



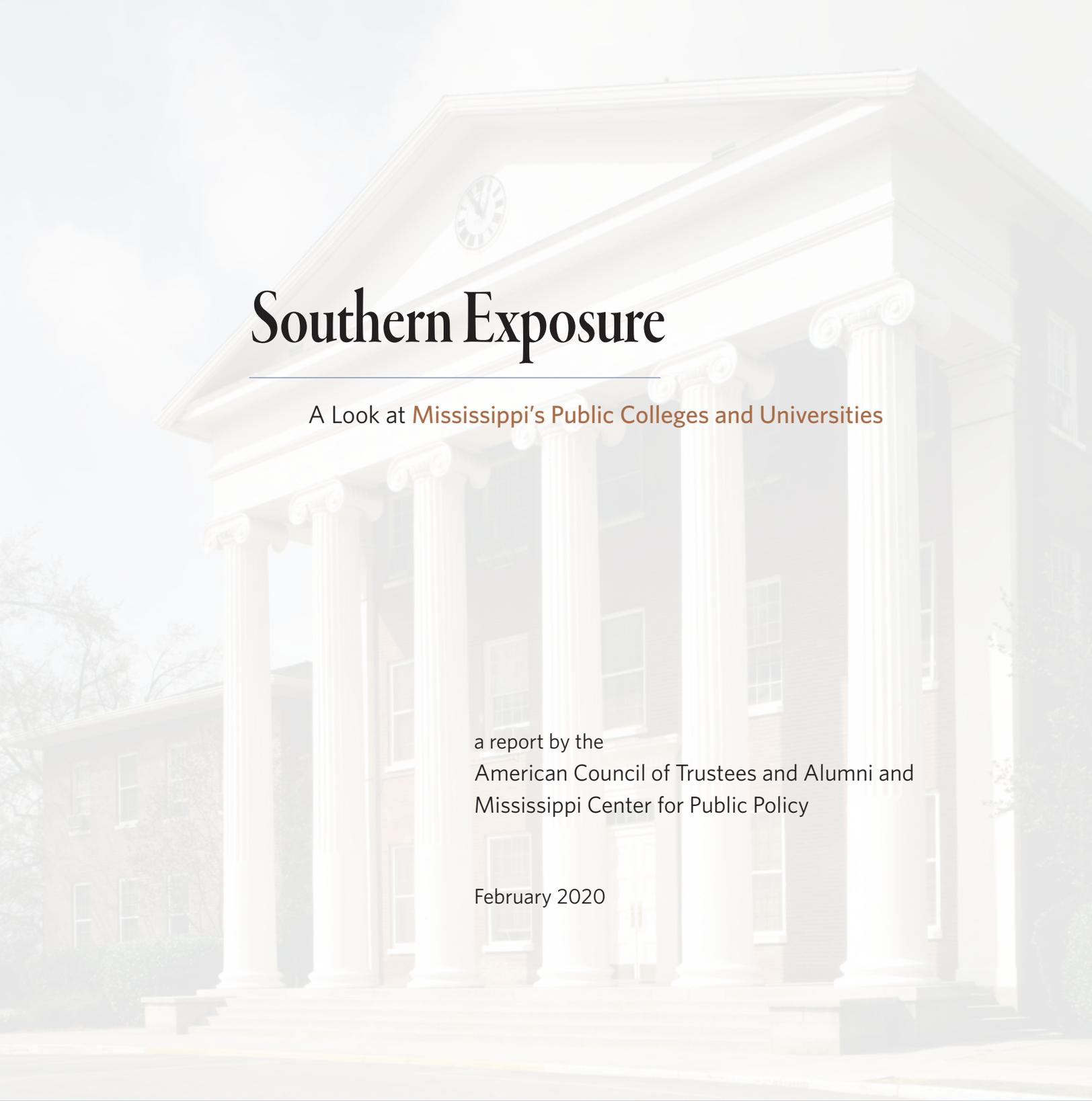
Southern Exposure

A Look at **Mississippi's Public Colleges and Universities**

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI
and MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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a report by the
American Council of Trustees and Alumni and
Mississippi Center for Public Policy

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Acknowledgments

This report on the eight public four-year undergraduate institutions in the state of Mississippi was prepared by the staff of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, primarily Dr. Michael Poliakoff, Armand Alacbay, Esq., Dr. Jonathan Pidluzny, and Ian Cook, with the assistance of the Mississippi Center for Public Policy.

The **American Council of Trustees and Alumni** (ACTA) is an independent nonprofit dedicated to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Since its founding in 1995, ACTA has counseled boards, educated the public, and published reports about such issues as good governance, historical literacy, core curricula, the free exchange of ideas, and accreditation. ACTA has previously published *Best Laid Plans: The Unfulfilled Promise of Public Higher Education in California*; *The Diffusion of Light and Education: Meeting the Challenges of Higher Education in Virginia*; *Prepared in Mind and Resources? A Report on Public Higher Education in South Carolina*; *Made in Maine: A State Report Card on Public Higher Education*; *Here We Have Idaho: A State Report Card on Public Higher Education*; *At a Crossroads: A Report Card on Public Higher Education in Minnesota*; *For the People: A Report Card on Public Higher Education in Illinois*; *Show Me: A Report Card on Public Higher Education in Missouri*; *Shining the Light: A Report Card on Georgia's System of Public Higher Education*; and *Governance in the Public Interest: A Case Study of the University of North Carolina System*, among other state-focused reports.

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary 1

Academic Strength

1. What are students learning? 4

Intellectual Diversity

2. Do schools promote a free exchange of ideas? 10

Cost & Effectiveness

3. How much are students paying? 19
4. Where is the money going? 24
5. Are students completing their programs? 38

Governance

6. Is Mississippi's higher education governance structure effective? 41

Recommendations 46

Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Criteria for Core Courses 49

Appendix B: School Evaluation Notes for Core Courses 51

End Notes 52

“Our society is growing ever more complex, requiring greater skill and knowledge from its public servants, its professionals, its executives, and its citizens. . . . In such an environment, the moment has surely come for America’s colleges to take a more candid look at their weaknesses and think more boldly about setting higher educational standards for themselves.”

—Derek Bok, President Emeritus, Harvard University,
in *Our Underachieving Colleges* (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 2006)

Executive Summary

The Board of Trustees of the Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) governs the state's eight public universities. The board is ultimately accountable to the people of Mississippi and bears the responsibility for effectively communicating the accomplishments, value, needs, and challenges of Mississippi's public universities.

This state report, one of many produced by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), examines the performance of the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning and the schools under its authority. We will use four general metrics—Academic Strength, Intellectual Diversity, Cost & Effectiveness, and Governance—to assess the overall quality of higher education in the state of Mississippi, and we make recommendations for ways that the IHL can strengthen the institutions it governs.

Key findings and recommendations in this report are:

- The rising cost of college is a problem nationwide. Although, currently, IHL schools have tuition costs below the national average, the IHL has important choices to make if it is to continue to provide an affordable education to its students.
- Faculty salaries have stagnated, making it more difficult to retain top talent, while the salaries of administrators such as the chancellor or president have grown consistently.
- Graduation rates among several IHL universities are unacceptably low.
- Athletic expenditures at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) and Mississippi State University have skyrocketed, outpacing many schools throughout the nation. Some of Mississippi's smaller schools have tried to keep pace, passing on these costs to their students.
- No school in Mississippi currently requires all its students to complete a course in American government or history. This deficit inevitably diminishes graduates' ability to participate effectively in our democratic republic.
- Although free speech policies at most Mississippi universities are appropriate, this is not the case at the state flagship. Ole Miss has a Bias Incident Response Team with highly disturbing implications for freedom of expression and the due process rights of students.
- None of the IHL schools have yet adopted the Chicago Principles, a commitment to the importance of the unfettered and unobstructed pursuit of truth and knowledge as the defining value of a college or university. The Chicago Principles are widely seen as the gold standard for protecting free inquiry and free expression on college campuses, and Mississippi needs to join other eminent universities and university systems that have made this important public commitment.

- The voting record of the IHL Board of Trustees shows little evidence of disagreement on the important business of the IHL, raising the possibility that there is insufficient transparency, debate, and analysis in decision making. ①



■ Academic Strength

1. What are students learning?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between the ages of 18 and 52, Americans can anticipate changing jobs an average of 12 times.¹ In these dynamic economic circumstances, a well-constructed and well-taught core curriculum offers significant advantages. Students who have been exposed to a broad array of liberal arts subjects, from literature to economics to foreign language, will be better-prepared for an evolving workplace where they will need multiple skill sets, strong critical thinking abilities, and wide-ranging knowledge. In particular, employers are interested in hiring “expert learners,” the kind of graduates who have the inclination and ability to learn new skills that help their business or organization effectively adapt to a rapidly-changing economy. A rigorous and coherent general education has been shown to help develop these abilities and cultivate “lifelong learning orientations.”²

A 2018 study by Hart Research Associates on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that, when considering potential hires, 90% of executives and hiring managers value effective oral communication, 84% value ethical judgment and decision making, 76% value written communication skills, and 73% value the ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources. In the survey, 54% of business executives deemed the ability to work with numbers and statistics to be of high importance, but only

36% found college graduates to be well-prepared to address this need.³ By providing students with a solid grounding in a broad range of liberal arts subjects, in addition to their specialized area of study, colleges and universities can ensure that their graduates have a leg-up in the job market.⁴ Alumni retrospectively report high levels of appreciation for challenging and rigorous curricula. According to a survey of 5,100 recent graduates, those who “strongly agree” that “they were challenged academically” were 2.4 times more likely to answer that “their education was worth the cost” and 3.6 times more likely to respond that “they were prepared for life outside of college.”⁵ While far too many schools fail to require even elementary-level foreign language courses, a study by the Hamilton Project and the Brookings Institution found that graduates who majored in foreign languages other than French, German, and Latin frequently went into law and made almost double that of a graduate with a pre-law degree.⁶

The analysis in this section follows that of ACTA’s What Will They Learn?[®] annual survey of collegiate general education requirements. Instead of evaluating America’s colleges and universities on the basis of their prestige or their reputation for research, we have evaluated institutions according to the subjects they require all students in their various arts and sciences programs to master. Using the most recent publicly-available course catalogs, we examined whether

eight state-funded Mississippi institutions require their students to take general education courses in seven key liberal arts subject areas: **Composition, Literature, (intermediate-level) Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural Science.** To receive credit, courses in each subject area must be foundational in design. Further, a course must truly be a requirement: Many universities give the appearance of providing a core curriculum by requiring students to take classes in several subject areas outside their majors—often called distribution requirements. But these are requirements in name only, typically allowing students to choose from dozens or even hundreds of courses. For further details on the criteria used for this section of the report, please see Appendix A.

As Figure 1 below shows, the public universities of Mississippi require courses in Composition, Mathematics, and Natural Science, and all but one institution require a Literature course. However, there is still room for improvement. The University of Mississippi, for example, is the only institution that requires all students to complete foreign language

coursework through the intermediate level. In addition, not a single school reviewed requires a U.S. Government or History course or an Economics class. This is a serious gap in education that leaves potential graduates unprepared for meaningful civic engagement and success in the workplace.⁷

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The absence of U.S. history requirements is particularly alarming in a state with so rich a legacy that is embedded deeply in our nation’s story. And it is a barrier to citizens’ effective performance of their civic duties—at all levels of government. Recent surveys have reconfirmed that civic illiteracy is a problem even among college graduates. A 2019

Figure 1

GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	Comp	Lit	Lang	US Gov/ Hist	Econ	Math	Sci
Alcorn State University	•					•	•
Delta State University	•	•				•	•
Jackson State University	•	•				•	•
Mississippi State University	•	•				•	•
Mississippi University for Women	•	•				•	•
Mississippi Valley State University	•	•				•	•
University of Mississippi	•	•	•			•	•
University of Southern Mississippi	•	•				•	•

Source: *WhatWillTheyLearn.com*



According to the most recent results of the University of Mississippi's National Survey of Student Engagement, available on the university's website, **39%** of college seniors study **10 hours per week or less**, while **61%** study **15 hours or less**.

ACTA survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) found that 15% of respondents with a bachelor's degree think that Brett Kavanaugh is the current Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (another 16% chose the late Antonin Scalia!). Only 18% of respondents with a college degree correctly identified James Madison as "the Father of the Constitution," and 51% could not identify the correct term lengths for U.S. Senators and Representatives—on a multiple-choice question.⁸ When the Woodrow Wilson Foundation administered the U.S. Citizenship Test to 41,000 Americans, 69% of Mississippi respondents failed. Only four states did worse: Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana.⁹

There are solutions to the problem of civic illiteracy. For example, Florida, Missouri, and Texas mandate that all colleges receiving state support require all students to complete a course in government or political science that includes instruction in the Constitution, American institutions and ideals, and the operation of representative government.¹⁰ This is not an onerous burden, either: In virtually all cases, institutions already offer these courses, but typically among numerous options that satisfy an existing distribution requirement in the social sciences, humanities, or another broad category such as general historical studies. (Such is the case at every Mississippi university studied in this report.)

