

Observations on the Future of Public Higher Education in Louisiana

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- First, let me thank all of the participants especially our panel members and our system presidents. Their roles individually and collectively are vital to the future of higher education for our state. Thanks also to Dr. Belle Wheelan, who is positioned at the heart of many of the trends and expectations addressed today. Her comments on your role as Trustees were especially appreciated.
- Let me share a few closing observations which might seem a little provocative, but are really designed to tease out the nature of the changes and trends now underway in higher education. Let me also note at the outset, that I am a firm and committed believer to the role of higher education for the person, for their community and for the state.
- First is the changing role of the professor. My first faculty position was in 1980 at Rutgers University in New Jersey. As a new assistant professor my role was defined first as scholarship, then teaching and finally service. Assessment consisted of the grade I gave to my students, few if any faculty members were part time or what we now term contingent, and my students were traditional 18-22 year olds taking 15 credits per semester with the expectation that they would graduate in 4 years.
- Fast forward 35 years to 2015. The role of teaching, except for the research based institutions, is now paramount. Assessment of student success in and out of the classroom takes more and more energy and staffing to complete. Adult students are now the largest demographic in the classroom, and more and more students are taking 12 credits per semester and graduating in 5

or six years. Most telling, while only 22% of faculty were contingent or adjunct in 1969, in 2013 that number was nearly 75% and growing.

- Embedded in this transformation is also the fact that few tenure track positions are available annually and in some fields, humanities, the lack of opportunity is even more pronounced.
- Second, is the changing nature of the university. The value proposition of higher education is being questioned on a daily basis as students graduate in fields that have few employment prospects, while still accumulating loans which must be paid back.
- The corporate sector is increasingly critical that students come to them unprepared for the world of work, while university faculty voice the same concerns over the students coming to them from high school.
- To some, the emphasis on STEM programs devalues the role of the liberal arts and sets programs up to compete for ever dwindling campus resources.
- Institutions are now directing significant portions of their budgets to supporting student success both in and out of the classroom, recognizing that students need more nurturing than in previous generations.
- Technology, especially learning via distance, is pushing classroom transformation in ways that may or may not be helpful.
- Third, is the changing nature of our society and its views on the appropriate role of higher education. As some of our panelists have noted, Louisiana is an under educated state and even though the vast majority of new jobs in the state require a credential beyond high school, there is a long standing reluctance to go that extra step. The challenge then is to reach out to this underserved population which in turn will further transform higher education from its traditional model.
- Transformation in higher education will, I believe, revolve around four trends.

- First, we are never going back to the way it was and by that I mean that public funding of higher education will continue to shift to the student, to the family and to the employer. Let's focus on the future and not lament the past.
- Second, the changing nature of the student population, especially the shift away from the 18-22 year old, will accelerate the move toward individualized courses of study, with technology as the preferred methodology of instruction, and a shift in the role of the faculty member away from mentor to more of a guide. Students will drop in to gain an additional credential for a specific purpose-whether career related or for personal enjoyment.
- Third, the flexibility of distance learning will accelerate the ability of a student to shop for classes rather than have to settle for a course of instruction at one institution. Student designed, custom packages from several institutions will become a viable alternative. The current monopoly position of faculty to require a specific set of courses for a particular degree will be diluted by a more free market program.
- The fourth transformation, competency based education, is the most radical. This is not credit for life experience but a process for a student to demonstrate mastery of a topic. This may be shown by a series of exams or by validating, for example, that a six month program run by IBM for its engineers is worth a certain number of credits toward a degree.
- Because competency based education is increasingly delivered via distance, its presence is challenging traditional bricks and mortar institutions. For example, Northern Arizona University, a major public research institution, recently received accreditation for its "Personalized Learning Initiative." A student pays \$2500 for six months, well below normal tuition and fees and may demonstrate as many competencies as they wish toward a degree. Not only is time to degree completion lowered, but a new market is created for adult as well as for traditional aged learners.

- So what does this all mean to us today? I believe that all of us in leadership positions for Louisiana higher education should shift our focus from the budget – although its positive resolution is critical for the success of our universities and students- to a discussion on the landscape of higher education for the state. How can we maximize partnerships with the business community to bring the adult learner back into the educational environment? How can we value both STEM and the liberal arts to create positive success outcomes for our students? How can we blend distance education and competency based learning with our traditional credit based classroom instruction? How do we balance access and affordability with the need to graduate with a credential that prepares the student for success in an increasingly competitive work place?
- Most importantly, how do we develop a compelling higher education narrative which supports our institutions when we welcome a new Governor and legislature next year?
- These are challenging times but also times which go to the heart of the future vitality of our state. Everyone in this room is a champion and advocate for public higher education and I urge you take the challenge remembering that at the end of the day, we have a responsibility to those students studying in our institutions who, when all is said and done, represent our future.
- Thank you and best wishes for the day.