

Supporting Higher Education Business Leaders

EnvisionED

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**PARTNERING AT
THE START LEADS
TO SUCCESS**

IN SYNC

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Canon's commitment

DEFINITION OF KYOSEI

Kyosei is the Japanese concept of living and working together for the **benefit of all**. It emphasizes collaboration, respect, and mutual support across communities and nations.

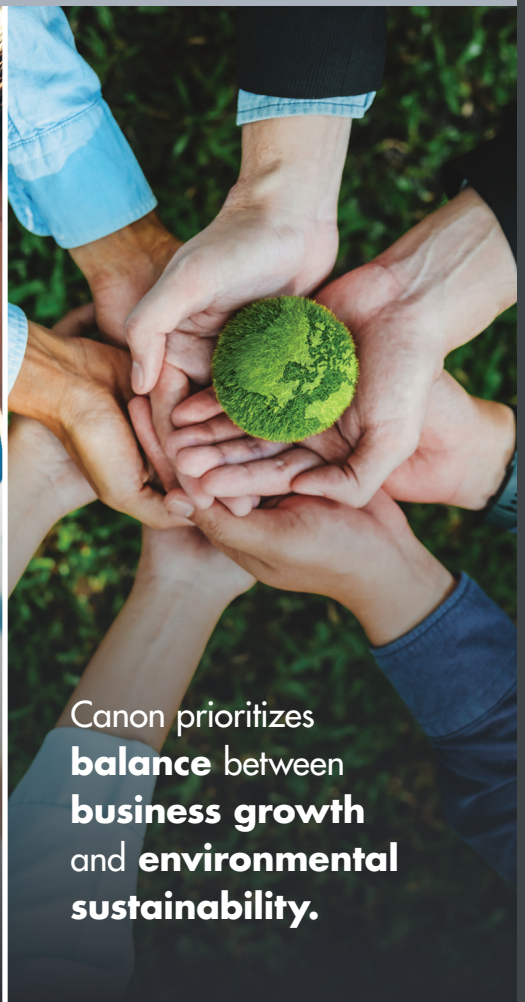
WHERE KYOSEI LIVES IN CANON



We strive to align our goals with the **planet's wellbeing**.



Our success is tied to the **health of our communities**.



Canon prioritizes **balance** between **business growth** and **environmental sustainability**.



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THE SHIFT

Here's the hard truth: Many institutions are trying to solve modern challenges with outdated buying behavior—and it's starting to show.

Higher education has entered a period of real complexity. The acceleration of AI, the permanence of hybrid learning environments, rising student expectations, and increasing operational pressure have changed the game. These are not isolated challenges. They are interconnected systems that require alignment, foresight, and adaptability. Yet too often, the approach to solving them remains reactive—defined by rigid procurement cycles, late-stage engagement, and decisions driven primarily by cost.

That model creates inefficiency. It introduces friction. And ultimately, it limits outcomes.

When partners are brought in only after requirements are fully defined, institutions are not accessing expertise—they are simply validating assumptions. The result is predictable: incremental solutions to systemic problems. In an environment where transformation is required, that is a losing equation.

The shift we are seeing—and the one that must accelerate—is from transactional buying to strategic partnership.

This is not about vendors positioning themselves differently. It is about institutions building the internal capability to engage differently. Leadership, in close coordination with procurement, must create space for earlier collaboration, clearer problem definition, and shared accountability for outcomes. It requires trust. It requires transparency. And it requires a

willingness to challenge long-standing processes that may no longer serve the institution's mission.

This is where the philosophy of Canon—Kyosei—becomes relevant. Defined as living and working together for the common good, Kyosei is not a slogan. It is a framework for how organizations can align around shared purpose. In the context of higher education, it reinforces a simple but powerful idea: The best outcomes are achieved when institutions and their partners work in true collaboration, not in isolation.

"Leadership, in close coordination with procurement, must create space for earlier collaboration, clearer problem definition, and shared accountability for outcomes."

Partnership, in this sense, is not a procurement strategy. It is a leadership strategy.

