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POLICY TRENDS & OPTIONS

Centrifugal Forces and Future Directions For Higher Education

A lot can happen in a year; and it seems that it has. While environmental, if not substantive change, is typically the norm, change is happening in American higher education at a more rapid pace than in many years. At the HESIG Policy Steering Council Inaugural Meeting, during June 2012, members identified **financial support** for colleges and **public trust** as the top two issues facing colleges and universities. Sustaining public trust and increasing degree productivity/ completion, followed on the list of top issues, with concerns about governance and regulation bringing up the rear as matters of principal concern.

At the HESIG September 2013 Council meeting, several new issues, including the **effectiveness of the traditional academic calendar** and **growing fiscal constraints** have joined the mix of “top of mind” concerns about where we are headed as an enterprise, and how we might get there. The big question affecting hope for accomplishing the promise of American higher education rests largely on how resilient and innovative colleges and universities can be in managing the centrifugal forces pulling apart long-standing policies and practices, while sustaining important centripetal values that help bring coherence to higher education’s broad public purposes. What is clear on the horizon is that colleges and universities have significant opportunity to shape a brighter future by tackling creatively many of emerging challenges facing them today.

TRENDS DRIVING CHANGE

Perhaps no other issue drives college leaders’ worries more than how to sustain financially the core enterprise. Earlier this year, and again in November, Moody’s Investors Service issued a very sobering “negative” outlook for higher education, projecting more limited public financial support, and a significant limitation of colleges’ ability to increase net revenue from tuition and fees. Such a projection places great pressure on colleges to constrain cost, reduce dependence on price increases, and to lower aspirations for facilities that increase debt service. Universities are forced to rethink traditional practices concerning more efficient use of faculty, support services, facilities and the effectiveness of the traditional academic calendar. In brief, in light of growing fiscal constraints, most analysts agree that the basic financial model sustaining colleges for decades requires a major overhaul.

Following several years of intense policy focus on increasing educational productivity and degree completion, the even larger question of the value of college, including



has emerged as a leading concern. Several studies have been published which confirm that individuals that attend college earn more and suffer less from economic downturns than do those without a college degree. A 2013 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report confirms that this is

cannot be developed effectively without review and reform of governance practices. As new educational delivery modes evolve, clearly the matter of the role of faculty in academic governance must be addressed.

The Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities' (AGB) recently created Commission on Governance is a case in point. As it relates to quality assurance and reform of business practices during a time of fiscal constraints, and greater competition for students, governance at the institutional and state levels is likely to get more attention. Greater tension between capitals and public college campuses is likely to be fostered by increasing demand from policy makers for more accountability, and on the other hand, colleges' desire for less regulation and greater policy flexibility, as they develop new business practices with limited public financial support.

Not too long ago, few educators knew what a "MOOC" was. Within just two years, most individuals around higher education know more

more attuned to shifts in prospective student populations than are public policy makers. As a recent Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) analysis indicates, some states will lose on the other side of the ledger, a likely 4 percent of students, a clear hands-on effort to 1 Tf-0.02 some states, a 3dely 4percent W policbn poift(As more atdivr oubliir education know sy policlomite some steducation know2()popta3df recenfo bite

college opportunity for their citizens. Accordingly, this suggests that the environment may be rich for analysis of local and regional policy solutions to the challenges facing higher education; and certainly points to the need for assertive engagement of citizens as well as policy makers on a local level, to build support for policy change and mutual trust in proposed solutions.

This year, with an emphasis on the issues of defining and improving

