NEOED

Top 5
TRENDS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION
for 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities are preparing for change in 2025. A widening talent pool and rapidly evolving technology present unique opportunities for institutions to future-ready HR operations. It's more important than ever to adapt to the HR trends outlined in this report.

NEOED is a comprehensive HR and workforce management platform designed specifically for colleges and universities to adapt to changing workforce conditions. Our programs help institutions attract and retain top talent, improve efficiency, and enhance the employee experience.

Who We Surveyed

Filled with valuable insights gathered from **158 survey respondents**, this report reflects the trends, challenges, and opportunities within HR in higher education. Respondents included HR generalists, recruiters, managers, administrators, and executives from a variety of institution across the United States, including 2-year community colleges (46%), 4-year college/ universities (30%), school districts (11%), k-12 (9%), and other (4%). The survey was conducted in January 2025.

Key Takeaways

Going into 2025, higher education institutions are focused on finding — and retaining — top talent. Staffing shortages continue to challenge nearly 60% of institutions, putting significant strain on existing staff. To better support and retain talent, institutions are focusing on professional development, employee wellness, and competitive pay.

Despite a growing number of planned retirements in the next five years, most institutions are not prioritizing succession planning to support this transition. Fewer are prioritizing AI adoption or modernizing technology amidst a technological revolution.

Keep reading to explore the top HR trends shaping higher education in more detail.

Figure 1

Top 5 Priorities for HR in Higher Education in 2025

Percent of Respondents

Priority	Percent
Retention	45%
Recruiting	43%
Operational Efficiency	38%
Employee Management	35%
Leadership Development	30%

3

TREND 1:
JOB MARKET FAVORING PUBLIC SECTOR & EDUCATION

The higher education job market is looking a bit brighter. As we reported in last year's The Education Hiring Crisis report, the number of open education jobs decreased slightly as more people viewed and applied to jobs. This slight upward trend indicated a positive shift in the higher ed job market – a shift that is continuing into 2025.

Job seekers in higher education have long been attracted to the steady benefits, job security, and meaningful work provided by public sector employment. And with plenty of open jobs to choose from, more job seekers are exploring higher ed employment. As promises of Federal restructuring and potential job cuts by the new administration come to fruition, you should be on the lookout for a rise in highly qualified professionals entering the candidate pool.

More candidates and plenty of open jobs paint a promising picture for the higher ed job market in 2025. Institutions are eager to fill roles (recruiting quality candidates is a top priority going into 2025) but will need to be strategic to find and attract the right candidates.
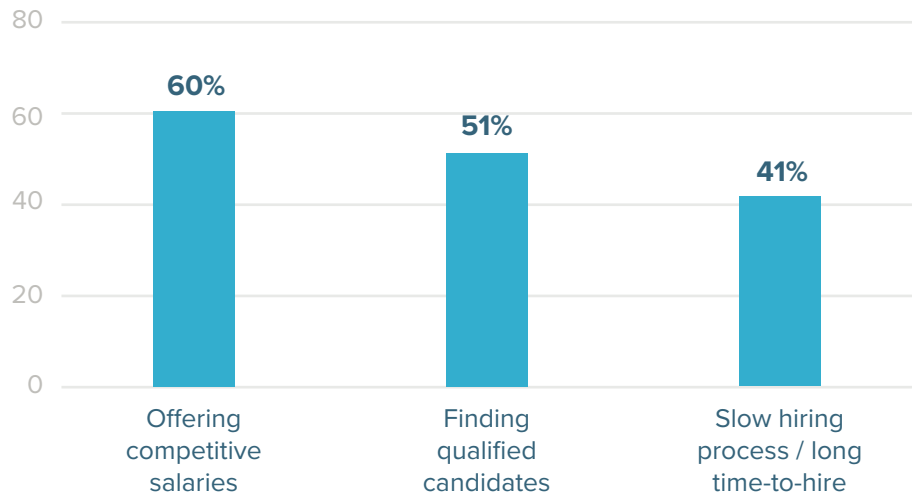
*A widening candidate pool and plenty of open jobs paints **a promising picture** for the higher education job market in 2025.*

4

Figure 2

Higher education's top recruiting challenges

Respondents chose their top two.

Our data indicates the top 3 recruiting challenges are offering competitive salaries (60%), finding qualified candidates for the job (51%), and the slow hiring process (41%). Most institutions are relying on career fairs to source candidates and offering remote or hybrid work options to enhance job appeal. There are a number of strategies you can employ to attract – and retain – top talent including expanding job sourcing, improving job positioning, enhancing job appeal, and optimizing the hiring process. You can explore these strategies in detail here, and we'll dive into more in this report.

Institutions will need to continue prioritizing competitive salaries to attract and retain top talent in 2025. **80% of agencies report the top reason employees leave is for higher paying opportunities.** It's no surprise that nearly 60% of higher ed institutions are using financial incentives, like tuition reimbursement and signing bonuses, to attract high-quality candidates.

5

TREND 2:
DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING IN HR

Integrating data-driven decision-making into workforce management can empower your organization to better adapt to an evolving job market. Advanced analytics tools provide insight into all aspects of HR so institutions can anticipate future needs more accurately and allocate resources effectively.

