

MINUTES OF THE FIFTH ANNUAL PRESIDENTS' FORUM
JANUARY 23, 2008

The President's Forum met on January 23, 2008, in the Cannon Caucus Room, #345 of the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, DC. The subject of the discussions was "Serving Adult Learners: Advancing the Nation's Competitive Edge." The first panel spoke to the challenges of increasing access, ensuring quality, and gaining credibility in a complex regulatory and policy arena that lacks uniformity in its requirements and expectations. The second gave a media perspective about what the media needs to know to enhance the awareness of policy makers, accreditors, regulators and the public about the contributions of and barriers to institutions that serve working adult students. The third discussed areas where further research is needed to bring home online student success.

The participants were:

Guests

Mary Adams, American Sentinel University

Jean Avnet Morse, President, Middle State Commission on Higher Education

Tom Benberg, Chief of Staff/Vice President, Southern Association of Colleges & Schools

Wallace Boston, Jr., President & CEO, American Public University System—American Military University

Patrick Callan, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Rebecca Campoverde, Vice President, Government Relations, Kaplan, Inc.

Mary Ellen Caro, Executive Vice Provost, Thomas Education State College

Dave Clinefelter, Provost, Kaplan University

Bob Clougherty, Greentree Gazette; Dean, Center for Graduate Programs, Empire State College

Kristin Conklin, Consultant, SHEEO

Jeffrey Cropsey, Director, DAN TES

Edward Dadez, Saint Leo University

Dan Devine, CEO, Compass Knowledge

Kathryn Dodge, Executive Director, New Hampshire Postsecondary Education Commission

Zanette Douglas, Coordinator for Institutional Certification, Arkansas Department of Higher Education

Alan Drimmer, President, American InterContinental University Online

Amy-Ellen Duke, Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy

Joyce Elliott, Interim President, Empire State College

Andrea Foster, Assistant Editor, Chronicle of Higher Education

Louis Fox, Executive Director, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

Richard Garrett, Program Director & Senior Research Analyst, Eduventures, LLC

Christine Geith, Assistant Provost, Michigan State University

Michael Goldstein, Dow Lohnes PLLC
 Roxanne Gonzale, Associate Dean, College for Distance Learning, Park University
 Darcy Hardy, University of Texas Tele-Campus
 Richard Hezel, President, Hezel Associations
 Ann Hunter, Voluntary Education Service Chief, U.S. Navy
 Jerry Ice, U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School
 Malcolm Johnson, Founder/Executive Director, Learning Objects LLC
 Jorge Klor de Alva, Senior Vice President for Academic Excellence, University of Phoenix
 Mary Beth Lakin, Assistant Director, Special Projects, American Council on Education
 Michael Lambert, Executive Director, Distance Education and Training Council (DETC)
 Doug Lederman, Inside Higher Education
 David Longenecker, Executive Director, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education
 Bernard Luskin, Fielding University
 Janice Magill, Director, Workforce and Education Programs, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Institute for a Competitive Workforce
 Frank Mayadas, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
 Frank McCluskey, Provost and Executive Vice President, American Public University System
 Tim Mott, Associate Provost, Distance Learning, Union Institute & University
 Muriel Oaks, Dean, Extended University Services, Washington State University
 Michael Offerman, Vice Chairman, Capella University
 Laura Palmer Noone, President Emeritus, University of Phoenix
 Mark Parker, Assistant Provost, Academic Affairs & Adjunct Associate Professor, Communication Studies, University of Maryland University College
 Kim Pearce, Director of Assessment and Institutional Research, Capella University
 Karen Pedersen, Southwestern College
 Julie Porosky Hamlin, Maryland Online
 Susan Porter Robinson, American Council on Education Center for Lifelong Learning
 Russell Poulin, Associate Director, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education
 Chris Rasmussen, Director of Policy Research, Midwestern Higher Education Compact
 Tom Reeves, National Director, Assessment Solutions – Higher Education, ETS
 Kevin Reilly, President, University of Wisconsin System
 Peter Rubba, Director, Academic Affairs, Penn State University World Campus
 Susan Saxton, Chief Academic Officer, Laureate Education, Inc., Walden University
 Christine Shelly, Executive Vice President, Grantham University
 Shelly Steinbach, Partner, WilmerHale
 Irene Silber, Director of Public Relations, Capella University
 William Simmons, Managing Principal, Dutko Group Companies
 Kathryn Snead, President, Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges
 Lt. Col. Raymond Staats, The Community College of the Air Force
 Sondra Stallard, President, Strayer University