The institutions that move in this direction will not only reduce inefficiency and cost—they will unlock better thinking, better solutions, and ultimately better experiences for students, faculty, and staff.

The shift is already underway. The question is not whether it will happen.

It's whether your institution will lead it—or be forced to catch up.

Warmest regards,
Kiyoshi Oka
EVP, GM, Marketing Strategy Unit
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THE PARTNERSHIP CHECKLIST

ARE YOU BUYING OR ACTUALLY PARTNERING?

Self-identify whether you are operating transactionally or strategically. The simple maturity model (Transactional vs. Consultative vs. Strategic Partner), will highlight gaps in your vendor engagement model and reinforce that partnerships are a capability rather than a pitch.

How to Use It - Score each statement and use your score to determine your maturity level.

0 = Never 1 = Sometimes 2 = Consistently

1 Engagement Timing — This is where most institutions fail.

- We engage potential partners before an RFP is written.
- We seek input on problem definition, not just solutions.
- We involve partners in early-stage planning discussions.
- We allow time for discovery and education prior to procurement.

2 Problem Definition — Transactional orgs define specs. Strategic orgs define outcomes.

- We define success in terms of outcomes, not features.
- We align internal stakeholders before going to market.
- We welcome partners to challenge our assumptions.
- We prioritize long-term impact over short-term cost.

3 Internal Alignment — Most breakdowns aren't vendor-related—they're internal.

- IT, procurement, finance, and leadership are aligned early.
- Decision-making authority is clear and consistent.
- Stakeholders share a common definition of success.
- We minimize late-stage surprises or reversals.

4 Partner Access & Transparency — Good partners can't help if they're kept at arm's length.

- We provide partners with access to key stakeholders.
- We openly share constraints (budget, timeline, politics).
- We communicate real challenges—not sanitized versions.
- We treat partners as trusted advisors, not just vendors.

5 Procurement Flexibility — This is the institutional bottleneck.

- Our procurement process allows for collaboration before formal bids.
- We evaluate based on value, not just price.
- We allow for iterative solution development.
- We avoid over-specifying solutions too early.

5 Innovation & Co-Creation — Partnership can produce better ideas—not just cheaper ones.

- We invite partners to bring new ideas proactively.
- We pilot or test solutions before full-scale rollout.
- We co-develop solutions tailored to our environment.
- We reward partners for innovation, not just execution.

6 Relationship Management — Partnership doesn't end at contract signing.

- We have ongoing strategic reviews, not just status updates.
- We measure success against shared KPIs.
- We provide honest, two-way feedback.
- We invest in long-term relationships, not one-off deals.

7 Risk & Accountability — True partnerships share risk—and upside.

- We structure agreements around shared outcomes.
- We are open to performance-based models.
- We collaborate on risk mitigation strategies.
- We view partners as accountable stakeholders, not outsiders.

SCORING MODEL (MATURITY LEVELS)

0–20: Transactional

rfp-driven, price-focused, limited innovation, high friction, low differentiation

21–44: Consultative

some early engagement, better alignment, still constrained by process

45–64: Strategic Partner

Early and open collaboration, outcome-driven, continuous innovation, strong, trust-based relationships

IN SYNC

**PARTNERING AT THE START
LEADS TO SUCCESS**



If there is one certainty in higher education today, it is that change never stops. Rudy Bellavia says the landscape's continual, at times dramatic, evolution is pushing institutions to think bigger, operate more strategically and recognize that things like vendor relationships can no longer remain purely transactional. That means the strongest partnerships today are built around advancing the mission of the university while also creating meaningful value for the partner.

Take the procurement process. Like many institutions, Arizona State University (ASU) follows a public procurement process. And while much of the critical engagement occurs after a Request for Proposal (RFP) is awarded, ASU invests significant effort well before that stage. "One approach we have taken is to think strategically about how we create mutual value with potential partners," says Bellavia, VP, University Business Services – Office of the Executive VP, Treasurer and CFO.

For Bellavia, those conversations extend far beyond pricing spreadsheets and procurement timelines. Universities today are evaluating partnerships that touch nearly every corner of campus life, from athletics and research to faculty engagement, student experience and professional development. The institutions finding the most success are not simply looking for vendors that can fulfill a scope of work. They are looking for partners that understand the culture, mission and long-term vision of the university itself.

