

# A Peacetime Mission for Higher Education

by William C. Richardson, President and CEO of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation

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*The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) has created a 25-member presidential Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities.*

*The Commission is funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. In announcing the initiative, Foundation President and CEO William C. Richardson spoke of the philosophy and practices of state and land-grant university education since the early 1930s, and why the Foundation decided to support a national dialog on institution reform in higher education. Before joining the Kellogg Foundation in 1995, Dr. Richardson was President of the Johns Hopkins University for five years. Kellogg granted ARL permission to publish the following excerpts of his remarks.*

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One may ask what does the Kellogg Commission seek to accomplish that numerous other commissions have not?

Even though we have tried to avoid "commissions," we still recognize that many have made great contributions to American society. The National Commission on Excellence in Education and the Pew Roundtable are both good examples. Therefore, after much discussion, the Foundation concluded that the Kellogg Commission has great potential. Further, we believe the land-grant ethic -- commitment to scholarship, broad access to higher education, and service to communities -- is still among the most noble and valuable ideals in American society.

Indeed, many of these land-grant ideals are embodied in the vision and mission of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Our grantmaking centers around the vision of a world in which each person has sense of worth, and accepts responsibility for self, family, community, and societal well-being and we believe each person has the capacity to be productive and to help create nurturing families, responsive institutions, and healthy communities.

The Commission will provide an organizing structure for fostering a national dialogue about institutional reform in higher education. And equally important, the Commission will convene the leaders, and provide the leadership, that will help convert these ideas into action.

I would like to address some key challenges that many of you will face as you work to implement the reforms promoted by this Commission. I also want to explore how we got where we are, but more importantly, how an increased focus on active outreach and effective partnership can help us take a tremendous leap forward.

In the next few years, I think the stakes will be very high. Should universities fail to make some important reforms, they indeed risk becoming the "academic Jurassic Parks" referred to in a recent statement from NASULGC leaders. In other words, fascinating, historic places to visit, but without connection to a world that may have passed them by.

But how did we get to this point as a society?

To help understand one of the driving forces behind the current situation of universities, one could look

at the United States high-tech arsenal. This was built on a foundation of university research: federally-funded university research. I think it is accurate to say that higher education played a major role -- albeit a discreet one -- in winning the Cold War. But this Cold War paradigm, which promotes research as the loftiest service of higher education, influenced the organizational structures and incentives we see at most major universities today. And of course, the competition of the superpowers went well beyond the military dimension, and included fields as far ranging as astronomy, zoology, and the biomedical sciences. International studies and foreign language instruction were also fostered.

Well, we have won the war. It was of course incredibly costly, a cost that we and our children will bear for decades. However, in 1996, many of our universities seem to be like a veteran who has not completely adapted to a new purpose in peacetime.

## **Learning By Doing**

One of the critical challenges for higher education is to redirect our knowledge and our resources in the service of rural communities and urban neighborhoods. In fact, it may be these investments that prove the true test and value of our research and outreach programs. Can we, for example, make a difference in the lives of people where they live, in the towns and communities of America? Can we build the capacity of people to play a central role in finding their own solutions? And, can we impact public policy that creates both economic and social opportunities for people to improve their quality of life?

It is true that states and local governments do not have very deep pockets any more when it comes to funding these types of activities. I cannot even suggest that you turn to the Kellogg Foundation, because we do not fund research, per se. We *do*, however, fund learning by doing. And in many cases, learning by doing in a community setting provides the optimum atmosphere for teaching, outreach, and important research.

With learning by doing, universities can add value to their teaching and research in a host of creative ways. As an example, consider NASA's Hubble Telescope project, which is headquartered at the Homewood campus of the Johns Hopkins University. It took a massive research effort to launch, and then make the needed fixes, on this hugely successful \$1.4 billion piece of equipment.

Yet it did not stop there. Hopkins' faculty have found some amazing ways to link the telescope with educational programs everywhere. There are programs linked to the Baltimore Public Schools, undergraduate courses, museums, and historically black institutions. With sound marketing and outreach, the Hubble Telescope has clearly added real value -- and income -- to the university and opportunity for the wider community.

As a fringe benefit of the Cold War, the Internet provides another challenging opportunity for higher education. It was largely the universities -- and not the private sector -- that developed the Internet in the first place, partially as a means to support defense-related research and other needs.

Now, as a true peace dividend, the Internet provides a fantastic medium for learning and communication. Many universities still use the Internet largely as a tool for research. They have yet to realize, or pursue, its vast, untapped capacity for outreach and service. Here is a situation where the infrastructure is largely in place; and what is needed is a new philosophy and approach for using this existing technology.

Again, the secret is finding new ways to add value -- and revenue -- through teaching and research in partnership with our communities. We of course need an academic culture, and leadership, that allows

and promotes these changes. But before we explore that challenge, I would like to question what I consider a myth of American higher education, one that has been espoused for too long.

