

Keeping Them in College

East Carolina University's efforts to improve retention and graduation rates

By Don Campbell

GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

NEARLY A THOUSAND incoming freshmen and anxious parents are crammed into East Carolina University's Wright Auditorium on a steamy hot morning in late June.

Don Joyner, ECU's associate vice chancellor for admissions and advising, is pacing from one end of the stage to the other, microphone in hand, doing a dead-on imitation of a fire-and-brimstone television minister exhorting the faithful in a high-pitched twang.

He's deep into a well-practiced recitation of what it takes to succeed in college—get involved in campus activities, use the library, learn some basic study skills, have realistic expectations—beginning with commandment number one: “Go to class.”

“Let me tell you what's going to happen to some of you,” Joyner shouts. “You're going to break up with your boyfriend or your girlfriend, and all of a sudden, you think your life is over! Well let me tell you some-

thing else: You've got to get over your depression! You can't use that as an excuse... because this place can be unforgiving!”

Wide-eyed parents and students are cackling one moment and nodding their heads solemnly the next, mesmerized by a

Increased awareness of the dropout problem is leading to demands for increased accountability in higher education across the nation.

popular and locally famous ritual that Joyner performs in orientation sessions seven times each summer. His tough-love message for new students is just one weapon in an innovative arsenal that East Carolina uses to keep them in college and get them through graduation.



TOM COGILL FOR CROSSTALK

East Carolina University tries to involve new students like track and field athlete Valeria Moore in as many non-classroom activities as possible in their first few weeks on campus.

Retention and graduation are two of the hottest topics in higher education these days, as governing boards, accrediting agencies, and state and federal lawmakers demand more accountability and bang for the buck from college administrators.

College dropout rates are not declining noticeably—and are rising in some cases—despite a wide array of programs aimed at keeping students enrolled.

The traditional standard of only four *continued on page 14*

The “Seamless System”

Florida's flurry of dramatic changes in the governance of public education

By Jon Marcus

ORLANDO

BEYOND THE FRESHLY planted, carefully manicured landscaping fringing the new roads, there's not much to betray what is planned for the area of Central Florida called Lake Nona. Only a few bored-looking cattle graze past the lonely new strip malls that are the unmistakable early warning signs of loom-

Backers of the new K-20 “seamless system” insisted it would bring an end to fighting among the various levels of education over finite resources.

ing development in this state.

What is about to happen here is symbolic both of the remarkable growth of higher education in Florida and the dramatic way the public universities are governed after two revolutionary changes in

just five years. Those changes served to decentralize a system that was once tightly centrally controlled (just as has been happening in other states), and then to rein it in again. Through it all, politics in this politically obsessed state became even more of a factor in what happens at each campus.

In January, VIPs will come from all over Florida to Lake Nona to mark the groundbreaking for a bio-sciences building that will be the first component of a new medical school and the 13th satellite campus for the University of Central Florida, a school that did not exist until 1968 and is now (along with two other Florida universities) one of the ten largest in the United States, with more than 45,000 students. “The biggest university you never heard of,” people in Orlando like to joke. Students call it “UCF—Under Construction Forever.”

UCF made its argument for a new medical school with a survey it commissioned that shows the demand for new physicians in Florida will grow from 2,800 a year now to 4,200 a year by 2021. Despite its aging



TODD ANDERSON, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

John Hitt presides over 45,000-student Central Florida University, one of the nation's largest.

demographic in need of health care, Florida ranks 37th per capita among the states in medical school enrollment. And Central Florida, whose elderly population will nearly double by 2025, has no medical

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In This Issue



JANA BIRCHUM, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

LINDSAY GREER, a University of Texas at Austin freshman who benefited from the state's policy of admitting all applicants ranking in the academic top ten percent at any state high school, thinks the policy is unfair to many students. (See page 6.)



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NEWS FROM THE CENTER

New Center Associates

NINETEEN MID-CAREER professionals have been selected by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education as Program Associates for 2006-07. They include faculty members, administrators, legislative staff members and postsecondary education specialists. They will attend three formal meetings during the academic year and also

will work with National Center staff members on a variety of projects.

The goal of the program, which is financially supported by the Ford Foundation, is to engage scholars and prospective leaders in the study of higher education policy issues. ♦



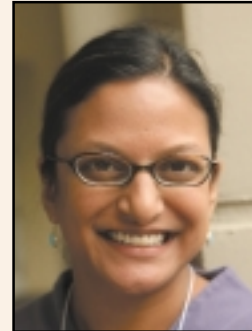
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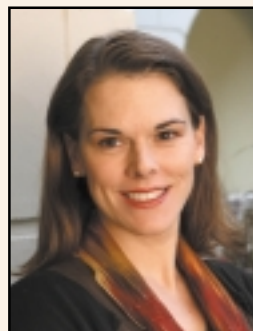
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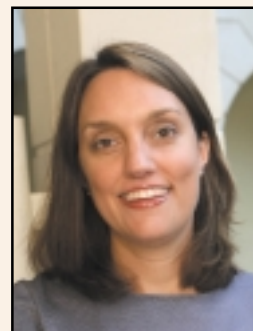
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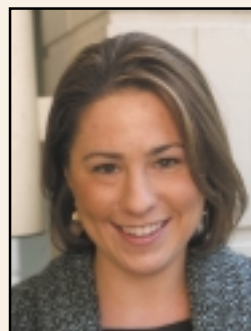
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PHOTOS BY DENNIS BRACK, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

EDITORIAL

Our National Underperformance

Is American higher education still the best in the world?

HOW EFFECTIVELY do the nation, the states and our colleges and universities meet the needs of the American people for education and training beyond high school? Since 2000, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education has addressed this question in its four editions of *Measuring Up*, its biennial report card on American higher education. Based on quantitative indicators, each issue of *Measuring Up* has assessed national and state performance in higher education through the baccalaureate degree. The indicators incorporate the contributions of two- and four-year, public and private, nonprofit and for-profit institutions of higher education.

I take this opportunity to emphasize

America's regression in college affordability is largely a function of the tuition and financial aid policies of colleges, universities and government.

two related and most troublesome aspects of our most recent report card: the international comparisons and college affordability.

First, *Measuring Up 2006* introduced—for the first time—an international perspective to the report card. We found that the United States no longer occupies its historic position of world leadership in critical areas, including college accessibility. In these areas, our national progress has stalled, with little or no improvement since about 1990, while many nations—our economic competitors—made great strides forward. As James B. Hunt Jr. and Garrey Carruthers state pointedly in their foreword to *Measuring Up 2006*, these findings challenge the conventional wisdom that American higher education is “the best in the world.”

Historically, college access has been one of our great comparative strengths. Our country once prided itself on each generation being better educated than the preceding one, but our progress has now stalled for a decade and a half. The likelihood of an American ninth grader enrolling in college four years later is about forty percent. A handful of states have improved on this and other indicators of higher education participation, but more states have regressed. Gaps in college attendance between whites and non-whites, and between low-income and high-income Americans are large and have not narrowed. The United States is still the

world leader in working-age adults, but the proportion of adults attending college part-time has declined over the last decade and a half.

Rates of completion of college programs—associate's degrees, baccalaureate degrees, and certificates—have improved only modestly, with almost all the improvement in the certificate category. *Measuring Up 2006* shows that completion rates remain the Achilles heel of American higher education: Only about two-thirds of students complete bachelor's degrees in six years. The United States ranks sixteenth among twenty-six nations compared internationally. Even the states with the highest completion grades in *Measuring Up 2006*'s state-by-state comparisons rank low in international comparisons.

Second, the international comparisons are troublesome, but our state-by-state findings on college affordability approach tragedy. The report card measures college affordability as the proportion of annual family income in each state required to pay for a year of college education at two- and four-year colleges and universities, after all college costs and financial aid are taken into account. By this indicator—the most important measure from the perspective of students and families—college affordability continues to deteriorate across the nation. The decline has contributed to flat college access and completion rates, and to the persistent gaps in college enrollment between low-income and other Americans.

Since 1992, the increase in college costs, particularly tuition, has significantly outpaced growth in family income for all but the 20 percent of American families with the highest income. Forty-three states received grades of “F” in college affordability in *Measuring Up 2006*. Simply stated, paying for college is now more difficult for students and families than it was fifteen years ago.

Shortly after the release of *Measuring Up 2006*, with 43 failing grades in college affordability, a new report using a rigorous methodology confirmed our findings. That report, “Mortgaging Our Future: How Financial Barriers to College Undercut America's Global Competitiveness,” was issued by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, an independent nonpartisan panel that advises Congress. The report offers a powerful analysis that projects the human costs to individuals and to our society of diminished college access for low- and moderate-income students. It estimated that in the 1990s between one million and 1.6 million academically qualified low- and moderate-income students with four-year college aspirations did not earn bachelor's degrees within eight years of high school graduation because of financial barriers.

An additional 1.4 to 2.4 million students of similar economic and educational characteristics are projected to be at similar risk of not obtaining the bachelor's degree in this decade.

The adverse consequences of decreased college affordability are pervasive. Escalating tuition discourages some students from enrolling in the rigorous high school courses required to prepare for college. Some students “trade down,” choosing less expensive colleges rather than those that best meet their educational goals and qualifications.

Others take on large debts or seek to minimize debt by working more hours than advisable during the academic year, both of which can cause academic difficulties, lengthen time in college or even jeopardize college completion. Current college graduates—and many students who never graduate—are the most heavily indebted young Americans in our history. Large debt burdens may discourage some college graduates from advanced study if that requires accumulating more debt, or from careers that are not highly remunerative.

Student financial assistance from all sources has increased by 140 percent since 1991, but has been outpaced by increases in the cost of college attendance, particularly tuition. As the escalation of tuition has squeezed the middle-income groups, state and federal governments have allo-

Our country once prided itself on each generation being better educated than the preceding one, but our progress has now stalled for a decade and a half.

cated larger shares of financial assistance to them through tax credits, merit aid and tax advantaged savings programs that do not require demonstration of financial need or, as with federal tax credits, exclude the most financially needy from participation. Compounding governmental action, colleges and universities have shifted their own aid dollars to recruitment incentives for more affluent students who bring the higher SAT and ACT scores that weigh



JOHN TROHA, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

heavily in college rankings.

America's regression in college affordability is largely a function of the tuition and financial aid policies of colleges, universities and government—the cumulative consequence, not of circumstances, but of deliberate choices.

In summary, the overall verdict of *Measuring Up 2006* on American higher education is underperformance:

- Underperformance in preparing the next generations of Americans to replace the highly educated baby boomers who are moving toward retirement years.
- Underperformance in giving the nation a college educated workforce that can compete internationally for the best jobs and the highest standards of living in the knowledge-based global economy.
- Underperformance in maintaining and enhancing opportunity and upward mobility for the heterogeneous generations of young Americans currently in the educational pipeline.

Our national underperformance contrasts sharply with the efforts of other nations, and the educational gains those efforts are producing. The improvements in higher education participation and completion in other nations derive from their recognition of the realities of the global economy, of the competitive advantages of a college educated workforce, and of the will to meet these challenges with renewed urgency.

A *New York Times* editorial review of *Measuring Up 2006* warned: “Unless America renews its commitment to the higher education policies that made the country great, we could soon find ourselves at the mercy of an increasingly global economy. And if we let ourselves hit bottom, it could take generations for us to dig ourselves out.” I agree. ♦

—Patrick M. Callan

Washington, D.C. symposium marks the release of *Measuring Up 2006*

Photographs by John Troha, Black Star, for CrossTalk

THE PRESENTATION of *Measuring Up 2006*, the national report card on higher education, was followed by a symposium at the National Press Club on September 7, 2006. Participants offered wide-ranging opinions and analysis regarding the current state, and future, of higher education.



Garrey Carruthers

"I believe universities are not very well managed and are not very efficient."
—Garrey Carruthers, former governor of New Mexico, now dean of the College of Business and vice president for economic development at New Mexico State University



James B. Hunt Jr., former governor of North Carolina and chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education



David W. Breneman

"We've got a financial aid system that makes the IRS look like a dream in terms of its simplicity."
—David W. Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia



Charles E. M. Kolb

"My goal is to get this report in front of every CEO, every business leader in this country, because frankly, right now a lot of them think we're just fine."

—Charles E.M. Kolb, president, Committee for Economic Development

"In America today, it costs the average family nearly a quarter of their annual income to pay total education costs, after financial aid, for a year of community college."

—Joni Finney, vice president, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education



Joni Finney



Arturo Madrid

"We continue to do very well by the best. We continue to privilege the privileged in this society, and specifically in higher education. The true test is how we do by everybody else. The true test of a fair and just society, of a healthy society, is how we do by the least."

—Arturo Madrid, Distinguished Professor of Humanities at Trinity University, Texas



William Pound, National Conference of State Legislatures



Margaret Spellings

"Higher education has gone from being a 'nice to have' to a 'must have.'"

—U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

"Now about two-thirds (of students) graduate with debt, and the amount of that debt has increased dramatically; over the past decade it has increased by 50 percent after taking account of inflation."

—Robert Shireman, executive director, The Institute for College Access and Success



Robert Shireman

"Policymakers, practitioners and the public are hungry for benchmarks and assessments of how well their education investments and efforts are paying off."

—Virginia B. Edwards, editor, Education Week



Virginia B. Edwards

"In reforming what we're doing in higher education, while I agree with raising standards, I would like to convert that to raising expectations, and then having our principal goal be to get more people through the system."

—Robert H. McCabe, senior fellow, League for Innovation in the Community College



Robert H. McCabe

"We've got to improve performance with the commitment of money and people we have now in higher education, and then I think the public will respond with what is required to get to the next level."

—Paul E. Lingenfelter, president, State Higher Education Executive Officers



Paul E. Lingenfelter

"What is going to happen in higher education is international economies, other educational systems, are going to kick our butts."

—Thomas J. Tierney, chairman and co-founder, Bridgespan Group



Alan Wagner



Margaret Miller, Director, Center for the Study of Higher Education, University of Virginia

"U.S. performance of eighth-graders on recent international assessments does indicate some improvement, but the U.S. performance still stands somewhere in the middle of a large group of countries, including that group of countries that are advanced market economies to which we are most similar."

—Alan Wagner, State University of New York at Albany



Thomas J. Tierney

The Ten-Percent Solution

Texas' enrollment strategy remains contentious, as the state becomes increasingly multi-cultural

By Susan C. Thomson

AUSTIN

TEXAS INNOVATES. From the state that gave the world Dr. Pepper and the microchip also came the nation's first percentage plan for public university admissions, later adapted to their own purposes by California and Florida.

The original, Lone Star version of the plan requires the University of Texas here, and the state's 34 other four-year universities, to automatically admit all applicants ranking in the academic top ten percent of any of the state's high schools—public and private; small and large; urban, suburban and rural; white, black and Hispanic. The idea was conceived as a supposedly race-blind tool to ensure racial diversity on campus.

Almost a decade later, the ten-percent solution has transformed and ingrained itself into Texas' university admissions culture, and the state's universities have grown overall more racially diverse. But nobody is claiming that the law alone has made the difference—or that, in light of the state's long-term demographic trends, that difference will be enough.

Nor is there any disputing that this mechanistic, admission-by-number system, while opening the door for some students, has slammed it on others who, by conventional measures like grades and test scores, appear to be higher achievers. There's the rub, and the source of ongoing contention over the law, and its fairness, in an increasingly multi-cultural state.

The debate turns intensely political in the biannual meetings of the Texas Legislature. Previous sessions have seen unsuccessful attempts to limit the guarantee to a smaller percentage of top students,

restrict it to those who have taken college-prep courses, eliminate the promise to students of admission to their first-choice school, cap the percentage the University of Texas at Austin would have to accept, and scrap the plan altogether. A repeat performance featuring at least some of those same proposals is expected at the legislature's next get-together, which starts in January.

Pressure for change comes from two sources: UT-Austin, which has been swamped by ten-percent applicants, and the state's affluent suburbs, where high schools are geared to college preparation. Now, for admission to state universities, 90 percent of those schools' students must get in line behind the favored ten percent from all of the state's other schools of whatever quality.

"In these communities, people are very much against the ten-percent rule," said Jeff Pilchick, head counselor at Westlake High School, outside Austin's western limits, where 90 percent of students are white and 94 percent go to college. He speaks also from previous experience at academically oriented Highland Park High School in Dallas, and his point is seconded by Westlake principal Linda Rawlings, formerly at Clear Lake, a similar high school in the Houston area.

Clear across town, on the east side of Interstate 35, which slices through and divides the area somewhat economically, the ten-percent issue comes into sharper focus at Austin Independent School District's LBJ High School. Here is a two-in-one—a magnet school for top students from across the city, combined with a school for a neighborhood of small ranch houses that have seen better days. This arrangement of two high schools under one roof is unique in the state, and the combined student



PHOTOS BY JANA BIRCHUM, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

High school principal Patrick Patterson likes the ten-percent plan because it gives more students a chance to attend the University of Texas flagship campus in Austin.

body of about 1,700 is roughly one-third white, one-third Hispanic and one-third African American, according to principal Patrick Patterson.

Students from both groups take some of their classes together and mingle in extracurricular activities and in the halls, where Patterson is a cheerful presence, greeting and smiling on all alike and wearing a purple polo shirt—purple being the school's uniting, signature color.

Only for class rankings are the two student bodies kept entirely apart—a system Patterson concedes works to the advantage of the neighborhood students, and to the disadvantage of sometimes better prepared magnet students, when they apply to Texas state universities. The magnet students "might not be able to go to the University of Texas, but they're going to top schools" like Brown, Harvard, Stanford, Yale and MIT, he said. At the same time, the neighborhood students are getting a shot at the University of Texas that they didn't have before, he said. "From my perspective [the ten-percent plan] works because it's giving kids an opportunity to go."

