Essentials of Institutional Transformation:

Growth Amid a University Merger

ASSOCIATION OF
PUBLIC &
LAND-GRANT
UNIVERSITIES

Coalition of
Urban Serving Universities

BILL & MELINDA
GATES foundation

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ABOUT THE
FRONTIER SET

In 2015, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) launched an initiative called the Frontier Set. The Frontier Set united thirty-one colleges, universities, and state systems in a shared commitment to serve first-generation, low-income, and other underrepresented minority students by eliminating race, ethnicity, and income as predictors of student success.

In addition to BMGF, six intermediaries—American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), Aspen Institute, the Historically Black Colleges and Universities, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), and University Innovation Alliance (UIA)— and four support partners—American Institutes for Research (AIR), VentureWell, National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA)—were responsible for carrying out the initiative by:

1. designing, implementing, and supporting the network that connects the involved higher education systems; and
2. determining how to gather, analyze, and share the initiative's findings more broadly. Funding and resources from BMGF supported this process. BMGF hopes to scale the Frontier Set's work to additional higher education systems in the future.

While the funding period for the Frontier Set ended in 2021, the work continues. The intermediary partners continue to refine and incorporate key interventions with the goal of achieving institutional transformation by closing equity gaps, improving access to higher education, and accelerating the production of degrees by underrepresented students.

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), together, are one of the intermediary partners of the Frontier Set. This case study, one of three produced, is a joint effort of the two organizations on behalf of the Frontier Set, in fulfilment of one of the initiative's key goals: **to share best practices related to institutional transformation.**

Foreword
from President Blake

Dear Colleagues,

Georgia State University has been honored to be one of the 29 institutions and two state systems that comprise the Frontier Set. Through our membership, our university has been fortunate to participate in regular dialogue and reflections with a diverse amalgam of higher education institutions. This cross section of the higher education landscape has promoted introspection and innovation within the campuses and programs that comprise our university.

As one of four R1 universities within Georgia, and the largest institution within our state, GSU focuses on access to quality higher education. The 2016 merger with Perimeter College, consisting of five campuses around the Metro Atlanta area, has provided our institution with even greater opportunities for students. Whether starting college for the first time, returning to complete a degree, or earn new skills to enter the workforce, Georgia State provides opportunities for students in Metro Atlanta communities as well as nationally and internationally.

Involvement with the Frontier Set has been beneficial to evaluate and implement processes and programs that advance the progress of our students. This initiative has provided our institution with tools that promote our educational mission and allow us to establish a network with other institutions. Through this affiliation, Georgia State has been able to share our successes and learn from the successes of other institutions.

The Frontier Set has emphasized that the power of personal outreach is critical to producing positive student outcomes. At large institutions, this kind of personal outreach can be a challenge. To increase capacity to communicate one on one with students, Georgia State was one of the first universities in the country to deploy an AI-enhanced chatbot that enables 24- hour communication with students. GSU's work with the chabot helped GSU decrease summer melt by more than 30%, translating to more than 1,000 students retained over the past few years.

As I begin my sixth month as President of Georgia State, I am inspired by the tremendous work that is being done in student success initiatives. Our next chapter will build upon the solid foundation that is already in place, and continue to use data, advising methods, and communication protocols that result in successful outcomes for our students. Although the Frontier Set will sunset in June 2022, our university will continue to use the tools and insights that were gained along this journey. All of us at Georgia State are grateful that we had the opportunity to participate.
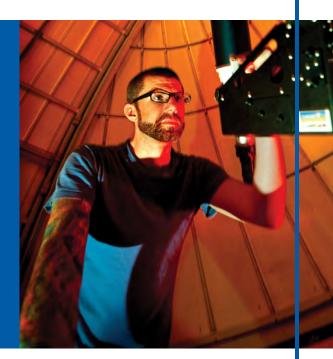
Sincerely,

M. Brian Blake
President

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:
Institutional Transformation

The three institutions participating in APLU and USU's Frontier Set study are Georgia State University (GSU), Florida International University (FIU), and Portland State University (PSU). These institutions contribute to the growing chorus of voices in the field that are united around a common purpose: to document and understand institutional change in order to improve the lives of students and the communities in which they are based. The Frontier Set project also provided the APLU/USU participating universities the opportunity to underscore the important role that urban-serving universities play as models and agents for transformational change. Given their legacy of educating diverse student populations and their ability to creatively scale effective practices, urban universities serve as valuable examples of how institutional transformation occurs. With support from the APLU/ USU and BMGF, the three participating universities are exploring what it takes to achieve successful institutional innovation and transformation. Collectively, their efforts provide a framework to guide other universities' transformational change initiatives and explore the financial and human costs of such transformation.

