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# With Campus Experience across Finance, Budgeting, and Senior Leadership Roles, Tru Consulting is helping Higher Education Institutions Modernize Planning and Maximize Impact

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**Interview conducted by:**
**Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine**

**CEOCFO:** ***Ms. Fezzey, what is the vision at Tru Consulting?***
**Ms. Fezzey:** At Tru Consulting, our vision is to help higher education institutions modernize planning and maximize impact. Many of our team members come directly from higher ed—we have more than 500 years of combined campus experience across finance, budgeting, and senior leadership roles. We understand the challenges because we've lived them.

Tru was founded to redefine what it means to work with a consultant. When I was on campus too often, "consultant" carried a negative connotation. Our goal is to be trusted partners who serve those that serve.

We saw how world-class organizations like Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and Nike use connected planning to align strategy and execution, and we knew higher ed deserved the same advantage. By bringing that technology and expertise to universities, we help leaders simplify complexity, connect people and data, and make confident, mission-driven decisions.

**CEOCFO:** ***Would you give us a typical engagement as well as something a bit outside the box?***
**Ms. Fezzey:** Most of our higher education clients begin their Tru journey with budgeting and planning. That often includes workforce planning, managing faculty appointments with multiple funding sources, as well as operating budgets and forecasting. It's where most institutions start modernizing their approach to financial planning.

Where things become more complex, and where we spend a significant amount of time, is in academic medicine. Those environments combine academic and clinical operations, which add a new layer of financial and operational complexity. Faculty compensation models, clinical revenue streams, and contract structures all require advanced modeling and scenario planning.

We’ve also helped clients design integrated solutions for grants planning, labor modeling, and faculty productivity, including government and research organizations like NASA JPL. In those cases, we’re helping teams manage distributed resources, track performance across geographies, and connect long-range planning with real-time data.

Every engagement looks a little different depending on where the institution is in its connected planning journey. Some start with operating and labor budgets; others, like the University of Miami, begin at scale. Their first phase included 13 interconnected use cases, from tuition and enrollment planning to executive reporting and capital planning, all unified within a single platform. For them, it was truly transformational, creating transparency and strategic alignment across every level of the university.

**CEOCFO:** ***How do you help a potential client with the trepidation of making a change?***
**Ms. Fezzey:** Change is never easy, especially in higher education where decisions impact so many people and processes. At Tru, we focus on building trust early. Many of our client relationships begin one to two years before a project even starts. It takes time to understand the culture, the stakeholders, and the challenges they face. Those early conversations help us build real partnerships, not transactions.

A lot of our work comes through word of mouth. Leaders recommend us to their peers because they have experienced firsthand what it means to have a true partner through transformation. Trust is everything. When someone says, “Call Mela” or “Call Justin, they’ll help you get this right,” that is the greatest compliment we can receive.

**“That’s why our approach focuses on partnership and empowerment. We don’t just deliver a system; we help institutions build the capacity to own their transformation. Our mission is to serve those that serve. It’s incredibly rewarding to see them grow in confidence and capability, but it also reinforces how important it is for institutions to invest in the people behind the technology. True transformation happens when teams have both the tools and the space to lead change effectively.” Mela Fezzey**

For me personally, one of the most rewarding parts of this work is connecting people. Higher education leaders are often isolated as they move up in their careers, so helping them build networks where they can share ideas, challenges, and solutions is powerful. Whether someone is a client or not, we want to help them grow in their role and make lasting connections across the industry.

That spirit of partnership has even taken us global. One of our clients who transitioned to a university in Saudi Arabia reached out for help standing up connected planning there. Since then, we have been on-site multiple times and are now expanding our work into Dubai, helping build a regional CXO network for collaboration and innovation. It is proof that when institutions connect and share knowledge, transformation happens faster and everyone benefits.

**CEOCFO:** ***When you are involved in an engagement in the education arena, what might you look at that less knowledgeable people don’t take into consideration?***
**Ms. Fezzey:** Often, institutions begin with a very specific goal in mind — like improving their operating budget process. They’ve received approval to focus on that one area, but what we see is an opportunity to look more broadly at how that decision connects across the entire institution.

For example, we might start with budgeting but also explore how that impacts revenue streams, enrollment patterns, and student marketing efforts. Are marketing dollars being spent in regions where students are actually enrolling? Are budget allocations aligned with the programs that are growing and serving students effectively? Those are the kinds of connections that can reveal powerful insights.

Many campuses view budgeting as a once-a-year exercise focused on authority to spend. At Tru, we help them think beyond that. We encourage leaders to consider how every dollar aligns with their mission and whether it is being invested in the right areas to drive long-term impact. It’s about helping institutions move from reactive budgeting to strategic, connected planning — ensuring that every decision supports student success and institutional sustainability.

**CEOCFO:** ***What have you learned as you have worked with universities?***

**Ms. Fezzey:** I've learned that there are incredibly talented and mission-driven people across higher education, public service, and government institutions. They care deeply about their work, but they are often limited by outdated tools and stretched across multiple roles. Our work at Tru is about helping them unlock their full potential by modernizing how they plan, forecast, and make decisions.

What's inspiring is how many innovative ideas already exist on campuses. The challenge is that leaders often lack the time, resources, or funding to bring those ideas to life. In many cases, our clients are driving transformational change while still managing their day-to-day responsibilities — often the equivalent of three jobs.

That's why our approach focuses on partnership and empowerment. We don't just deliver a system; we help institutions build the capacity to own their transformation. Our mission is to serve those that serve. It's incredibly rewarding to see them grow in confidence and capability, but it also reinforces how important it is for institutions to invest in the people behind the technology. True transformation happens when teams have both the tools and the space to lead change effectively.

**CEOCFO:** ***Would you tell us about recognition for Tru Consulting this year in the Inc. 5000?***
**Ms. Fezzey:** The growth has been incredible to witness. When we started, no one in the planning space was focused on higher education. I remember knocking on doors, asking people to pay attention to the unique challenges and opportunities within this community. To see Tru recognized again on the Inc. 5000 list shows that the impact we're making is both real and lasting.

Our team has been the driving force behind that success. Many of them came from organizations that served global brands like Coca-Cola or Nike, but they've embraced a very different kind of mission here. Our work is about service — helping institutions that don't have those kinds of budgets but still deserve best-in-class technology and guidance. The fact that our clients continue to return year after year, and refer others to us, speaks to the trust and relationships we've built.

Beyond the growth metrics and awards, what means the most to me is the impact on people — both our clients and our team. Every family supported through Tru, every institution that's better equipped to serve its students, represents why we do this.

We'll continue to innovate and expand in this space, but always with the same foundation: creating a place where our people can thrive, our clients can grow, and our collective work can truly make a difference. If someone on my team goes on to a Big Five firm one day, I'll be proud knowing Tru helped them become the best version of themselves while they were here.