and institutional outcomes.

ELEMENT 2

Creating Equitable and Inclusive Experiences

FIGURE 3
Element Two of the BIHE Model



The **second element** of the BIHE vision focuses on ensuring **equitable experiences**. In examining the sociocultural external factors, now more than ever, equity is a priority due to a resurgence of protests for racial equality and demands for social justice as part of the Black Lives Matter movement. Examination of current institutional education systems shows that inequalities are built into the systems. Educational systems and structures are inherently racist and elitist (Joosten et al., 2021). While traditionally the burden has fallen on the student to catch up, "inequality in higher education is a structural problem" (Bensimon, Dowd, & Witham, 2016, para 6). Using systems thinking and implementing the BIHE model can support creating equitable experiences for students.

RESOURCE ALERT

Bensimon, E. M., Dowd, A. C., & Witham, K. (2016). Five principles for enacting equity by design. *Diversity and Democracy*, *19*(1), 1–8. https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2016/winter/bensimon

> **“Equity and diversity are not just sentiment in an institutional statement. They are not simply things we do or the activities that take place across our institutions to help students. Equity and diversity are who we are as an institution and a people who value every student and each different voice and experience — a core value.”**

Equitable learning moves beyond access to the same experience and is a strategic effort at all levels that identifies and removes inequities. As academic leaders, there is an institutional priority to provide equitable and accessible experiences for students that are core to the institutional values of BIHE. Most institutions of higher education are embracing a paradigm of equity and strategizing on how to ensure success for all students as a societal mandate. The BIHE supports access and equity for all students, especially those who have historically been excluded, discriminated against, and disenfranchised and presented with significant barriers.

Too often, students are not provided technology-mediated options for learning, service, or support because of concerns about access to technology and technology skills due to economic or social factors. This limits students from experiences that could lead to positive outcomes for them (see Joosten et al., 2021), such as blended, hybrid, or online learning. Rather than limit students’ experiences, institutions should be working to develop a culture and institutional structures that create equitable experiences (see Joosten & Cusatis, 2020).

RESOURCE ALERT

Joosten, T., & Cusatis, R. (2020). Online learning readiness. *American Journal of Distance Education, 34*(3), 180-193. https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2020.1726167

All stakeholders within the BIHE share the assumption that all students, including students who are racially minoritized, poverty-affected, first-generation, or have an impairment or a disability, have equitable experiences throughout their postsecondary experience to create an opportunity for them to succeed in college and beyond. One may describe this core value as follows:

Equity and diversity are not just sentiment in an institutional statement. They are not simply things we do or the activities that take place across our institutions to help students. Equity and diversity are who we are as an institution and a people who value every student and each different voice and experience — a core value.

The belief in diversity, equity, and inclusiveness for all the institutions' stakeholders is part of the organization's culture and is evident in strategy, planning, policies, resource allocation, infrastructure, and more. Academic leaders apply systems thinking to analyze their institution's challenges and barriers in instilling their core values within their organizational culture.

The vision of BIHE centers on students' needs and successes. BIHE leaders use an equity-minded lens, rather than a deficit-minded lens, to develop strategies to espouse these values. They can operationalize equitable and inclusive strategies and planning to promote actions that identify and eliminate barriers for students. As Joosten et al. (2021) note, "It is urgent that America and the world end institutional racism, including racism inherent in educational systems such as higher education institutions" (p. 5). To do so, leaders need to examine institutional elements supporting racist and oppressive structures that create barriers for students through collaborative campus efforts and develop measurable goals and activities to remove these barriers.

Institutions need to identify the institutional structures and actions of individuals at institutions that are influencing the success of students who are racially and ethnically underrepresented to change the systems to create greater access and equity. Specifically, there is a need for efforts that identify the structures and actions, especially those inside and outside of the classroom, that have the potential to positively influence student success (Joosten et al., 2021).

By examining each institutional component for inherent racism and challenges for traditionally minoritized and underrepresented students, better understanding the complexity of a student, and taking action to achieve the vision of equity and access, the BIHE vision of equity will be the institution of tomorrow.

Historically, the burden has been placed on students' shoulders for lower levels of success (e.g., Bensimon, 2005; Ogbu, 1990) or has taken a deficit lens. While efforts are made to identify barriers and challenges, support provided "is more akin to a patch while recognizing that larger systemic structures of racism need dismantling for equitable education to be the norm" (Joosten et al., 2021, p. 5). Institutional leaders need to strategically identify the institutional structures and actions of individuals that are limiting students.

