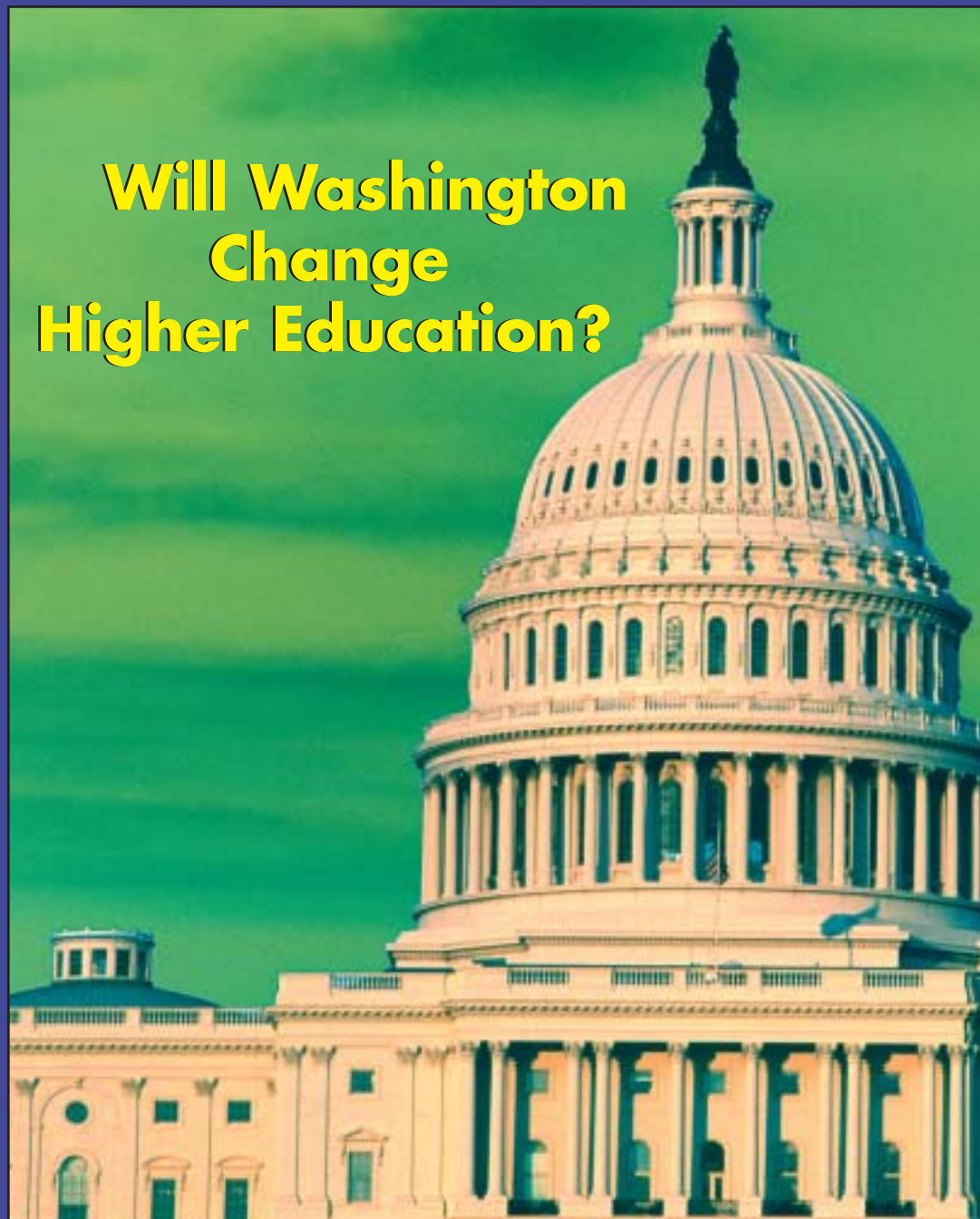


CONNECTION

THE JOURNAL OF THE NEW ENGLAND BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION



Will Washington Change Higher Education?

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WINTER 2007

Inside:

- Sizing up the Work of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education
- Exclusive Essays by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings and U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy
- Will Greater Transparency Bring Economic Diversity to Campus?
- As Student Debt Increases, Colleges Owe More in Performance
- How "Open-Source" Curricula Could Bridge the Global Education Divide

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EDITOR'S MEMO

Transparency

On the chance that the report of the national Commission on the Future of Higher Education defies its genre and does not collect dust, New Englanders need to pay attention ... especially to the commission's calls for increased transparency.

To be sure, the process launched by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings in 2005 and headed by Houston investment manager Charles Miller, a former Bush-appointed chair of the University of Texas System, began inauspiciously in the historical seat of American higher education. Of the commission's 19 members, only one, former MIT President Charles Vest, had any significant connection to New England. And when the commission held its sole New England hearing last March, just five of the 19 showed.

Nonetheless, the commission's final report issued in September 2006 could gain traction on some heretofore intractable problems such as aligning high school curricula with higher education's expectations and making college more affordable. And the report will surely generate further debate with its trajectory toward college-level standardized testing and its call for a national "unit-record" database to track students' progress and open a window on how colleges are performing and accounting for costs.

In a September speech at the National Press Club, Spellings offered a hint at which recommendations would be part of the now lame-duck department's agenda. Conspicuously absent was the commission's call to dramatically increase need-based Pell Grants—a proposal Washington's most stalwart supporter of opportunity, Massachusetts Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, has already signaled will be a priority when he retakes the chairmanship of the powerful Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

The secretary did champion the controversial student record database as part of an overall emphasis on making higher education more transparent, noting: "If you want to buy a new car, you go online and compare a full range of models, makes and pricing options. And when you're done you'll know everything from how well each car holds its value down to wheel size and number of cup-holders. ... The same transparency and ease should be the case when students and families shop for colleges, especially when one year of college can cost a lot more than a car!" The idea, the secretary explained, is to find out: "How much is this school really going to cost me? How long will it take to get my degree?"

The database will be a tough sell for an administration that has disregarded privacy in its quest for "total information awareness." Still, the general call for transparency could find legs as the public tires of secrecy all around. And despite resistance from academe, that may not be such a bad thing. But in the car analogy, cup-holders and even resale value are not the end all. Consumers also should know why Detroit steadfastly resists alternative fuels and why it took so long to equip cars with air bags. In the same way, higher education transparency should go beyond oversimplified measures of graduation rates and job placement.

How about a clear view, for example, into the outreach efforts of the couple of dozen New England colleges that still in this day and age—in this demography—enroll a student body that is more than 95 percent white? Could we see exactly how many children of alumni a given college admits each year? How much money do wealthy colleges draw from their endowments each year and how does that square with their inevitable annual tuition hikes? How many students get tuition discounts? How many drop out after incurring life-changing debt? How about the precise terms of deals struck between colleges and commercial vendors from Nike to credit card companies. Isn't it time for full transparency on exactly what it is about a course at one accredited New England college that makes its credits unacceptable to another college? How about publishing the ratio of adjuncts to full-time professors teaching undergraduates?

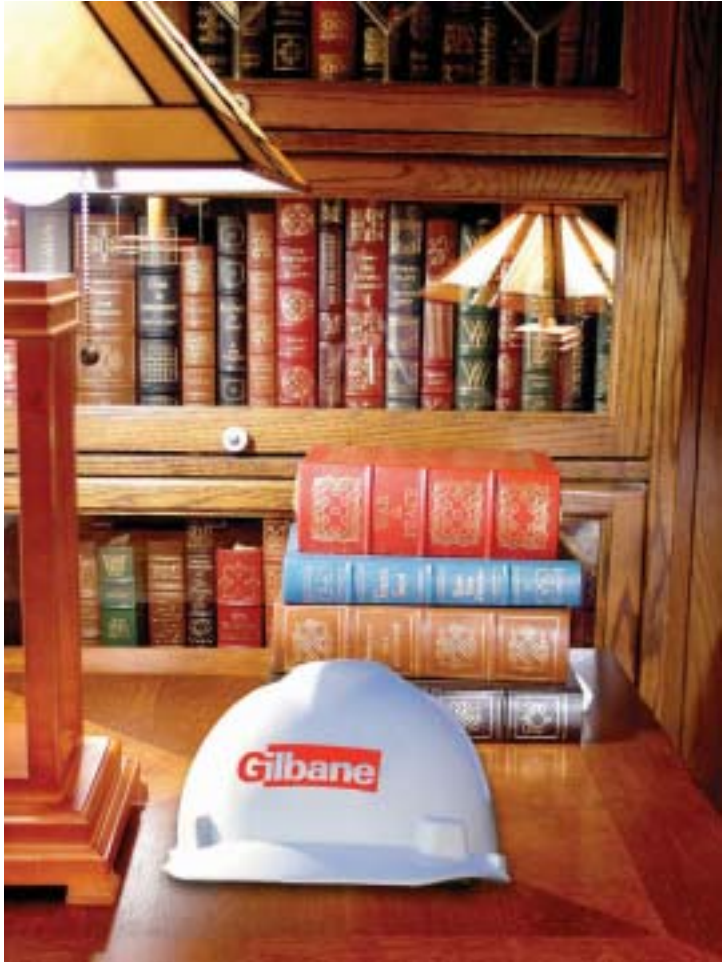
The last federal education report to have any real impact was *A Nation at Risk*. Ronald Reagan mostly hoped its authors would call for prayer in schools and the abolition of the Education Department. But in the end, it was the report's other recommendations on accountability and teacher pay that ushered in 20 years of education reform, standards and testing. Transparency could be a lasting—and enlightening—byproduct of the recent commission's work as long it allows students and families to see through to something that matters.