Jennifer Stephens, Director, Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, American Public University System

Peter Stokes, Executive Vice President, Eduventures

Linda (Dian) Stoskopf, Director of Education, Department of the Army

Jerome Sullivan, Executive Director, American Association for Collegiate Registrars & Admissions Officers

Jay Urwitz, Partner, Wilmer Hale

Christopher Washington, Academic Affairs, Franklin University

Katherine Zatz, Chair, Board of Trustees, American Public University System

Vernon Taylor, Head of Marine Corps Lifelong Learning (MRRV)

Excelsior College

John Ebersole, President

Arthur Gregg, Trustee Emeritus, Excelsior College

Mary Beth Hanner, Vice President for Outcomes Assessment and Faculty Development

William Moran, Board Member

Dana Offerman, Provost and Chief Academic Officer

Joseph Porter, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs & General Counsel

Paul Shiffman, Assistant Vice President for Strategic and Government Relations

Harry Staley, Board Member

Welcome

John Ebersole began by explaining that there would be no keynote speaker because Representative Ruben E. Hinojosa (D-TX), who chairs the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Competitiveness in the House of Representatives, had been called back to Texas on personal business.

In welcoming the group, Mr. Ebersole first acknowledged the diversity of those present. There was representation from institutions of higher education, public policy organizations, accrediting and policy groups, the media, and foundations; Congressman McNulty of New York had also stopped by to wish the group well.

He then reviewed the purpose of the Presidents' Forum: to bring together those who serve adults at a distance, online, and in other formats so that they can discuss common issues and concerns. "We are not just competitors," he said. "We are advocates for participating students and the institutions that serve them."

"Now that we have addressed the 50 percent rule," Mr. Ebersole went on, "what next?" He identified three areas for future work:

1. **Assessment of outcomes:** Commenting "Do our programs do what we say they will do?" With the Forum's sponsorship a new process for evaluating outcomes, entitled *Transparency by Design*, has been developed. This will be described in greater detail later in the program.

2. **Greater standardization between states and accrediting bodies:** There are now 56 bodies monitoring national providers, and that does not count those evaluating programs. All of this affects access and affordability, especially since requirements are sometimes contradictory.
3. **Increase awareness and understanding of online learning:** The power and potential of online learning are not well recognized by many, especially those in Congress, some higher education public policy makers, and the media.

Now the major concerns articulated by the U.S. Department of Education are accountability, affordability, and accessibility. Mr. Ebersole's hope is that the participants in the Forum and others will work to bring various sectors together in support of online learning. "We need to talk about a research agenda, and we need to think about how online learning is being viewed by others."

In regard to, the Department of Education's concern with accountability, affordability, and access these will not go away with a change in administration: "We must be prepared to engage with these issues over the long term."

Mr. Ebersole did see some opportunities:

- "We need to think more about the common bonds in higher education."
- For-profit and nonprofit, online only and campus mainly—"we can learn from each other . . . higher education has demonstrated it can both compete and cooperate." We need to talk about where we are as an organization of organizations with shared interests.

He then introduced the moderator of the first panel, Patrick Callan, founding president, of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, an organization best known, Mr. Ebersole said, for its Measuring Up report cards. Dr. Callan has worked in a variety of states overseeing post-secondary education programs. "He is a voice for change, academic excellence, and affordability."

Panel 1: State Reciprocity: Recognition and Credibility

Patrick Callan commented that "the conversation we are having here on the role of public policy is increasing a national conversation, and an important one for the country. Perhaps the panel will jumpstart a deeper conversation."

The problem, he said, is that "we are working out of a post-World War II infrastructure in a new century. . . . and why are we still having this conversation?" The real change, he thought, is "the magnitude of educational deficits the country is facing. If we benchmark to best international standards, we still can't fill the gap." In the face of changing demographics and economics, "we're slipping back." The work of the Stallings Commission is "another piece," but it really just reflects what's happening, it does not resolve it. The question, then, is "how do we rationalize regulation so it is in the public interest and improves higher education?" The panel, he thought, brings quite different perspectives to the question.