These structures can include:

- making decisions focused on an outdated concept of the majority (of students);
- sustaining the digital divide and lack of access to hardware and broadband needed for flexible and more effective learning;
- continuing support of faculty and units who use outdated modes of learning;
- supporting pedagogies and curriculum that are exclusive and irrelevant to students' needs for now and the future; and,
- disregarding lapses in policy regarding the development of courses, course design, and media that lead to ineffective and inaccessible courses for each student group.

As it is clear that equity and inclusiveness are neither solely components of the model, nor are they simply micro-level actions, student success, access, equity, diversity, and inclusiveness are core values of the BIHE model, as well as documentable outcomes. Adams, Bali, Eder, Fladd, Garrett, Garth-McCullough, Gibson, Gunder, Iuzzini, Knott, Rafferty, & Weber (2021b) share key approaches (e.g., Culturally Responsive Teaching, Trauma-Informed Teaching, and Universal Design for Learning) that support analyzing how culture, diversity, and experiences are portrayed and positioned in the curriculum, as well as how educators can engage students with empathy and enable multiple means of engagement. Similarly it may also be essential for leaders to develop ways to include students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, interests, and ways of knowing to create more equitable student outcomes, inclusive student services, and a sense of belonging to the community in a way that leverages multiple means of engagement. Consideration in developing institutional structures, including anti-racist policies, governance, resources, staffing, budgeting, and planning, will allow academic leaders to shift institutional behaviors and activities to those that are more accessible, inclusive, and equitable.

RESOURCE ALERT

Adams, S., Bali, M., Eder, Z., Fladd, L., Garrett, K., Garth-McCullough, R., Gibson, A. M., Gunder, A., Iuzzini, J., Knott, J. L., Rafferty, J. & Weber, N. L. (2021). *Caring for students playbook: Getting started with key terms and challenges.* Every Learner Everywhere. https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/

"Consideration in developing institutional structures, including anti-racist policies, governance, resources, staffing, budgeting, and planning, will allow academic leaders to shift institutional behaviors and activities to those that are more accessible, inclusive, and equitable."

ELEMENT 2

Summary: Creating Equitable and Inclusive Experiences

KEY REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Does your institution utilize an equity-minded lens? What areas are doing this well? Which are still placing the burden on the student and could use improvement?
- How might your institution be unintentionally recreating racist and oppressive structures that limit minoritized and traditionally underrepresented students? How can this be changed?
- What institutional and instructional practices could be immediately implemented to create equity?

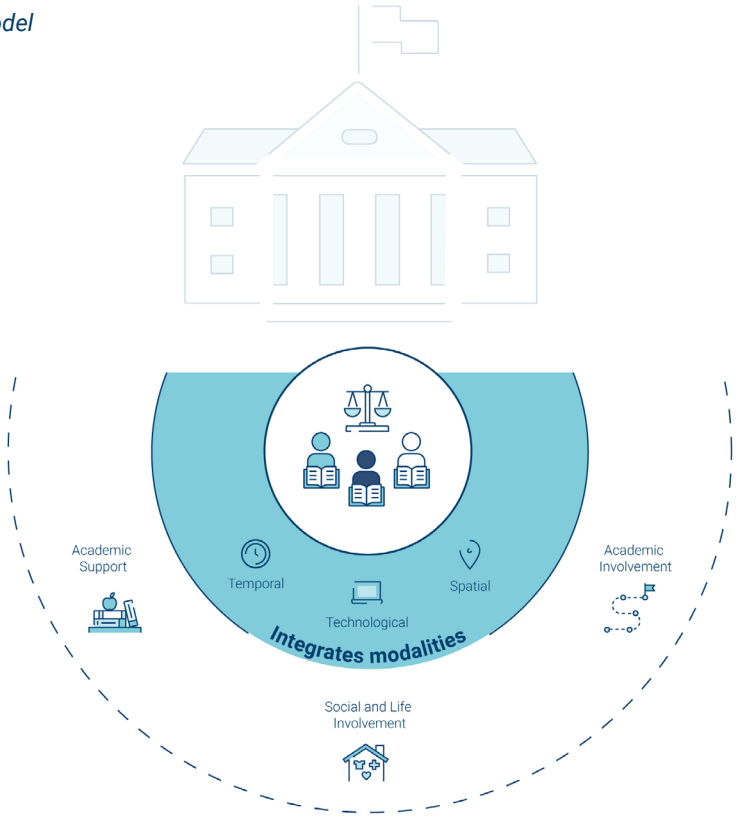
KEY POINTS

- BIHE leaders ensure equitable and inclusive experiences throughout the institution providing access for all students.
- The value of equity is evident in everything a BIHE does, including strategy, policy development, resource allocation, decision-making, infrastructure support, and more.
- Strategic activities identify systemic barriers to success through an equity-minded perspective and eliminate them.

