



# Near College

A Hypothetical/Composite College Case Study (Truncated) Developed for the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual  
NEAIR Conference  
Jersey City, New Jersey  
Monday, November 20, 2017

Neair College (NC) is a comprehensive, primarily undergraduate college located in the town of Suburbia, which is approximately 70 miles outside of Megacity. This 11,000 student college is one of 25 higher education institutions located within the state's higher education system. As one of the oldest systems of higher education in the country, the All College Higher Education System (ACHES) is a model of bureaucracy and statusquoism. Faculty, staff and administrators throughout the system refer to ACHES as the "system where innovation comes to die." It is a system guided by archaic policies and procedures that make transfer between institutions difficult, discourages colleges from sharing information or ideas, and prevents centralized support for new initiatives. ACHES has a new chancellor who has vowed to change the reputation and operations of the system and has held numerous town halls to share her proposed changes. While the majority of college presidents (including Neair's president) are hopeful that the chancellor will succeed in breaking through the malaise, many of the long-tenured faculty, staff, and administrators remain skeptical.

NC was founded as a normal school (teacher's college) in 1895 and has, historically, been a primary provider of K-12 teachers and administrators within the five-county service area. The College was incorporated into ACHES as a comprehensive undergraduate college in 1948 to help educate the substantial number of returning service members who were taking advantage of the GI Bill. As a result, the mission and scope of academic programming was broadened to include the arts and sciences, social sciences, and business degrees. As the mission expanded and the community became more aware of and invested in the college, its influence began to grow. Johnathan Neair, the president at the time, worked with the local high schools and community organizations to increase underrepresented minority student attendance and graduation. In recognition of his work and the College's impact on the community, the institution was renamed Neair College in 1964. Included in the College's mission is a commitment to student achievement, economic empowerment, and social justice and equity.

While the College's history contains numerous examples of innovation, trailblazing, and educational leadership, the past few decades have seen the institution mired in legislative fights over state funding, a lackluster response to changing economic conditions, and mixed success in meeting the educational needs of a more diverse population. The College has been so busy responding to changing conditions it no longer resembles the innovative institution of the past. Regarding the Cabinet, the President (6 years), Vice-President of Academic Affairs (5 years), Vice-President of Business and Finance (4 years) and Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning (1 year) are referred to as the "new guard", while the Vice-President of Student Affairs (27 years), Vice President of Public Relations and Development (20 years), and General Counsel (15 years) are known as the "old guard." The new guard has largely embraced generally accepted and best practices as well as innovative approaches based on evidence and the use of data analytics that challenge tradition while the old guard remains focused on ensuring stability and a readiness to react to changing conditions. The president, while dedicated to improving student outcomes and the environment for student success,

chooses to lead by consensus. Unless there is consensus at the cabinet level, he is loath to act and is keenly aware of and focused on maintaining significant political capital. Thus far, the president has the complete and unquestioned support of the Near Board of Trustees.

He is also aware that the central administration at ACHES is slow to embrace major educational or procedural changes within the Colleges or the system. All of these factors have created an institutional culture defined by hesitancy and has resulted in an environment where individuals are risk-averse. The only new ideas emanating from the faculty and staff, outside of pedagogical and curricular changes within the academic programs, are the “no-brainer” concepts which are guaranteed to succeed. While newer members of the cabinet are encouraging risk-taking within their divisions (aside from the VP of Business and Finance), they have gained little traction due to long held fears, inculturation and indoctrination of new staff, and a lack of transparency and communication from the system office. It should be noted that the new VP of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning was hired to help develop a “culture of evidence” through the creation of a comprehensive institutional effectiveness system, establishment of integrated data systems, and dedication to data mining and that allows for data influenced decision-making. The president consciously chose an individual with documented institutional research, effectiveness, assessment, and planning skills and success hoping this hire would help revitalize the culture of innovation that once characterized the college.

### NEAIR COLLEGE CABINET/IE OFFICE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