At most schools, students can fulfill a large portion of their degree requirements with nugatory subjects. Why not include a small, three credit-hour requirement that pays dividends in the long run? For educators concerned about workloads and having an extra class pressed upon them, this is an opportunity for cross-departmental collaboration. Such a class could even be group taught or split up into sections taught by the history, political science, and literature departments.

Student Engagement

Just as governing boards should take an interest in what universities are teaching, they should work to ensure the maintenance of high academic standards. That means implementing policies that discourage grade inflation and encourage meaningful program-level competency assessments where they are appropriate. This matter is important because one of the few uncontested findings in the large literature treating collegiate learning is that more time and effort expended in courses and coursework "pays off in increased competence, whether measured by self-reported gains in general education, changes in knowledge over four years, or [specific learning] outcomes: investigative, artistic, social, and enterprising."¹¹ Notwithstanding the demands of the knowledge economy, the National Survey of Student

Engagement (NSSE) shows alarmingly low rates of academic commitment. According to the most recent results of the University of Mississippi’s NSSE, available on the university’s website, 39% of college seniors study 10 hours per week or less, while 61% study 15 hours or less. The average full-time college student will spend approximately 15 hours per week in class, and then 15 hours or less preparing for class, which amounts to, at best, three-quarters of the hours expected each week of a full-time employee. To put this in further context, a full 45% of seniors at Ole Miss spend over 10 hours per week “relaxing and socializing”—characterized by “time with friends, video games, TV or videos” and the like—while more than one-quarter of seniors spend *over 15 hours* per week on leisure activities. Such patterns of engagement undoubtedly risk setting up soon-to-be graduates with unrealistic expectations for the level of effort necessary to succeed in their career paths.¹²

Student-Faculty Ratios

Student-faculty ratios also constitute an important metric, to which institutional leaders should pay considerable attention. There is strong evidence that direct faculty engagement with students is one of the most important contributors to student learning on a range of important metrics. Specifically, the research on collegiate learning has clearly demonstrated that the opportunity to engage in closely-mentored undergraduate research “significantly and positively [predicts students’] gains in critical thinking.”¹³ Similarly, several large-*n* studies found that “course-related student-faculty interactions . . . [are] statistically related to students’ self-reported learning gains” as well as students’ “cognitive development” and “self-reported changes in critical thinking.”¹⁴

Large-*n* studies of alumni attitudes toward their alma maters also suggest that close interactions with faculty are among the most significant contributors to several important student learning outcomes. For example, a study of University of Tennessee–Martin graduates found that students who reported having a “professor who made [them] excited about learning,” a “mentor who encouraged [them] to pursue [their] goals and dreams,” or who “worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete” were in each case almost twice as likely to report high levels of “workplace engagement” and “investment in their job”—both of which are important predictors of overall well-being. Students who had all three as well as three additional “positive experiences”—an internship, active involvement in extracurriculars, and a professor who cared about them—were *17 times* more likely to “strongly agree” that their education “prepared [them] well for life outside of college.”¹⁵ Studies of alumni attitudes at universities around the country have returned substantially similar results: High levels of active faculty involvement translate into graduates who are better prepared for challenging and fulfilling careers (and much more engaged as alumni).

To be sure, making these experiences available to high numbers of students requires a lower student-faculty ratio. Mississippi institutions boast generally favorable numbers, with ratios ranging from 13:1 at Delta State University to 20:1 at Mississippi State University. Figure 2 on the following page shows that student-faculty ratios have been stable at most state institutions for the last decade. Five institutions have allowed the ratio to creep up, most significantly so at Alcorn State University where the number of students per faculty member increased from 15 to 18 since 2008. Two institutions have pushed the ratio down

Figure 2

STUDENT TO FACULTY RATIO BY YEAR

INSTITUTION	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Alcorn State University	15	14	17	19	18	17	16	16	16	18
Delta State University	15	15	12	18	18	18	14	14	14	13
Jackson State University	16	18	18	18	18	15	15	18	18	17
Mississippi State University	18	18	20	20	19	19	19	19	20	20
Mississippi University for Women	13	13	14	14	14	13	14	14	14	14
Mississippi Valley State University	17	17	15	14	13	13	14	16	15	15
University of Mississippi	18	17	18	19	19	19	18	18	18	18
University of Southern Mississippi	16	16	17	17	18	17	17	17	17	17

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

modestly, from 15 to 13 students per faculty member at Delta State and from 17 to 15 at Mississippi Valley State.¹⁶

While student-faculty ratios are an important metric—and one of the drivers of *U.S. News and World Report’s* annual ranking of American colleges and universities—they are not necessarily the most important factor when it comes to meaningful faculty engagement in students’ academic experiences. Governing boards must also be attentive to the course

loads of the full-time faculty and the administrative support campuses provide for high-impact teaching. Perhaps most important of all are the incentives established by tenure and promotion policies. Schools that actively work to recruit, renew, and grant tenure to faculty who excel in the classroom—as opposed to prioritizing reflexively faculty research and grant productivity—are much more likely to create an environment conducive to student success and alumni satisfaction.¹⁷ ●



■ Intellectual Diversity

2. Do schools promote a free exchange of ideas?

The free exploration of ideas from across the ideological and political spectrum has traditionally been at the center of the university's mission. Unfortunately, today, at higher education institutions across the country, those who hold ideas that depart from campus orthodoxies face shout downs by angry protesters and disinvitations from campus events. Some schools even enact policies that restrict freedom of expression for the entire campus community. At a college or university with a "free speech zone" (which by its definition implies that free expression is unwelcome elsewhere), or which otherwise investigates or punishes "offensive" speech, students are less likely to encounter viewpoints that have the potential to challenge and enrich their own opinions, an experience that is essential for learning how to think critically about the world and to interact with others respectfully.

The reasons for maintaining a proactive approach to intellectual diversity and free speech include more than the imperative to stay within constitutional law. Because the intellectual health of a university depends upon the opportunity to express ideas freely and test their merits, institutions must actively foster an atmosphere of free inquiry. As Yale University's C. Vann Woodward Committee report of 1975 observed:

The primary function of a university is to discover and disseminate knowledge by

means of research and teaching. To fulfill this function a free interchange of ideas is necessary not only within its walls but with the world beyond as well. . . . The history of intellectual growth and discovery clearly demonstrates the need for unfettered freedom, the right to think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable, and challenge the unchallengeable.¹⁸

Hanna Holborn Gray, president emerita of the University of Chicago, rightly noted, "education should not be intended to make people comfortable, it is meant to make them think."¹⁹

Campus policies that encourage civility and respectful dialogue are to be encouraged. Policies that restrict speech and expression of the viewpoint a student might like to articulate, or hinder the free and open discussion of certain issues because they might cause another student offense, inevitably chill the speech of those who do not subscribe to campus orthodoxies.

A recent Gallup poll found that 61% of U.S. college students think that the climate on their campus prevents some people from saying what they believe because others might find their statements offensive.

In such an environment, reasonable students and faculty are likely to self-censor from fear of adverse consequences—whether the reprisal is formal and disciplinary, or the damage is mainly reputational. Indeed, a recent Gallup poll found that 61% of U.S. college students think that the climate on their campus prevents some people from saying what they believe because others might find their statements offensive.²⁰

Several surveys of current students have confirmed these findings. One of the most recent, a survey conducted by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the Independent Women’s Forum in October 2019, found that students are self-censoring in troubling numbers. Sixty-one percent answered that they stop themselves at least “occasionally” from “expressing . . . opinions on sensitive political topics in class because of concerns [a] professor

Figure 3

CAMPUS SPEECH POLL
OCTOBER 2019 • 2,165 COLLEGE STUDENTS

Q6: It is hard to have open and wide-ranging discussions about the following topics on my college campus [Select all that apply]:

TOPIC	Total	Gender		Class of			
		Female	Male	2020	2021	2022	2023
President Trump	56%	59%	53%	52%	54%	59%	62%
Abortion	54	55	51	50	54	58	52
U.S. Immigration Policy	48	49	47	47	49	52	44
Sexual Assault on Campus	32	32	31	32	36	31	24
Dating Relationships	16	13	19	16	13	17	16
Unweighted N	2,006	915	1,034	502	606	535	340

TOPIC	Total	Political Affiliation					
		Strong Democrat	Weak Democrat	Independent Lean Democrat	Independent Lean Republican	Weak Republican	Strong Republican
President Trump	56%	46%	46%	54%	71%	83%	80%
Abortion	54	45	45	48	69	74	71
U.S. Immigration Policy	48	38	37	46	61	71	72
Sexual Assault on Campus	32	35	30	28	32	34	36
Dating Relationships	16	14	15	11	17	18	21
Unweighted N	2,006	375	223	461	284	131	187

Source: ACTA and Independent Women’s Forum, *Killing Campus Civility and Derailing Civic Dialogue: How Speech Codes and Student Self-Censorship Undermine Political Discourse and Student Fellowship*, forthcoming 2020 (data available on request)

might disagree,” with 26% answering that they do so “sometimes” and another 13%, “often.” Thirty-eight percent answered that they stop themselves from “expressing . . . opinions on sensitive political topics” at least occasionally due to their “college’s speech policies.” And fully 85% of students reported self-censoring at least “occasionally” in a similarly worded question to “avoid offending other students,” with 20% doing so “often” and 42% doing so “sometimes.” As a result, majorities of those surveyed answered that it is “hard to have open and wide-ranging discussions” about President Trump (56%) and abortion (54%) on their campuses, with near majorities expressing analogous views regarding U.S. immigration policy (48%) and gender discrimination (41%).²¹

Those who would seek to silence views that they disagree with may be emboldened by school policy to do so. Restrictive speech codes are not simply a matter of civility and sensitivity. They pose a special danger to a democratic society that depends upon evaluation of multiple perspectives to determine what is in the country’s best interest. Indeed, the U.S. Supreme Court has acknowledged that the “nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth ‘out of a multitude of tongues, [rather] than through any kind of authoritative selection.’”²²

As such, the U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that students at public universities can expect robust protections of their First Amendment rights. In doing so, the Court has rejected arguments that officials at public institutions may restrict student speech when they fear disruptive activities may result or when the restrictions are designed to prevent students from making disparaging, demeaning, or uncivil comments. In fact, the Court has expressly noted that free speech “may indeed best serve its high

purpose when it induces a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, or even stirs people to anger.”²³

One of the most alarming new trends in American collegiate life is the establishment of bias response teams. These Orwellian-sounding task forces are responsible for soliciting complaints about offensive speech or bias-motivated behavior from campus members. According to a 2017 report, over 200 institutions (including the University of Mississippi) operate some kind of response team today. The teams often include campus police officers and other campus personnel whose main function is disciplinary, and they are generally dispatched to investigate incidents of bias or perceived prejudice, with the express purpose of re-educating offenders and logging the incident and response in annual campus climate reports.²⁴ One federal judge has noted that bias reporting structures are “reminiscent of the neighborhood watches that serve as the eyes and ears of totalitarian regimes, much like the *Comites de Defensa de la Revolución* in Castro’s Cuba.”²⁵

In an important recent ruling, the three-member U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit determined, in a 2-1 decision, that the University of Michigan’s bias response team’s power to refer students it finds guilty of offensive speech to other university agencies “is a real consequence that objectively chills speech.”²⁶ The ruling prompted the University of Michigan to reach a settlement with the plaintiff, Speech First, an organization that had alleged several of the university’s policies deter students from expressing opinions based on the viewpoint they wish to venture. As part of the settlement, the university agreed to abandon its bias response team and correct several other policies that chilled campus speech. Similar cases are now pending on appeal before the Fifth and the Seventh Circuit appeals courts, and it appears



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that there is a growing cognizance that colleges and universities must not establish policies and practices that in any way interfere with constitutionally protected speech.²⁷

Ole Miss: Dangerous Restrictions

Overall, public institutions in Mississippi do somewhat better than those in most states at protecting the free exchange of ideas. Six institutions have earned from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) a “Green Light” rating, which signifies that an institution’s written policies do not threaten free speech. A review of FIRE’s disinvitation database, which chronicles over 400 attempts to disinvite high-profile speakers, did not turn up a single successful instance at a public Mississippi institution.²⁸ But there remains substantial room for improvement, and in at least one case, the need for improvement is urgent.

An examination of the free speech policy of Ole Miss has found a number of startling practices that jeopardize the very core of freedom of expression. Ole Miss has set out unconstitutional rules for “Speaker’s Corners,” “Organized Student Demonstrations,” carrying props, and use of sidewalk chalk.²⁹ It has, moreover, a Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT), whose stated procedures will almost inevitably trigger legal challenge.

