The Higher Education Triad: Ensuring Student Success Amid Political Uncertainty

Dr. Will Miller | Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

NASASPS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE ADMINISTRATORS
AND SUPERVISORS OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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Why We're Here

We Care About Educational Integrity

Our shared mission is protecting the value and quality of higher education.

The Current System Is Unsustainable

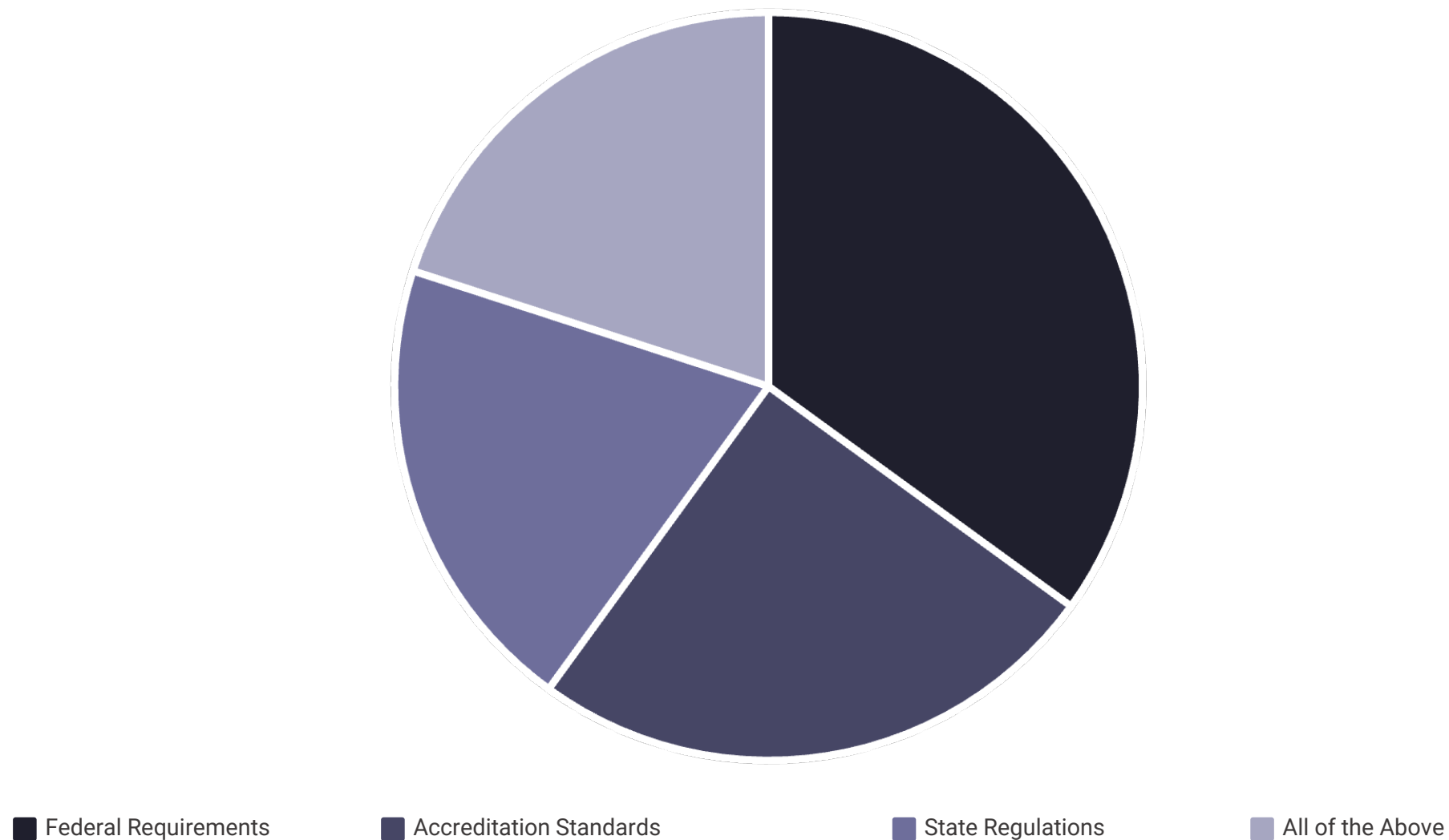Regulatory complexity creates burdens for institutions and students alike.

