



PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

A discussion with leaders in higher education about navigating the P-16 agenda

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The Leaders

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Realizing the Need for Reform

There has been a nationwide increase in attention to the alignment of K-12 and postsecondary expectations, including standards, assessments, coursetaking requirements, and accountability systems. Your state/system is recognized by many as a leader on this front. Is there a specific moment you can remember when you realized the urgency of the college preparation issue?

Stan Jones: For Indiana, the discussion began in the early 90's but the realization that more needed to be done came later, around 1998-99. Indiana wanted to find a better way to ensure students were graduating high school better prepared and the conversation revolved around standards. It became clear that Indiana's high school standards were pretty vague. I was at an ECS meeting where Achieve was one of the presenters discussing their American Diploma Project, which Indiana was interested in joining as a method of evaluating standards. The evaluation was more critical than I had anticipated, and it even stung a little, but it was a needed step that provided an impetus for important policy discussions, which eventually led to very real reform.

Karen Nicodemus: Well, I can't say it was any one moment in time but rather a series of realizations. As the President of a college, I understood that we needed to have strong partnership with our K-12 colleagues, but as a member of the state board and the Governor's P-20 council, it became clear that the strength and depth of that partnership needed to be addressed. I began reading literature on the knowledge based economy and Thomas Friedman's "The World is Flat" and they all painted the same picture – we couldn't continue to do business as usual. Around this same time, Arizona joined Achieve's American Diploma Project, providing us with a framework to analyze our current efforts, and to have a

line of communication with what other states were doing. During this same time, I took the opportunity to read research articles including research on 8th grade student's aspirations – which were very high – but not reflected in what we were actually experiencing in terms of who we did (or did not) see entering, and graduating from college. All of this made us realize how much more we, which for me meant both as an institution and a system, had to do to prepare students not only for access but for persistence in college.

Judith Ramaley: I began to appreciate the significance of alignment and partnership even before I was a college President and brought this experience with me to my first Presidency. And, the Presidency certainly offers perspective. I often try to provide an illustration of the President's role with an old cover of *The New Yorker* magazine that shows the world from the top of the Empire State building. There is great detail within the immediate vicinity of the building, but as the picture moves beyond the shores of Manhattan the detail disappears and eventually there are little "lumps" that represent Japan. Serving as the President of a university is much the same – the immediate focus is on the local environment with concerns and challenges spreading out from there. One of the earliest challenges I recognized was that we, Portland State, were not in charge of the learning environment of students before they arrived to our campus, and to some degree we had limited control when students did arrive. We used this challenge not as an excuse but as a reason to reach out to our K-12 partners and provide them with a roadmap for what students needed to learn in order to succeed at college-level work.

Lynne Weisenbach: For me it was actually a moment in time. Six years ago, when I was in Indiana, the state started using a cohort graduation rate. The data this rate produced shed a light on something that at the time was surprising – the high school graduation issue wasn't limited to a few districts but was a statewide crisis. At this moment I realized that if students weren't graduating they certainly weren't thinking about post-secondary education. This was a vivid example of the discrepancies that exist between high school and college. If we were going to focus on high school reform we needed to align these efforts with postsecondary preparation.

Tonya Lam: While my path to the alignment agenda is different from Lynne's it is grounded in the same element – data. The University System of Georgia's (USG) *Retention, Progression and Graduation Initiative* involves a series of activities aimed at understanding what changes are needed in order to increase Georgia's college retention, progression and graduation rates. An early, and key, activity of this initiative involved using data to identify factors that impacted a student's chance of graduating from college and also looked at what was happening to students once they entered college. The data showed a breakdown in expectations – students were not leaving high school with clear understanding of what was needed to succeed in college.

What role do data play in the policymaking process? Was there any particular comparison that grabbed the public's or policymaker's attention about the need for change?

SJ: It is actually less any one data point and more the external validation that has helped bolster our conversation. It's the idea that you can't be an expert in your own town, so there is value of having

people and information from the outside – this motivated us to change. Despite this, it was still difficult to dislodge long-held beliefs. We also had a rapidly changing economy in Indiana, and it is still changing. Indiana has long been a manufacturing state but that began to change, particularly in the 80's. So, we had to move from a mindset that higher education's mission was to serve a small segment of the population to a policy agenda that focused on providing all students with access and opportunity to succeed in college.