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College Emissions

With New Hampshire's average winter temperatures rising by nearly 4°F over the past century, and the number of downhill ski resorts shrinking from 65 in the 1970s to about 20 today, the University of New Hampshire doesn't need a weatherman to know which way its wind blows.

UNH is among a growing number of New England campuses reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions while teaching environmental sustainability. UNH says it cut emissions by 5 percent from 2003 to 2005 by increasing use of public transportation, powering down computers during breaks, retrofitting buildings with energy-efficient lighting and fixtures, and composting and recycling. A new cogeneration plant and increased use of vehicles fueled by compressed natural gas, electricity or biodiesel will slash emissions by 40 percent more, UNH officials say.

UNH is not alone. Middlebury approved plans for an \$11 million biomass plant that will cut greenhouse gas emissions by almost 12,500 metric tons annually with power generated from sustainably harvested wood chips. Besides providing a renewable fuel for campus heating, cooling and electricity, the initiative will create demand for 20,000 tons of locally produced wood chips annually. Down Route 30, Green Mountain College has signed up with Central Vermont Public Service to deliver energy created from cow manure on Vermont dairy farms.

Mount Wachusett Community College has slashed its reliance on electricity for heating by 80 percent since opening a biomass plant in 2002. Now, the college has state support to test the electric-generating potential of a wind turbine and National Science Foundation money to offer courses on renewable energy.

Vermont Law School is going after global warming from a different angle. The law school recently received a three-year, \$1.8 million grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development to team up with Sun Yat-Sen University

School of Law in China's Guangdong Province to provide training in environmental law in China, where a booming economy adds the equivalent of Vermont's total electric demand to the electric system every month and few legal mechanisms exist to protect the environment. The partnership will propose solutions to mutual environmental problems, offer workshops for law school faculty in Guangdong Province and fellowships for Chinese faculty and students to study in Vermont, and conduct joint research on regulatory reforms and energy alternatives that could minimize greenhouse gas emissions.

Yale, meanwhile, launched a collaboration with the insurance giant Marsh and the social investment group Ceres to teach members of corporate boards about the liabilities and opportunities global climate change will create for companies.

MySpace Gets Schooled

The social networking revolution, seen in such phenomena as MySpace,

has focused on sharing information about one's personal life. *What band did you see last night?* But social networking also offers "tremendous potential to facilitate the exchange of thoughts and ideas," says Jeffrey Yan, who co-founded Providence-based Digication in 2002 with fellow Rhode Island School of Design teacher Kelly Driscoll.

Digication and other small firms have developed online digital portfolios and safe social networks to help schools tap that potential. Digication's Spotlight allows teachers, students and alumni to create "spots" where they can post their original writing, artwork, music and ideas for colleges, employers, teachers and other students to see. "The motivation behind doing work now is no longer just, 'Am I going to get a good grade?' but 'Is my work going to get posted by my teacher or the department?,'" says Yan.

While many people have damaged their digital identity by posting suspect information to social networking communities, according to Yan, schools and teachers can control

Retentive

One way to measure how well a college does at "retaining" students is to look at the percentage of degree-seeking, full-time freshmen who return the next year as sophomores. At extremely selective private institutions such as Williams College, the rate is 98 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, fewer than half of freshmen at some public community colleges serving working adults return for sophomore year. Much of this is predictable. Students with less money and more distractions, such as work and family responsibilities, are less likely to return than traditional, perhaps privileged, students. So private colleges like Cambridge and Fisher that target working adults also have lower retention rates. With that caveat, CONNECTION compared New England public four-year colleges and universities with retention rates over 80 percent with private four-year colleges and universities with rates under 60 percent.

New England public four-year colleges and universities where more than 80 percent of full-time freshmen returned as sophomores, 2004-05 ...

Maine Maritime Academy	96%
U.S. Coast Guard Academy	91%
University of Connecticut	90%
University of New Hampshire	85%
Massachusetts College of Art	85%
University of Connecticut Stamford	84%
University of Vermont	84%
University of Massachusetts Amherst	82%
University of Connecticut Avery Point	81%

New England private four-year colleges and universities where fewer than 60 percent or fewer full-time freshmen returned as sophomores, 2004-05 ...

Cambridge College	28%
Fisher College	31%
Woodbury College	50%
Mitchell College	51%
College of St. Joseph (Vt.)	51%
American International College	56%
Pine Manor College	58%
Mount Ida College	59%

Source: The Institute for College Access and Success, www.economicdiversity.org

who gets on the Digication Spotlight network and whom students contact.

Spotlight follows Digication's first splash called Digication Campus, a "web-based" classroom Yan and Driscoll developed to enhance teaching in RISD's art education program. Campus digitally archives information discussed in class, makes it accessible with a regular web browser and encourages students to build on the discussion via web postings. A teacher might offer a question as a prompt, one student responds and soon a collaborative process of learning is underway. Instead of the traditional homework relationship between one student and an instructor, Yan allows all students to see and respond to one another's homework. This past summer, Yan taught a six-week class to 12 students. When it was over, the class had generated 600 posts. "When one student does something, it motivates others to learn from it and take clues about how they can do it better," says Yan. "They start to build knowledge. With the right guidance, that's a better way to learn. It's self-discovery not on your own but as a class."

Being able to post a response digitally offers a particular equalizer for students who learn best when they have time to digest what they hear in class. Traditionally, these students might have to wait a week until the class meets again to contribute to the discussion. Now, they can post their thoughts when they click. "Some students are very good thinkers but they're not that good at thinking quickly," says Yan.

Digication provides Campus and Spotlight free to the first 1,000 users at any U.S. accredited institution. That can cover a whole elementary or high school or work like a "free trial offer" at larger institutions, Yan says.

Reproducing Elites

"As standards have risen, testing has become more important in regulating access to college; like reserving beds in the best hospitals for the healthiest people, we reserve seats in the best colleges for the best students. As a result, access to college is increasingly concentrated among families with college-educated parents and high wages, and higher education is becoming a passive participant in a system that reproduces economic and cultural elites."

—Anthony P. Carnevale, senior fellow at the National Center on Education and the Economy, writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 22, 2006

Trouble in Paradise

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush seemed to have plenty to boast about when the state's fourth-graders moved ahead of their counterparts nationwide on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress math results. Most impressive, African-American scores jumped from 215 in 2003 to 224 in 2005. In August 2006, Bush and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg coauthored an op-ed in the *Washington Post* attributing the improved performance and closing racial gap to their emphasis on accountability.

Then Boston College threw another Hail Mary. "It turns out that the apparent dramatic gains in grade 4 NAEP math results are simply an indirect reflection of the fact that in 2003-04, Florida started flunking many more students, disproportionately minority students, to repeat grade 3," BC education professor Walter Haney observed in a paper presented to colleagues in September.

Indeed, in 2003-04, Florida schools held back up to 20 percent of African-American and Hispanic children to repeat third grade, compared with about 6 percent of white students, Haney reported. "Thus it is clear that the NAEP grade 4 results for 2005 reflected not any dramatic improvements in elementary education in the state. Rather, they were an indirect reflection of Florida policy that resulted in two to three times larger percentages of minority than white children being flunked to repeat grade 3."

Haney called all this "a tragedy in the making," noting that making children repeat grades doesn't boost achievement and dramatically increases the probability that students will drop out.

* * * *

Schools hold back even larger proportions of ninth-graders, especially black males. Writing in *Education Week*, Michael Holzman, consultant to the Cambridge, Mass.-based Schott Foundation, notes that many schools restrict promotion from ninth to 10th grade based on a high-stakes exam, and nationally, 30 percent or more of black male students repeat grade 9, compared with 15 percent of white males. The resulting "grade 9 bulge" Holzman says, reveals a failure to educate black students as well as a statistical hazard, since high school graduation rates are often measured by comparing the number of ninth-graders one year to the number of students who get diplomas four years later.

Letters

An inaccuracy in the Fall 2006 "Data Connection" feature could lead readers to underestimate the severity of the impact of recent military base closings on New England's economy.

The item reads: "Number of civilian and military jobs lost as a result of closings of Loring Air Force Base in Maine, Fort Devens in Massachusetts, and Pease Air Force Base in New Hampshire: 3,889."

Actually, this statistic includes civilian jobs only and excludes military employment. For example, Fort Devens alone had 6,700 military jobs when it went on the base closing list and still had more than 4,000 such jobs when it eventually closed. MassDevelopment and neighboring Devens communities (Ayer, Harvard and Shirley) have worked together for more than a decade to mitigate these enormous losses and make Devens the thriving economic engine that it is today.