Reform Is Possible

We can create student-centered regulation through thoughtful collaboration.
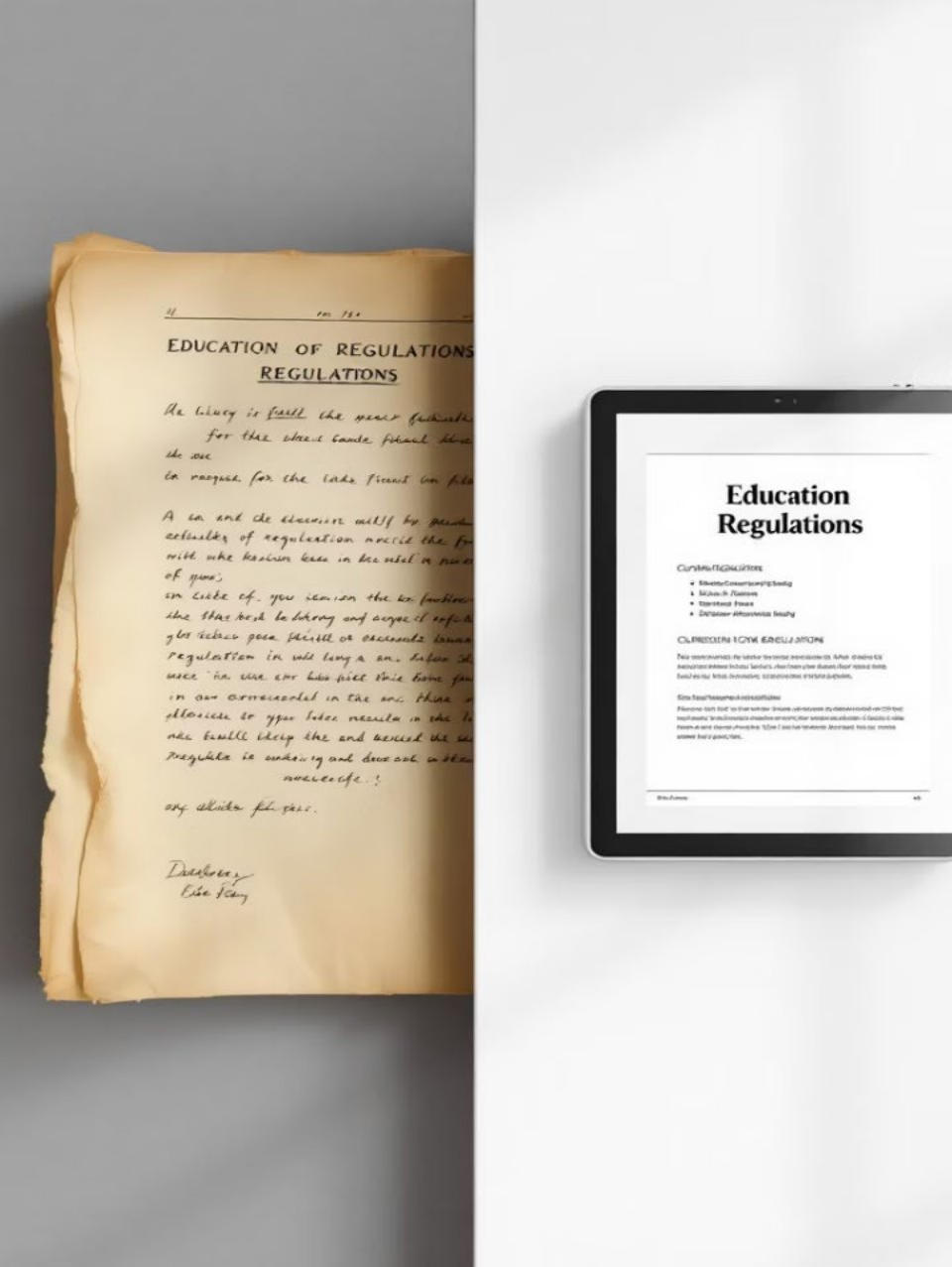
The Higher Education Triad

Accreditors

Quality assurance and academic integrity verification

Department of Education

Federal oversight of Title IV financial aid eligibility and compliance

State Regulators

Consumer protection and institutional authorization

What Causes Your Greatest Compliance Challenges?

■ Federal Requirements   ■ Accreditation Standards   ■ State Regulations   ■ All of the Above

How We Got Here

1965: Higher Education Act

Initial Federal regulatory structure with limited oversight

1992: Major Amendments

Expanded regulatory framework following financial aid scandals

2008-2016: Rapid Expansion

Regulations grew dramatically across all three triad members

2016-Present: Pendulum Swings

Oscillation between deregulation and intensified enforcement

The Regulatory Labyrinth

NASASPS
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Started With Good Intentions

Regulations were created to ensure institutional accountability and protect students.

Grew Unchecked

Each crisis or scandal added new layers without removing outdated requirements.

Became a Labyrinth

Institutions now navigate multiple overlapping systems with conflicting priorities.

Created Massive Costs

Compliance now requires specialized staff and diverts resources from education.

Real-World Navigation Challenges

NC-SARA

Interstate authorization requirements

Separate annual reporting process

Different state-by-state interpretations

Title IV

Federal financial aid compliance

Regular program reviews

Complex enrollment reporting

State Licensing

Program-specific requirements

Varying renewal timelines

Differing documentation standards

The Cost of Compliance

$27B+

Annual Cost

Higher education compliance costs exceed $27 billion annually

14%

Administrative Growth

Increase in compliance staff at typical institution

200+

Federal Requirements

Separate federal requirements to track and report

$970

Per Student

Average compliance cost passed to each student

The Audit Culture

What It Is

The rise of continuous assessment, documentation, and verification across higher education.