## **Research as the Measure of Success**

This myth surfaced again a few weeks ago, while we were discussing the Kellogg Commission. A Kellogg Foundation staff member commented to me that during the early 1980s, his university had a goal. They wanted to become "The Harvard of the Midwest." In other words, a big, high profile research-driven titan, with well-to-do sponsors and benefactors. I would like to think that this narrow goal has changed, but I suspect otherwise. I think too many universities, public and private, still use research activities as a yardstick to define a significant part of their success.

The truth is, there is the Harvard of myth and then there is the Harvard of reality. Now I realize that Harvard, or Johns Hopkins, or any excellent university, still does a huge amount of very important research. But in actual fact, there has been a transformation at these universities. It is a transformation driven by a new or renewed commitment to part-time learners, adult education, and undergraduates -- a transformation that includes hands-on research that is readily useful and transferable to communities. In fact, these universities are at their best when their faculties engage in a range of such activities.

It is ironic. While many land-grant and regional universities are trying to become more like *Harvard*, Harvard appears to be trying to become more like *them!*

There is little question that a research-as-king mindset has shaped the academic culture and hierarchy of most American universities. And clearly, our ability to change the status quo will pose yet another major challenge for higher education during the post Cold War era.

## **Institutional Strategies**

Now, I do not propose any organizational template that a university should use to quickly create such a new structure. However, I can suggest an approach that rewards people for doing what they do best, in ways that benefit the taxpaying public and the university.

University leadership -- administration and faculty -- must articulate a multi-faceted mission that is balanced and forward-looking.

Within this context, faculty appointments, among other things, may be viewed as licenses that enable faculty to pursue their own work, but in a way that puts revenue in the university's accounts. Faculty activities include teaching at a level that generates enough credits to support the position. Or if one has a heavy research focus, generating enough research grants to support oneself and the work, or a mix of these. The same logic applies for faculty who are engaged in clinical practice. This strategy reflects a clear correlation between the organizational setting that the university is providing and the work that it wishes to see accomplished -- its mission.

Such an approach promotes flexibility within the university. It allows faculty to pursue the needs of a fast-paced society, with greater flexibility as to what constitutes enough published research, while providing encouragement for other activities. As taxpayers increasingly expect higher education to become engaged with society, we will need this more flexible, mixed model orientation to respond effectively.

## **Personal Leadership**

Higher education must trust more than one model of scholarship and practice. To accomplish this, universities need to support and reward what may be unconventional thinking. As Thomas Huxley once said, "Every great advance in natural knowledge has involved the rejection of authority."

What higher education needs, then, are teachers and researchers who can think and act independently *and* responsibly. To achieve that, universities need to promote a strong ethic of personal leadership. And this notion of leadership must extend beyond the traditional job titles of dean, department head, or provost.

On a broader scale, we must call every faculty or staff member to leadership. Leadership in their discipline. Leadership in their ability to connect with community. Leadership in their ability to mentor students, community people, and other faculty. As universities become more decentralized, this ethic of personal leadership will prove even more important.

## **Lifelong Learning**

If only for reasons of personal job effectiveness, neither we nor our institutions can afford the luxury of limited vision. Most people during their careers will need significant re-education every five to seven years. And that brings us to the final challenge that I would like you to consider: lifelong learning.

What this amounts to is a wonderful opportunity for universities to adopt a seamless approach to education. Now I believe most universities *have done* an admirable job of addressing the needs of lifelong learners. Child care, weekend courses, mid-career graduate programs, and distance learning have all helped add students and value to the university.

There still exists, however, a lingering lack of conviction about the value of lifelong learning. It is as if we are not yet convinced that global competition, and technology, have made this a serious reality.

We seem to regard higher education as a one-way street from teacher to student or university to community. But the late Ernest Boyer and others have pointed out we are all learners -- students and professors and communities. And we need the chance to move from theory to practice and back again.

I think a graduate with as little as two- or three-years' work experience can be a great resource. In many respects, we should regard our graduates not just as alumni, but Extension Agents. They are a network that can help the university advance its mission, while we help them grow professionally and personally.

Today, we envision the tremendous potential for higher education to revitalize American society. Likewise, I hope these ideas will spark your interest in the critical reforms so needed by the higher education community.

I do not believe there is a question as to whether we are up to the task. We helped win the Cold War, so it is not a question of capability but of commitment. It is truly time for us to move on.

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## **NASULGC's Kellogg Commission and its Plans**

In early 1996, five topics were proposed as the basis of Kellogg Commission discussions and for a series of reports to be issued over the next 30 months.

- **The student experience:** placing the student experience -- graduate and undergraduate, traditional and non-traditional -- at the heart of institutional concerns.
- **Access:** maintaining access as a priority, despite financial and political pressures.
- **Engaged Institutions:** going beyond extension to become more productively involved with our communities.
- **A Learning Society:** creating an America that encourages learning throughout life.
- **Campus Culture:** redefining excellence and traditional reward systems on campus through the prism of this new agenda.

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