JR: For me it is actually the approach to data and not any particular data point that helps open the door for conversation. Leaders and policymakers need to decide what data to collect and how these data will be used to build a path towards evidence based practice. This needs to be done with our colleagues in the K-12 system; we can't peer out from our ivory tower, point to a data point and say "fix it." This conversation requires everyone sitting at the table and talking through what the data tells us – where are the gaps between high school and college; how and why are students falling through the cracks; what are the challenges faced by K-12 (high school in particular)? The expectations of postsecondary may be implicit but they need to be explicitly communicated and the study of data is a powerful tool in this effort.

LW: Well, there is the "of course" element to data – such as looking at persistence, demographics, and graduation rates – but the power of data is the picture it can paint. I remember one of my first meetings here in Georgia, there was a slide showing the faces of entering freshman, it progressed through four years with the last slide showing who would be left. It put a very real image to the urgency of the problem we are grappling with.

TL: I'd say the data that has been most useful is that which can be communicated not only to policymakers but also directly to the student. We've been able to look at student data in college to see which students have particular skills and understand where and how they acquired these skills. It has not only impacted policies around curriculum but allowed us to communicate to the student the importance of particular skills that lead to success in college and the workforce.

KN: From a community college perspective, we have an open admissions policy so we rely heavily on placement assessments to determine for what level of work students are prepared. This provides us with a powerful picture of where gaps exist between the K-12 and higher education systems. It is this and other types of tangible data that provided us with the needed catalyst to begin conversations and partnerships around the need for greater alignment. One such partnership has been with Achieve's American Diploma Project Network and the subsequent work focused on articulating requirement of high school graduation to the expectations of higher education. Arizona convened discipline-specific experts from the K-12 and postsecondary systems, along with business representatives, to examine current K-12 (or in this case, actually K-10) math standards with the intent to modify the state standards to include K-12 standards that reflect college and career readiness expectations. We've also been able to share information between community colleges and the university system (Arizona Board of Regents), allowing us to examine how students perform when they transition from community college to the university system. For example, we know that students who increase their credit hours while in

community college perform better in the university system. Because of this, the Arizona Board of Regents is considering a change in its current admissions policy specific to guaranteeing admission to community college students. The Regents will increase expectations as relates to both performance and completion of credit hours at a community college prior to transfer to one of the state's three public universities.

But, I think data is largely underutilized by higher education as a system. We do okay as individual institutions, but there isn't a great deal of coordinated effort produce meaningful reports looking specifically at both community colleges and universities as a system. In Arizona, some of this could be attributed to the limits of our data systems. Our K-12 and higher education systems are not linked which makes it difficult to produce in-depth longitudinal analysis of how students transition between high school and college – we have limited ability to truly answer the key questions of who is entering, who is persisting and who is graduating across the P-20 continuum. We've spent a lot of time focusing on the development of our data systems for this very reason. In the meantime we've had more informal efforts in place to link information – such as legislation asking public higher education institutions to have entering students use their student id assigned to them in K-12. But, ultimately you get out of a data system what you put into it, and we need a system that demands more meaningful information around preparing students to be college ready.

Cochise College, within our own local service areas and as part of the K-12 outreach effort I talked about earlier, initiated a conversation with folks from Cal-PASS. Basically, we have completed the first year of a multi-year process to establish a shared longitudinal student data base for the purpose of informing administrators as well as faculty/teacher learning councils. These councils and the data base cross education sectors, K-12 and higher education. Unfortunately, we are in a holding pattern until additional resources can be found to support this local effort or, in a best case scenario, the state's efforts move forward as planned and provide us with the necessary data infrastructure.

Many people will say that there is an inherit trade-off between increasing access to college and maintaining (or increasing) performance standards. Similarly, there still remains a sense that not everyone needs to go to college or be prepared for college. How have you overcome these challenges?