Thank you for allowing me to correct the record.

Robert L. Culver
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An Education Mandate for New England's Governors

EVAN S. DOBELLE

New England jobs that were once open to smart, ambitious high school graduates now require a college degree. But New Englanders face two daunting barriers to college success. One, many are simply not prepared for college academically or in other ways; at least 25 percent of those who enter ninth grade will not even graduate from high school. Two, many cannot afford the high price of college—or believe they can't.

Here are some regional strategies for the six New England governors to consider in tackling the twin problems of college readiness and affordability:

- Hold a summit meeting on how we finance public education. New England is failing its urban, rural, low-income and first-generation students from Bangor to Bridgeport. All our best intentions about making these students “college-ready” and closing the “education gap” are empty as long as tax-poor cities depend on local property taxes to finance schools.

- Create a regionwide forum for best practices in teaching. Some education reformers would put creative teachers in a straitjacket of curricular requirements and tests. If we want innovation, we need to give teachers and administrators financial incentives to try new ideas and to share information on what works.

- Expand kindergarten and make preschool mandatory for three-year-olds. This one's a no-brainer. The six states can invest in early childhood education now or spend the money in the criminal justice and social welfare systems later.

- Develop a regional network of policymakers and educators, from pre-kindergarten through college, to explore ways to make sure what our

schools teach is aligned appropriately with what colleges expect of freshmen. New England could create a regional exchange program enabling college professors to spend a semester working in K-12 schools and giving school teachers time off to undertake research projects at New England colleges.

- Develop marketing campaigns targeted at those groups of students who face the most difficulty in entering and succeeding in college. These campaigns should work in partnership with after-school and enrichment programs administered by community organizations. Their goal must be to impress upon students and their parents the value of a college degree in today's job market, and to direct them to one-stop web sites for the information they need to successfully navigate college options.

Some of these steps are already being undertaken by the New England Board of Higher Education's “College Ready New England” initiative. This effort marks the first time in history that the region's governors, state higher education executives and education commissioners have come together with the business community to increase college preparedness and success.

The region's governors and other key officials also need to step up to the plate to make higher education affordable.

According to federal estimates, in this decade, more than two million low- and moderate-income high school graduates who are college ready will not complete college due to financial barriers. Here are some ways New England can reverse this fortune:

- Use political leverage to lobby for strengthened Pell Grants. The recent Commission on the Future of Higher Education recommended raising the

purchasing power of the average Pell Grant to cover 70 percent of average in-state tuition at public four-year campuses, up from the current 48 percent. Five years of efforts to raise the maximum Pell Grant have failed. But Congress and the administration might now be ready to listen to New England's bipartisan delegation of governors if they went to D.C., unified, to argue for more need-based aid.

- Direct aid dollars to need, not merit. The recent history of student aid is marked by two trends: 1) a shift from grants to loans and tax breaks and 2) a shift away from aid based on student financial need to aid based on sometimes dubious measures of merit. Merit aid often benefits students who would go to college anyway. If we are serious about the value of higher education to our future, we need to use scarce resources to fund students who would not otherwise go to college.

- Create a regionwide corps of students, including nontraditional students, to address our teaching and nursing shortages by waiving tuition in exchange for a guarantee that they will practice their profession for four years in New England after graduation.

- Make community college free and ease transfer of credits to four-year institutions. Harry Truman suggested 60 years ago that education be tuition-free through “14th grade.” It's time to make this happen.

College readiness and affordability present a quagmire for too many New England students. Working together, the region's six governors have a brilliant opportunity to offer those students and their families new hope.

Evan S. Dobelle is president and CEO of the New England Board of Higher Education and publisher of CONNECTION. Email: edobelle@nebhe.org.

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Global Student Marketplace

MARY R. CATHCART



Is New England prepared for the challenges and opportunities offered by a shrinking world?

In November, NEBHE convened nearly 300 educators and decision-makers in Providence for a thought-provoking conference titled, *College Ready/World Ready: New England Higher Education in a Global Student Marketplace*. The conference featured three panel discussions and luncheon addresses by Asia expert S. Frederick Starr, who chairs the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and Larry E. Christensen, vice president of export controls with JPMorgan Chase Vastera.

Demographic trends analyst Peter Francese, the founding editor of *American Demographics* magazine, showed that New England is losing young people and women of child-bearing age faster than it is gaining immigrants. The region's native population of traditional college age will also soon decline, he predicted.

Christopher "Kip" Bergstrom, executive director of the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, noted that New England must turn its immigrants, who are often illiterate in their native languages, into "knowledge workers."

Bergstrom reassured the audience that students from disadvantaged backgrounds can learn and succeed if afforded the right kinds of learning programs. He cited the Metropolitan School in Providence, where each teacher facilitates the learning of 14 students and stays with those students for four years until they graduate, even keeping students on speed dial on their cell phones to stay connected.

Philip Altbach, director of Boston College's Center for International Higher Education, explained that of the estimated 2.3 million college stu-

dents worldwide who are studying outside their home countries, about one-third study in the United States. He said New England should play off its higher education brand and market itself as a higher education destination. He added that international students want to be in an English-speaking culture. "English is the Latin of the 21st century," he noted.

Record global migration among academics and other professionals will only grow as borders become more porous, Altbach said. He urged educators to pay attention to global treaties; the Bologna agreement aimed at breaking down walls between higher education systems *within* Europe could also build walls *around* Europe, he warned. Trade treaties such as GATS will impact international distance education.

Allan Goodman, president of the Institute of International Education, noted that the United Kingdom and Australia invest far more than the United States in recruiting foreign students and scholars, though financial resources are available for this purpose.

Karen Boucias of the University of Maine focused on the small number of U.S. students who study abroad, noting that 80 percent of U.S. citizens do not even have passports. Her program focuses on helping foreign students feel "at home" in Maine and encourages them to recruit others when they return to their native countries.

Carol Bellamy, president of Vermont's School for International Training, warned educators to avoid the study abroad "low road," but instead to manage the "footprint" of U.S. students abroad and immerse students in the language and culture of the country to which they are going.

Carole Cowan, president of Middlesex Community College, high-

lighted the vital role of community colleges in preparing immigrants for the workforce.

Bates College Vice President for External Affairs William Hiss explained how Bates has merged its domestic and international financial aid and created a full-time position of international dean of admissions. Hiss visited Hanoi's Amsterdam High School while in Vietnam adopting a daughter. Today, the school accounts for more Bates applicants than do the high schools in the college's host cities of Lewiston and Auburn. Now 70 percent of Bates students do some study abroad, and Bates receives enough international applicants to fill its entire class with foreign students.

Roger Williams University President Roy Nirschel explained how his wife Paula was touched by the suffering of Afghan women following September 11 and asked her husband what he could do as president. In response, Roger Williams introduced a special four-year scholarship for an Afghan woman. The Nirschels challenged university presidents across the country to follow suit, and now, more than a dozen colleges participate in the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women, and Roger Williams has extended its outreach to Iraq and other distressed countries.

These were a few of the compelling revelations at this NEBHE conference. For more on this topic, visit: <http://www.nebhe.org/worldready06>.

Mary R. Cathcart is chair of the New England Board of Higher Education. She is a senior policy associate at the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center and former four-term Maine state senator. Email: maryorono@verizon.net.



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The Commission on the Future of Higher Education *Perspectives*

In September, the national Commission on the Future of Higher Education appointed one year earlier by U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings presented what many commentators saw as a long-overdue analysis of the state of higher education in the United States. Not since 1983's *A Nation at Risk* had a government report on education been so anticipated, if not necessarily welcomed. The commission's findings and recommendations fall in four main areas: access, affordability, quality and accountability. Where the proposals go from here will depend in large part on the priorities of a new Democrat-controlled Congress.

Connection asked Secretary Spellings as well as Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D.-Mass.), the new chair of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, and other experts to comment on the commission's work, particularly as it relates to New England. (For a full copy of the report, visit: www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html)

Time for Action to Bolster Future of Higher Education

MARGARET SPELLINGS

Higher education in America had its origins in New England more than 350 years ago. Since then, America's colleges and universities have been the incubators of great ideas, birthplaces of great inventions and testing grounds of great individuals. For generations of New Englanders, meanwhile, a college education has provided the opportunity to fully embrace the American Dream. In recent decades, New England has led our nation with the highest percentage of citizens with bachelor's degrees. This has led to strong economic growth and high quality of life for the region.

Through the years, New England institutions have also built a strong partnership with the federal government in responding to challenges our nation has faced. More than 50 years ago, when the New England Board of Higher Education was established, America faced stiff competition from the Soviet Union in the academic fields of math and science as evidenced by the launch of Sputnik. In response, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 helped academia focus on math, science and modern languages. Within a decade, our country tripled the number of science and engineering Ph.Ds awarded annually. More importantly, our universities pioneered new research and development that improved the quality of life for our citizens and countless others worldwide.

The competition America faces today from around the world might not be as obvious as a satellite streaking through space. But in the past half-century, technological

advances have resulted in an ever-flattening world. Aging populations, a diminishing manufacturing sector and increased global competition from countries like India and China mean that a college education is more important than ever.

