

Perspectives

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY'S JAMES CRAIGLOW AND THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF NEW HAMPSHIRE'S STEPHEN RENO ON BUSINESS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

INTERVIEWS BY CHERRYL JENSEN



What does business want from higher education? What does higher education want from business? CONNECTION asked presidents of two distinctly different higher education systems to ponder these questions.

James H. Craiglow is chancellor of Antioch University, a private five-campus university with sites in Ohio, New Hampshire, California and Washington. Its mission is “to develop students and graduates who desire to grow in their commitment to the improvement of the human condition through responsible leadership in their careers and communities.” Before he became chancellor, Craiglow was president of Antioch New England Graduate School in Keene, N.H., from 1986 to 2002.

Stephen J. Reno is chancellor of the University System of New Hampshire. The system serves more than 28,000 students at campuses in Durham, Plymouth, Keene and Manchester, and operates the state’s public broadcasting affiliate. Reno was president of Southern Oregon University before moving to New Hampshire. He also served as provost there and has taught comparative religion and served as an administrator at the University of Leicester in England, Harvard University and the University of Southern Maine.



Antioch University Chancellor
James Craiglow

What do you believe business wants from higher education?

It appears that business wants a certain level of technical and quantitative skills and expertise. This is partly shaped by the technological age. It’s true, that’s what they need, but it may be a bit unbalanced. I suspect business also needs people who can think critically and understand change, who know how to work together in teams and appreciate the human dimension of the work experience—people with the more qualitative side of the skills base.

There’s a delicate relationship between what I would characterize as the world of quantitative mindsets versus the world of qualitative mindsets. I’m not always sure that businesses understand the critical importance of the qualitative mind set. This plays itself out in curricular issues, in how the quality of life in the workplace is perceived, in how customers and others view their transactions with companies.

Focus on a clear set of specific, technically driven skills is not enough. The human side of the enterprise

is very important. You've got to have the data, the research, but you also have to ask: "What are the real-world issues and problems?"

Give me a smart person any day and I'll figure out how to get them to acquire the necessary technical skills.

Do businesses still want graduates with MBAs?

The MBA still has an incredibly powerful cachet with business. That's less true from the higher education perspective. We are recognizing the importance of a more balanced preparation for management and leadership. Business has been slow to adopt this more broadened perspective on management and leadership training.

Do you believe the traditional business school curriculum has anything to do with the current business scandals and financial problems in companies such as Enron, Adelphia and Tyco?

We certainly can't blame the MBA but there may be a relationship. If I don't understand the dynamics of group communication and interpersonal relationships, it's easy to become oblivious to others. It fosters a sense of self-centeredness and egregious behaviors. If I'm trained in a way that gives me a broad perspective, I'm less inclined to take a narrow view and to engage in unethical behaviors. I understand the implications internally and externally.

How does the balanced approach you mentioned play out in the Antioch New England management program?

For us, the balance means the qualitative and the quantitative are given equal billing in the curriculum. We believe a solid grasp of qualitative skills is just as important to an organization as some of the technical stuff. The human resources aspects of business permeate our management curriculum. A person with great technical expertise but no human relations skills is a recipe for disaster. Ideally, higher education would work with business to encourage less attention to the letters in a degree and more to defining the balance of skills needed to survive and thrive in this anxious business world.

As a progressive institution, Antioch promotes social change. Our goal is to change the workplace to make it more responsive and productive. If we don't change—whether we're a business or a college or an individual—we get left behind. We aim to help people understand where change is necessary and how to manage it. And you don't manage change by putting numbers into an Excel spreadsheet.

Do you believe business wants this type of preparation for its future managers?

I am struck by the fact that the business community is often silent on issues that seem to work against critical thinking, team-building and human relationship skills. For instance, they have not come out with

one voice regarding high-stakes testing. If business really wants a workforce that can think and work together, why not speak out forcefully against it?

And I don't hear business talking about what it means to deal with a more diverse workforce or the changing demographics of the workforce. It does not appear that the ramifications of these issues are given as much attention as branding or capital equipment purchases.

I don't believe businesses have effectively conveyed a sense of care and compassion for those who labor. Or dealt with issues related to long-term sustainability—the so-called green workplace. We are all required to look at a multiplicity of issues.

It sounds like you would have business get more involved in education issues—something many higher education leaders have resisted.

I believe business should take a more active and public role in education policy issues. They ought to look at whether high-stakes testing, for instance, really serves them. And at what kinds of leaders we are preparing. I don't see it happening, though. I don't see anything on the public policy screen except homeland security and war.

I have a deep concern that we are not cultivating and developing a new generation of leaders in all sectors—business, education, health, politics. Leadership is perceived as stressful and filled with headaches, litigation and unethical behavior. This ought to disturb business and education alike. What can we do to foster a different impression of leadership? This is a major public policy issue. We ought to be scared to death.

We can't find enough school administrators, for example, or managers in health and elderly care. This opens the door to untrained leaders and fosters incompetence and unethical behavior. It will weaken us as a country. If we train people to understand how to manage change and how to approach taking a risk, we begin to counter this lack of leadership.

The reality is that, as a leader, you will agonize, you will come under fire. My own sense is that learning certain skill sets can help people see that those things that accompany leadership aren't so awful, so debilitating, as they expect. Some of us can't bear to be unloved and there is no question that the persons willing to put themselves out in front will feel negativity. But the ability to defuse that negativity is related to how successfully they learn to define and engage in productive dispute. It doesn't have to be terrible to be a leader.