When Texans think college, it's often UT-Austin that flashes first to mind. As Admissions Director Bruce Walker put it, "There is an expectation among Texas residents that they have a right to be at the University of Texas." Of late, more and more would-be Longhorns every year have been positively stampeding the university to exercise a right the ten-percent plan gives them. Among all UT-Austin freshmen from the state this fall, three-quarters are these must-admits.

"That's a very high percentage of your student body getting in under one single criterion," frustrating the university's ability to choose its students, said Walker. So, the university has backed legislative proposals that would limit its automatic admissions to somewhere around half of the total. Will the university do so again? Walker skirts the issue, saying only that that's not his decision.

"No question, they're going to come

back seeking a cap," said Gary Bledsoe, president of the state's NAACP. He's unsympathetic. "I think the University of Texas at Austin has overblown the impact of the top-ten-percent plan, and other folks out there have picked up the same dogma," he said. Though he is open to "reasonable" change, he said all proposals to date would have gutted a law that is "actually working for diversity" by leveling the playing field for top students from disadvantaged schools. "When you compete as best you can in your environment, why

While opening the door for some students, Texas has slammed it on others who, by conventional measures like grades and test scores, appear to be higher achievers.

shouldn't the state's best universities let you in?"

Bledsoe and Ana Yanez-Correa, legislative director of the state's League of United Latin American Citizens, take credit for jointly stalling all efforts to amend the law in 2005, and say they are braced to do it again in 2007, barring assurance of some quid pro quo, not previously forthcoming. "We said, 'What is the deal here? What are we getting back?'" said Bledsoe. As for those left-out suburban high school students, he added, "Too bad. Join the club. We've been struggling for generations about being excluded. These kids can afford to go to other schools."

It's not that either of their organizations has given up on affirmative action. In fact, Bledsoe and Yanez-Correa say they want that too, along with the ten-percent plan. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund also endorses this kind of belts-and-suspenders approach to diversity, as does state Senator Gonzalo



Texas State Senator Gonzalo Barrientos introduced the legislation making students in the top ten percent academically at each Texas public high school eligible for admission to UT-Austin and Texas A&M.

Barrientos. Affirmative action is fine, he said, but ten-percent adds to it “a solid methodology for continued fairness.”

The ten-percent plan was born as a fall-back strategy—after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in 1996 rejected the University of Texas Law School’s use of race in admissions decisions. The ruling put a chill on affirmative

Texas’ ten-percent plan was a fall-back strategy, born out of the urgency to come up with some way to enroll minorities in a post-affirmative action world.

action not just at the University of Texas but across the entire Fifth Circuit, consisting of Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

Texas alone moved to blunt the blow. Barrientos—a Tejano, or Mexican American, who delights in recounting his personal story of growing up doing farm labor with his migrant family and eventually finding his way to the University of Texas—recalls an urgency to come up with some way to enroll minorities in a post-affirmative action world. Although he eventually wrote the Senate version of the ten-percent bill, he said it was the product of many people’s thinking, especially David Montejano, a sociologist then at UT-Austin, now at the University of California at Berkeley.

The theory—and it was only that, because nothing like it had ever been tried—was that racial diversity would automatically result from admitting the best students from all of the state’s high schools, with their different racial compositions.

The legislature passed the ten-percent plan, and then-Governor George W. Bush signed it into law with a flourish in 1997. (“He took credit for my plan,” Barrientos, a Democrat, said with a mischievous twinkle.) The law went into effect with students entering college the next year, and it has survived—thrived even—since the Supreme Court’s decision three years ago opening the way for colleges to consider race, among other factors, in evaluating applicants. Walker said UT-Austin is doing that again in deciding how to fill its ever-shrinking share of slots not automatically claimed by top-ten-percent students.

Random interviews on the campus suggest that students are well aware, sometimes painfully so, of the ten-percent law and their own either-or status under it. Overall, they give it a failing grade. Those who made the charmed circle were more self-effacing than boastful about it. Both Lindsay Greer, from Garland, and Amit Bhatka, from Llano, said they knew many capable students who missed the cutoff and were not accepted. Bhatka went so far as to say that the rejects included “a lot of people who are a lot more intelligent” than he.

Students who had not qualified for the automatic pass were especially sensitive to

the slight, and were inclined to be defensive. One freshman admitted that she did not like the plan simply because she hadn’t qualified under it. Another freshman, Jamie Tamez, from Gregory, said, “I think it’s ridiculous because there are high schools that are difficult and high schools that are not so difficult.” Hers was among the hard ones, she said. “I could have gone to another high school and graduated in the top ten percent.”

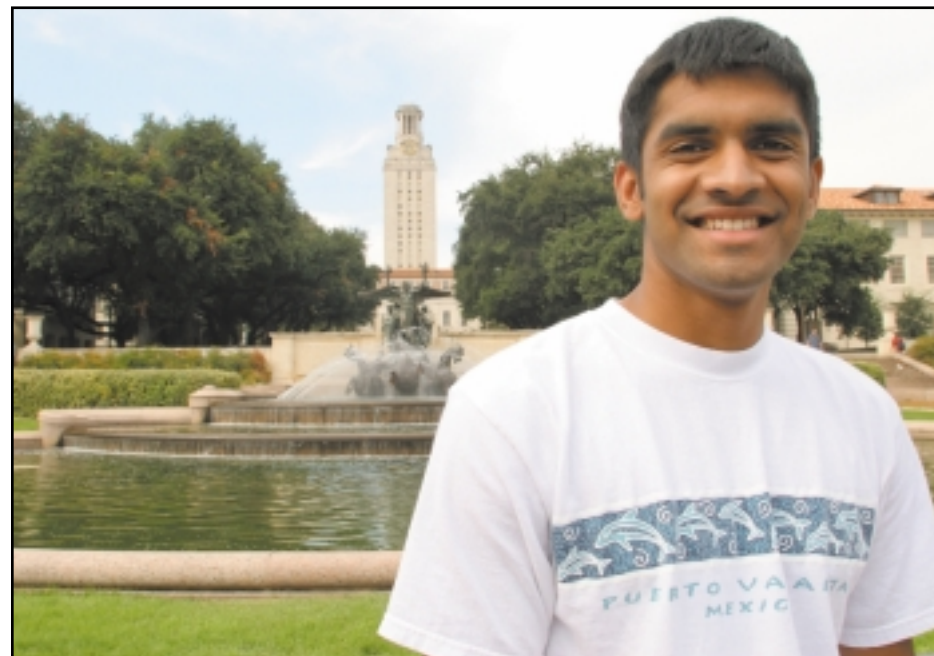
In casual conversations, several students at Texas A&M University echoed that lament, insisting that they would have made the top ten percent if only they had not taken such tough courses or gone to such rigorous high schools.

Texans tend to measure the law in terms of its effect on UT-Austin or Texas A&M. These are the state’s two flagship universities, its most selective in admissions, strongest in traditions, biggest in image, and highest in student demand. At nearly 50,000 students each, the two campuses account together for roughly 20 percent of all students at the state’s public universities and half of all of the top-ten-percent students who have enrolled under the law over the years.

One hundred flat Texas miles east of Austin, in more rural College Station, A&M goes now by initials that originally stood for “agricultural” and “mechanical.” Agriculture remains one of the university’s strongest programs, and students and alumni take glowing pride in being “Aggies.” A public high school guidance counselor in the Houston area, who asked not to be named because his school frowns on staff members talking to the press, described A&M as conservative in culture and UT-Austin as liberal. That makes A&M the tougher sell to minority students.

Although ten-percent students have made up a pretty steady half of all new A&M enrollees for several years, the university’s student body has remained roughly three-quarters white and ten percent Hispanic. And although A&M, like UT-Austin, practiced affirmative action before 1996, A&M has not returned to it.

Instead, as a race-neutral alternative,



Amit Bhatka, a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin, says the students who did not make the ten-percent cutoff included “a lot of people who are a lot more intelligent” than he.



Jeff Pilchick, head counselor at 90-percent white Westlake High School, in the Austin suburbs, says, “In these communities, people are very much against the ten-percent rule.”

A&M three years ago began seeking out and awarding scholarships to students that Alice Reinarz, assistant provost for enrollment, described as “first generation, low-income...from areas of the state that are low-income and not necessarily college-going cultures.”

To do that, the university beefed up its staff of recruiters and divided the state up among them. A&M graduate Eric Watson, for instance, became a recruiter. He travels the Brazos Valley, in south Texas, regularly visiting his assigned 60 high schools, some of them with only a few students in their graduating classes. He describes his job as pitching college in general and, in particular, A&M and the ten-percent plan, which, in his experience, has been “a motivator” for “students who never thought they could attend.”

Reinarz agrees. She called ten-percent “an educational incentive,” and said A&M unreservedly supports it. She added that the outreach effort that the university has coupled with it has borne fruit in the last few years, especially in the form of more

Hispanic recruits who, she believes, will soon begin to make a difference in the university’s overall racial profile.

UT-Austin has also been casting a bigger net to attract a broader economic and geographic pool of students. In 1999 the university identified 70 of the state’s rural and urban low-income-area high schools, previously underrepresented on campus, and began offering scholarships to their top-ten-percent graduates. The university measures its success in diversity partly by the number of Texas high schools its freshmen come from—798 in 2005, compared with 616 in 1996, out of a statewide total of about 1,500.

Walker said this outreach to a greater number of schools is the “single most important” of many things UT-Austin has

Random interviews of students suggest that they are well aware of the ten-percent law and their own either-or status under it. Overall, they give it a failing grade.

been doing over the past decade to increase diversity. Whatever the cause, the campus is more diverse now than it was before—58 percent white (down seven points), 14 percent Hispanic (up two points), and 15 percent Asian (up three points) at latest count.

Despite the ten-percent law and their outreach efforts, black enrollment at both UT-Austin and A&M has stayed stuck at about three percent, while historically black Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern continue to attract about 30 percent of all black students enrolled in the state’s public universities.

Like the rising tide that lifts all boats, rising enrollment in those 35 universities—

continued next page

PHOTOS BY JANA BIRCHUM, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK



Texas state demographer Steve Murdock believes the ten-percent plan has enabled more minorities, especially Hispanics, to attend the state's public universities.

from preceding page

a seven-year, 18 percent increase to half a million students in 2005, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board—has increased the statewide totals for students of every hue, blacks included. Overall, whites remain the majority—53 percent of the total in 2005, down from 61 percent when ten-percent became the rule. Blacks and Hispanics have gained, respectively, two points to 11 percent and three points to 22 percent of the sum, with Asians, international students and various others making up the rest.

Meanwhile, growing shares of Texas students are packing their bags for states beyond. A state-by-state, year-by-year analysis of students' interstate mobility by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, published in May, shows Texas to be a net exporter of college freshmen, with more of them leaving the state than entering it for all of its public and private colleges and universities, since the early '90s. Since 1996, the trend

Several students at Texas A&M insisted that they would have made the top ten percent if only they had not gone to such rigorous high schools.

has accelerated slightly to the state's net loss of 6,189 freshmen in 2004. The numbers were greater only for Maryland, Illinois and New Jersey.

Thomas G. Mortenson, the institute's policy analyst, said students' migration patterns reflect in general the relative attractiveness and unattractiveness of their in-state and out-of-state college options.

Texas Governor Rick Perry, George W. Bush's former lieutenant governor and his successor in the state's top job, has a different take on Texas' student drain. He has complained that other states are siphoning away strong Texas students who are not making the ten-percent cut.

What role, if any, Perry might play in the upcoming ten-percent debate is a matter of speculation. He has not spoken publicly on the law for some time, and his office declined to make him or any of his staff members available to comment on it for this article.

In a press release last year state Senator Jeff Wentworth, a Republican from San Antonio, declared for the opposition. Saying the law was "undermining our efforts to admit the best and brightest high school students to Texas' flagship universities," he called for its repeal. Previously he had simply advocated limiting it to the top ten percent of academically prepared students—a view akin to that of many who predicted early on that the law would bring to the universities too many students ill-prepared for the work. UT-Austin and A&M have now refuted that argument with in-house research showing that, as a group, their ten-percent students get higher grades, and are more likely to graduate, than their other students.

So much for what John Stevens, executive director of the Texas Business & Education Coalition, calls "the merit argument" against the ten-percent law. "These students have figured out how to be successful students even though they don't come from rich schools," he said. His organization, whose sponsors include Exxon, IBM and Southwestern Bell, has backed the ten-percent law before, and its board of directors voted last month to reaffirm its support.

In the past, advocates have also been able to count on a coalition of Democratic and Republican legislators from the rural and urban areas of the state, where the law has worked to students' advantage, to stand firm against all efforts to overturn or weaken it. Whether a similar support group will form out of whatever mix of senators and representatives results from November's election remains to be seen.

Royce West, a Dallas Democrat, chairman of the Senate's higher education subcommittee and coalition leader in the past, remains staunch. He said he wants to make certain the law survives and to find some solution—though he professes he has no idea what it might be—to UT-

Austin's particular objections. He foresees "good chances" on both scores.

Barrientos, retiring rather than running for re-election this year, is not so sure about the law's chances. He said he fears the opposition might be strong enough to

Texas A&M is seen as conservative in culture, while UT-Austin is liberal. That makes A&M the tougher sell to minority students.

strike the law down next time around. But, he cautioned, "If they would be foolish enough to do this, the (political) repercussions would be hard and long because over half of the state is now minority, and I'm not talking about undocumented aliens."

Texas became "majority minority" two years ago, joining Hawaii, California and New Mexico in the distinction of being a state where whites—Anglos, in Texas parlance—are outnumbered by a stew of other racial groups.

That's just half of the demographic story in this population pressure cooker of a state, which is growing rapidly in sheer numbers of people as well. Growth is an old story for Texas, which state demographer Steve Murdock says has been adding population faster than the nation as a whole every decade since it joined the union. This held true for the 1990s, when the nation's population was growing at a rate of 13.2 percent and Texas' swelled by 22.8 percent. Murdock foresees no letup, predicting that there will be anywhere from two-thirds to two and a half times more Texans in 2040 than there were in 2000. He reckons further that, as Hispanics are now the majority in the under-18 group, somewhere between 2025 and 2035, they will become the overall majority.

Everything is plus-size in Texas, including the challenge posed by the double whammy of rapid population growth and racial change, which has implications for every facet of Texas life, including higher education. In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board created a set of statewide goals called "Closing the Gaps by 2015." Among those goals was getting more students—especially more minority students—into Texas' colleges and universities, two- and four-year, public and private.

The board has now set its sights on a statewide total of 1.65 million students in all Texas higher education by 2015—481,000 more students than in 2005. According to the board's specific targets for racial diversity, 33,000 of those additional students should be black and almost 357,000 of them Hispanic. If Murdock projects correctly, the state's public universities alone need to brace for a population

boom of anywhere from 29 to 82 percent by 2040, compared with 2000. By that later date, he estimates, as many as two-thirds of their students could be "non-Anglo."

"There's no doubt but that the ten-percent plan has increased access (to the public universities) for minority students and rural students," Murdock said. Access remains key, in his view, because minority students, especially Hispanics, have by no means caught up. "If you don't close these educational gaps, Texas will become poorer and less competitive than it is today," he said, adding that catching up is going to take "a tremendous increase in capacity" in the state's public higher education system.

Dennis Jones, president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, which is working with the Governor's Business Council to set legislative goals for the upcoming session, also foresees a capacity crunch, especially given his sense that the Coordinating Board has underestimated the "huge number of additional students" needed to make Texas competitive.

A decade ago, as a law professor at UT-Austin, Douglas Laycock helped argue in court the university's case for affirmative action. He still prefers that over the ten-percent law as a tool for getting minorities into college, but he sees access as only one of many problems. "The state has to figure out a way to increase achievement levels in its population, or it is doomed," said Laycock, who moved this fall from UT-Austin to the University of Michigan. "We have to get more Hispanics into college. We have to get more into the flagships. And we have to get more to graduate." ♦

Susan C. Thomson is a former higher education reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.



The Texas Business and Education Coalition, including such influential companies as Exxon, IBM and Southwestern Bell, supports the ten-percent plan, says Executive Director John Stevens.

JANA BIRCHUM, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

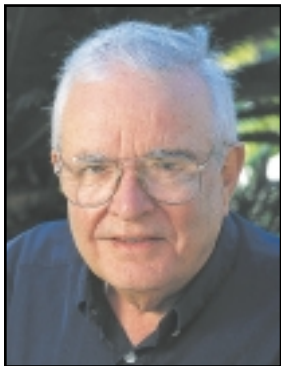
Reactions to the Spellings Commission Report

NATIONAL CROSSTALK asked nine experts who have followed higher education policy closely to comment on the recently released report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Their commentaries are presented here. On Page 8A, we reprint the letter Commission Chairman Charles Miller wrote to Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings at the completion of the commission's work. The full Commission report can be seen at the U.S. Department of Education website: <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/pre-pub-report.pdf>.

LANDMARK REPORT DESERVES THE ATTENTION OF ANYONE CONCERNED WITH THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

BY ROBERT ATWELL

THE REPORT of the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education is a document remarkable both for its findings and recommendations and for the fact that it is the product of 18 of the commission's 19 members (only one declined to sign) who are a very diverse group of educators, corporate leaders, a former governor and two higher education association leaders. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings is to be commended for appointing a diverse group where there was a high risk that agreement would not be possible. And the chairman, Charles Miller, deserves praise for bringing this very talented and accomplished group together around a landmark report which needs the attention of anyone concerned with the future of higher education.



While recognizing its strengths, the commission has identified and documented areas of needed improvement. Clearly the report was heavily influenced by the work of some of higher education's best policy analysts, aided by a very able staff. It is well-written and draws on substantial evidence to support its conclusions and recommendations.

