



Trends in Higher Education

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The Society for College and University Planning publishes this environmental scanning report as one outcome of routine work which informs our board of directors. We share this in the interest of providing our members and the broader higher education community with an ongoing analysis of trends that affect integrated planning in institutions. For your convenience, trends are categorized as Demographics, Economy, Environment, Global Education, Learning, Politics, and Technology. Within each category we share some facts from our environmental scanning and we also share with you some of our thoughts about the implications of those facts.

We hope that you find it useful and welcome your thoughts and comments; share them by email at trends@scup.org. This report and others in the series can be found in SCUP's website www.scup.org/knowledge/.

Demographics

Fact: Student Loan Debt

Students are graduating with debts that would astonish the previous generation.

- Fewer entry-level positions with bachelor's degrees pay enough for students to live on and also pay off their debts.
- Recent legislation has increased the average student loan borrowing limit by \$1,500.
- More graduates are being more heavily supported financially by parents than before.

Our thoughts:

Access takes another hit when debt keeps students from graduating.

- What happens if large numbers of students decline to go into debt due to lack of security about job prospects? If you're going to make \$30k a year—with or without a degree—why pay back \$100k in loans?
- Will there be relief for students and parents in the 2007 Congress?
- Institutions may need to increase their support for students to include more counseling about their long-term handling and consequences of large amounts of debt.



Fact: Near-Campus Living for Faculty and Staff

With higher education institutions now such obvious drivers of economic growth, institutions outside traditional urban areas are beginning to experience housing issues that affect recruitment of faculty and staff.

- College towns are magnets for the affluent, who want to live in intellectual and entertainment centers.
- Long a problem for urban schools the costs for university employees of living near where they work is causing problems for schools even in the middle of the country.
- Many institutions are getting involved in major commuting and transportation efforts.

Our thoughts:

- Public-private partnerships of various sorts will be explored for their value in creating affordable living situations, sometimes subsidized by the institution.
- The trend for campuses to work with surrounding communities to solve larger issues of affordability and community life will grow.
- These issues may well fold into discussions related to sustainable practices.

Fact: Affirmative Action?

Affirmative action is taking a beating, politically, and is less easily useful as a tool for achieving institutional diversity.

- In Michigan, with every top Republican and Democrat urging voters to protect affirmative action, and where Democrats won the top positions, affirmative action was overwhelmingly voted down in November 2006.
- In states where similar measures passed, decreases in minority enrollment have already occurred.

Our thoughts:

- Keep an eye on the University of Michigan, whose president is set to use the institution's resources to challenge the new law in court.
- Retention of minorities becomes even more important once affirmative action plans are shot down.
- Who is most hurt by the loss of affirmative action? Is it the elite institutions struggling for diversity, or the individual minority students who do not matriculate?



Economics

Fact: For-Profit Competition

The for-profit industry has had growing pains, but has made strides in removing barriers to further growth and is trying new tactics.

- Congress killed the 50 percent rule earlier this year—allowing groups that primarily provide distance education access to financial aid dollars.
- The University of Phoenix has its own football stadium, having recently paid for the naming rights to the Phoenix stadium of the Arizona Cardinals.
- Kaplan and Newsweek magazine are teaming up to offer MBAs.
- Employers are more accepting of online-only degrees than before.

Our thoughts:

Overall, traditional higher education has been competing well. Small, poorly funded, less-known institutions continue to face the possibility of folding. On the other hand, some for-profits might lend a hand by purchasing a traditional institution, or part of it.

- Co-existence is not only possible, it may be inevitable, so the traditional higher education world may be making more forays into collaborating with the for-profits, or at least talking to them in more formal venues.
- What, me worry? The largest university in the US is Arizona State University, right in Phoenix University's back yard. Yet, ASU is adding another downtown campus and overall is in great shape.
- Traditional institutions are finding lessons to be learned for their own operations from watching the evolution of the for-profits.

Fact: Value & Costs

The public is confused about the costs and benefits of higher education.

