

Chapter 6

Leading Institutions Through Change to Improve Learning

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ABSTRACT

Student success in higher education depends on a complex set of services that must be integrated seamlessly and delivered to students. This chapter looks at the complex, and often competing, interests of students, faculty, administration, and external stakeholders as they seek to improve student success in higher education. Administrators, mid-level managers, change agents, faculty and ancillary student support services all need to understand the importance of their role in working together to make the changes necessary to improve teaching and learning. The great challenge is managing the change that this will require. Educational institutions in the 21st century need to become agile and able to manage change imposed by both internal and external pressures.

INTRODUCTION

Build buildings, recruit more students, improve instruction, keep up with changing regulations, deal with labor/union issues, raise pay, lower costs, handle parents, market differently, implement technology, and the list of demands on higher education goes on. College leaders are facing the daunting task of changing in more ways, and faster than the entire industry has in the last 1,000 years. Increasingly it is evident that traditional practices are not meeting the needs of students, future employers or governmental agencies. Change is difficult in higher education. *Institutions with long histories of success operating in one method are finding it difficult to manage the changes.*

Change is the process of making something different or modifying something that exists (Miriam Webster, 2021). Innovation is also the process of changing something, or introducing a new method or idea (Christensen & McDonald, 2015). While it is easy to define, it is less easy to know what the change or innovation should be, or how to get it accomplished.

As Tom Kelley wrote in *Creative Confidence* (2013): *Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, “The first step toward a great answer is to reframe the question.”

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The most common question from educational leadership seems to be framed around the word ‘what’, but the author of this chapter believes the question for educational leadership needs to focus more on ‘how’. Research on how students learn is emerging, as is data on how institutional organizations can handle change management as administrators, middle managers and faculty face many of the same challenges overcome by management teams everywhere. Institutions of higher education need to reframe the question in order to solve the challenges.

BACKGROUND

Research in higher education traditionally focused on the subjects being taught and was conducted by the instructors and researchers hired by the institutions to conduct that research. However, higher education itself is increasingly the subject of the research. In the information age, education has become a commodity, and is subject to the demands for accountability and transparency. Multiple stakeholders are asking for improvements, particularly as the cost of higher education continues to rise at alarming rates while student completion (or success) is falling (Paquette, G., 2021).

There are multiple reasons for the convergence of the challenges of rising costs and failing success rates, and they are both complex. This chapter will describe the challenges as background, not as solutions. The democratization of higher education in the 20th century caused a seismic shift in student populations, the numbers and types of institutions, the demand for external funding, and the demand by industry for people with advanced degrees. Yet, all measurements of success in higher education are generally measured by graduation rates within specific time frames, not allowing for the challenges of the greater diversity of the 21st century. According to NCES data (NCES, 2020) students are only counted as fall term, first-time, full-time and degree seeking. Students who start in other terms, are part-time, of non-degree seeking are not included in the national database. The result is incomplete information on the true student population in higher education.

The changes in higher education enrollments, by type of institution, over the last century is well documented. Baum, Kurose, and McPherson wrote in *An Overview of American Higher Education* (2021),

The early 1960s was a time of quiet ambition in American higher education. The baby boomers were beginning to overcrowd grade schools and high schools, but the tidal wave of postwar births had not yet hit college. Undergraduate education was operated mainly through private nonprofit colleges and through public four-year institutions financed by state governments. Degree-credit enrollment in for profit colleges was too small to track.

According to research conducted by The Center for Education Statistics, 90% of high school graduates expect to enroll in post-secondary education. As the chart below indicates, colleges in the United States have experienced significant growth in enrollments since the end of World War II, particularly by women (Snyder, 1993).

At the same time that enrollments have increased, the revenue streams for most institutions have changed significantly. Before the end of WWII there was limited federal funding for higher education. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill) expanded college enrollment by more than 1 million. The first student loan program emerged in the 1950’s before the High Education Act of 1965

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