Institutional transformation has been regularly occurring at some higher education institutions. However, prior to the Frontier Set research, it remained unclear how that institutional transformation occurred and, more importantly, how it contributed to increased student success at scale and for institutions that were primarily focused on "expand[ing] access, persistence, and completion for those who have historically been excluded from the benefits and value of higher education."[1] Without that understanding, translating success to additional universities was difficult. Today, it's imperative that more universities adopt widespread transformational change in order to contribute to national economic stability and overall prosperity. To achieve these goals, leaders of Frontier Set institutions have pledged finances and effort to explore and explain change initiatives—both their successes and failures—so that other institutions can learn from, adapt, and integrate similar transformations on their campuses.

Understanding institutional change requires studying the forces that inspire, catalyze, and drive change. Institutional transformation within universities can stem from external and/or internal forces. Examples of external forces include federal and state policies, the philanthropic community, and globalization. Examples of internal forces include changes in leadership, student demographics, and institutional strategic finance. Additionally, growing enrollments of traditionally underserved or marginalized populations in public universities, paired with increasing financial challenges, create an uncertain future for higher education. Together, these factors create an urgency for higher education transformation.

Each case study developed by APLU/USU focuses on institutional transformation through the lens of one participating institution and its experience. Throughout this case study, the terms "institutional transformation" and "institutional change" are used interchangeably to describe the realignment of an institution's structures, culture, and business model to create a student experience that results in dramatic and equitable increases in outcomes and education value.[2] In this case study, we examine GSU and the relationship between university mergers and institutional transformation.

[1] Why is transformation important? - Frontier Set
[2] Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation: Frontier Set

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION
During a Univesity Merger

Why Do Mergers Matter?

Higher education mergers elicit different reactions from stakeholders for many reasons. Few institutions follow a premeditated plan and consider the impacts a merger will have on the involved institutions' internal and external stakeholders. Mergers, undoubtedly, present risks and costs to the newly consolidated institution's capacity to transform. Therefore, it is vital for the stakeholders who guide a merger to set a positive tone for the faculty, staff, and community.

Mergers often elicit feelings of fear and loss among involved staff, which can ultimately lead to a decrease in commitment and productivity at the systems level. Bowditch and Buono (1991) explain that "merger syndrome" occurs when stakeholders feel alarmed that critical information has been withheld from staff during a merger.[3] To avoid merger syndrome, Bowditch and Buono note the importance that an institution remain transparent with all stakeholders, regardless of title, so that all of an organization's members feel supported through the process.[4]

> An organization's culture may also be significantly impacted by a merger.

A five-year long 2014 research study conducted by Ribando and Evans, tracked changes among faculty of a college merger.[5] They found a correlation between the occurrence of a merger and job-related stress, resulting in low commitment and a high turnover rate among faculty and other key university members.[6] The cultural shifts that occur on a university campus during a merger can lead to individuals' disengagement from the university— which underscores the importance of transparency during the development process of a potential merger. It is vital for the university to efficiently and promptly support staff and faculty through a change as significant as a merger because not doing so can damage staff and faculty morale and continued commitment to the university.

Because mergers are much more complex than they may appear externally—they often entail changes to department, staffing, and infrastructure. It is important for institutions undergoing mergers to consider the impacts them will have on their people, jobs, commitment, culture, and communication. Employing strategies to address these elements ahead of time can help reduce or avoid challenges.

[3] https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1936-4490.1991.tb00563.x
[4] https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1936-4490.1991.tb00563.x
[5] https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0091026014550406
[6] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0091026014550406

ABOUT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Located in Atlanta, Georgia State University (GSU) is an urban research university and the largest university in Georgia with campuses in the surrounding Metro area. Following a 2016 merger with a nearby two-year institution, Perimeter College (PC), the consolidated university operates under the name Georgia State University (GSU). GSU now has six campuses and is part of the University System of Georgia.

