

Employers Are Rewriting Higher Education's Hierarchy, Says New 3E Presidents Brief

Report explores how employer investment in academic programs is helping institutions build prestige, attract students, and deepen corporate partnerships.



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EINPresswire.com/ -- Employers are increasingly investing in the academic programs, facilities, and learning experiences that prepare their future workforce. Those relationships are helping reshape institutional prestige, enrollment opportunity, and corporate investment, according to the latest 3E [Presidents Brief](#), Employers Are Rewriting the Higher Education Hierarchy.

Written by 3E co-founders James Rogers and Patricia Maben, the brief examines an emerging source of institutional advantage: the ability to consistently produce the talent that employers and regional economies need.

The report suggests that a second hierarchy is forming alongside traditional academic prestige—one shaped by employer relevance, talent development, and economic importance. Institutions that connect academic strengths with employer demand can build a reinforcing cycle: corporate investment strengthens programs, stronger programs attract students and produce sought-after graduates, and those outcomes attract deeper employer investment.

“For generations, institutional prestige helped determine where employers recruited,” said James Rogers, CEO and Co-Founder of 3E. “Increasingly, employers are helping build that prestige through the programs they support, the facilities they fund, and the graduates they hire. These relationships can become a powerful driver of enrollment and long-term institutional value.”

The brief describes this dynamic as “employer gravity.” Employers are moving beyond recruiting graduates to helping shape how students are prepared. Through curriculum collaboration, research funding, technology investments, internships, and co-op experiences, companies are helping institutions develop the capabilities and talent their industries need.

“Employers are investing earlier in the development of their future workforce,” said Patricia Maben, Co-Founder of 3E. “They are helping shape academic programs and supporting the technology and experiences that prepare students to contribute. Institutions that build these relationships well can gain on several fronts: stronger programs, greater prestige, increased student demand, and deeper corporate investment.”

Drawing on examples including Purdue’s relationship with Rolls-Royce, Arizona State University’s partnership with Starbucks, and the University of Central Florida’s long-standing relationship with Disney, the report explores how corporate partnerships are evolving into institutional infrastructure. These relationships increasingly influence academic strategy, workforce development, and regional economic growth.

The opportunity extends well beyond large research universities. Smaller institutions can strengthen their competitive position by becoming an essential source of talent for a particular industry, employer group, or regional workforce need.

The brief highlights four implications for institutional leaders:

- Employer investment can strengthen academic distinction. Partnerships that support curriculum, faculty collaboration, facilities, and technology help institutions prepare talent aligned with industry needs.
- Career opportunity can build prestige and student demand. Strong employer connections give students and families tangible reasons to consider an institution and confidence in the opportunities an education can create.
- Successful graduates can attract further corporate investment. Institutions that consistently deliver sought-after talent give employers a reason to expand their commitments.
- Employer engagement deserves an institution-wide strategy. Coordinating academic affairs, career services, advancement, and research helps turn individual relationships into lasting institutional advantage.

As institutions consider investments in artificial intelligence, technology, and academic innovation, the brief encourages leaders to connect those decisions with the employers and industries most likely to value—and invest in—their graduates.

“The strategic question is becoming more direct,” Rogers said. “What will make your institution indispensable to the employers and communities you serve? The answer can help shape academic priorities, enrollment strategy, and long-term institutional value.”

Read the full 3E Presidents Brief at <https://3enrollment.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Presidents-Brief-July-2026.pdf>.

About 3E

3E is a founder-owned enrollment marketing firm that helps colleges and universities strengthen market position and grow enrollment through strategy, marketing, and technology. Its Presidents

Brief series examines market shifts and their implications for higher education leadership. Learn more at 3enrollment.com.

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