

Preparing for the Uncertain

Crisis communications has long been top of mind for all university leaders, and we know what a challenge it is to prepare for something that is often un-preparable. From natural disasters to large-scale protests, university leaders are charged with ensuring the safety of their campuses and providing timely, reliable information, all while triaging often contradictory reports and rumors on social media platforms.

In her article, “Navigating the Return of the Culture Wars and Other Crises,” writer Karen Doss Bowman explores the president’s role in crisis management and how higher education leaders can ensure that when a potential calamity comes to campus, the right people and procedures are in place to address it.

As Patty Cormier, president emerita of Longwood University (Va.), points out, “It’s about constant communication, and the key is not to hide, but to tell the truth. You need to be forthright; you need to come forward; you need to say it; and you need to be in charge.” This presidential must-read begins on page 2.

The cover story this month, written by longtime higher education writer Stephen Pelletier, looks at the critical issue of demographics and asks, “How well is your institution positioned for a future where students may be scarce, the student body will be more diverse, and some learners may need more help to succeed?”

In this article, which you’ll find starting on page 6, Pelletier makes a compelling case for addressing the changing student body through strategic innovation. He notes, “The demographics data suggest that many institutions will increasingly serve new and different student populations, whether those students are older or from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.”

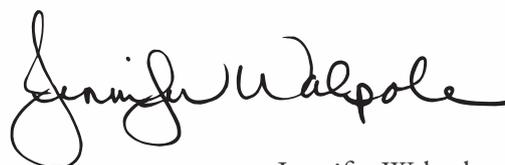
Responding to changing demographics is a key concern for Northern Arizona University President Rita Cheng, who has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to closing gaps in attainment, retention and graduation through myriad initiatives to serve a diversifying student body. In addition to creating a multi-cultural center “so that we can serve all our students, including all of our ethnic population and our LGBTQIA students, a bit better,” Cheng explains, “the need to serve first generation students is predominant on the minds of our student affairs staff.”

We often hear from AASCU member presidents and chancellors that they appreciate learning from their colleagues in the pages of *Public Purpose*, whether it’s a best practice piece, an anecdote, or a presidential commentary.

While our readership includes everyone from students and faculty to provosts and other senior administrators, we build each article in the magazine from a fundamental question: how will this article benefit the leadership of our member presidents?

Our members are the heart of this publication, for it’s your wisdom and experiences that make each issue so rich. Whether it’s sharing a success story or a challenge on campus, or talking about a timely issue in higher education, the presidential perspective gives others valuable ideas to consider as leaders of America’s state colleges and universities.

If you would like to contribute a commentary for this magazine, please email me at walpolej@aaascu.org with your ideas. We’re eager to showcase the great work of your institution in these pages.



Jennifer Walpole

BETWEEN
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LINES