68%
students of color

45%
receive Pell grants

5,345
bachelor's degrees awarded in 2019-20

55,927
undergraduate students in 2019-20

During the 2019-2020 academic year, GSU enrolled 57,932 total undergraduate students: 43 percent Black or African American, 22 percent white, 12 percent Asian, and 12 percent Hispanic/Latino.[7] In 2019-20, 48% of bachelor's students were Pell Grant recipients, and 45% of undergraduates overall were Pell recipients.[8]

In 2021, GSU ranked 48 out of 1,549 colleges and universities on the social mobility index (SMI), which "measures the extent to which a college or university educates more economically disadvantaged students (with family incomes below the national median) at lower tuition and graduates them into good paying jobs" and was recognized as the top-ranked institution in Georgia on the SMI.[9]

As a result of the merger, GSU now offers associate degrees in addition to bachelor's and graduate degrees. GSU's leadership continues to be centralized, with departments and units supporting and serving both two-year and four-year students.

> During the merger, GSU's commitment to student success advanced through its institutional strategic efforts with Perimeter College.

APLU and USU have worked with GSU over the course of the Frontier Set project with the goal of better understanding how a merger can affect the university's capacity for institutional change. This exploratory case study will:

1. explore what drives institutional transformation;
2. outline how student success infrastructure was designed and implemented despite a merger; and
3. identify specific strategies and resources that may be applicable to other institutions undergoing mergers.

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Causes of
TRANSFORMATION

The merger reaffirmed GSU's commitment to providing access and equity to a diverse student body comprised of students from a wide range of socioeconomic and first-generation backgrounds.

Over the last decade, there has been a significant shift in how institutional leaders define and discuss student success. Across higher education, there is growing awareness about what students experience both inside and outside the classroom and how their experiences affect their overall satisfaction as a student at an institution. Shifting student demographics, needs, and learning preferences have driven institutions to reprioritize, adapt, and sometimes, completely alter the ways they meet students where they are.

Colleges and universities are facing constant internal and external pressures to adapt and change in order to improve student success and keep their competitive advantage. However, higher education institutions have continued to grapple with their ability to become change- ready organizations. As budgets are cut, significant leadership transitions occur, and the needs of tomorrow's learners are constantly evolving, what ultimately pushes an institution to move from its current state to its ideal future state?

The consolidation of GSU and Perimeter College—culminated into the merged institution, now known as Georgia State University—was prompted, in part, by the desire to leverage combined resources to increase opportunities and degree attainment for students. But it also served as an opportunity for GSU to improve how it designs, implements, and delivers on its promise of student success for all students. Following the merger, GSU designed student success initiatives to meet the needs of each student, resulting in more centralized communication across multiple university offices and departments. The consolidation may have been unanticipated, but GSU's approach and attitude allowed the university's work towards an improved future state.

Even when unanticipated, consolidation can be a positive experience for those involved—the beginning of a vital, and possibly overdue, transformation journey. Consolidation led GSU down a path towards better understanding of its student body and the equalizing of opportunities for all. The way GSU approached the merger with a positive mindset provided the institution with ongoing opportunities to towards beneficial institutional transformation.

Prior to the merger, both GSU and PC faced external pressure to meet student outcome metrics, which forced both institutions to adapt and change at a quicker rate than most institutions experience. However, its use of forward and proactive thinking to quickly address the pressures proved beneficial because they had existing infrastructure and personnel capacity built into the system which allowed them to pivot quickly. To build a strong foundation for their merger, GSU and PC had to quickly familiarize themselves with each other. For example, PC was a decentralized college, meaning it had five separate physical campuses, plus an online campus. Operating a decentralized college was unfamiliar to GSU prior to the consolidation but taking a one-size-fits-all approach to student-centered and student-focused efforts would have been detrimental to GSU's new student body. Therefore, GSU had to consider all of the students attending its various new campuses and come to an understanding that

students in different communities often have different educational experiences. GSU strives to contextualize the educational experience and seeks to understand who they serve and how each student brings a unique experience and perspective.

