

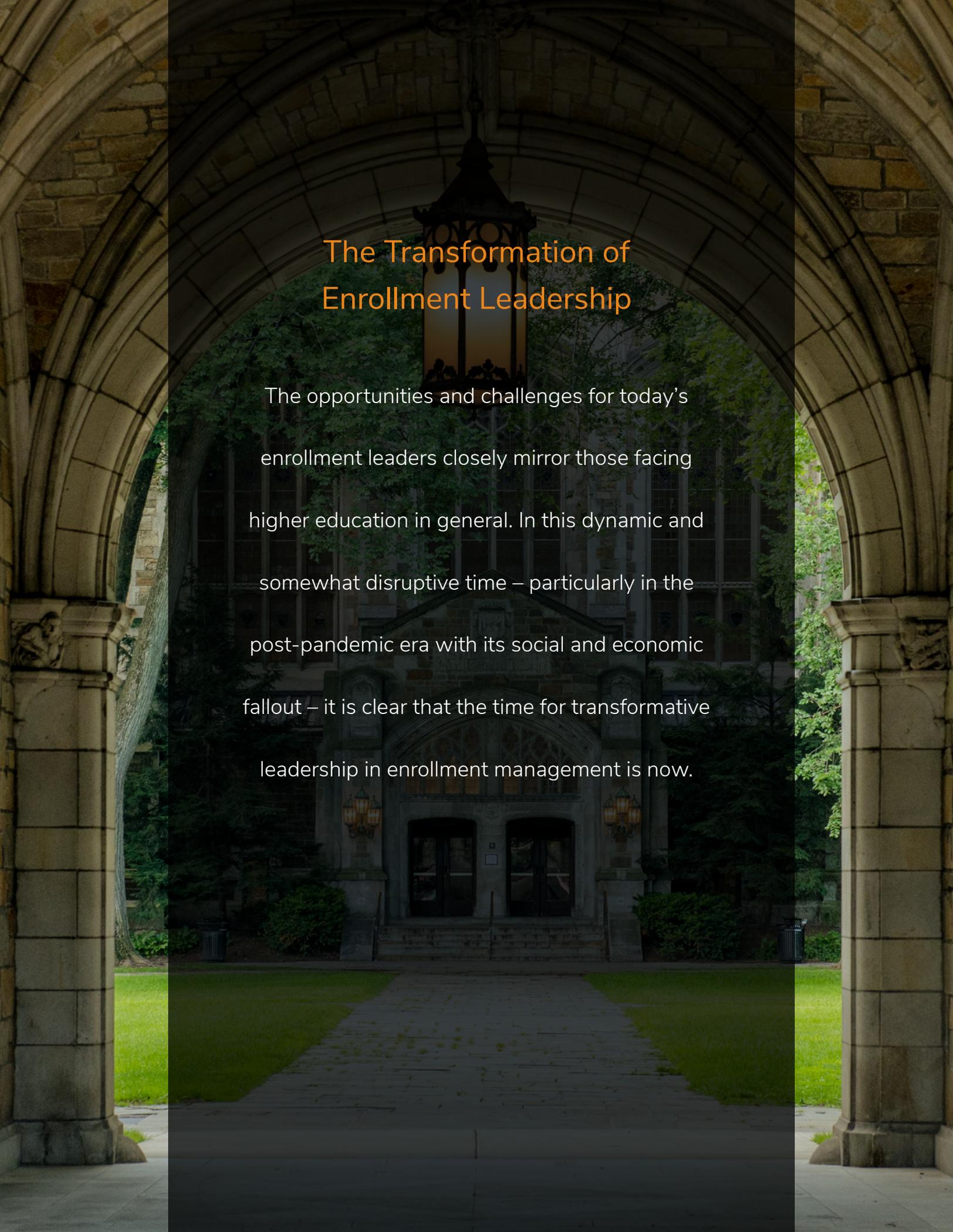


# Chief Enrollment Management Officers

in a *Time of Change,*  
*Challenge and*  
*Opportunity*



A WittKieffer Survey Report



## The Transformation of Enrollment Leadership

The opportunities and challenges for today's enrollment leaders closely mirror those facing higher education in general. In this dynamic and somewhat disruptive time – particularly in the post-pandemic era with its social and economic fallout – it is clear that the time for transformative leadership in enrollment management is now.

For chief enrollment officers, the role is more and more complex as expectations continue to rise and, for most institutions, enrollment success is inextricably tied to financial health. The stakes are higher than ever, and enrollment leaders are feeling the brunt of it. “The role I now play is increasingly unrecognizable from the one I had a decade ago,” says one respondent to WittKieffer’s recent enrollment leadership survey. “The pace is unrelenting; the media and legal scrutiny is overwhelming.”

Despite these challenges, there is also tempered optimism from some survey respondents, as well as hope for the future of the chief enrollment management officer (CEMO) role and for higher education. “I am a radical optimist and a pragmatist,” states one enrollment leader. “I believe in the power of education to effect positive change, and that is my guiding light as we wade through the continued and increasing ambiguity of our work going forward.”

These comments were part of a survey conducted by WittKieffer in the summer of 2022 of more than 180 chief enrollment management officers. The survey was undertaken to gauge these leaders’ greatest pain points and career challenges. Among the topics it considered are: What are today’s most pressing challenges, what skills are now most critical to success in the field, what salary ranges and expectations are typical of today’s CEMOs, and what level of burnout is present in light of the pandemic – for leaders and their staffs? This report details our findings and provides recommendations for how institutions can best recruit and retain enrollment leaders – to ensure that the future of the profession is in good hands.

