Some Observations on the SOE's Task Force on Higher Ed
BOARDS & COMMISSIONS
A National Dialogue: The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education

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FEATURES

Fifth Meeting -- Washington, D.C. (May 18-19, 2006)

Issue Papers

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Charge

- To determine the higher education needs of the nation both for today and in the future.
- To assess the degree to which the current U.S. higher education enterprise is capable of meeting these needs.
- To suggest implementation strategies for better aligning higher education with the needs of the nation.
Concerns

- Changing national needs
- Access
- Affordability
- Accountability
“The flattening of the world is moving ahead apace, and nothing is going to stop it. What can happen is a decline in our standard of living if more Americans are not empowered and educated to participate in a world where all the knowledge centers are being connection. We have within our society all the ingredients for American individuals to thrive in such a world, but if we squander these ingredients, we will stagnate.” (Thomas Friedman, 2005)
There is evidence that both the access to and the distribution of students within American higher education are becoming alarmingly stratified based upon economic status, race, and ethnicity.

Only 8% of the bottom quartile will graduate from a four-year institution, compared to 75% of the top quartile.

While there are important actions that can be taken both by colleges and universities and by their patrons (state and federal government, private support) to improve access at the margin, major gains are not likely without a sustained improvement in secondary education.
Affordability

- The rapid increase in the price of a college education, driven in part by cost shifting from tax support to tuition in public institutions, by inefficiency and stagnant productivity gains, and by unbridled competition for the best students, faculty, resources, and reputations, is undermining public confidence in higher education.

- Do current financial aid programs conducted by the federal government, the states, and individual institutions adequately address the goals of increased access by those students with need, increased retention or graduation, and reduced debt burdens that might otherwise prevent lower-income students from pursuing low-paying and socially beneficial areas?
Accountability

- The inadequate performance of much of the higher education enterprise as measured by graduation rates, time to degree, learning outcomes, and even literacy.
- The limited capacity of postsecondary education to innovate and adapt to changing needs and conditions.
- The lack of transparency in providing public information about costs, prices, and value.
- The reluctance of many higher education institutions to recognize their public purpose and respond to the changing needs of the nation.
Title: "Raising the Bar: America's Challenge to Higher Education"

Context:
- Acknowledge leadership of U.S. higher ed
- Yet a changing nation (demographics) and a changing world (global, knowledge economy) requires much more
Goals

- The United States must demand and be prepared to support a world-class system of higher education at all levels capable of meeting the changing educational, research, and service needs of the nation.
- American higher education must re-establish through its quality, nimbleness, innovation, efficiency, and responsiveness its accountability and public purpose.
- The nation must address and correct those factors that have created a strong dependence of access to and success in higher education upon socioeconomic status.
Goals (continued)

● The nation must sustain and enhance the world’s leading system of research universities, capable of educating and attracting world-class scientists, engineers, and other knowledge professionals while providing and applying the new knowledge necessary for national prosperity and security through basic research, development, and innovation.

● The nation should embrace and achieve the objective of providing all of its citizens with universal access to lifelong learning opportunities at the post-secondary level.
Premises

- The likelihood that the private sector will be the primary source of additional resources to meet the growing higher education needs of the nation, coupled with the highly decentralized and competitive nature of the postsecondary education enterprise, suggest that market forces will be more effective than public policy and regulation in stimulating and enabling higher education to respond to the needs of the nation. Moreover, market pressure and competition should drive not only quality and productivity but also stimulate innovation and responsiveness.
Premises (continued)

- The challenge therefore is to enable the postsecondary education market to function efficiently and effectively, by empowering more informed consumers of educational services, eliminating unnecessary market constraints and monopolies, and providing the additional incentives and investments necessary for innovation and change.

- Key in this effort will be the adoption of standards for institutional disclosure and transparency of information such as learning outcomes, student flows (unit record tracking), financial data, and other measures of institutional impact (R&D, public service) aimed at providing both consumer information and evidence of public accountability.
Possible Recommendations

- Access
- Affordability
- Accountability
- Innovation
- Alignment
Access

Preparation
- Establish post-secondary education as a goal for all students**
- Adopt/achieve college prep standards for all schools & students
- Encourage dual enrollment, AP, etc. in 12th grade
- Overhaul K-12 teacher preparation
  - E.g., eliminate Ed Sch degrees
  - Alternative routes to teacher certification

Incentives
- Learn Grant Accounts (e.g. fed/st/priv “529s” for all students)***

Coordination (articulation) (both K-12 and adults)
- National strategy for K-1, higher ed, and workforce alignment
- Remove barriers to distance learning and adult education*
- Establish clear paths among levels and institutions
Affordability

Need-based Financial Aid
- Increase need-based financial aid (feds, states, institutions)**
- Reinvent Federal Financial Aid System***
- Demand highest priority for need-based aid (feds, states, inst)**
- Use Pell Grants as primary mechanism for federal aid
- Eliminate unnecessary subsidy of fed loan industry

Efficiency, productivity, cost-containment
- Provide incentives cost-containment and productivity
- Provide loans for productivity projects
- Establish nonprofits to provide tiger teams for productivity

Provide adequate public and private investment (states, philanthropy)
Accountability

Adoption of goals to achieve world-class standards
  Demand world-class performance in all of higher ed***
  Set specific goals for increasing college access and success
  Increase 6 year graduation rates to ## percent

Quality assurance
  Demand evidence-based assessment of educational effectiveness***
  Baldridge Award certification**
  Use accreditation to stimulate continuous improvement

Transparency
  Adopt transparency/disclosure practices from capital markets***
  Establish a national database of useful/user-friendly info**
  Establish a national/state student unit record system**
  Develop a “consumer reports” approach to transparency**
Innovation

Stimulate innovative culture in higher ed (incentives, remove barriers)
Federal R&D on learning, technology, systems (ED, NSF, NIH, DOD)
  Both basic (NSF-NIH) and applied (FIPSE)
Stimulate institutional R&D to support continuous improvement
Encourage bold experiments in different approaches to K-16 education
Alignment

Workforce/Livelong Learning
National Public/Private Commitment to Lifelong Learning***
Lifelong Learning Accounts
Endorse and support the recommendations of ACI, RAGS, NII***
Support RAGS “10,000 Teachers, 10,000,000 Minds”
Sustain/enhance the world’s leading system of research univ***

Immigration Policies
Encourage foreign students and enable them to stay

Public Good
Challenge higher ed to reestablish itself as a public good with a strong public purpose through quality, efficiency, productivity, nimbleness, and innovation
Possible Blockbusters...

- Refocus federal, state, and institutional financial aid programs on need-based aid.
- National commitment to lifelong learning
- Disclosure and transparency requirements
- Endorse ACI, RAGS, and NII
- Stimulating more innovation in higher ed
- Learn Grants???
Unlikely

- Standardized testing a la NCLB
  - (…but may require evidence-based assessment of educational effectiveness)

- Creation of national institution accreditation agency
  - (…but may push accreditation toward assessment of learning value added and continuous improvement)

- Major increase in federal support…