ELEMENT 3

Integration of Modalities Across the Institution

FIGURE 4
Element Three of the BIHE Model



The **third element** of the BIHE vision focuses on **integrating modalities across the institution**. While students' needs and previous experiences are an input into an organizational process, and students' success is an output of the organization, the process or the integration within the institutions is of particular notability. The BIHE centers the student as the nucleus of the system. Their needs and success are the driver of the institution. All of the interactions that a student has within the institution and throughout their lifetime at an institution are going to determine whether or not they have a successful experience.

The integration or blending of modes or modalities across the institution while focusing on the students is what makes the BIHE unique. The ways in which institutional members communicate and interact across time and space are critical aspects as to whether an institution can sustain. Through a thoughtful and strategic integration of how students, faculty, and staff communicate and interact — in which locations (on-site or online), during which temporal cadence (real-time or over time), and through which technologies — creates (or greatly limits) opportunities for an institution's ability to be flexible and responsive to its environment and change, which is a ripe opportunity today.

With the needs of students at the center, the BIHE leader thoughtfully weaves an array of modalities of student, faculty, and staff interactions with considerations for location, time, and technologies across the institution. In this way, these modalities (e.g., online or on-site, real-time or over time) become a transformative strategy that will enhance institutional processes (e.g., practices, procedures, operations) and create ubiquitous opportunities for student development and success. Specifically, the BIHE blends and integrates instruction, learning, support, and services for students, ensuring the outcomes align while also considering the environmental factors of the workforce and society. By applying the central construct of student-centered, integrated experiences through multiple modalities, as witnessed in blended learning for the past two decades, leaders can now start scaling up to the institutional level, employing systems thinking, and guiding strategy to harness the potential of the BIHE.

With its emphasis on the integration of the modality, time, and place of learning experiences and technologies, the BIHE enhances the ability to serve students and their evolving needs into the digital future. Recent reports state that quality learning experiences occur in practically every combination of environment and modality and recommend that institutions continue offering courses in a variety of formats to meet student demands (Brooks & Gierdowski, 2021). Digital, blended, and online learning can improve the array of instructional and technological strategies available to faculty and instructors. These strategies allow faculty and instructors to provide boundless opportunities to enhance the student learning experience through deep engagement and achievement of learning objectives, flexibility in place and time, and the creation of life balance for students and faculty.

“Digital, blended, and online learning can improve the array of instructional and technological strategies available to faculty and instructors. These strategies allow faculty and instructors to provide boundless opportunities to enhance the student learning experience through deep engagement and achievement of learning objectives, flexibility in place and time, and the creation of life balance for students and faculty.”

With growing awareness and comfort with technology across institutions, now is the time to think strategically to improve students' learning experiences. Academic leaders can foster student success by using student-centered design and new pedagogies, instructional approaches, and digital technologies available as a part of digital, blended, and online learning. Institutions can learn from these course- and program-level experiences and evolve into strategic and balanced systems focused on quality and sustainability.

To help advance institutional goals, the BIHE model helps leaders move beyond blending individual courses and programs, ultimately creating a cohesive and comprehensive blend and integration of modalities across sectors of a university or college such as:

- academics (e.g., teaching and research),
- student academic services (e.g., advising, tutoring, writing),
- student services (e.g., health, food, housing),
- business and financial services (e.g., enrollment, registration, financial aid), and
- socioemotional supports (e.g., social communities, recreation).

Each sector must create potential for transformation to a new, integrated model that centers the students. For example, Pelletier and Hutt (2021) discuss work to integrate technology in a student service — advising — that is strategic, takes place over time at the institutional level, and responds to external shifts to create a new operating model that is resilient. The process is described as a student-centered approach to create a new model with a focus on advising with a primary objective of improving the student experience. While many leaders look to acquire a technology solution for the classroom or a student service such as advising, sustainability comes from focusing on student experience and the interrelated systems surrounding the students' experience. Additionally, the authors discuss designing the advising experience focused on students' needs and outcomes, digitizing the advising process, integrating modalities and support across campus, training staff, developing policies, using data and analytics, evaluating interventions, and more. They describe it as a holistic approach to advising to address academic, professional (e.g., career), and non-academic needs (e.g., basic needs). The strategic process for advising discussed is one that would need to be undertaken by all institutional units and functions.

