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THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

**SUMMARY**

**NEW JERSEY CITY UNIVERSITY ROUNDTABLE ON COLLEGE VALUE  
HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC INFORMATION AND GOVERNANCE (HESIG)**

**MARCH 20, 2014**

Business, school, college, community leaders, and elected officials, met for nearly three hours at New Jersey City University, as a “roundtable” on the topic of college value. The meeting was supported, in part, by a grant from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Center for Advocacy and Philanthropy, to The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey Center for Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance (HESIG), as well as support by Stockton President Herman Saatkamp, from the president’s Strategic Initiative Fund, and the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. Important project guidance was provided by HESIG’s Policy Steering Council, and Office of the New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education.

HESIG deeply appreciates the generosity of New Jersey City University President Sue Henderson, and members of her executive team, who hosted and helped to plan this session. Finally, special thanks go to Roundtable participants (appended) who took time from busy schedules to attend this important meeting.

Entitled “**Finding Solutions, Building Public Trust in an Era of Change,**” the purpose of the grant project is to identify practical solutions to enhance college affordability, accountability and value, especially to increase educational achievement for New Jersey’s diverse emerging student population; and to build partnerships to achieve this goal. Roundtable participants were not asked to reach consensus, but instead to provide candid advice about defining college value (“return on investment”) in terms broader than economic payoff, such as prospects for increased earnings over a lifetime.

**Fundamental questions guiding the Roundtable discussion included:**

1. How should higher education define its purposes and value during an era of rapid change, and in light of a changing student population?
2. How do colleges and universities productively engage policy makers and citizens regarding concurrence about outcomes and the public benefits of college, to build stronger public trust and support for constructive policy change?
3. What school, college and state-level practices and policies need to be changed; and what partnerships need to be expanded or created to meet the challenges of college access, affordability, and completion?

**Roundtable discussion provided insights and advice, as follows:**

1. In concurrence with prior advice from the February Stockton Roundtable, participants stressed that the changing nature of the global economic environment requires colleges and universities to

reform how they prepare students, academically, to meet emerging workforce and career needs. Even so, members indicated that college value should be defined broadly in terms of public and private benefits of “liberal learning,” leading to literate, aware, productive and effective citizens. One individual stressed that America and New Jersey face an educational “emergency,” if educators and other leaders fail to meet this challenge for middle-income families.

2. Regarding definition of the “college value proposition,” participants suggested that development of higher-order academic skills should begin early, through school-level collaboration, with greater awareness of workforce needs. In partnership with business and others, students should be exposed to needs and values of a workplace environment, and prepared for participation in a democratic society. Specifically, they stressed connecting both content-based knowledge competencies and affective skills, to workforce and economic development needs, as well as to effective citizenship.
3. Some participants indicated that colleges find it difficult to communicate with citizens about college value, because of public perception of college as high priced, driven by high cost, and leading to high debt for individuals, but not well enough connected to practical learning experiences that predictably lead to good jobs and careers.
4. In this respect, participants recommended that colleges view jobs and economic prosperity, not simply degree program completion as the, important outcome, meaning that colleges should focus more on how they help to spur economic development, and job growth, working in partnership with others, rather than continuing analysis by colleges of how these issues affect college participation and completion.
5. Addressing tension among the traditional roles of colleges and universities, and emerging expectations, driven by “disruptive” events, such as new technology for non-traditional educational delivery, and need to reform long-standing revenue/expense models, based on government funding, participants specifically suggested:
  - a. Create more intern and co-op experiences for students that move them sooner from the classroom to practical, workplace experiences and problem solving;
  - b. In both traditional and nontraditional learning modes, stress oral and written communication as a critical competency skill set for lifelong learning and success;
  - c. Redefine general education as an explicit set of measureable skills and competencies; one of these being what it means to be an effective citizen, and an individual who gains a broad understanding of different cultures, world events, and the ability to understand and work with diverse sets of people;
  - d. Measure such competencies and overall college value in terms of public and private benefit, and in a manner that is widely understood and supported by policy makers, employers and citizens;
  - e. Develop “niche” academic program specialties that explicitly market as an outcome, a defined set of skills, related to job and workforce opportunity, and professional and community service;
  - f. Actively study and promote those industries that should locate in NJ, and tie academic program development to this goal;
  - g. Coordinate closely with schools and community colleges to match high school completion and college entrance standards; to improve educational remediation efforts; and to create and disseminate broadly “best practices” leading to college completion, such as dual enrollment and reverse-degree programs;

- h. Partner with business on educational policy development concerning assessment and certification of prior learning outside of college; and to address the needs of a rapidly changing population, including adults who have not completed college.
6. Finally, participants suggested that colleges recognize community engagement and development as a core business focus, to improve the quality of life for individuals regionally, whether or not attending college, thereby serving as an anchor for innovative partnerships fostering education, health, public safety, and job creation.

**Important outcomes of the Roundtable discussion are:**

1. A second HESIG/Stockton scientific poll during spring 2014, to test public perceptions about college value, (the 2013 poll focused on college affordability and completion);
2. Synthesis of “best practices” at the school, college and state levels, to advance college opportunity and completion, and shared understanding of college value;
3. Specific policy recommendations to college and state policymakers regarding policy reform to strengthen public trust and investment in educational opportunity.

An earlier Roundtable on College Value was hosted by The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, home to HESIG, February 27, 2014.

Additional information about HESIG, its expert Policy Steering Council, and the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy can be viewed at [www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig](http://www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig).

Respectfully,

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