

Higher Education Members Identify Top Risks

Risk Management Premium Credit Survey Results 2020-2021



United Educators (UE) surveys member institutions each year about their five most pressing risk management concerns as part of our Risk Management Premium Credit (RMPC) program. This report provides a comparison of top risks identified by 499 participating UE higher education members. It includes data collected from May 2020 through August 2021 and broken down by segment, highlights emerging risks, and tracks changes over three years. Strategies and UE resources for mitigating these risks are included to help colleges and universities handle what's most important now and anticipate what's coming next. Institutions' identified risks vary depending on their size and mission. Pages 7 and 8 list the top risks for two-year colleges, research universities, public institutions, and private institutions.

Use the data below to start discussions about your institution's top risks and benchmark against peers.

Learn more about the [RMPC program](#), which enables eligible UE members to earn a credit toward their premium by mitigating critical risks.

Note: Percentages in this report reflect the percentage of respondents that identified a given risk. Because respondents listed five risks, these percentages don't add up to 100%.

COVID-19's Impact on This Report

The pandemic persisted throughout the data collection period. UE researchers coded responses that mentioned "COVID-19," the "pandemic," or a closely related term as a risk related to "COVID-19 and Future Pandemics."

Many survey responses discussed risks that may have emerged from the pandemic but didn't mention COVID-19 by name. UE coded these risks based on the topic in the response. For example, a response stating "the shift to online learning" was coded as an "Online Learning" risk, despite the pandemic causing a shift to remote programs.

With at least six of the top 10 risks – including the top five risks – intertwined with COVID-19, this report reveals how the pandemic amplifies many of the risks facing higher education institutions.

Top 10 Risks

1. Enrollment
2. Data Security
3. COVID-19 and Future Pandemics
4. Operational Pressures
5. Funding
6. Facilities and Deferred Maintenance
7. Regulatory and Legal Compliance (Non-Title IX/VAWA)
8. Title IX
9. Sexual Misconduct
10. Public Safety

Managing Top Risks: Higher Education

Respondents listed the following as their leading risks:

01. Enrollment

77%

Risks affecting new student admission and retention of current students

UE Resource:

How Higher Ed Institutions Can Respond to "Operation Varsity Blues"

Mitigation Efforts:

- Evaluate and expand program offerings.
- Change discounting and pricing strategies.
- Expand online and remote programs.
- Enhance student retention programs and tools.
- Strengthen relationships with local schools and transfer partners.

02. Data Security

59%

Information technology risks such as data breaches, phishing, accidental disclosure of personal data, ransomware, and hacking

UE Resources:

Manage the Risks of Remote Learning in Higher Education
Don't Take the Bait: Defending Institutional Data from Phishing During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Data Security Learning Program

Mitigation Efforts:

- Train faculty on videoconference software security.
- Hire more data security staff.
- Conduct data security training.
- Create or update data governance strategy.
- Conduct third-party risk assessments.
- Update software and hardware systems.

03. COVID-19 and Future Pandemics

37%

Risks emerging from pandemics now and in the future

UE Resource:

COVID-19 Response Resources

Mitigation Efforts:

- Develop university-wide public health response teams.
- Follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; state; and local public health guidelines.
- Transition to remote learning.
- Train on-campus employees on COVID-19 safety guidelines.
- Re-engineer building ventilation systems.

Managing Top Risks: Higher Education

04. Operational Pressures 31%

Risks created by constraints on institutional processes and the institution's business model

UE Resources:

Academic Program Changes and Institutional Closures
Checklist: Employee Layoffs Driven by Financial Pressure
Employee Burnout Is a Risk Management Issue
Sharing Campus Resources During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mitigation Efforts:

- Seek short-term government support.
- Consider partnerships, mergers, and acquisitions.
- Access new debt.
- Reimagine organizational structure.
- Reduce operational redundancies.
- Improve financial procedures.

05. Funding 29%

Risks concerning a lack of financial resources

UE Resources:

Academic Program Changes and Institutional Closures
Charge Back the Cost of Risk

Mitigation Efforts:

- Expand enrollment strategies to reach new demographic groups.
- Reconsider budgeting strategy.
- Increase philanthropic fundraising.
- Lobby state and federal governments for additional support.
- Diversify sources of funded research.

06. Facilities and Deferred Maintenance 24%

Risks concerning outdated facilities and new construction

UE Resources:

Take Inventory of Your Off-Campus Real Estate
Adopt Tree Assessment and Removal Policies and Practices
Good Signage = Good Risk Management
Checklist: Indoor Floor Safety
Checklist: Safety at Commencement and Other Events
Checklist: Investigating Accidents Causing Personal Injury

Mitigation Efforts:

- Repurpose existing buildings for low-occupancy use.
- Increase funding for deferred maintenance.
- Adjust new construction plans.
- Partner with property developers and managers.
- Add new signage.
- Close unsafe spaces and areas under construction.