RESOURCE ALERT

Pelletier, K. & Hutt, C. (2021). Digital transformation: Equipping advisors for the journey, students for success, change. *The Magazine of Higher Learning, 53*(3), 30-36. https:/doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2021.1906142

Decades of research support digital, blended, and online learning as instrumental in creating innovative course delivery modes that can support all disciplinary programs (e.g., natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, arts, and professions), various kinds of learning experiences (e.g., preparatory, undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, workforce development, degree completion), and an array of institution types (e.g., private or public, two-year or four-year, and associate- to doctorate-granting). Through the thoughtful selection of modalities (online or on-site, real-time or over time, rich or lean; see Joosten et al., 2021), students can receive the scaffolded support they need across the institution from faculty and instructors, staff, and peers for their academic and professional journey.

Each unit on campus needs to thoughtfully integrate technology to improve the student experience by redesigning their units as part of a larger system model. Students should have ubiquitous access to any service or experience in a modality that is best for them. In doing so, technology acquisition is one small piece of the puzzle. Technology and digitalization are integrated and aligned with the needs of the students to ensure quality. Faculty and staff can be trained and developed to learn effective practices in using the technology (e.g., technology functions, data and analytics) but also in how to best take advantage of the technology to align with the task at hand (e.g., advising, teaching, learning). Moreover, policies and procedures have to be developed or redeveloped with a priority placed on students and their experience. Continuous evaluation planning of these processes should be initiated (e.g., student data collection or attitude about process to inform process improvement).

The black box of the institution must be revealed, analyzed, and redesigned to ensure that students are able to have their needs met in order to achieve their desired outcomes — equitable outcomes. Through designing the organizational processes and implementing new models like the BIHE that focus on reengineering students' experiences by centering their needs and improving their interactions through thoughtful integration, an institution can become more sustainable.

ELEMENT 3

Summary: Integration of Modalities Across the Institution

KEY REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What integral academic pieces, student services, and supports does your institution not yet do (or do well) online that students may need while at your institution?
- How is your institution preparing students to be digitally literate citizens in a blended workforce?

KEY POINTS

- BIHEs go beyond blended courses, creating a cohesive and comprehensive blend of on-site and online strategies encompassing academics, student services, and support.
- BIHE leaders encourage the use of and leverage evolving pedagogies, technologies, modalities, and models to meet students where they are, giving them the building blocks needed for their future careers and citizenry.

Next Steps

Often in higher education, leaders may find themselves deep in the weeds with little time to step outside of the thick of it and take a drone-like perspective examining the status of the forest. Systems thinking is just that — taking that critical pause and stepping back, gaining perspective of the system or institution, and analyzing how the system works in order to shift the system so it works better. In what has felt like a time of disorder, academic leaders may employ systems thinking to ensure sustainability.

Now that you have been presented with a model and vision to guide an institutional transformation in this guide, the next step is to employ systems thinking to get started moving toward an institutional blended approach.

PLANNING FOR THE BIHE: NEXT STEPS

1 Develop a collaborative group of stakeholders to drive institutional transformation through vision and strategy.

2 Analyze external systems and develop continuous evaluation of those systems to inform strategy on a timely basis.

3 Analyze internal systems, evaluate their effectiveness, and determine how they will need to shift to develop capacity for change to a new model.

4 Refine your vision based on the input from our collaborative group of stakeholders and the analyses of external and internal factors.

5 Develop clear strategic goals, the activities that will achieve those goals, and how achievement is measured for each of the goals.

Step 1:

Develop a collaborative group of stakeholders to drive institutional transformation through vision and strategy.

Leaders should work collaboratively with a diverse group of stakeholders from across the institution (e.g., faculty, administration, staff, students, alumni) and beyond (e.g., industry partners, community members; Rouse, Lombardi, & Craig, 2018; Society for College and University Planning, 2021; Chaney, Chaney, & Eddy, 2010). It is integral that students be included and inform these discussions and activities throughout the process. Stakeholders may represent different functions on campus (e.g., university operations and services, teaching and learning, technology, or research and grants), and leaders to keep the working groups on task should be identified. Stakeholders should be co-creators in a new vision and the strategic activities of the institution. They are more likely to support communication, organizational change, and adoption of new models if they are included in and help drive the process and decisions.