The underlying theme of the report is that while U.S. higher education has been a success in many respects, it has become complacent and needs some serious change to meet the needs of the nation in the competitive global economy of the 21st century. While the report provides much evidence to support this theme and a number of recommendations for change, I was particularly impressed with several points:

- The proportion of those seeking postsecondary education has stalled, and minorities, particularly African Americans and Latinos, lag well behind whites in both access and success.
- The pipeline leading from college entry to graduation is much too leaky, again particularly true for minorities, and is an example of where we lag behind many other nations.
- The failure to align high school graduation and college admission and placement requirements is an illustration of the failure to create a seamless K-16 and beyond system.
- The need-based financial aid system, involving the federal and state governments and institutions, is overly complex, seriously underfunded, and needs a complete overhaul.
- The costs of operating colleges and universities are rising at

unsustainable rates, with few incentives for increasing productivity and plenty of incentives to raise student fees. One of the most dramatic recommendations in this area is the proposal that increases in student fees be tied to increases in family incomes.

- Colleges should be rated on the basis of performance rather than reputation or resources.

What is missing from the report?

First and foremost, the report provides no guide to what will now happen. One would have thought that there would be more guidance on the respective federal and state roles and a clear sense of who should be doing what to carry out the recommendations. That failure can, in the face of inevitable institutional resistance, simply result in yet another fine report gathering dust on the shelves. That would be a shame.

Second, the report says essentially nothing about graduate and professional education and research, as the Association of American Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges have correctly pointed out.

There are plenty of problems with graduate education which have directly caused some of the problems of undergraduate education, so this is a serious omission, despite the presence on the panel of two former research university presidents.

Third, the report does not address what some of us refer to as "mission creep," meaning the tendency of regional state universities to want to become national research universities, and for some private colleges to strive to become "research colleges." This phenomenon is quite central to the shortcomings which the commission has identified in its findings.

Fourth, the commission largely dropped any agenda on the need for accreditation reform, except for exhorting the accrediting bodies to be more transparent. An initial consulting report submitted to the commission drew such strong opposition, because it urged what would have been a largely federal accreditation system, that it was apparently easier to drop the idea of any reform of a system that badly needs attention.

Fifth, the commission's call for greater accountability gives no attention to the role of federal or state governments and institutional governing boards addressing accountability. Rather, one is left with the impression that better consumer information will solve the accountability problem.

What are the difficulties faced by the commission agenda?

The cherished diversity of our institutions means that agreement on public policy objectives is blocked by the sometimes conflicting objectives of the different sectors. That is at the heart of the chaotic federal and state student aid programs, and we have

seen how the commission's report, particularly its earlier drafts, provoked strong opposition by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, in contrast to the endorsements by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the American Association of Community Colleges.

The fact that federal and state policies on financial aid and other matters affecting colleges and universities are almost never coordinated contributes to confusion and to policy vacuums.

Higher education policy has been driven to a large extent by the providers, the colleges and universities and their associations, rather than by the public interest as reflected in actions of federal and state policymakers. Good public policy is more than the sum total of institutional interests. The decline in the influ-

THE PIPELINE LEADING FROM COLLEGE ENTRY TO GRADUATION IS MUCH TOO LEAKY, AND IS AN EXAMPLE OF WHERE WE LAG BEHIND MANY OTHER NATIONS.

ence of state policy agencies has been quite pronounced in recent years. Within institutions, the balkanization of governance in which disparate faculty interests often prevail over institution-wide governance, is another illustration of the difficulties faced by agents of change.

The higher education associations are much more effective at resisting change than presenting unified policy objectives. "Give us more money but cut back on the regulations" is often the outer limits of their agreement. In the face of their frequent disunity on federal policy, power gravitates to the congressional staffs, many of whom are unversed in the larger issues raised by Secretary Spellings' commission and others.

The endless reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act have sometimes reflected unity as long as every sector gets what it wants in the authorizations. But that unity falls apart when the inevitable appropriation battles begin. The refusal of David Ward, president of the American Council on Education, to sign the commission's report is a reflection of the disunity, since some of the associations with which ACE works most closely supported the report while others did not.

While Ward's political position was obviously difficult, it would have been helpful if he had stated at the time of the vote, or in his subsequent interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *continued next page*

from preceding page

Education, what he did not like in the commission report, rather than saying that his declination left him free to “contest” some aspects of the report. Contest what? Ward and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities are concerned about “one size fits all” solutions, but the commission report does not contain any such solution.

In fairness, Ward has elaborated some of his issues more recently, but with little indication of what the associations will now do in responding to the report and to Secretary Spellings’ recent speech.

What should happen now?

First, the secretary of education needs to state what parts of this report will be part of the Bush Administration agenda, as urged by commission member former Governor James Hunt. This is an opportunity for this administration to state its views on the federal role in higher education. According to news reports, the Department of Education is planning a series of open meetings around the country to explore the extent to which portions of the commission recommendations could be addressed administratively.

However, it is certainly the case that most of the sweeping reforms—such as a complete overhaul of student financial aid, including a very substantial increase in Pell grant funding and a reduction in student indebtedness—would require congressional

commission dropped.

Fourth, student aid reform requires the participation of the federal government (both the executive and congressional branches), state policymakers and institutional leaders. Here, the secretary of education should take the lead in convening a representative group of the stakeholders (which should also include the lenders), with a very specific charge to come up with overhaul proposals within a year. History would suggest that this is “mission impossible,” but the commission is right in its analysis and it would be tragic

to miss the opportunity to give reform a try.

As a final note, I suggest that the commission’s report be read in conjunction with Derek Bok’s seminal work, “Our Underachieving Colleges,” which is a thoroughly researched and brilliantly argued treatise on what needs to be done to address the shortcomings of that portion of undergraduate education centered on the liberal arts. ❖

Robert Atwell is former president of the American Council on Education.

THE CHERISHED DIVERSITY OF OUR INSTITUTIONS MEANS THAT AGREEMENT ON PUBLIC POLICY OBJECTIVES IS BLOCKED BY THE SOMETIMES CONFLICTING OBJECTIVES OF THE DIFFERENT SECTORS.

authorizations or appropriations or both.

In her recent speech, Secretary Spellings implied that she will address that issue in next year’s president’s budget.

Second, the foundations should support one or more serious projects designed to identify the causes of the unsustainable cost and student fee increases and suggest ways to address and remedy these causes.

Third, presidentially based associations should develop a plan for restructuring and reforming accreditation, a topic on which they have some possibility of achieving unity, but on which the

SPELLINGS COMMISSION REPORT IS LONG ON PRACTICALITY BUT SHORT ON VISION

BY DAVID W. BRENEMAN

TWO THINGS STAND out after several readings of the August 9 version of the Spellings Commission report: first, the report’s relentless focus on higher education as a marketplace, with students as consumers, colleges and universities as producers, and the economic contribution that postsecondary education and training make to society; second, the strong imprint of the work of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (which also publishes *National CrossTalk*), particularly the biennial *Measuring Up* series, on the approach and recommendations of the report. While I applaud the second point, I have mixed feelings about the first one.



The first point is evident in the report’s preamble and summary, where the commission lists its five goals for American higher education. Paraphrasing, these goals are: 1) A world-class system that contributes to economic prosperity; 2) One that is accessible to all; 3) One that is efficient and affordable; 4) One that provides workplace skills for a changing economy; and 5) One that is adaptable to changing technologies, demographic realities and globalization.

These are all fine goals, but it slights the non-economic, social benefits that we used to associate with higher education, including the cultivation of ethical and aesthetic capabilities, preparation for civic society and democratic government, the development of character and understanding of other cultures. One would never know from reading this report that the humanities continue to be an important part of the collegiate experience, and that a range of societal benefits have traditionally been assumed to be one result of an educated populace. The report is long on practicality but short on vision.

THE REPORT PLACES EMPHASIS ON SERVICE TO CITIZENS RATHER THAN ON STATUS, PRESTIGE AND COMPETITION AMONG INSTITUTIONS.

That being said, on the practical level where the report resides, I find little to fault in its findings and recommendations. The four key areas addressed are access, affordability, quality and accountability, a set of issues similar to the performance categories of the National Center’s *Measuring Up* reports. In both cases, emphasis is placed on service to citizens rather than on status, prestige and competition among institutions. Indeed, one could argue that much of what has passed for state policy toward higher education traditionally has been about institutions—how many, what type, where they are located, how they are supported, and how resources are allocated among them—rather than about students.

Both reports shift our attention away from institutional discussion and debate and toward potential students who seek educational opportunity, but who encounter barriers (such as poor preparation, lack of information about how to navigate the system, and an inability to pay the increasing costs of attendance). I consider this shift of perspective to be particularly wholesome and warranted, as the forces that accentuate institutional concerns are exceedingly strong, and need the counterbalance that these reports provide.

The Findings section of the Spellings Commission report will hardly surprise anyone who has been following the *Measuring Up* reports, published since 2000. The country has invested significantly in improving K–12 education, and while there have been gains in academic preparation, a substantial percentage of young people still do not complete high school, and remedial programs are still needed in most colleges and universities. Furthermore, the participation rate has not increased for more than a decade, and the completion rate remains distressingly low.

Meanwhile (and probably linked causally to the low completion rates), college tuition has continued to increase faster than family income, forcing some students to drop out and others to work more hours than is advisable. By any conceivable measure, affordability of college has declined over recent decades, resulting in the large number of failing grades assigned to the states by *Measuring Up*.

One of the tensions in the policy debates on affordability is the extent to which declining state support has been the culprit, forcing institutions to raise tuition sharply, versus the view that inefficiency is the real culprit, with lax management and an institutional “arms race” for prestige driving costs far higher than they need be. The Spellings Commission report straddles this debate, casting aspersions on all parties. The report does not support any form of federal price control, however, an approach that several members

ONE WOULD NEVER KNOW FROM READING THIS REPORT THAT THE HUMANITIES CONTINUE TO BE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE.

of Congress have threatened to implement if they could figure out how to do it. In this instance, the report wisely opts for pragmatism over ideology.

Several of the recommendations are controversial within the higher education community, including the inevitable push to simplify the many programs providing federal student aid (a hearty perennial, never achieved); support for a student unit record system; and encouragement for measures of college-level learning, beyond each student’s grade point average.

In the area of federal student aid, the recommendation to increase Pell grants over five years to 70 percent of the average in-state tuition at public, four-year institutions, is surely something that the higher education community can support, although the cost is likely to prevent it from happening. The awareness that more need-based student aid is required, however, is an encouraging sign, and should give the community something on which to build.

The student unit record system makes extraordinarily good sense, and it pains me to see the idea attacked by some members of the community through the red-herring argument of privacy protection. If we are ever to understand the flow of students among institutions, and how they finance their education, we have to have such data. One hopes that the report will bring this issue to life again, and allow the community to focus on reasonable concerns of costs and implementation, and not on specious arguments designed to upset presidents of private colleges.

The focus on new ways to measure college-level learning is a movement that is upon us, and rather than resist, it is gratifying to see that several of the higher education associations are exploring ways to undertake such efforts. One hopes that such efforts will be coordinated with the accrediting agencies so that a common approach is found.

The Bush administration is far from universally respected in the higher education community, but it would be a serious mistake to dismiss this report for that reason. In my judgment, this is a serious and thoughtful report, not without flaws, but well worth taking seriously. I hope it receives the attention it deserves. ❖

David W. Breneman is dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia.

COLLABORATION, FROM PRESCHOOL THROUGH GRADUATE SCHOOL, IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

BY VIRGINIA B. EDWARDS AND LYNN OLSON

WITH BOTH higher education and K-12 education now under the proverbial microscope, it's an opportune time for the two sectors to work together to find common ground based on their mutual interests. After all, our students will eventually become your students. And tomorrow's elementary and secondary school teachers are attending higher education institutions today.



That's why we agree with the Commission on the Future of Higher Education's conclusion: "The nation can no longer afford to have K-12 and higher education systems operate independently of one another."

The costs of the current fragmentation are clear, particularly from young people's point of view. Today's high school students overwhelmingly report that they aspire to a postsecondary education. Yet, only seven in ten graduate from high school within four years. And of high school graduates entering four-year colleges, only about six in ten earn a bachelor's degree within six years.

The figures are far worse for poor, minority and first-generation college students, and for those enrolled in two-year institutions.

The United States can no longer afford such a leaky pipeline. As *Measuring Up 2006* reported, younger Americans are falling behind young people of other nations in college enrollment and completion rates. While the United States is still a world leader in the proportion of Americans ages 35 to 64 with a college degree, it ranks seventh on this measure for 25- to 34-year-olds.

At *Education Week*, we are committed to better understanding and strengthening the connections between K-12 education and the larger constellation of systems and institutions that both shape elementary and secondary education and that are shaped by it.

That's why we are in the midst of "re-imagining" *Quality Counts*, our flagship annual report card on public education in the 50 states, to focus more attention on the transition points between K-12 education and the systems that come before and after it in young people's lives: namely, early childhood education, postsecondary education and training, teacher preparation, and the needs

of the business sector for economic and workforce development.

If you think about it, state education policy has largely been thought of in three separate buckets: early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, and postsecondary education and training. It's only the young people themselves who experience the system as a continuous—or discontinuous—whole.

In essence, *Quality Counts* spent its first decade helping to shed light into the black box of K-12 education policy. For ten years now, we have devoted ourselves to better understanding the states' role within the confines of the K-12 system. And we have charted the relationship between gains in student achievement at the state level and the pursuit of a standards-based education agenda.

Going forward, we've set our sights on developing a more holistic view: one that also looks at issues of school readiness, college and workforce readiness, affordability and access to higher education. And we're interested in measuring U.S. education policy in the context of international comparisons.

As the Spellings Commission argued, the United States must commit to an "unprecedented effort" to expand college access and success by, among other strategies, ensuring that students are better prepared for college and removing non-academic barriers to college attendance and completion.

The report urges higher education to assume responsibility for working with the K-12 system to ensure that teachers are adequately trained, that curricula are aligned, and that entrance standards are clear. It encourages early assessment initiatives that determine whether students are on track for college, and it calls for the creation of clearer pathways so that students can move seamlessly toward their educational and career aspirations without encountering unnecessary barriers. It also recommends support for initiatives that help states hold both high schools and colleges accountable for teaching their students and teaching them well.

The good news is that interest in these cross-sector issues is growing. School-readiness standards are a major topic in early childhood education, as are cost-benefit analyses to determine how investments in the early years pay off. Debates over strategies for high school reform have increasingly referenced the issues of college- and workforce-readiness. Efforts to address the tension between school preparation and the high need for remedial courses once students get to college are taking hold. And the business

community is ensuring that the focus on national competitiveness explicitly links the quality of K-12 and postsecondary education to the continued viability of the nation's workforce in a world that has gone global and technological.

States are getting the message, too. In the past decade, 30 states have created what are often called "P-16" or "P-20" councils or initiatives designed to increase collaboration across the various levels of education, from preschool through graduate school. Unfortunately, many of these initiatives currently lack the authority or the teeth to make much of a difference.

At the same time—and this is good news, too—the appetite for education data, research and information is strong and growing. Policymakers, practitioners and the public are hungry for benchmarks and assessments of how well their education investments and efforts are paying off.

Moving forward, *Quality Counts* is committed to tracking such bridge-spanning efforts and their results. By collecting data across now-fragmented sectors of the "education-and-workforce-develop-

AS THE SPELLINGS COMMISSION ARGUED, THE UNITED STATES MUST COMMIT TO AN "UNPRECEDENTED EFFORT" TO EXPAND COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS.

ment" enterprise, and by providing a clear framework for these indicators, the policy debate can be changed in ways that will ultimately benefit states and our nation's young people.

For the past decade, the K-12 education system has benefited from being under the policy microscope: subject to increasing pressure for higher expectations, accountability and results. Increasingly, higher education is under the same sorts of pressure. It would be unfortunate if some of the lessons learned from the K-12 experience were not applied as America rethinks its higher education policies and practices. Perhaps we have something to learn from each other. ♦

Virginia B. Edwards is the editor of *Education Week* and *Quality Counts*, an annual report card that has tracked state policy indicators in K-12 education for the past decade. Lynn Olson is the newspaper's managing editor for special projects and the project editor of *Quality Counts*.

2.7 CHEERS FOR MILLER COMMISSION

BY CHESTER E. FINN JR.

CHARLES MILLER is one of my heroes. He's unafraid to say that the American higher education emperor, though plenty rich, is clad in tattered finery with far too many rips, moth holes, stains and patches.



The commission that Margaret Spellings asked him to chair wasn't quite so gutsy. Its final report, though clear, strong and constructive, pulls a few punches, blunts a few criticisms and is judiciously vague on how exactly to proceed on such sensitive matters as institutional costs and productivity, financial aid and the assessment of student learning.

That's true of almost all commissions, to be sure, and Miller surely prodded his to go further than most by making public an exceptionally eloquent first draft that his colleagues then had to

soften—in public view. The final product doesn't rival "A Nation at Risk," whose clarion call has inspired more than two decades of serious reform in K-12 education, but it is an important piece of work that sets an agenda worth following.

Whether anyone will follow it, however, depends mainly on leadership from government, business or the higher education industry itself.

The latter is least likely. What passes for leadership in U.S. higher education today is complacent, defensive and greedy, more interested in protecting current turf, revenues, enrollments and reputations than in spearheading important changes that might boost quality, efficiency and American competitiveness.

