

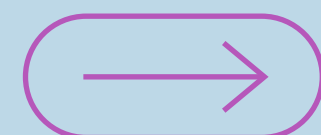
The background features a complex network of thin, colorful lines in shades of blue, green, purple, and orange, with small colored dots scattered throughout. The lines are more densely packed in the lower half of the image, creating a sense of depth and movement.

T H E

IMPACT IMPERATIVE.



Universities are more productive than ever — and more questioned than ever. How should institutions respond when publications, rankings and revenue are no longer enough?



Societal contribution is becoming a test of institutional credibility.

Governments want clearer returns on public funding. Students and families are comparing outcomes with growing transparency. Employers want graduates who can adapt, collaborate and apply what they've learned.

A growing number of universities are responding — reorienting research towards real-world pathways, building deeper partnerships beyond campus, and investing in the ability to demonstrate public value credibly.



Three institutions, three approaches:

RAND Corporation

Every research project must identify its intended users and map a plausible pathway to influence.

Northeastern University

Students spend roughly a third of their degree in paid professional placements, graduating with tested skills and employer networks.

Arizona State University

Grew into one of the largest US universities while increasing access for low-income and first-generation students — and lifting graduation rates.



Most universities are structurally designed to **resist change**.

Shared governance requires consensus before action. Tenure freezes faculty in place. Rankings reward prestige and publication volume over societal outcomes.

The result: institutions can hire impact officers, publish strategies and commission reports, without changing a single promotion criterion that shapes day-to-day decisions.

*Drawing on Brian Rosenberg,
president emeritus of Macalester College*

Some universities are proving that impact-oriented models work at scale.

SMU's Office of Impact is revising promotion criteria, developing structured impact case studies, and building systems to make research visible beyond journals.

The cost of inaction keeps rising. In a world where legitimacy depends on visible societal contribution, the institutions that move first will define the terms.

Storytelling has its place. But it should reflect substance, not substitute for it.

Read the full article by Scott A. Fritzen on *Asian Management Insights*. [Link in caption.](#)

