

KEY  
TAKEAWAYS

A man in a grey suit is speaking to a group in a meeting room. He is gesturing with his hands. A woman with glasses is smiling in the background. A laptop is open on a table in the foreground.

# Managing Higher Ed's Modern Work Force

WITH  
SUPPORT  
FROM

**ModernThink**  
Proud Sponsor of the Great Colleges to Work For® Program

THE CHRONICLE  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

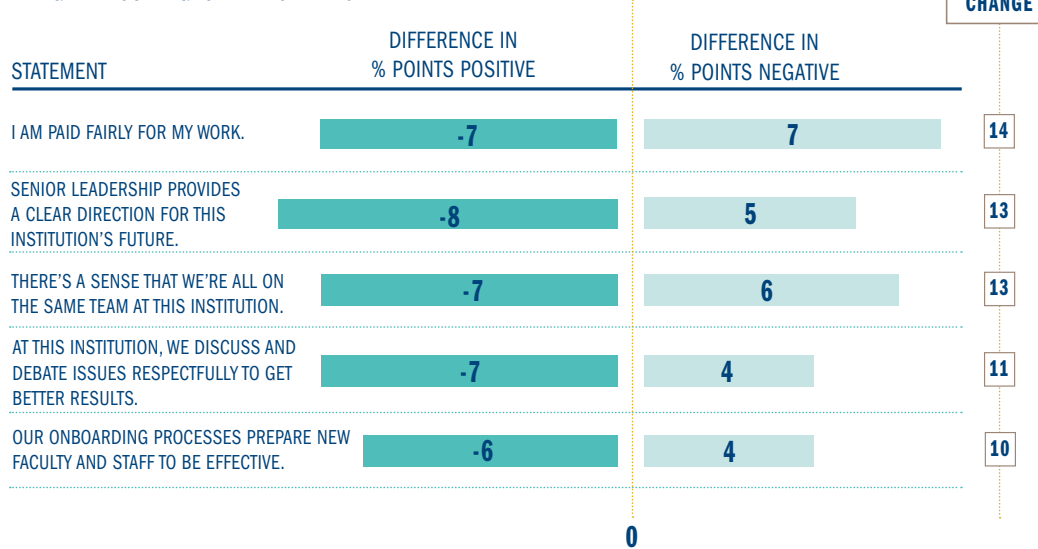
## 42% OF INSTITUTIONS IMPROVE THEIR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SCORES AFTER JUST TWO YEARS IN THE GREAT COLLEGES PROGRAM.

With higher education facing politicization, burnout, faculty and staff shortages, and more, now is the right time for an employee engagement survey. Providing everyday stability for students while navigating the modern workplace, your faculty and staff are at the center of this—all while feeling more disengaged from their colleges than they have even during the pandemic.

Faculty and staff responses to our 2022 ModernThink Higher Education Insight Survey show that positive sentiment was down not only from pre-pandemic 2019 levels but also from both 2021 and 2020 results. The results for half of the survey items were down by 5% points or more from 2021 to 2022; 12 of those items regressed by 10% points or more. As a point of comparison, only two survey items regressed by 5% points or more from 2020 to 2021.

### NOTEWORTHY OVERALL DECLINES FROM 2021 TO 2022

ALL GREAT COLLEGES PARTICIPANTS



As evident from last year's scores, it's a difficult time to manage a modern work force, but the Great Colleges program helps you stay on top of your employees' changing needs. Register for the 2023 Great Colleges to Work For program to receive a nationally-normed engagement survey and collect actionable data – including benchmarks – for free.

ModernThink is proud to underwrite this program and serve our friends and colleagues across higher education in building tomorrow's modern work force. We welcome your college to become a Great College to Work For in 2023.

Sincerely,

*Rich Boyer*

ModernThink Senior Consultant and Co-Founder  
of the Great Colleges to Work For Program



### BY THE NUMBERS

**1,586,248**

FACULTY AND STAFF  
SURVEYED

**1,197**

COLLEGES  
SURVEYED

**41-45%**

AVERAGE ANNUAL  
RESPONSE RATE

**60**

SURVEY  
STATEMENTS

**20**

BENEFIT SATISFACTION  
QUESTIONS

**10**

DEMOGRAPHICS

**2**

OPEN-ENDED  
QUESTIONS



# Managing Higher Ed's Modern Work Force

Key Takeaways from a virtual forum

Presented by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* with support from ModernThink



## SPEAKERS

### Megan Zahneis

Senior Reporter,  
*The Chronicle of  
Higher Education*

### Susan Maddux

Vice President for Finance  
and Administration,  
Furman University

### Falecia D. Williams

President,  
Prince George's Community College,  
Maryland

Outdated workplace environments are a growing challenge for colleges and universities trying to attract and retain employees. In fact, according to a [recent survey](#) by *The Chronicle*, 57 percent of administrators believe their institutions lack the right policies and practices to manage today's work force.

What ideas should leaders adopt to stay up to date and compete for talent? What type of preparation do provosts, deans, department chairs, and other academic managers need to be better suited for the modern workplace?

To find out, *The Chronicle* held a virtual forum, "Managing Higher Ed's Modern Work Force," on December 8, with support from Modern Think, to hear from a group of leaders about best practices, training, and strategies they are using to support their campus employees.

The following comments, which have been edited for clarity and length, represent key takeaways from the forum. To hear the full discussion, watch the recorded webinar [here](#).

**Megan Zahneis:** Susan, one of the keys to managing in this environment has been to move away from thinking that in-person work is the only path to productivity. You told me that you used to think that way as a manager. What changed?

**Susan Maddux:** I definitely was that manager prior to the pandemic who thought that only those employees who were in the office were productive, and if they were at home, then it would offer way too many distractions. But throughout the pandemic, I've seen that that's really not true, and in fact, some of our employees are much more productive when they're at home without some of the distractions that you might get from an office setting.

That definitely has helped me grow as a manager, and it's up to leaders today in higher education to find ways that we can keep our employees engaged and satisfied with their work.

Because when you have engaged employees, that leads to engaged students, which is what everyone in the higher ed is looking for.

**“When you have engaged employees, that leads to engaged students, which is what everyone in the higher ed is looking for.”**

**Zahneis:** Falecia, at Prince George's you created a position, a vice president for equity, culture, and talent. Can you tell us about that position and why it was needed?

**Falecia D. Williams:** When I arrived in 2020, we did not have a vice president in human resources; we only had an associate vice president. It was important to think about who really owns that work. So I did create a new role where we actually pulled together traditional human-resources functions and also diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

We see the intertwining of them as being integral to organizational excellence and organizational effectiveness; it has to permeate not only the employee experience, but also the students' experience.

**Zahneis:** What policies have you put in place for remote work or other types of flexible schedules?

**Williams:** We have crafted what we call alternative work schedules, and we have three forms. One is more of your traditional telework, where employees are able to work as much as 40 percent of their schedules remotely. The second category is a compressed work schedule, where employees could be working four days a week, for example. And then we have a third group who are working on a schedule that is different from our standard 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. That can look



like your traditional shift work, but it could be modified to accommodate, say, school times for children or to provide care for elderly parents.

**Zahneis:** I know some campuses have offered training to managers to help them oversee a work force that has a more flexible schedule or is remote. Susan, you've done something along those lines.

**Maddux:** We have rolled out training sessions, and we talked directly with our supervisors on how to set goals, how to manage a remote work force, and we've done an HR 101 to get back to the basics for what it means to have a remote worker, what happens if your remote employee gets hurt while they're working at home, many things that corporate America has had to think through but higher ed less so.

**Williams:** We have found ourselves having to go back and to rethink all of our organizational practices. We have created an entire new catalog of supervisor-training sessions to help them understand how to work with their employees in these blended formats and how to begin to evaluate them. We've worked with employees to look at how to write smart goals for their performance evaluations.

**“We’ve done an HR 101 to get back to the basics for what it means to have a remote worker.”**

**Zahneis:** We have a question from an attendee who asks how residential campuses can balance the pressures for remote work or flexible work on the employee side with the need to have a vibrant campus culture.

**Maddux:** Furman has a four-year residency requirement. For student-facing positions, the critical teams for facilities, and campus police, they need to be here with our students. All of those positions are in person.

In general, we work with each one of our employees to see how they connect to a personal pathway for our students so that they understand why they need to be here or when they need to be here.

**Williams:** We're not a residential institution, but we do have a strong focus on student engagement. We know that the engaged student generally is going to be retained at a higher level and then eventually going to achieve their academic goals. During the pandemic, we began to talk about how we could be simultaneously present and virtual, similar to what retail has done for such a long time.

**Zahneis:** In an environment where colleges are requiring many employees to come back to campus, the business sector often offers more flexibility and higher salaries. How has that affected staff hiring and retention?

**Maddux:** Through the pandemic Furman lost a lot of staff in our student-affairs division. Burnout within student affairs across the nation was just rampant, and the skills they have are transferable to corporate America.

We've been hiring, including a handful of students who had just graduated from Furman. Student affairs has the ability to pick the cream of the crop because they know the best students; they know the students that are higher performing, that are engaging. That has allowed us to not have to fill all the empty positions at once.

**Williams:** We have experienced the same type of loss, but across the organization. Our hardest-hit area has been technology staff.

We are examining our compensation models. How competitive are they in our area? How competitive are they in our sector related to community colleges? There is no doubt that we are disadvantaged in our market. We're in the middle of the DMV [District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia]; we are surrounded by private corporations; we're surrounded by higher-education institutions, public and private; and we are a public community college in the midst of that market.

Can we compete with the four-year institutions in terms of salary? We can't. So we really have to look at our comprehensive package that we provide to employees.

We put out advertisements that pitch a different mind-set for meaningful work. Would you like to design a new department? Would you like to be a trailblazer? So focusing on those narratives where you don't have the dollars.

**Maddux:** One of the things that a higher ed has to do is a better job of engaging our work force. How do they know that we care about them? That we're listening to them? And you can't do that unless you get the data from the employees.

Corporate America has done a really good job of selling work and saying an employee can work at whatever time of the day. Higher ed has got to figure out how to make that work so that we can be flexible around our employees, as long as they can complete the job that we need completed and it works with the student experience. We've got to figure out how to be more competitive in that way.