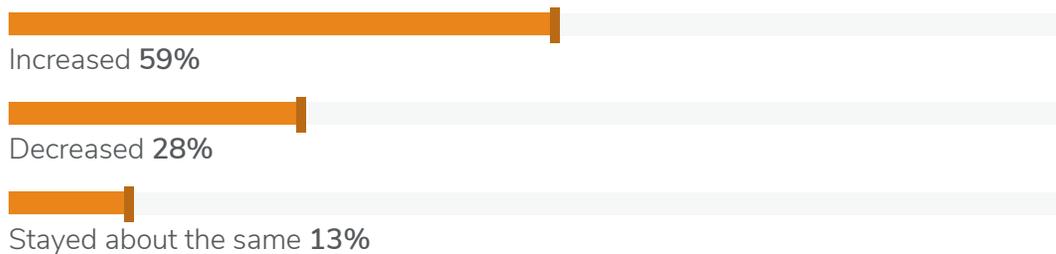


“Demographic shifts, societal questions regarding the value of a college education, unsustainable discount rate increases, and high employee turnover have made our industry more volatile than it has ever been.”

## What Has Changed and What Challenges Lie Ahead

The global pandemic and the racial reckoning have ushered a multitude of changes to the enrollment process and introduced new challenges for enrollment leaders. Many institutions have needed to contend with increased application volume, find new ways to engage with students and families, and navigate the pressure of meeting ambitious headcount and net tuition revenue targets, all of which has put tremendous strain on staff during an already stressful time.

### Since Fall 2019 (Before the Pandemic) Have Your Applications . . .



“Too much strain is being put on enrollment managers to grow enrollment at a time when students have greater choice. There are a select few schools who will never have to worry, but the vast majority of our institutions are very dependent on enrollment. More emphasis, in my opinion, should be placed on retention and student support.”

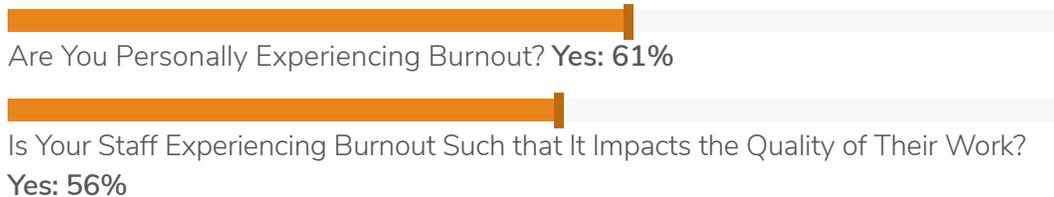
**The pressure to meet enrollment goals coupled with the social and financial pressures brought on in the aftermath of the pandemic have combined to cause high employee turnover.** Since the fall of 2019 (pre-pandemic), 83% of the leaders surveyed have seen an increase in employee turnover, with only 2% seeing a decrease, and 15% staying about the same.

### Since Fall 2019 (Before the Pandemic), Has Your Employee Turnover . . .



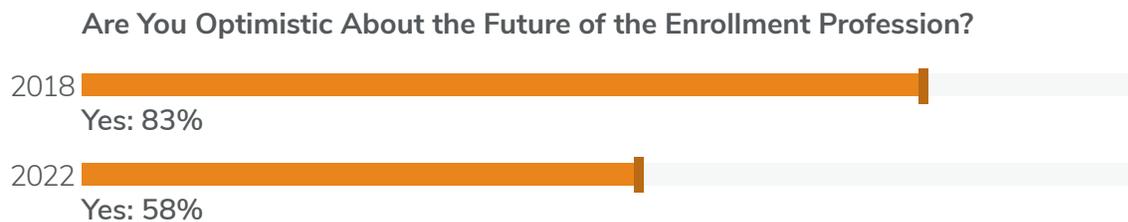
## Impact on Enrollment Leaders: More Burnout, Less Optimism

Higher expectations, increased workload and decreased resources – both human and financial – have resulted in increased levels of burnout for both enrollment leaders and their staffs, and decreased the level of optimism among leaders. When asked if they are personally experiencing burnout in their work, 61% of enrollment leaders responded “yes.” When it comes to their staffs, 56% of CEMOs said they are seeing burnout.



“I worry about the health and mental well-being of staff in my division,” shares an enrollment executive. “With that said, I am spending much more time thinking about how to improve the work culture, and how to incorporate hybrid/flexible scheduling. I am extremely encouraging of staff seeking professional development opportunities and looking for growth in leadership opportunities.”

CEMOs are less optimistic than they were four years ago prior to the pandemic when 83% of survey respondents were optimistic about the profession. In 2022, that number drops to 58%.



Despite this, some say the pandemic “has increased the strategic importance of enrollment management,” as well as given impetus to more diverse leadership. Enrollment leaders are visionaries and optimists by nature who believe in the power of education to shape our future. To this end, they remain true to the profession, despite the challenges.