- Few students pay the sticker price, but it's the sticker price that gets debated.
- You don't have to dig deep to find student essays titled, "College is a Waste of Time and Money."
- The public good versus private benefit debate continues.
- The Education Writers Association is paying special attention to this issue in 2007—that means even more news stories.

Our thoughts:

- Tuition discounting may become "less arcane, but even more controversial as the potential for confusion remains."
- Each institution needs to understand the various "customer" perspectives on the value equation: students, parents, state officials, and alumnae.
- Institutions may be undervaluing the effect of student involvement in the community on community perceptions of value.



Fact: Non-Tuition Funding

The public situation varies widely from state to state and within states by type of institution.

- The 2001 recession lasted only a short time, but states in general have taken a very long time to bring their funding back to late 1990s levels for higher education.
- Global competition is a factor in some states' recent increases in funding.
- Research in some key scientific areas—climate change, stem cell work—may benefit from new federal funding due to election changes.

Our thoughts:

Will the Higher Education Reauthorization Act finally be passed and how will it reflect the Spellings' Commission's findings?

- Public education will regain more of its lost ground, from the federal government and the states, although with varying calls for accountability attached.
- Even very small institutions will be paying more attention to “government relations” as the years go by, be it county-wide, statewide, or federal.
- Two-year institutions may be in line for previously unanticipated foundation funding.

Environment

Fact: Sustainability Research

Knowledge about the extent of human impact on climate change continues to grow.

- No fish in the sea? Measurement and projection from current trends indicate a loss of the ocean-based fishing industries by mid-century.
- Disappearing glaciers and other ice cover: Loss of ice cover can have multiplier and feedback effects from albedo changes and the addition of cold, fresh water to the oceans, and may disturb the sources of fresh water for hundreds of millions.
- It turns out to be true that the major challenges to biofuels are political attitudes and the price of petroleum.

Our thoughts:

Research related to climate change is no longer easily viewed as esoteric. Higher education should seize the opportunity to take credit for being the source of this research.

- Kudos to institutions for their work to bridge and connect the relevant research being conducted on their campuses.
- The AIA (American Institute of Architects) continues to push on green design for new construction.
- If the 2006 federal election changes in the US House and Senate affect the 2007–2008 budget institutions could well see increases in funding for research.



Fact: Green Industry Boom

“Green Industry” growth is accelerating. The “marketplace transformation” that the United States Green Building Council successfully undertook in the building industry, is replaying in other major industries.

- Within the next 15 years or so, the alternative fuels industry will employ several times more people than the petroleum industry.
- “Green” is being demanded by consumers: geothermal heating for homes, green products, alternative fuels for vehicles and more.
- Statewide and regional green industry consortia or associations exist in every state now and most, if not all, are interested in partnerships with higher education institutions.

Our thoughts:

- Community colleges are perfectly placed to contribute to the training of green industry workers; new ones as well as retraining for older workers.
- This is another area like information technology, where higher education institutions can be local and regional leaders in revenue generation and market transformation.
- What replaces “green” and “sustainable” as modifiers once almost everything can be so labeled?

Fact: Climate Change

Momentum for positive changes in human behavior with regard to global warming is increasing and the pressure on higher education institutions to do something about it will become overwhelming.

- Pressure is increasing on institutions to change their operations. It is coming from alums, professional associations of campus administrators, academic disciplines, and from potential and current students.
- Many recent studies have shown that “operating green” has a host of previously unexpected benefits, and more often than not has a reduced cost if intelligently done.
- Institutional comparisons, such as “Who is building the greenest campus?” arrive in the media.

Our thoughts:

- Give up any thought of resisting calls for more institutional involvement. This is an opportunity to embrace research and learning in a way people will be passionate about.
- Don’t let the emphasis on climate change distract your institution’s interests in the Triple Bottom Line of environmental and social performance, in addition to financial performance.
- What your constituents think of you regarding this is very important. Don’t let your institution be seen as somehow lagging behind its comparative peer institutions.