The merger reaffirmed GSU's commitment to providing access and equity to a diverse student body comprised of students from a wide range of socioeconomic and first-generation backgrounds. GSU has repeatedly stated that it has a moral imperative to improve how it fulfills its mission of serving students. Each institution has its own set of unique strengths prior to the merger—GSU's Atlanta Campus brought student success and innovation and Perimeter College brought the accessibility and experience with teaching. Under the newly consolidated GSU, the two institutions were able to bring their respective strengths for the benefit of all students.

GSU Initiatives

GSU has experienced a significant amount of change at all levels of the organization in the last five years. However, its commitment to institutional transformation can be seen through several key initiatives, all of which helped to build a solid foundation, including the State Farm-Public Partnership, Pounce Chatbot, and Graduation Progression System Advising Model.

State Farm Public-Private Partnership

In 2017, State Farm announced a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership with GSU to help qualified students entering the Decatur campus have a clear pathway to success.

Prior to the launch of this partnership, enrollment data showed that GSU Decatur campus had disproportionately low rates in first-year retention and three-year graduation. The student body at the Decatur campus consisted of 98 percent first-generation and low-income students. GSU, along with State Farm, decided it needed to use this partnership at the Decatur campus as a pilot, to test and later scale to other campuses, including those that are four-year.[10]

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[10]   https://news.gsu.edu/2017/04/18/georgia-state-state-farm-partnership/

Consolidation not only allowed for development of a shared culture—one in which each campus makes information available to others—but it also opened the door to improved student success outcomes. Following the merger, programs that were once only available to students at a particular campus were made available to all.

Pounce Chatbot

GSU remains fully committed to using data to make decisions. This data has led to interventions that also maximize the use of technology to increase student success. For example, in summer 2016, it piloted an artificial intelligence chatbot, called Pounce Chatbot, to help students at GSU find answers to common questions and concerns. The chatbot communicated with incoming freshmen via text message about common obstacles to enrollment such as financial aid and class registration. It answered more than 200,000 questions and reduced summer melt, or the number of freshman students who do not fully enroll in their first term after being admitted, by 22 percent. Due to its success, GSU scaled this intervention and by fall 2020, the Pounce Chatbot had expanded capabilities and was available to incoming freshmen across all GSU campuses.

Graduation Progression System (GPS) Advising Model

Prior to the merger, GSU focused on the important role advising played in student success. Once the merger was complete, in 2016, GSU partnered with the Education Advisory Board (EAB) Navigate to use its GPS student advising model at the Decatur campus. Today, the model is used across all campuses. GSU hired new advisors for the former PC campuses, which brought down the advisor ratio from 1,000:1 to 400:1 across these campuses. Expanding this advising model impacted an additional 20,000 students seeking associate degrees. GSU advisors on these campuses now follow a cohort of students and can see how each student is doing academically. This system allows advisors to not only monitor student progress but be proactive and predict possible problems before they occur. The GPS model uses predictive analytics and has over 800 alerts, which advisors monitor and respond to in a timely manner. GSU has committed resources to hire additional advising staff for the former PC campuses because the evidence indicates that the impact on student success can be 'scaled-up' for the Atlanta campus. This technology is providing rich information on how to better understand and support transfer pathways between two-and four-year institutions.

PEOPLE-DRIVEN
Transformation

GSU has been successful in ensuring every voice is heard and every person is given the space to turn ideas into measurable actions.

A common thread through each of the above initiatives is that people are central to institutional transformation. The contributions of faculty, staff, and students to institutional transformation efforts are vital. If the people making up an institution's body ignore the transformation process, it can negatively impact the result. Georgia State University (GSU) has experienced significant organizational changes over the last several years, exacerbated by the pandemic that hit the world unexpectedly in 2020. The pace and frequency of change forced university leaders to quickly re-imagine how best to fulfill the university's mission to provide students equitable access to higher education, as well as to reflect on how best to shape the university's identity for the long-term.

Each person within an institution plays a role in the sustainability of that institution's transformation. If the goal is for all voices to participate in the transformation process, each participant must be committed to transparency and communication. GSU has been successful in ensuring every voice is heard and every person is given the space to turn ideas into measurable actions. GSU has prioritized information sharing and maintained a constant communication loop between all campuses, thereby ensuring that individuals work together as a team towards the common goal of improving student success.