J. Jorge Klor de Alva offered “a quick sense of the University of Phoenix experience with the irrationality of the current situation and what needs to be done.” Since 1978 they have been visited by the Higher Education Commission three times a year. “In 1998 we finally got some sense of what was needed.” On the state side, they realized “we had to get a clear idea of the politics.” So they have hired lobbyists in every one of the 43 states in which they operate—“each is very different.” Over the past seven years it became clear that some states had contradictions in their own laws; others had de facto licensing problems. Councils are made up of traditional institutions. Texas and Pennsylvania initially did not allow for-profits; now they do. Other states worked on the “ignore and conquer” principle, others on the “delay and conquer” principles. Others required a physical library within the state. In New Jersey Phoenix now has a formal relation with a local institution to provide library services to its students. Other states required a demonstration of need and there had to be a hearing. In Illinois, Phoenix had to buy a local institution. There are also the “don’t even think about applying” states that create a bureaucratic labyrinth. In 1989 Phoenix started its online campus and decided to analyze all states. Eight states explicitly regulate online learning, and Phoenix now runs 127 programs through those states.

Given the lack of unanimity, Mr. de Alva asked, “Is state reciprocity likely in our time?” He considered it “a possibility.” The challenge is to establish a baseline—“a gold standard”—working through national programmatic and regional accreditors. “We need clear, defined, uniform standards that apply across all institutions, whether they are for-profit or nonprofit.”

The North Central association got together with other regional bodies and worked with them as Phoenix was moving into a state. Mr. de Alva’s recommendation: Approach the states by accreditation region, starting with the more enlightened.”

Jean Morse, speaking as a regional accreditor, said she looks at everything an institution does wherever it does it. There may be pressure for federal regulation to evaluate distance learning, but it should not be treated differently. She distinguished two issues: online learning, and adult learning. In either case, accreditors look at the same factors: level playing field, local competition, who is in charge.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (**CHEA**) has model policies and is addressing issues of joint ownership and multiple campuses. The later may include a school that has a branch out of the region; a school that seems to be a branch, but is separately creditable; or where there is common management. There is interest in how distance learning is integrated with other types. A distinction is made between home and host regions.

In 2007 the Middle States Commission adopted a policy on “inter-regionally operating institutions” that for the first time stated specifically that there should be “full faith and credit.” If an institution from another region goes into a host region, it lets the host representative know. In the process it has found a hidden problem with “separately creditable institutions,” which relates to administrative independence. In the end, the home region decides if it possible to transfer or extend accreditation.

The Commission has begun to see national institutions, both for- and non-profit, which are impacted by the “related entity” policy. An institution has to let the accreditor know if they are partnering with others. Areas the Commission looks at are, e.g., finances, admissions, decisions to go public.

Continuing issues are how to create baselines, how to draft model policies, how to define the role of the federal government, and how to accredit international institutions.

David Longanecker commented that he was “shocked that state oversight is still an issue.” In the 1990s, he pointed out, SHEEO (State Higher Education Executive Officers) decided “we can work together,” based on two principles: “We should have reciprocity and trust” and “We should follow the best.” This raised some dilemmas:

1. With regard to trust, “each state sees itself as special, and therefore the best.”
2. What does “highest standard” mean? Is it about education? 3. What about the politics of higher education, especially public education? Some believed it was not possible to deliver higher education in a different way, especially for profit and at a distance. More insidious was the concern about protecting those in-state institutions from competition.
4. There was also a concern about uniformity. The Spelling Commission’s concern was about standardizing to the lowest standard. Learning is learning, but quality assurance has been focused on processes, not outcomes to this point.

Now things are different.

1. First, there is the University of Phoenix solution: offer a degree from one of the states where it was approved to operate. This is a satisfying but not optimizing solution. And it screws up the statistics. But it works if states want to keep their heads buried in the sand . . .
2. Regional compacts can bring states together. Again, this is satisfying but not optimizing. Many states won’t belong to a regional compact; they are not into collaboration.
3. Regional commissions could get together with the accreditors and come up with common standards. In this case the problem is that some programs are accredited nationally, not regionally.

Internationally there is not just a concern about program quality but also about westernization.

Lastly, there’s the “all aboard” approach: “establish a train everybody believes they have to be on even if they don’t want to be. We may be there now.”

Dr. Longanecker ended by commenting: “We maybe facing something similar to the practice of banks, which are centralizing a lot of their activities for tax and administrative reasons.” “I hope not,” Dr. Morse added. “But regional accreditation is not that different, whether online or physical, separately accreditable or related.”