Stakeholders should be change agents for their unit who are willing to commit to performing the tasks required to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategic plan. Stakeholders should be identified by leadership in each unit. However, every institutional member should have a chance to participate and to respond to the strategic planning activities. The blended model and digitization influence every aspect of university operations, and each unit should have a chance to respond to versions of the plans. The process of strategy development may be a year-long conversation, data collection, and reflection. The large group of stakeholders should meet on a timely basis and hold working groups accountable for progress in key areas that create, maintain, and work to continuously improve equitable, inclusive, and multimodal experiences across the institution to center students and their needs.

Step 2:

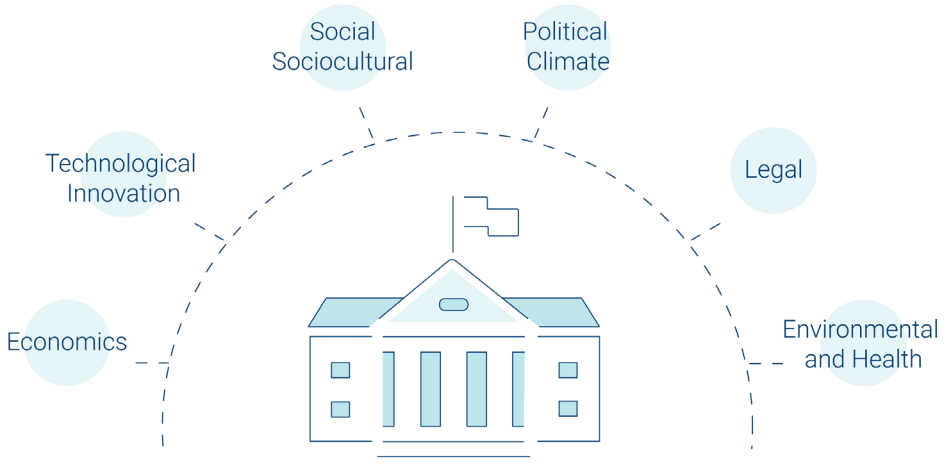
Analyze external systems and develop continuous evaluation of those systems to inform strategy on a timely basis.

Stakeholders can identify and analyze external factors that influence the inputs, processes or throughputs, and outputs of your institution, especially in light of the pandemic. While many were discussed earlier in this resource, these external factors tend to fall into six categories: economics, technological innovation, social or sociocultural, political, legal, and environment and health. Others have recently discussed some of the factors specific to postsecondary education in discussing the shifting culture and workforce (see Pelletier & Hutt, 2021).

This analysis may also include an environmental scan of other institutions and their systems. Importantly, in the analysis of the external factors, leaders should consider what are the threats and opportunities provided by these factors (e.g., SWOT analysis), how they can be responded to, what structural or resource adaptations need to be made for change, and how to know if it is working.

These external factors will affect each student, their experiences, and the outcomes of the institution as well as the infrastructure and operations of the university or college. Who are the students? What are their experiences coming to campus? What experiences, academically and socially, will they or should they have on campus to help them achieve their goals as defined by them? What is the role of technology in these experiences? How can institutions remove barriers and help them achieve their goals? What are these current and new outcomes that should be used to measure their success? How can these and other measures be used to evaluate the success of the institution beyond traditional measures?

FIGURE 5
External Factors in Postsecondary Education



Step 3:

Analyze internal systems, evaluate their effectiveness, and determine how they will need to shift to develop capacity for change to a new model.

Institutional structural components or elements of the system may include strategy and planning itself. Vision, mission, values, strategic plan, planning, process, and other components are important to the success of implementation and adoption of a new model. Next administrative components will need to be analyzed. These include policies, policy development and management, and more. Some of these policies may be related to business (e.g., purchasing), students (academic integrity, technology use, or data privacy), or human resources (telecommuting). Outdated policies or policy development procedures can greatly decrease an institution's ability to change.

