

## *Retrenchment in Higher Education*

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### **Abstract**

The covid19 pandemic along with changing attitudes has forced many rural public universities to retrench faculty and staff. As enrollments decrease, institutions of higher learning must adapt and change to the changing demographics. Retrenchment is only one alternative to dealing with declining enrollment. Retrenchment needs to be balanced with long-term strategic considerations. As the retrenchment process is conducted, there is a need to review several alternative actions and decisions. Other cost reduction considerations include subsidies to athletics; repair/replacement; and technological infrastructure. Formal and informal communications to faculty, staff, students, and community must be maintained and possibly expanded. Most importantly, the continued education of the students should be completed in as normal a manner as possible.

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## **Introduction**

The covid19 pandemic along with changing attitudes has forced many rural public universities to retrench faculty and staff. Salehi, et al, (2023) found that the COVID-19 pandemic forced many higher education institutions to swiftly shift to immediate online instruction (ERI) with little preparation. Fortunately for Bemidji State University, the Accountancy program was fully online before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Matczak, et al, (2023) report students tend to discard online education as they see significant limitations of class administration; online education can result in shift of education related to revenue-production; and the change to the online system influenced an increase in social separation and learning transformations. Bughrara, et al, (2023) determined that several learning adjustments occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as video conferencing tools, that can be exploited in a post-pandemic world.

As enrollments decrease, rural institutions of higher learning must adapt and change to the changing demographics. Collier (2023) focused on the instructor experiences. Hassan (2023) chronicled the anxiety of online students. Kharel, et al, (2022), studied the preparing instruction for public helpers to fight COVID 19. Wu, et al, discussed how higher education may have over-expanded during weakening enrollments. Naidoo, V., (2024) attributed declining foreign enrollment in higher education in the U.S. to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Can, et al, (2020) were compelled to focus their thought on college students from rural areas. Furthermore, Cain, et al, (2020) advocate student affairs offices need to consider the uniqueness and requirements of rural students. The diverse social circumstances of rural students need to be recognized, Cain, et al, 2020. With focused consideration on rural students, Cain, et al, (2020) propose the declining enrollment rates within higher education may be mitigated increasing recruitment efforts on rural students.

## **Retrenchment**

According to du (2023), one of the disastrous outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic was laid-off employees. Clark (2023), discusses the relationship among retrenchment, the courts, and occupation law. Retrenchment results in decreased growth and adaptation related to unemployment, according to Social Policy & Administration, (2022). Retrenchment are key shocks to the jobs of many rural households; and the search for alternative employment opportunities can be ineffective, Rantso and Ralitjeleng-Mahlelebe (2023). Retrenchment is related to substantive equality by Palmer (2021).

In seminal educational retrenchment, Hawkins (1991) finds the loss of previous educational gains. According to Wong (1998), educational retrenchment adversely effects research, and there is difficulty in relating principles to practice. TES, Magazine (2004) states quality is the foremost loss of reductions caused by retrenchment of instructors and staff in higher education. Duffy, M. (2005) argues retrenchment versus reform in the U.S.

Retrenchment needs to be balanced with long-term strategic considerations. Colley (2023) discusses strategic retrenchment from a global perspective. Strategic retrenchment requires perspective, balance, and policies, according to Simon (2016). Brands (2015) proposes intermittent discriminating retrenchment can be effective in safeguarding the long-term viability of retrenchment strategy. Putra (2023). concludes that retrenchment must align with

prevailing circumstances and strategy. Haynes (2015) argues the degree of an institution's retrenchment policy needs to be balanced with strategic importance of the region and to the institution's declining enrollment in determining when and how retrenchment will be implemented. Grogan, et al, (2020) discuss how strategy should enhance responsibility related to retrenchment.