In responding to the panel from the point of view of a national institution, **David Clinefelter** suggested that “the accreditation battle may be already won. The University of Phoenix and DeVry forced the issue.” Today, the big issue, he said, is the states and their oversight. Here he was pessimistic: “Not in our lifetime. We have to go state by state.” It will help to have some public institutions go through the state by state process. It has to be done by design: Set high standards for outcomes, be willing to meet them—help break down the barriers. Next on the agenda for the Presidents’ Forum, he suggested, might be policies for transfer of credit. If institutions within states accept them, why not make them more uniformly acceptable.

In her response to the panel, **Dana Offerman** said “it is important for national adult-serving institutions to embrace quality standards.” She was concerned that “conflicts can hinder learning delivery;” pointing out that Excelsior “is reviewed by everybody.” It’s wasteful of resources that could be used for programs and services.”

One problem with state program licensing is that it can restrict access to educational opportunities where there are critical needs. One state, for instance, does not accept national nursing accreditation. But “the option of regional compacts is excellent.”

Dr. Clinefelter commented that Kaplan is “doing all we can with the states, but don’t see reciprocity happening soon.”

“Is there a different way of framing this?” Dr. Callan asked. “Can we move beyond the turf issue and make this part of the national emphasis on access?”

Dr. Longanecker said he was fairly optimistic that it could be made clear to the states that “if they don’t play, we’ll work around them.” California is almost unregulated; just the opposite of New York. But it might be possible to get a confederation to work.

Middle States, Dr. Morse said, had offered specialized accreditation for programs, but it was “not popular.” She also said that she was not sure it was realistic to ask states to defer to accreditation intra-regionally.

Dr. Klor de Alva suggested it might be important to differentiate between short and long-term issues. The state-by-state problem could be thought of as a short-term issue, but “there are huge public policy issues, many having to do with the speed with which the U.S. is becoming less competitive—it’s on a downward slide.” He thought that for the sake of the U.S. it was necessary to be optimistic because higher education is so important: “We can help inject education into the public debate about competitiveness. We need to articulate this so we can bring better tools for our lobbyists. This is really central to public policy.”

Dr. Clinefelter commented, “We can set standards, draft an ideal set of standards for accreditation for higher education. Demonstrate adherence. Speak to the issue—we should lead in forcing the discussion.” Dr. Offerman agreed: “We need to work with the regional bodies to establish a unique differentiation for us. We need to continue to ask for input from state regulators to gain their support.”

Dr. Morse said that in terms of drafting, to save trouble “we all have to get together. If state standards get to quality issues that accreditation addresses, we may be dragging states into a difficult situation.

Dr. Callan summed up by saying that, first, it might be a good idea to use a WICHE-type approach because it would be more accepted, and, second, it will be hugely complicated because underneath outcomes there is a raging debate about what quality is. Finally, the larger problem is that “we have to bring about a debate about the relationship of these issues to competitiveness.”

Transparency by Design: Update and Outlook

Mr. Ebersole introduced the presentation by Michael Offerman and Russ Poulin by commenting that the challenge is to help people, especially state policy-makers, get comfortable with the idea of national institutions, for-profits, and online learning. “We’re asking states to accept a lot. But 60 percent of accredited institutions now have online offerings and are dealing with the same problems. They will become our allies if we can show credibility in the outcomes we achieve online. This is where *Transparency by Design* comes in.”

Discussion about The Transparency by Design program, **Michael Offerman** said, was begun in March 2006 to document the special strengths of institutions that educate adults online. Those strengths are in being learning outcomes based and in the data generated in the online delivery mode.

After about a year and half of planning, *Transparency by Design* was launched in October 2007 and currently has twelve institutions engaged in a proof of concept about learning outcomes transparency designed for prospective adult learners. The idea is to provide sufficient information so that prospective learners can make informed choices about which adult online institution to attend. The program has identified a set of principles to which each member commits. One of the principles is to be transparent through publicly sharing *Transparency by Design* annual reports. Unlike other so called accountability reports, *Transparency by Design* recognizes that adults want to know what specifically they are going to learn that will help them to advance in their chosen professions, and therefore, the reports detail learning outcomes at the program specialization level.