Over a year ago, I launched a bipartisan commission of business and education leaders to lead a robust national dialogue on the future of higher education. The commission's final report, *A Test of Leadership*, offers keen insights into the changes that must be made for us to provide wider opportunities for more Americans to pursue and earn college degrees. In September, in response to the commission's recommendations, I released my action plan to make college more accessible, affordable and accountable.

Accessibility. The No Child Left Behind Act has brought high standards and accountability to our elementary and middle schools, ensuring that our students are getting the fundamentals necessary for future academic success. When almost half of all freshmen in American colleges and universities must take at least one remedial course, however, it only makes sense that we expand these same principles of accountability to our high schools.

Parents rightly expect that high schools' curriculum standards be aligned with college-level expectations. Research has indicated that a student's exposure to a rigorous and challenging curriculum during high school leads to higher college attendance rates, better retention and faster completion. New England is leading the way in

increasing the rigor of high school, as evidenced by the efforts of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island—each the winner of a National Governors Association Honor States Grant to redesign high schools.

Affordability. As we work to increase accessibility, we should also consider ways to make college more affordable for all New Englanders. While the amount of Pell Grant aid available to low-income students has increased—from \$9.96 billion in 2001-02 to an estimated \$12.77 billion for 2006-2007—more needs to be done. States and institutions must do their part to support need-based financial aid. In New England, this effort varies widely. For example, one New England state contributes \$0.85 in need-based aid for every dollar of federal Pell Grants received, while a neighboring state's contribution is just \$0.11 on the federal dollar.

In addition, the financial aid process must be simpler for students and families. This fall, the Department of Education will commission an independent review of the entire financial aid system. This study will provide a roadmap for how to simplify student access to financial aid, notify students of their eligibility earlier, target available and new resources to the neediest students and reduce inflationary pressures on tuition. In the meantime, the department's Federal Student Aid office is identifying ways to partner with states and access initiatives like the New England Board of Higher Education's College Ready New England initiative to get information about financial aid eligibility in the hands of students and families when they are in middle school.

Accountability. Parents and students need comparative information about colleges. They deserve to know the answers to basic questions about actual tuition costs or

the likelihood of employment when they graduate. Over the years, residents of New England have invested billions of dollars in public and private colleges and universities. It's reasonable for taxpayers and students to know what they are getting in return for that money.

That's why I have called for the development of a voluntary, privacy-protected higher education information system. Two states in the New England region, Connecticut and Massachusetts, already have such a postsecondary system in place. In New England, more than any other region, the high mobility of students makes connectivity and comparability of these data systems important. Having accurate data can showcase institutions' good work to students and policymakers. It will also enable governing boards, presidents and faculty senates to make more informed decisions that will better serve their institutions and students.

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Shared Responsibility. The reactions to the commission's findings have already achieved one of my major objectives: to start a conversation in our country about the future of higher education. Now is the time for all key stakeholders to move into action, and I am encouraged by the leadership already demonstrated in New England. In late October 2006, Rhode Island Gov. Donald Carcieri announced a plan to increase need-based scholarships by \$20 million—nearly doubling the amount currently allocated. His plan would reward low-income students who perform well in high school and on state tests with scholarships to attend any public or private college in Rhode Island. The value of the grants would be based on the tuition at the University of Rhode Island. The plan also has provisions to award scholarships based on financial need for students to attend any school in the country.

This spring, the efforts of Rhode Island and other states will be highlighted in a national summit to be hosted by the Education Department. Leaders from higher education, government, business and philanthropic organizations will join us in developing an action plan with specific responsibilities for all stakeholders.

Government and higher education have a long tradition of working together to address the common challenges faced by our country. This partnership has produced historic changes that have benefited generations. We must build on that partnership and move forward to strengthen higher education for New England and all Americans. Together, we can ensure that the countless opportunities a college education provides are a reality for every American who chooses to pursue one.

Margaret Spellings is the U.S. secretary of education.

"Our yearlong examination of the challenges facing higher education has brought us to the uneasy conclusion that the sector's past attainments have led our nation to unwarranted complacency about its future."

"In this consumer-driven environment, students increasingly care little about the distinctions that sometimes preoccupy the academic establishment, from whether a college has for-profit or nonprofit status to whether its classes are offered online or in brick-and-mortar buildings. Instead, they care—as we do—about results."

"Substandard high school preparation is compounded by poor alignment between high schools and colleges, which often creates an 'expectations gap' between what colleges require and what high schools produce."

—A Test of Leadership, Commission on the Future of Higher Education

To Strengthen Higher Education, Boost Pell Grants, End Waste in Private Loan Programs

EDWARD M. KENNEDY

In this new era of globalization, it's more important than ever for our citizens to have a college education so they can obtain good jobs and have a fair chance at the American Dream. But it's becoming increasingly difficult for them to get such an education—including in New England. According to the most recent report of the College Board, our region's four-year colleges—both public and private—continue to be the most expensive in the nation. Earlier this year, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education gave every state in the region an "F" in college affordability. New England is the nation's leader in many aspects of higher education, but our distinction in this category is hardly welcome.

Obviously, we can't let this situation continue. If we don't act quickly to improve college access, we risk losing the educated workforce that has helped transform our region's economy and produced our eminence in health care, biomedical research, computer technology, finance and education. We also risk maintaining the shameful status quo—here and across the country—in which low-income, first-generation and minority students are far less likely to obtain a college degree than other students.

I welcome the recent report by the secretary of education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. I don't agree with all the commission's recommendations, but the report is helping create a better debate on higher education and its role in ensuring opportunity for all our citizens, and this discussion has great potential to improve our system of higher education.

I support the report's call for an increase in the Pell Grant, so that the average award will cover 70 percent of the typical tuition at a four-year public college. In New England, this increase would directly help more than 200,000 low-income beneficiaries of these grants—many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. After four years in a row of broken pledges from President Bush and the Republican Congress to raise the maximum Pell Grant, the commission's reaffirmation of this program as the foundation of our college aid system is a welcome development.

I disagree, however, with the commission's suggestion that we pay for this increase by consolidating other federal grant programs. Instead of taking away funds that go directly to students, we should end the outrageous waste in the government's student loan programs, and use those savings to increase need-based aid. We could generate \$13 billion in new Pell Grants over the next 10 years—at no cost to the taxpayer—by promoting

fair competition between the privately funded Federal Family Education Loan program and the government's less-expensive Direct Loan program. Such a change would generate more than \$100 million in additional Pell Grants every year in New England.

We could also auction off the right to make or hold student loans, so that lenders have an incentive to participate in federal student loan programs at the lowest cost to the government. Today, we pay lenders enormous subsidies to participate, because the law—basically unchanged in 40 years—reflects the effort in the 1960s to attract lenders to take part in the then-new student loan program. But with thousands of lenders participating today, inflated subsidies are no longer necessary. By requiring lenders to bid on the right to make or hold student loans, we could significantly reduce the cost of the government's loan program—and channel the savings into grants for our neediest students. At a time when government subsidies make student loans the second most profitable business for banks—after credit cards—such bold options are well worth considering.

After four years in a row of broken pledges from President Bush and the Republican Congress to raise the maximum Pell Grant, the commission's reaffirmation of this program as the foundation of our college aid system is a welcome development.

As the new Congress moves forward, we should agree that cost must never be a barrier to college education. We should expand the income-contingent repayment program for student loans, so no borrowers have to put more than 15 percent of their monthly discretionary income into loan payments. Loan

"A specific benchmark should be established to increase the purchasing power of the average Pell Grant to a level of 70 percent (from 48 percent in 2004–05) of the average in-state tuition at public, four-year institutions over a period of five years. However, even with significant additional federal investment, there is little chance of restoring the Pell's purchasing power if tuition increases absorb most or all of the new money. This effort requires not only federal investment but also strategies by which colleges and universities contain increases in tuition and fees."

—A Test of Leadership, Commission on the Future of Higher Education

forgiveness after 10 years should be available to those in public service professions such as teaching, public health and law enforcement.

In addition, all young students in America should be offered contracts when they reach eighth grade, making clear that if they work hard, finish high school and are accepted to a college, we will guarantee them a grant that covers the cost of earning a degree. The federal government should partner with states to support the creation of these “Contract for Educational Opportunity” grants to cover students’ unmet needs, up to the cost of attendance at public four-year colleges in that state.

We also need greater scrutiny of the private student loan market, which has grown more than thirteen-fold over the past decade. As colleges and universities in New England know, private lenders are increasingly using aggressive marketing practices to get students’ business. Some have offered exotic trips to financial aid administrators, proposed deals in which colleges receive perks in exchange for establishing arrangements with lenders, and urged students to borrow more than they need to attend college. It’s time to end these abuses.

I also hope Secretary Spellings will use the regulatory process underway at the Education Department to help students and families struggling under the weight of heavy student loan burdens. Using her existing authority, the secretary could take several steps to address the commission’s finding that “too many students are either discouraged from attending college by rising costs, or take on worrisome debt burdens in order to

do so.” For example, the department could simplify the application process for student loan deferrals when borrowers have unexpected economic hardships. Steps like this could be easily accomplished and quickly implemented, and would enjoy broad public support.

