

Bold Thinking about Innovation & Collaboration in Higher Education

Kristen Betts, Ed.D.
Armstrong Atlantic State University
Savannah, Georgia
kristen.betts@armstrong.edu

At no time in history has there been a greater need for higher education. According to *Help Wanted: Projecting Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018*, “63 percent of all jobs will require at least some postsecondary education” by 2018 (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010, p. 1). However, the challenge in meeting this projection is that less than half of all adults 25 years old and older in the United States have completed some college or completed a college degree. The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac reveals that only 19.4 percent have completed a bachelor’s degree, 9.1 percent have completed an Associate’s degree, and 16.8 percent have completed some college (Almanac, 2011). Additionally, the combined public and private six-year graduation rate in the United States is approximately 57 percent for four-year institutions while the three-year graduation rate for two-year institutions is 30.5 percent (Schneider, 2010). Hence, the current conundrum of how to increase higher education enrollments and completion rates during an economic crisis coupled with soaring tuition rates and increasing student attrition.

Amidst the challenges of what is now referred to as the “Great Recession,” colleges and universities have a unique opportunity to lead economic change through education, particularly continuing higher education. As shared by Anthony P. Carnevale, 2010, “America needs more workers with college degrees, certificates, and industry certifications” (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2011, p. 1). Through innovative and collaborative educational partnerships with employment

sectors and communities, continuing higher education leaders can develop and expand credit and non-credit programs to serve as catalysts to stimulate and sustain the emergent workforce. However, a paradigm shift is critically needed in higher education.

Today's "traditional student" population is actually "non-traditional." According to Peter Stokes, in an issues paper to the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, "traditional 18-22 year-old full time undergraduate students residing on campus account for only 16 percent of higher education enrollments.....the vast majority of college and university students are "non- traditional" – largely working adults struggling to balance jobs, families, and education" (2005, p. 1). Therefore, colleges and universities need to redesign traditional on-campus educational delivery to meet the needs of a growing non-traditional student population. Furthermore, there is a critical need to align curricula with current and future workforce needs to prepare graduates for job placement, advancement, transition, or advanced studies.

So how can colleges and universities proactively meet the diverse delivery and educational needs of today's and tomorrow's workforce? The answer is two-fold.

First, colleges and universities need to consider flexible educational delivery options such as such as online education and/or blended education. According to Ambient Research (2011), 25 million post-secondary students in the United States will be taking classes online by 2015; concurrently, the number of students taking classes exclusively on physical campuses will be decreasing from 14.4 million in 2010 to just 4.1 million five years later. Much of the projected demand will most likely be from students 25 years old and older. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) project student enrollment increases of 21 percent for individuals 25 to 34 years old and 16 percent for individuals 35 years old and older. These combined projections are more than

quadruple the enrollment projections for individuals aged 18 to 24 years old which is only 9 percent. It is clear that higher education will need to be responsive to a growing non-traditional student population.

Second, a paradigm shift in higher education is critical to meeting both student and workforce needs. College and university leaders should consider the opportunities provided through the concept of collective impact. According to Kania and Kramer (2011) in *The Stanford Social Innovation Review*, “Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination” (n.p.). However, “the nonprofit sector most frequently operates using an approach that we call isolated impact” (Kania & Kramer, 2011, n.p.). Therefore, collective impact may be a great impetus to support a paradigm shift in higher education. Collective impact typically has five conditions that in concert lead to powerful results. These conditions include: (1) a common agenda, (2) shared measurement systems, (3) mutually reinforcing activities, (4) continuous communication, and (5) backbone support organizations. Collective impact opportunities for higher education may include, but not be limited to, grants, new consortia-based initiatives, articulation agreements, etc. The shift from isolate impact to collective impact provides new opportunity for taking a systemic approach to social impact and change.

As history reveals, higher education has served as a catalyst for change during times of crisis. However, a paradigm shift is needed today within higher education to stimulate and sustain needed change. Colleges and universities must rethink how education is delivered to an increasingly diverse population. And, higher education leaders much work collaboratively to provide the highest quality of education to all students from point of matriculation to graduation in credit and non-credit programs. The time for change is now and collective impact starts with us.

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