"At ASU, it is essential that we remain current, engaged and connected to all aspects of campus life," Bellavia says. "Likewise, the partners we pursue must also have a strong understanding of our mission, culture and design aspirations in order to build truly impactful collaborations."

The shift is becoming increasingly important as colleges and universities navigate tighter budgets, growing operational complexity, rapid advances in technology and mounting pressure to improve student outcomes. More procurement leaders are starting conversations earlier to better define challenges, align priorities and shape long-term goals.

For Bellavia, the shift is not about bypassing process, but creating better outcomes. While traditional RFPs were built around fairness, compliance and cost comparison, universities also are recognizing that rigid requirements can unintentionally limit innovation before the conversation even starts. "The ability to think strategically across the many facets of a university is

critical to creating meaningful value and driving success," Bellavia says.

"THE INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE SEEN THE GREATEST IMPACT ON STUDENT SUCCESS AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE ENTERED MARKET CONVERSATIONS WITH A PROBLEM STATEMENT, NOT A PREDETERMINED SOLUTION."

— James Dwyer, Vice Chancellor for University Business Services, Washington University

Engaging partners earlier allows colleges to focus less on predetermined solutions and more on broader institutional goals like improving the student experience, modernizing operations, advancing research initiatives and strengthening technology infrastructure.

The process also helps procurement, finance, IT, academic leadership and operational teams align around shared priorities before implementation challenges emerge later. “Developing a relationship with the units across the enterprise is critical,” Bellavia says. “It clearly sets expectations, goals, operational success and many other important needs.”

Bellavia says the impact often shows up long after the contract is signed through faster execution, fewer operational surprises and stronger adoption across departments. Institutions increasingly are looking for partners that understand the university beyond the scope of work attached to a bid.

“As we shape the RFPs of the future, it is essential that we remain current, engaged and connected to all aspects of campus life,” Bellavia says. “Likewise, the partners we pursue must also have a strong understanding of our mission, culture and design aspirations in order to build truly impactful collaborations.”

Universities also need partners capable of evolving alongside rapidly changing technology environments instead of simply delivering against a static checklist. As institutions continue scaling AI initiatives, cloud systems and integrated digital operations, flexibility and adaptability become increasingly important. “Technology evolves rapidly,” Bellavia says. “We rely heavily on our partners to help us innovate and move quickly.”

Bellavia believes successful partnerships require agility, flexibility and shared accountability from the very beginning, particularly around integration, scalability and risk management. “There is a shared responsibility to conduct thorough due diligence early in the process so that when all the pieces come together, there are no unexpected issues that bring progress to a halt.”

Beyond Compliance

James Dwyer says many colleges are beginning partnership conversations too late in the process, after key operational decisions already have started taking shape internally. Traditional RFPs are built around compliance and price optimization, often forcing vendors into the same narrow framework and limiting opportunities for innovation.

“DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITS ACROSS THE ENTERPRISE IS CRITICAL. IT CLEARLY SETS EXPECTATIONS, GOALS, OPERATIONAL SUCCESS AND MANY OTHER IMPORTANT NEEDS.”

— Rudy Bellavia, VP, University Business Services – Office of the Executive VP, Treasurer and CFO, Arizona State University

“The institutions that have seen the greatest impact on student success and operational excellence entered market conversations with a problem statement, not a predetermined



solution,” says Dwyer, Vice Chancellor for University Business Services at Washington University in St. Louis. “Early collaboration brings forward capabilities, models and ideas the institution may not have known to ask for. That creative space is where differentiation is born. The RFP then becomes a tool to competitively validate the best ideas, not the starting point for defining them.”

More colleges are shifting discovery conversations earlier in the process. This helps create stronger alignment across campus before contracts are signed and implementation begins. “Each stakeholder group shapes the requirements from their vantage point, which surfaces conflicts and trade-offs early when they’re manageable, not mid-implementation when they’re costly,” Dwyer says.

