

Higher Ed Institution Survival of the Fittest

A visual depiction of colleges
and universities in the U.S. that
have closed or been absorbed
since the start of COVID-19





Across the United States, a growing number of colleges and universities are facing closures, mergers, or significant financial distress.

Demographic shifts, particularly the declining number of traditional college-aged students, combined with rising tuition costs and increasing skepticism around the return on investment (ROI) of a four-year degree have created a perfect storm. Families and prospective students are asking harder questions:

Will this degree lead to a meaningful career?

Is the cost justified compared to alternatives like trade programs, certifications, or direct-to-work pathways?

As a result, many smaller and mid-tier institutions, especially those without strong brand differentiation or endowments, are struggling to maintain enrollment and sustain operations.

At the same time, the higher education landscape has become far more competitive and complex. Online learning platforms, employer-sponsored education programs, and nontraditional credentialing options are eroding the monopoly universities once held on knowledge and career advancement.

Institutions that rely on legacy positioning or outdated program structures are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain students.

Simply put, the traditional playbook no longer works in an environment where students behave more like discerning consumers than passive applicants.



This shift demands new thinking—strategically, operationally, and creatively. Colleges and universities must rethink how they articulate value, design programs aligned with workforce needs, and build brands that resonate in a crowded market.

Revenue generation can no longer depend solely on tuition; institutions must explore diversified streams such as partnerships, digital offerings such as AI and modern media, lifelong learning ecosystems, and experiential education models.

Differentiation is no longer a “nice to have”, it is existential.

That’s where a modern, forward-thinking partner like pleOS becomes critical.

In an era where institutions must operate with both academic integrity and market agility, pleOS brings a strategic blend of branding, growth strategy, and innovation to help colleges redefine their positioning and unlock new revenue opportunities.

Whether it’s crafting compelling narratives that resonate with today’s students, identifying untapped market segments, or designing scalable digital experiences, an innovation agency like pleOS help institutions not only survive but evolve. In a rapidly changing education economy, success will belong to those willing to rethink everything, and execute with precision.



58 U.S. Colleges and Universities Closed Since COVID-19



49 U.S. Colleges and Universities Absorbed Since COVID-19



Diagnosis for a Healthy Future in a Changing Landscape

- 1. Expand into Adult & Nontraditional Learners**
The biggest growth market isn't 18-year-olds—it's working adults.
- 2. Build Employer Partnerships (Not Just Advisory Boards)**
Move beyond "industry input" to revenue-generating relationships.
- 3. Launch High-ROI Programs***
Double down on programs tied directly to career outcomes.
- 4. Create Online Programs That Actually Compete**
Most schools offer online—but few are truly competitive.
- 5. Improve Enrollment Marketing & Conversion***
Many schools are sitting on inefficient funnels.
- 6. Retention = Hidden Revenue***
Losing a student is losing years of revenue.
- 7. Monetize Campus Assets and Branding Year-Round***
Most campuses sit underutilized.
- 8. Invest in Brand Differentiation***
"Good education" is not a differentiator anymore.
- 9. Grow Alternative Revenue Streams & Partnerships***
Tuition dependency is risky.
- 10. Reimagine the Academic Product**
This is the hardest—and most important.

Start with an audit of all aspects of your product, faculty, marketing and communications, branding, value proposition, alumni and donor relations, and revenue opportunities or cost saving initiatives that are not in clear sight.

PLEOS AGENCY HAS EXPERTISE IN DOING ASSESSMENTS AND CAN HELP PROVIDE AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE. * denotes areas pleOS can help.



pleOS Agency combines a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities in higher education with decades of consumer marketing expertise. We know how to make you stand out. We know how to monetize your brand. And we know how to turn the crank to generate revenue and engage your various stakeholders.

If you need better ways of driving enrollment.
If you need new ways of generating new revenues.

You need to rise above the clutter and thrive in the new reality.

Some of our revenue generating services:

- Market and opportunity assessment
- Brand positioning
- New experiential teaching in podcast, social media, and other aspects of changing digital world.
- Viewd campus TV screen advertising revenues
- Commercial sponsorship and strategic partner strategies and interactive presentations & platform
- AI processes used in marketing and admissions
- Merchandising strategy & delivery (branded items)
- Turn institution magazine into a revenue generator versus a cost center
- Print audit and savings
- Fundraising turnkey programs
- Podcasting with sponsor support
- Workforce development partnerships
- Graduate degree customer engagement platform
- Brand based traditional & digital marketing campaigns

Client Experience in Higher Education + Vocational

Georgian Court University
Rutgers University-Newark
Seton Hall University
Rutgers Medical School
Centenary University
Rutgers Business School
Ideal Institute of Technology
Concorde Career College
Herzing University
Lincoln Tech

Essex County College
NJIT
Pillar College
Ryder University
Montclair State University
Bloomfield College
Kean University
St. Elizabeth University
Berkeley College
Fairleigh Dickinson University

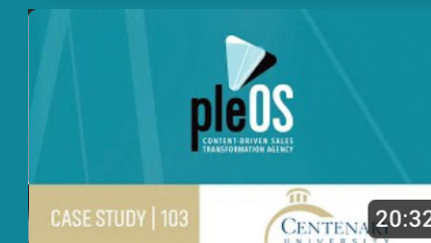
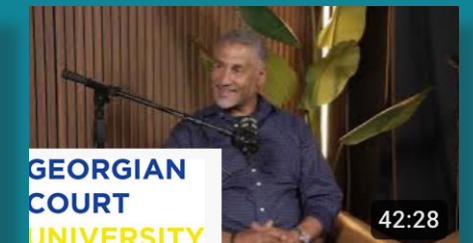
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