Key Technology Developments

Predictive analytics is a powerful tool to support workforce planning. By using predictive models, institutions can more accurately plan for retirements, identify recruitment bottlenecks, or address workload imbalances.

These tools are particularly useful to forecast staffing needs ahead of the 'Silver Tsunami', or the surge of Baby Boomer retirements. **Nearly 40% of institutions surveyed indicate they're starting to see an increase in retirement volume**, which means it's not too late to start succession planning.

Predictive analytics tools often have dashboards that allow organizations to monitor the hiring process, employee performance, and engagement in real-time. With real-time insights available, HR leaders can identify trends and bottlenecks quickly, and develop targeted solutions within minutes.

Figure 3
AI & Recruiting
Source: SHRM

2 in 3 organizations are using AI to support recruitment tasks

6

Strategies to Enhance Data-Driven Decision Making in HR

1   **Invest in HR Systems.** Prioritize systems with robust analytics capabilities that provide real-time insights and predictive modeling.

2   **Train HR Teams.** Equip teams with the skills to interpret workforce data and apply it to strategic decision-making.

3   **Drive Equity Initiatives.** Analyze hiring, promotion, and retention data to identify and address disparities.

4   **Monitor Faculty Workloads.** Utilize data to track teaching loads, research output, and administrative responsibilities to ensure equitable workloads and prevent burnout among faculty.

5   **Conduct Predictive Scenario Planning.** Use analytics to simulate potential scenarios, such as enrollment changes or funding shifts, and prepare strategies to proactively address any potential impacts.

TREND 3:
PRIORITIZING EMPLOYEE WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

In higher education, employee wellbeing is taking the spotlight in 2025 as rates of burnout and turnover among faculty increase. The 2023 CUPA-HR Higher Education Employee Retention Survey reported the highest rates of staff turnover during the 2022-23 school year. In that report, only half of employees felt recognized at work, and the majority want flexible or hybrid work arrangements.

By prioritizing the mental health and overall wellness of employees, colleges and universities can create more resilient and healthy work environments that support faculty and staff retention.

Key Technology Developments

Most institutions indicate they're providing educational programs on topics such as health and wellness (60%) to better support employee health and wellbeing. Over half are implementing or expanding wellness benefits, such as access to therapy and wellness apps. Only a quarter are giving employees more flexible work options.

Despite a growing 'return to the office' trend, hybrid and remote work options are still very popular among workers and job seekers. According to Pew Research, **nearly half (46%) of workers who work from home would leave their job if they could no longer work remotely**, and 63% of people who rarely or never work from home say they would choose to work from home if it was an option for them.

If your organization is facing high turnover and competitive job markets, hybrid and flexible work models can be a powerful solution to improve retention and attract candidates. Addressing the entire employee experience, including workloads, time off, and flexible scheduling, is key to creating supportive work environments for faculty and staff.

Strategies to Support Employee Health and Wellbeing in Higher Education

1

Partner with Wellness Solution Providers. Offer tailored mental health and wellness programs and training to your staff by collaborating with experts.

2

Regularly Assess Employee Needs: Use surveys to gauge the effectiveness of wellness initiatives, identify unmet needs, adjust programs and offerings based on your employee feedback.

3

Promote Work-Life Balance. When possible, offer hybrid and flexible work options, encourage use of paid time off, and ensure workloads are manageable for your faculty and staff.

TREND 4:
FOCUS ON INCLUSIVITY AND BELONGING ON CAMPUS

Fostering an inclusive work environment can have a powerful impact on an organization. When staff and faculty feel a sense of belonging, organizations can experience lower turnover, higher productivity, positive workplace culture, and stronger institutional loyalty. Additionally, a diverse faculty and staff bring varied perspectives to campus, which leads to a richer work and learning experiences.

Most institutions surveyed offer training on unconscious bias to improve diversity and inclusion. Others are focusing on measuring and communicating DEI goal progress.

Key Technology Developments

By tapping into workforce analytics tools, institutions can monitor diversity and representation across the organization. Analyzing data from applicant tracking systems, like NEOED's Insight, helps identify problems with implicit bias that may be unfavorably impacting underrepresented groups in the recruitment process.

Using workforce analytics tools, you can generate Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Reports to support equitable decision-making and the development of policies that address pay equity and career development opportunities.

Strategies to Foster Inclusivity and a Sense of Belonging on Campus

- **Embed Inclusivity and Belonging Goals into Strategic HR Planning.** Align DEI objectives with your institutional priorities by incorporating them into HR strategies, policies, and hiring practices. Regularly evaluate progress to ensure these goals remain actionable and impactful.

- **Leverage Technology to Identify and Address Gaps.** Utilize workforce analytics to track representation, pay equity, and career advancement opportunities. Pinpoint disparities and develop targeted initiatives to address them effectively.

- **Provide Comprehensive Training Programs.** Offer ongoing education, such as unconscious bias training, to build awareness and equip your employees with the skills to foster a more inclusive environment.