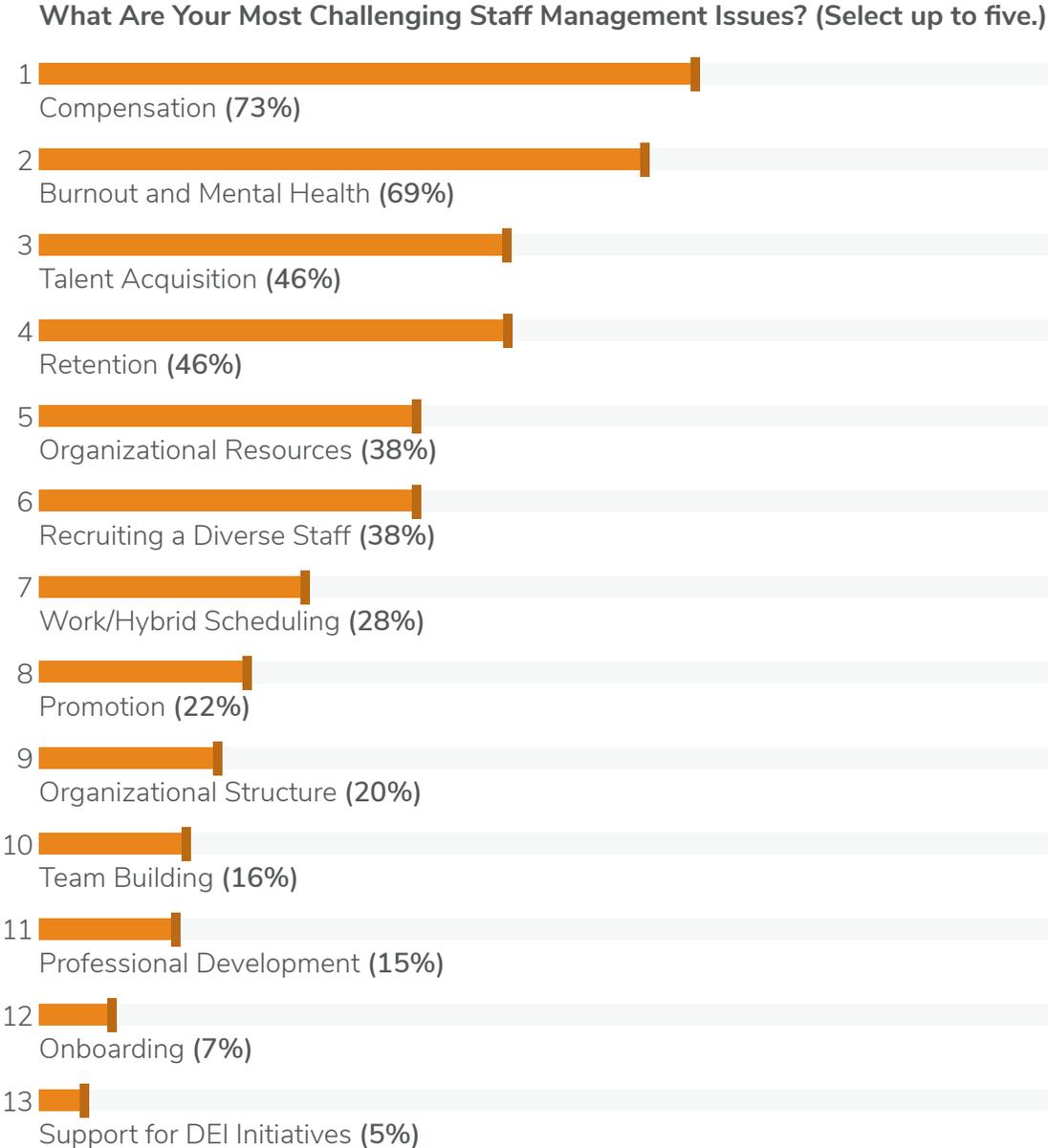
“Education is core to the basic functions of our society and our well-being. I remain optimistic if we are willing to make adjustments in our institutions to reflect the reality of today’s demographics, societal inequities, differences in education preparation, opportunities, and financial resources,” shares one enrollment leader.

“While the work of enrollment management is more challenging and uncertain than ever, it is also more critical to institutional success than ever,” says another. “It won’t be easy, but there is opportunity.”

# Challenges in Staff Management

Staff management issues have also become more prevalent. When asked what their most challenging staff management issues are currently, enrollment leaders surveyed resoundingly placed compensation at the top of the list (73%). This was closely followed by burnout (69%) and a tie for talent acquisition (46%) and retention (46%). Interestingly, “recruiting a diverse staff” landed in fifth place when it came to challenges, tying with “organizational resources.”

“We need to compensate admission officers better,” shares one enrollment leader. “They should be looked at similarly to advancement staff and yet they are not. We put an enormous amount of responsibility on staff but compensation is not commensurate.”



## CEMO Compensation

One silver lining might be that enrollment managers have seen incremental increases in their base compensation, according to data from our last three surveys. **CEMO salaries have crept up in the past eight years.** In 2014, nearly 40% of CEMOs were earning between \$151,000 and \$200,000. Today, 28% of CEMOs surveyed are making \$201,000 to \$250,000 and another 20% are earning up to \$300,000. While in 2014, only 1% of CEMOs made over \$300,000, in 2022 that number rises to 8% making between \$301,000 to \$400,000. **This reflects the increasingly high demands of the role and its importance in the success of an institution.**

Annual Gross Salary	2014	2018	2022
Under \$100K	8%	4%	2%
\$101K-\$150K	31%	16%	15%
\$151K-\$200K	39%	36%	27%
\$201K-\$250K	16%	23%	28%
\$251K-\$300K	4%	14%	20%
\$301K-\$350K	1%	4%	5%
\$351K-\$400K	0%	1%	3%
Over \$400K	0%	1%	1%

## Leaving? Why, When, and for What?

When asked whether they would leave the field, and their reasons for leaving, CEMOs had plenty to say. In regards to current career plans, about one-third were happy with where they are now. Just over one-fifth of them plan to seek a new opportunity within the next two to three years and about 15% plan to retire within the next few years. Just over a quarter of them are seeking a new opportunity right now or plan to within the next year.