In its simplest form, *Transparency by Design* tells learners what they should expect to learn, how learning outcomes are assessed, and how well graduates are able to demonstrate that they have achieved the desired learning outcomes. But the effort does not stop there; it also involves research about graduates’ experience to assess the impact of the outcomes in order to assure that what is being taught and learned is in accord with the desired outcomes.

“When you talk about adults,” Dr. Offerman pointed out, “you have to deal with learning at the program level.”

The twelve institutions participating in Transparency by Design are:

American Public University System, Capella University, Charter Oak State College, Excelsior College, Fielding Graduate University, Franklin University, Kaplan University, Regis University, Rio Salado College, Southwestern College, Western Governors University, and Union Institute & University.

“We are passionate,” Dr. Offerman said, “about serving adults at a distance with high quality higher education, and we are designing reports that have the adult perspective.”

Also on the agenda for Transparency by Design is to give data to regulators and consumers alike in a common form, “without whining or apologies, we have learning outcomes data and we are going to share that information.” The first reports will be issued in the first calendar quarter of 2009.

Russ Pollen announced that WCET, the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications, “has agreed to act as an independent reviewer, publish reports, and provide a web site for prospective learners containing the Transparency by Design information. He explained that WCET had been founded by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) in 1989. “We’re excited to be part of this collaborative initiative,” he said. “WCET is committed to working with online students and adult learners. We are also working with Prentice-Hall on the Distance Learning Guide and are doing students services research. We also collaborated with Middle States on its Principles of Electronic Learning.”

What WCET wants to do, he went on, is to “act as a neutral third party to help people see with fresh ideas . . . and help our partners meet student goals.” One aspect of this is to “provide web site context for students, so that they can learn how to look at the information and compare it usefully.” Dr. Offerman commented, “There’s lots of work to do. This is a natural relationship and we’re already working on what Phase I will look like.” He then invited questions from the floor.

Kristin Conklin wondered whether the project would be thinking about indicators and costs to tie with the needs of state regulators. Dr. Offerman responded that “we’re trying to influence the debate.” Recognizing that the states are trying to protect consumers, he said, “What should we be looking for?” We think it is information on program level learning outcomes. He recognized a risk: “The data we will be laying out is unprecedented—how will people use it?” He wants to be careful that the initiative does not commit members “beyond what they’re already committed to.” Mr. Poulin added that “we start with students, but we have to think about whom else will be using this information.” Dr. Offerman agreed that “we’ll be developing reports with prospective learners in mind first.”

Muriel Oaks commented that “any models you can give us to help with accountability will be very valuable.” Mr. Poulin said they are beginning to survey what has already been done, “so we inform the market, not confuse it.” Dr. Offerman said, “We hope to figure out where we

can work with other organizations. It's an opportunity to learn how we rationalize different accountability models, starting from our own demographics."

Dr. Morse had question about the specificity of learning goals and how those would be measured and whether *Transparency by Design* would report on all programs. Dr. Offerman replied that the intent is to report learning outcomes at the program level and the challenge is to make certain that the explanation of how these are assessed is done in a simple, straightforward way that is understandable to the intended user, the prospective adult learner.

In summary, he said, "We're looking forward with great anticipation to where this is going to take us. And WCET is absolutely the appropriate organization to work with." Mr. Poulin added that WCET is concerned to make the information "as comparable as possible."

Before the lunch break, Mr. Ebersole reported that when the Forum is over, Christine Geith and Richard Hezel have invited participants to a reception Michigan State is hosting for a Chinese group that is concerned with distance learning.

Lunch Speaker: Laura Palmer Noone

Over a working lunch Mr. Ebersole introduced Laura Palmer Noone, president emerita of the University of Phoenix. Dr. Noone said that the forum had reinforced one lesson that she had learned early on: Though colleges and universities demanded that students live by their rules, and their rules only had one size, in fact one size does not fit all. That recognition is the basis of the success of the University of Phoenix. Universities "are all alike in our desire to educate students, but we are different in the way we go about it.

Moreover, as the Spellings Commission has made clear: "The belief today is that the public and particularly the federal government are entitled to know what is happening in higher education and how the students are doing on our campuses today."

Dr. Noone reviewed the history of access to higher education, starting with the time when only the ruling class and religious leaders had access and the eventual evolution of guilds of scholars who decided what students needed to know and how they would learn it.