Dwyer believes the same principle applies to the partner relationship itself.





When both sides understand strategic priorities up front, projects tend to move faster with fewer escalations and less operational friction. Early collaboration also helps institutions uncover unnecessary complexity before contracts are finalized.

“A traditional bid optimizes for the lowest price on a defined scope,” Dwyer says. “But if the scope is wrong, the implementation fails or the partnership requires costly mid-course corrections, those savings evaporate quickly. The multidimensional challenges institutions face today demand multidimensional solutions. A traditional bid process was simply not designed to deliver them.”

For colleges and universities navigating increasing operational pressure, the future of procurement may not be replacing the RFP, but redefining what happens before it. ■

THE HIDDEN COST OF RFPs

Why trusted partnerships are replacing endless bidding

Behind every Request for Proposal (RFP) is a financial reality few universities fully measure. According to NIGP’s 2025 “Bridging the Gap” whitepaper, for suppliers, responding to a single proposal—a formal document used to solicit bids from potential vendors for products or services—can require anywhere from \$6,000 to \$30,000 in time, labor and resources. These costs are real costs that show up in process or the bottom line.

While traditional RFPs were designed to promote fairness and competition, they can also create inefficiency, slow decision-making and overlooked opportunities. That reality is pushing more universities toward long-term vendor partnerships.

As proposal costs rise and requirements grow more complex, suppliers are applying stricter “go/no-go” filters, opting out of opportunities that feel misaligned, unclear or overly burdensome. The result is fewer bids, less

competition and diminished value for institutions seeking the strongest solutions.

The universities getting it right are treating procurement as a relationship rather than a transaction. They define clear roles and responsibilities across the RFP lifecycle, ensuring accountability and efficiency at every stage. They survey internal teams to better understand the time and resources tied to each solicitation. Most importantly, they evaluate the total sourcing effort to better measure their return on investment.

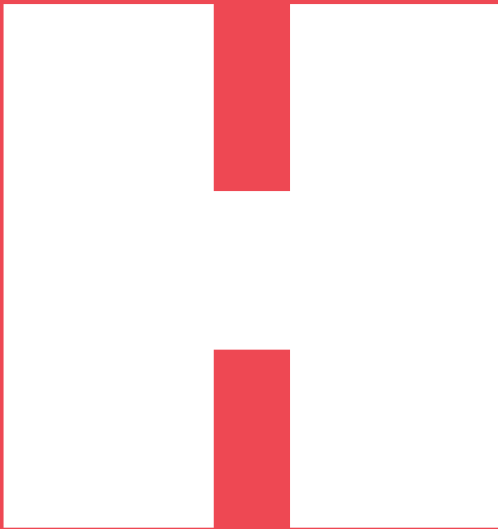
This approach changes the entire dynamic. When procurement professionals recognize the demands placed on both sides, they begin to design processes that invite participation rather than deter it. Early engagement replaces guesswork. Transparency builds trust. And suppliers evolve from vendors into collaborators capable of delivering insight, innovation and long-term value.

In a landscape where time, resources and attention are limited, the question is no longer how many bids you receive, but how many meaningful partnerships you build along the way.

MEET THEM WHEREVER THEY ARE

WHY STUDENT EXPERIENCE
IS THE REAL MEASURE OF
CAMPUS SUCCESS





ousing support. Classroom technology. Research equipment. Dining services. When students at the University at Buffalo need something, they rarely think about procurement contracts, operational workflows or the bureaucracy behind the scenes. They just want the experience to work.

That's what Carmen Gonzalez constantly reminds her team. In the day-to-day grind that is the college experience, Gonzalez believes finance and administration professionals must make more of an effort to connect their roles to the student experience than faculty members.

"When we do—and we see how we are supporting the academic and research missions—then we become committed to the mission of our institutions and that makes a positive impact on retention and engagement," says Gonzalez, University at Buffalo's Assistant VP of Purchasing and Contract Services for Business Services within the Division of Finance & Administration.