### Current Career Plans

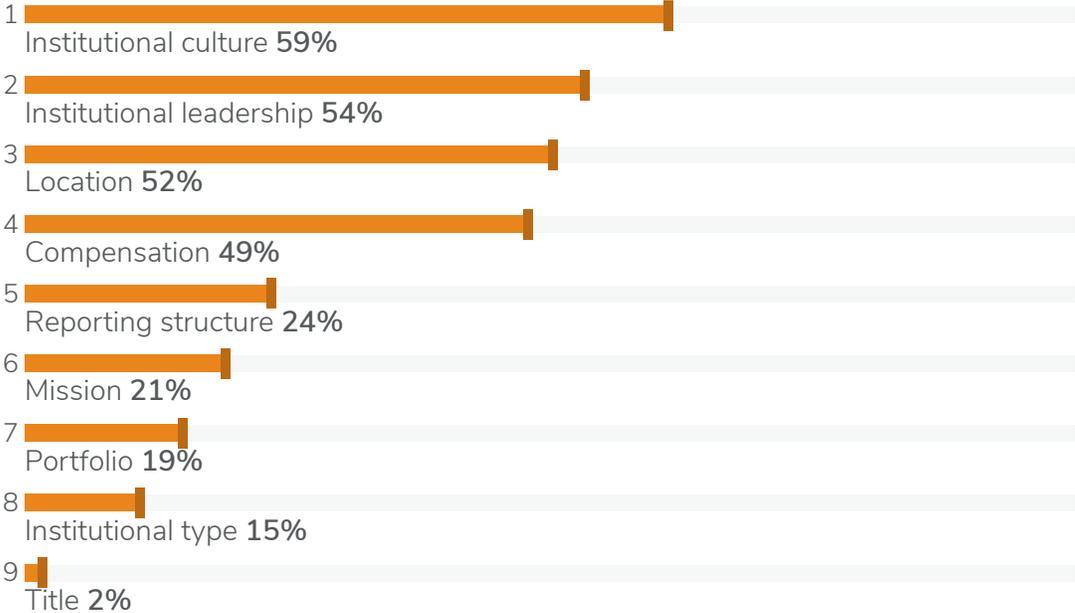


Reasons they gave that would prompt them to leave ran the gamut from retirement to looking for greater compensation with a less stressful role to leveraging their skills to support student success.

The responses show that many enrollment leaders are feeling increasing pressure to grow enrollment without the necessary resources to meet those expectations. Many would jump at the opportunity “to make a greater impact/progress on the shared values in education” or “to apply my skills and creativity in a more direct manner, at a smaller non-profit or working overseas. Plus, less stress, ideally!”

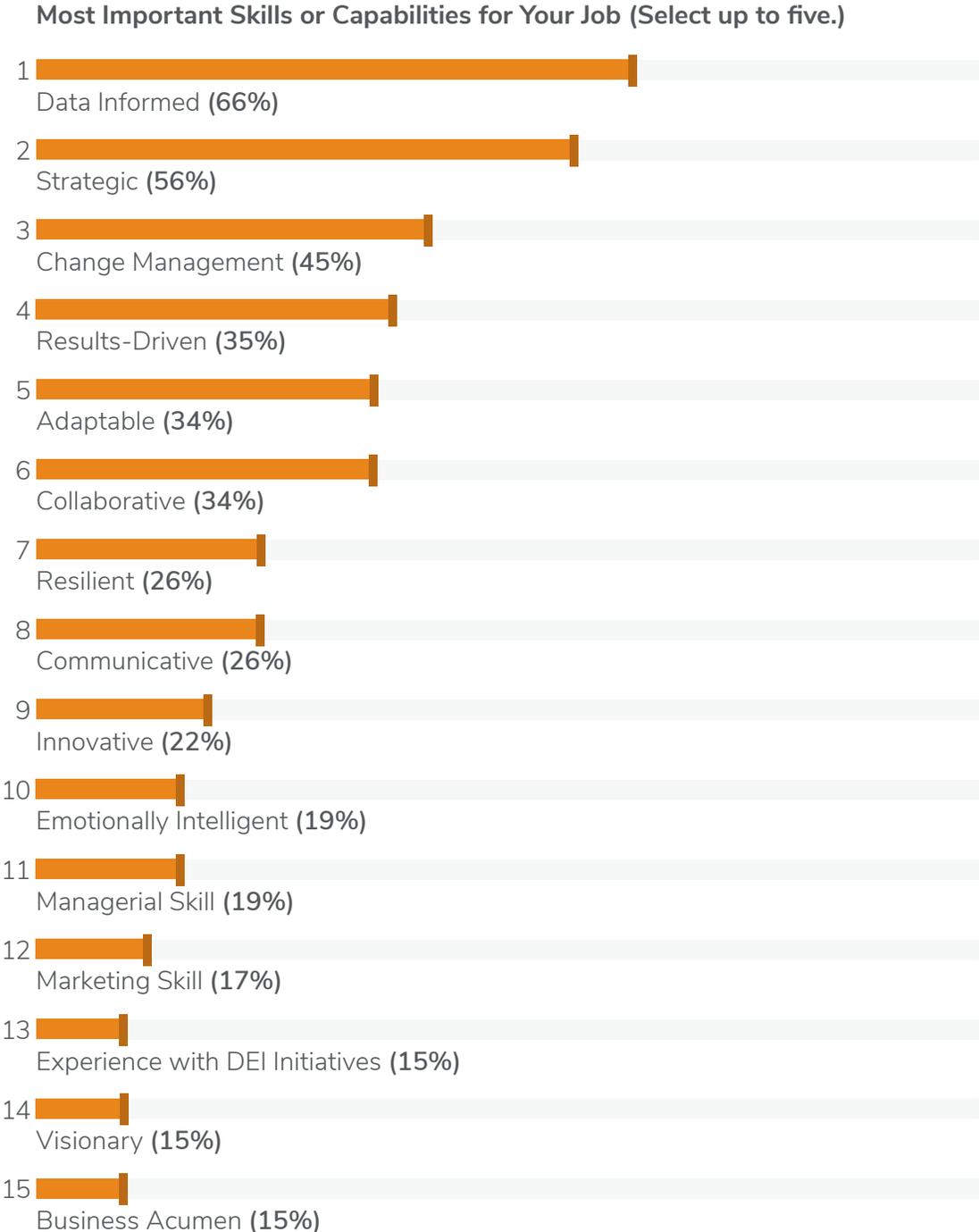
CEMOs list institutional culture and leadership as the most important aspects they are looking for in a new role. This is followed closely by location and compensation.

