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NC STATE Poole College of Management
Enterprise Risk Management Initiative

UNLEASHING ENTERPRISE VALUE

2027 Top Risks and Opportunities in Higher Education

Transform. Protect. Respond: Building the capabilities for higher education's next chapter

Leaders in higher education are well aware of the need to transform while remaining conscious of the risks. The question for institutional leaders is not whether change is necessary, but whether they can build the capabilities to transform, protect institutional value and respond to change with agility and confidence.

Top 10 Risks in 2027

1. Cyber threats
2. Emergence of new risks from implementing artificial intelligence
3. Skills and talent acquisition and retention, leadership development and succession challenges
4. Heightened regulatory change, uncertainty and fragmentation
5. Economic conditions, including inflationary pressures
6. Ensuring privacy and compliance with growing privacy and identity protection regulations and expectations
7. Rapid speed of disruptive innovations enabled by emerging technologies and/or other market forces
8. Talent and labour availability
9. Operations and legacy IT infrastructure unable to support performance expectations
10. Third-party risks

Results are based on a survey of 1,330 board members and C-suite executives worldwide. The full survey report, Executive Perspectives on Top Risks, may be accessed at erm.ncsu.edu or protiviti.com/toprisks. It includes detailed breakdowns of the results by respondent role, industry, geography, organisation size and other categories.

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Calls to action: What should higher education leaders do now?

The following actions can help institutions address the risks, maximise the opportunities and increase their level of confidence across the three areas:

TRANSFORM

- **Align mission, growth and risk decisions.** Evaluate partnerships, programmes and initiatives based on their contribution to mission, student success, financial sustainability, cyber resilience and institutional trust.
- **Modernise the administration.** Simplify processes and use automation, AI and analytics to increase agility and redirect resources to academic, research and student success priorities. Refocus on the mission.
- **Build AI-enabled workforce capabilities.** Move beyond AI awareness by equipping faculty and staff with role-based training, practical guidance and the skills needed to maximise AI's value. Adapt institutional processes, roles and ways of working as AI adoption matures.

PROTECT

- **Strengthen AI governance and data foundations.** Establish clear accountability and safeguards while improving data quality, security and trust.
- **Make cybersecurity an enabler of innovation.** Embed cyber resilience and privacy into modernisation efforts so innovation can advance without increasing exposure.
- **Govern the extended institutional ecosystem.** Apply consistent due diligence, accountability and resilience standards across technology providers, employers, research partners and other third parties.

RESPOND

- **Increase organisational agility.** Modernise governance, planning and operating models to act earlier on emerging risks and opportunities while preserving appropriate consultation and academic input.
- **Build strategic ecosystem capacity.** Work with employers, technology providers, research collaborators and community organisations to accelerate innovation, expand capabilities and respond more rapidly to emerging student needs.