Post consolidation, the institutions moved forward with a strategic realignment at the leadership level. To accomplish collaboration across the campuses,

leadership from PC were assigned roles to align with their colleagues on the GSU Atlanta Campus. For example, associate deans (ADs) across different departments now share the same title, AD for Student Success, which allows for the individuals in those roles to more easily identify and connect with their counterparts. GSU faculty now collaborate to create courses for all students across all campuses to ensure they have the same learning experience and opportunity.

GSU leaders have become a connected and united community, one where everyone—students included—see themselves as Georgia State Panthers. Many of today's leaders at GSU worked there prior to the consolidation and have had front-row seats to the university's transformation process. While GSU leaders are proud of how far their institution has come, they also recognize that there is always more work to be done in the name of student success.

GSU attributes much of its success to its approach to collaboration. Its investment in human capital and use of real-time information allows it to respond more immediately to the ongoing needs of the community. If a leader identifies an issue outside of their scope of work, they know whom to contact, regardless of campus location, to get things resolved as soon as possible. GSU sees itself as one university with one vision, working to ensure equitable services across all campuses.

THE COST OF
Institutional Transformation

Institutions that cannot meet the changing needs of students could experience significant opportunity costs because of decreased enrollment revenues.

When considering institutional transformation, the financial cost is a primary concern. This is a particularly salient issue since many institutions face decreased state and federal support. Institutions that cannot meet the changing needs of students could experience significant opportunity costs because of decreased enrollment revenues. Additionally, there will be an inevitable increase in universities re-evaluating the value they provide to future students. Many universities will continue to face financial strains, forcing a rise in mergers between institutions. As higher education mergers increase, both financial and human costs must be considered.

The costs of transformation primarily stem from investment in infrastructure, people, and technology. Organizations that adopt a strategy for managing the costs of their transformational change processes will be more successful. Developing processes for reviewing initiatives, establishing calculations for returns on investments, and developing criteria for accountability are key to ensuring that all investments made are planned for, allowing for the sustainability of the transformation.

Since joining the Frontier Set project, the University System of Georgia (USG), another Frontier Set member, has guided a total of nine university mergers intended to decrease duplicated resources and increase the quality of public education in Georgia.[11] USG staff were committed to supporting and guiding the universities through the mergers, including that of GSU and Perimeter College.[12]

The American Institutes for Research's (AIR) case summary of GSU's Frontier Set project outlines the start of GSU's institutional transformation, which included key transformative changes, and notes the barriers and challenges to buy-in when the merger was announced, especially among faculty. The lack of communication about and understanding of the merger process caused widespread faculty and staff concern.

There are several strategies and mindsets that institutions utilize in the transformation process, regardless of financial constraints. For example, the shift to a data- informed mindset has helped stakeholders across the institutions understand that having a clear assessment and evaluation plan can help identify when an initiative may not be having the intended impact. At that point in time, they can either adapt or pivot, thereby saving resources or reallocating those resources to more effective initiatives. Additionally, a commitment to leveraging technology where possible to ensure that human resources are being used in the most impactful way possible is essential.

11   American Institutes for Research (AIR) Georgia State University 2021 Case Summary
12   American Institutes for Research (AIR) Georgia State University 2021 Case Summary

It is important for institutions to produce specific strategies for critical areas of student success to ensure transformation sustainability and long-term financial success. By producing cross-institutional collaboration through the mergers, institutions will have long-term high-impact outcomes, reducing the duplication of resources and maximizing human capacity.

Ultimately, this can lead to an increase in operational productivity. As higher education faces an increase in mergers, there are strategies that institutions can leverage to aid the consolidation process while also working to achieve institutional transformation.[13]

Perimeter College merged with GSU because of financial challenges and low student performance.[14] Although GSU was known industry-wide as a model for student success, the consolidation required the university to expand its efforts to better serve its associate-degree students on the PC campuses. The merger also accelerated GSU's restructuring of student success initiatives, to align with the goals of PC, and consolidated finances and faculty to enable a centralized leadership structure—key to GSU's successful transformation.[15]

Institutions wishing to undergo transformation during a merger must be open to risk, piloting initiatives and projects, and scaling university efforts as a collective unit to ensure the financial barriers and challenges don't impede the process. To meet the needs of PC,

> It is important for institutions to produce specific strategies for critical areas of student success to ensure transformation sustainability and long-term financial success.