JR: I've heard that frequently. There is a notion that we already have too many high skilled people, which usually boils down to people thinking very traditional thoughts about what college is. I often respond by asking people the question "what do you think college means?" The response almost always boils down to people thinking very traditional thoughts about what college is - the image of a 4-year private college where students live on campus, etc. From here you are able to educate people about the necessity for 21st century skills – the world's economy has rapidly changed and will continue to do so. The economic downturn has shed some light on this realization. The new jobs that are emerging require additional education and skills that can't be acquired on the job because people can't get the job in the first place. It is no longer a matter of whether someone needs to go to college but a matter of when. And, for a majority of people it will not be the research universities or the liberal arts colleges that will provide this pathway. This tangible conversation usually helps people break away from their

pre-conceived notions and understand that the role and model for postsecondary education is very different from twenty years ago.

KN: Balance of these two objectives is necessary. We have to pay equal attention to setting the bar but understand what interventions/level-of-support are necessary to get students to a level where they can be successful in college-level work. We need to do everything we can to be sure everyone is prepared to access post-secondary education – and a lot can be gained by clearly articulating to students what is expected. We also need to pay attention to the needs of students and understand that not everyone gains success following the same path. Expectations don't differ, but the path to reaching those expectations may, and it is our challenge to provide multiple ways to help students reach their full potential and access postsecondary education. This is actually a unique role a community college plays within the postsecondary system. In Arizona, universities do not provide remedial coursework; instead students requiring remediation tend to start at a community college. So we have a very diverse student body in terms of preparation and it is our role to find ways for students to achieve their goals – whether they plan on moving to the university level or directly into the workforce.

Governance, Policymakers & Partners

Different states have different ways of setting policy. These can sometimes create challenges or obstacles to effecting change. How has the governance or policymaking system in your state affected your ability to develop and implement a coordinated program between the various partners? How have you overcome these challenges?

LW: In Georgia it is really the creation of the Alliance (Georgia Alliance of Education Heads) that has allowed us to be effective in instituting a coordinated policy effort. The Alliance provides consistency and coordination among various agencies –providing a natural place for the various stakeholders to come together and discuss focus on the intersection of issues between their various agencies. Often times this translates into transitions for students – from high school to college and college to the workforce.

Jan Kettlewell and others were key leaders in laying some important groundwork that has allowed the Alliance to be an effective mechanism of coordination and change. For example, there is a full time staff that enables the work to move forward. We've also dispersed a lot of the work outside of the P-16 initiative office so now staff and offices across the Board of Regents take responsibility for the implementation of various policies that flow out of the Alliance. Prior to this, good things were getting done but it became obvious that people across the Board of Regents needed to be engaged in this work. And, work has moved forward in a better fashion because of this engagement. We've been able to engage outside partners, like the business community, all of which play a critical role in creating opportunities for students.

TL: I would say the Alliance also helps us better educate other policymakers by providing a better awareness of how certain policies have a ripple effect, impacting agencies and priorities beyond the particular agency being regulated. As we've seen across the country, the state legislatures often get

involved and try to give direction to what they think is important – working in partnership through the Alliance often prevents against mandates that are not in the best interest of our efforts. A good example of that is a recent effort in Georgia to reverse graduation standards and go back to a two-tier diploma. Because of the Alliance, the Georgia Department of Education wasn't the only voice of opposition in the state. All the agency heads (and outside organizations, such as Achieve) went to the mat to prevent this change from happening.

KN: Arizona has a unique way of governance/coordination of higher education. The Arizona Board of Regents has oversight of the three public universities. The Governor and Superintendent of Education both sit on this board, so there is an avenue for conversation between the university and K-12 systems. Community Colleges are governed differently; there is no statewide coordinating board or governance board. Each community college operates under its own locally elected district governing board. While community colleges work together on issues, the coordination is not seen as strong as in states where there is a coordinating or governing entity. This also makes it difficult to have a dialogue with the K-12 system, because there is no cross representation between the community college system and the K-12 or university systems. Locally, districts overcome some of these challenges by making a priority the college's relationship with the local university and the local K-12 districts we serve. At Cochise, we've created a pathway that tries to link various efforts to support student success along a continuum. For example, we have a summer, on-campus 8th grade math academy for at risk middle school students. We have also added what we refer to as Running Start academies. These are somewhat modeled after a national early college model but reflects the reality of our rural service area. And, to continue building out the pathway, we have added a STEM Exploration Academy for 9th and 10th grade students. As the state increased its high school graduation requirements, we worked with the K-12 system to provide professional development to teachers, and engaging in discussions as to how community college faculty may help to meet teacher shortages at the high school level, particularly in math and science.