- **Create Mentorships and Sponsorship Programs.** Pair underrepresented employees with more experienced colleagues to help them navigate their careers and feel connected to the organization.

9

TREND 5:
TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION FOR SEAMLESS HR OPERATIONS

The world of work is changing. Younger, tech-native workers are entering the workforce with different expectations, and organizations must evolve to meet higher standards. As the job market shifts, technology plays a pivotal role in enabling institutions to adapt and thrive amidst these changes.

The right technology streamlines routine tasks, like applicant tracking and onboarding, which frees up time for HR teams to focus on strategic priorities. Empowering employees with self-service access improves transparency, operational efficiency and employee satisfaction. And real-time analytics capabilities equip leaders with insights to drive effective decision-making.

Key Technology Developments

The need for unified, technology-driven HR systems has never been greater. Institutions are recognizing the importance of integrated platforms that connect recruiting, onboarding, payroll, and performance management into a single ecosystem. Comprehensive systems that connect the full employee lifecycle are becoming critical to modern HR operations.

With remote, mobile-first work on the rise, more HR platforms are being designed for mobile accessibility. Enabling employees and administrators to manage HR related tasks from mobile devices encourages employee self-service and keeps managers informed on-the-go.

10

Integrating advanced technology into HR operations helps institutions maintain compliance by automating processes, tracking policy updates, and ensuring accurate reporting. NEOED's comprehensive suite of SaaS solutions are specifically designed to address the unique needs of higher education institutions. By automating manual tasks and providing powerful employee self-service tools, NEOED empowers HR teams to focus on strategic initiatives rather than time-consuming administrative duties. As a result, our programs enhance operational efficiency, promote compliance, and fosters a most engaged workforce – ensuring you not only attract top employees, but also retain them.

Strategies to Integrate Technology into Higher Ed HR Operations

1   **Regularly Review and Upgrade HR Technology.** Stay ahead of evolving needs by conducting periodic evaluations of your existing systems and processes to identify improvements before issues arise.

2   **Focus on Scalable, User-Friendly Solutions.** Choose technology that is not only adaptable to changing institutional requirements, but also adds positive value to your workforce. Doing so can ensure widespread adoption of new solutions.

3   **Offer Training and Support to Staff.** Equip your HR teams, managers, and employees with the knowledge and skills to maximize the potential of new solutions.

Learn how the Alabama Community College System used NEOED Perform to save **70% more time on performance management for 24 colleges.**

11

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION HR IN 2025

1. **Leverage a Growing Talent Pool.** Take advantage of a growing talent pool by focusing on developing an employer brand that highlights the unique benefits of your institution. Enhance job appeal with flexible work options, competitive salaries, and financial incentives like tuition reimbursement and signing bonuses.

2. **Adopt Data-Driven Decision-Making**. Invest in cutting-edge HR systems with robust analytics capabilities to forecast staffing needs, track performance, and monitor diversity metrics. Equip your HR teams with training to interpret data and develop strategies for proactive workforce planning, including addressing the impacts of the 'Silver Tsunami.'

3. **Prioritize Employee Wellness.** Expand wellness programs to include access to mental health resources, therapy, and wellness apps. Promote work-life balance with hybrid and flexible work options, manageable workloads, and paid time off to reduce burnout and improve retention

4. **Foster Inclusivity and Belonging.** Embed DEI goals into strategic HR plans, use analytics to identify representation gaps, and develop targeted initiatives to address disparities. Provide ongoing training, such as unconscious bias workshops, and create mentorship programs to support career advancement for underrepresented groups.

5. **Integrate Technology for Seamless Operations.** Regularly evaluate and upgrade your HR technology to ensure it meets evolving needs. Focus on scalable, mobile-first solutions to enhance accessibility and employee self-service. Offer training to maximize the adoption and impact of new tools, streamlining administrative processes and allowing HR teams to focus on strategic priorities.

Partnering with technology providers like NEOED is critical to modernizing HR processes and addressing higher ed workforce challenges now and in the future. Technology platforms streamline recruitment, onboarding, performance management, and compliance, enabling institutions like yours to operate more efficiently and future-proof HR processes.

Over the next decade, higher ed HR will be defined by technological advancements, generational shifts, and evolving workforce expectations. Institutions will increasingly rely on advanced technology and predictive analytics to drive data-informed decision-making, improve operational efficiency, and improve the employee experience. HR teams that embrace innovation and adaptability will lead the way in creating resilient, future-ready organizations that meet the needs of both employees and the students they serve.

NEXT STEPS

The five trends shaping higher ed HR in 2025 — leveraging a growing labor pool, using data to drive decision-making, prioritizing employee wellbeing and mental health, focusing on inclusivity and belonging on campus, and integrating technology into HR operations — offer higher education institutions a roadmap to navigate workforce challenges and build resiliency.

Let's work together to modernize your HR practices and future-proof your workforce for the decade ahead.

NEOED serves public sector HR with a comprehensive suite of solutions for recruitment, onboarding, performance management, employee development, and more. We are proud to serve the people who serve the people.

13,000+
Public Sector Agencies

800,000+
People Use NEOED

20+
Years of Experience