Ole Miss has designated three areas known as “Speaker’s Corners” where students are allowed to express themselves and participate in organized protests. The addendum virtually hidden at the bottom of this policy states, “Nothing in this section shall be interpreted as limiting the right of student expression elsewhere on the campus so long as the expressive activities or related student conduct do not violate any other applicable University policies.”³⁰ This qualification is unconvincing at best and does little to inform students of their rights. What purpose is served by designating a specific place for student speech if not the discouragement of free and unfettered inquiry elsewhere on campus? The university would do well to remember that historically, 100% of cases regarding “Speaker’s Corners” and designated free speech zones have been won by students, not universities.

The university’s “Organized Student Demonstrations” policy is unreasonably vague and includes a surprising amount of subjective language, giving the university license to shut down any event which it deems unwelcome. The word “may” is applied to at least five categories of requirements, making it nearly impossible for a student ever to know if he or she remains within the boundaries that the university envisions. Students must contact the administration and apply to conduct their demonstration prior to

the event if it “*may* draw a large crowd, *may* require security, *may* impede pedestrian or vehicular traffic, includes a parade, march, or other similar activity, or *may* pose a substantial risk of disrupting the functioning of the University or of violating any other University policy [italics added].”³¹

Any expressive event “may” draw a crowd, need security, or impede traffic. What is a “large crowd”? What are “similar activities” to parades and marches? This could mean almost anything. How are students supposed to assess whether their event “may pose a substantial risk of disrupting the functioning of the University or of violating any other University policy”? This section on demonstrations allows too many loopholes that enable the administration to crack down on any protester, student, or even professor who has something to say.

In the “Masks, Props, Disguise Materials” clause, the university reserves the right “to prohibit the wearing of masks, personal disguises and other means of concealing one’s identity.” What is understandable as a security measure is overbroad in its scope. The clause also prohibits the possession of “props or items that may be used as weapons.”³² As almost anything can be defined as a prop, or satisfy an administration official’s subjective definition of a weapon, the policy in essence gives the university nearly unlimited ability to ban everything from a sign to a walking stick. Such policies are vague and do not provide students with a fair or precise warning as to what is prohibited and in what context.

The “Use of Chalk” clause permits the use of chalk only for university-approved events and activities.³³ This is an unreasonably broad time, place, and manner restriction that silences alternate viewpoints. Limiting speech based on viewpoint is unconstitutional. The very point of freedom of expression is to have a wide variety of voices and opinions.

Ole Miss’s Bias Incident Response Team offers a disingenuous definition of its own activities. It “tracks bias data,” “monitor[s] campus climate,” and provides several examples of protected speech it exists to discourage (including offensive social media posts and “creating pictures that . . . ridicule”)—pretending that its interventions are not disciplinary or punitive.³⁴ In several places, the institution tacitly acknowledges that the response team’s activities raise serious First Amendment concerns, all while claiming that it is possible for a public university to investigate speech without chilling the expression of disfavored viewpoints:

- “The freedom of speech protects all citizens from punishment or other outcomes as a result of the legal use of free speech.”
- “Because BIRT is not a disciplinary arm, BIRT addresses legal bias speech as an opportunity for education.”
- “In instances where bias speech breaches the legal use of free speech or the student code of conduct, BIRT *will work with the Judicial Council or UPD on coordinating educational intervention or restorative justice as needed* [italics added].”³⁵

These assertions are dangerous to their core. BIRT leaves students uncertain of the rules but frightened of breaking them. In a status-driven social environment like a university, investigation itself can serve as a punishment that alienates outsiders from the majority. Punishments can also include the actions of law enforcement, student judiciaries, or the administration. The fact that investigations are time-consuming and difficult to navigate adds to the discomfiture of the accused. Another important effect of such investigations is that they legitimize the idea of administratively pursuing controversial speech. With a student’s social credit and more at risk, it is

no wonder that objectively reasonable students will toe the line and decline to participate in debate or otherwise challenge dominant campus viewpoints.

In addition to this aggressive orientation to their work—including the adoption of terms drawn from criminal procedure—bias response teams, including that of Ole Miss, generally have the inferred power to refer students for formal discipline. A very prominent link on Ole Miss’s BIRT website allows anyone to report a bias incident anonymously.³⁶ The report form plainly states that submitting the report can initiate law enforcement, judicial, or administrative action. It was just this seemingly routine function that drew the objections of the Sixth Circuit when the legality of the University of Michigan’s bias response team was before them. Given the salience of campus climate issues, and U.S. appeals courts’ demonstrated interest in assessing the constitutionality of bias response teams (cases are pending now in the Fifth and Seventh Circuits), Ole Miss would do well immediately to terminate its BIRT.

BIRT itself is part of the Diversity and Community Engagement Office (D&CE), an administrative unit at Ole Miss which nearly doubled its budget over the past year.³⁷ As a research and outreach program, D&CE may seem innocuous. The danger comes when D&CE offices work closely with student judiciary committees and administrators who are in charge of discipline and law enforcement. This puts the expansion of the office and the increase of its budget in a new light: If the newly augmented D&CE offices play a quasi-judicial role in the imposition of disciplinary sanctions, their ad hoc procedures carry significant due process concerns.

These policies and procedures do not support the stated mission of the University of Mississippi’s Oxford Campus. Ole Miss articulates a laudable vision of striving “to create, evaluate, share, and apply

knowledge in a free, open, and inclusive environment of intellectual inquiry.”³⁸ The institution needs to cleave to this goal.

The High Costs of Disruption and Trustees’ Responsibilities

Trustees must do more than simply prevent their institutions from erecting obstacles to academic freedom or the free exchange of ideas. Governing boards have a responsibility to establish institutional policies that affirmatively promote these values and set expectations for norms of behavior. Likewise, they must also remain vigilant to ensure that university leadership implements these policies successfully. Like plagiarism, encroachments on the free exchange of ideas, such as shouting down a speaker, threaten the academic integrity of the institution and must be deterred. Board statements and policies are important in establishing a culture in which such conduct will not be tolerated. But absent the willingness to impose serious disciplinary measures on those who violate these policies—and to communicate to the community that such sanctions have been imposed—any policy will lack the deterrent value necessary to be effective.



Trustees must do more than simply prevent their institutions from erecting obstacles to academic freedom or the free exchange of ideas. Governing boards have a responsibility to establish institutional policies that affirmatively promote these values and set expectations for norms of behavior.

Sadly, this is often the case at universities around the country, including some of the most prestigious. Several years ago at the University of Virginia, the university’s Hillel chapter hosted an event entitled

“Building Bridges” intended to bring people together to have a discussion about the conflict between Israel and Palestine. University students and others began shouting over the participants, effectively suspending the event until campus security came in to remove the disruptors. Citing privacy laws, the university declined to comment as to whether it applied any disciplinary sanctions to anyone involved in the deplatforming incident.³⁹

At Middlebury College, demonstrators shouted down Charles Murray, a prominent social scientist, and assaulted their own distinguished professor, who was his interlocutor, sending her to the hospital. The institution’s sole public statement on its investigation of the matter made only vague reference to “sanctions ranging from probation to official College discipline” for those involved. Later reports indicate that the vast majority of those who entered the disciplinary process received no more than probation as a result. The institutions did not take appropriately strong action.⁴⁰

At Evergreen State College, students burst into the classroom of a professor who chose to conduct class on a day the protesters had wanted all white people to leave, making the campus “minority only,” deeming that to be a way to highlight injustice. This professor—who, by his own description, was politically very progressive—opposed meeting injustice with injustice. This did not resonate well with the protesters who cursed him and threw racial epithets at him until his class was forced off campus. The president of the university, rather than supporting his own faculty member, not to mention the intellectual tradition of civil dialogue, ordered campus security to stand down and applauded the protesters for their bravery and courage.⁴¹

Events like these are not just symptomatic of a toxic campus climate that impedes free and open dialogue. They are also public relations nightmares that do lasting damage to an institution’s ability to recruit students and meet its capital campaign target. In the years following the events that convulsed Evergreen’s campus, the institution experienced a “catastrophic” decline in freshman enrollment, requiring the college to cut almost 10% of its budget. Badly-handled disruptions at the University of Missouri–Columbia (Mizzou) in 2015 cost the institution thousands of students in subsequent years and helped to open a \$49 million budget hole. At Yale University, repeated incidents that have raised questions about the institution’s commitment to intellectual freedom have reportedly delayed its most recent capital campaign.⁴²

Trustees have a critically important role to play. As fiduciaries, trustees must insist that administrators and faculty regularly review policies governing free expression to ensure that free speech is protected, not suppressed, on campus. Trustees can and should use their “bully pulpit” in defense of the First Amendment.

It is frustrating that not a single institution in Mississippi has adopted the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression.

It is frustrating that not a single institution in Mississippi has adopted the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression. To date, 70 institutions—including such eminent institutions as Purdue University, Johns Hopkins University, Ohio University, the University of Colorado, Columbia University, and Princeton University—have done so. In some cases, like the State University System of Florida and the University of Wisconsin System,

a state board has made the adoption of the Chicago Principles a system-wide commitment.

The brief but cogent Chicago Principles establish a policy that sets expectations for behavior. The Principles read, in part: “In a word, the University’s fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed.”⁴³

In conclusion, best practice is for boards to make absolutely clear, at every juncture—including commencement, convocation, and catalog—the full commitment of the institution to the free exchange of ideas. Only in this way will higher education be able to foster the intellectual boldness and habits of inquiry that are its heritage and lifeblood. Such leadership will redound to the credibility and reputation of Mississippi public higher education. 



■ Cost & Effectiveness

3. How much are students paying?

If there is one trend that is holding steady in the nation today, it is the rising cost of college. In the last 30 years, the nationwide average annual cost of tuition for a four-year public university has risen by more than \$12,000, nearly tripling the price.⁴⁴ Many students, struggling to cover ever-rising tuition costs, must take out large loans to pay for school, while others are simply opting out of going to college at all.⁴⁵

In the last 30 years, the nationwide average annual cost of tuition for a four-year public university has risen by more than \$12,000, nearly tripling the price.

Although tuition and fees at Mississippi public universities are currently below the national average, the trajectory of cost has been disquieting. Figures 4 and 5 on the following page show trends in tuition and required fees—otherwise known as the “sticker price”—for four-year public universities in Mississippi, in constant 2019 dollars, along with the percent change from 2012–17. While Mississippi Valley State at 8% was just under the national average over the same period, all but one public university saw more than double that growth rate (even after adjusting for inflation), with Jackson State, Mississippi State, and the University of Mississippi leading the way at 34.8%, 25.6%, and 25.3%, respectively.⁴⁶

Over a longer timeframe and including the total cost of attendance for in-state students living on campus, the trend is even more of a concern. Since 2002, the sticker price for the total cost of attendance has more than doubled at all but two institutions, Jackson State and Mississippi Valley State, where the total cost of attendance has *almost* doubled. Delta State has increased its sticker price more aggressively than any other institution, by 166.2% since 2002, but it nonetheless remains the most reasonably-priced university for in-state students living on campus (\$20,068). From 2002 to 2019, the cumulative rate of inflation (according to the Consumer Price Index) was 45.1%. Had the cost of attendance at Delta State increased at that rate, its sticker price would be roughly half what it is in 2019, or \$10,938 per year.⁴⁷

Sticker price is an imperfect measure of college affordability because of the practice of tuition discounting, in which institutions offer some students need- and merit-based grant aid to offset the price of attendance. However, the cost of college is still highly burdensome, particularly for those from middle class families. For example, an 18-year-old, in-state student from a family of four earning \$55,000 per year can expect to pay over \$20,000 per year net of all aid to attend the University of Mississippi after factoring in tuition, fees, room and board, books, and other expenses. Moreover, a

Figure 4 UNDERGRADUATE IN-STATE TUITION & FEES BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	2011-12	2016-17	% Change
Alcorn State University	\$5,964	\$6,973	16.9%
Delta State University	6,010	6,836	13.7
Jackson State University	5,740	7,734	34.8
Mississippi State University	6,598	8,287	25.6
Mississippi University for Women	5,542	6,460	16.6
Mississippi Valley State University	6,032	6,515	8.0
University of Mississippi	6,581	8,249	25.3
University of Southern Mississippi	6,631	8,158	23.0

Source: HowCollegesSpendMoney.com
 Note: Dollar amounts are expressed in 2019 inflation-adjusted numbers.
 Tuition and fees are for first-time, full-time undergraduate students.