All young students in America should be offered contracts when they reach eighth grade, making clear that if they work hard, finish high school and are accepted to a college, we will guarantee them a grant that covers the cost of earning a degree.

It’s clear, however, that no consensus yet exists on some of the commission’s other recommendations, such as its calls to establish a new national database to track students’ progress through college. Several New England states have developed such systems on their own, and the results are impressive. In Massachusetts, the Board of Higher Education uses its database to provide detailed performance reports on access, affordability and graduation for its 29 public colleges. The database also includes the information on students’ high school performance, so that colleges can assess the effect of secondary school preparation on college readiness. Such state-based efforts are extremely valuable, but in order for such a database to work on a national level, we must address legitimate concerns about the burden such a system would create for smaller colleges, as well as worries about the privacy of student data. Before we require our higher education institutions to send even more data to the federal government, we should make an effort to see whether we can scale back what we currently ask them to send, and put together a clear plan that explains how a national database can help individual students and colleges.

The 20th century was widely hailed as the American century, but the 21st century is up for grabs. No nation is guaranteed a future of lasting prosperity. We have to work for it. We have to sacrifice for it. We have to earn it.

New Englanders have a choice. We can continue to be buffeted by the harsh winds of the global economy. Or we can think anew, and guide the currents of globalization with a progressive vision that strengthens our nation and equips our citizens to move confidently into the future. By doing so, we can turn this era of globalization into a new era of opportunity for our region. Once again, we’ll be calling on our remarkable system of higher education to help us do so. The Commission on the Future of Higher Education deserves our gratitude for its important contributions to this indispensable debate. Now it’s up to all of us to get the job done.

U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) chairs the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. Email: senator@kennedy.senate.gov.

“We propose replacing the current maze of financial aid programs, rules and regulations with a system more in line with student needs and national priorities. That effort would require a significant increase in need-based financial aid and a complete restructuring of the current federal financial aid system. Our recommendations call for consolidating programs, streamlining processes, and replacing the FAFSA with a much shorter and simpler application.”

—A Test of Leadership, Commission on the Future of Higher Education

“Finding effective ways to track the progress of individuals, without having their identities known in some originating database, seems to us to be impossible. ... We also fear that the existence of such a massive registry will prove irresistible to future demands for ancillary uses of the data, and for additions to the data for non-educational purposes.”

—National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities President David Warren, writing in *National Crosstalk* about the commission’s proposal to create a database of student records.

Commission Report Should Prompt a Re-examination of New England Higher Education

BLENDA J. WILSON

The national Commission on the Future of Higher Education provides some deserved criticism of the way U.S. higher education currently works. Insofar as higher education institutions are the intellectual and economic engines that power New England, it is prudent for us to re-examine higher education in New England today from the perspective of the commission's report, *A Test of Leadership*.

Access. The commission correctly observes that the major impediments to improving access to college for young people are: 1) achievement inequities at the K-12 level, and 2) the disconnect between the expectations of the K-12 and higher education communities.

In New England, the inequities between K-12 students of color and white students and between wealthy and poor students are pronounced. This does not bode well for the region, since the number of white high school graduates is projected to shrink by 18,000 by 2018, while the number of minority students will grow by 11,000. New England is also experiencing an increase in the number of school-age children living in poverty. In Rhode Island, for example, an estimated 21 percent of children under age 18 live in poverty.

The so-called Spellings Commission recommends that states adopt high school curricula that prepare all students for participation in postsecondary education and that higher education play a strong role in improving K-12 education. Higher education institutions in New England must work more closely with K-12 schools to make sure that a larger percentage of the region's fastest growing populations have a chance to graduate from high school and succeed in college. Already, partnerships between the University of Massachusetts Lowell and Lowell High School and between UMass Boston and the Dorchester Education Complex create an environment of high expectations and academic achievement while providing high school students with access to rigorous courses, mentoring, advising and assessment. Partnerships like these can help lead the way in expanding access to higher education for New England high school students.

Cost and Affordability. The issues of access and affordability are inextricably linked. No matter how well students perform in high school, the high cost of college attendance will be a significant barrier for large numbers of low- and moderate-income students.

In New England, the cost of college is especially prohibitive. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education reports that for New England families in the bottom 40 percent of incomes, the cost of attending a public four-year college—tuition and

room and board minus financial aid—will absorb up to half of annual household incomes. These costs are an insurmountable obstacle to college participation even for “college-ready” students.

The commission recommends that new incentives be developed for institutions to improve cost management, productivity and efficiency as ways to control costs. The commission rejected price controls but hinted that limiting the growth in college tuition to the growth in median family income over a five-year period, for example, would be an appropriate use of benchmarking. Such policies would be particularly meaningful in those New England states where major declines in traditional industries and a slow recovery from the economic recession of the late 1990s have limited growth of household incomes.

Financial Aid. One reason New England's public colleges and universities are less affordable than the national average is that the New England states invest far less in public higher education and grant aid than states in other regions. Also, as in other states, new non-need based financial aid programs, such as the John and Abigail Adams scholarships for high achievers in Massachusetts have diverted already-diminished student aid dollars away from the neediest students.

“States should provide incentives for higher education institutions to make long-term commitments to working actively and collaboratively with K-12 schools and systems to help underserved students improve college preparation and persistence.”

“The philanthropic community and other third-party organizations are urged to invest in the research and development of instruments measuring the intersection of institutional resources, student characteristics, and educational value-added. Tools should be developed that aggregate data at the state level and that also can be used for institutional benchmarking.”

“Reports from those working at the grassroots level in fields such as teacher preparation and math and science education indicate that the results of scholarly research on teaching and learning are rarely translated into practice. Little of the significant research of the past decade in areas such as cognitive science, neurosciences, and organizational theory is making it into American classroom practice, whether at the K-12 level or in colleges and universities.”

—A Test of Leadership, Commission on the Future of Higher Education

Of all the commission's recommendations, those that would restructure the student financial aid system and consolidate federal grant programs to increase the purchasing power of need-based Pell Grants have received the most positive response from higher education. New England institutions and students would benefit greatly from such policies. In addition, if New England states increased their financial support to public higher education up to at least the national average, institutions could make higher education more affordable by rolling back some of the costs they have passed on to students and their families in recent years.

Student Preparation. The commission report emphasizes the importance of improving student readiness for higher education. This is mostly a charge for high schools, but higher education has a role to play in enhancing the preparation of teachers and creating greater transparency about what it takes for students to succeed in college. New England states have led the nation in K-12 reform, developing state tests of high school performance and increasing graduation standards. Massachusetts, for example, is one of just nine states to receive a grade of "Plus" from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education for developing measures of college learning. Ensuring that students from low-income, rural and urban schools can meet these high standards must continue to be a high priority for New England's education policymakers.

Accountability. The commission's recommendations that colleges and universities become more transparent about cost, price and student success are perhaps the most controversial areas of the report. The report

embraces a "value added" form of evaluation and public reporting for colleges, based more on judgments about what students learn while they're in college than what they know when they enter. This would be a new and potentially demanding standard for a region whose reputation as a higher education leader has rested on the prestige of some highly selective private institutions thought to admit the "best and the brightest."

College Ready New England, an initiative of the New England Board of Higher Education, should go a long way toward improving the overall understanding of what constitutes success for our higher education community. By helping the New England states collect and share key data on issues such as college preparedness, enrollment, persistence and graduation rates, this regional effort should increase the transparency and accountability of higher education. There are, however, no regional plans at this time to require value-added measures of student learning.

To sustain even our current level of prosperity, we must expand college access and affordability and improve performance. The changes that are required do not reside in the recommendations of the Spellings Commission report, but in the commitment and wisdom of New England policymakers, business leaders, education and higher education officials whom the report calls to lead.

Blenda J. Wilson recently retired as president and CEO of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, where she will continue to serve as a consultant until June 2007. Email: bwilson@nmefdn.org.

Could Transparency Bring Economic Diversity?

RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

The Spellings Commission report calls for greater access to higher education for low- and moderate-income students, greater transparency in the way higher education works and greater accountability for producing results. These recommendations are all significant in their own right, but the three concepts also converge to provide powerful support for an important new idea: requiring greater transparency and accountability of colleges for whether or not they are honoring a commitment to the American Dream—the ideal that someone from even the most humble background can, through hard work and talent, get a good education and do well in American society.

The report's emphasis on equity for low-income students is welcome. As the commission notes (in more polite language) dumb rich kids in America are as likely to go to college as smart poor kids. The commission's recommendation to boost the purchasing

power of the Pell Grant, which has significantly eroded over time, is vital. Whereas the Pell Grant once covered 40 percent of the total cost of a private four-year college education, today it covers 15 percent.

The problem of access identified in the report is particularly acute at the nation's most selective colleges and universities. Selective institutions have done an admirable job of promoting racial diversity on campus, but according to a Century Foundation study of the nation's most selective 146 colleges, only 3 percent of students come from the bottom socioeconomic quarter of the population, while 74 percent come from the richest quarter. Put differently, one is 25 times as likely to run into a rich student as a poor student on the nation's most selective campuses. Just 10 percent of students at these institutions come from the bottom socioeconomic half, according to the study conducted by researchers Anthony Carnevale and Stephen Rose.