Higher education, Dr. Noone said, was previously based on exclusion and denial of access. "How far have we come?" she asked. One area in which there has been a huge change is that we have come from an agricultural to a knowledge-based economy. However, today the U.S. is now ranked seventh in the individual attainment of education of its citizenry among all nations" Throughout the world, "knowledge is the currency of choice." The reason, she said, is that "there is a direct correlation between education and productivity." In 2008 the U.S. will graduate the largest number of high school students ever, and "only 70 percent want to go on."

In 2006 the Secretary of Education commissioned a study on the future of higher education. "The report suggests that higher education needs to assist the public in making decisions

about how to choose the appropriate institution. Perhaps,” Dr. Noone said, “this is my opportunity to discuss accountability.”

One option, she said, is to continue the way we are. The higher education issue of *U.S. News and World Report* is the magazine’s most-read issue, and that is where most of the usable information comes from. “That has to change, and this audience has to change it.” Higher education is not meeting expectations. It has to “dig in—with care.” Issue Paper No. 5 for the Spellings Commission suggests that “performance and transparency must be the main issues in accrediting institutions of higher education.” One recommendation was for a National Accreditation Foundation. But Dr. Noone sees “national standards and federal intervention as steps backward to the *one size fits all* mentality.” Regional and national accrediting bodies, she asserted, “must take on the responsibility of ensuring that colleges are ranked on performance, not on reputations.”

For instance, graduation rates are based on the percentage of the students who enter the institution with no transferable credits and then go on to graduate. Yet even today the majority of the University of Phoenix students enter with transfer credits, as is true for many other distance learning students.

The accreditation process does not address the needs of all stakeholders. Self-study, for instance, Dr. Noone said, “gives an outline for strategic planning and budgeting. The process benefits institutions, not stakeholders.” Meanwhile, “the public has questions.”

Moreover, “if we measure how much is learned by the amount of time a student sits in a seat, then perhaps we are focusing on the wrong end of the student. . . . Outputs, not inputs, are key. We must address the questions the new technologies and economy present society. Our view cannot be limited to our own campuses, states, or even country.”

It’s a matter of transparency by design: “The intent here is to obtain and document comparative outcomes, not how or where they were obtained.”

The needs of today’s students are diverse, and so are they, far more than in the past. At the same time cradle to grave employment is gone. The Department of Labor estimates that today’s students will have between 10 and 14 jobs before they are 38. In fact, “the top ten in-demand jobs in the year 2010 *didn’t exist in 2004*. So “we are currently preparing students for jobs that don’t yet exist, using technologies that haven’t been invented . . . to solve problems that we don’t even know are problems yet.” That is why “lifelong learning and evolution are essential today.”

Affordability is another issue, Dr. Noone said. “Here nonprofits have to learn to be more efficient.” Taxpayer dollars will not be available on the same scale, she thought, and students look for the most effective use of money allocated for education. Part of the cost problem is that at the moment higher education is subject to more than 200 federal regulations, and new legislation would double that. “The costs associated with these are huge—and they are passed on to students.”

“Affordability is linked to remediation as a barrier to entry,” she said. Remedial education is not fully covered by Title IV financial aid. Moreover, although many of the underserved lacked educational opportunities, “12 states bar remedial education in higher education.” The challenge is to invent systems to take up the slack.

The education of the workforce is never for just one group. “We need a collegial effort . . . so it’s not just ‘no child’ but ‘no *one* left behind.” Nontraditional higher education,” Dr. Noone said, “is a serious partner in the evolution of the higher education landscape.”

Presentation: Access to Learning

Darcy Hardy previewed a demonstration of *Access to Learning* that updates the state of online learning in America, a President’s Forum Outreach Initiative. She has been working with online learning since 1998 and has seen that “Some are still skeptical about this approach to education, but online is only going to become more ubiquitous. “ One need she identified is that “People sometimes don’t realize that online instruction is not just an electronic correspondence study, and it’s not simply a transcription of a classroom course.”

Every forum participant was given an *Access to Learning* CD. The CD packaging is designed so institutions can distribute it but identify themselves as the source. She also thanked the institutions which had contributed to the project for their help, and asked that Forum participants send her their comments.

Mr. Ebersole commented that the project focused on how traditional institutions are handling online learning because there is a perception that it is only provided by nontraditional institutions. He also pointed out, “the institutional design and media shown are aspirational, not typical.” Mr. Ebersole reported that he would be heading over to Senator Kennedy’s office later today to present the *Access to Learning* CD to him.

