

Consensus Statement from NACUBO, ASCN, BVA on Integrative Decision-Making for Leading Innovative Projects in Higher Education

Background: On February 20-22, 2024, academic change agents, chief financial/business officers, learning analytics experts, and academic leaders met at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute to discuss a charge to align financial and academic decision-making. Participants came to consensus on the benefits of integrative decision-making that involved co-leadership from academic, student success, and financial “sides” of the academic enterprise. Brainstorming and co-creating together is key to supporting cross-silo decision-making. In bringing together individuals from these “sides,” it was important to have an opportunity to get to know one another beyond themselves as professionals and to intentionally have a group synthesize desired outcomes for the group.

Overarching conclusions from the workshop:

- 1) Important university decisions almost always have academic and financial impacts.
- 2) In times of rapid change, excellence in decision-making is critically important and requires diversity, knowledge, wisdom, empathy, creativity, energy, and patience.
- 3) In the past, financial trade-offs and academic trade-offs were often considered independently. This limits diversity within decision-making teams and *reduces* knowledge sharing, creativity, and synergy - which is too high a price to pay for convenience.
- 4) Moving forward, key decisions should be co-led by academic, student success, and financial leaders.
- 5) True co-leadership means participating as equals aimed at sustained intentionality.

Financial Alignment with Inclusive Teaching Effectiveness (FAITE) Workshop Highlights

The organizers' motivation for the [Financial Alignment with Inclusive Teaching Effectiveness \(FAITE\) Workshop](#) was to bring together a diverse set of higher education stakeholders who do not normally cross paths. Academic change agents, chief financial/business officers, learning analytics experts, and academic leaders met to explore how aligning financial decision-making with inclusive and effective teaching practices could benefit higher education and student success. The organizers represented three organizations: [Accelerating Systemic Change in STEM Undergraduate Education Network \(ASCN\)](#), the [Bay View Alliance \(BVA\)](#), and the [National Association of College and University Business Officers \(NACUBO\)](#).

Fifty-four individuals attended the meeting. They were from 28 academic institutions and seven associations/societies. Within the academic institutions represented were five primarily undergraduate colleges, eight regional/community colleges, and 14 research-focused institutions. Workshop participants included academic leaders, academic change agents, data analytics experts, financial and business officers, and association leaders.

Participants were asked to prepare an introductory slide with information about themselves, their role, and their institution. They were also asked to list challenges and questions arising from their particular positions at their institutions. Based on these challenges, they were asked to share outcomes they hoped to see from the workshop. The workshop organizers made use of an iterative human-in-the-loop AI analysis process to iteratively refine themes from the responses of the 54 attendees. [Seven themes and](#)

[four desired workshop outcomes](#) were identified and presented to workshop participants. These themes included financial decision-making challenges with financial stewardship and strategic planning as well as the importance of valuing and supporting inclusive and equitable pedagogy and student success when making financial decisions. Desired outcomes included developing strategic financing approaches, creating project action clusters, and forming new organizational structures to further engage academics, student success experts, and financial officers in an ongoing dialogue.

The initial themes were reviewed and edited during two randomly assigned breakout groups at the workshop, and seven refined themes emerged. Participants voted on their preferred theme for the next steps and taking action. Five themes were selected, and the remainder of the working time was spent in breakout groups, each developing a poster where refined problem statements were articulated and barriers and action items were identified. The [five posters](#) focused on the following:

1. Financial Challenges and Decision-Making in Higher Education
2. Return on Investment (ROI) and Resource Allocation
3. Inclusive Pedagogy and Student Success
4. Data Analytics and Decision-Making Support
5. Strategies for Institutional Improvement and Sustainability

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants provided feedback via an [evaluation survey](#). Participants valued the opportunity to engage in insightful cross-silo conversations between academic and financial perspectives on decision-making in higher education. They also valued the insight into challenges and approaches from diverse institutional perspectives brought by participants from differing institutional types and learning about the NACUBO Student Success Hub toolkits designed to finance equitable student outcomes strategically.

Following the workshop, several participants planned to engage in advocacy within their institutions by strategically forming and facilitating campus groups that include financial officers in academic decision-making. Workshop participants planned to make changes to their current work processes by creating review processes that more intentionally incorporate data, forming data groups, and incorporating financial metrics in program review processes. Participants expressed a strong interest in being a part of a community focused on aligning financial and academic decision-making and generating potential grant projects from the posters developed by the working groups. ASCN is working to facilitate these conversations in monthly meetings of the [Financial Alignment with Inclusive Teaching Effectiveness \(FAITE\) Working Group](#) to develop further the ideas and projects developed at the workshop. If you are interested in following the development of the next steps, please join the working group, which has been open to interested participants from its inception.



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