GSU redesigned its Educational Advisory Board (EAB) Navigate and Perimeter Academy software to support degree completion for two-year students.[16] Further, new initiatives were developed in collaboration with departments across the merged institutions, which included the implementation of College to Career Quality Enhancement Plan and Pounce Chatbot to improve student outcomes (one of the main goals of the merger, in addition to increasing the financial wellness of PC).[17]

Though challenging at the start, GSU maintained its commitment to students, staff, and faculty, offering leadership support and guidance, which allowed for a smooth transition. It is vital for institutions considering a merger to weigh human cost as much as the financial cost.

13 https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeltnietzel/2021/02/15/university-mergers-on-the-rise/?sh=1b9e06ac2709
14 Completion rates are key to Georgia State U's merger with Georgia Perimeter College (insidehighered.com)
15 American Institutes for Research (AIR) Georgia State University 2021 Case Summary
16 American Institutes for Research (AIR) Georgia State University 2021 Case Summary
17 https://sacscoc.gsu.edu/files/2019/02/QEP-CTC-Proposal-.pdf

Risks to
TRANSFORMATION

Higher education institutions are often criticized for the speed at which they enact change. Therefore, when institutional transformation is considered, the task may seem daunting. Many institutions, especially those with long histories, may find themselves balancing tradition with desire for change. A report published by Huron, the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Georgia Institute of Technology summarizes the responses of 495 higher education leaders and finds that, "in many cases, administrators' tendency to delay visionary planning is enabled by older constructs, such as accreditation timelines, leadership renewal cycles and institutional risk aversion."[18] The same study reports that nearly a quarter of the respondents were "not very confident" or "not confident at all" in their institution's ability to respond to the top five market trends impacting higher education. Given this information, how are some institutions able to overcome these barriers,
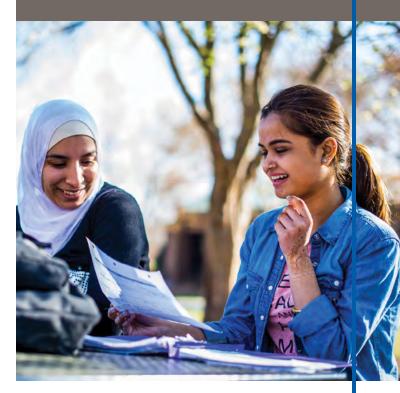
GSU has also mitigated risk by restructuring its business model to reflect one institution that serves two student populations. GSU's six campuses operate under a single president, and all non-academic departments—such as student success, advising, financial aid, and facilities—have been centralized.

[18] https://sacscoc.gsu.edu/files/2019/02/QEP-CTC-Proposal-.pdf

and what influences an institution's ability to balance this perceived risk with the positive impact that transformation could produce?

The impact of leadership and the ability of an institution to implement change are two critical factors that can impact transformation. In many ways, the ability of an institution to transform is based on whether the institution is prepared to manage change. While the acceptance of change at the individual or project level is important, adopting enterprise-level change management is key. According to Smith, Hyde, Falkner, and Kerlin (2020), enterprise-level change management entails "an institution's roles, structures, processes, projects, and leadership competencies" all being on board."[19] Without a clear strategy or institution-wide participation mandate, embarking on a transformation journey presents significant risk.

There are several strategies to mitigate risk during institutional transformation. One of the most critical components of a college's transformation journey is a clear, widely held vision of what success looks like at that specific institution. This is especially true in the context of institutional mergers, as the newly consolidated institution must have a clear mission and vision in order to establish a new institutional identity. Without it, buy-in of new initiatives will be challenging and could lead to duplicated or competing efforts, and ultimately, financial risk. During the merger of GSU and Perimeter College, GSU adopted a clear vision and plan for expanding its student success initiatives to all campuses. By giving two-year students access to the same resources enjoyed by four-year students and taking more tangible steps such as printing "Georgia State University" on two-year degrees, GSU's marketing in the years since the consolidation has been consistent and equitable for both student populations.