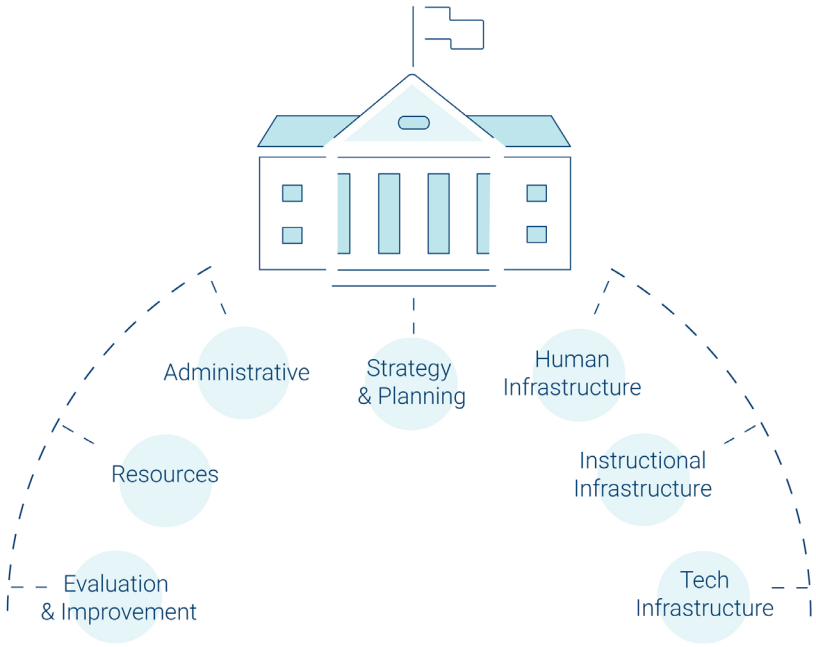
While resources and budgeting are always a concern, in particular in certain sectors of schools and colleges, success of a new institutional model needs adequate resources to ensure quality, implementation, and adoption. Moreover, budgets, staffing, faculty and staff incentives, materials, costs, tuition, revenue, grants, overhead, and other areas may be altered as the change proceeds to affect the financial management and health of an institution.

While an investment tends to be in technological infrastructure (learning management system, video conference tools), many believe the human infrastructure that supports the use of technology for learning, support, or services is more pertinent but often forgotten. Technology shouldn't just be made available; it should be supported by IT staff and by those who are experts in how it can be used for academic and social activities. Support for the technological infrastructure should move beyond just technical support and training, and it should include training and professional development for students, faculty, and staff to share effective practices of using the technology for different functions (e.g., teaching, learning, and others). Moreover, the technological and the human infrastructure should be continuously evaluated to ensure they are supporting core functionality.

To support a transformative model and to strategically plan for the core functions of the university or college as teaching, the pedagogical and instructional infrastructure should be considered. Engaging pedagogical models that are technology enhanced, policies that are consistent across modalities, and procedures and guides for quality and standards exemplified through instructional improvement (design, development, and evaluation) should be analyzed. Faculty and staff should have the resources and incentives needed to ensure quality across modalities and to bridge experience within a course's walls and beyond.

Once you have reviewed internal and external systems while analyzing the components using systems thinking, it is time to move forward with vision development.

FIGURE 6
Internal Factors in Postsecondary Education



Step 4:

Refine your vision based on the input from our collaborative group of stakeholders and the analyses of external and internal factors.

While this guide provides a model and vision to prime your thoughts about developing a sustainable model for your institution based on research and analysis, leaders can work with the stakeholders on your campus to develop a vision, values, and mission that is right for your campus. For academic leaders, developing a vision is an initial requirement of implementing a new or renewed institutional model. Shukla (2018) describes that one must determine the vision to determine what thinking stakeholders will relate to each result. Therefore, leaders in developing a new vision need to consider the questions:

- Where is your institution today?
- What will it look like when you get there?

Vision is aspirational, inspiring, futuristic, and consumable. Where will you be in 5 or 10 years?

As we discussed the three key elements in the BIHE, the vision should encapsulate the importance of these elements: 1.) students needs and success, 2.) access, equity, inclusiveness, and diversity, and 3.) integration of modalities to meet students' needs wherever they are while preparing them for success across their lifespan. The vision will align with the institutional values and these three elements are critical to sustainability and should be considered when rethinking the vision, values, and mission. While many colleges and universities may prioritize innovation, research, prestige, national recognition, and excellence, the vision should address and be relevant to students, all students, their needs, and their goals. Furthermore, the institutional values should support the vision of the college or university putting students at the center and reflecting efforts to shift internal capacity to respond to evolving external factors.