Government leadership means that key politicians must embrace this cause and make it their own. (In K-12 education, state governors were key.) It is too early to be sure, but so far there has not exactly been a clamor of interest in Miller's report from the statehouses, Capitol Hill, the White House or even the Department of Education. Perhaps that will change when he formally presents it to Secretary Spellings, but one early sign is wor-

THE COMMISSION'S FINAL REPORT, THOUGH CLEAR, STRONG AND CONSTRUCTIVE, PULLS A FEW PUNCHES, BLUNTS A FEW CRITICISMS AND IS JUDICIOUSLY VAGUE.

rying: the Education Department's announcement that it will hold "hearings" around the country on higher education policy during the autumn and might appoint stakeholder-heavy "committees" to ponder these topics.

Decades of dreary experience prove that public hearings of this sort mainly attract "stakeholders," not reformers, and the one thing they can agree on is that things are pretty darn swell the way they are today, though more money would surely be welcome. Spellings will likely find that such hearings and committees make it even harder for her to embrace the Miller

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Commission's most important findings and recommendations, should she be so inclined. (They are old friends from Texas, of course.)

Perhaps there is hope for the "business community," in light of its mounting anxiety about American competitiveness in world markets and our weakening prowess in key fields such as science, engineering and math. But no one in particular has stepped up to the higher education reform components of this predicament; most individual tycoons are faithful trustees of their favorite colleges; the big organizations that matter (Business Roundtable, Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers, etc.) are still obsessed with K-12 reform; and change-minded education philanthropies (e.g. Gates, Broad, Carnegie and Hewlett) rarely look beyond high school.

Miller will do his own considerable best to flog the commission's findings and recommendations, and he enjoys the credibility, the stamina and the wherewithal to do plenty. But not even Archimedes, solo, could move the entire world, despite his quest for a suitable fulcrum.

The commission's great overarching finding, akin to 1983's warning that the nation was at risk due to a "rising tide of mediocrity" in its schools, is that America is losing its global pre-eminence in higher education as its institutions grow "mature," smug and self-absorbed, while other countries gain on us and surpass us on key indicators. "History is littered with examples of industries," the report correctly notes, "that, at their peril, failed to respond to—or even to notice—changes in the world around them, from railroads to steel manufacturers." U.S. high-

er education institutions, the commissioners warn, risk "falling into the same trap, seeing their market share substantially reduced and their services increasingly characterized by obsolescence."

This glum alarm—echoed by Jim Hunt and Garrey Carruthers in the National Center's excellent *Measuring Up 2006* report

THE COMMISSION'S GREAT OVERARCHING FINDING IS THAT AMERICA IS LOSING ITS GLOBAL PRE-EMINENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AS ITS INSTITUTIONS GROW "MATURE," SMUG AND SELF-ABSORBED.

card—is followed by seven general findings and a half dozen broad recommendations, amplified in 41 specifics.

All deserve serious attention, but to my eye the most important of them address institutional productivity, quality, competitiveness, transparency and accountability. These six recommendations are especially powerful:

- Improve institutional cost management through the development of new performance benchmarks designed to measure and improve productivity and efficiency. Also, better measures of costs should be provided to enable consumers and policymakers to see institutional results in the areas of academic quality, productivity and efficiency.

- Policymakers and accrediting organizations should work to eliminate regulatory and accreditation barriers to new models in

higher education that will increase supply and drive costs down.

- The Department of Education should collect data and provide information in a common format so that interested parties can create a searchable, consumer-friendly database that provides access to institutional performance and aggregate student outcomes.

- The results of student learning assessments, including value-added measurements that indicate how much students' skills have improved over time, should be made available to students and reported in the aggregate publicly.

- Accreditation agencies should make performance outcomes the core of their assessment, as a priority over inputs or processes.

- A high school degree should signify that a student is college- and/or work-ready.

There's plenty more, all of it needed, much of it urgent. The risk, of course, is that the very scale of this reform challenge is so daunting, and its moving parts so numerous and intertwined, that few will have the vision and tenacity to tackle it at all.

If we don't, however, trouble lies ahead. It won't be a sudden collapse. It will be gradual erosion, diminution, enervation, leading slowly but inexorably to exhaustion and mediocrity for the U.S. higher education enterprise and peril for the nation itself.

Miller knows that well. Most of his fellow commissioners agree with most of it. But what about their audience? ❖

Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

THE SPELLINGS COMMISSION REPORT LACKS VISION, SCOPE AND SPECIFICITY

BY ARTHUR LEVINE

BLUE RIBBON commission reports on the condition of higher education have been a periodic phenomenon in the decades since World War II. Three stand out for promoting national debate and influencing public policy—the 1971 Newman Commission report, the 1967–80 Carnegie Commission/Council reports, and the 1947 Truman Commission report. The Spellings Commission report compares unfavorably with these. It lacks the vision of the Newman Commission report, the scope of the Carnegie reports, and the specificity of the Truman Commission report.



VISION

The Spellings Commission succeeds best at identifying six major challenges facing higher education—the need to expand access, enhance affordability, cut costs, restructure existing financial aid programs, raise the quality of teaching and learning, and increase accountability. These are very real problems, but the report is shortsighted in the remedies it proposes.

In 1828, the faculty of Yale, faced with government criticism and a nation undergoing an economic transformation, much like that described by the Spellings Commission today, wrote their own report. It asked how much Yale needed to change—a lot or a little? The authors said this was the wrong question. The right question was what is the purpose of a college? The Spellings Commission did not answer this question, which is neither esoteric, nor merely philosophical today.

The world of postsecondary education is undergoing a revolution. There are now not-for-profit and for-profit universities, corporate universities, online universities and international universities. College instruction is being offered by museums,

symphony orchestras and publishing companies. The largest university in the country is traded on NASDAQ. The options available to students are multiplying. Given these realities, what should constitute America's system of higher education? What types of institutions are included?

There are brick, click, and brick-and-click universities. What mix of these things does the country need?

We have the technological capacity today to eliminate the traditional textbook, to offer interactive virtual classrooms, and to provide instruction at any time and any place, 24 hours a day. At the same time, the Sunbelt is experiencing a tidal wave of student growth and lacks the campuses to accommodate it. The new majority of college students—older than 22, part-time, and working—generally come to campus just to attend classes. Under these circumstances, to what extent do we still need the physical plant called a college? How many more campuses should the country build? Should they look like traditional colleges? How much higher education should be delivered via new technologies?

Given the extraordinary diversity of alternatives available to students in terms of the length, subject matters, pedagogies and methods of assessment, does the system of credits based on hours of instruction continue to make sense? Will it in the future? Would a transcript of competencies be educationally superior?

The Spellings Commission didn't pose these questions beyond saying, "We want postsecondary institutions to adapt to a world altered by technology, changing demographics, and globalization, in which the higher-education landscape includes new providers and new paradigms, from for-profit universities to distance learning." It didn't offer a useful vision of higher education's purpose, which would provide a foundation for raising these questions about higher education's future.

Instead, the commission called for "a world-class higher education system that creates new knowledge, contributes to economic prosperity and global competitiveness, and empowers citizens." That system would also solve the challenges of cost

reduction, access and quality instruction while teaching workplace skills. The report did not explain what "world class" means, what knowledge universities should create, how universities should contribute to economic prosperity, how they should empower citizens, or what workplace skills should be taught in higher education. It did not discuss whether all institutions should do the same things and, if not, how they should be differentiated. Should differentiation continue to be based on selectivity and degrees awarded?

In sum, the Spellings Commission did not offer a vision of what higher education needs to become to meet the profound changes facing the nation.

SCOPE

The six problems identified by the commission, though important, are not discrete; they are interconnected. The primary

THE CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION ARE MUCH GREATER THAN THE SIX IDENTIFIED BY THE SPELLINGS COMMISSION.

challenge before higher education is to make the transition from a national industrial society to an international, information economy. The six challenges are a product of the transition. Access has become even more urgent in an information economy in which decent jobs require the highest levels of skills and knowledge in history, and the nation needs a better educated population to compete in a global marketplace and to sustain a democratic society. This is exacerbated because America has changed demographically; the location of our institutions of higher education does not match our population's movements and growth.

Increasing costs also reflect the change. Among other factors driving up expenses are new technologies, the rising salaries of knowledge workers (professors and technology staff, among

others), redesigning libraries and other facilities for the information age, rebuilding the campus infrastructure for a high technology era, and providing services to an increasingly diverse student body.

Affordability is an issue owing to the rising cost of college, but also because improving access increasingly involves low-income students. The current financial aid system, with its inefficiencies, inconsistencies and inadequate funding, needs to be rethought in order to advance access and affordability.

The call to improve student learning flows directly from changes in the economy and technology. Industrial economies focus on establishing uniformity in process—four years on campus, four courses a term, instruction for three hours a week for fifteen weeks a semester. The emphasis is on teaching and time spent in the classroom. In contrast, information economies are concerned with outcomes—what students learn, not what they are taught. This shift is turning all that goes on in the classroom on its head. Plus, new technologies promise to overthrow traditional methods of teaching and learning.

Accountability is simply the institutional result of the shift to a focus on outcomes. Colleges and universities are being asked for the first time in history to demonstrate what it is they are

achieving in terms of student performance, graduation rates and a host of other indicators.

The point is this: The challenges facing higher education are much greater than the six identified by the Spellings Commission.

SPECIFICITY

The commission's recommendations lack the specificity to give them meaning and power. For instance, they call for "America's colleges and universities [to] embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement," and to increase "the quality of learning outcomes and the economic value of a college education." They propose that the nation commit itself "to an unprecedented effort to expand higher education access and success by improving student preparation and persistence, addressing non-academic barriers and providing significant increases in aid to low-income students."

Without greater specificity, it is not clear what needs to occur and how it will be accomplished. For example, the report recommends "every student in the nation should have an opportunity to pursue postsecondary education." But it doesn't translate this into real numbers of students who should be

expected to attend higher education, as the Truman Commission did. It doesn't explain: What number of institutions do we need to accomplish this; what types of institutions do we need; who should pay; how much should they pay; who is responsible for making this happen (institutions, states, federal government, or other); what specifically do they need to do, by what date, and how much it will cost?

Without these specifics, the Spellings Commission's recommendations are aspirations, good thoughts. With specifics, the commission could be offering the nation a much needed plan.

CONCLUSION

The Spellings Commission should be commended for its year of study, its identification of six important challenges facing higher education, and its ability to reach a consensus. The commission can provide an even greater service to the country if it builds on this body of work by enlarging its vision, expanding its scope, and offering the nation a plan to guide the future. ❖

Arthur Levine is president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENTS DO TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

BY BRIDGET TERRY LONG

AFTER MONTHS of testimony and debate, we now have the final report from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Many responses to the report have focused on its call for the assessment of learning, accountability measures, and increased cost control by institutions. There certainly are important questions about what institutions could do to more effectively and efficiently serve their students. I, however, choose to use this space to focus on what the government could do to improve access and success in higher education.



When approaching the issue of possible government action, we often simplify the barriers to attaining a postsecondary degree into two categories: financial and academic. However, there is growing acknowledgement that a lack of information, as well as misinformation, are major impediments as well. Research documents that high school students have very little understanding of college prices, financial aid opportunities, the academic requirements for college, and admissions procedures.

Focusing more specifically on financial aid, the commission concluded that some students "don't enter college because of inadequate information and rising costs, combined with a confusing financial aid system." The commission emphasized that "our financial aid system is confusing, complex, inefficient, [and] duplicative." Whether because of the complexity of the system or the lack of information about the availability of aid, the American Council on Education estimates that 850,000 students who would have been eligible for financial aid in 2000 did not complete the necessary forms to receive such aid.

As we approach the thirty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Pell grant next year, we must ask ourselves why awareness of government aid programs is so low and why so few students understand how to access them. It is not good enough merely to create a program—the implementation, design and marketing of the program must acknowledge the realities of the target population and seek to minimize the confusion and time needed to access the benefit.

The commission's report calls "for consolidating programs, streamlining processes, and replacing the Free Application for

Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) with a much shorter and simpler application." This is likely a step in the right direction, but how much further could we go? What concrete steps could the federal government take?

First consider concrete ways to simplify the process. According to a 1999 study by Thomas Kane, family income and family size account for nearly two-thirds of the variance in the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) as determined by the Federal need-analysis system. Today, these two factors would probably explain even more of the variation, because housing assets are no longer included in the calculation. Of course there are tradeoffs with this approach: The more information we collect, the better we are able to approximate the "true" ability to pay. While there might be an efficiency loss from simplifying the application and criteria, we already know that we are suffering losses due to the high transaction costs (i.e., information and time) associated with the current FAFSA.

Not only is the process complex, but it is redundant. Even the lowest-income students, who have already established their eligibility for other federal means-tested programs like welfare, food stamps, and free or reduced-price lunches, must complete the arduous process. Clearly these students would be eligible for federal student aid. Is there a way to capitalize on the information the government already has? Using information from other federal offices, the Department of Education could identify thousands of low-income students who would be eligible for the Pell grant.

The idea for a notification program develops from a successful federal financial aid policy that existed several decades ago. The Social Security Student Benefit program gave 18- to 22-year-old children of Social Security beneficiaries support while they were enrolled full-time in college. At its peak, it provided grants totaling \$3.3 billion annually to one out of every ten college students. Eligible students were notified by mail, and the process of accepting the benefit was simple. The program was so successful that when it was eliminated in 1982, Susan Dynarski estimated students who formerly would have been eligible for the benefit were five percentage points less likely to attend college.

The fact is that the government is able to identify families by income, and could use this information more effectively to overcome some of the informational barriers. A slightly different reform would be to issue annual aid eligibility reports similar to what we receive from the Social Security administration.

Sending a signal to students early about the possibility of financial support for college could positively impact decisions about academic preparation. In essence, information could help address both financial and academic barriers. This reform would also address issues with the late timing of the FAFSA, another problem noted by the commission.

It is also important to note that we are in a larger world, and multiple countries are trying to tackle similar issues. What could we learn from ongoing international experiments with financial aid, such as income-contingent loans in Australia?

Financial aid is not a cure-all to the problems facing students as they try to access a higher education. More money is needed to help students overcome the significant and substantial monetary barriers to a college degree. But what else could the government do? Are the programs that currently exist functioning properly to meet their goals?

This is certainly not a time for complacency. Although much of the population has been convinced to focus on issues of access in terms of moral responsibility and the ideals of equal opportunity and meritocracy, we are at a moment in time when these issues have become an economic imperative. Technological change and global competition have changed the labor market to one that is dependent on all citizens having higher-level skills. The functioning of the nation depends not on a tal-

NOTIFYING STUDENTS EARLY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR COLLEGE COULD POSITIVELY IMPACT DECISIONS ABOUT ACADEMIC PREPARATION.

ented tenth, third, or half, but instead the engagement of individuals from all backgrounds and segments of society.

Those who are not convinced by these arguments should consider the tax implications of having significant numbers shut out of higher education. Giving up on people who are 18 or 25 or 30 years old translates into decades of government dependency.

So the question I have as we see the reactions to the commission's report is, What will be the government's response? Problems have been identified. It is now time for action. ❖

Bridget Terry Long is an assistant professor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

BY CHARLES B. REED

THE REPORT of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education recognizes two significant realities: one, that American higher education must face many important issues in order to maintain global economic competitiveness; and two, that the value of higher education has never been greater in our society. For these reasons, American colleges and universities must learn to adapt accordingly.



The commission's initial draft directed a great deal of criticism at higher education, and many critics of the recommendations have focused on that rough draft as the foundation for their dissatisfaction with the commission's final results. However, it was always my hope that the commission would come forward with some "big ideas" to challenge higher education on a lot of entrenched issues. Fortunately, the recommendations address many of these important concerns and challenges.

ACCESS

First, the recommendations recognize that a new national commitment must be made to expanding access and student success, especially for underrepresented student populations. In fact, I believe this is one of the biggest challenges facing higher education today. The numbers of first-generation and underrepresented minority students are growing too quickly for us to keep up with them through our traditional and somewhat passive recruitment methods. The commission is correct in saying that

THE COMMISSION IS CORRECT IN SAYING THAT WE NEED A COMMITMENT OF STATE AND POSSIBLY FEDERAL INCENTIVES TO PROVIDE SEAMLESS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

we need a commitment of state and possibly federal incentives to provide seamless educational programs between high schools, colleges and universities. But universities themselves have to be willing to step outside their traditional comfort zones as well.

By way of example, the California State University's Early Assessment Program (an 11th grade test tied to the California

Standards Test that gives students an early signal about college readiness) has become a model for pre-college preparation and outreach. Cal State has also made waves with its "Super Sunday" college information sessions at African American churches in northern and southern California, reaching more than 30,000 participants. These efforts demonstrate that going beyond the traditional "the door is open if you want to come in" attitude is an important step toward reaching students who might not otherwise get on the right track for college.

FINANCIAL AID

Second, the recommendations advocate for a complete reform of the current financial aid system. The potential value of these recommendations is that future financial aid funding could be distributed based more on student needs than institutional needs. For example, published "net prices" (advocated as a tool for better consumer information in another recommendation), could be used instead of inflated "sticker prices" in financial aid programs to provide more resources to needy students attending lower-cost institutions. This would force higher-cost institutions to rethink their reliance on inflated "sticker pricing," thus slowing the tuition and fee growth that is causing much public concern.

Beyond cost issues, one of the most important improvements in today's complex financial aid system would be the simplification of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Time after time, the complexity of this form becomes a barrier for those students who are most in need of assistance. The commission rightly suggests that the application process can be substantially streamlined.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Next, as the report points out, there are significant shortcomings in the current accreditation system at a time when there is growing public demand for increased accountability and transparency.