GSU has also mitigated risk by restructuring its business model to reflect one institution that serves two student populations. GSU's six campuses operate under a single president, and all non-academic departments—such as student success, advising, financial aid, and facilities—have been centralized. In addition, GSU continues to work with its software vendors to maximize the impacts of these platforms and minimize wasted resources. By implementing technologies across campuses, GSU aims to improve the student experience for both its two- and four-year students. As a result, GSU transfer students outperform transfer students from other Georgia institutions.

In summary, the biggest risk to institutional transformation is whether an institution is prepared

to embrace change. Institutions willing to have conversations about change, to intentionally pilot programs to test new ideas, and to accept risk are more likely to experience successful mergers. GSU serves as an exemplar of how institutions can be resilient in their transformational journeys. An institutional merger is perhaps one of the only catalysts that requires an institution to revisit every tenant of its mission and vision, as GSU did.

[19] https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=educationpub

> Institutions **willing to have conversations about change, intentionally pilot programs to test new ideas, and accept risk** are more likely to experience successful mergers.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Open and ongoing communication between a variety of university stakeholders is vital to the advancement and sustainability of change efforts. Without honest reflection on the university's current culture and state, especially as it relates to universities experiencing a consolidation, student success efforts across the institution are likely to be negatively impacted. The questions below can help guide critical discussions among university leaders and spark new ways of approaching transformation efforts.

Q1 Where do existing communication silos exist within your university? How will this be amplified with a consolidation? Identify the key campus leaders involved in the consolidation process and consider joint efforts to create ongoing communication channels for increased transparency and collaboration.

Q2 What are common links within each institution's strategic plan, specifically as it relates to designing and implementing new student success practices and policies during a merger? Uniting on common goals can lead to expanding your impact.

Q3 What are the existing feedback loops available for capturing student voice and understanding the lived student experience? How do you plan on evolving these feedback loops throughout the merger process?

Q4 How does each institution define equity and student success? How do you plan on uniting to create one vision to embed in the university culture during a merger?

Q5 What is your data currently telling you? What ongoing data practices could contribute to the university's effort of advancing transformation amid consolidation?

Q6 What role does the chief financial officer play in decision-making practices during a merger process?

Q7 What mechanisms (e.g., townhall, surveys) allow faculty and staff to provide feedback on changes on university goals, purposes, etc. during a merger process?

Resources for Practitioners

The below topics and resources can serve as a starting point for practitioners within institutions that are considering how to begin or foster institutional transformation, especially during an institutional merger.

Essentials for a Merger

https://changinghighered.com/higher-ed-mergers-and-alliances-podcast/

Developing Alliance and Support

https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/managing-and-supporting-employees-through-cultural-change-in-mergers

Change Management

https://dealroom.net/blog/mergers-and-acquisitions-change-management

Strategic Processes

https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/university-mergers/252562

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About APLU

APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. With a membership of 244 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations, APLU's agenda is built on the three pillars of increasing degree completion and academic success, advancing scientific research, and expanding engagement. Annually, its 201 U.S. member campuses enroll 4.2 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award 1.2 million degrees, employ 1.1 million faculty and staff, and conduct $46.8 billion in university-based research.

About USU

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) is a president-led organization committed to enhancing urban university engagement to increase prosperity and opportunity in our nation's cities and to tackling key urban challenges. The Coalition includes 41 public urban research universities representing all U.S. geographic regions across 25 states. Annually, member campuses enroll over 1 million undergraduate and graduate students. The USU agenda focuses on creating a competitive workforce, strengthening student success, building strong communities, and improving the health of a diverse population. The Coalition of Urban Universities (USU) has partnered with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to establish an Office of Urban Initiatives, housed at APLU, to jointly lead an urban agenda for the nation's public universities.

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the Coalition of Urban-Serving Universities have been an intermediary member of the Frontier Set since its inception in 2015. This case study, in addition to two other reports produced on leadership transitions and state performance-funding, is a joint effort of the two organizations in fulfilment of one of the Frontier Set's goals to share best practices related to institutional transformation.

Learn more at www.frontierset.org

Coalition of Urban Serving Universities

ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC & LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES