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Honey I Shrunk the University: Navigating Through Change in Higher Education

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Presenter Information

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Enrollment declines continue to show no mercy for post-secondary institutions, threatening long-term stability of higher education. Some of the main trends responsible for the decline in college enrollment include declining birth rates, shifting job market, rising tuition costs, changing demographics, and the overall perceived value of a college education. As these trends will continue to challenge and change academic tradition, what does the future university experience hold for students, faculty, and administrators?

Similar to other institutions, our university serves students from a variety of backgrounds, to include: low-income, rural, first-generation, and minority populations. The institution has felt the continued and significant impact of declining enrollment to include major shifts in key leadership positions. Most recently, in 22-23, the institution began the academic year with approximately ½ of the department chairs being new to their roles and shifting from two deans to one serving as the leader of both schools—Graduate and Professional Studies and Arts and Sciences. While overwhelming at first, such challenges proved to be the catalyst needed to redefine the organizational structure. Through this process, new administrative roles at the faculty level were created to establish shared forms of leadership in addressing some of the complex issues facing our university.

As we navigate through the changing landscape of higher education, we are learning that change must occur in marketing our programs, becoming more interdisciplinary, and continuing to meet our mission to serve our community while changing our operation mindset. In this session, presenters will discuss some of the current challenges surrounding higher education at our university, which will serve as a springboard for discussion with attendees about issues at their institutions.

Topics of discussion include the following:

- Programs that serve specific community needs in our local economy which also allow space in the curriculum for students to complete meaningful internships in their field that promote authentic learning and provide increased job skills for students.
- Concurrent/Dual enrollment serves the needs of area high school students and provides opportunities for both the institution and the students in terms of enrollment, along with challenges in scheduling, curriculum, and rigor of courses.
- Certificate or micro-credential programs for degree and non-degree seeking students to increase their skills in areas identified by local employers and to allow students a shorter-term program that meets the immediate demand of the labor market.

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