Figure 5 TREND IN TOTAL PRICE FOR IN-STATE STUDENTS LIVING ON CAMPUS
 2002-03 TO 2018-19

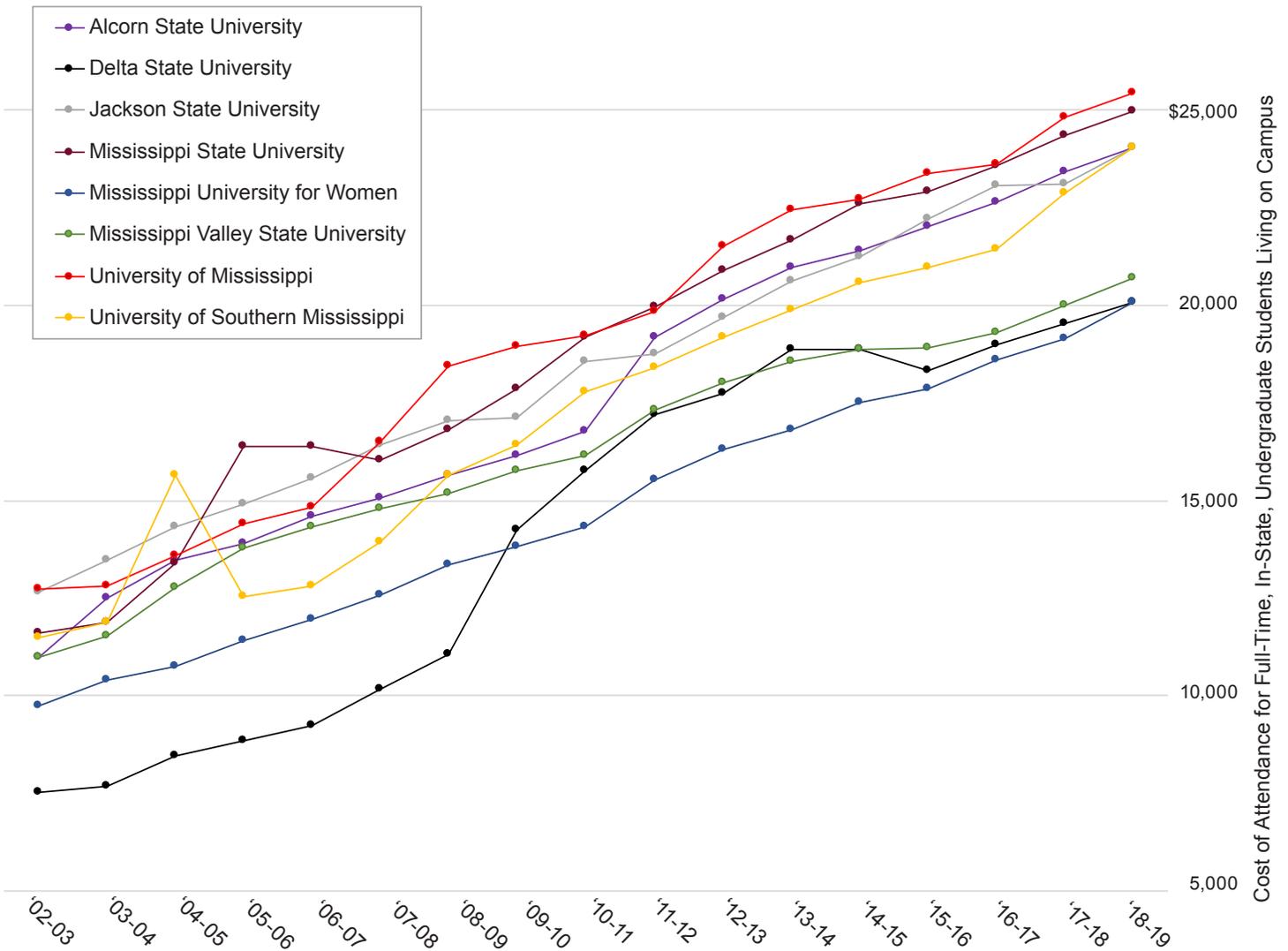
INSTITUTION	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Alcorn State University	\$10,997	\$12,480	\$13,464	\$13,911	\$14,599	\$15,072	\$15,648	\$16,172	\$16,778
Delta State University	7,538	7,692	8,454	8,833	9,242	10,152	11,068	14,250	15,776
Jackson State University	12,638	13,482	14,316	14,908	15,556	16,416	17,054	17,127	18,568
Mississippi State University	11,622	11,884	13,379	16,388	16,383	16,037	16,797	17,871	19,198
Mississippi University for Women	9,750	10,408	10,744	11,404	11,943	12,568	13,369	13,802	14,342
Mississippi Valley State University	10,985	11,531	12,788	13,770	14,339	14,809	15,172	15,758	16,168
University of Mississippi	12,716	12,816	13,604	14,414	14,834	16,484	18,438	18,966	19,210
University of Southern Mississippi	11,482	11,864	15,636	12,526	12,814	13,954	15,644	16,412	17,800

INSTITUTION	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Alcorn State University	\$19,189	\$20,139	\$20,984	\$21,392	\$22,036	\$22,644	\$23,413	\$24,032
Delta State University	17,213	17,749	18,887	18,887	18,317	18,992	19,543	20,068
Jackson State University	18,746	19,694	20,640	21,240	22,212	23,069	23,096	24,029
Mississippi State University	19,975	20,902	21,670	22,620	22,924	23,582	24,370	24,957
Mississippi University for Women	15,544	16,307	16,823	17,521	17,872	18,609	19,146	20,079
Mississippi Valley State University	17,307	18,013	18,552	18,883	18,913	19,310	19,986	20,714
University of Mississippi	19,852	21,526	22,444	22,704	23,372	23,606	24,822	25,436
University of Southern Mississippi	18,426	19,201	19,894	20,600	20,954	21,441	22,883	24,048

Source: IPEDS
 Note: Cost of attendance for full-time degree/certificate seeking in-state undergraduate students living on campus for academic year 2017-18. It includes in-state tuition and fees, books and supplies, on-campus room and board, and other on-campus expenses.
 Not adjusted for inflation.

Figure 6

INCREASING COST OF ATTENDANCE AT MISSISSIPPI UNIVERSITIES OVER TIME



Source: IPEDS

Note: Cost of attendance for first-time, full-time degree/certificate seeking in-state undergraduate students living on campus includes in-state tuition and fees, books and supplies, on-campus room and board, and other on-campus expenses. Not adjusted for inflation.

student from a family earning \$45,000 per year (the median household income in Mississippi is just over \$42,000) would still expect to pay over \$18,000 per year on net.⁴⁸ As such, the growth of sticker price—which in many cases far outpaces the return rate of any investment vehicle a typical family may use to save for college—is still an effective indicator of an unsustainable condition.

The landscape in Mississippi is somewhat more forgiving when looking at tuition as a percentage of median household income. As illustrated in Figure 7, the price of tuition and required fees for each of Mississippi’s public four-year universities is under one-fifth of the state’s median household income, and, with few exceptions, has remained as such over the past five years. By way of comparison, tuition and required

Figure 7 UNDERGRADUATE IN-STATE TUITION & FEES BY INSTITUTION AS A PERCENTAGE OF STATE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

INSTITUTION	2012-13	2016-17
Alcorn State University	15.6%	15.9%
Delta State University	15.6	15.6
Jackson State University	16.1	17.7
Mississippi State University	17.1	18.9
Mississippi University for Women	14.5	14.8
Mississippi Valley State University	15.6	14.9
University of Mississippi	17.1	18.8
University of Southern Mississippi	17.3	18.6

Source: *HowCollegesSpendMoney.com*
 Note: Percentages are based on in-state tuition and fees for first-time, full-time undergraduate students.

fees at Louisiana State University–Baton Rouge (LSU) and the University of Kentucky each represent over one-quarter of their respective states’ median household income (LSU: 25.6%; Kentucky: 25.3%).⁴⁹ Considering that many financial planning experts advise households to spend no more than 30% of their income on housing, it remains a matter of time before the cost to attend college in some states becomes tantamount to taking on a second mortgage.

The Escalating Student Loan Burden

As a result of quickly-escalating costs, the American public is questioning, for the first time in generations, whether college is worth the price. Total outstanding student loan debt recently passed \$1.6 trillion, which is \$600 billion more than Americans owe in credit card debt.⁵⁰ According to a College Board report, 67% of students at a public four-year institution took on debt in order to attend school.⁵¹ Nationally, the average graduate leaves college owing \$29,200, and in Mississippi, the average debt of graduates from

four-year public and private institutions is \$30,117.⁵² Those who do not complete their programs still have debt obligations, but do not have the career-boosting degree that would have helped pay off the aforementioned debt.

The costs of escalating student debt reverberate through the economy with grave consequences for many who leave college owing large sums. Graduates report delaying home ownership, marriage, and starting a family due to high monthly payments. And fewer are starting small businesses—long one of the most important drivers of economic growth in the U.S.⁵³ Unlike consumer debt, student loans cannot be discharged through bankruptcy; as such, students who fail to make payments will be hindered by their repayment obligations and damaged credits for decades.⁵⁴ It is thus incumbent upon schools to do everything they can to reduce costs and make higher education an attractive option for furthering one’s career.

Figure 8

COHORT DEFAULT RATES BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	2014 Cohort	2015 Cohort	2016 Cohort
Alcorn State University	16.3%	19.5%	21.4%
Delta State University	7.7	8.1	10.3
Jackson State University	14.3	14.4	17.8
Mississippi State University	7.5	7.4	7.6
Mississippi University for Women	7.7	8.9	8.4
Mississippi Valley State University	16.5	18.9	23.3
University of Mississippi	8.8	8.1	7.5
University of Southern Mississippi	11.3	9.7	8.7

Source: Federal Student Aid Office, U.S. Department of Education

Nationally, 11.3 million borrowers are in deferment, forbearance, or default. This includes a large number of students who recently attended Mississippi's public institutions. Among Mississippi graduates who were scheduled to begin making student loan payments in 2014–16, 6,523 borrowers—most in their early- to mid-twenties—are already in default.⁵⁵

Default rates and trajectories vary widely across Mississippi's public institutions. The rates are highest at

Alcorn State and Mississippi Valley State, where recent upticks in default rates mean that more than one in five students from the latest cohort are already in default. Default rates at two of the largest state institutions—the University of Mississippi and University of Southern Mississippi—are relatively low and trending downward. They are in the range of Mississippi State University's default rate, which has been stable across the last three cohorts at 7.4%–7.6%.⁵⁶ 

4. Where is the money going?

Funding student learning should be the most critical component of a university's budget. More and more often, tuition increases, but the money goes to new initiatives that require new staff and greater administrative costs rather than enhancing resources for teaching. With the burden of college costs already hurting many, how long can this pattern continue?

A report released in 2014 revealed a prodigious growth in non-academic employees at colleges and universities, greatly outpacing the growth of the student body and the faculty. The New England Center for Investigative Reporting found that from 1987 to 2012, 517,636 administrators and professional employees had been hired at colleges and universities across the country.⁵⁷ That is an average of 87 hires every working day! After seeing this growth, it is only natural to wonder, what is all this spending doing to educate students better and in the most affordable way?

A report released in 2014 revealed a prodigious growth in non-academic employees at colleges and universities, greatly outpacing the growth of the student body and the faculty.

Nationally, faculty salaries have changed only negligibly, while administrative salaries have shot up. A 2018 survey found that the average salary

for full professors was \$104,820, up 3% from the previous year, but when adjusted for inflation, that represents a mere 1% increase.⁵⁸ College presidents and chancellors fared much better, with an average salary of \$487,475, and chief financial officers earned \$289,286.⁵⁹ Colleges and universities will suffer when they mis-value their resources, which hinders their ability to retain and attract top academic talent.

Trends in Mississippi Faculty Salaries

The same trends are apparent in Mississippi. Since 2007–08, professors' salaries at Mississippi institutions have increased only slightly—a trend that is consistent across ranks and institutions. The average full professor salary increased just 3.6% at Mississippi Valley State University over the last decade (the lowest rate of growth) and by 18.1% at Alcorn State University, whose tenured faculty saw the highest percentage rates of increase among Mississippi institutions. In inflation-adjusted terms, however, full professor salaries fell at *every* public institution; associate professor salaries rose at only one institution, by 2.3% at Alcorn State. Broadly similar trends are apparent at the ranks of assistant professor and instructor, with assistant professor salaries up an average of 1.1% at the University of Mississippi and instructor salaries up 2.4% and 12.2% at Mississippi State and Ole Miss respectively (inflation adjusted).⁶⁰

Figure 9

2017-18 AVERAGE SALARIES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	Full	Associate	Assistant	Instructor
Alcorn State University	\$78,230	\$71,665	\$55,273	\$40,879
Delta State University	70,245	58,728	55,775	50,862
Jackson State University	80,942	70,133	59,123	45,515
Mississippi State University	105,880	81,510	72,870	47,742
Mississippi University for Women	66,955	54,919	50,861	50,810
Mississippi Valley State University	64,598	55,897	48,848	44,471
University of Mississippi	113,671	86,041	73,916	47,393
University of Southern Mississippi	90,689	69,875	62,493	48,716

Source: IPEDS

Note: Dollar values reflect a nine-month contract.

