

Strengthening campus culture across your entire workforce



HR leaders have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to lead their organizations with vision and purpose.

In colleges and universities, culture acts as the connective tissue that links academic departments, student services, IT, HR and administrative operations. It's what steadies the institution through leadership transitions, enrollment shifts and rising public scrutiny.

Yet today's campus reality makes cultural alignment harder to maintain. Hybrid teaching models, distributed staff and a workforce spanning generations and contract types all shape how employees experience

their work. Lean HR teams are expected to bring coherence to this complexity while also navigating compliance, labor and considerations as well as evolving employee expectations.

In this environment, culture can't be sustained through messaging alone. Higher ed HR leaders need structure—systems, workflows and shared standards—to build consistency across the institution and support every employee, wherever they work.



The hidden forces pulling campus culture apart

Higher education HR teams face distinct challenges when trying to establish cultural cohesion for their workforce:

Siloed systems and manual processes create uneven experiences across campuses, schools and departments

Turnover among adjuncts, early-career staff and grant-funded roles disrupts continuity for colleagues and students

Varied employment types like tenure-track faculty, adjunct instructors, professional services staff and student workers, complicate onboarding, communication and expectations

Remote and hybrid teams, including online learning designers, IT support and shared services, often feel disconnected from daily campus life

These dynamics create cultural fragmentation that impacts engagement, service quality and ultimately the student experience.



4 indicators of a healthy campus culture

Look for these signals to evaluate the strength and consistency of your institution's culture:

1

**Strategic clarity
and campus-wide
communication**

Do employees understand institutional priorities in a consistent way, from academic departments to student services and operational teams?

2

**Equitable onboarding
across roles and locations**

Do new hires, whether faculty, adjuncts, professional services staff or student workers, experience role-specific onboarding that sets clear expectations?

3

**Structured connection
points between managers
and teams**

Are regular check-ins creating genuine two-way dialogue, not just passing along announcements?

4

**Visible pathways for
growth and development**

Can employees see real opportunities for progression, skill building and lateral movement, regardless of contract type or campus location?

These indicators are your early alert system for cultural drift, helping you address issues before they affect employee engagement or the broader campus experience.



Quick wins you can achieve this term

Resource-constrained HR teams can begin strengthening culture through targeted, manageable steps:

Review internal communications to ensure they land effectively with different workforce groups, including faculty, professional staff, adjuncts and student workers

Refresh onboarding for a single high-impact group to create more consistency and role clarity

Pilot AI-enabled check-ins in one department to surface sentiment trends and workload issues early

Offer focused learning opportunities to underserved groups, signaling that development is available to everyone, regardless of role or location

These small shifts double as low-risk test cases, giving your team early insight into what works before rolling improvements out more broadly.



Real-world results with People First

Campus HR teams are seeing how People First, powered by MHR, strengthens both cultural alignment and operational clarity:

Onboarding that supports retention

Streamlined workflows create consistent, role-specific experiences that help new hires feel supported from day one.

Early insight for proactive action

AI-enabled check-ins with structured prompts reveal emerging DEI or engagement concerns before they escalate, helping leaders respond quickly and transparently.

Unified data that clarifies culture gaps

Integrated analytics highlight patterns across departments, campuses and contract types, enabling targeted interventions that improve the employee experience.

These outcomes show how People First gives HR teams faster insight, clearer patterns and more inclusive support for their workforce.

Strengthen your institution's culture with People First

People First brings onboarding, engagement, compliance and performance together in one intuitive HCM platform designed for modern universities. By reducing administrative load and providing real-time workforce insight, it frees lean HR teams to focus on building the clarity and unity your workforce needs.



Want to go deeper?

Download our Reinventing HR eBook for strategies that help institutions simplify complexity and build a stronger culture.

people first



About MHR

MHR has been driving innovation across the HRIS space for over 40 years. We don't just meet the industry standard, we exceed it. Engineered by the latest SaaS technology, our product, People First enables increased employee productivity and organizational growth with a demonstrable return on investment.

People First is guided by what our customers and the market demand in a rapidly changing world.

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