Managing Top Risks: Higher Education

07. Regulatory and Legal Compliance (Non-Title IX/VAWA) 22%

Risks involving noncompliance with federal, state, and local regulations and other voluntary regulatory agreements (such as with athletic conferences, professional associations, etc.)

UE Resources:

Guide to Campus Telehealth Risk Mitigation
Background Check Fundamentals
Recent Changes to Higher Education Athletics Benefits
Understand Your Duty to Make Technology Accessible

Mitigation Efforts:

- Centralize your compliance program.
- Consult with outside counsel.
- Update electronic privacy and record retention policies.
- Establish a risk and compliance committee.
- Continue training and awareness.
- Cross-train staff on compliance.

08. Title IX 17%

Risks concerning sex discrimination

UE Resources:

Title IX and VAWA/Campus SaVE Act Resources
Title IX & Collegiate Athletics Under the Biden Administration

Mitigation Efforts:

- Update Title IX policies and processes for new regulations and guidance.
- Expand Title IX training/information sessions.
- Implement bystander training for students.
- Seek third-party advisors on Title IX investigations and decisions.
- Conduct campus climate surveys.

09. Sexual Misconduct (Non-Title IX/VAWA) 17%

Risks related to unwanted sexual behavior, including employee misconduct, sexual harassment, and abuse of minors

UE Resource:

Employee Sexual Misconduct in Higher Ed

Mitigation Efforts:

- Increase mandatory training for students, faculty, and staff.
- Conduct thorough background checks.
- Audit and improve reporting channels.
- Update sexual misconduct policies.
- Review compliance with Office for Civil Rights guidelines.
- Evaluate institution oversight.

Managing Top Risks: Higher Education

10. Public Safety

15%

Risks related to crime and safety for the campus community and guests

UE Resources:

Reimagining Campus Safety

Guide to Developing an Anti-Racist Campus Safety Force

Clarify the Jurisdiction of Campus Police

Increased Risks and Costs of Arming Educators

Mitigation Efforts:

- Revisit relationships with third-party security providers.
- Restrict access to campus.
- Increase monitoring of campus grounds and facilities.
- Install key card entry systems in buildings.
- Change the scope of your campus safety office's work.

Changes Since 2018

Rank	2020-2021 Top Risks	Rank in 2019-2020	Rank in 2018-2019
1	Enrollment	1	1
2	Data Security	2	4
3	COVID-19 and Future Pandemics	Not ranked	Not ranked
4	Operational Pressures	6	3
5	Funding	7	2
6	Facilities and Deferred Maintenance	4	Not ranked
7	Regulatory and Legal Compliance	5	8
8	Title IX	3	5
9	Sexual Misconduct (Non-Title IX/VAWA)	8	6
10	Public Safety	Not ranked	10

Emerging Risks

Survey participants also were asked to identify the risk they think will have the greatest impact on their institution over the next few years.

Top responses include:

Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic

Revenue and financial sustainability including student demographic change, sustainability of the discount rate, and amount of state funding

Online programs underperforming in-person programs

Data security/cybersecurity

Anti-education political and regulatory environment

Top Risks by Segment

Disaggregated data highlights the top risks at institutions with different risk profiles: Two-year colleges and research universities. Differences between public and private institutions are also evident.

Top Risks by Carnegie Classification*

Rank	Two-Year Colleges 2020-2021 Top Risks (n=56)	Percentage of Respondents Identifying this Risk
1	Enrollment	80%
2	Data Security	68%
3	Funding	50%
4	Regulatory and Legal Compliance	27%
5	Public Safety	25%
6	Facilities and Deferred Maintenance	23%
7	Operational Pressures	21%
8	COVID-19 and Future Pandemics	21%
9	Crisis Management	18%
10	Recruitment and Hiring	14%

Two-year colleges:

These institutions' top risks reflect their connection to their community, disproportionately naming Enrollment, Funding, and Public Safety as top risks.

About 21% of two-year colleges cited COVID-19 and Future Pandemics as a top risk; this suggests they may have adapted their operations to this crisis better than their four-year peers.

Rank	Research Universities 2020-2021 Top Risks (n=84)	Percentage of Respondents Identifying this Risk
1	Data Security	56%
2	Enrollment	54%
3	COVID-19 and Future Pandemics	46%
4	Sexual Misconduct	36%
5	Compliance (Non-Title IX/VAWA)	26%
6	Operational Pressures	21%
7	Title IX	19%
8	Facilities & Deferred Maintenance	19%
9	Insurance and Risk Transfer	14%
10	Student Health and Safety	14%

Research universities:

Large research universities listed Sexual Misconduct, COVID-19 and Future Pandemics, and Insurance and Risk Transfer as top risks more often than other segments. These are risks that can result in safety, financial, and reputational outcomes commensurate with the size of a research university.

Just over half listed Enrollment as a top risk, which is lower than all other segments. Their prominence in society may better shield them from the enrollment pressures smaller institutions face.