An environment where process documentation often matters more than educational outcomes.

A system that rewards risk avoidance rather than innovation.

Impact on Institutions

- Innovation resistance

- Risk aversion

- Resource diversion

- Documentation overload

- Compliance fatigue

Key Insight

Regulation has become a full-time job for institutions—and students are paying the price.

Administrative Burden

Institutions hire specialists just to navigate regulatory requirements.

Student Impact

Compliance costs are passed on through higher tuition and fees.

Educational Quality

Time spent on compliance is time not spent on improving education.

The Fragile Triad

Federal Level
Pendulum swings between deregulation and expanded enforcement
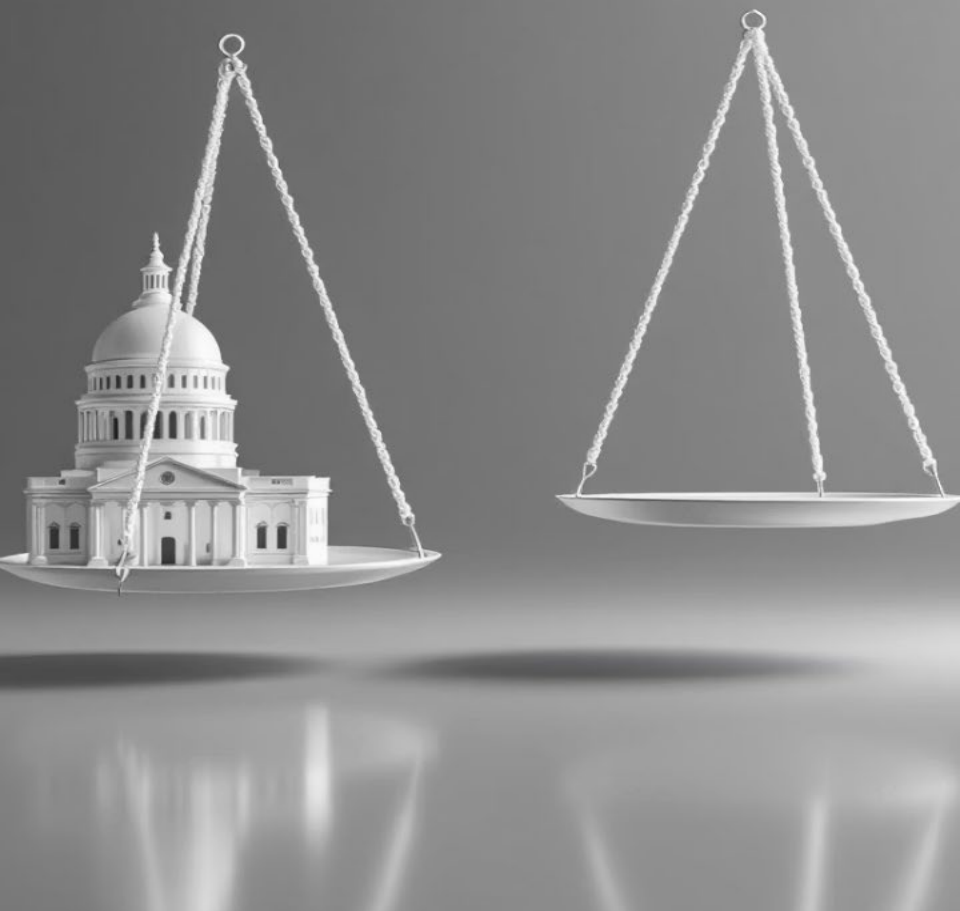
Accreditors
Evolved from partners in quality to federal gatekeepers

State Level
Increasing political pressures and workforce demands

Federal Level: The Pendulum Effect

Protective Era
Expanded consumer protection and institutional accountability

Deregulation Phase
Reduction of regulatory burdens and compliance requirements

Enforcement Focus
Intensified scrutiny and expanded monitoring systems

Cycle Continues
Political shifts trigger regulatory policy reversals

Accreditors: Evolving Mission

1 Original Purpose

Peer-based quality improvement partners focused on academic standards

2 Transition Period

Growing focus on measurable outcomes and compliance verification
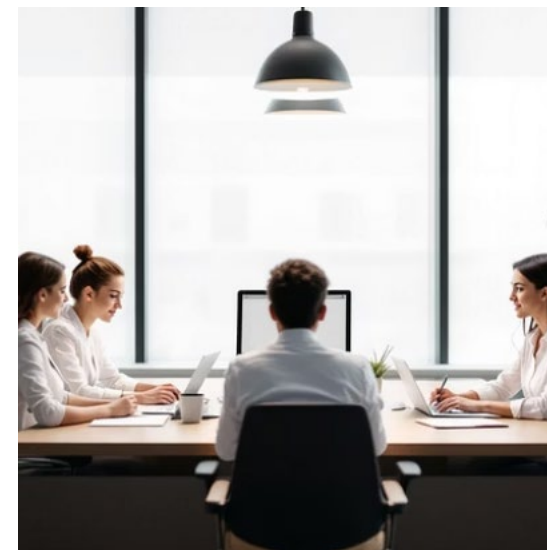
3 Current Reality