On the higher education end of the continuum, we are developing transfer admission guarantees to fully build out our Running Start academies. The Arizona Governor's P-20 Council, created in 2005, has also provided a platform for these conversations by bringing together representatives from education (early childhood, K-12, community college and university), business and industry and other stakeholders to discuss how Arizona can better align its education systems and meet the needs of the 21st century workforce. Additionally, Arizona's Governor issued an Executive Order establishing an Arizona Community College Council to provide a level of statewide coordination. So, we feel like we are creating a cohesive effort around this pathway that crosses K-12, community college and university partners.

Who are the key partners in this initiative?

SJ: Well, there are strong ideas from various members of the community. The teachers' unions and the business community had loud voices, but were constantly working on different sides of the issue. The Commission (Indiana Commission on Higher Education) helped broker this conversation. There was little trust at first, which made it difficult to bring people together, but we were able to navigate through the obstacles and get some common understanding.

What is the role of a university president in shaping policy and providing leadership?

JR: As a President, there is a platform to ask questions and draw attention to things that people should notice. The best way to do this is to bring people together for dialogue. You need to connect people who carry the message – convene people from various sectors, provide them a safe environment to have a conversation and think in new ways, and trust that something good will come from your efforts. As much as the university has expectations from K-12, business and industry have expectations of the university – that we are responding to the changes and new demands of the economy or a particular profession. The only way to understand these expectations is to connect people. As President, I can't command it and I can't just live it, I need find ways to expand the number of people in the circle so that the conversation continues beyond my tenure.

Navigating Budgetary Challenges & Leveraging Resources to Effect Change

In difficult economic times resources are not always available for new programs or policy initiatives. How have you navigated these challenges? How have you leveraged new and existing resources towards implementation?

LW: Well for us, the effect is very real as the funding for P-16 core operations was eliminated from the budget this year. The last 2-3 months have been difficult, but we've stepped back and prioritized our work. We learned a valuable lesson that we need to do a better job of making the case about the value of our work and separate the work we do at the university level from the work done at the K-12 system. Through this year's budget process the P-16 initiative got listed as duplicative to the services offered through the Department of Education. This was a huge wake-up call to us that we need to think about the nomenclature and vocabulary used, and to educate the legislature and public that our efforts are not duplicative of the K-12 system, but complimentary. There are certainly opportunities for us as a system to think about alignment internally, breaking down silos, coordinating efforts and working smarter. But at end of day there has to be some funding for this work. We also need to think hard and fresh about what we really call this work – very important in short term and in long term.

KN: Well, simply put we need to do better with the resources we have. There are ways to focus and leverage resources between different sectors of education for both the student and the system – transfer policies and shared faculty are a few examples. These conversations are difficult and we need a safe and trusting environment in which to have them – the focus should be on changing and redirecting resources vs. a threat of losing them. The time has come for us to work together and think differently as educators across all three sectors to make a more effective and efficient system.

JR: I think there is some truth in the adage that a crisis is a sad thing to waste. When I was at Portland State I would say "if you can't have an earthquake, have a budget cut" and I actually was able to persuade the central office to delay the implementation of the budget cuts so that our faculty could build a new general curriculum that could operate effectively on a lower budget. And, while certainly not ideal, a challenging budget environment provides you with leverage to prioritize and institute change. When making budget decisions, there are four things I test every decision against – from hiring

- to major program decisions: 1) Will it keep us attractive to potential students?
2) Will it support the success of students currently with us?
3) Will it allow us to maintain signature and core program that makes us a unique university; and
4) Will it diversify our revenue?

