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## Higher Education and Change

## To the Editor:

I read with interest the lead article of the July/August issue of *Trusteeship*, “Overcoming Inertia: Can Higher Education Change?” In response to the question raised, I would like to share some of my experiences at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta:

1. Everything we have done in my five years of leadership at Oglethorpe has been about change. The idea that higher-education leaders have collectively not recognized the need for change and are incapable of executing it is just wrong.

2. Often the discussion about the need for systemwide change is focused on only the most well-known and wealthiest institutions. Most of us in this enterprise don’t work at such places. A person quoted in the article states, “We just copy last year’s budget and roll it forward with changes around the edges.” While that sure sounds nice, we don’t handle our budget that way at Oglethorpe.

3. How do we change the conversation in the board room toward strategic decision making? Strategic decision making and identifying strategic priorities are what my board is all about.

4. Tuition-dependent institutions like Oglethorpe are among the most efficient organizations I know—they have to be to survive. The University of California at Davis saved \$8 million in its payroll function. My entire administrative budget is far less than \$8 million, and we run all our payroll with one part-time person.

I know a small percentage of our institutions have so much money they might have a hard time figuring how to spend it all. That sure doesn’t describe the vast majority of us.

Lawrence M. Schall  
President  
Oglethorpe University

## To the Editor:

There is much to disagree with in “Overcoming Inertia: Can Higher Education Change?” (*Trusteeship*, July/August).

To argue that colleges and universities are not changing almost constantly is to ignore the painfully apparent and growing mountain of evidence accumulating every day. I know of no higher-education institution that has not used an exhaustive array of management moves to adjust to the unprecedented change in the economic landscape over the past couple of years. Indeed, the case can be made that the response of colleges to what is now being called the Great Recession has demonstrated extraordinary managerial expertise and imagination—far beyond any sector of American business.

The discussion in your article reads like a think-tank jam session, opining at 30,000 feet with little understanding of the actual work of higher-education institutions. It is instructive that your panel includes no presidents or deans from any college or university. (Systems and partnerships are not colleges and universities.) None of the “experts” seems to understand that for traditional-aged students—still the majority of students—“going to college” is not just about degree production or about getting a degree as quickly as possible or even about jobs. Sure they want to get diplomas and jobs, but they understand the distinction the Wizard of Oz made when he told the scarecrow, “I can’t give you a brain, but I can give you a diploma.” They want to grow up and become educated men and women, and they know that “going to college” is a principle way that happens in our culture.

The issue that your experts get right is the extraordinary proportion of higher-education resources spent on research and graduate programs, much of which is more about the unregulated priorities and ambitions of faculty and administrators than about what our students and states need. That is “the dirty little secret” of American higher education.

Donald R. Eastman III  
President  
Eckerd College