

SUMMARY

STOCKTON ROUNDTABLE ON COLLEGE VALUE HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC INFORMATION AND GOVERNANCE (HESIG)

FEBRUARY 27, 2014

Business, school, college, community leaders, and elected officials, met for nearly three hours at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, 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 Stockton Center for Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance (HESIG), as well as by 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 Roundtable participants (appended) who took time from busy schedules to attend this 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 employment and prospects for increased earnings over a lifetime.

Fundamental questions guiding the roundtable discussion included:

1. How should public 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. As supported by recent survey research, college value should be defined broadly in terms of public and private benefits of “liberal learning,” leading to literate, aware, productive and effective citizens. Measures of value should include the ability to synthesize and apply information, and to inform effective decision making. College-level learning should add to the ability to understand and connect goals and objectives in a work setting; to work collaboratively toward a common outcome; to accomplish many related tasks simultaneously; and to communicate effectively and confidently.
2. The definition of such higher order skills should begin early, through school-level collaboration, with greater awareness of the needs of non-college bound students, and in partnership with business and others to expose students to needs and values of a workplace environment, and for participation in a democratic society.
3. Colleges should connect explicitly content-based and specific knowledge competencies with development of affective interpersonal skills, such as tolerance of diversity of opinion, openness to multiple approaches to problem solving, and application of high ethical standards.

4. In addition to colleges' stronger cooperation with K-12 education, closer collaboration is required among four-year and two-year colleges, recognizing the special role of community colleges' missions regarding open access to education, training, and community service.
5. Colleges should continue efforts to reform traditional "place and time-bound" delivery of education, by creating a closer fit between curricula, students, business and community needs. Specifically, suggestions included:
 - a. Reduce time to degree, for example by reducing some required course credits;
 - b. Re-examine general education requirements to rebalance the relationship between subject content- knowledge and developmental skills;
 - c. Involve business and nonprofit organizations more to help develop educational content, internship experiences, and to structure expectations about desired outcomes;
 - d. Measure college outcomes in terms of both design and performance standards, outcomes competencies, and private and public benefit;
 - e. Stick to educational and business practices that enhance and improve the college core educational mission;
 - f. Align higher learning competencies with K-12 and community college preparation, and long-term social and economic needs of the region and the state;
 - g. Involve community leaders to help define standards for community engagement and responsible citizenship in a democratic society, as a measure of value and return on investment.
6. Finally, higher education, in partnership with others, should drive a comprehensive definition of educational value by incorporating a broader view of the educational process, as seamless, not compartmentalized; one that is transparent, open to experimentation and risk-taking; and based on a shared vision, broad and resilient enough to allow for missteps, adaptation, reform, and success.

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.

A second Roundtable on College Value will be hosted by New Jersey City University during spring 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.

Respectfully,

Darryl G. Greer, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow, HESIG
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