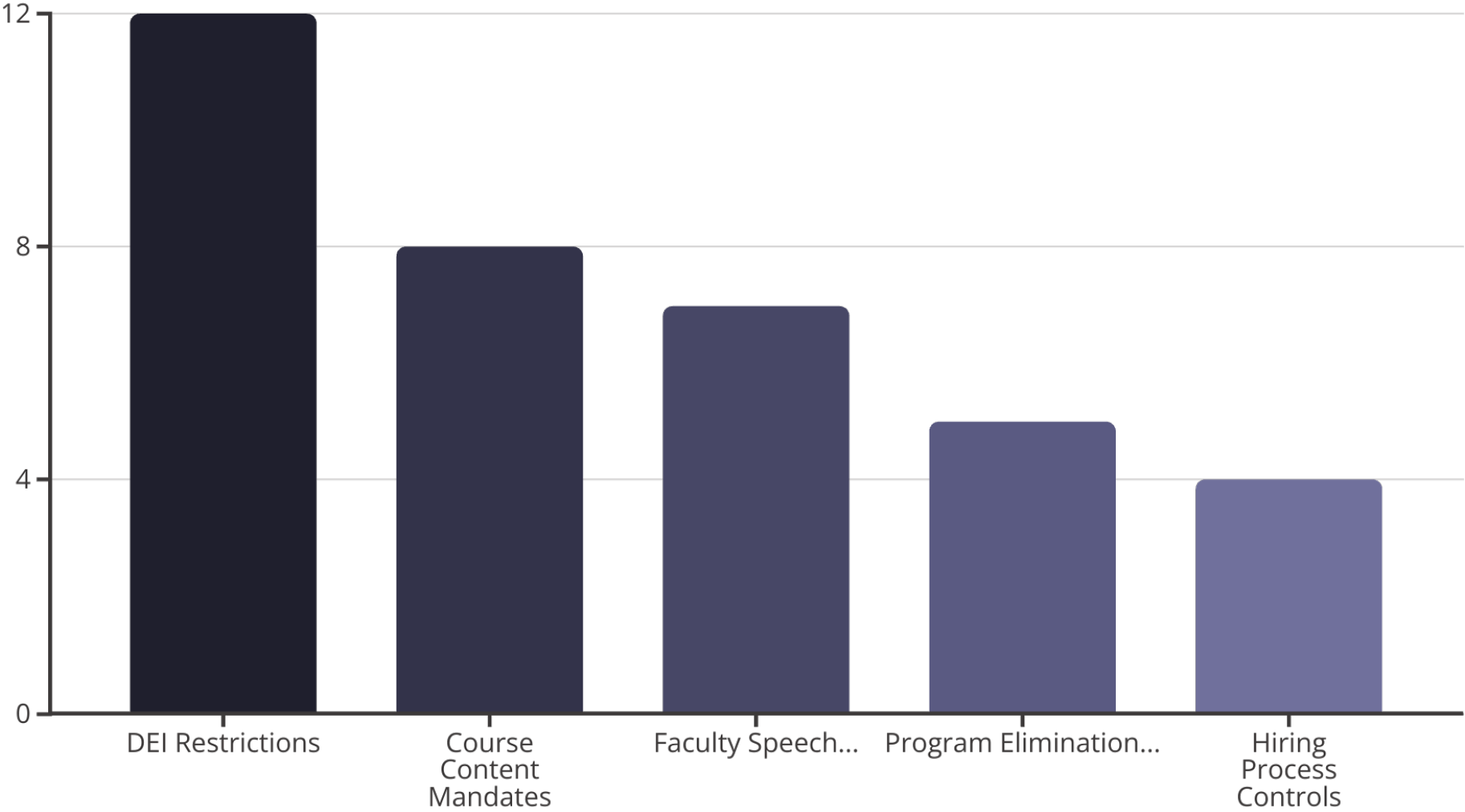Federal gatekeepers controlling access to Title IV funding

State-Level Trends

Political interference in curricula, pressure for workforce alignment, and shifting roles in consumer protection create complex challenges for state regulators.

Political Interference in Curricula

The Ideological Shift

"Regulators are increasingly asked to enforce not just standards—but ideologies."