### Most Important Aspects of a New Role (Select up to five.)



# The Right Skills for Today and Tomorrow

As the profession and the context in which enrollment managers operate continue to evolve, what skills become most critical for success? Survey participants were asked to identify up to five of the most important skills and capabilities for their job right now from a list of possibilities. Being “data-informed” was the runaway first choice, followed by “strategic” and “change management.” Ranking lowest were “self-aware,” “team-oriented,” and “entrepreneurial.” Surprisingly, qualities such as managerial skills and experience with DEI initiatives ranked well down the list.



## How Institutions Can Recruit and Retain Enrollment Leaders

When launching enrollment leadership searches, we encounter a common refrain: Enrollment management is absolutely critical to the success of the institution. The chief enrollment management officer is a key thought partner for the president and campus leaders and is instrumental in helping drive the transformation that every college and university seeks.

How can institutions find the next generation of leaders who will spark meaningful change and provide a distinct strategic advantage in the dynamic higher education landscape? In reviewing the comments to our survey and considering the input we've heard from countless leaders across higher education, we offer up the following suggestions:

### **Set realistic expectations and offer support.**

Enrollment success is critical to institutional success, but this can sometimes lead to a disproportionate burden placed on the office. A CEMO is not a fairy godmother. Success takes coordinated efforts by many — a common thread in this CEMO survey. Hitting enrollment numbers should be the concern of every employee and department at an institution, not just the handful of people in the CEMO's office. Important to the success of this initiative is the cross-training of employees to understand how everyone can support the goals for enrollment. This involves building structures for cross-unit collaboration and breaking down silos. Fostering appropriate expectations and supporting enrollment leaders in their work leads to greater satisfaction with their roles and longer tenures.

“Without significant collaboration from our academic colleagues, it will be tougher to be successful as the demographics shift,” shares one leader.

### **Get the compensation and resources right.**

Enrollment management is hard work, and it must be compensated and resourced accordingly. It is no wonder that the average tenure of CEMOs is about six years as they move from role to role in a battle against burnout and an effort to be supported in the critical work they do.

There is also a need to pay enrollment staff a salary on par with the level of commitment the roles demand while also supporting them in their work. “I am nervous about the retention of employees given so many critical factors like pay, satisfaction with the industry and overall expectations for the office,” shares one leader.

“For the most part I am optimistic about the future of our vocation. The industry will always need people who can problem solve, troubleshoot and lead. The headwinds that we will face are not dissimilar to headwinds that have been faced before.”

“We expect a significant workload and project and program management of folks at all levels of the profession; I am not convinced we are compensating accordingly,” shares another.

**Feed the CEMO pipeline.** Training the leaders of tomorrow is just as important as finding the right leaders today. As many CEMOs retire and leave the sector, the need to prepare others to step into the role is vital. To do this, institutions need to nurture the education and development of enrollment staff. Measures may include: identifying pathways to greater leadership; supporting professional development activities such as fellows programs and regional and national conferences; and cross-training staff so they are familiar with all aspects of enrollment management. Equally important, CEMOs must focus on staff support to ensure a career in enrollment feels sustainable from a personal and professional perspective.

**Advance DEI priorities across the institution.**

Now is the time to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives by hiring and advancing leaders who can support historically under-represented student populations. For today’s students, representation matters, and they want to see themselves reflected in all areas of an institution. Recruiting a diverse faculty and staff is critical to recruiting, retaining and supporting a more diverse student body where students can aspire to achieve their own leadership goals.

“I am worried about the departures of good people from the field, and I am especially concerned about how many talented folks of color have given up on the profession,” shares one CEMO.

“I see schools needing to be more responsive to student needs and social issues — diversity, access, etc. The resulting changes should be beneficial to all involved.”