For colleges and universities navigating enrollment pressure, shifting student expectations and growing demands for seamless services, the conversation around operational strategy is evolving. The focus is no longer about reducing costs or improving administrative efficiency. Increasingly,

institutions are asking how operational decisions shape whether students feel supported, connected and successful.

"Even though the degree of engagement by the student is difficult to measure, partners play a role in the success of a student."

**— Humberto Speziani,
Associate VP of Business
Services, University of Miami**

Students may never see the systems operating behind the scenes, but they experience the outcomes every day.

"Universities tend to be bureaucratic, committee-driven and slow to change, so it's challenging to meet students' expectations who live in our 'Amazon,' 'ChatGPT' world," Gonzalez says. "In procurement, we are doing our best to streamline processes and put more innovative contracts in place to support

this effort, but the bureaucracy isn't evolving fast enough yet."

Today's students expect campus experiences to function more like the digital platforms they use outside higher education. Intuitive. Connected. Responsive. Frictionless. Whether they are attending classes in person, online or through hybrid formats, students expect services to meet them where they are.

At the University of Miami, Humberto Speziani says fragmented systems and disconnected departments have created what some informally refer to as the "UM Shuffle." The term describes the experience of students being passed between offices, digital systems and departments without getting direct answers to their problems.

The issue is not unique to one institution. Across higher education, students often navigate multiple platforms for advising, billing, learning management, student life and support services. What may look like separate

operational decisions internally can feel like a confusing maze externally. “The ‘UM Shuffle’ is a pain point to students who cannot get a direct response to their issues,” says Speziani, Associate VP of Business Services.

When students repeatedly encounter barriers while seeking help, engagement begins to erode. Advising appointments become harder to schedule. Support resources feel inaccessible. Administrative tasks become frustrating instead of supportive. Over time, those moments can influence whether students feel connected to the institution at all.

That’s why many colleges and universities are beginning to connect operational decisions more directly to student success and engagement rather than viewing them strictly as administrative functions.

Gonzalez says procurement teams, finance leaders, IT departments and student affairs divisions all contribute to the student experience, even if students never see the work happening behind the scenes. “If the goods and services aren’t purchased, then academics, athletics, facility managers and researchers don’t have the ability to do their jobs.”

THE SILO FACTOR

As colleges and universities navigate long approval processes and competing priorities across departments and units, breaking down silos remains one of higher education’s biggest challenges.



“Every different college and unit have their own culture, goals, financial challenges and leadership,” Gonzalez says. “This requires the president, provost and finance and administration leaders to be in lockstep with each other to break down the silos and enable the best systems and processes to support the student experience and success.”

That challenge also is reshaping how institutions think about partnerships. “Suppliers first and foremost need to understand how universities are organized,” Gonzalez says. “They need to understand the impact/importance of the goods and services they provide, and they need to understand the finances of their customer.”

“Universities tend to be bureaucratic, committee-driven and slow to change, so it’s challenging to meet students’ expectations who live in our ‘Amazon,’ ‘ChatGPT’ world.”

— Carmen Gonzalez,
Assistant VP of Purchasing and
Contract Services for Business Services,
University at Buffalo

She says suppliers that understand the institutional landscape are better positioned to offer strategic guidance that

TURNING CREATIVITY INTO REALITY

Where classroom ideas meet real-world production

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The story still stands out for Mark Carter. One of the students in the University of Louisville Hite Art Institute of Design program had a stack of vintage vinyl records and an idea. As part of his portfolio, the student wanted to create a custom packaging presentation. The only catch was the print shop did not initially have the exact equipment traditionally used to produce it.

Rather than scaling back the idea, Carter, Representative, Client Services Lead with Canon U.S.A., helped engineer a solution by breaking the design into simple components and assembling the structure through multiple printed pieces. The final product not only brought the student's vision to life, but also showcased how the Louisville Student Accelerator Program helps bridge classroom creativity with professional execution.

"Seeing the student's excitement when the final product came together was incredibly rewarding," Carter recalls. "Moments like that truly reflect the power of this partnership."

Through the Canon U.S.A. and Hite Institute of Art + Design program, students gain hands-on exposure to professional creative production, everything from workflow

management and file preparation to collaboration, deadlines and print execution.