Traditional Role	Emerging Expectation
Ensure basic educational quality	Enforce specific political viewpoints
Protect student investment	Advance particular economic priorities
Verify institutional stability	Reshape curriculum and staffing
Maintain regulatory compliance	Implement partisan agendas

Core Regulatory Tension
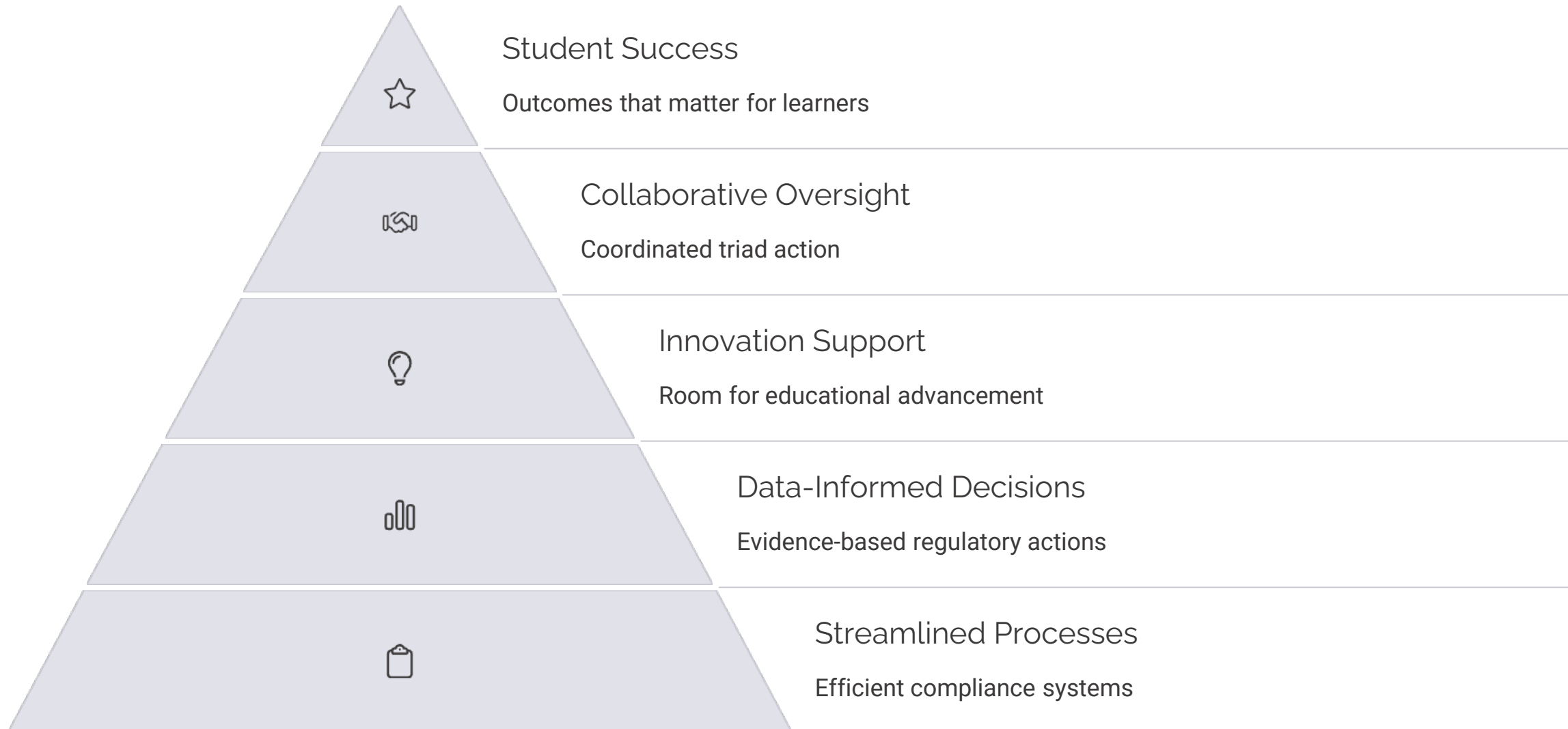
Protecting Public Investment

- Ensuring fiscal responsibility

- Preventing fraud and abuse

- Guaranteeing minimum quality

- Tracking student outcomes

- Maintaining transparency

Preserving Institutional Autonomy

- Academic freedom

- Curricular independence

- Governance flexibility

- Innovation capacity

- Mission fulfillment

A Vision for Change

Student Success
Outcomes that matter for learners

Collaborative Oversight
Coordinated triad action

Innovation Support
Room for educational advancement

Data-Informed Decisions
Evidence-based regulatory actions

Streamlined Processes
Efficient compliance systems

Framing Question

What would it look like if regulation was designed to drive student success, not just paperwork?

Success-Focused

Regulation measuring what actually matters for students.