Figure 10

CHANGES IN FACULTY SALARY BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	Change Since 2007-08				Change Since 2012-13			
	Full	Associate	Assistant	Instructor	Full	Associate	Assistant	Instructor
Alcorn State University	18.1%	21.1%	3.8%	3.8%	11.4%	15.4%	-2.8%	0.2%
Delta State University	13.0	3.0	17.3	13.4	7.6	6.5	10.1	18.6
Jackson State University	13.5	12.7	8.6	17.9	10.1	10.8	7.6	12.2
Mississippi State University	15.0	15.4	18.1	21.2	14.9	11.9	14.3	14.8
Mississippi University for Women	16.1	14.5	8.8	9.7	16.4	10.5	-0.1	7.2
Mississippi Valley State University	3.6	-5.7	-2.1	10.4	1.1	7.0	2.1	22.2
University of Mississippi	13.3	13.0	19.6	32.9	4.3	8.9	10.4	20.0
University of Southern Mississippi	6.2	5.3	12.7	11.1	5.6	9.7	5.9	5.8

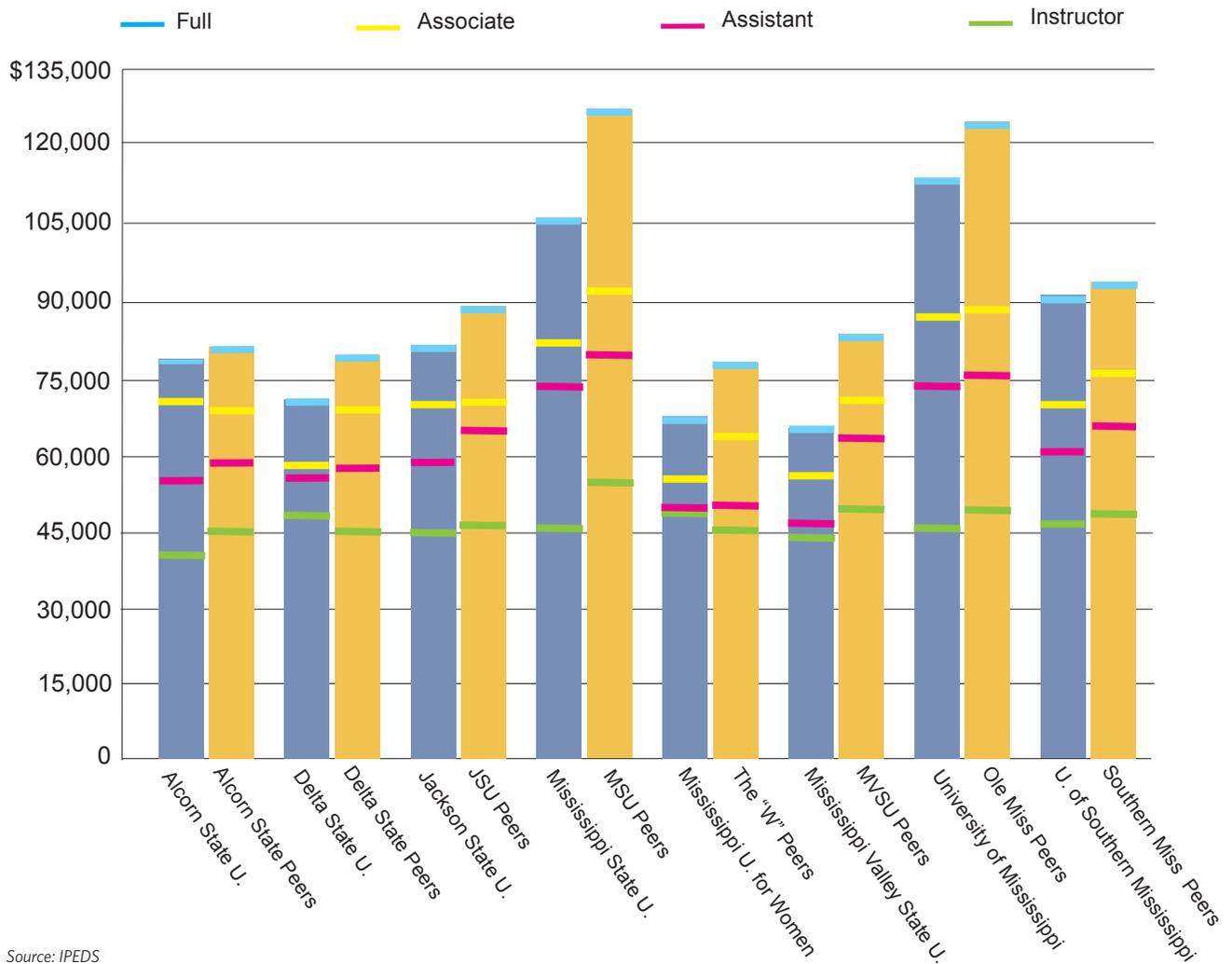
INSTITUTION	Inflation Adjusted Change Since 2007-08				Inflation Adjusted Change Since 2012-13			
	Full	Associate	Assistant	Instructor	Full	Associate	Assistant	Instructor
Alcorn State University	-0.3%	2.3%	-12.3%	-12.4%	4.5%	8.2%	-8.8%	-6.0%
Delta State University	-4.5	-13.0	-0.9	-4.2	0.9	-0.1	3.2	11.2
Jackson State University	-4.1	-4.8	-8.3	-0.4	3.2	3.9	0.8	5.2
Mississippi State University	-2.9	-2.5	-0.3	2.4	7.7	4.9	7.2	7.6
Mississippi University for Women	-1.9	-3.3	-8.1	-7.4	9.1	3.6	-6.3	0.5
Mississippi Valley State University	-12.5	-20.3	-17.3	-6.7	-5.2	0.3	-4.3	14.5
University of Mississippi	-4.3	-4.6	1.1	12.2	-2.2	2.1	3.5	12.5
University of Southern Mississippi	-10.3	-11.0	-4.8	-6.1	-1.0	2.9	-0.7	-0.8

Source: IPEDS

Note: Comparison based on 2012-13 and 2007-08 average faculty salaries adjusted to 2017 dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator.

Figure 11

2017-18 AVERAGE SALARIES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF AT MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES COMPARED TO PEER INSTITUTIONS



Source: IPEDS
 Note: Peer institutions reflect those indicated in the institution's IPEDS Data Feedback Report.

Mississippi's two flagship doctoral institutions both lag their self-selected peers in average faculty salaries across ranks. The average full professor at the University of Mississippi makes about \$11,000 less than the median full professor salary at comparable institutions according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). For Mississippi State, the gulf is more than \$21,000.

The trend extends to Mississippi institutions across Carnegie classifications.⁶¹

Trends in Mississippi Senior Administration Salaries

No such restraint is apparent when it comes to presidential salaries, as shown by the charts on the following page. At the time of publication, the

Figure 12

**PRESIDENT, PROVOST, & CFO SALARIES
AT MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, 2019-20**

INSTITUTION	President	Provost	CFO
Alcorn State University	\$250,000	\$175,000	\$153,912
Delta State University	215,001	185,400	149,350
Jackson State University	300,000	200,000	185,000
Mississippi State University	800,000	400,000	257,000
Mississippi University for Women	245,000	160,000	150,000
Mississippi Valley State University	225,000	131,755	121,620
University of Mississippi	600,000	396,548	322,000
University of Southern Mississippi	600,000	290,700	210,000

Source: Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, response to public record request dated December 6, 2019

Figure 13

**SENIOR EXECUTIVE SALARIES COMPARED TO AVERAGE FULL
PROFESSOR SALARY AT MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, 2018-19**

INSTITUTION	President	Ratio, Pres. to Full Prof.	Provost	Ratio, Provost to Full Prof.	CFO	Ratio, CFO to Full Prof.	Full Professor
Alcorn State University	\$250,000	3.13	\$175,000	2.19	\$153,912	1.93	\$79,911
Delta State University	215,001	2.89	185,400	2.49	149,350	2.01	74,377
Jackson State University	300,000	3.64	200,000	2.42	185,000	2.24	82,482
Mississippi State University	800,000	7.43	400,000	3.71	233,700	2.17	107,703
Mississippi University for Women	245,000	3.74	155,000	2.37	145,000	2.22	65,455
Mississippi Valley State University	225,000	3.48	131,755	2.04	121,620	1.88	64,724
University of Mississippi	600,000	5.11	396,548	3.38	322,000	2.74	117,363
University of Southern Mississippi	464,500	5.23	285,000	3.21	210,000	2.36	88,866

Source: Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, response to public record request dated December 6, 2019

Note: 2018-19 average salaries for full professors at Mississippi institutions are drawn from IHL data for this comparison, not IPEDS, so that data source and comparison year are consistent.

Figure 14

**NATIONAL TRENDS FOR SENIOR EXECUTIVE SALARIES COMPARED
TO AVERAGE FULL PROFESSOR SALARY AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, 2018-19**

INSTITUTION	President	Ratio, Avg. Pres. to Avg. Full Prof.	Provost	Ratio, Avg. Provost to Avg. Full Prof.	CFO	Ratio, Avg. CFO to Avg. Full Prof.	Full Professor
Average, Public Doctoral	\$504,927	3.56	\$357,389	2.52	\$300,535	2.12	\$141,859
Average, Public Master's	290,359	2.88	214,913	2.13	191,829	1.90	100,831
Average, Public Bachelor's	251,732	2.68	154,142	1.64	136,528	1.45	93,924

Source: American Association of University Professors, "The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession," 2018-19

Note: See end note 64 for further explanation of ratios and Carnegie classification.

Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning had proposed to hire Glenn Boyce to lead the University of Mississippi at an annual salary of \$800,000/year. That would match the 2019–20 salary of Mississippi State University President Mark Keenum. In both cases, chief executive compensation is supplemented by the universities' respective foundations, due to the state's \$300,000 salary cap for university leaders. This represents a dramatic pay increase for presidents on both campuses—almost double the \$429,000 that Ole Miss paid Chancellor Daniel W. Jones in 2014–15 and about 50% more than the \$527,370 that Mississippi State paid President Keenum in 2015–16.⁶²

These rates of compensation will exceed last year's average and median salaries for presidents at public doctoral granting institutions, \$504,927 and \$482,125 respectively, as reported by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) based on a survey of 634 institutions.⁶³ They also exceed normal ratios of chief executive to full professor compensation for doctoral-granting universities. In 2018–19, the average presidential salary at the doctoral institutions surveyed by the AAUP was about three and a half times higher than the average salary for full professors at the same group of institutions. (The average and median ratios for public doctoral institutions were only slightly higher, 4.00 and 4.08 respectively.)

Next year, Mississippi's flagship institutions will each pay their president *more than six times* the campus's average annual salary for a full professor.

In comparison, next year, Mississippi's flagship institutions will each pay their president *more than six times* the campus's average annual salary for a full professor.⁶⁴

Salaries for university provosts and chief financial officers at Mississippi public universities are closer to national benchmarks, though the chief academic officer's salary is more than three times the average full professor salary at Mississippi's three largest institutions: Ole Miss, Mississippi State, and the University of Southern Mississippi. The table on page 27 also shows that chief financial officer salaries at Mississippi campuses are remarkably similar when benchmarked against the same campus's average salary for a full professor, with most institutions paying their senior finance officer double, or modestly more than double, what they pay an average full professor. This aligns closely with national benchmarks. The outlier is Ole Miss, where the CFO to full professor salary ratio was 2.74 to 1 in 2018–19.

Instructional versus Administrative Spending

Using figures from HowCollegesSpendMoney.com, an online financial benchmarking tool for college trustees that incorporates data from the U.S. Department of Education, the charts on the following page indicate trends in instructional spending per student, administrative spending per student, and the ratio of administrative-to-instructional costs at Mississippi public universities. In the five-year period from 2012 to 2016, five out of eight universities—Alcorn State, Delta State, Jackson State, Mississippi State, and Mississippi University for Women—saw spending on instruction grow faster than administrative spending (and in the case of Jackson State, administrative spending actually decreased during the time period).⁶⁵

More intriguing, however, is a look at the universities' administrative-to-instructional cost ratio, or the amount that institutions spend on administration relative to instruction. Over the past five years, Jackson State significantly reduced the amount it

Figure 15

INSTRUCTIONAL VS. ADMINISTRATIVE SPENDING PER STUDENT BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION		FY 2012	FY 2016	5-Year % Change
Alcorn State University	<i>Instruction</i>	\$ 7,440	\$ 7,836	5.3%
	<i>Administration</i>	3,175	3,175	0.0
Delta State University	<i>Instruction</i>	7,093	9,303	31.2
	<i>Administration</i>	1,757	1,880	7.0
Jackson State University	<i>Instruction</i>	8,163	9,525	16.7
	<i>Administration</i>	4,812	4,077	-15.3
Mississippi State University	<i>Instruction</i>	8,621	9,402	9.1
	<i>Administration</i>	3,199	3,387	5.9
Mississippi University for Women	<i>Instruction</i>	9,632	11,154	15.8
	<i>Administration</i>	2,252	2,524	12.1
Mississippi Valley State University	<i>Instruction</i>	10,046	9,134	-9.1
	<i>Administration</i>	3,147	3,267	3.8
University of Mississippi*	<i>Instruction</i>	11,110	15,900	43.1
	<i>Administration</i>	1,611	7,284	352.1
University of Southern Mississippi	<i>Instruction</i>	8,543	10,107	18.3
	<i>Administration</i>	1,705	2,046	20.0

Source: HowCollegesSpendMoney.com

Note: Dollar amounts are expressed in 2019 inflation-adjusted numbers. FY 2016 are the latest final data available.