Accreditation could be improved if each university were required to concretely assess its own value-added contributions. One important effort on this front is the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), a national effort to assess the quality of undergraduate education by directly measuring student learning outcomes. The Council for Aid to Education (on whose board I serve)

has created this performance-based assessment model to assess student ability and learning in critical thinking, writing and synthesizing skills. The measures are focused on skills that students will need as they graduate and enter the work force, and will provide clear signals to students at much earlier points in their education. Any new measurement system that we undertake needs

this kind of clarity and purpose-driven focus.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The commission report also advocates a robust culture of transparency and accountability throughout higher education that would make widespread comparative information available. This would enhance institutional accountability as well as provide important decision-making information that does not exist for the general public today.

This directive is raising serious concerns among the accrediting bodies, private institutions, and many leading higher education organizations. However, if policy makers actually knew and compared average per-student cost increases over the last two decades they would discover drastic differences and increasing disparities in efficiencies between universities. These kinds of comparisons would help the public to have a better understanding of the value these institutions add through education.

INNOVATION

On the subject of innovation, the report rightly calls attention to the most glaring flaws of the traditional academic program—the fact that the physical plant is underused, and that the courses are frequently targeted only to full-time, site-based students. In fact, many institutions are still working on essentially the same schedule they used a century ago, with mid-week, mid-day, classroom-based instruction. How ironic that many universities study the science and art of innovation but still have not found a way to integrate it into their operations.

At a time when we are facing more competition than ever from for-profit institutions and abroad, it is time for us to learn from our colleagues who have found new ways to reach people and perform jobs more efficiently. Our curriculum also needs to reflect more of what is going on in the outside world, including team-building, interdisciplinary collaborations, and skilled communications.

ENDNOTE: SUPPORT FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Finally, there are a number of important recommendations for state and federal policymakers to consider, including more widespread use of educational technologies, relief from regulatory burdens, and a continued commitment to the support of public higher education. Even though universities may be on board for any number of changes, we cannot make these changes alone. We will need the strongest possible commitment from the legislators and policymakers who have the power to create an environment where students will flourish. It is my hope that these recommendations will not go unheeded. ♦

Charles B. Reed is chancellor of the 23-campus California State University system.

THE SPELLINGS COMMISSION GOT IT RIGHT

BY ALFREDO G. DE LOS SANTOS JR.

AFTER READING the report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education appointed in 2005 by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, I must confess that I agree completely with the commission's findings. As well, I have no disagreement with the commission's goals. To some degree, I have been surprised at the reaction to the commission's recommendations. But, I guess I should not be. Given the magnificent diversity and variety of the institutions of postsecondary education in this country, I think it would be impossible for any group to recommend changes



that all of us would accept.

In this space, I want to do three things: to give my opinion of some of the findings of the commission; to comment on a few of the commission's recommendations; and to share my ideas concerning some of the reactions.

MY VIEW OF THE COMMISSION'S FINDINGS

Perhaps the most important point the commission made is that the United States is falling behind when compared with other countries. The latest national report card, *Measuring Up 2006*, by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (which also publishes *National CrossTalk*), clearly shows that the postsecondary educational systems in a number of countries are performing better than we are. We rank eighth in the percent of adults ages 25 to 34 who have earned at least an associate's degree. We rank fourth in the percent of adults 18 to 24 who are enrolled in college. And we rank sixteenth in the total

number of college degrees or certificates completed per 100 students enrolled.

The second point on which I want to focus is the issue of affordability. As shown in *Measuring Up*, a total of 43 states earned an F in this category. Only two states, California and Utah, earned a C. In effect, postsecondary education is not accessible for a growing number of families; the percentage of family income needed for one family member to enroll is too high. Even community colleges have priced themselves out of the market for families with incomes in the two lowest quintiles, the group that perhaps needs the most help and support.

This, then, leads me to the issue of financial aid. The commission pointed out, correctly, that the financial aid system is so complex that students even have problems completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Another important point is that the "buying power" of Pell grants has declined; the grant now covers a smaller percentage of students' costs than it did ten

or fifteen years ago. The third point is that the focus of financial aid has made a dramatic shift in recent years from need-based to other criteria. In some states, the financial aid programs provide support to students from middle-class and upper-middle-class families, who really do not need such assistance. The students from the lowest quintiles in terms of family income are not supported at all.

One of the consequences of these and other flaws and weaknesses in our educational system is that our institutions of higher education have not served well many segments of our society, including families with limited resources and minority groups, including African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics and other groups. Recently, some policymakers have noted that the number of males who succeed in postsecondary education is declining, especially males from the groups noted above.

At the same time, the largest proportion of the growth in U.S. population is projected to be among these minority groups. Among the working-age population, the proportion of minorities is projected to increase from 18 percent in 1980 to 37 percent in 2020.

If we do not change our institutions of higher education to be more responsive to the needs of these groups, the number of prepared workers, in all probability, will decrease. This will likely result in a decline in overall personal income per capita, and might lead to a downward spiral that will have broader impacts.

RECOMMENDATIONS: I AGREE, BUT...

I strongly support the commission's first recommendations that every "student in the nation should have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education" and that the "U.S. commit to an unprecedented effort to expand higher education access and success... providing significant increases in aid to low-income students."

As well, I think the commission was right on target when it recommended that "the entire financial aid system be restructured and new incentives put in place to improve the measurement and management of costs and institutional productivity."

GIVEN THE MAGNIFICENT DIVERSITY AND VARIETY OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN THIS COUNTRY, NO GROUP COULD RECOMMEND CHANGES THAT ALL OF US WOULD ACCEPT.

I agree with the commission in calling for the federal government to increase the average Pell grant to cover 70 percent of the average in-state tuition at public four-year colleges. The whole financial application process must be simplified; it is too complex now. And, perhaps most importantly, both federal and state policymakers must increase need-based financial aid.

The issues of measurement and management are more complex. As the saying goes, the devil is in the details. My sense is that, historically, we in postsecondary education have been reluctant to accept mandates and pressures from the outside to "measure" what we do. As well, we have defended the increases in tuition and fees; and even though some of our leaders (such as Larry Faulkner, former president at the University of Texas at Austin and now president of the Houston Endowment) have called for us to "index" our increases to increases in average income, with few exceptions, we continue to increase the cost to the family and student. Unless and until the state and federal governments, and, in the case of community colleges, local taxpayers, provide more resources, my sense is that the increases will continue, to our detriment.

A few words about accreditation. I have been involved in accreditation for more than four decades. In the last ten years, I have been lucky to have served in two organizations that "overlook" the accreditors: the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, which reports to the U.S. Secretary of Education. My sense is that through cooperation among the accreditors and these two organizations, there has been significant progress in making accreditation more trans-

parent and in helping institutions to focus on excellence, output instead of input, efficiency and accountability.

In the view of some, this has not been enough. But the work continues. For example, CHEA, in preparation for the tenth anniversary of its founding, has appointed a committee that will review the status of accreditation and will, by 2007, recommend ways to improve it.

COMMENTS ABOUT CRITICISMS OF THE REPORT

In this final part, I want to comment about some of the criticisms I have read about the commission's report. A few have noted that the commission's recommendations do not provide a "road map" for postsecondary education, as an institution, to take action. But I wonder what would have happened if the commission had provided a detailed agenda, with timelines, outputs, etc. I can just imagine the adverse reaction.

At some level, I can understand the concerns expressed about the commission's call for a unit record system to follow students throughout their educational experiences. At another level, as a person who has spent most of his career in community colleges, I believe that we need such a system. I understand the issue of privacy; unless we can guarantee students' privacy, we need to move slowly on this. My sense is that we have no data to help us understand the many paths our students take. As a consequence, we do not know enough to make informed decisions on a lot of important issues.

The commission's report is another reminder that while we have a wonderful system of postsecondary education, our institutions have not served well large segments of our communities. As well, we know that unless we make changes, we will continue to lose ground in the global marketplace. In effect, the commission has given us a great opportunity to move now, to change the way we conduct our business. We need to change, the sooner the better. ❖

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SOME SPELLINGS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS ARE EXTREMELY PROBLEMATIC

BY DAVID WARREN



FIRST, I want to commend the members of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education for their spirited debate of the issues, especially throughout the various drafts of their report, and for their consideration of public comment and outside views as the drafts evolved. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings' official response to the report marked a step toward engaging the higher education community as full participants in addressing the challenges facing our colleges and universities.

There are many elements in the final report that the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) membership can support and even applaud. These include the commission's emphasis on increasing access; the recognition of the vital role of higher education in contributing to the public good and to individual enhancement; the need for accountability (although we would emphasize accountability that is appropriate to the many stakeholders in higher education); the importance of increasing need-based student financial aid; a heightened awareness for additional resources in science, technology, engineering and mathematics; the call for deregulation of higher education at the federal and state level; the importance of an education which will produce globally literate graduates; and the need to address important policies aimed at international students who wish to study in the United States.

STUDENT UNIT RECORD DATA

While saluting the Commission's recommendations in these areas, there are others that are extremely problematic. The first of these has to do with student unit record data. NAICU and its members share a fundamental belief that student and family privacy must be protected. For 30 years, federal privacy laws have allowed schools to release student-specific confidential data only with the written approval of the student. We strongly support those laws. We object to the use of student-level data on the basis of four key concerns: privacy, security, the law and existing data.

- **Privacy.** Put simply, we do not believe that the price of enrolling in college should be permanent entry into a federal registry. That has been the driving force behind NAICU's opposition to a federal unit record data system. A centralized national database tracking college students, their academic progress, financial aid information, enrollment, and performance in their careers is profoundly counter to the democratic underpinnings of higher education and American society. We recognize that some people accept the personal privacy compromises of data systems that would collect student information throughout all of one's schooling and beyond. However, NAICU members find this idea chilling.

Although the commission report calls for "non-identifiable" data, this is inconsistent with the commission's desire to collect data on transfer students, and to track labor-force outcomes. Finding effective ways to track the progress of individuals, without having their identities known in some originating database, seems to us to be impossible.

- **Security.** We also fear that the existence of such a massive registry will prove irresistible to future demands for ancillary

uses of the data, and for additions to the data for non-educational purposes. The recent report of students' and families' personal information from their financial aid applications being shared by the U.S. Department of Education with the FBI is an example of how data collected for one purpose can be used for another purpose. How far such sharing potentially can go is limited only by one's imagination.

Assurances are given that modern technology and electronic security practices will keep this most sensitive personal information safe. Yet, with increasing frequency, there are news stories of serious breaches in the data levees. No one can say that individual student information collected would be absolutely secure.

- **The law.** In July 2005, the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce unanimously adopted an amendment to the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization bill that would prohibit the Department of Education from using HEA funds for a student unit record data system. This language was not challenged when the full House considered the measure in March of this year.

Overwhelmingly, the law reflects American public opinion. In a poll conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs in July, and sponsored by NAICU, Americans agreed by a two-to-one margin that enough data are already collected at the college and university level, and that reporting individual data is a breach of privacy that could result in abuses of personal information.

- **Existing data.** A wealth of aggregate data are available through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, and these data have helped guide any number of poli-

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cy questions. In addition, there are several longitudinal studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics—such as the National Education Longitudinal Study and the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study—that capture individual student information for research into student demographic characteristics, program persistence and completion, and post-baccalaureate education and employment.

These studies, based on statistically valid samples of students, have been useful in addressing policy questions and do not compromise individual student privacy. NAICU believes that these studies are capable of providing sufficient data in response to the frequently cited public policy need for information on transfer students and graduation rates.

FEDERAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID PROGRAMS

NAICU's second area of concern is the commission's recommendation to dismantle the current array of federal student financial aid programs, and replace it with something as yet undefined. We certainly concur with the commission that the Pell grant program needs to be substantially increased. However those funds should not come from a dismantling of the current programs. Each program serves a vital and proven purpose, and

THE PRICE OF ENROLLING IN COLLEGE SHOULD NOT BE PERMANENT ENTRY INTO A FEDERAL REGISTRY.

eliminating any will only serve to diminish support for low-income students overall. Indeed, the commission's recommendations would have a net negative impact on student aid for the neediest students.

Despite mentioning the themes of access and affordability several times

in her official response to the commission's report, Secretary Spellings did not endorse the commission's specific call for a substantial increase in the maximum Pell grant. In her prepared remarks, she made a reference to need-based aid, but only mentioned a generic commitment to Pell grants in response to an audience question. The Pell grant is the linchpin to ensuring that higher education remains open to the neediest students. The first priority of the administration and Congress should be to increase funding of the maximum Pell grant for the first time in five years.

OUTCOME MEASURES

While the commission has steered away from specific language about a single test to measure students' performance, we are concerned that the commission's rationale for outcomes information gives the impression that it is possible to compare one institution with all others. A drive for such comparisons will inevitably lead to the attempt to adopt a single test. Much more relevant would be a system that is voluntary among peer institutions, in which these specific institutions could identify and evaluate several instruments useful in comparisons among themselves. Independent colleges and universities have been on the forefront of better student assessment for many years. Each year, more institutions are adopting one or more measures to best evaluate learning outcomes. However, the rich variety of American institutions of higher education cannot be captured by a single measure.

NEXT STEPS

The commission report is one among many in this season of reports, including "Rising Above the Gathering Storm," by the National Academies of Science, and "Mortgaging our Future," by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. These reports already have resulted in conversations among institutions and associations about how best to meet the century's new challenges. The Washington-based presidential associations are engaging with their members to address challenges in undergraduate education.

Whether the commission's recommendations are the most effective for the nation deserves debate, and it remains to be seen how closely actions implemented by institutions will follow the commission's direction. However, America's colleges and universities have met many challenges in the past. Bolstered by truly thoughtful and informed public policies and private action, I am confident we will continue to do so in the future. ❖

David Warren is president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

A Personal Letter

Commission Chairman Charles Miller addresses Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

After serving on a national commission for a year, the chairman vents his frustration about the dysfunctional nature of higher education finance, and the lack of accountability among private and elite colleges and universities



September 19, 2006

Dear Secretary:

At the conclusion of your assignment to me as Chair of your Commission on The Future of Higher Education, I want to share some strictly personal observations with you.

The commission was asked to consider the future of higher education. In my opinion, it seems likely that higher education will undergo major transformation in coming decades from the same forces which are changing the world in other economic sectors and at other institutions. As noted in the Conclusion section of the Spellings Commission report, "The future of our country's colleges and universities is threatened by global competitive pressures, powerful technological developments, restraints on public finance and serious structural limitations that cry out for reform."

No matter how effective the U.S. system of higher education has been in the past, it seems especially vulnerable in its current state. A combination of advances in communications and information technologies have created exceptional opportunities for productivity improvements in other economic sectors such as financial services, manufacturing and retail trade, even beyond changes resulting from outsourcing and globalization. The gains in U.S. economic productivity in the last decade have been exceptional by any historical or global standard. However, this has not been the case in higher education.

Of particular serious concern to me is the dysfunctional nature of higher education finance. In addition to the lack of transparency regarding pricing, which severely limits the price signals found in a market-based system, there is a lack of the incentives necessary to affect institutional behavior so as to reward innovation and improvement in productivity. Financial systems of higher education instead focus on, and reward, increasing revenues—a top-line structure with no real bottom line.

In order to provide incentives for productive behavior or to reward certain results, it is necessary to have an information system which provides results and identifies behavior related to those results. Currently, higher education is replete with opaque, complex information systems which are not informative for governing boards, policymakers and the public. These information systems also provide limited capacity for institutional managers to find and adopt best practices or to make resource allocation decisions. Accountability measurements in a regime of full transparency will be needed to address this shortcoming in higher education.

Effective accountability systems will be needed to develop the most productive financial structure for higher education. We cannot address critical issues of *affordability* effectively without dealing with this effectively. Today, the dysfunctional financial system combined with the lack of transparent systems of accountability leave higher education in a dangerous position.

There are some specific signs of stress.

After pointing out the contributions of our top universities, Albert Carnesale, chancellor of the University of California at Los Angeles and a former provost of Harvard College, wrote: "But growing disparities between the financial resources of private universities and those of public universities are creating inequities that could have damaging repercussions—not only for economic advancement and social mobility in our own country, but also for the ability of America to compete internationally."

More pointedly, from "Universities and Business: Partnering for the Knowledge Society," a book by Luc E. Weber and James J. Duderstadt: "The highly competitive nature of higher education in America, where universities compete for the best faculty, the best students, resources from public and private sources, athletic supremacy and reputation, has created an environment that demands excellence. However, it has also created an intensely Darwinian, 'winner-take-all' ecosystem in which the strongest and wealthiest institutions have become predators, raiding the best faculty and students of the less generously supported and more constrained public universities and manipulating federal research and financial policies to sustain a system in which the rich get richer and the poor get devoured."

Even further, in his book with the illuminating title, "Our Underachieving Colleges," Derek Bok, president emeritus and current interim president of Harvard University, wrote: "However much professors care about their teaching, nothing forces them or their academic leaders to go beyond normal conscientiousness in fulfilling their classroom duties. There is no compelling necessity to re-examine familiar forms of instruction and experiment with new pedagogic methods in an effort to help their students accomplish more. The fundamental reason for the lack of such pressure is the difficulty of judging how successful colleges are in helping their students to learn and develop. No published reports exist that reveal how much undergraduates have progressed intellectually, let alone how such progress compares across colleges." And, "As long as professors do not palpably neglect their students, colleges that do very little to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning will not suffer a penalty, since the consequences of such inaction will normally be invisible. No one will know whether they are falling significantly behind rival institutions in developing the mind and character of their students, still less whether colleges as a whole are doing less than they might in these respects."

What particularly concerns me is the special resistance to accountability exhibited by a large set of "private" colleges and universities. There is resistance to measuring student learning. There is also strong resistance to financial and other accountability systems inherent in their opposition to a unit record system. What elevates this concern is the fact that so-called "private" colleges and universities receive a large amount of support from the public, that is, from the taxpayer.