"The students moved beyond their classroom assignments to a real-world environment where design standards, print quality, collaboration and communication are vital to the execution of their projects," Carter says.

During the program, students also can tour the print facility, explore production workflows and see firsthand how operational decisions influence creative outcomes. Carter says the experience helped reinforce the importance of adaptability, attention to detail and communication under real production conditions.

supports the student experience rather than simply completing transactions.

At the University of Miami, Speziani says true partnership requires engagement that extends beyond transactions and sales goals. "It is difficult for a supplier to be a true partner, in which the engagement is beyond the transaction. Most suppliers' motivation/business plans are to increase sales and not to engage the customer in non-revenue initiatives."

As colleges and universities continue facing enrollment pressures and rising student expectations, leaders say institutions may need to rethink how success is measured.

"Institutions are tracking enrollment, and this is a critical metric for finance and administration," Gonzalez says. "Supplier partners should be bringing any innovative products and services to their procurement partners that they believe will support the student experience."

Speziani says student engagement itself has become an important indicator. "Even though the degree of engagement by the student is difficult to measure, partners play a role in the success of a student."

For colleges and universities focused on retention, the goal is no longer just improving operations behind the scenes. It is creating a student experience that feels connected, responsive and easy to navigate when support matters most. ■

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

LEADERS WEIGH IN ON THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF PROCUREMENT

It has become clear that schools are repositioning procurement from gatekeeper to strategic enabler. According to some of the most progressive campus executives, procurement can facilitate innovation, ensure accountability, and protect institutional interests while enabling flexibility. Their reach is boundless and their knowledge is acute. The time is right for them to have a seat at the big table.

"If you only talk about the transaction, it isn't a partnership. We value partnerships as a two-way street. It isn't just about what we can take from a supplier; it's about what we can give back, whether it's a local small business or an international firm. Suppliers have finite resources just like we do. We want to be the organization they choose to prioritize. We identify our critical partners and lean into those relationships so they want to run through a wall for us when a crisis hits."

— Cristal Swain, Senior Director of Procurement & Sourcing at University of Colorado

"There is a natural resistance when we step in now to offer support. End users sometimes think, 'I've had it figured out for 20 years, why are you here now to tell me what to do?' But it's also a massive opportunity. We are finally bringing in the system support needed to create efficient workflows and enforce policies that were previously impossible to manage manually."

— Chris Kane, Director of Procurement, Swarthmore College



"For me, it's about the connection to the community. At Michigan, our strategic suppliers literally feed into the Ann Arbor economy. That propels me. I'm a problem solver, and procurement keeps me on my toes. You have to be ready to pivot at any moment because of the geopolitical and national landscape."

— Xavia Jackson-Ivey, Procurement Agent, University of Michigan

"While we must remain impartial as a state agency, the best partners recognize the mission of higher ed—curing cancer, saving the world, protecting the oceans. The best vendors connect us with other colleges going through the same ERP transitions to discuss pain points. They help us with benchmarking so we can see how our peers are facing the same struggles. We deeply appreciate those who understand that we are trying to do more than just complete a transaction."

— Lynn Magill, Assistant Director - Procurement Services, University of Washington

"You have to own your lane and your leadership. Procurement professionals have a unique vantage point because we see what is happening across the entire university; we are less likely to be siloed. We aren't just subject matter experts on how to buy something; we are institutional movers. We weave connection points together, handle the 'political gaming,' and strategize how to move people forward. If you're at the table, you're offering that high-level value to ensure the university meets its end goals."

— Claire Boyd, Chief Procurement Officer, University of Georgia

"We're trying to move procurement from a 'compliance afterthought' to a customer service value-add. Leadership—our CFO, President, and VPs—sees that we are putting in the 'blood, sweat, and tears' to solve problems rather than just policing them. I'm a big advocate for a shared service model. A faculty member shouldn't be filling out a requisition or HR paperwork. We want to get the experts doing what they are good at so the faculty can get back to what they are good at: teaching and research."