*See page 30 for information on the University of Mississippi's administrative costs.

Figure 16

AMOUNT SPENT ON ADMINISTRATION PER DOLLAR SPENT ON INSTRUCTION BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	FY 2012	FY 2016	2016 Average for Similar Institutions (FY 2016)*
Alcorn State University	\$0.43	\$0.41	\$0.30
Delta State University	0.25	0.20	0.24
Jackson State University	0.59	0.43	0.22
Mississippi State University	0.37	0.36	0.22
Mississippi University for Women	0.23	0.23	0.33
Mississippi Valley State University	0.31	0.36	0.33
University of Mississippi	0.15	0.46	0.19
University of Southern Mississippi	0.20	0.20	0.22

Source: HowCollegesSpendMoney.com

*"Similar institutions" refers to public, four-year institutions of the same Carnegie classification, e.g., "Doctoral University: Highest Research Activity." Carnegie classifications reflect those held by institutions in FY 2016.



From 2010 to 2017, per-student expenditure on **student services** at four-year public universities increased by 16.4%, faster than spending on instruction (5.6%), academic support (13.7%), or research (which *decreased* by 7.6%).

spends on administration from 59 cents for every dollar it spends on instruction down to 43 cents per dollar of instruction, yet its cost ratio of 0.43 is still higher than the average of 0.22 for public universities of Carnegie classification “Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity.” With the exception of Delta State, Southern Mississippi, and the Mississippi University for Women, public institutions in Mississippi maintain administrative-to-instructional cost ratios at or above the average for their Carnegie classification.⁶⁶ To be sure, no metric is dispositive—and administrative costs in this context include many vital functions such as a university development office—but these are measures that warrant careful monitoring to ensure that public universities are using taxpayer resources prudently. Moreover, year-to-year fluctuations can sometimes be explained by changes institutions make based on internal decisions that determine how they report data to the federal government in a given year. Such is the case at the University of Mississippi and its increase in administrative spending reflected in Figure 15 on the previous page.

Not included in the definition of “administrative” expenditure above are what IPEDS classifies as “student services” expenses, which include costs such as the admissions or registrar’s office as well as “activities whose primary purpose is to contribute to

students’ emotional and physical well-being and to their intellectual, cultural, and social development,” such as student activities, cultural events, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and the like.⁶⁷ Nationally, this is a fast-growing sector of higher education: From 2010 to 2017, per-student expenditure on student services at four-year public universities increased by 16.4%, faster than spending on instruction (5.6%), academic support (13.7%), or research (which *decreased* by 7.6%).⁶⁸

The student services category typically also includes offices like Diversity and Community Engagement (D&CE). The Mississippi Center for Public Policy recently submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the Institutions of Higher Learning to acquire information regarding the pay structure of the D&CE offices of Mississippi State University and Ole Miss. As discussed on page 15, the Diversity and Community Engagement Office is an administrative unit at Ole Miss. Its budget for salaries and benefits in 2017–18 was \$310,440. In 2018–19, that budget was increased to \$710,740.⁶⁹ This pays for two new assistant vice chancellors and a raise for the vice chancellor, the head of the office.

To be clear, the generous funding of the Diversity and Community Engagement Office is not for student scholarships which, if properly directed to students

from disadvantaged backgrounds, would actually increase diversity.

Athletic Spending

What about athletic spending? Universities are not required to report their athletic departments' expenditures to the Department of Education as a separate item, so it is harder to say exactly where the money goes. However, information obtained by *USA Today* through a Freedom of Information Act request provides some insight concerning trends in athletic spending for more than 230 public schools across the country.

Both the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University have poured significant resources into their athletic programs in recent years. In the 10-year period from 2009 to 2018, athletic spending at both Ole Miss and Mississippi State more than doubled, growing at a rate greater than any other public institution in the Southeastern Athletic Conference (SEC). Among the 230 institutions in the *USA Today* database, Ole Miss and Mississippi State

now rank 27th and 43rd respectively, in total spending on athletics.⁷⁰

In the 10-year period from 2009 to 2018, athletic spending at both Ole Miss and Mississippi State more than doubled, growing at a rate greater than any other public institution in the Southeastern Athletic Conference.

Such growth in athletic spending raises concerns as to whether student fees and institutional funds—monies that could otherwise go toward student instruction or reducing tuition—are instead used for non-academic purposes. The chart on the following page shows the total amount that Mississippi public universities have collected from student fees (funds paid directly by students) and school funds (which include funding and services provided by institutional or government sources) to operate Division I athletic programs.⁷¹

Mississippi State and Ole Miss—both of which compete in the SEC and operate athletic programs

Figure 17

TRENDS IN ATHLETIC SPENDING AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTION	2009	2013	2018	5-Year Change	10-Year Change
Alcorn State University	\$ 4,942,041	\$ 6,042,709	\$ 6,784,422	12.3%	37.3%
Jackson State University	5,859,217	6,411,728	8,249,184	28.7	40.8
Mississippi State University	36,703,582	57,362,224	89,794,392	56.5	144.6
Mississippi Valley State University	3,684,306	4,368,954	4,175,281	-4.4	13.3
University of Mississippi	41,290,128	71,315,807	116,812,268	63.8	182.9
University of Southern Mississippi	19,861,580	22,399,056	26,135,504	16.7	31.6

Source: USA Today

Note: Dollar figures not adjusted for inflation. USA Today study only includes data for Division I schools.

with annual revenues exceeding \$100 million—have long relied only minimally on institutional subsidies. Mississippi State eliminated its student athletics fee in 2016 and has operated virtually unsubsidized for the last three years (only 21 Division I athletic programs in the country receive less than 1% of their revenues from students or the institution). Ole Miss and its students subsidized the Rebels to the tune of about \$200 per full time equivalent student in 2018, a figure that has been remarkably stable for the last decade.⁷²

Southern Mississippi operates a program that costs approximately \$25 million, with 41% of its 2018 revenue (\$10 million) coming from student fees and direct institutional subsidy. In per pupil terms, the subsidy amounts to \$782, up from \$568 in 2009. Mississippi Valley, Alcorn State, and Jackson State all operate much smaller athletic departments, with expenses ranging from \$4.2 to \$8.2 million in 2018. Smaller programs tend to rely much more on institutional subsidies (in terms proportional to the budget) even though the programs are relatively

Figure 18

ATHLETIC SUBSIDIES BY INSTITUTION

School Funds + Student Fees

INSTITUTION	2009	2013	2018	5-Year Change	10-Year Change
Alcorn State University	\$3,116,600	\$7,501,398	\$3,429,682	-54.3%	10.0%
Jackson State University	3,264,510	3,759,290	4,738,147	26.0	45.1
Mississippi State University	5,028,837	3,000,000	93,321	-96.9	-98.1
Mississippi Valley State University	2,295,906	2,821,442	2,041,761	-27.6	-11.1
University of Mississippi	3,402,886	3,831,598	5,169,691	34.9	51.9
University of Southern Mississippi	7,339,063	9,802,774	10,054,148	2.6	37.0

Subsidy Per Full-Time Equivalent Student

INSTITUTION	2009	2013	2018	5-Year Change	10-Year Change
Alcorn State University	\$1,098.55	\$2,199.82	\$1,031.79	-53.1%	-6.1%
Jackson State University	460.70	517.67	638.05	23.3	38.5
Mississippi State University	320.33	164.10	4.67	-97.2	-98.5
Mississippi Valley State University	895.09	1,314.13	1,009.27	-23.2	12.8
University of Mississippi	242.27	216.93	238.71	10.0	-1.5
University of Southern Mississippi	568.08	689.17	782.12	13.5	37.7

Source: IPEDS, USA Today

modest in scope. In 2018, Alcorn State and Jackson State received more than 50% of their revenues from student fees and school funds, with Mississippi Valley State just behind at 49%. In per pupil terms, Mississippi Valley State and Alcorn State have the highest subsidies, which in each case surpassed \$1,000 per student. But this is mainly a reflection of the size of the student body and not the result of extravagant spending habits. Each of these three athletic programs rank near the bottom in total expenditure among schools in the *USA Today* database.⁷³

More broadly, however, substantial athletic spending has a negative impact on institutions' ability to grow in areas pertinent to their academic mission. Attracting and retaining prominent faculty requires not only offering competitive salaries, but often necessitates investment in technologically-sophisticated and costly research facilities. Doing so can be difficult when the highest-paid state employee is the head coach of a school's athletic program—as

is the case of Ole Miss's head football coach, whose \$3,000,000 salary is over 24 times that of the state governor.⁷⁴ Governing boards have the duty to control the rapid growth of non-academic budgets relative to those of other functions of the university and to remedy misaligned priorities.

Academic Program Prioritization

The proliferation of academic programs is an immense contributor to costs, and any effort to reduce costs and enhance productivity must include program prioritization and, where appropriate, the closing of redundant or inefficient programs. In *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*, former University of Northern Colorado president Robert C. Dickeson describes the problem: “For the most part, adding academic programs results in a substantial diminution of resources for existing programs,” and the “price for academic bloat for all is impoverishment of each.” Dr. Dickeson recommends

Figure 19

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS WITH FEW COMPLETIONS BY INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	No. of Bachelor Programs with Fewer than 10 Completions 2017-18	% of Bachelor Programs with Fewer than 10 Completions
Alcorn State University	16	55.1%
Delta State University	19	51.4
Jackson State University	18	41.0
Mississippi State University	14	18.2
Mississippi University for Women	13	46.4
Mississippi Valley State University	18	62.1
University of Mississippi	17	22.7
University of Southern Mississippi	17	23.6

Source: College Navigator
Note: Data reported are for first majors.



In FY 2020, Mississippi system institutions requested from the state legislature funding for capital projects totaling nearly **\$640 million**. And in FY 2019, the IHL listed on its financial statement revenues of over **\$72 million** in “state appropriations restricted for capital purposes.”

that governing boards take the lead in the important job of academic prioritization.⁷⁵ Particularly for public institutions, the number of students graduating with a major from an academic program is one of several indicators of cost-effectiveness.

At many schools, smaller, niche departments account for a significant proportion of the academic programs offered, but fail to graduate many students. Figure 19 on the previous page shows the number (and percentage of) baccalaureate degree programs at each of Mississippi’s public institutions that produced fewer than 10 graduates in 2017–18. At five of the institutions—Mississippi Valley State, Mississippi University for Women, Jackson State, Delta State, and Alcorn State—more than 30% of programs each produced fewer than 10 graduates. A total of 24 baccalaureate programs at these eight institutions produced no graduates in 2017–18.⁷⁶

Low enrollment itself should not be a reason to terminate a program—for example, a foreign language department may produce few majors, but still provide valuable courses for the student body at large. Such offerings are often referred to as “service courses,” which encompass the broader category of undergraduate general education classes taken by students of all majors. Nonetheless, program enrollment is an important indicator that can be used to determine which programs should be

carefully reviewed for the possibility of merging or eliminating them. Each program is unique, and it is the responsibility of trustees to question whether each one represents an appropriate use of limited resources and tuition dollars. By making these tough decisions, trustee boards also ensure that their best programs have the resources they need to thrive.

Building Utilization

In FY 2020, Mississippi system institutions requested from the state legislature funding for capital projects totaling nearly \$640 million. And in FY 2019, the IHL listed on its financial statement revenues of over \$72 million in “state appropriations restricted for capital purposes.”⁷⁷ A major question is whether all of these projects merit funding, and it is most unclear whether the IHL Board of Trustees has sufficient information to make appropriate decisions.