Efficient
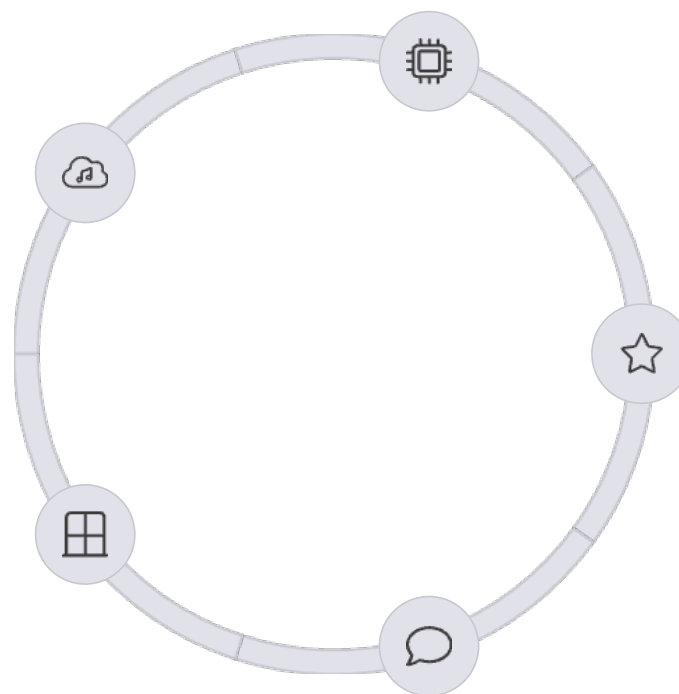
Streamlined processes that reduce administrative burden.

Collaborative

Aligned requirements across all regulatory bodies.

The IFHER Framework

Technological Innovation

Leverage modern tools for efficient oversight

Regulatory Streamlining

Align and simplify compliance processes

Collaborative Advocacy

Unite regulatory voices for meaningful reform

Transparency & Engagement

Foster public understanding and input

Institutional Governance

Empower shared responsibility for quality

Pillar 1: Regulatory Streamlining

1 Align Timelines

Synchronize DOE, state, and licensure reporting cycles.

2 Eliminate Duplication

Identify and remove redundant data collection requirements.

3 Share Data

Create secure information exchange between regulatory bodies.

4 Standardize Formats

Develop common templates across state and federal systems.

One Report, Three Audiences Model

Current State

Institutions prepare separate reports with 60-70% overlapping data.

Different formats, templates, and submission systems for each regulator.

Inconsistent definitions and metrics across reporting requirements.

Streamlined Approach

Core data submitted once through unified portal.

Standardized definitions and metrics across all regulators.

Automatic distribution to appropriate regulatory bodies.

Expected Benefits

40% reduction in administrative time.

Improved data consistency and reliability.

Enhanced focus on substantive review rather than collection.

Pillar 2: Technological Innovation

AI for Compliance

Artificial intelligence tools that monitor compliance in real-time.

Blockchain Verification

Secure credential verification through distributed ledger technology.
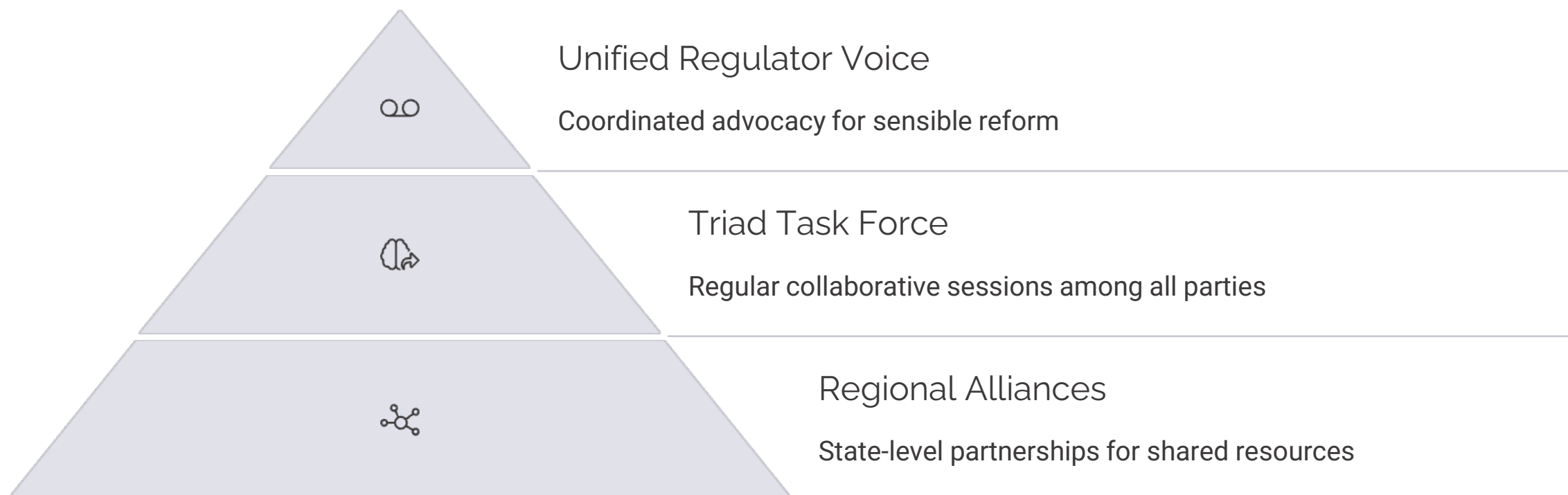
Regulatory Chatbots

On-demand guidance through intuitive conversation interfaces.