What should businesses expect of higher education, especially alternative institutions like Antioch?

They should expect progressive education to continue to raise questions, to challenge where it's appropriate. One of the great strengths of this country historically is that higher education has raised challenging ques-

tions. If one is silent, one accepts the status quo and gets bogged down in inertia. Our role is to continue to question, to have dialogue and to realize there is no one single way to truth. You don't move things forward, you don't leave the world a better place, by being silent, by not asking questions and ignoring change.



University System of New Hampshire
Chancellor Stephen Reno

What do you believe business wants from higher education?

Business wants higher education to be responsive, productive, of high quality and entrepreneurial—many of the same things business wants of itself. Business also expects us to be committed to the intrinsic value of knowledge, to be deliberative in our operations and to be a stable presence in society. And it wants us to provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum and to produce graduates who are well-prepared.

Do any of the expectations of business clash with what you see as the mission of higher education?

Public higher education in particular has a clear responsibility to contribute to economic and workforce development. At the same time, however, we are not simply training facilities. We engage in both basic and applied research, but also contribute to the general level of public discourse and cultural enhancement. We share these responsibilities with private colleges and universities.

What are some of the challenges for business and higher education as they work together?

We live in different worlds. Our friends in the corporate world don't understand why we are sometimes so slow to act, so slow to change. To them, we may seem unresponsive, and they sometimes rightly complain that we don't follow through. Businesses operate within a tight

How would you like to see higher education and business work together to move things forward?

I think this is a good time for higher education and business to figure out ways to assess what is really needed to prepare ourselves more effectively for the future. Businesses are at a crossroads in some cases. People's confidence has been shaken; they're nervous and confused. Higher education recognizes that it has a critical role in real-world service and research. Given this reality, it might be a good time to talk about the deeper issues, to go beyond internships or shadowing or the number of engineers we're training ... to attempt a deeper level of engagement.

time frame and must themselves change and bring products to market quickly.

Colleges and universities, on the other hand, realize that things of quality often take time. And some things are serendipitous in their creation and simply do not come about on a strict timetable. That is the reality of the research enterprise.

We need to acknowledge our different approaches and assumptions. The challenge is to bring our two parties together, to find our common ground, and to decide what we'll work on together.

What does higher education want from business?

It sometimes seems to me that business expects more of higher education than higher education expects of business.

We want support and advocacy, certainly. Last year, for example, the New Hampshire Legislature and governor made the largest capital allocation to the university system in the history of the state. We got those dollars in part because of the advocacy of the business community. They sat at the table with us.

But even more important, we hope for true collaboration and partnership—for higher education and business to recognize each other as problem solvers. I am pleased by the times when business and higher education have come together. We often discover that there is something we can do together that is above and beyond what either of us could do alone.

Collaboration won't work, however, if either side simply dictates. The human dimensions of a partnership must be attended to carefully.

How do you see the role of business in helping determine the university curricula?

Universities can benefit from business advisory committees that help to bring current practice to our attention. The new bachelor's degree in environmental engineering at the University of New Hampshire was developed in association with industry; it's a good example of such a partnership. And the Whittemore

School of Business and Economics (also at UNH) has substantially revised its curriculum in close collaboration with its advisory council.

We must address the curriculum from both ends, making sure we are providing the fundamentals but also being responsive to the needs of the workplace. But as we all know, workplace needs ebb and flow. What's at the "cutting edge" changes almost daily. Higher education must be sensitive to such changes, but we cannot be driven by them.

This continuing conversation between higher education and the professional community is well-illustrated in the area of nursing. Nursing educators recognize that their colleagues in the clinical sites, hospitals, nursing homes and the like are their partners in the preparation of their graduates. Part of the student's education comes in the classroom and laboratory but, equally important, part of the work is done at the clinical sites. There is an understanding from both parties that neither can do it alone. The same is true for medicine. Looked at one way, teaching hospitals are places where the two worlds (of education and professional practice) come together.

Are there other issues where higher education and business could work more closely?

We all need to address the issue of the preparation of the students coming into higher education. A little over 10 years ago, the New Hampshire Business and Industry Association set out to examine what skills we should expect of our high school graduates. Since then, the business community has been actively engaged in questions regarding outcome assessment and accountability. Since the Claremont* decisions, however, the state's attention has turned to the question of school funding and the issues of adequacy and accountability have become intertwined, often leading to lack of clarity regarding both. Much time has been spent defining "adequacy" and determining what is "average." I know only a couple places where "average" is good enough: your cholesterol level and your blood pressure. When I see a bumper sticker that says, "It takes a school to impoverish a village," I feel very sad. Our children deserve more than an "adequate" education, and we must find a forum in which to discuss

these matters in an informed and committed way.

How do you envision this collaboration between higher education and business?

I'd like to see a structure that brings together the higher education and business communities around solid and useful partnership opportunities, activities such as internships, loaned executives and loaned faculty programs, research and development projects, consultancies and contract projects. Such an organization would perform an honest brokering function, publicizing needs and resources and then matching up and supporting specific partnerships. The New Hampshire Forum on Higher Education offers the possibility of serving as such a structure.** Its members seem ready to work together to bring this about. I sincerely hope so.

**In 1997, the New Hampshire State Supreme Court ordered the state to overhaul its system for financing education. The court said the state must provide every child with an adequate education and pay for it with a statewide, uniform-rate tax.*

***The New Hampshire Forum on Higher Education is a nonprofit organization formed to provide a place for higher education, primary and secondary education, business and public policy leaders to join together in addressing education and workforce issues.*

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