Carnevale and Rose find further that many more low-income and working-class students could do the

work at selective institutions if they were given the chance. With *economic affirmative action*, the bottom socioeconomic half could almost quadruple its representation—to 38 percent—and graduation levels would remain the same as they are with today's roster of students.

Part of the reason colleges allow these deep levels of economic stratification is that there is little transparency on the issue. Economic differences among students are less obvious to the naked eye than racial differences, and as a society we are less accustomed to talking about addressing class inequality. Consider the reaction to a recent report that the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) had admitted a freshman class that was just 2 percent African-American. Appropriately, the story was reported heavily in the press. A commission was formed, and action plans were detailed to address the problem.

For black students to be underrepresented by a factor of six (blacks constitute about 12 percent of the population) was rightly considered unacceptable. But according to Carnevale's research, poor children are even more underrepresented on selective campuses than blacks at UCLA (a 3 percent representation for the bottom 25 percent of the economic population is an underrepresentation by a factor of eight). And the economic disparity is not limited to one campus; it exists at selective campuses nationwide. Better reporting of this problem—perhaps growing out of the Spellings Commission's call for greater transparency—would help illuminate the issue on various campuses and help the public hold individual institutions accountable for their progress on economic diversity.

In recent years, some light has been shed on the issue of economic diversity as a number of research organizations (including The Century Foundation) have begun publishing a breakdown of the percentage of students eligible for Pell Grants on various campuses. *U.S. News & World Report* now includes a list in its annual rankings issue, using Pell numbers to show economic diversity on individual campuses.

But Pell figures are limited in their utility. Pell Grant-eligibility data provide only a binary snapshot—eligible versus not eligible—and do not provide much detail about the whole economic range of students. This is important because Carnevale and Rose's study suggests it is not just the lowest socioeconomic quartile that is under-represented, but the two middle quartiles as well. Pell Grant data also do not contain information about some critical socioeconomic criteria such as parental levels of education.

It is important to note not only how many students are white, black, Asian or Latino at UCLA or Princeton, but also how many are poor, lower middle-class, upper middle-class or wealthy. What percentage

"Despite years of funding student aid programs, family income and the quality of high school education remain major factors in college-level access and success ... Low-income high school graduates in the top quartile on standardized tests attend college at the same rate as high-income high school graduates in the bottom quartile on the same tests. Only 36 percent of college-qualified low-income students complete bachelor's degrees within eight and a half years, compared with 81 percent of high-income students."

—A Test of Leadership, Commission on the Future of Higher Education

are first-generation college-goers? What percentage come from single-parent households? In all the talk about accountability for colleges, it's time to establish a set of measures to help us know whether or not individual institutions of higher education are doing their part to make the American Dream a reality for students.

Richard D. Kahlenberg is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and editor of America's Untapped Resource: Low-Income Students in Higher Education (Century Foundation Press, 2004).
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As Student Debt Increases, Colleges Owe More in Performance

BRIDGET TERRY LONG AND DANA ANSEL

A college degree has become the ticket to the middle class. Yet, at the same time, the cost of achieving this milestone has increased considerably. For many students and families, the only way to meet the substantial cost of higher education is to take out loans. While some amount of debt may be acceptable—after all, it is important for students to be responsible for at least part of the cost of their educations—there is growing concern about the burden of college loans. And for good reason.

Our research finds that since 1992, the number of students taking out loans to attend college has increased significantly. The trend is particularly striking in New England, where growth in the use of loans at four-year colleges has outpaced national trends. At the region's public four-year colleges, the share of students with loans nearly doubled from 25 percent in academic year 1992-93 to 48 percent in academic year 2003-04. Overall, 44 percent of students attending college in New England took out loans in 2003-04, compared with 35 percent of students nationally.

The amount of debt students in New England are incurring has also increased considerably. In 2003-04, fourth-year undergraduates at public four-year colleges in New England had accumulated debt averaging \$15,399. After accounting for inflation, this represented a 39 percent increase in debt levels since 1992-93. At private colleges in New England, the average student debt was \$23,491, a 49 percent increase during the same period. In addition, loans to parents increased significantly, suggesting that debt incurred to pursue a college education is shared by the whole family.

Recent legislation increases federal student loan limits beginning in 2007, meaning that college debt levels are likely to rise even more in the coming years.

While most of the loans students take out are from the federal government, the portion of loans from private companies has tripled from 6 percent in 1996-97 to 18 percent today, according to the College Board. These private loans often do not have the same favorable terms as federal student loan programs, and thus may be more detrimental to the student. For example, private loans generally have higher interest rates and more restrictive repayment requirements.

Nonetheless, there is little agreement about the significance of the increase in student debt. While some economists and other observers are concerned about the financial strain college graduates face, others believe the concern is exaggerated because earning a college degree is so valuable economically. ["Student Debt: Earnings Premium or Opportunity Cost? CONNECTION,

Summer 2006] Numerous studies document the fact that college graduates earn significantly more income than those with only a high school degree. But the debate about whether the value of a college degree justifies the increasing levels of debt obscures a critical point: many college students take on debt but then leave college without earning a degree.

At public four-year colleges in Massachusetts, for instance, less than half of students who entered college in 1998 had graduated six years later, according to performance reports by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. Unfortunately, many institutions across New England post similar graduation rates. The consequences are significant for students. Dropouts are frequently left with substantial debt but do not enjoy the job-market advantages and earnings premiums enjoyed by their counterparts who complete degrees. Among students who began college in 1995 and borrowed money but later dropped out, the median debt was \$7,000, according to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. One in every five dropouts with debt defaulted on at least one of their loans.

The large number of students who do not finish their college degrees, and the debt they incur, under-

"Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a 'value-added' basis that takes into account students' academic baseline when assessing their results. This information should be made available to students, and reported publicly in aggregate form to provide consumers and policymakers an accessible, understandable way to measure the relative effectiveness of different colleges and universities."

"The federal government, states and institutions should significantly increase need-based student aid. To accomplish this, the present student financial aid system should be replaced with a strategically oriented, results-driven system built on the principles of (i) increased access, or enrollment in college by those students who would not otherwise be likely to attend, including nontraditional students; (ii) increased retention, or graduation by students who might not have been able to complete college due to the cost, (iii) decreased debt burden, and (iv) eliminating structural incentives for tuition inflation."

—A Test of Leadership, Commission on the Future of Higher Education

scores a key issue related to growing debt levels: *risk*. The increasing use of loans has shifted a greater amount of risk to students and their families. Ultimately, they are responsible for paying back the money they owe, but their ability to do so depends largely on whether the student earns a college degree.

With students and their families taking on more risk as they take out loans to pay for higher education, it is important to consider how well colleges are serving students. Are students supported enough to have a fair chance at reaping the promised benefits of a college degree? Too often in higher education, students and their families are making decisions without adequate and comparable information about their chances for success.

The performance of colleges must be measured and communicated in order to help inform students of their options. Though it is a complicated issue, the most common measure is graduation rates, and there are already several efforts to make this information available online. One such effort is College Results Online (<http://www.collegeresults.org/>), which allows families to examine overall institutional graduation rates as well as those for diverse groups of students. Visitors to the site can also compare the graduation rates of an institution to those of other colleges or universities in its peer group. Comparing schools with similar student bodies, there are large differences in graduation rates. This suggests that institutional actions, policies and programs can matter in the outcomes of students, and these kinds of differences should be further publicized and investigated. Beyond graduation rates, there are

other important issues to consider and measure, including what students actually learn in college. Many colleges are currently developing instruments to reflect learning such as student portfolios or departmental exams that test subject matter. Other schools instead focus on the passage rates of programs leading to certification exams, such as nursing and teaching.

These ideas are consistent with the conclusions of the national Commission on the Future of Higher Education, assembled by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. The commission has called for a “robust culture of accountability and transparency.” The final recommendations include developing “new systems of data measurement and a publicly available information database with comparable college information,” which would help students and families gain access to the information they need to make better decisions.

Given that the debt burden has increased so rapidly in such a short period of time, the consequences of borrowing heavily to pay for college are not yet fully understood. However, the adverse consequences for students who do not finish their college degrees are clear. Growing expectations that students will incur debt to pay for their educations must be met with increased information about what students are buying.

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Test the Spellings Commission’s Assumptions

CATHRYN L. ADDY

It’s hard to argue with much of the report from the national Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Many of its conclusions and recommendations echo criticisms that have been leveled at higher education for years, and others borrow from reforms already underway on various campuses. Still, some of the assumptions upon which the Spellings Commission report is based need further examination.