Global Education

Fact: Funding & Accountability Vary

Higher education and its relationship to government (and other) funding sources is in an increasing state of flux, not just in the US, but around the world.

- In Australia, fees are going up for Australian students just as there is a decline in the number of Asian international students that institutions had targeted.
- British universities are facing calls for a more centralized quality assurance process. Like Australia, ‘top up’ fees are becoming of increasing concern and fueling demands for alternative methods of financing.
- In Korea the government is doing its best to “farm out” decision making authority to individual universities and communities.

Our thoughts:

- It is becoming clearer that for any country or government to function well in the information economy it must have a well educated populace. Like everyone, we anticipate global demand for higher education continuing to increase.
- Countries which are able and willing to pay for it will be able to get the best in international learning for their students.

Fact: Still Number One

American higher education remains the benchmark by which leaders in other higher education systems measure themselves.

- Mexico is taking steps to introduce American-style accreditation as mandatory for all college-level programs.
- The international graduate student enrollment in the US is now above 2001 levels.
- In Korea and other countries, university rankings are of paramount importance, and American institutions dominate the Top 20.
- Also in Korea, the government is establishing American-style graduate law schools in 2008.

Our thoughts:

- Opportunities for consultants will grow beyond capacity.
- The United States could continue to miss opportunities in international higher education due to restrictive federal policies.



Fact: Apples Are Not Oranges

Speaking of benchmarks, getting apples to apples comparisons of postsecondary institutions across national boundaries is much more difficult than many think.

- Oft reported comparisons of the numbers of “engineering graduates,” are fraught with issues: for example, many Chinese engineering degrees are three-year, not four-year.
- The European Union continues to face articulation issues, after many years of attempting to level the European playing field.
- Perhaps invisible to American institutions and not on organizational charts, a parallel leadership structure at every level of university leadership exists, “academic” alongside “party,” in China.

Our thoughts:

- Expect more international efforts to standardize at least some measures of output and quality, like the one between the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- If you want to know what’s happening in other countries, you’ve got to dig deeper than tables, charts, and executive summaries.

Learning

Fact: Access

Divisive perceptions of private benefit and public good create tension around admissions.

- Statewide anti-affirmative action initiatives are having increased success, most recently in Michigan.
- Early admission is being abandoned by Harvard University (and others) for the entering freshmen of the class of 2011.
- The rite of passage that is college admissions is filled with turmoil and calls for change.

Our thoughts:

- Look to even more defined articulation relationships between two-year institutions and even the most prestigious four-year colleges, even though “back door” transfer-admissions will be increasingly scrutinized.
- State-funded institutions facing diversity issues and political restrictions on selective admissions might find ways to increase diversity articulation with community colleges.
- Ending early admissions can free up staff time and resources for more outreach.



Fact: Generational Learning Changes

How young people learn continues to change, more affected by technology and culture, than by institutional decision making.

- The grammatical structure and abbreviations of “texting” via instant messaging or cell phone messaging systems, are beginning to be accepted by some K–12 instructors.
- Instant access to information continues to erode the importance of memorization, and increase the importance of information navigation skills.
- Team projects and collaborative work have increased in importance due both to deliberate institutional intent as well as student acceptance of constantly-on networking.

Our thoughts:

- It’s not completely ludicrous to imagine a future where even highly educated people do not have a mastery of reading, unless they are in a niche profession that relies on text.
- Skeptics among the Baby Boomers may find themselves better understanding the learning power of short videos, as YouTube usage expands demographically.
- Constantly-on networking will only increase in importance on campus, as students come with that focus and then graduate to companies where they work with that focus.

Fact: Focus on the Teaching

“Learner-centered” has not reached the end of its life space as a concept, but institutions are finding it worthwhile to pay attention to the teacher end of things.

- Some studies have recently demonstrated possible linkages between poorer student outcomes and the increasing use of adjunct faculty.
- More and more research demonstrates a connection between the physical environment and learning outcomes.
- More institutions are taking their teacher training program seriously as the demand for teachers grows in many states.