These institutions receive, on average, an estimated 25 percent of revenues from the federal government in the form of financial aid and research funding. In addition, they receive a significant level of state and local support, and they benefit from tax policies regarding earnings and contributions. In financial terms, it is difficult to classify most of these institutions as truly private, raising serious issues about transparency, accountability and public trust. These are issues that need to be addressed by policymakers who appropriate and spend public funds, as well as by those institutions who receive and benefit from public funds.

Another particular concern I have relates to our "elite" colleges and universities. Notably, our great research universities are looked upon as world-class and treated with respect. When they talk, we listen; and when they ask, we usually give. However, research expenditures are a major "cost-driver" in higher education and need the same intense examination and skeptical analysis other financial issues require, especially since most of these are public funds. I think there is ample evidence that our great universities have much to account for—and have great intellectual and financial resources to contribute—yet often come to the public arena without taking full responsibility for their own imperfections, while at the same time demanding more of the scarce public resources.

Tying these elements together is the theme that there is a need to examine higher education in financial terms with full accountability for sources of funds: Which institutions get them and why, and how productively those funds are utilized for the benefit to the public providers of those funds. This should mean an examination of the whole system, with no special rights for any recipient of public funds, and no free pass for any type of institution, no exception for those ranking high in the "top tier," or no exception for those bearing the arbitrary and often inaccurate label as a "private" institution.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this national dialogue.

Sincerely,
Charles Miller

Devastation Brings Sweeping Changes

Opportunity, and opportunism, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina

By Kathy Witkowsky

NEW ORLEANS

ON A SWELTERING August morning, about 150 faculty, staff and students gathered under a white tent between trailers 19 and 25 on the temporary campus of Southern University at New Orleans to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The ceremony included a litany led by two students and a short speech by Johnny Anderson, chairman of the Southern University Board of Supervisors, which oversees the school. "I didn't come here to celebrate, because there is no celebration to be had," Anderson told the audience.

The biggest round of applause came after William Belisle, SUNO's director of research and strategic initiatives, played a rap song, entitled "Sure Feels Good to Come Back to New Orleans," from a CD he had made. Belisle was selling the CD, he announced, for \$14.99, and donating a third of the proceeds to a scholarship fund in the hopes of helping a displaced student return to SUNO.

Students who do return to SUNO will find a vastly different institution than the one they attended prior to Hurricane Katrina.

In part, that is because of the physical damage wrought by the storm: SUNO is operating out of 45 modular trailers, while officials wait for the repair and rebuilding of its main campus, which suffered severe flooding after Katrina and remains uninhabitable. Uninhabitable, too, is much of the surrounding neighborhood, which lies in the city's hard-hit Ninth Ward, where many abandoned houses still bear the black X marks left by search and rescue teams. Before Katrina, SUNO had been solely a commuter school, drawing heavily from the Ninth Ward and the rest of the city of New Orleans; now displaced stu-

dents, faculty and staff are living in 400 FEMA trailers located behind the classroom and administration area. So many residences were damaged that rental units are hard to come by in New Orleans, and rents have skyrocketed.

But the changes go well beyond the physical campus: The school has cut 19 programs, and enrollment is down 30 percent, to 2,500 students. Forty percent of the faculty were furloughed last year, and even though many have since been rehired, morale, said Alvin Bopp, a professor of chemistry who just completed a term as faculty senate president, is "somewhere between low and leave me alone."

It doesn't sound like a promising scenario. But Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie believes that SUNO, along with the rest of the state's higher education institutions, will ultimately benefit from the sweeping changes that last year's storms (Hurricane Katrina was followed less than a month later by Hurricane Rita) helped him usher in. "We are definitely becoming a better system. Katrina helped quicken the pace," he said.

"Disaster is not strong enough" to describe the situation the higher education community faced a year ago, said Savoie (pronounced SAV-wha). Eighty-four thousand students and 15,000 faculty and staff were initially displaced; 19 campuses were temporarily closed (and several of them have not reopened). Public institutions of higher education alone suffered \$500 million to \$600 million worth of damage, more than \$150 million in lost revenue and tuition, and \$75 million in immediate budget cuts.

But at the same time, Savoie said, the storms washed away many obstacles to reform, providing an opportunity to accelerate efforts to improve the state's troubled higher education system. "We're hoping to skip a generation of evolution. We're determined not to restore what we had," said the 52-year-old Savoie, who has been commissioner since 1996. "It's statewide. We're not just dealing with the affected campuses. We're using that to drive policy decisions."

The state's budget picture is considerably brighter than it was just a few months ago. But officials do not plan to rescind the series of program and administrative cuts they have already made, and are still pondering the future of some heavily affected campuses. A moratorium on the development of new programs not directly related to storm-recovery remains in place. "I think that the education leadership in the state has done a pretty good job of using Katrina as a device for making some badly

needed changes," said Dennis Jones, president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). Jones has consulted for the state's Board of Regents, which oversees the 33 public higher education institutions.

Some of the most significant changes occurred at SUNO, an historically African American institution which has a dismal 12 percent graduation rate and a reputation for political infighting. The regents resisted calls to recommend closing or merging the school with nearby University of New Orleans (UNO), a far larger and more selective institution; either action would have required legislative approval. Instead, Savoie and his staff worked with SUNO's governing board and administrators to identify and phase out programs with low-completion rates or low enrollment, or those that weren't accredited or were duplicated at UNO.

Majors in chemistry, math and English are among the programs being eliminated, although the school will still offer courses in those subjects. The idea is for SUNO to focus on the needs of the surrounding community, with programs such as criminal justice, social work and early childhood development. "If they are successful in developing that niche, they'll be meeting a serious need," Savoie said. Plans, he said, are also in the works to locate related state-agency offices at the school's rebuilt campus, which will bring more students to the school and create additional training

Students who return to Southern University at New Orleans will find a vastly different institution than the one they attended prior to Hurricane Katrina.

opportunities for students.

"We would have liked to do it on our own terms and at our own pace," SUNO Chancellor Victor Ukpolo said of the cuts.

But, he added, "We will emerge a better institution, no question about that." Already, said Ukpolo, who became chancellor last January, SUNO has introduced four new degree programs that address the community's post-Katrina needs, such as health management information systems. And it has plans to establish two more.

In addition to the programs cut at SUNO, about a dozen others were eliminated statewide, including five at the University of New Orleans, which also was heavily damaged by Katrina, and where enrollment, which had been more than



PHOTOS BY JACKSON HILL, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

E. Joseph Savoie, Louisiana commissioner of higher education, sees opportunities for constructive change in the wake of the devastating hurricanes.

17,000, is down about 25 percent this fall. The programs that were targeted—bachelor's and master's degree programs in both economics and mass communications, and a bachelor's degree in health promotion and human performance—were chosen based on the recommendations of department chairs, because the programs either had low completion rates or were not critical to the school's mission, said UNO Chancellor Tim Ryan.

UNO also eliminated about 50 elective courses and 89 faculty positions, according to Ryan. "We're not stronger right now," he said. "But we have a platform to build on so we can get stronger."

"I don't think a disaster of this magnitude creates opportunities," said Delgado Community College Chancellor Alex Johnson. "What Hurricane Katrina allows us to do is focus on the critical needs of education in our community more than we ever have in the past." Delgado, for instance, whose main campus is still only about 60 percent operational, has not cut any of its 40 programs but is offering more courses in construction trades and additional accelerated nursing training to address the city's post-storm workforce shortages.

The school, which prior to the storm was one of the largest education institutions in the state, may be much smaller in terms of enrollment and faculty positions, which are at about 70 percent and 60 percent of pre-storm numbers, respectively, said Johnson. "But in terms of our mission, it's much expanded."

Due to a reorganization of the Louisiana Technical College, the state's vocational training system, Delgado Community College is now linked to four LTC campuses (though two of them are still closed). Decentralizing control of all 40 LTC cam-

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Enrollment has dropped 25 percent at the University of New Orleans, leading Chancellor Tim Ryan to drop programs and lay off faculty.

PHOTOS BY JACKSON HILL, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK



Only 70 percent of the students, and 60 percent of the faculty, have returned to Chancellor Alex Johnson's Delgado Community College campus.

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pus statewide is expected to save between \$3.5 and \$4 million a year in administrative costs.

The commissioner's office had begun drawing up plans for the reorganization prior to Katrina, but the gloomy budget scenario after the storms allowed Savoie to be a lot bolder in his recommendations. "It bridged a lot of political pushback," Savoie said.

Future changes in the system will depend in large part on population trends,

Public institutions of higher education alone suffered \$500 million to \$600 million worth of damage, more than \$150 million in lost revenue and tuition, and \$75 million in immediate budget cuts.

he said. For instance, officials have yet to decide whether to reopen one heavily damaged technical college campus in New Orleans' depopulated Ninth Ward, and might combine another damaged technical college campus in Slidell, on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, with three off-site learning centers there run by three different institutions.

The commissioner's office also might recommend more narrowly focusing the mission of Nunez Community College to concentrate on workforce training, Savoie said. Nunez is located in Chalmette, just east of New Orleans, and both its campus and the surrounding community experienced heavy flooding; many residents have not yet returned, and enrollment is about

half of what it was before the storm.

"We don't need to build or create additional colleges," said Savoie. "We need to collaborate among our existing institutions and collapse assets at the same time that we offer a broader scope of services."

One example of that is an unusual partnership between schools from two different university systems in the state: Students in the pharmacy school at the University of Louisiana at Monroe will be able to do their clinical studies at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in Shreveport and at the LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans. That will allow the school to expand the pharmacy program at a time of critical demand for health professionals.

"Many of these things were kind of on a wish list, and the storms have made

them more possible," said Savoie, a Louisiana native of Cajun descent known to his friends as "T-Joe."

"We hope we never have another opportunity like this," said Dave Spence, president of the Southern Regional Education Board. Nonetheless, he said, it is an opportunity, one that Savoie and state officials are wisely taking advantage of.

"They really do have their eyes on the future," said Spence. "The changes I know about are not cosmetic, they're substantial, and will result in a much better system of postsecondary education."

But the cuts that have occurred at both public and private institutions in the state (Tulane University, for instance, eliminated four out of its six engineering programs, and laid off 225 faculty, the vast majority of them medical school clinical faculty) have raised some concerns.

A popular phrase among Louisiana higher education officials these days is that "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste," said Jordan Kurland, associate general secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). "But the relationship between Katrina and what's being done is in many ways dubious."

The AAUP does not make judgments on curriculum changes such as those implemented at SUNO. "Times can change, and needs can change, and adjustment is necessary," Kurland said. But, he added, "This kind of transition is very complicated and difficult to implement. It's the kind of thing that's done over years, and you can't just do it in one fell swoop."

Kurland is the staff director for a special committee of the AAUP that is investigating layoffs and program cuts at eight postsecondary institutions in New Orleans (three public and five private), where he said more than a thousand faculty have not returned this fall. No one, he said, has broken down the numbers in terms of who was laid off, and "who left in disgust, and

who coincidentally decided to retire." Many of them taught at the city's two medical schools, which, due to hospital closures, are suffering from a lack of patients.

The committee is expected to release a draft of its report sometime this winter. "As of now, we're not faulting anybody," said Kurland, adding that the idea behind the report is to be helpful by practicing "preventative medicine" rather than "pathology."

Thanks to an infusion of federal disaster-recovery funds, the state's budget has improved dramatically since the spring; as a result, this summer, the legislature not only restored the initial \$75 million that had been cut but allocated an additional \$75 million for higher education this year. The total higher education budget has more than doubled since 1995-96, from \$594 million to \$1.28 billion in 2006-07.

But instead of simply giving the money back to the institutions and programs that had been cut, Savoie and Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, a former schoolteacher who has made education one of her top priorities, agreed they should dole it out more strategically.

"The governor said, 'I will not put the money back. I will require that it be done in a different way that will seed the reforms that we were trying to do pre-Katrina,'" said Kim Hunter Reed, Blanco's deputy chief of staff. "This is the kind of investment that will ensure our recovery."

The state has been plagued by low graduation rates (in 2004, it was 34 percent for students at public four-year institutions) and poverty. Funding per student at four-year institutions is more than 30 percent below the regional average.

Guided by a 2001 master plan, officials had been trying to increase minority enrollment and retention, improve adult education, and increase graduation rates. The numbers have improved, though not nearly enough, said Savoie. Now that admissions standards have been fully implemented at all but three of the state's four-year institutions, he expects the graduation rate to pull close to the national average within six years.

The admissions standards have also



Chancellor Victor Ukpole of Southern University at New Orleans is convinced "we will emerge a better institution" from the hurricane wreckage.

helped to "right-size" the state's institutions, by steering more students toward the two-year schools, which are less expensive, and where enrollment more than doubled between 2000 and 2004. In 2000, only 35 percent of college freshmen were enrolled at two-year schools; five years later, that number had increased to nearly 42 percent. The current and immediate need for increased workforce training is expected to further that trend.

Higher education officials also worked with the K-12 system to overhaul teacher education and administrator programs; this year, Louisiana earned the top spot among all 50 states in *Education Week's* 2006 "Quality Counts" assessment of efforts to improve teacher quality.

"I think the culture has changed. But we were so far behind—two or three laps behind—we've got a lot of running to do," Savoie said.

"I think they've made real progress," agreed NCHEMS Dennis Jones. "But having said that, they were way behind. And they still are."

Savoie has an unusually close relationship with the governor—he describes himself as "part of the family"—that stretches back to the days when he was a university student; the governor's husband, Raymond Blanco, who is the vice president for student affairs at University of Louisiana at Lafayette, later hired Savoie for his first job. Because the governor has been part of a campus community most of her adult life, she has a unique perspective on higher education, Savoie said. The two serve together on the Southern Regional Education Board, where Blanco just completed a term as chair. In addition, both Reed, Blanco's deputy chief of staff, and her chief of staff, James Clark, are former deputy commissioners of higher education who worked for Savoie.

"You don't have to do a lot of explaining to her on higher education issues," Savoie said. "She understands these issues very well. And she is fully committed to the value the colleges and universities have in terms of the quality of life in the state."

Lawmakers are also supportive of the higher education agenda, said state Representative Carl Crane, a longtime Republican legislator from Baton Rouge who is chair of the House Education Committee. "In spite of the storm, I think that we're still moving in the right direction. And I'm going to give credit to Savoie and the Board of Regents and their staff for what they've done to stay focused on whatever it took to make higher education whole again," said Crane. "I'm not trying to sugar coat. We still have a long way to go to get to where we want to be. But I think overall, we're well on our way to getting to that point."

Katrina, said Sally Clausen, president of the University of Louisiana System, exposed an underbelly of poverty and helplessness in New Orleans that has brought a new sense of urgency to the education reforms that were already moving forward. "We've been plodding along doing what we thought was right. But we could go to sleep at night." Now, she said, "there are nightmares that are occurring because we're not doing our work fast enough."

This year's higher education budget is 7.1 percent above the budget originally approved for 2005-06 and has been designed with the post-Katrina economy and recovery in mind.

A large chunk of the increase—\$31.7 million—is allocated for a faculty pay raise averaging five percent, the first in five years. Given that hundreds of faculty were furloughed after Katrina, "I still get a little grief about that," said Savoie.

But the state's average faculty salary still is 14th among 16 southern states, and, Savoie said, many talented faculty who were concerned about the state's economic stability were being lost. "So it was an important strategy to say, We're coming back, and we want you to be a part of it, and we're going to invest in you to demonstrate that."

The state also has lost thousands of students and potential students. Even before the storms, Louisiana's high school population was on the decline; nonetheless, by enrolling higher percentages of recent high school graduates, the state's public colleges and universities had achieved record enrollments four years in a row.

Katrina and Rita have drastically changed that scenario. Preliminary fall enrollment figures for public institutions of higher education are down seven percent from pre-storm numbers, from 210,000 to 195,000. And Savoie suspects that many of those students are only attending school part-time as they try to pick up the pieces



Alvin Bopp, former president of the faculty senate, says morale is low at Southern University at New Orleans.

of their lives after the storms. More ominously, first-time freshman enrollment has declined 11 percent. Officials are still analyzing the long-term implications of that figure.

In an attempt to attract and retain college students from this smaller pool, the state's new budget includes \$2 million for a new dual enrollment program that is meant to encourage high school students, more than 30 percent of whom drop out before graduating, to stay in school and get

an early jump on college. There is also a half-million dollar initiative for adult learning. (Twenty percent of Louisiana adults ages 22 to 44 do not have a high school diploma or equivalent; only 19 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.)

Another \$15 million in state funds, and \$38 million in federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, are being used to provide free short-term training in construction trades for an estimated 15,000 workers. To ensure that those workers are employable after the anticipated post-Katrina building boom, they will be required to achieve certain academic standards before they can receive that skills training.

The state also used \$8.5 million of a \$95 million federal relief package to create 9,000 "Return to Learn" scholarships. (The rest went to individual campuses). "It was an important signal to students that we were interested in getting them back to Louisiana to get in school," said Savoie. The scholarships were snatched up within a few months.

But even before Katrina, the state had a shortage of jobs for its educated professionals, many of whom were leaving Louisiana. Educating its population is not enough; it also has to provide employment opportunities.

To help address that issue, the Board of Regents has allocated \$29 million in federal CDBG funds, and \$25 million of its own funds (\$5 million annually over each of the

next five years), to rebuild the scientific research facilities and recoup associated faculty it lost as a result of the storm—this time with an eye toward areas that have the greatest potential to generate commercial discoveries, federal research dollars and jobs.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science is consulting with the state to help it decide which disciplines to focus on. Once this has been done, the Board of Regents plans to invest in programs at all levels of postsecondary education that will support those disciplines. "The idea is that if we come up with some research discovery that could be commercialized, and have a business created around it, we want to be simultaneously building the workforce for that business so that they can locate in the state," said Savoie.