Visual Dashboards

Interactive visualization of compliance status and trends.

Pillar 3: Collaborative Advocacy

Unified Regulator Voice

Coordinated advocacy for sensible reform

Triad Task Force

Regular collaborative sessions among all parties

Regional Alliances

State-level partnerships for shared resources

The Untapped Power of State Regulators

Current Challenges

- Limited visibility in policy discussions

- Resource constraints for effective advocacy

- Fragmented voice across different states

- Insufficient connections to federal policymakers

Strategic Opportunities

- Direct student protection experience

- Unique insight into local education needs

- Practical implementation knowledge

- Cross-institutional perspective

- Ground-level impact understanding

Pillar 4: Institutional Governance Enhancement

Faculty-Led Compliance Review

Empower faculty committees to evaluate regulatory impacts.

Integrate academic mission into compliance processes.

Foster shared responsibility for quality assurance.

Cross-Functional Teams

Combine expertise from multiple institutional departments.

Break down silos between compliance and academics.

Create holistic approaches to regulatory challenges.

Embedded Quality Assurance

Integrate compliance into curriculum design from start.

Develop assessment strategies that serve multiple purposes.

Build regulatory awareness across all institutional levels.

Pillar 5: Transparency & Public Engagement

Public Dashboards

Clear visualization of institutional compliance and spending.

Compliance Cost Disclosure

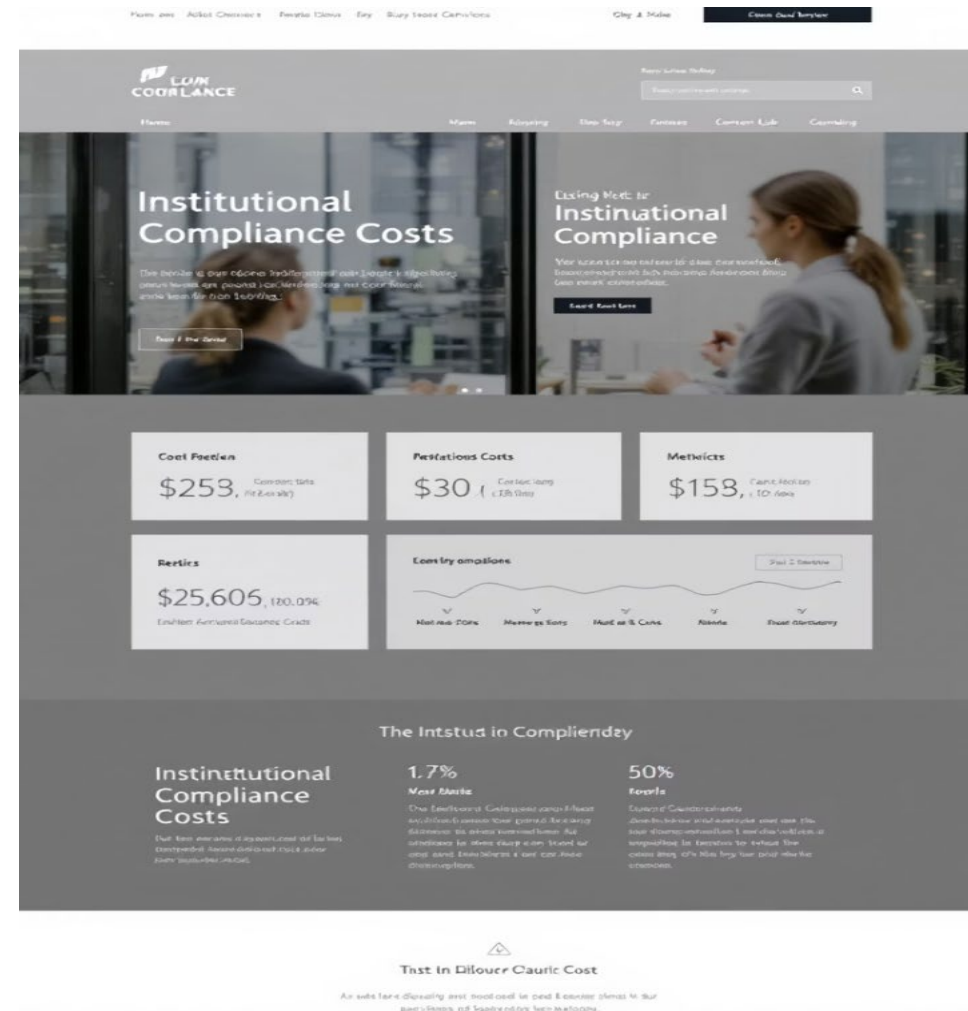Detail regulatory expenses for students, families, and legislators.

Community Input Channels

Structured processes for stakeholder feedback on regulatory impact.

Plain Language Reports

Accessible explanations of regulatory purposes and outcomes.