Panel 2: A Media Perspective on Online Learning

The moderator of the panel, **Michael Goldstein**, said, “If we’re so good, why don’t we get any respect? We’ve been truly online for over a decade.” He introduced the panel as “two reporters, and two guys who have been keen observers of the keen observers.” Mr. Goldstein would pose the questions and invite answers. The first question: “Telecourses have been around since the late 80s. Why are we still trying to explain them?”

In response **Doug Lederman** asked, “What do you cite as evidence that you don’t get respect?”

Mr. Goldstein said that “the majority of those completing an Eduventures sponsored survey reported that they have less confidence in distance learning than in more traditional classroom based programs.”

Mr. Lederman said, “the media are a reflection of as well as an interpreter to the public. Editors, like representatives, are still of a generation where they have only been exposed to the traditional version.” Also, he pointed out, “there’s been a deterioration of higher education coverage generally. Elite institutions where editors want their kids to go get coverage.” He suggested encouraging reporters to “take a course with you.”

Andrea Foster agreed. Many journalists have not been educated that way—and don’t know people who have been. Members of Congress and employers are skeptical, and we report that.

Turning to **Bernard Luskin**, Mr. Goldstein said, “Bernie, you’ve been selling the product, what do you think?” Mr. Luskin responded, “There’s always tremendous resistance to change. This Forum came together because we were being ignored by traditional higher education. I remember that there was a similar problem with community colleges and the American Council on Education in the past.” It’s also a pocketbook issue, he said. “It’s defensive; sharing is not natural.”

He suggested thinking of e- in e-learning as meaning not just “electronic”, but also “exciting, exhilarating, and effective.”

Turning to the media representatives, Mr. Goldstein said, “Is he right? We haven’t been engaging people?” Ms. Foster said, “I don’t hear students saying, ‘this was exciting.’” Mr. Lederman said, “I don’t think students get that far. It’s not a quality issue, it’s perceptual—it has to do with preconceived notions and is bound up with the history of correspondence courses, rather than being based on knowledge.” In response to another question, he continued, “People don’t realize traditional institutions are using online learning. It’s only been about twenty years, and it usually takes a generation. Education moves slowly, but it’s going in that direction.”

Ms. Foster said, “The media focuses on the scandalous, like diploma mills.”

Shelly Steinbach commented that to some extent it does go back to correspondence schools and the media’s ideas about them. “The early programs lacked academic rigor.” In one case, state employees were criticized by the local press for all using the same set of courses to get ahead (like ‘scholar-athletes’?). Now, he pointed out, some are taking distance learning in high school. “When our kids go through the process and we understand the process, the conversation will end.”

Mr. Goldstein asked about how to sell online learning through the media. Ms. Foster said, “Highlight success stories. Find people satisfied with their education.” Mr. Lederman suggested inviting the best on=line instructors to do demo segments for local reporters and broadcast to other cities. “Online allows for measurability and accountability to a degree you don’t get with classroom education.”

Mr. Goldstein wondered whether the move of the media to provide information online might help.” Ms. Foster thought “it’s going to take a generation that’s learned in this new way to

write about it differently.” Mr. Lederman, who founded an online higher education publication, said, “The publications we represent are causing great problems for traditional media. It’s having a negative effect on their coverage. There are fewer and fewer well-educated reporters and less imaginative coverage. The generation growing up online is more used to getting information that way”

“How do traditional media and traditional institutions going on line affect us?” Mr. Goldstein asked. Mr. Steinbach said he thought things would get better “as more household names get comfortable online.” He mentioned that North Carolina is putting more money and muscle into getting courses online because it’s cost-effective, but he wondered whether there was a side issue: “Will someone be criticizing them? Campus-based for the rich, online for the poor?”

Mr. Goldstein thought higher education had already gone through something like this with community colleges. “Should we be promoting this as an efficiency tool?” he asked. “Or an access tool?” Both, Ms. Foster thought.

In Mr. Lederman’s opinion, “Community colleges still feel that way, [but] the more blending there is, the more there will be the same kinds of evaluation. It’s less likely to solidify as second-class.

Mr. Luskin pointed out “in retailing, banking, and all the other sectors we are concerned about efficiency and the saving of time. We need to rethink the meaning of time: how you can fit everything into your schedule and your work.” This is where asynchronous learning can help.