Every campus president relishes the opportunity to construct a new building, cut the ribbon, and put on his or her resume the achievement of funding a major capital project. But a new building, when maintenance costs are calculated, can be the “gift that keeps on taking.” Capital expenditures represent an enormous expense for higher education. According to the Urban Institute, in 2016, 12% of the \$288 billion that state and local governments spent on higher education went to capital outlays, including

construction, maintenance, and equipment.⁷⁸ Despite the vast technological advancements in telecommunication over the past several decades, colleges and universities have continued to amass real estate at rates of which other sectors of the economy would be envious. And 2015 was no exception: Colleges and universities spent \$11.5 billion on construction and maintenance, increasing higher education's physical footprint by 21 million square feet.⁷⁹ A Sightlines report found that total campus space grew nationally by 10% from 2007 to 2016, which was more than the growth of enrollment. According to Sasaki Associates, an architectural firm in Boston, the amount of space per student has tripled since the 1970s.⁸⁰

As the *Chronicle of Higher Education* noted 10 years ago:

More buildings means higher utility bills and maintenance costs when colleges cannot afford them. Facilities are second only to personnel in campus expenditures. One gross square foot of construction can cost \$300. Some experts say that on a five-million-square-foot campus, 1 percent of underutilized lab and office space equals about \$3.7-million in wasted construction costs. And that's just the beginning. Maintenance, utilities, and renewal costs can compose about 70 percent of the lifetime costs of a building.⁸¹

States often set guidelines for how often classrooms should be in use as a way of containing capital expenditures and maximizing access and enrollment, yet many public institutions fail to meet minimum expectations for hours of classroom use. A 2015 ACTA study of the 50 top-ranked public universities in *U.S. News & World Report* found that of the institutions whose states had official guidelines for weekly and hourly classroom usage, only three (the

University of Maryland, the University of Washington, and the University of California–Santa Cruz) regularly met those standards.⁸²

One culprit in the underutilization of university buildings is the practice of not scheduling classes during off-peak hours, particularly late afternoons and on Fridays.

One culprit in the underutilization of university buildings is the practice of not scheduling classes during off-peak hours, particularly late afternoons and on Fridays. Institutions that make data on building utilization publicly available illustrate this drop-off. In 2014, Western Carolina University found that its building use dropped precipitously on Fridays, with hourly use dropping more than 300 hours and the number of class or lab meetings scheduled dropping by nearly half. Western Carolina also had a large amount of underused capacity: Of the 161 rooms available to hold class, 96% of courses were held in 109 of the available rooms. That left 52 rooms used just 4% of the time.⁸³ The University of Maryland–Baltimore County conducted a study in January of 2019 that found the day effectively ends at 2:30 p.m. on Fridays in the fall: At 11:00 a.m. on Fridays, the number of classrooms in use peaked at 61, but by 3:00 p.m., the number plummeted to less than 10.⁸⁴

As Pennsylvania State University's board of trustees conceded in a previous strategic plan:

The University has invested heavily in both the construction of classroom and laboratory facilities and the renovation of existing facilities to accommodate new modes of teaching and learning and the greater use of technology. **Too often, these facilities are not fully utilized—**

and the University constructs additional facilities—because of lack of use outside of certain “prime time” class periods or times of the day. Classroom space at University Park, for example, is near fully utilized between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on a typical day, but much capacity is underutilized at other times of the day. While a notable reduction in classroom utilization has occurred at 8:00 a.m., in response to student (and some faculty) preferences, mid- and late-afternoon scheduling remains significantly lower [bold added].⁸⁵

In recent years, Penn State has addressed the issue of classroom underutilization by setting university-wide expectations for how academic departments should schedule course offerings. For example, departments may offer no more than 45% of their sections during “prime time”—between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Mississippi can use a similar framework to ensure that classrooms are being utilized at a greater capacity.⁸⁶

The cost to a campus is not only financial. Employers cry out for graduates with “soft skills,” which include such habits as punctuality and strong work ethic. A schedule that avoids morning classes and facilitates a three-day weekend hardly answers to the needs of the workforce. Campuses that have earned the reputation of hard-drinking party cultures should consider whether classroom scheduling has facilitated and encouraged such behavior.

While Mississippi’s public institutions have taken on increasing levels of debt in recent years, most have pursued a relatively conservative approach to debt-

financed capital investment at a time when many institutions are competing for students in what has become an all-out facilities arms race. This is not to say that debt levels have not risen quickly. Total outstanding debt has more than doubled at Southern Mississippi and Delta State, and has increased almost six-fold at the University of Mississippi. Alcorn State had negligible debt a decade ago but owes almost \$50 million today. In per pupil terms, three public institutions have bond obligations in excess of \$15,000 per full-time equivalent student, but only one, the University of Mississippi, reported an annual debt service expense exceeding \$600 per student in the 2016–17 fiscal year.⁸⁷

But greater efficiency, which would in turn increase access and lower costs, is possible. Transparency is the first step. Best practice dictates that state institutions make data on classroom and laboratory utilization rates publicly available. In 2016, the Louisiana State Legislature unanimously passed a bill requiring public university boards to study and report classroom usage rates by day of week and time of day, and to make such data available for public comment prior to submitting any individual capital expenditure requests in excess of \$10 million.⁸⁸ Mississippi law currently does not impose such a requirement on public institutions, and the IHL Board of Trustees does not appear to report such data to the general public. A dashboard on building utilization rates, disaggregated by day of week and time of day, would go far to instill taxpayer confidence in the universities’ use of resources. ●

Figure 20

DEBT SERVICE PER INSTITUTION

INSTITUTION	Total Long-Term Debt	Debt Per FTE		Change Since 2006-07
		2006-07	2016-17	
Alcorn State University	\$ 49,292,164.00	\$ 75.13	\$16,289.55	21,583.3%
Delta State University	14,361,541.00	1,758.78	4,804.80	173.2
Jackson State University	95,440,535.00	12,737.15	11,537.78	-9.4
Mississippi State University	324,565,000.00	9,761.19	16,424.52	68.3
Mississippi University for Women	77,053.00	299.54	30.49	-89.8
Mississippi Valley State University	18,149,348.00	6,860.72	8,605.67	25.4
University of Mississippi	496,850,180.00	6,043.77	22,546.18	273.0
University of Southern Mississippi	173,595,042.00	5,981.24	13,534.62	126.3

INSTITUTION	Debt Service Per FTE		Change Since 2006-07
	2006-07	2016-17	
Alcorn State University	\$ 15.90	\$ 237.94	1,396.2%
Delta State University	253.49	434.60	71.4
Jackson State University	318.53	447.91	40.6
Mississippi State University	456.97	511.36	11.9
Mississippi University for Women	108.37	59.74	-44.9
Mississippi Valley State University	43.53	158.59	264.4
University of Mississippi	350.25	1,127.07	221.8
University of Southern Mississippi	188.94	508.74	169.3

Source: IPEDS

Note: Debt service refers to what is reported in IPEDS as "Long-term debt, current portion," defined as "the amount of long-term debt that is expected to require current assets to pay or liquidate during the next year."

5. Are students completing their programs?

Students who enter college but do not graduate represent a failed investment, with serious consequences for the student, the institution, and taxpayers. Nationally, only 60.4% of full-time students enrolling for the first time in college earn a degree in six years: 59.7% of the students at public institutions graduate in six years, and 66.4% of the students at private, non-profit institutions graduate in this time.⁸⁹ Even allowing for students who transfer and finish at another institution, these low rates put the United States behind its global competitors. Despite spending more per student on higher education than any other country in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) except Luxembourg, the United States ranks 22nd out of 36 in the percentage of young adults who have completed college.⁹⁰

Figure 21 on the following page shows the four-year and six-year graduation rates in Mississippi for the cohort of students who entered college in 2011. Seven out of eight Mississippi schools failed to reach the national six-year graduation standard for public institutions. Only the University of Mississippi exceeded this standard.⁹¹ A baccalaureate degree, moreover, typically is designed to take four, not six,

years to complete. Students who entered in 2011 should have graduated in 2015 and moved forward with careers or further training, yet not a single school in Mississippi graduated at least half of its students in four years. Only at four schools did a quarter or more of students graduate in four years.⁹²

Seven out of eight Mississippi schools failed to reach the national six-year graduation standard for public institutions. Only the University of Mississippi exceeded this standard.

Admittedly, some students take longer to graduate because of financial or family obligations or military service that they must balance against progress toward degree completion. But timely completion of degree programs is a crucial metric of higher education's effectiveness, constituting one of the most important responsibilities of any governing board. It goes without saying that students who start college and fail to graduate, especially if they have taken student loans, compromise their future and ultimately the economic progress of the state. ●

Figure 21

**BACCALAUREATE GRADUATION RATES FOR
FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME FRESHMEN BY INSTITUTION**

INSTITUTION	Class of 2011 Graduation Rate		Class of 2015 Graduation Rate	
	4-Year	6-Year	4-Year	6-Year
Alcorn State University	18%	34%	15%	32%
Delta State University	16	35	19	40
Jackson State University	17	39	19	34
Mississippi State University	31	61	30	58
Mississippi University for Women	22	39	25	44
Mississippi Valley State University	11	26	14	30
University of Mississippi	36	58	39	60
University of Southern Mississippi	21	45	26	47

Source: IPEDS

Note: The classes of 2011 and 2015 are the cohorts of first-time, full-time freshmen who entered in 2007 and 2011.



■ Governance

6. Is Mississippi's higher education governance structure effective?

Colleges and universities in the United States, both public and private, adhere to a unique system of lay governance. An institution's board of trustees is the final arbiter of institutional policy and is ultimately accountable for both the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution. Public university trustees also have a special fiduciary duty to ensure that the university stewards taxpayer resources prudently.

Established by the state constitution, the 12-member Board of Trustees of Mississippi's State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) is the single governing body of the state's eight public universities. As is the case in approximately two-thirds of states, the governor of Mississippi appoints members to the IHL board. Since 2012, trustees on the IHL board serve for a term of nine years.⁹³

The board is charged with financial and policy oversight of the eight public universities. It is also responsible for demonstrating accountability to the people of Mississippi and effectively communicating the accomplishments, needs, and value of the system of universities to the public. By strengthening and maintaining a viable and comprehensive planning, management, and evaluation process, the board facilitates effective decision making, resource allocation and utilization, fiscal accountability, and program review and evaluation.⁹⁴

The board or the board president may establish standing committees to bring special focus to key aspects of the board's work. The members and chair of the committee are appointed by the board president and approved by the rest of the board. The committees that are currently active are Academic Affairs, Finance, Health Affairs, Legal, Real Estate, and Diversity. There is also the Ayers Endowment Management Committee to take care of the court ordered trust that benefits the Historically Black Universities—Alcorn State, Jackson State, and Mississippi Valley State.⁹⁵

The board's role also embraces “the performance of such duties, to the end that such board shall perform the high and honorable duties thereof to the greatest advantage of the people of the state and of such educational institutions, uninfluenced by any political considerations.” The board has “the power and authority to elect heads of the various institutions of higher learning and to contract with all deans, professors and other members of the teaching staff, and all administrative employees of said institutions for a term not exceeding four years. The board shall have the power and authority to terminate any such contract at any time for malfeasance, inefficiency, or contumacious conduct, but never for political reasons.”⁹⁶

What this means in practice is that IHL trustees have the responsibility for hiring and firing presidents at the eight public universities in Mississippi and approval of hiring decisions for teaching and administrative positions. Trustees do not take political leanings into consideration, but have the responsibility to review poor performance, insubordination, and misconduct. It is highly unusual for trustees to become involved in the hiring process for individual professors. As the policy makes clear, they delegate hiring decisions to the Institutional Executive Officers.⁹⁷

One of the most important tasks that the board of trustees can undertake is selecting a new president. Hiring a capable, visionary leader can make the difference between a school that closes and a school that thrives.

IHL Presidential Selection

One of the most important tasks that the board of trustees can undertake is selecting a new president. Hiring a capable, visionary leader can make the difference between a school that closes and a school that thrives. The IHL board is charged with the search for and hiring of Institutional Executive Officers (in the case of Ole Miss, the Chancellor). The process is laid out in the board's bylaws.⁹⁸ The board appoints a committee that manages the search process. The search committee can hire a consultant if it determines one is needed. The committee may consider the input of constituents regarding desired characteristics for an Institutional Executive Officer.