One of these assumptions is that higher education, responding to government directives, has the ability to chart its own future. In reality, many of the issues highlighted by the commission report are beyond the control or influence of higher education institutions. If recommended reforms in financial aid distribution and allocation are to occur, for example, Congress and federal agencies, not higher education, will have to take

the lead. Indeed, higher education leaders are acutely aware of the fact that the gap between what students receive through the Pell Grant program and what is needed to cover their costs is growing exponentially, with particularly grave consequences for lower-income students at community colleges. Despite years of urging from colleges and universities to pay attention to this growing gap, nothing has happened. And it seems unlikely that something will happen now since the commission’s recommendation to significantly increase the maximum Pell Grant has not been pushed by the education secretary.

Another assumption is that we can solve the problems of college access and affordability by forcing institutions to become more productive and thereby control costs. It is impossible to increase higher education productivity without the cooperation of faculty in particular. Yet

nothing in the Spellings Commission report provides a traditional, full-time faculty member with a reason to buy into its vision of “innovation,” including its call to change the academic calendar. The business mentality that is prominent in the commission’s discussion of productivity is suspect in much of the professoriate and would be actively resisted. We have to figure out a different way of talking *with* college faculty, rather than *at* them, if productivity is to be enhanced.

The commission also assumes that providing data will make higher education more accountable and allow colleges to be judged on performance, rather than reputation. Providing more data so students can make more informed choices about how to spend their tuition dollars make sense. But all the data in the world will not convince someone that it is better to attend a community college or a state university than it is to attend Harvard or Yale, regardless of the cost. People strive to belong to groups that are difficult to get into. The belief that high cost equates to quality education keeps many students in debt unnecessarily.

Although the commission wisely calls for better alignment with K-12 as a way to address the learning gap between high school and college, the final report says little about teacher education—arguably the most important topic higher education can address in determining how well students are prepared when they reach college.

In the end, while the Spellings Commission is right in recommending that higher education become better aligned with K-12 systems and that a college education remain accessible and affordable, its findings and recommendations may have little relevance to the future of New England higher education. The commission focuses significantly on the economic value of higher education, and indeed students want a “reward” from college education and training. They want their college credential to open up new opportunities. So why should young

“Colleges and universities have few incentives to contain costs because prestige is often measured by resources, and managers who hold down spending risk losing their academic reputations.”

—A Test of Leadership, Commission on the Future of Higher Education

“It is especially regrettable that the commission’s report focuses almost exclusively on workforce preparation, narrowly defined. The longstanding and distinctively American goal of preparing students for engaged citizenship is ignored entirely by the commission.”

—Statement by Association of American Colleges and Universities

people go to college in a region where at the end of the line they will find fewer jobs that pay them enough to keep up with the region’s monstrous cost of living?

The data already show that the New England states in which jobs are being created (Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire) are seeing college enrollments go up. The states in which jobs are not being created to the same extent (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island) are experiencing either flat or lower enrollments. Educators need to start demanding that our states do a better job of planning for the future. We must help address issues such as transportation, health care, and housing as well as the educational standards that will help meet the needs of an increasingly complex world. In other words, if the sweeping national higher education reforms recommended by the Spellings Commission are to have any impact in New England, the economic and social problems facing New England must be resolved too.

Cathryn L. Addy is president of Tunxis Community College. Email: caddy@txcc.comnet.edu.

Resist Simplistic Measures of Success

JACK M. WILSON

When I testified last year before the national Commission on the Future of Higher Education created by U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, I congratulated the commission for training a spotlight on the key issues of affordability, accessibility and accountability, while pointing out what I felt were some of the shortcomings of the metrics that purport to measure these.

I particularly object to the notion that college is simply high school for older kids. Approaches that

have been used widely in the schools—such as high-stakes testing of general achievement—have limited utility in colleges where our academic aims and programs are far more diverse.

Furthermore, metrics that are often cited in discussions of where higher education needs to improve may have exactly the opposite effect to that intended. The Spellings Commission and others speak of a need for universities to improve their graduation rates, but the metric often cited to measure this aspect of college success is outmoded and could actually lead to much lower accessibility, affordability and completion.

How can that be? The old model of the 18-year-old heading off to college, remaining there for four or more years, and then graduating, is no longer the norm. The typical student today attends two or more institutions before graduating. Yet “graduation rates” are a measure of the percentage of first-time, full-time freshmen graduating in five or six years. The typical student today cannot possibly meet this old-fashioned metric of success. Worse, if such a metric were to become the standard for enforcement and funding, one must expect that colleges and universities would reduce their intake of transfer students, community colleges would try to avoid having students transfer to other institutions prior to finishing an associate degree, older students and part-time students would find reduced opportunities and there would be fewer continuing education and on-line degree programs.

I am completely in favor of accountability on college success but fully opposed to simplistic application of “graduation rates.” We can and must design a better metric.

As for accessibility and affordability, colleges and universities have to know their communities and make sure the programs they create are affordable and accessible for the communities they serve. Understanding that the rising cost of education presents challenges for Massachusetts families, the University of Massachusetts has held increases in student charges under the rate of inflation for each of the past three years.

One vital aspect of higher education that received comparatively less attention in the Spellings Commission report is university research. This is an area where our efforts must be much more closely connected to the needs of the community. It is vitally important that our research involve students and enrich our communities in multiple ways: by producing discoveries and breakthroughs that improve the quality of life but also by producing the ideas and products that create new businesses and new jobs.

We work hard to attract research funding, in part motivated by academia’s time-honored and intrinsic desire to ask why and to expand the boundaries of human knowledge, but also because we understand that research is the rocket fuel that keeps New England’s economy hurtling forward. We have enjoyed many

recent successes at UMass, winning major competitions to locate three national research centers, bringing a \$40 million atmospheric sensing center and a \$16 million nanotechnology center to UMass-Amherst, and a \$12 million nanotechnology center in UMass-Lowell, the latter in partnership with Northeastern University and the University of New Hampshire. These public and private university partnerships involve companies like Raytheon, IBM, TIAX, Lucent, Bay State Medical Center, GE, EMC and many others.

While I advocate for an explicit community focus, I am, of course, mindful of the fact that we live in an ever-smaller world and, in many ways, our “community” is global in nature. We need to fully appreciate the realities of globalization and, while doing so, maintain our view of the local community.

Approaches that have been used widely in the schools—such as high-stakes testing of general achievement—have limited utility in colleges where our academic aims and programs are far more diverse.

It is clear that what happens in Beijing enormously affects what happens in Boston. UMass has launched a number of international programs, three of the most recent establishing very close ties with China, Germany and South Africa. In November, we opened the first Confucius Institute in New England in partnership with the Chinese Ministry of Education. Our closer ties with China will surely open the door to two-way economic activity that will benefit the citizens of Massachusetts.

While I believe in close integration with the community and its many sectors—business, governmental, voluntary and community service—I am not advocating an abrogation of academic independence or of higher education’s traditional practice of charting its own course. UMass Medical School research professor Craig C. Mello’s recent Nobel prize-winning discovery of RNA interference, or gene silencing, would not have been on the “to do” list that any external group would have provided to us. Rather, it was the fruit of a brilliant researcher being allowed the freedom to pursue his own course of investigation.

Ultimately, Dr. Mello’s work may yield enormous benefits for the community by eradicating terrible diseases and stimulating economic activity. If the latter occurs, it will occur in part because we have so consciously and energetically established mechanisms to convert innovation into economic benefit for our community and Commonwealth.

That is where higher education should be going, heading out into the community and forging alliances that ultimately make the term “ivory tower” an archaic expression.

Jack M. Wilson is president of the five-campus University of Massachusetts System. Email: jwilson@umassp.edu.

“The secretary’s commission expressed some unease about credit transfer in the United States, where nearly 60 percent of your daughter’s friends will attend more than one school, and 25 percent will pack up the apartment, call the movers and formally transfer. Had it looked at the Bologna Process, the commission might have offered a creative proposal for rethinking the very value system of our credit currency, and, in the process, added to our tools for judging institutional performance.”

—Clifford Adelman, who spent 27 years as a U.S. Education Department analyst before moving last year to the D.C.-based Institute for Higher Education Policy, writing in *Education Week*.



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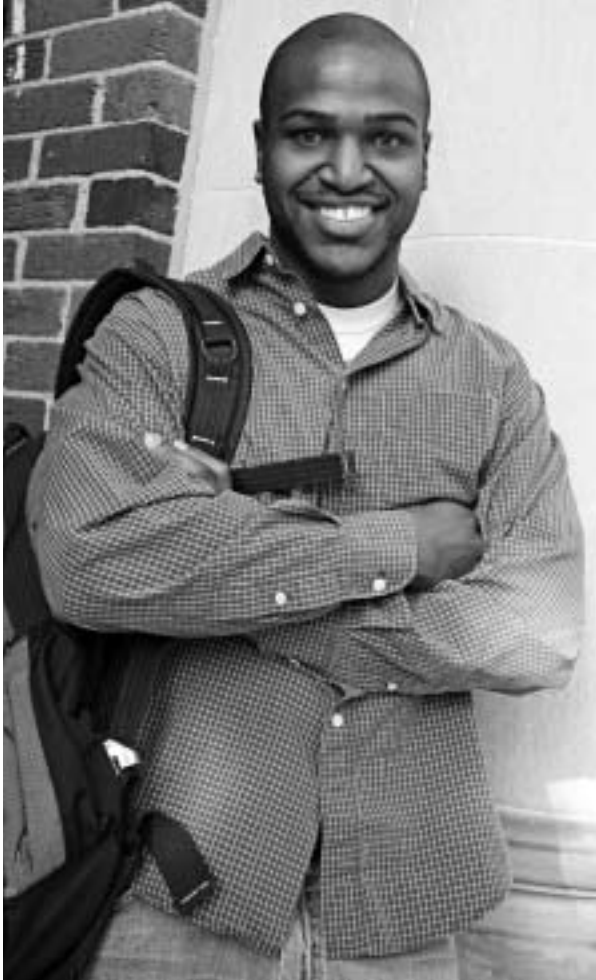


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How Open-Source Curricula Could Bridge the Education Divide

BARBARA KURSHAN



With the United States spending about \$200 billion per year on textbooks, students, publishers and policymakers are moving to rein in costs. Students are forming groups to share or swap books. Publishers—including Pearson PLC and Thomson Corp.—are creating electronic alternatives and customized textbook packages. And, according to the National Association of College Stores, at least 18 states introduced legislation last year highlighting the high cost of textbooks, including Connecticut, which began requiring publishers to always disclose book prices to faculty, rather than only upon request.