Public vs. Private Institutions:

Public institutions depend on relationships with a broader set of stakeholders than many private institutions. Their top risks reflect those relationships. They ranked risks to Funding, Regulatory and Legal Compliance, and Public Safety higher than private institutions.

Private institutions disproportionately cited Enrollment, Operational Pressures, and COVID-19 and Future Pandemics as top risks, reflecting an uncertain future for operations at those colleges and universities.

Top Risks by Public or Private Institution

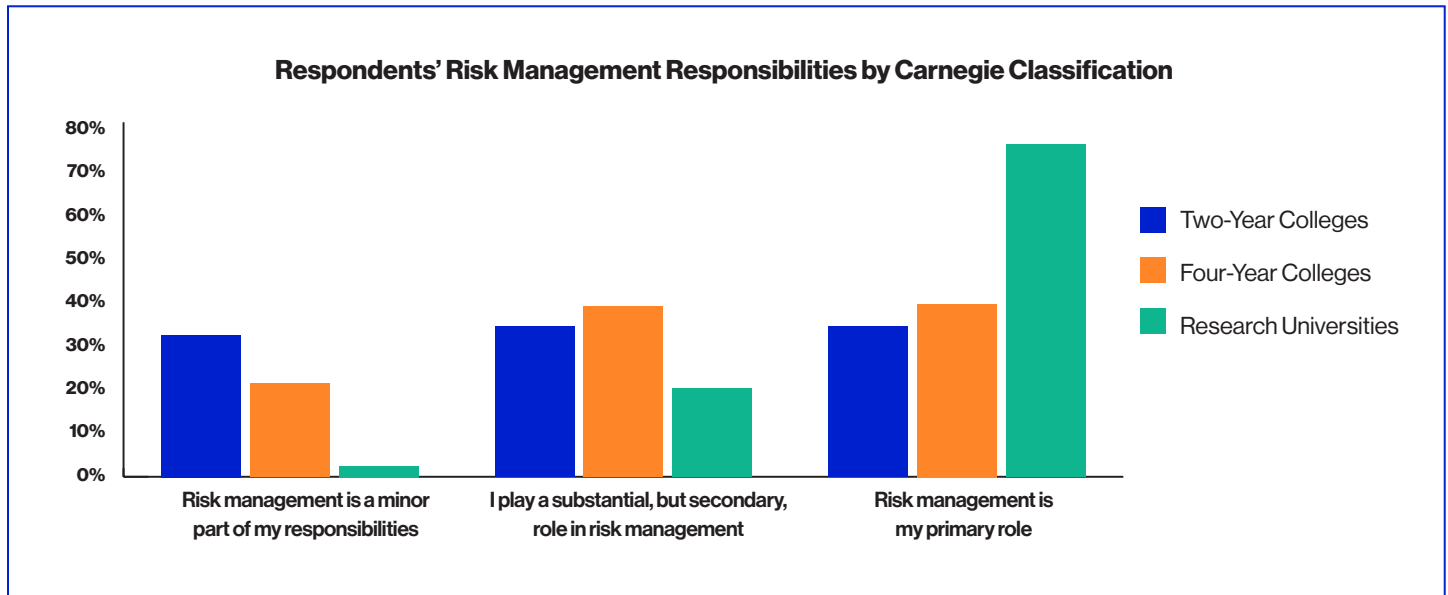
Rank	Public Institution 2020-2021 Top Risks (n=130)	Percentage of Respondents Identifying this Risk	Private Institution 2020-2021 Top Risks (n=369)	Percentage of Respondents Identifying this Risk
1	Enrollment	70%	Enrollment	79%
2	Data Security	68%	Data Security	56%
3	Funding	38%	COVID-19 and Future Pandemics	40%
4	COVID-19 and Future Pandemics	28%	Operational Pressures	34%
5	Regulatory and Legal Compliance	27%	Funding	26%
6	Facilities and Deferred Maintenance	25%	Facilities and Deferred Maintenance	24%
7	Operational Pressures	23%	Regulatory and Legal Compliance	20%
8	Sexual Misconduct (Non-Title IX/VAWA)	20%	Title IX	20%
9	Public Safety	18%	Student Health and Safety	16%
10	Crisis Management	15%	Sexual Misconduct (Non-Title IX/VAWA)	16%



Respondents' Risk Management Role

Survey respondents at colleges and universities vary in the depth of their roles as risk managers. The survey separated members into three segments: Two-year colleges, four-year non-research institutions, and research universities.*

Most research universities have a dedicated risk manager. While two-year and four-year institutions are less likely to have a dedicated risk manager than research universities, it is still common to have someone who is focused on risk management. Institutions that lack a risk management role might fall behind their peers.



* Each segment is defined as follows:

- Two-Year Colleges (n=56): All of the designations for Associate's College, Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges, and Two-Year Special Focus institutions
- Four-Year Colleges (n=359): All four-year institutions excluding Research Universities, defined below
- Research Universities (n=84): Institutions with a Very High Research Activity or High Research Activity designation (R1 or R2)



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