The Commissioner of the IHL (not a board member) takes the next step by forming a Campus Search Advisory Committee (CSAC). This committee

includes faculty, staff, students, alumni, foundation representatives, and members of the community. Section E of the IHL board's Policy and Bylaws 201.0509 gives the board the right to add candidates to the recruitment pool at any time without starting the process over, and the board has the discretion to forward these candidates to be reviewed by the Campus Search Advisory Committee. As discussed below, this particular power became a source of contention in the fall of 2019.⁹⁹

The CSAC votes for five candidates they recommend for the position via secret ballot. The results are given to the Board Search Committee (BSC), which takes this recommendation into consideration when deciding whom to bring for interviews. When the interviews begin, CSAC creates a subcommittee to participate in the interviews called the Interview Search Advisory Committee, which sits in on all relevant meetings as deemed appropriate by the board. The consultant or IHL Commissioner conducts background checks and reference checks of the interviewees at the same time. The Commissioner provides his findings to the committee, and they deliberate on which candidates to bring back for a second interview, or to bring in new candidates for a first interview.¹⁰⁰

Once this process is complete, the board meets to select a Preferred Candidate based on the assessment of the committee and the Commissioner. The Preferred Candidate is invited to campus for a day of interviews with different constituencies. These groups provide feedback to the board. The board meets to review the feedback and discuss the candidate. They vote to accept the candidate or to proceed further with the search.¹⁰¹

The IHL has recently come under fire for the selection of a new president for the state's flagship institution, the University of Mississippi. The board



The IHL has recently come under fire for the selection of a new president for the state's flagship institution, the University of Mississippi. The **lack of transparency** and the failure to acknowledge faculty and student concerns suggest that IHL's operating procedure is highly problematic.

took advantage of the aforementioned clause that allows the board to add candidates at any step of the process to consider, as a candidate for the position, Dr. Glenn Boyce, the man initially hired to conduct the presidential search. Before being asked to conduct the search, he was the Commissioner of the IHL, an advisor close to the board. Once he was chosen, there was public outcry at Ole Miss. Law enforcement forcibly removed protesters from the press event that announced the decision.¹⁰² The lack of transparency and the failure to acknowledge faculty and student concerns suggest that IHL's operating procedure is highly problematic.

Governance Structures

Critics of IHL's process in the Ole Miss chancellor search called into question the governance structure of Mississippi's public higher education system. Mississippi has a consolidated university system model, in which one governing board oversees multiple institutions. This is one of two predominant governance models in American higher education. In Mississippi, as is the case in states including Kansas, Wisconsin, Hawaii, and Georgia, all the state's public four-year universities reside under one system with a single board of trustees (or board of regents, as they are called in some states). States can also have

multiple university systems, each governed by a separate board: The University of Texas System and the University of California System are among the largest university systems in the country, but they are not the only consolidated systems within their own states.¹⁰³

The other prevailing model is one in which each university has its own board of trustees responsible for a single institution. States with this "one board, one institution" model of governance—which include Virginia, South Carolina, and Kentucky—typically also have a statewide coordinating board (e.g., the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia or the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education). In contrast to consolidated governing boards, coordinating boards do not have the investiture of statutory authority. While they can serve as a catalyst for meaningful improvements in institutional performance—for example, compiling data to help streamline course articulation (credit transfer) across institutions—they cannot mandate reform. A coordinating board's role typically is to facilitate the relationship between public colleges and universities and other state agencies such as the state department of education.¹⁰⁴

Still others—including Louisiana, Florida, and North Carolina—have a nested board governance system,

where a system-level board of governors shares responsibility with a campus-level board of trustees.

There are a number of strengths and weaknesses to both consolidated and coordinating boards. Both types of boards are good at providing statewide strategic planning and being responsive to state priorities, because they have connections and responsibilities to both state and university stakeholders. Consolidated boards, due to the large bureaucracies that grow around them, are typically slower to respond to market forces.¹⁰⁵

While no single governance structure is appropriate for all states, any analysis of the effectiveness of higher education accountability measures should include a look at the structure of the body that is ultimately accountable. In 2016, lawmakers in Tennessee, citing the need for greater responsiveness and freedom of action in adapting to the changing nature of higher education, passed the FOCUS (Focus on College and University Success) Act. The Act reduced the size of the Tennessee Board of Regents (which governed all state institutions aside from the University of Tennessee) and created university-level boards that have a closer understanding of local student and faculty needs.¹⁰⁶ Over a transition period in 2017, these university boards took over responsibility for their schools' policies, academic programs, mission statements, capital projects, tuition, and selecting new presidents.¹⁰⁷

A Call for Transparency

The role of the board of trustees is best described as one of policymaking and oversight rather than actual execution of policy. Accountability and independent

thinking are critical aspects of the board's role. In June of 2019, a Freedom of Information Act request was sent to the IHL for board minutes, starting in 2017 and continuing through the last available set of minutes. In a review of the minutes for all meetings from May 2017 to June 2019, roughly 500 votes were recorded. Of those 500 votes, only three were not unanimous.¹⁰⁸ There are a few possible explanations for this unusual voting record. One explanation is that the board members too readily accept the proposals before them. If trustees habitually sign off on initiatives without robust debate, they are not fully embracing the American tradition of lay governance of higher education institutions, where individuals outside of academia represent the public interest.

In a review of the minutes for all meetings from May 2017 to June 2019, roughly 500 votes were recorded. Of those 500 votes, only three were not unanimous.

Alternatively, the board could well be actively engaged in debate and dissent that is simply not reflected in its meeting minutes. This would present its own concerns about transparency and public accountability. If the majority overwhelms dissenters in the boardroom and the official record fails to document minority objections, the public will be unaware of which decisions—if any—may warrant further scrutiny. Transparency is an essential part of good governance, and when trustees are making decisions, some of which of necessity will be controversial, the record of their debates needs to be available to the public whom the board ultimately serves. ●



■ Recommendations

Recommendations

Curricular Strength and Academic Outcomes

- Undertake a campus-by-campus review of core curricular requirements to be certain that all students graduate with the foundational skills needed for informed citizenship and meaningful careers. Compare especially the requirements in other states, notably Georgia, Florida, Texas, Oklahoma, and Nevada, which have board or state-level requirements for the study of U.S. government or history.
- Consider the adoption of nationally-normed, value-added assessments of core collegiate skills, such as the Proficiency Profile or the Collegiate Learning Assessment. Make the results of these assessments, along with the results of licensure examinations, part of annual campus reports submitted to the board.
- Track student-faculty ratios and develop practices and policies that encourage engaged faculty mentorship.
- Be certain that the board has up-to-date and accurate information on all retention and graduation rates, how they have changed over time, and how they compare to those of peer institutions.

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech on Campus

- Mississippi has the opportunity to be in the vanguard of outstanding colleges, universities,

and university systems by adopting the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression or a similarly clear statement protecting the free exchange of ideas on campus. This is a crucial first step in building and maintaining a culture of freedom of speech and inquiry.

- Make the protection of the free exchange of ideas and the fostering of intellectual diversity part of the annual review of campus chancellors, thus making it a campus priority.
- Review with campus leadership their procedures for approving and scheduling campus events to be certain that the procedures are content-neutral, in keeping with current court rulings.
- Review with campus leadership student and faculty handbooks to be certain that campus communities know that disrupting an officially-sponsored event will occasion significant penalties, including suspension, expulsion, or, in the case of faculty, termination.

Fiscal Oversight

- Be certain that all board members have fine-grained budgetary information. Trustees should be able to see at a glance the ratio of expenditure for instruction compared to administrative expenditure, as well as expenditure for instruction compared with student services. When these ratios are significantly higher than those of peer institutions, it is time to seek an explanation.

- Ensure that annually each board member receives a report on utilization of classroom and laboratory space on each campus. Specify that the reports must break down utilization by day of the week and hour of the day. Deliberation about new campus construction should always involve an analysis of the use of existing space, as well as total outstanding debt and annual debt service costs calculated per student.
 - Seek out detailed information on athletic expenditures. When the institution prepares to offer a multi-year contract to a member of the coaching staff, the board should know what the financial liability is for the full term of the contract. Be certain when comparing athletic revenue with athletic expenditures that the amount the institution contributes through student fees is clearly distinguished from revenue brought in by ticket sales and media contracts.
 - Ensure that board members have detailed information on teaching loads in different academic units. Review the incentives for faculty to do more and better teaching, and pay careful attention to faculty salaries in relation to administrative salaries and trends at peer institutions.
- ## Governance
- Be informed and proactive in strengthening Mississippi public higher education. Be certain that you have up-to-date and accurate information on all key areas of institutional operations and practices.
 - In conducting a chancellor search, start with a review of current bylaws and procedures. As the search begins, be sure to review and update the strategic plan and envision what the university needs to accomplish over the next 10 years.
 - Define the type of leader who can realize the aforementioned objectives. Consult with all campus constituencies and stakeholders.
 - Consider whether using a search consultant or a search firm would be beneficial, but no board member should delegate away the crucial task of reviewing the applicant pool, forming the short list, and making the final selection.
 - Be certain to consider candidates from sectors other than higher education: It is possible that business and government leaders may be best suited for the demands of top-level administration.
 - Keeping the search as transparent as possible will build public confidence in the institution.
 - Consider other forms of board structure and decide if a unitary board provides the best benefit to Mississippi or if independent boards have the potential to be more responsive to situations at individual schools.



■ Appendices

Appendix A

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR CORE COURSES

Distribution requirements on most campuses today permit students to pick from a wide range of courses that often are narrow or even outside the stated field altogether. Accordingly, to determine whether institutions in fact have a solid core curriculum, ACTA defines success in each of the seven subject areas as follows:

Composition

An introductory college writing class focusing on grammar, clarity, argument, and appropriate expository style. Remedial courses and SAT/ACT scores may not be used to satisfy a composition requirement. University-administered exams or portfolios are acceptable only when they are used to determine exceptional pre-college preparation for students. Writing-intensive courses, “writing across the curriculum” seminars, and writing for a discipline are not acceptable *unless* there is an indication of clear provisions for multiple writing assignments, instructor feedback, revision and resubmission of student writing, and explicit language concerning the mechanics of formal writing, including such elements as grammar, sentence structure, coherence, and documentation.

Literature

A comprehensive literature survey or a selection of courses of which a clear majority are surveys and the remainder are literary in nature, although single-author or theme-based in structure. Freshman seminars, humanities sequences, or other specialized courses that include a substantial literature survey component count.

Foreign Language

Competency at the intermediate level, defined as at least three semesters of college-level study in any foreign language. No distinction is made between B.A. and B.S. degrees, or individual majors within these degrees, when applying the Foreign Language criteria.

U.S. Government or History

A survey course in either U.S. government or history with enough chronological and topical breadth to expose students to the sweep of American history and institutions. Narrow, niche courses do not count for the requirement, nor do courses that only focus on a limited chronological period or a specific state or region. State- or university-administered, and/or state-mandated, exams are accepted for credit on a case-by-case basis dependent upon the rigor required.

Economics

A course covering basic economic principles, preferably an introductory micro- or macroeconomics course taught by faculty from the economics or business department.

Mathematics

A college-level course in mathematics. Specific topics may vary, but must involve study beyond the level of intermediate algebra and cover topics beyond those typical of a college-preparatory high school curriculum. Remedial courses or SAT/ACT scores may not be used as substitutes. Courses in formal or symbolic logic, computer science with programming, and linguistics involving formal analysis count.

Natural or Physical Science

A course in astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, physical geography, physics, or environmental science, preferably with a laboratory component. Overly narrow courses, courses with weak scientific content, and courses taught by faculty outside of the science departments do not count. Psychology courses count if they are focused on the biological, chemical, or neuroscientific aspects of the field.

Half-Credit

If a requirement exists from which students choose between otherwise qualifying courses within two What Will They Learn?[®] subject areas (e.g., math or science; history or economics, etc.), one-half credit is given for both subjects.

Appendix B

SCHOOL EVALUATION NOTES FOR CORE COURSES

Alcorn State University

No credit given for Literature because a survey course in literature is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Creative Arts” requirement. No credit given for U.S. Government or History because a survey course in American government or history is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Social Sciences” requirement.

Delta State University

No credit given for U.S. Government or History because a survey course in American history or government is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “History” requirement. No credit given for Economics because a course in economics is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Perspectives on Society” requirement.

Jackson State University

No credit given for Foreign Language because students may fulfill the requirement with elementary-level study. No credit given for U.S. Government or History because the “Social & Behavioral Sciences” requirement may be satisfied by courses that are not U.S. history or government surveys. No credit given for Economics because a course in economics is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Social & Behavioral Sciences” requirement.

Mississippi State University

No credit given for Foreign Language because intermediate-level language study is only required for select degree programs. No credit given for U.S. Government or History because a survey course in American government or history is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Humanities” requirement.

Mississippi University for Women

No credit given for Foreign Language because the

“Foreign Language” requirement only applies to select degree programs. No credit given for U.S. Government or History because a survey course in American government or history is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Social Science” requirement and the “Critical Thinking” requirement. No credit given for Economics because a course in economics is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Social Science” requirement.

Mississippi Valley State University

No credit given for U.S. Government or History because a survey course in American government or history is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Humanities” requirement. No credit given for Economics because a course in economics is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Social and Behavioral Sciences” requirement.

University of Mississippi

No credit given for U.S. Government or History because the “History” requirement only applies to select degree programs and a survey course in American history or government is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “History” requirement.

University of Southern Mississippi

No credit given for Foreign Language because the requirement only applies to select degree programs. No credit given for U.S. Government or History because the qualifying courses for the “Humanities” requirement are world history courses rather than U.S. government or history surveys. No credit given for Economics because a course in economics is an option, but not required, to fulfill the “Social and Behavioral Sciences” requirement.

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