Textbooks are a key component of curricula, and their rising price is a symptom of the larger issue of inequality in education. This inequality, sometimes described as the *Education Divide*, is, in fact, caused by the mounting cost of textbooks, curricula and other learning materials, which makes it difficult for communities with limited financial resources to provide their children with quality education. But education should not be available to only those with money; it should be accessible to all. And it can be.

Open source

The advent of the Internet has changed the curricular landscape in a variety of ways. Now, so-called “open-source curricula” provides real educational opportunity for urban schools in the United States, developing countries and other areas where there is an Education Divide caused by poverty, lack of resources or limited access to education.

Open-source curricula are derived from the phenomenon of open-source

software, such as Linux. Open-source software has an original creator or group of creators. But since the software’s code is not proprietary, its users are free to modify and improve it as necessary. These improvements are then shared with the greater community of users, so others may benefit from the adaptations made by a single user. Think of the popular online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, which is continually added to and edited by any visitor to the web site.

Open-source curricula are derived from the phenomenon of open-source software ... since the software’s code is not proprietary, its users are free to modify and improve it as necessary.

In education, the open-source process will expand the development of curricula and educational materials, such as textbooks, and empower educational professionals to become an active community in the creation of world-class curricula. As a result of this community’s commitment to using, reusing and mixing educational resources in the open-source environment, the curricula will continually be improved upon to create the best and most up-to-date instructional materials available. Open-source also provides new ways to manage the costs and quality of the instructional materials that are fundamental to educational excellence from K-12 through the university level.

Because of open-source curricula, students and teachers will finally have access to quality curricula, which

includes textbooks, interactive online courses, streaming video and even a collection of resources that mix text, video and animation at little or no cost.

In practice

Several open-source curricula projects are underway in the United States.

“Curriculum repositories” like Curriki.org or Connexions.org represent one way in which the concept of open-source curricula is being explored. With these online repositories, a curriculum framework for a particular course is created by an instructional designer or author in conjunction with content experts. Learning objectives are clearly identified, while learning activities, instructional sequences and assessments are developed and offered to support the attainment of the objectives. However, all users (from students to educators) are empowered to add, delete and modify the learning activities. For instance, a leading authority in mathematics would create an e-book and post it to an online repository. From there, a global population would be able to access it and create a customized textbook to meet their individual interests. This paradigm shift in the way content is created makes it possible for the best minds in education to easily reach a population that was previously inaccessible.

The concept of open-source curricula was recently tested at a conference called Pop!Tech, which is held annually in Camden, Maine, to highlight innovations in the field. The conference’s Education Fellows—comprising one classroom teacher, a K-12 technology coordinator, a university professor, a nuclear physicist and an actress/educator—are working closely with the nonprofit, Curriki, to make the topics

discussed during Pop!Tech available as open-source curricula. What will result are curricula on education, globalization and health care that include lesson plans, teacher instructional guides, assessment and activities that students, teachers and educational professionals are able to access free on Curriki's web site (www.curriki.org) to incorporate into their teaching.

In addition to the Pop!Tech curricula program, other educational organizations have created free and open-source curriculum for the K-12 and university level. Examples of current projects include the Monterey Institute of Technology in Education for educational technology, MERLOT for higher education and the e-book initiative taking place in Texas school systems.

One thing learned in these initial open-source projects is that in the long run, it will be very difficult for proprietary textbook publishers to compete with open-source projects that have dozens of professors adapting

and refining a textbook on a particular subject. It will instead require new models of collaboration between traditional publishers and open-source projects like Curriki.

The early successes with open-source curricula demonstrate that it is a very real solution to ease textbook costs and ultimately eliminate the Education Divide. But, as with any maturing method, there are challenges. Licensing and ownership, critical mass of content, how to evaluate the curricula and how to grow the community are key challenges for open-source curricula. There are also questions to be answered: Who "owns" a particular course? Can you trust the community to build collaborative curricula? Will instructors embrace this new community approach to building curricula? And perhaps most importantly, can open-source curricula be vetted so it addresses education standards and quality of content?

These questions are important to

consider as open-source curricula matures. The open-source community will require that teachers be taught skills in instructional design and that the web sites provide templates and online tours to support the development process. Furthermore, new "rules" will evolve for evaluation and for providing evidence of the impact of textbooks or other types of curricula on achievement. The community will become both the user and the evaluator. Already, lively discussions are in progress on web sites like www.eschoolnews.com and www.futureofthebook.org about open-source curricula and the growing momentum behind open-source textbooks.

As the educational community searches for a resolution to the rising costs of textbooks, it must not ignore the larger Education Divide. Knowledge is not proprietary. Open-source education is built on that fact. It

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- Percentage of Connecticut people in poverty who live in those five cities: **45%**
- Percentage of inmates in Connecticut prisons who are from those five cities: **51%**
- Number of colleges and universities located in the five cities: **17**
- Amount by which Yale University's endowment grew between July 1, 2005 and June 30, 2006: **\$2,800,000,000**
- Amount of total endowment Yale plans to spend in fiscal 2007: **\$676,000,000**
- Value of nonprofit properties as a percent of all real estate in Boston: **8%**
- Value of nonprofit properties as a percent of all real estate in San Francisco: **4%**
- Percentage of students at Burlington, Vt.'s Charles P. Smith School who qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program for students living in poverty: **32%**
- Percentage of students at Burlington, Vt.'s Lawrence Barnes and H.O. Wheeler schools who do: **90%**
- Percentage of Boston Public School students who are black: **49%**
- Of Boston Public School students who get suspended, percentage who are black: **72%**
- Of Boston Public School students classified as emotionally disturbed, percentage who are black: **69%**
- Percentage of 28- to 64-year-old American workers with bachelor's degrees who have access to employer-provided health-care coverage: **95%**
- Percentage with high school diplomas who do: **77%**
- Percentage of 28- to 64-year-old American workers with bachelor's degrees who have access to employer-provided pension plans: **90%**
- Percentage with high school diplomas who do: **81%**
- Of the 25 recipients of the 2006 John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation "genius" grants, number who are Harvard or Radcliffe faculty and fellows: **4**
- Number who are alumni of the Rhode Island School of Design: **4**
- Percentage of U.S. entrepreneurs who say innate drive was the No. 1 motivator in starting their own venture: **62%**
- Percentage of U.S. entrepreneurs who say work experience was the No. 1 motivator: **21%**
- Percentage who say higher education was: **1%**
- Number of U.S. college students taking at least one course online this past fall: **3,200,000**
- Number last year: **2,300,000**

Sources: 1,2,3 Connecticut Regional Institute for the 21st Century; 4 CONNECTION analysis; 5,6 Yale University; 7,8 *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*; 9,10 *Seven Days: Vermont's Alternative Weekly*; 11,12,13 The Schott Foundation for Public Education; 14,15,16,17 Anthony P. Carnevale, National Center on Education and the Economy analysis of US Census data; 18 Harvard University; 19 Rhode Island School of Design; 20,21,22 Northeastern University School of Technological Entrepreneurship; 23,24 The College Board and The Sloan Consortium

Continued from page 30

uses free, already-existing and widely available educational content in the public domain. It allows a community of educational professionals to collaborate to improve the quality of textbooks and curricula that are available. It provides a serious solution for breaking down the Education Divide because when open-source is applied to the creation of textbooks and curricula, it cuts costs and ultimately makes educational materials of the highest quality available to those who want to teach and those who want to learn.

Already communities in the United States and around the world are using open-source textbooks as their entry into a complete open-source curricular environment. The escalating costs and de-escalating quality of education are leaving them no choice. The technology is available. The educational materials are being created. The big question is: Will educators be courageous enough to engage in this community to build open-source curricula and use it?

Barbara Kurshan is executive director of Curriki-The Education & Learning Community, a co-founder of WorldSage, the first large private European post-secondary education system, and author of several books on education and technology. Email: bkurshan@curriki.org.

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