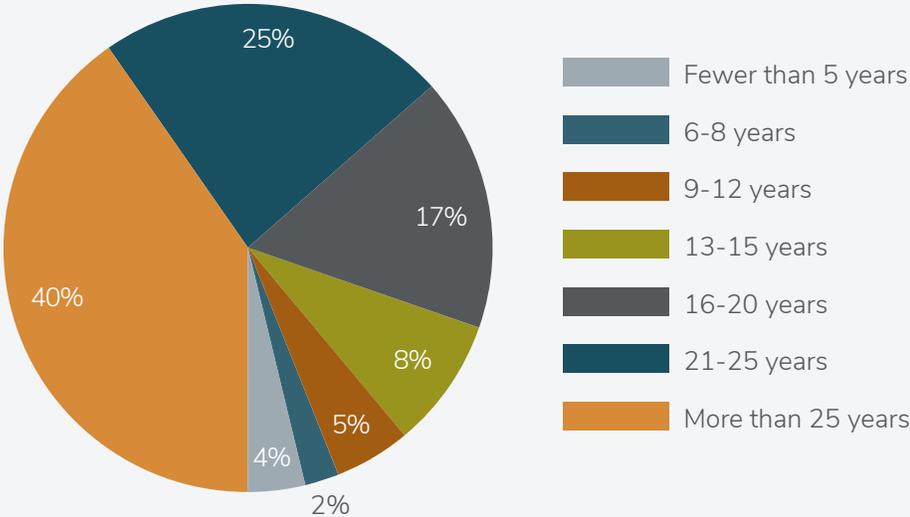
## Survey Methodology and Respondent Demographics

For this online survey, 183 higher education professionals in the U.S. with the title of chief enrollment management officer or equivalent responded. About 6 in 10 of the CEMOs work at private colleges or universities (62%); the others work at public institutions. Most are influential positions, with two-thirds reporting directly to the president and three-quarters saying that they are members of the president’s cabinet.

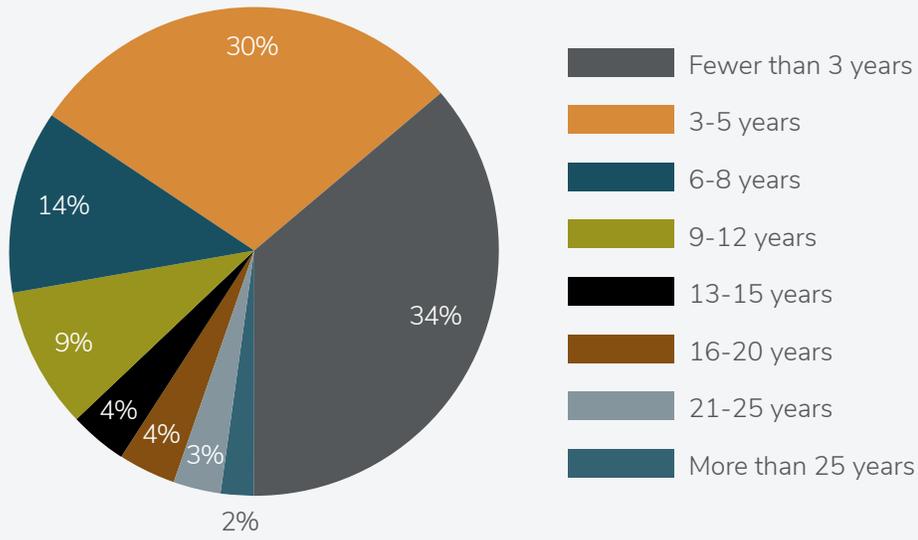
As we know, diversity is lacking in top leadership roles in enrollment. In our survey, 8 of 10 respondents classify themselves as White, with the remainder identifying as either African American (8%), Hispanic/Latino (7%) or multiracial (4%). Just over half of respondents identified as male (54%) and the remainder as female. (None identified themselves as non-binary.)

Few enrollment leaders (7%) responding to the survey are younger than 40 with the majority of them ranging in age from 41-55 years old. Four in 10 have been in the profession for over 25 years, a quarter of them for 21-25 years, and another 17% for 16-20 years, signifying a tenured group and a deep understanding of the role and its evolution.

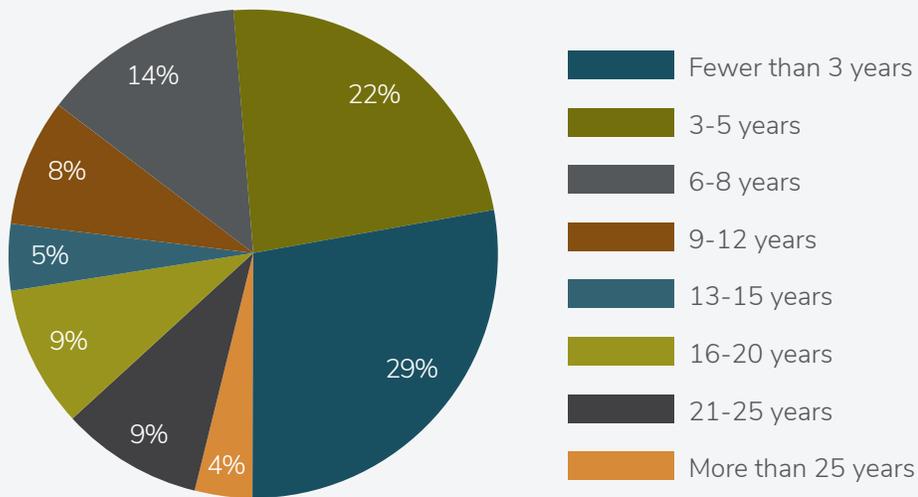
YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN ENROLLMENT



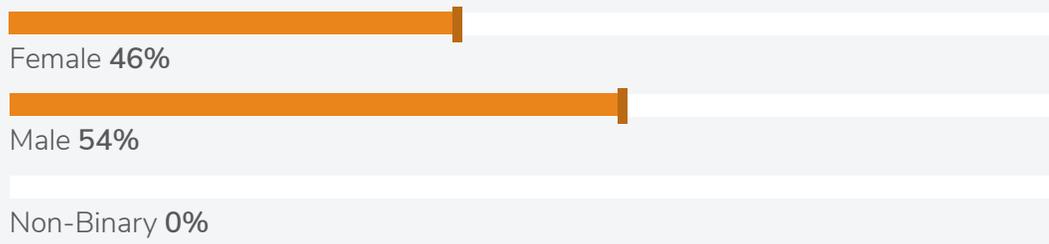
### YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION



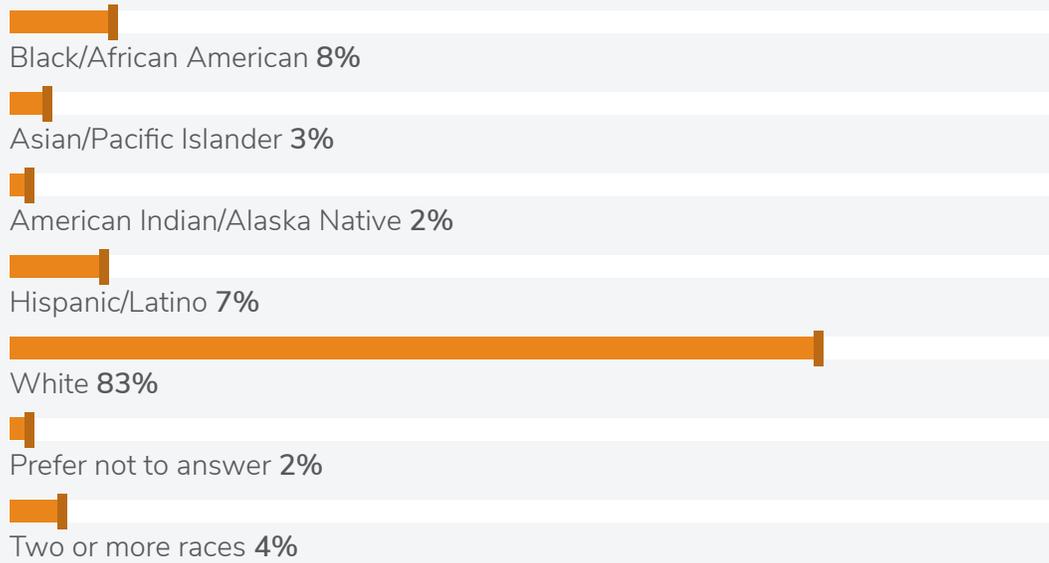
### YEARS AT CURRENT INSTITUTION



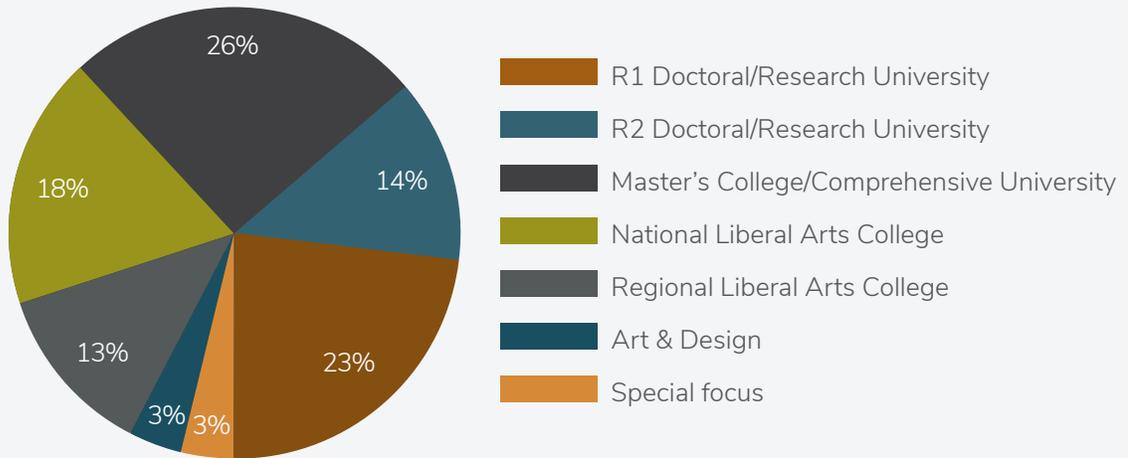
## Gender



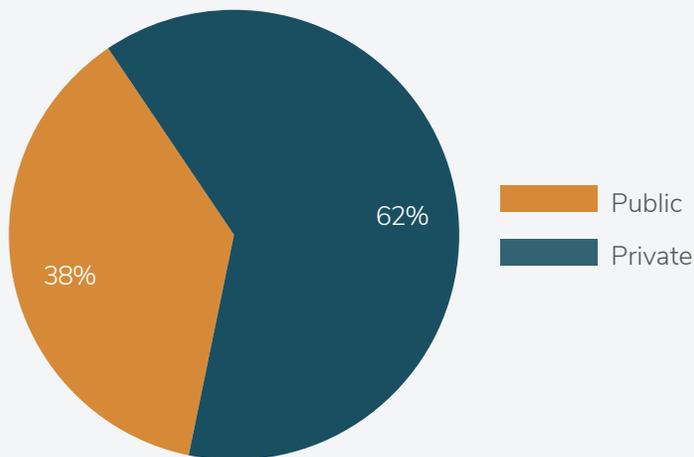
## Race/Ethnicity (Check all that apply.)