Key Message

Regulation doesn't have to be a barrier—it can be a lever for meaningful, data-informed, and student-aligned oversight.

Regulatory Mapping Tool

Category	DOE Requirement	State Requirement	Accreditor Requirement
Program Review	Gainful Employment data	Workforce outcome metrics	Learning assessment
Financial Stability	Composite Score	State bond requirements	Financial ratio analysis
Student Information	IPEDS submissions	Enrollment reporting	Retention/graduation data
Faculty Credentials	Minimal requirements	Field-specific licensing	Detailed qualification review

Discussion Question 1

What compliance process do you wish you could redesign from scratch?

Consider These Aspects

Which processes create the most frustration for your team?

Identify Duplication

Where do you collect the same information multiple times?

Imagine Possibilities

If you could start over, what would an ideal process look like?
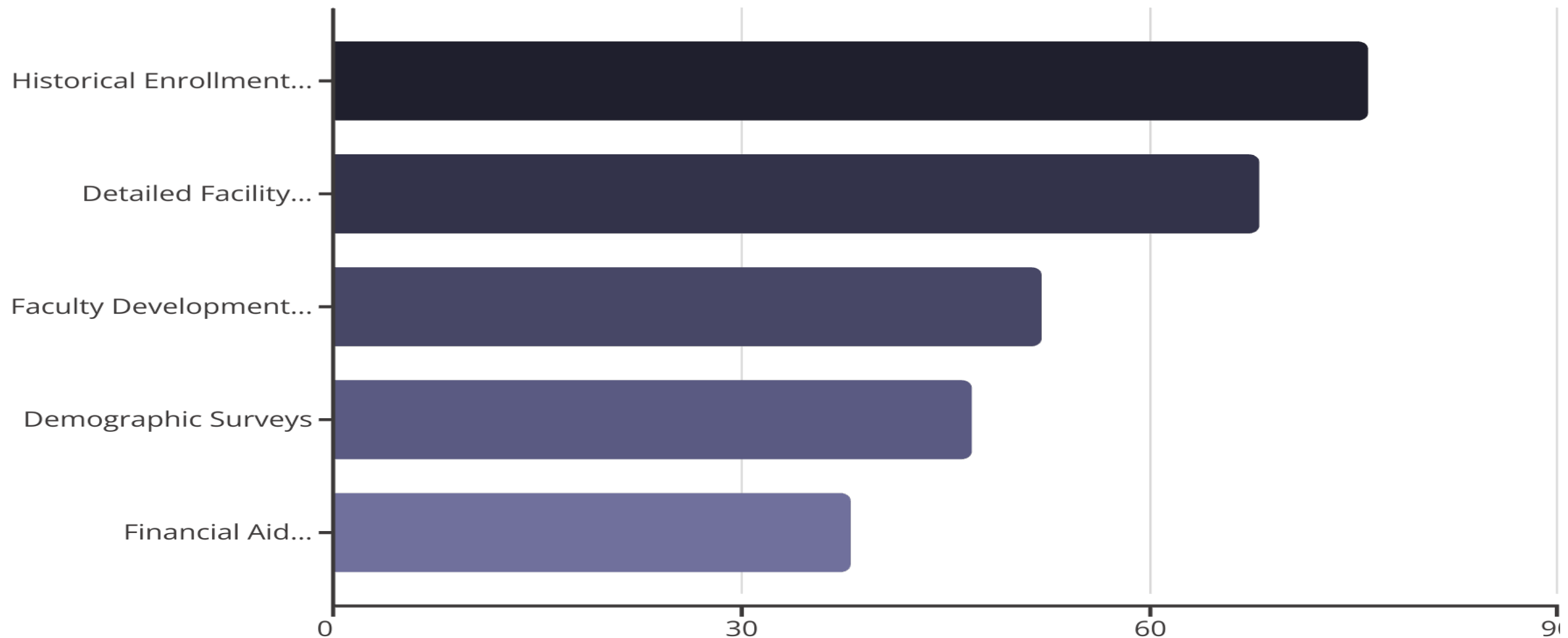
Discussion Question 3

What does it mean to be a student-centered regulator?

Prioritize Outcomes

Focus on results that matter to students' lives and careers

Minimize Burden

Reduce costs and complications that get passed to learners

Enable Innovation

Allow for new approaches that better serve student needs

Ensure Transparency

Make regulation understandable to those it ultimately serves

Our Path Forward

Acknowledge Reality

The current system isn't serving students or institutions effectively.

Compliance has become an end in itself rather than a means to quality.

Commit to Change

We have the power to reshape regulatory approaches.

Small innovations can lead to significant improvements.

Collaborate Across Boundaries

No single regulator can solve these challenges alone.

We must work together across the entire triad.

Keep Students Central

Every form, policy, and checklist impacts a student's experience.

Let's be the generation of regulators who chose clarity, collaboration, and student success.

Questions?

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Thank you!

Dr. Will Miller | will.miller@erau.edu