That sort of emphasis on economic development and recovery will be front and center this fall, as Savoie and his staff begin writing a new higher education master plan that will pick up where the last one left off. "We're determined to do all the right things," he said. "This is a serious time for our state. And when I think back on my service, I don't want to have any doubt that I've done everything possible to make improvements." ♦

Kathy Witkowsky is a freelance reporter in Missoula, Montana, and a frequent contributor to National Public Radio.

FLORIDA

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school at all.

But numbers alone were not the crux of the university's strategy. UCF also teamed up with public Florida International University in southwest Miami, which wanted a medical school, too, citing, among other things, the prestige it would attract along with a projected tripling of the \$80 million a year in sponsored research FIU conducts today.

The two proposals, which together will cost an estimated \$500 million over ten years, were made into a single package, channeling the impressive political clout of two of the most politically dominant sections of the state. "That was just arithmetic," UCF President John Hitt said unabashedly. "If you look at the delegations

Florida's sweeping 2001 education reform was famously hashed out by Governor Jeb Bush and Florida's speaker of the House on a napkin over dinner.

and the politics, you've got Southeast Florida and Central Florida. It's very hard to stop that in the legislature."

The university also brought in John Thrasher, a former speaker of the House, who had earlier managed to get a medical

school for his alma mater, Florida State University, over the objections of the Board of Regents. Thrasher was paid \$7,500 a month to lobby for UCF. "If somebody's working for you, they're not working against you," Hitt explained. In all, the UCF Foundation hired eight lobbyists to push the medical school.

Though some members questioned whether a new medical school was needed, let alone two (critics argued that expanding residency programs was a better way to increase the number of Florida doctors), the new university oversight committee, now called the Board of Governors, approved them last April, by a vote of 16 to one. Within weeks, so did the legislature.

Politics like these are not a new part of Florida higher education, of course. It would be "incredibly naive" to believe so, said John Cavanaugh, president of the University of West Florida and head of the resurgent State University Presidents Association. "You're dealing with a political system. By definition it's political."

It was politics that brought things to this condition in the first place.

For 35 years, Florida's university system was largely controlled by the Board of Regents, which served in part to protect the schools from interference by legislators who wanted to put pet programs on the campuses in their districts. The regents also kept a tight lid on the universities, representing their interests collectively but minimizing (while not entirely preventing) direct lobbying by universities of friendly legislators.

This, not surprisingly, created tensions. It all came to a head in 2000, when the regents rejected an elaborate political horse

trade designed to bring a new medical school to Florida State, and law schools to Florida International and Florida A&M universities. In each case, angry legislators—led by the powerful Thrasher, who threatened to hold up all other business until the deal was approved—stepped in and reversed the board.

The legislators didn't stop there. Within a year, on July 1, 2001, under a sweeping statewide education reform famously hashed out by Thrasher and Governor Jeb Bush on a napkin over dinner and called the K-20 initiative, the Board of Regents itself was dissolved. It was replaced by a single education "super board" to oversee primary and secondary schools, the state's 28 community colleges, and the 11 public universities, with their 285,289 students, 13,600 faculty, and \$6.9 billion budget.

This new "seamless system," putting all levels of education under a single governing authority, was also ostensibly meant to improve coordination, especially among community colleges and universities—even though Florida was already a leader in this area, with long-established articulation agreements, common course numbers, and other partnerships.

Regardless of the merits of the K-20 idea, it really came down to this, said



Chairman Carolyn Roberts of the state university Board of Governors hopes to cut down on the "end runs" that campus presidents make around the board to reach key legislators.

Robert Atwell, retired president of the American Council on Education, who lives part-time in Florida: "The Board of Regents was correct to try to stop the (Florida A&M) law school and the Florida State medical school, but it cost them their life." The scheme to get rid of the regents, the *St. Petersburg Times* editorialized, "was plainly tinged with malice on the part of House Speaker John Thrasher and other legislators who favored pricey new pro-

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grams...that the regents opposed. For more than 35 years, most legislatures had allowed the regents to do what they were created to do: minimize competition among the schools; get Florida the best bang for a buck. Occasionally, however, legislators tried to get rid of the regents. Finally, they succeeded."

Backers of the new system insisted it would bring an end to fighting among the various levels of education (and among the public universities) over finite resources. The seamless system, they said, also would result in better student preparation for universities and better teacher preparation by them. And they contended that another facet of the plan, which established local boards of trustees for each of the public universities, would help them better serve their own regions—an outcome of the change that almost everyone now seems to agree has been its greatest strength.

Critics countered that the fighting over resources would be worse than ever. And, in fact, the University of Florida soon had hired eight lobbyists, as political pressure for more campuses and more programs grew. Long prevented from offering four-year bachelor's degrees, some community colleges started to do so, to the consternation of the universities. The local university boards of trustees started their work by vying to see who could pay their presidents the most. Some universities began to encroach on one another's turf; for example, Florida International University started offering master's degree programs near Florida Atlantic University, and the University of Florida started an MBA program 314 miles away in Broward County, where Florida Atlantic University has four campuses. It was warlike enough to make one university president ask what the "rules of engagement" were.

Meanwhile, another powerful legislator pushed through an Alzheimer's research center at the University of South Florida,

and named it for his father. With the Board of Regents no longer serving as a buffer, many such "member projects," as they were euphemistically termed ("little turkeys," one higher education official called them privately), showed up in the budgets of community colleges and universities. Santa Fe Community College, for example, was compelled to open a branch in a legislator's sparsely populated home district. When the agricultural arm of the University of Florida tried to close a facility in the Senate president's hometown, he passed legislation preventing services there from ever being cut. A bipartisan group of former state officials and educators would ultimately call Florida's higher education governance system "a banana republic rife with gamesmanship."

Within months, statewide budget problems threatened a billion dollars in cuts for education, and the various factions dug in. Opponents of the "seamless system" said they had been right all along—that the different education sectors would be at each others' throats for money. There was no question that the funding was needed to serve the state's exploding population. The primary and secondary schools that year found themselves with 16,000 unanticipated students. It was a familiar problem.

Public universities have grown by 100,000 students in the last 15 years. (Florida Gulf Coast University alone, which opened in 1997 on former swampland near Fort Myers, already has more than 6,000 students, and expects 15,000 by 2010.) Yet while three Florida public universities now rank in the top ten in size, only the University of Florida ranks nationally in quality. As the budget crisis raged, Florida continued to be near the bottom of the 50 states in education funding, according to a study by the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

Only 28 percent of Florida high school graduates go immediately to college, compared to 54 percent in the best performing states. Many begin their work toward a degree at the community colleges, which struggle to keep up with the demand. It was the community colleges that the education "super board" singled out for protection from the budget cuts, citing their soaring enrollment (especially of minorities) and the need for worker training.

"It was pretty disastrous," Atwell said of the early days of the new system. "You had chaos. Each of the individual institutions and their lobbyists and supporters worked Tallahassee, competing with each other for resources. It was absolutely Darwinian."

In the end, the universities and community colleges treaded water, ending up with their budgets undiminished from the previous year, but also not raised. And even that was only possible because of a significant increase in student tuition.

The more surprising outcome of the disarray came in the familiar figure of U.S. Senator Bob Graham. The former governor had been watching from the sidelines and complained that, while the old Board of Regents had its flaws (he once vetoed an earlier attempt by the legislature to abolish it), the new structure invited too much political interference in higher education. Along with E.T. York, former state university system chancellor, and others, Graham started campaigning for a referendum to revive a Board of Regents-like governing body. Local boards of trustees would remain in place, but there would again be a statewide governing council that would determine how money allocated by the legislature for the universities would be spent—on, say, medical or law schools, or not. The Graham proposal went on the ballot as Amendment 11 in November 2002.

State university presidents, many university trustees, and the community colleges lined up against the measure. The community colleges were particularly opposed, saying Graham's new board ignored the community college system, which serves four times as many students as the state universities. "The dynamics of it are, you have the children in the K-12 system

The University of Central Florida, along with two other Florida universities, is among the ten largest in the United States, with more than 45,000 students.

that everyone wants to take care of; and the universities seem to be where people—even people who go to community colleges and then on to universities—have more of a connection than with their community colleges," said Michael Comins, chief executive officer of the Florida Association of Community Colleges.

Backers of Amendment 11, including former Board of Regents member Joan Ruffier, said that, whether they liked it or not, the universities needed some form of a statewide governing body to advocate for their collective interests. "Florida is trying to build the best university system in the country, if not the world," Ruffier said. "To have a single board overseeing all of education was just too much. We felt we couldn't go back to the way things were because the boards of trustees had been put in place. But there was no overriding system to prevent the universities from competing



Joan Ruffier, a veteran of Florida higher education politics, believes the Board of Governors is needed "to prevent the universities from competing to mutual extinction."

to mutual extinction."

"To the surprise of a lot of people," as Atwell put it, the amendment was approved by the voters, creating a new Board of Governors to oversee Florida's public university system. It would be the third higher education governance structure in the state in as many years. And it already had a big problem: The members were to be appointed by the governor, and showed no signs of wanting to rock the boat. "That was a terrible thing to do, and it haunts us today," Atwell said.

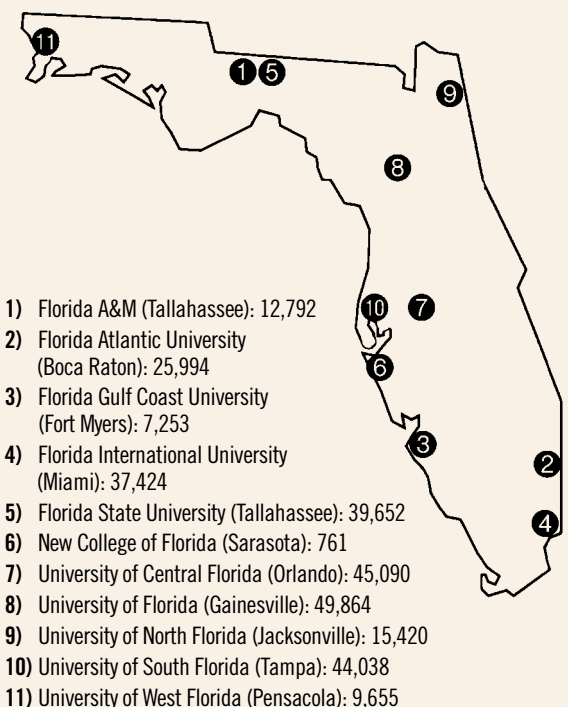
The Board of Governors, loaded with Jeb Bush appointees, met for the first time in January 2003 and almost immediately refused much of the power voters had given them. They filled the university boards of trustees with the same people who had been on them before, using a list provided by the governor's office. While the people who had written the amendment said the board should set tuition, it left that to the legislature. Although it was authorized to set presidential compensation and bargain with unions, it let the trustees do that. And it ruled that a proposed chiropractic school at Florida State University did not need its approval.

The chiropractic school proposal marked as much of a milestone as had Amendment 11. With shades of the medical school that had been snagged by John Thrasher, the chiropractic college was the baby of Senate President Jim King, a Florida State University alumnus, and then-Senate Majority Leader Dennis Jones, a chiropractor. It was a formidable lineup.

The university's faculty came out against the school, calling chiropractic medicine a pseudo science. So did alumni who feared that it would hurt their alma mater's academic reputation. Florida already has more chiropractors than the national average; a new private chiropractic college had just opened near Daytona.

Then, nearly two years after deciding that it would not weigh in, the Board of Governors voted unanimously that the chi-

Florida's public universities and their fall 2005 enrollments



ropractic college did, in fact, require its approval. Two months after that, on January 27, 2005, the board rejected the proposal. "That was when we really came of age," said Carolyn Roberts, the chairman and a veteran of the Board of Regents. "We are an evolving system. Anything healthy evolves."

It wasn't an entirely spontaneous epiphany. The backers of Amendment 11 had sued the board to do what they said it was supposed to do—stop legislators from

A bipartisan group of former state officials and educators would ultimately call Florida's higher education governance system "a banana republic rife with gamesmanship."

funding pet projects at the universities in their districts or at the schools they had attended, for example. In a hearing, the plaintiffs compared the local trustee boards to "little bitty kingdoms," and charged that, "Whoever had the best politicians, the best lobbyists, got a medical school, got all this stuff. You're dealing with a provision passed by the people that has not only been mismanaged, but deliberately converted or perverted to be a power play."

Although the Board of Governors seems to have begun to flex its muscles, few on any side of the various debates are entirely happy with it yet. The board did little to challenge the political blockbuster medical school proposals at the University of Central Florida and Florida International University, for instance.

While he's optimistic, York said, "there are a number of things I think need to be done that they haven't done. For example, there was no credible evidence that we needed two new medical colleges, yet the Board of Governors has now approved two. The chair says she's concerned about alienating the legislature. Well, hell's bells, what was the purpose of the amendment in the first place?" Tom Auxter, president of the United Faculty of Florida union, complains the board is "always looking over their shoulder and being careful not to do anything the governor doesn't want or the legislature doesn't want. I think that eventually the Board of Governors will have the kind of power and authority and composition that it needs to do its work, but not for 15 years or so."

As for Roberts, she said Florida's governance system "is going to work very well. It has not been without some serious conversations," she said, choosing her words carefully. "But I believe, overall, people are becoming comfortable."

They had better settle in. Florida continues to face huge challenges. A voter referendum that mandated smaller class sizes in primary and secondary schools has turned out to be impossibly expensive, leading universities to wonder whether the

money will come out of their budgets; already, the education commissioner has proposed diverting cash for K-12 construction from a fund supported by utility taxes that has long been designated exclusively for university construction. "That is going to take a large amount of money, and we have to compete with that, too," Roberts said. "But, you know, [the universities] have class size issues, too, as I keep telling the legislature."

The Florida Board of Education has instituted a new process for community colleges to offer still more four-year degrees, largely over the universities' objections. While Florida's community colleges lead the nation in associate's degrees granted, the state ranks 47th in the number of bachelor's degrees. And the breakneck population growth shows no signs of abating, which will force important decisions about whether to send even more students through the community colleges or build new state universities or branch campuses.

The University of Florida, in the small city of Gainesville, has said it simply can not get any bigger. It announced in the fall that it would cut faculty in departments including English, philosophy and religion because of a budget deficit that occurred when funding for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences failed to keep pace with enrollment. The cuts will come through retirements, but Auxter, himself a philosophy professor there, estimates that a quarter of the demoralized younger faculty are shopping around for new jobs.

Nor have the politics abated. In May, the University of Florida and Florida State got more than \$40 million in construction money from the legislature that had not been requested by the Board of Governors. "Somebody cut a separate deal," John Delaney, president of the University of North Florida, told the board in a contentious public conference call. Board member Charles Edwards added, "We actually had our own universities out lobbying against us. We need to look at how our universities' lobbyists work with us. They should not be allowed to lobby against the interests of the board."

Roberts agrees with Edwards. She has appointed a committee to decide what penalty university presidents will face if they bypass the board and go directly to the legislature for programs or money. "We're all pro-university," she said. "But this competition among the universities in Tallahassee is not appropriate." Said Atwell: "This outfit (the Board of Governors) is not a joke, but it certainly has been rather weak, and the dog-eat-dog situation in Tallahassee continues."

The presidential pay arms race persists, too. The legislature capped presidential salaries at \$225,000 in 2003, but local university trustees continue to award huge raises to their presidents by using money from their private fundraising foundations. After winning the medical school vote, the president of Florida International University got an \$80,000 bonus and a salary increase bringing him to \$542,608 a year. Six weeks later, Hitt, at UCF, got a \$100,000 bonus, \$80,000 in deferred compensation, and a raise to \$450,000.

There are good things going on in

Florida, too. There is now finally a chancellor of higher education, Mark Rosenberg, former provost at Florida International University, who university officials rate highly but who has so far kept a fairly low profile. (Citing scheduling pressures, a Rosenberg spokesman said he was unavailable to be interviewed, in response to requests made over a four-week period.) The state continues to be a leader in the relationships between universities and community colleges. "Left to our own devices, we might have eventually gotten here anyway," said Cavanaugh, the University of West Florida president. "But the (K-20) initiative really speeded up that process."

Cavanaugh said there is also less competition than collaboration among Florida's 11 public universities. "Quite honestly, and we can set the medical school debate aside, I have not seen the university sector slug it out for who's going to get the next Ph.D. in English program or anything of that sort." Besides, he said, "a certain level of competition is good for the system.

To squelch competition would pretty much lock in mediocrity."

Decentralization in the form of their local boards of trustees has tied the universities more closely to their communities than most of them once were—and vice versa. Local residents and, by extension, legislative delegations these days take a deeper interest in the universities' needs for buildings, equipment and other resources. (It is also an unaccustomed disadvantage for the University of Florida in Gainesville and Florida State in Tallahassee; because of their small-city hometowns, they don't have the political clout that they enjoyed before.)

Back at the University of Central Florida, the rush-hour traffic on University Boulevard is even heavier than the traffic driving toward fast-growing downtown Orlando 13 miles away. Four stories above the teeming campus, workers are preparing to remodel Hitt's outer office to make more room. On the wall behind him at a conference table is a satellite image of the school, carved out of a cypress swamp and arranged in concentric circles with the parking on the outside. There's a 45,000-seat football stadium going up, along with a 10,000-seat arena, new engineering and psychology buildings, and new residence halls. More than \$50 million in land and cash has been raised for the new medical school. The university already has a \$14 million recreation center with an indoor track, a 41-foot climbing wall, a pool, and a smoothie bar. Its Rosen College of Hospitality Management is housed in a \$28 million facility near Walt Disney World. Its College of Optics and Photonics is developing lasers used in warfare and to detect chemical and biological weapons. And its

engineering program produces graduates ready to work at nearby Lockheed Martin.