Our thoughts:

- Awards like those of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which encourage university career flexibility, will gain increasing recognition.
- A growing focus on institutional mission is highlighting inherent tensions between such dichotomies as teaching and research, or faculty loyalties to academic disciplines versus institutions.



Politics

Fact: Dealing with Crises

Not a week goes by without extensive media coverage of some kind of ‘reputational’ crisis, sometimes related to a physical disaster, at an institution of higher learning.

- Tornados, hurricanes, flooding, earthquakes, etc.
- What is the cost to any institution of a crisis, regardless of its origin? Time, money and lost opportunities all add up.

Our thoughts:

- Katrina was probably something of a watershed given how many institutions and students were involved, and how many other institutions provided assistance.
- CEOs, and if not CEOs first, then governing boards, are going to be demanding better integration of disaster planning, more business continuity planning, and in the best cases, institution-wide crisis planning and management structures.
- The best business continuity planning on campuses is in IT departments, and since IT is essential for broader-scale business continuity planning, CIOs should be at all the planning tables.

Fact: Engaging the Department of Education

The form of the engagement between the Department of Education and the Academy is taking shape and will be a constant federal pressure on much of campus leadership.

- The US Secretary of Education’s Commission on Higher Education (the Spellings Commission) released its final report, unsigned by the representative from the American Council on Education.
- Shortly thereafter, six leading presidential organizations sent letters to their president-members regarding a potentially unified position vis-à-vis the commission’s recommendations.
- Secretary of Education Spellings issued a complex plan within days, signaling the intent to engage with energy.

Our thoughts:

- Battle lines have been drawn and the Academy is watching to see what Democratic control of the House and Senate means for the Department of Education’s plans.



Technology

Fact: Data Security

At the same time as concerns about protection of personal information rise, institutional secrets are becoming more difficult to keep.

- Ohio University is recovering from a reputational crisis, at least partly due to repeated security breaches of personal information.
- Blogs and social networking sites like Facebook are everywhere. Facebook no longer requires an “.edu” domain for access.
- The EDUCAUSE 2006 top issues survey identified “Security and identity management” both as the current top issue and as the issue most likely to get even more pressing soon.

Our thoughts:

- If the Secretary of Education’s plans for federal involvement with assessment of higher education bear any fruit, even more data about institutions than is already shared via the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) will become publicly available.
- Any institutions that still use social security numbers as identifiers need to do whatever it takes to change that situation.
- At the dawn of the IT age, researchers were more concerned with things like “single log-ons.” The issues are now more complex and need to be examined within the context of institution-wide, integrated strategic planning, which will require human and financial resources.

Fact: Virtual Becoming Real

Technology continues to change what we recognize as pedagogy. The implementation of learning methods may change more in the next 15 years than in the last 150; especially as the line between “real” and “virtual” continues to blur for young people.

- Video games/gaming are being seriously researched and implemented as major teaching tools.
- At Florida State University researchers are working on “pedagogical agents,” which interact via a computer screen. Students have avatars (cartoon-like representations) for professors.
- The number of courses taken via distance education has reached an all-time high.

Our thoughts:

- Even adult professional learners will be demanding changes in delivery, not to mention military veterans who have experienced distance learning while serving.
- Within 10 years, we really could see the end of printed-out textbooks, replaced by anytime, anywhere, mobile access to what used to be the content of such books. Will those services be provided by institutions or by commercial vendors?
- Writing assignments are already becoming assigned video/audio reports, or at the least, slide shows.



Fact: Effective Communications

The tools, venues, and methods of communication used by people vary greatly based on generational, as well as cultural and socioeconomic access.

- Less than one quarter of teenagers use, or even want to use, email. Instead, they use IM, social networks, and text messaging.
- Those who do use email find themselves even more buried under piles of unstoppable spam.

Our thoughts:

- What method of communication most quickly and inexpensively reaches your constituencies?
- Can you afford to send official communications using a method that might not reach everyone?
- The text-messaging and other kinds of mass communications systems being looked at by institutions may well grow from “there in case of a crisis” to everyday use.