It also helps to have a collaborative and open model that keeps people informed about the realities of what is happening. Maintaining a dialogue with governance groups, establishing forums and suggestion boxes for people to engage in the conversation all help to maintain a trust in the process of building a budget in difficult times. An engaged strategy also changes your approach to managing through difficulties – you have a commitment to your partners so you need to find a way to get things done, regardless of the situation.

Realizing Accomplishments

What is the most rewarding part about the efforts you've undertaken to align the p-16 pipeline? Is there a specific experience that comes to mind? Have you been surprised by anything?

LW: The most rewarding part of the work I do is working with campuses. I work with talented, committed individuals that are focused on college access and success. It doesn't get more rewarding than having the ability to work with people who share common vision and commitment to an agenda where the need is very real and relevant. I'd say the greatest surprise or challenge for me right now is simply learning how to operate within a university system and learning about a new state. The economy is also something we never really expected, and it creates new challenges, limiting our ability to think and plan ahead.

TL: It has been very exciting and rewarding to watch the P-16 efforts and collaboration develop within the university system. But, I also represent student affairs, providing me with a direct interface with students on a regular basis and get a direct look at the outcomes. It has been rewarding to see the results firsthand. And there is work being done to make it even better. This also brings some hesitancy as we navigate the budget and understand what adjustments are necessary to ensure, to the degree possible, we don't lose the momentum and success of our past and current efforts.

SJ: We've reached a point in Indiana where all students are now required to graduate high school with a Core 40 diploma. Part of our success in getting to this point was the time we gave people to adjust. And, while we have an opt-out provision, we tried to set it up so it is a more conscious decision. Parents need to meet with counselors to talk about the consequences of the decision and that opting out is a decision not to be taken lightly. We now have two-thirds of students graduating with the Core 40 curriculum, and I think it will rise to at least 85 percent. And, this is now part of the fabric in Indiana. Core 40, 21st Century Scholars, community colleges, none of those are going away.

KN: Having recently retired, I ended a long career in K-12 and higher education. Nothing replaces seeing the benefit of what you are doing transferred into an individual life. The most rewarding moments are students' coming to you to say "thank you." We help jump start a student's college

experience; often times students who never thought they could do it are provided with opportunities to complete college, and we are able to make it relevant for them. One quick example is a single mom in a homeless shelter who came to the community college and transferred to the university system. She is now on her way toward earning a Ph.D. It is those stories and experiences that are so satisfying and incredibly reinforcing.

I've also had the pleasure of being involved in a rich dialogue about pathways, and was involved in the State Board's work to increase graduation requirements and movement toward college and career ready standards. There is urgency to this work – we certainly don't have decades to get this right – so it has been very exciting to see how far we have come.

What is the most significant lesson that you would share with others trying to do this in their states?

SJ: We wouldn't have gotten where we are without the effort we put in to building a broad base of support. I didn't really think of it ahead of time, I just did. But, some of the better things I did were not my choice; I was forced into it. Many of these things were easy to talk about, because I was further from trenches and less aware how hard, how contentious these issues were. Often times some of your strongest opposition comes from inside the family. The strongest opponents of Core 40 were high school counselors. They were convinced that these kids could not do the work we are asking them to do- they couldn't pass 4 years of math, algebra II, and achieve at college-ready levels. But ultimately we were able to build support and make it real for the students – without financial aid incentives and common expectations students don't get the message.

The Changing Landscape & A Focus on Completion

*How has the conversation around common standards/expectations changed over the last several years?
What work remains?*

JR: Twenty years ago the discussion revolved around “soft skills” – we needed to teach people to be good employees, not so much specific skills or competencies. Today we are facing the reality that the majority of people need more than a high school education, and that we, as higher education, need to build in the capacity to adapt to the changing demands and expectations about what purpose higher education serves. The challenge is for us to create an environment where students develop knowledge and skills that make them resilient and able to respond to the unexpected.

SJ: I spent 32 years in public policy, and we have made strides on the access agenda. Access is in our blood – part of our religion since the GI Bill. Seventy-five percent of seniors go on to college after graduation. The next challenge is focusing on college completion.

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