Hitt worries most that some future governor will centralize Florida's university system again. "That's the one concern about it, that if you have another governor who didn't believe as Governor Bush did in devolution or decentralization, then you might go back to one-size-fits-all. And it doesn't work. It just doesn't." With one exception, Hitt said: There is a need for a central board "to divvy up enrollment, to divvy up construction funds. You can't leave that as a food fight among the presidents. It does make sense to have a professional, centralized body overseeing that." The Board of Governors is preparing a strategic plan, and that, said Hitt, "is the kind of thing they ought to be doing."

More than just Floridians will be watching. Decentralization is a trend among public university systems. From Illinois to New Jersey to Virginia, legislatures are giving more autonomy to individual institutions. "I think it was the realization of



Michael Comins, chief executive officer of the Florida Association of Community Colleges, says the two-year schools have been generally ignored in formation of the various new higher education governance arrangements.

greater competition, a feeling that the higher educational market needed nimble institutions to be able to respond quickly to student demand and changes in the market—for example, research projects that could be moved more quickly from the laboratory to the market," said Richard Novak, vice president for public-sector institutions at the Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Governance in Washington. Still, he said, "There's a great concern about public purposes and the need for a state-level entity of some sort that can ensure that public purposes, particularly access, affordability and participation, don't fall too far down the priority list."

Yet on the whole, said Atwell, state governing bodies have been weakened, not strengthened, despite the fact that "good public policy is more than the sum of individual institutional interests." ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covered the Florida state university system in the Board of Regents era.

NORTH CAROLINA

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years in college is mostly a relic; today's measure of an acceptable completion rate, except in the most elite institutions, is six years, and some prominent education experts think the standard should be eight or ten years.

Assessing the problem is difficult because national statistics on retention and graduation rates are unreliable. Because students often transfer to other institutions, there is no dependable way to track retention and graduation beyond state borders. Rates for both vary wildly from the Ivy League schools to lower-tier schools in public university systems.

But ECU, despite drawing heavily from a rural eastern North Carolina population that includes sizeable numbers of first-generation college students, has managed to hold its own—and even excel in one area—when compared with peer institutions within the state and nationally.

Its six-year graduation rate of 54 percent compares favorably with other institutions in the University of North Carolina system, except UNC-Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University. Its freshman retention rate is six percentage points better than those at 13 peer institutions across the country. And it compares favorably to 85 “moderately selective” public institutions nationally on both retention and graduation rates for four, five and six years.

Most notable, however, is its success in retaining and graduating African American students. Not only is the percentage of ECU's black student population higher than at most public colleges in North Carolina, its six-year graduation rate for

blacks is nearly five percentage points higher than that of the UNC system as a whole.

A study by The Education Trust found that East Carolina University's six-year graduation rate of 60 percent for African American students was nearly double that of “competitive” doctoral-degree granting institutions in its peer group.

And yet the hurdles that must be overcome to keep students from dropping out or “stopping out” at ECU are the same that face most public institutions. They start with personal problems that often are most acute in the first six to eight weeks of the first semester, ranging from homesickness to a death or financial crisis in the family to breaking up with one's high school sweetheart. Some new students find that they just don't fit in, or can't make friends, which is not surprising on a campus where the university population alone may be many times that of the community in which they grew up.

Some have no idea how to manage their time, while others arrive poorly prepared, with the mistaken assumption that college is just high school writ large. “One thing we hear a lot is, ‘I didn't have to study in high school,’” said Shelly Myers, director of ECU's Academic Enrichment Center. That notion starts to fade with midterm exams and is dispelled completely for some when D's and F's start showing up at the end of the first semester.

Moreover, surviving the first semester on the 23,500-student campus doesn't guarantee long-term persistence or timely graduation. Growing debt prompts some students to give up, and others to “stop out” for a semester or more to earn tuition money. While most administrators here believe that working ten to 12 hours a week helps give structure to a student's life, the problem comes when they try to work 20 to 30 hours a week and carry full class loads of 15 or 16 hours. “That's mutually exclusive, and I tell students that,” said Joyner.

Still other students get bored with their professors or the field of study they've chosen and opt to switch majors, a move that is almost guaranteed to cost them an extra year in school. Some just decide that the community college back home is the place they should be.

Whatever the reasons, increased awareness of the dropout problem, fueled in part by better record-keeping and more accessible



“We know you need to tie them into the university in those first six to eight weeks,” says Don Joyner, associate vice chancellor for admissions and advising at East Carolina University.

data, is leading to demands for increased accountability in higher education here in North Carolina and across the nation. And the debate over who is responsible for students dropping out—the students themselves who are, after all, adults, or the institutions—seems to be losing steam.

“We've always assumed that it was all

At East Carolina University, the focus on freshmen is unrelenting, beginning with summer orientation and a “Weeks of Welcome” program.

about students,” said Kati Haycock, executive director of The Education Trust. “All that universities were responsible for was to make their treasures available, and if students take advantage of that, fine, and if not, fine. I think what folks are saying now, especially when it's clear that it's not all about the students, is that you cannot blame your low graduation rates on more poor students, and them having to work more jobs, because when you look at comparable institutions, you find wildly different success rates.”

Stanford University education professor Michael Kirst is less sanguine. He said that while universities are doing better at assessing the dropout problem and providing data that documents the scope of the problem, “there's still no accountability in higher education. While there are people bemoaning this, there are no sanctions and incentives for these results.”

But there are signs of change. The new president of the University of North Carolina system, Erskine Bowles, declared in his inaugural address earlier this year that retention rates at the state's 16 four-year colleges and universities are “wholly unacceptable.” Some administrators here at ECU took that to mean that targets or

quotas for retention will be imposed.

In Georgia, the university system's board of regents recently adopted a plan that freezes tuition for four years for incoming freshmen, an incentive for students to get their degree in four years or face a sharp tuition increase in the fifth year. A similar program at Western Illinois University since 1999 has resulted in a four-percent increase in the four-year graduation rate.

In New York, Governor George Pataki has proposed that the state give its public institutions a \$500 bonus for each student who graduates in four years. At the University of Houston, students can get tuition rebates if they successfully complete enough credit hours at the end of their first, second and third years.

The demand for more accountability, when backed by the threat of losing state funds, is likely to force colleges and universities to try new programs and abandon old ones.

One expert, Syracuse University education professor Vincent Tinto, argues that a program of incentives and disincentives will benefit schools populated by full-time students who already have the opportunity and the means to finish on time. Other schools, he said, will try to solve the problem by adding courses, hiring consultants, creating new offices.

The real answer, Tinto said, is to establish the right conditions and settings in which students, particularly new students, are expected to exist. The research shows, Tinto said, that students are more likely to stay in school and graduate in settings where advising is taken seriously, where there is a broad palette of support—academic, social and personal—that connects students to other aspects of the collegiate experience, and where there is frequent, high-quality contact among faculty, staff and students. One contributing factor to the current situation, Tinto said, is that colleges depend too much on adjunct faculty and graduate students to teach first-year courses, when it should be assigning its most experienced professors to those classes.



Many entering freshmen are not prepared for rigorous college work, says Jayne Geissler, director of East Carolina's Academic Advising and Support Center, which tries to help students survive the difficult first weeks.

“Simply put,” Tinto said, “involvement matters, and at no point does it matter more than the first year, when student attachments are so tenuous and the pull of the institution so weak.”

Here at East Carolina University, the focus on freshmen is unrelenting, beginning with summer orientation and a “Weeks of Welcome” program aimed at the first weeks on campus.

Said Joyner: “We have to create—in or-

Some freshmen arrive poorly prepared, with the mistaken assumption that college is just high school writ large.

der to retain students—a sense of belonging, a sense of competence and a sense of progression. You’ve also got to have good quality advisers, and you’ve got to have a clear career direction. Those are the indices.”

“The first six weeks are critical,” said Kris Smith, director of institutional research and testing. “The students come in and they are so worried about fitting in...about the social aspect. And then about four weeks into the semester we start giving tests, and they are, like, ‘Oh, my god,’ because they have no clue what it means to take a test at this level, and have to cover so much material.”

“We know you need to tie them into the university in those first six to eight weeks,” said Joyner. “So we have all kinds of academic activities, out-of-class learning experience, engagement with faculty—all that outside the classroom during those weeks. And we know that someone in Student Life is coordinating that for a sense of belonging.”

Valeria Moore, a freshman track and

field athlete from Newark, Delaware, had that experience in her first week this year.

“When mom and dad left I was happy,” she said. “And then a couple days later it hit me. I woke up in the morning and I was sad. I was, like, ‘I’m not in my bed.’ I’m used to going to my mom in the morning and harassing her. I felt it in the morning when I woke up, and I felt it at night when I went to bed.”

But within two weeks, she said, she found plenty of things to keep her occupied. “You just have to be willing to go out and get involved in it,” she said. “It’s there, but you have to go and get involved.”

The university has set up a collaborative of professional advisers to help students with their career direction. And it created the Academic Enrichment Center for students who find themselves in academic difficulty, offering workshops that train them on basic study skills, explain academic rules and regulations, and identify other resources on campus that will be helpful. About 500 students attend these workshops in the fall, and as many as three times that number attend in the spring. It also provides tutoring for students falling behind in the “D and F” courses like chemistry, math, physics and biology.

The center, whose motto is “Let your efforts rise above your excuses,” also offers an array of brochures, with titles like “Test Anxiety—Tips for Success,” “Making the Grade as a Freshman Who Lives Off-Campus,” and “Learn about Getting Organized.”

The centerpiece of the East Carolina retention effort, however, is the freshman seminar, a one-hour-credit course offered in the fall and spring that typically draws more than a third of ECU’s 3,600 freshmen. Admission is by self-selection, and the course is taught by instructors who apply for the job. Most sections of the course are offered to all freshmen, but one is designed for first-generation students, and some are reserved for freshmen who live



Faculty and staff advisors, as well as student friends, helped East Carolina sophomore Lauren Moscar deal with the breakup of a long relationship with her boyfriend in Stem, North Carolina, her home town.

off-campus nearby or who commute from home.

ECU, which has a waiting list of students who want to move on campus, long ago concluded that living off-campus was another possible impediment to retention. “Students who live off-campus are the first to say, ‘We aren’t plugged in like the kids on campus,’” said Kris Smith. “There’s a whole socialization that happens in residence halls that doesn’t happen off campus.”

Topics in the freshman seminar include understanding the transition from high school to college, motivation, goal-setting, learning styles, memory development, listening and note-taking, test-taking, critical-thinking skills and career development.

According to Smith, students who take the course in the fall are seven percent more likely to return to ECU the following fall, and those who take it in the spring are 13 percent more likely to return. Freshmen in summer orientation classes are also given a survey in which they are asked to list which social organizations or interest groups they might want to join, giving administrators another avenue for getting the students engaged when they arrive for the fall semester.

The Academic Enrichment Center is also hiring a new staffer this year who will meet with students who want to withdraw from the university. “We want to get a sense not only of why they’re leaving, but also if they need to be one of those “stop-out” people, so we can make it easier for them to get back in,” director Shelly Myers said.

Residence hall coordinators and resident advisers are trained to spot students who may not be fitting in. They tend to be students who are constantly on the phone to their parents, “loners”

who sit by themselves in the cafeteria or in dormitory lounges, and students who do not decorate their rooms.

Some efforts at retention are more spontaneous and unstructured. Jayne Geissler, director of the Academic Advising and Support Center, relates a story of a student who arrived on campus in August and announced after less than a week that he was homesick and ready to quit.

“I asked him what one thing would make him feel better,” Geissler said. “He was a football player in high school and missed that terribly.” So, the young man’s freshman seminar class, taught by Geissler,

Growing debt prompts some students to give up, and others to “stop out” for a semester or more to earn tuition money.

organized a flag football team and made the young man the coach. “It was the first time that I saw a smile on his face!” said Geissler. “So for me, the challenge of any freshman seminar class is to find the one thing that can make a difference in a student adjusting and thriving in college. Even if it’s a football game.”

The challenge of retaining students, while acute in the first weeks, doesn’t get much easier down the road. When she first took her position three years ago, Geissler was immediately confronted with students who were having difficulty academically. “They would come in and say ‘I had three D’s and two F’s last semester.’ And my first question would be, ‘Well, what do you think happened?’ Ninety-nine percent of the time, their response would be, ‘I didn’t realize college would be so different from high school.’ Freshmen know it’s going to be different, but they don’t have a clue.”

Geissler’s office also faces a steady ***continued next page***



East Carolina’s Academic Enrichment Center, directed by Shelly Myers, assists many freshmen in making the difficult transition from high school to college.

from preceding page

stream of students who can't decide on a major, or who have been suspended academically and have returned to campus, or who have to reconsider their major or career goals because they can't meet the requirements.

ECU, which has medical and nursing schools, and soon will have a dental school, attracts numerous students who find out

New York Governor George Pataki has proposed that the state give its public institutions a \$500 bonus for each student who graduates in four years.

after a couple of years that they can't meet the grade point average required for admission to those schools. "Some of them wanted to be a nurse all their lives," said Geissler, "and they usually come to us pretty devastated."

The pressure to increase retention and graduation numbers prompts an assortment of debates. Setting quotas for both, which some officials predict will happen in the North Carolina system, appeals to education experts like Haycock of The Education Trust. "It's absolutely a good idea," she said. "While it would have been hard years ago to say what's a reasonable

target for institutions, it doesn't seem to be now. That is, if you look at an institution compared to institutions just like it, and if you look at what the top-performing institutions in that category are doing as a starting place, a goal that has a campus seeking to stretch out to the sort of best-in-class makes a lot of sense.

"Hopefully," she added, "that will lead to something better than what we have, which is four in ten graduating after four years. That's just crazy."

But measuring requires reliable numbers. Right now, no one is able, with any confidence, to track students who move between institutions, especially if they move to another state.

The U.S. Department of Education and some private organizations, including The Education Trust, support the creation of a national database that would track students' progress from admission to graduation, no matter how many institutions they attended.

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities vigorously opposes such a database as an invasion of privacy, and produced a poll last summer that found that 62 percent of the American people are similarly opposed. Haycock called that "the most evil poll," and added, "I'm worried, because if you want people to take graduation seriously, you have to have good data."

Measuring graduation rates also leads to a debate over what constitutes a realistic timeframe, and whether programs that reward progress will have the unintended effect of leaving students in lower economic classes behind. College populations are changing so rapidly that only the top-level schools attract students with the preparation, motivation and wherewithal to finish in four years.

Indeed, some educators, most notably Stanford's Michael Kirst, believe that even six years is too short a time to expect students to graduate.

"Forty-six percent of our students (in California) start in community colleges," said Kirst. "So finishing from there in six years is a dream. I think ten (years) is better. And how you arrange an accountability system with that kind of timeline and movement is difficult—because you want to be fair to these institutions."



An ambitious program of visits to high schools has been organized by Al Smith, director of student development at East Carolina (shown with members of the university's student government). "You've got to get a dialogue going with the high schools," Smith says.

Some dismiss the longer time frame. Haycock calls it "a crazy idea" because, she said, "If your career begins with a bachelor's degree at 22 or 23, you have an enormously different earnings trajectory than you do if you get a B.A. at 32 or 36. You don't want to signal to institutions, 'Oh, don't worry, slow it down.' Those students who are taking more time are taking up seats. And we're in a time in some institutions where we don't have enough seats to go around. Universities have made a virtue out of multiple paths to graduation, with stop outs, and so forth, and the fact of the matter is those are not equal paths."

That said, there is growing evidence, as noted in a recent *New York Times* report, that students entering community colleges—more often coming from lower-income backgrounds—are unprepared and need extensive remediation. This can have a snowball effect, as it extends the time required to graduate from the two-year college and move on to a four-year institution.

The macro issue becomes how to make higher education a more seamless transition from high school to college, a K-16 process.

At East Carolina University, another new initiative is to send admissions counselors and other advisors into area high schools. Said Al Smith, ECU's director of student development, "You've got to get a dialogue going that says to the high schools, 'This is what we're seeing. This is what we're looking for. This is why students are not making it in math, English, whatever.' This is definitely a huge issue."

The solution, echoes Kirst, is to get K-12 and higher education working together on remediation and jointly fund that effort. "You can't solve this with those two levels working separately," said Kirst. "You've got to look at joint products and pay them for joint outcomes."

Elaborate programs aside, nothing beats the personal touch for keeping students on campus. The story of Lauren

Moscar, an ECU sophomore from the little town of Stem, North Carolina, demonstrates that fact and makes Don Joyner's welcoming address for freshmen prophetic.

Months into her freshman year, Moscar broke up with her high school sweetheart. "Four and a half years dating somebody," she recalled. "You come back from Christmas break and they're not there anymore. That support system you have is gone. It was almost enough for me to consider, you know, 'What am I doing here? I'm all by myself now, and I have no idea where to go from here.'"

Moscar credits friends she hardly knew she had, and advisor Jayne Geissler, for

The challenge of retaining students, while acute in the first weeks, doesn't get much easier down the road.

coming to her rescue. "A lot of people who were kind of in the background stepped forward, and I think that's what college is about—finding people that you didn't know were there.

"Actually, Dr. Geissler was a really big help. I'd go to her office and sit down. I was supposed to go to sign up for a class and I'd end up there two hours talking about my ex-boyfriend and what else was going on in my life. So those two things pretty much are what kept me here and pulled me through."

Moscar, who enrolled in ECU intending to transfer to UNC-Chapel Hill, has since changed those plans. "I'm going to stay here," she said. "I love it; I love the atmosphere here. And I have no doubt I'll finish on time." ♦

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Kris Smith, director of institutional research and testing, says many first-year students "have no clue what it means to take a test at this level, and have to cover so much material."