— Joshua Uhlich, Chief Procurement Office, San Diego State University



Q&A Talking with..today's leaders



The Student Centered-Approach

Leaders discuss operational strategy

Higher education is under increasing pressure to modernize operations, integrate emerging technologies, strengthen cybersecurity, and meet rising student expectations—all while navigating financial constraints and organizational complexity. But the institutions making the greatest progress are not simply investing in technology. They are rethinking the role of partnership, operational strategy, and leadership itself.



Former Dartmouth CIO, Mitch Davis and former MIT CIO, Mark Silis share their perspectives on what it takes to build institutions that are both operationally resilient and student-centered. Drawing from decades of experience leading large-scale digital transformation efforts at some of the nation's most prestigious universities, both leaders emphasize a common theme: technology should never exist for its own sake. It should serve people, remove friction, and create environments where students, faculty, and staff can thrive.

Why is it so important for campus IT to operate as a strategic partner across the institution rather than simply a service provider, and how does that ultimately shape the student experience?

Davis: Organizational leadership that has limited knowledge of technology usually wants to quantify it as a service. This makes technology seem more relatable and understandable like finance, facilities, and HR. But, it is unlike any other service because IT is pervasive, expansive, rapidly growing and disrupting the status quo individually, organizationally, and globally. Technologies within robotics, quantum computing, and Artificial

Intelligence are all remapping our future. In turn, the IT staff are some of the most knowledgeable, well paid and educated people on campus. If you choose not to utilize them as a catalyst for ideas and building your future, you are limiting your institution's ability to compete.

Silis: Technology today is integral to everything that happens under the university roof. The traditional model—where each part of the institution owns its own digital strategy for its own systems, whether teaching and learning, HR, finance, research management, or the student information system—no longer works. These systems have to

operate as one digital ecosystem across the campus. That demands a fundamentally different role for campus IT than 20 years ago, when the work was largely about offering recommendations and guidance. Today, the work is building and orchestrating an ecosystem in which every system serves the community seamlessly.

The same principle shapes the student experience. Students born in the 2000s expect to navigate institutional complexity the way they navigate everything else: on their phones, in a couple of clicks. It shouldn't take five phone calls, 10 tickets, and 12 different people to

land a class schedule, plan a degree, or pick a meal plan. That's the world they grew up in, and it's the world higher education has to operate in.

Campus IT is not a service provider. Technology is a strategic capability—essential, not complementary—and the pandemic proved it.

“Problems arise when partners, leadership, and operations lose focus on why they exist.”

— Mitch Davis,
former Dartmouth CIO

How should institutions think differently about operational excellence so that efficiency improvements actually enhance engagement, access, and student success?

Davis: The student experience is best done with them in mind. Maintaining successful relationships with student government and IT related students is incredibly important. With the students involved, you have advocates on campus that can provide valuable information when you are making changes to operations or systems. Delivering desired operationing solutions is only possible if you engage students in the process of change. By working with them to deliver meaningful change, you can build a relationship where they wait in anticipation for change rather than resistance.

Silis: The right question about operational efficiency is: efficiency for whom? Too often, “efficiency” is just another word for cost savings, measured purely from the back-office perspective. And in my experience, even on those narrow terms, very few systems projects actually deliver. When I've asked colleagues what a project will save, or what capabilities it will provide, and whether we can hold those to measurable metrics, the honest answer is usually some version of “we just want to make it better.”

Real operational efficiency has to be measured holistically from the perspective of the people running the institution, and from the perspective of the people it serves. That second perspective is the one universities most often miss. Take something as simple as a facilities repair form. The more detail the back office can capture up front, the more efficient its workflow. But that efficiency is purchased by asking the person reporting the problem to fill out 50 fields across 20 categories. Multiply that pattern across registration, room booking, financial aid, and every other touchpoint, and you have an institution whose internal efficiency is paid for by the friction it imposes on its community.

Here's what's actually at stake. You have some of the brightest minds in the world on your campus. You want them spending their time on the work that furthers their education and produces research breakthroughs, not navigating internal systems or

administrative bureaucracy. Done well, operational excellence makes that possible. Everyone wins. But it requires thinking about efficiency from every side of the equation, not just the back office.