A lot goes on campus that can’t go on online, Mr. Goldstein pointed out. “How do we get value online?” A commentator from the floor said that institutions need to feature online on their web sites. “They aren’t selling learning—websites are self-centered, not learning-centered. They’re expecting others to do it for them.” Another commentator wondered, “Are we a bit over-concerned about this? American education has always had haves and have-nots. Actually the field is growing as fast as we can manage.” Someone else suggested “A-learning: Any time, Any place.”

Returning to Mr. Goldstein’s question, someone suggested emphasizing that “online you get feedback and everyone’s involved. We can do things we can’t do in the classroom.”

David Longenecker commented that “one state that cares is Arizona because e-learning is big business there: where they know you, they’re receptive.” Janice Magill added that “the sense of urgency is going to come from the business community saying, ‘we don’t have enough educated people.’ At the moment this is not a squeaky-wheel issue for many states. But it is at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Technology is the answer.”

Panel 3: Online Student Success Research Needs

Frank Mayadas said that the Sloan Foundation asynchronous annual report has become a benchmark. “The surveys report both numbers and perceptions.” The survey of chief academic officers asks, for instance, whether online offerings are part of an institution’s program. The “yeses” are in the majority and increasing.

There has been a gradual increase in positive responses to “Faculty at my school accept the quality and value of online learning,” and they’re now about one-third. The report sorts schools by degree of commitment to online learning. For those that are fully committed, 62 percent of faculty sees the value.

Not all research has to be done by surveys. Interviews may be the way to go to evaluate student success. It might be done by discipline: nursing, business, information technology. It might also be possible to involve the association that does accrediting for that discipline.

In sum, Dr. Mayadas said, “We will continue to assess the state of the overall online movement and also look at doing things that are discipline-specific.

Peter Stokes, working with both traditional and nontraditional organizations, sees higher education as being in a period of transition based on:

1. changing demographics
2. intensified competition
3. demand for accountability.

“We try to advocate for higher education leadership as they respond,” he said. It’s important to cooperate on defining goals, as in the Forum, and measures to judge success.

His company, Eduventures, conducts both administrative and programmatic research. It has internal capacity to do the research itself. It is now conducting a two-year study of students who are purely on line at 70 universities. It is looking at the size of the market, the leading providers, and how to segment by, e.g., institutional type and delivery mode.

Another question is the impact of mainstreaming online learning on growth rates, and at how programs can differentiate themselves. Eduventures is also beginning to examine student success. The work incorporates operational benchmarks, new markets, and alumni satisfaction. He hopes to compare the success of online and campus-based learning in terms of how careers progress over time.

Questions still to be answered are:

- What don’t we know about student success?
- Who doesn’t know?
- Are there any risks in aggregating the information?

In the general discussion, Muriel Oaks said that “One audience we care about is our academic partners. Most skepticism is internal.” But she added that the degree is the same whether it’s earned online or on campus: Employers can’t know so can’t compare.

Dana Offerman wondered why a high percentage of Excelsior students are ethnically diverse. “Why are they attracted to our programs?” Someone else wondered whether institutions are helping people remediate.”

Mr. Ebersole mentioned that Excelsior has been working with Zogby International on a series of surveys, one of which deals with what employers think of online learning. A previous Penn study had said they were negative. It appears that they are more likely to accept degrees from big online institutions than from the less well-known: “The brand trumps the methodology.” Also, “the more you know about it, the more you like it. 82% of human resource managers and CEO’s that expressed some familiarity with online learning indicated that they made no distinction between degrees earned online or in a classroom.” Some believe that online students miss out on networking opportunities.

The degree of support in the online community is not well understood: 81% of adults and 82% of minority adults without a four-year degree thought both teacher and peer support are important. On the other hand, Ebersole noted that former General Electric CEO John Welch has observed that those completing a degree online are seen as having the focus and self-discipline that employers seek.

Closing Remarks: John Ebersole

In reporting on his visit to Senator Kennedy’s office, John Ebersole said, “The Senator expressed support for online learning and the initiatives of the Forum. He thinks it’s the way to go for many adults and for expanding access to higher education in general. The visit was very gratifying.”

New items on the Forum agenda:

- We have just started talking to the states. Dr. Morse intends to talk to the accrediting agencies about how to best reach out to the states.
- We need to know who you’re sending CDs to, so we can keep an account.
- We will keep you informed of the Zogby survey results.

Mr. Ebersole closed by thanking all the participants.