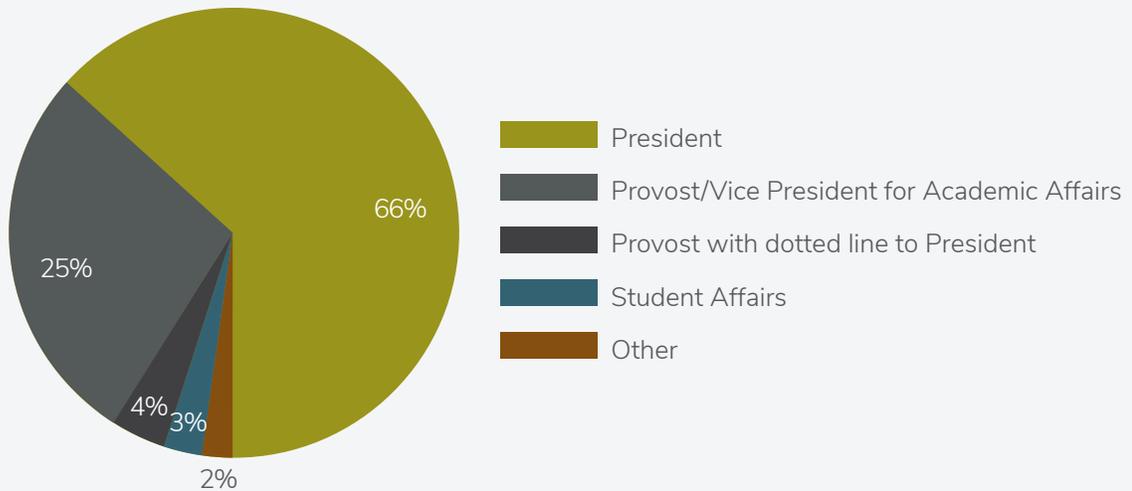
### INSTITUTION CLASSIFICATION



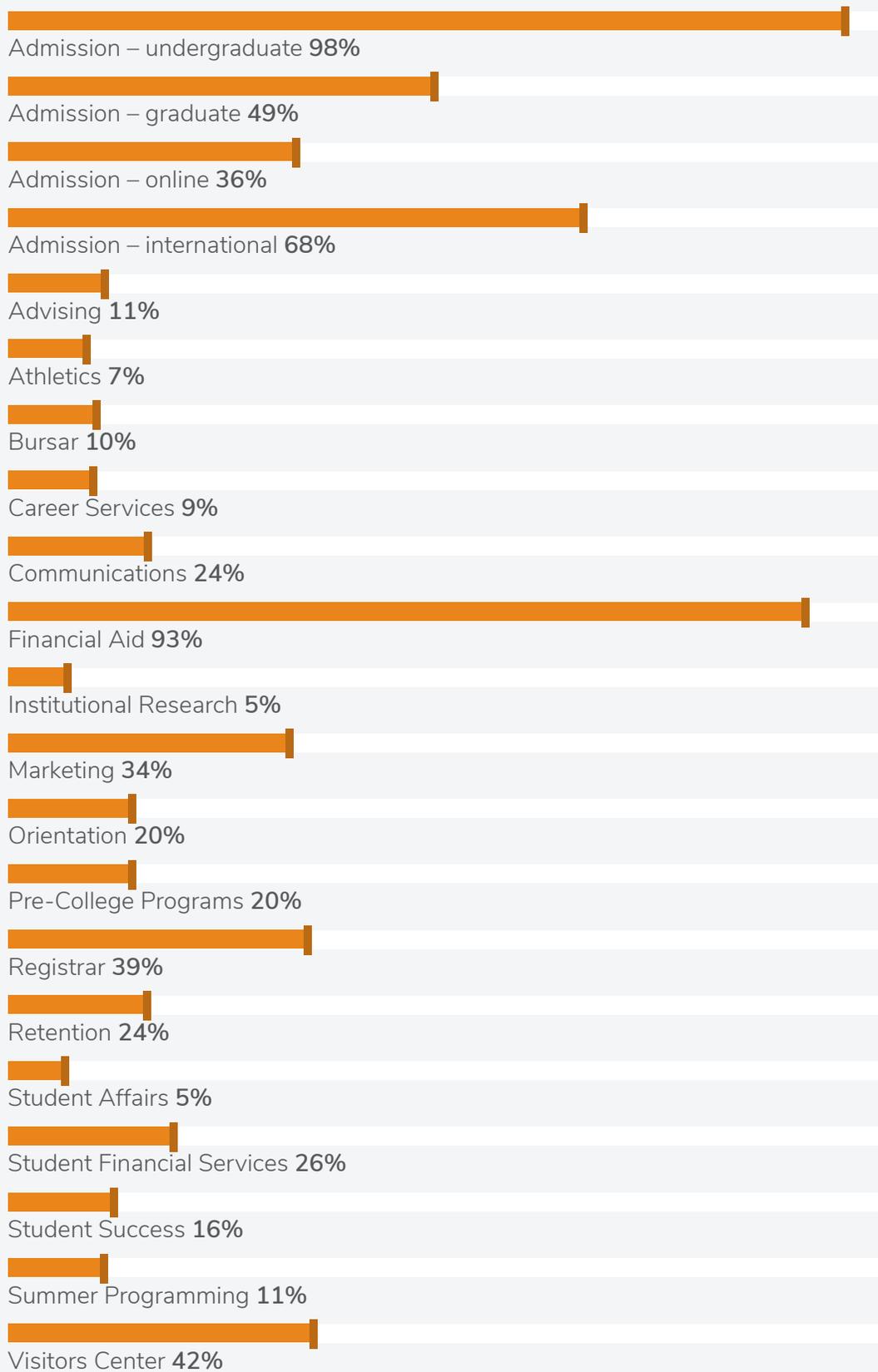
### INSTITUTION TYPE



### POSITION CEMO REPORTS TO



## Departments Reporting to CEMO



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