How critical is collaboration between IT, operations, procurement, academic leadership, and external partners when trying to create a more seamless and supportive campus experience for students?

Davis: Problems arise when partners, leadership, and operations lose focus on why they exist. Collaboration isn't as essential if everyone agrees on outcomes up front. I have seen collaborations fall apart when partners become more concerned about who is getting credit than doing the right thing. What is essential is embedding IT staff into departments. It is the best way to build a solid partnership and cultural alignment. But, the person must be invited to participate and it will take lots of time and effort.

Silis: Collaboration is absolutely essential, and it starts from a simple fact: Digital is part of everything now. Every function on campus—academic leadership, operations, procurement, teaching and learning, external partners—touches the digital ecosystem in some way. You cannot build a seamless campus experience by treating that ecosystem as campus IT's problem alone. Everyone has to be part of the journey.

Q&A Talking with..today's leaders

When I look back at the projects that genuinely worked—the ones that produced experiences worthy of the institution—what stands out isn't the technology. It's the working relationships of the teams that built them. The openness, the transparency, the willingness to ask hard questions in front of each other, and the shared posture of trying to solve problems together rather than defending turf. That's what produces the best and most satisfying solutions.

The alternative is regression. If campus IT designs in isolation, or any single function does, you end up with seams, the disconnected systems and disjointed experiences that students, faculty, and staff feel every day. The work of creating a truly supportive campus experience requires every part of the institution to come to the table, stay at the table, and own the outcome together.

What advice would you give institutional leaders about building partnerships and operational strategies that remain focused on people first—not just technology first?

Davis: People always come first when thinking about outcomes. In addition, you need an operational and access state for Information Technology to ensure everything is in place for all the strategic vision to be realized. You simply cannot hobble IT by ignoring proper training, equipment, and funding and then blame them for



unmet goals. Trusting IT leadership to deliver requires a seat at the table helping to define and determine what success means for all stakeholders.

“The fundamental tension is this: Human capacity for change is linear, while technology’s capacity for change is exponential.”

— Mark Silis, former MIT CIO

Silis: We're at a moment in history that feels a lot like the early days of the internet but on a completely different scale. In the nineties, when I arrived at MIT, the institution had to build Project Athena to put computing workstations in students' hands because access to technology was so uneven. Today, the technology is already in everyone's hands. That's why the AI revolution will evolve far more quickly, and reach far deeper into how we live and work than the internet revolution did.



The fundamental tension is this: Human capacity for change is linear, while technology's capacity for change is exponential. Managing the gap between those two curves is much of what campus IT does day to day, and the gap is widening.

My advice to institutional leaders is: lean in. Don't turn away from these changes because we don't yet understand them or know how to use them, both of which may be true. Lean in anyway. Take responsible risks. Engage the debate

on what we teach and how. The graphing calculator was resisted in the nineties for many of the same reasons AI is resisted in the classroom now, and it turned out to be a net benefit. It freed students to develop more intuition and tackle higher-order problems. We've always abstracted away yesterday's foundations so people can solve tomorrow's problems. AI is the next step in that pattern.

The most important shift, though, is who gets to build and what gets

built. AI is putting technical capabilities into the hands of every individual on campus. People who never wrote a line of code are now building working software, and increasingly they're building agentic systems—AI that doesn't just respond to a prompt, but acts on their behalf, navigates processes for them, and gets work done. That's a tectonic change for how an institution operates, because the community we serve is no longer just consuming what campus IT provides. They're active participants—designing their own experiences, their own interfaces, and their own agents to engage the institution on their behalf. That changes expectations. It changes the loop of accountability.

For most of its history, campus IT delivered one solution and asked everyone to live with it—80% good enough for the average user. We're moving into a world where each person can shape their own experience and, increasingly, deploy their own agents to act on it. People-first strategy, in this moment, means accepting that shift and building an environment that enables it—partnerships that pull faculty, staff, students, and external partners into co-creation, and infrastructure that's built to be navigated by agents, not just clicked through by humans. Lead with that, and the technology choices will follow. ■

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