Once the vision is clear, the institution can begin to document renewed values in the wake of the analysis of external factors, while developing a new and relevant mission focused on students. What does the institution value? Who does the institution serve? What does the institution do? Why does it do it? How does it operate? It is important that the values and mission have input from different stakeholders, especially students, and become iterative as the institution moves towards their vision. There will be an interplay between the vision, values, and mission. Each informing each other. Moreover, each unit or program should develop their own mission in alignment with the institution. Again, these steps will help advance sustainability of the university or college.

Step 5:

Develop clear strategic goals, the activities that will achieve those goals, and how achievement is measured for each of the goals.

Once you have the vision clarified among stakeholders, strategic goal development can take place, aligning with each influential external and internal factor in strategic response. Each goal should have a series of actions and sub-actions that will support achieving the strategic goal. Additionally, each action should identify the resources and timeline to complete the actions.

Institutional activities may focus on strategic goals in teaching and learning, research, faculty support, teaching support, and communication. For instance, goals may be identified for academic support interactions, such as tutoring and library, to ensure that they are ubiquitous and available to students across modalities. These may require acquiring of technology and staff, training staff for new services, or building partnerships with regional, state, or national organizations to collaborate on support. Or perhaps pedagogical and technological practices need to be identified (e.g., open education resources, adaptive or personalized learning, team-based learning) to ensure alignment with students' needs and ensure quality, effective practices are identified. A goal of using the most innovative technologies to ensure quality and meet students' needs may include an activity such as incorporating new innovative initiatives that pilot and evaluate innovations through rigorous research. Outlining goals, measuring goals, and taking action to achieve goals are important to move progress forward and keep the collaborative efforts accountable.

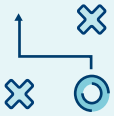
FIGURE 7
Sample Strategic Planning Document

Develop strategic goals

Example of a strategic goal

Promote the use of digital technologies for active learning across campus to improve student success with attention to success for racially minoritized, poverty affected, and other traditionally underrepresented students.

Identify activities



Examples of activities that can help achieve the defined goal

- Allocate resources for infrastructure.
- Implement a faculty and instructional development program to provide training and support.
- Identify research-based criteria of quality in digital student-centered, active learning.
- Share effective digital active learning practices across campuses via multiple dissemination methods.
- Provide faculty and instructors incentives and support (e.g., stipend, buy-out, overload).

Determine metrics and methods

Examples of metrics and methods that could be used to evaluate progress toward the defined goal

- Document increase in student outcomes in courses and programs to illustrate goals are met.
- Measure outcomes using multiple data sources (see Joosten, 2020).
- Develop quality improvement cycles to enhance student outcomes.
- Analyze data based on student demographic groups and profiles of students revealing structural gaps.

Systems thinking can provide an opportunity to analyze the larger view while strategizing where to shift in order to improve sustainability, which is particularly crucial as the field of higher education has collectively experienced such a monumental, seismic shift as a result of emergency remote learning. Academic leaders who cultivate systems thinking to inform a BIHE model are also poised to guide their institutions as they navigate external and internal factors to meet institutional goals. By strategically integrating modalities throughout institutions to create ubiquitous interactions and communication for students to meet their needs and enhance their success, the potential for organizational viability increases.

With significant enrollment declines and themes of instability in postsecondary education across the nation, many academic leaders are aware of the urgency to create conditions to support institutional sustainability while the world is in the present shadow of the impact of pandemic disruptions. For academic leaders guiding their institutions in these conditions, the key to achieving institutional sustainability, especially while the world continues in a state of flux, comes through strategic leadership. ***The Blended Institution of Higher Education: A Model for a Sustainable Institution*** provides a model and a vision so that leaders can be prepared to catalyze change by rethinking their institutional strategy and focusing on the axioms of blending: student-centering, focusing on needs and success, removing barriers to and rethinking success, and creating ubiquitous experiences through careful integration across modalities and the institution. Finally, leaders can start further visioning an institutional blended model that works for their university and college, identifying institutional goals that align with the mission of their organization based on the new model; developing strategic actions to help stakeholders internally shift through changes in resources, policies, procedures, and staffing; and initiating a timeline including key milestones and measures of progress and success with a focus on long-term sustainability.

Looking to engage with other academic leaders on developing an institutional blended strategy for your BIHE?

Join the OLC's Blended Learning Community of Practice, where you can connect with and learn from leaders and share your experiences and stories of leading your institution's efforts to adopt or refine its blended approach.

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