### **Alternatives to Retrenchment**

Retrenchment is only one alternative to dealing with declining enrollment. Chien-Tsung Lu, et al, (2023) discloses the realistic strategies of flexibility presented during the pandemic time, which includes survival strategies beyond COVID-19 including student protection, faculty and staff retrenchment, innovation, and long-term strategic plans. Neff (2019) that social media, artificial intelligence, and alumni recommendations can be used to reverse stave off declining enrollments in higher education. Hsu, et al, (2024) advocate the development of career parts for students to overcome declining enrollments.

As the retrenchment process is conducted, there is a need to review several alternative actions and decisions. Wolf (2020) recognizes that retrenchment is not a "one-size-fits-all" massive strategy; there are degrees, ranging from faculty and staff retrenchment, redistribution of resource, and cutting back and/or complete elimination of specific programs. Stansfield, et al, (2018) advocate the necessity of having a post-retrenchment strategy to ensure future growth and success. The attempt to deliver fiscal stability through retrenchment must not reduce critical assets and capabilities, according to Collington, R. (2022). Wright (2020) goes so far as to characterize retrenchment as "folly," if not implemented with proper strategy.

Other cost reduction considerations include subsidies to athletics; repair/replacement; and technological infrastructure. Cheslock and Knight (2015) discuss conflicting revenues, surging expenditures, and subsequent subsidies as being unbalanced and that increasing financial strain of intercollegiate athletics is placing on higher education and students. Delaney and Kearney (2022) found significant declines in direct subsidies and student fees, but no significant change for indirect subsidies. Hoffer and Pincin (2016) demonstrate that additional athletic revenue increases expenditures for coaches 7.5 times more than direct expenditures for student-athletes.

Sargeant and Berkowitz (2014) illustrations that the Rutgers athletics department received nearly \$47 million in subsidies from the university's allocations fund to make up for a shortfall in the approximately \$79 million athletics budget during the 2012-13 season; it's an increase of about 68% from subsidy the athletics department received in 2012. According to Gillum, et al, (2010) student fees and university subsidies are bolstering athletic program expenses at the nation's top sports colleges; these subsidies to college athletics have reached that level amid a continuing crisis in higher education funding.

In addition, Gillum, et al, (2010) at some of the schools where athletics is most heavily subsidized, faculty salaries have descended, state-funded financial aid is decreasing significantly, and students are facing significant tuition and fee increases. According to Blumenstyk (2014), of all higher education expenditures (research, teaching, administrators' salaries, luxury facilities), expenses are increasing rapidest is in intercollegiate athletic programs. Berkowitz, et al, (2013) find at a time of severe funds in higher education, athletics departments are continuing to receive subsidies in the form of student fees, school or state support.

Alternatives and/or combinations with retrenchment include repairs and/or replacements and technological infrastructure. The Executive (2002) discusses both a plan of action to save jobs from retrenchment and how to finance repair of school buildings. Wolf, A. (2006) reports on discretionary reductions due to retrenchment. Lang (2007) states that industry is marred by retrenchment and regrowth and that these are reflected in changes to technology.

## **Communications**

Retrenchment requires both formal and informal communications to faculty, staff, students, and community. Not only must the retrenchment communication be maintained regularly, but the communication may also possibly need to be expanded. Slagle, et al, (2021) examined a public university's experiences managing the Covid-19 pandemic crisis while simultaneously navigating financial challenges that had been building over time; they found that the university used instructing and advising information within its messages from its top administrator but fell short of incorporating empathy for its stakeholders in its initial responses.

Stansfield, et al, (2018) suggest that communications across various types of retrenchment. In Focus (2006) reported on academic labor in U.S. higher education, including retrenchment and restructuring and communications: they found increased tuition, fees, academic workload, and by reducing the compensation for faculty staff.

Baker, et al, (2001) comment on the value of communication with employees during organizational retrenchment: specifically related to higher education financial performance and employee entitlements.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

Formal and informal communications to faculty, staff, students, and community must be maintained and possibly expanded. Retrenchment needs to be balanced with long-term strategic considerations. Most importantly, the continued education of the students should be completed in as normal a manner as possible.

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