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FOREWORD BY FREEMAN A. HRABOWSKI

THE
UNDERGRADUATE
EXPERIENCE

FOCUSING INSTITUTIONS ON
WHAT MATTERS MOST

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FOREWORD

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEADERS WHO SEEK TO ENHANCE the student experience will find this book especially uplifting because the authors are leaders in their own right, with deep experience and success in setting visions, developing plans, and reaching goals. These are can-do, get-it-done educators.

Even more important, the authors are leaders who understand that moving a college or university forward is not about one person but rather about a community and the culture of the institution. In fact, what comes through as one reads the illustrations in this book and absorbs their lessons is that the substance of an institution's culture is particularly critical to what we can achieve. Many institutions talk about supporting all students and about being mission driven. However, institutions that are most effective are those that foster broad agreement on priorities, allow people to ask questions and take initiative, and offer incentives and rewards to those who innovate.

The book provides excellent examples of colleges and universities staying true to their missions—continually evolving and innovating to ensure success in those missions. In fact, the authors place “positive restlessness” at the center of successful institutional leadership. This is the notion, outlined by George Kuh and colleagues in 2010, that one must be constantly seeking

and striving to improve, determined not to be satisfied and not to say, “Been there, done that.” On my campus, my colleagues constantly remark that success is never final. We use data analytics and focus groups to gather deep information on issues that arise; ask difficult questions about our assumptions and the data; involve faculty, staff, and students in these conversations; and develop strategies that are critical to constant improvement.

Some readers may be bothered by the book authors’ assertion that money is not everything. Yet many will be convinced by the argument that although funding is always necessary, it is even more important to make the best use of those funds and to think carefully about the priorities that must be protected. It really is true that during times of scarcity, enlightened institutions can become more imaginative in their spending. The question is, what are the priorities that are most critical to carrying out the mission of the institution? The book addresses the fundamental question of how to use funds not just to make incremental changes but also to transform the institution in ways that can be sustained.

It is sometimes very easy for leaders to become discouraged by forces beyond their control, whether by trends in state and federal policies and funding or the demands of boards, elected officials, and alumni. For leaders who find themselves discouraged because of external constituents and forces, the authors argue that the focus must be on controlling the things that we have the power to control, starting with the work we do to carry out our fundamental missions: promoting student learning and ensuring the quality of the student experience. They argue that leaders at multiple levels have a major impact on the quality of the undergraduate experience—especially if they pay attention to

students, understand their backgrounds, and align the culture of the institution with the students it serves.

They also go beyond the typical discussion involving retention and graduation rates to challenge us to focus on the undergraduate experience. Of course, like money, retention and completion are very important, but the authors are correct that the essence of education is about more than keeping students in college. It is about learning how to learn, asking good questions, analyzing data and information, putting whatever is going on in the world into perspective, and making sound, informed decisions.

Each chapter provides examples that bring these issues to life and give them new meaning. Educators often talk about caring about all students. This book is different because it acknowledges that one-size-fits-all strategies for learning seldom work, yet that certain principles of learning can be applied effectively to meet the needs of all students from all backgrounds at all types of institutions. Here is where the authors deliver at the very practical level. For example, they note the challenges students face when they lack the financial resources to participate in enriching extracurricular experiences, such as study abroad programs. Readers will find the practical discussion of linking budgets with priorities especially helpful as a means for supporting students and institutions.

Leaders—present and future—interested in enhancing the student experience will be challenged to think about their own visions and goals in relation to strategic planning, developing priorities, budgeting, and other institutional functions. The authors also address a number of other critical leadership issues, including strengthening communication across campus

and nurturing relationships among key constituents of the institution. One essential characteristic of a healthy institutional culture is the extent to which the climate encourages transparency and honest dialogue. The very meaning of shared governance involves cooperation and collaboration among the different groups at the institution.

These authors—and the institutions they represent—understand that what we do in higher education will have a profound impact on our students and the future of our country, whether we are talking about social justice or economic well-being. In essence, the authors inspire us to think about our own institutions, leadership styles, and visions, with the hope that these stories can strengthen our resolve to change and turn our visions into the desired reality.

Most important, they offer optimism at a time when we need it more than ever. Every generation in higher education has faced challenges and opportunities, and so do we. We face a globalizing social and economic context, shifting fiscal politics, changing demographics, accelerating technological change, and advances in teaching and learning. I often tell my students that the way we think about ourselves, the language that we use, and the values that we hold shape who we become. We hear an increasing number of people predicting a gloomy future for higher education. If we are not careful, that gloomy picture will become reality. This book offers us—through both hope and evidence of success—a positive vision to which we can all aspire. Our students need us and this vision now more than ever.

Freeman A. Hrabowski III
President, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MANY COLLEAGUES HAVE INSPIRED AND TAUGHT US throughout our careers. Two merit particular attention here: Russell Edgerton and George Keller. As president of the American Association for Higher Education and then as a senior program officer for higher education at The Pew Charitable Trusts, Edgerton mentored and profoundly influenced us as individuals and academics. From his perch at the University of Pennsylvania, the late George Keller was a preeminent scholar and advisor to higher education who shaped how we understand our work and our institutions. We are deeply indebted to both of them.

Pat Hutchings, Lou Albert, and Gerry Francis gave us invaluable feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. Megan Scribner, Laura St. Cyr, and Sandra Fields provided editorial guidance along the way, and Alyx Bean served as editorial assistant. Jessica Pasion kept us organized and well fed. The Elon School of Law hosted our meetings, allowing us to focus on what matters most.

And while John Gardner and Betsy Barefoot had the pleasure of collaborating on this project as a husband and wife team, the spouses of Peter, Charles, and Leo (Sara Walker, Barbara Schroeder, and Laurie Lambert) have been wonderfully supportive and patient with us as we have focused on this project.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

THE FIVE COAUTHORS OF THIS VOLUME BRING DIFFERENT perspectives on undergraduate education. Collectively we have worked in a wide range of institutions, from public community colleges to private research universities. We have consulted on hundreds of different campuses, served as staff and faculty in roles from assistant professor to dean and president, been elected to leadership roles in diverse professional associations, contributed to the scholarship of higher education, and edited several higher education journals. In this book we aim to distill what we have learned from those many experiences.

So that you know a bit about each of us, we will introduce ourselves briefly:

Peter Felten is assistant provost for teaching and learning and professor of history at Elon University. He also is the executive director of the Center for Engaged Learning, which sponsors multi-institutional research on high-impact practices, and the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, which coordinates faculty development at Elon. His recent publications include the coauthored books *Transforming Students: Fulfilling the Promise of Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014) and *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching* (Jossey-Bass, 2014). He is

a former president of the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network and currently is president-elect of the International Society of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. He coedits the *International Journal for Academic Development*, a leading journal for faculty and organizational developers in higher education.

John N. Gardner is president (and cofounder in 1999 with Betsy O. Barefoot) of the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, a nonprofit corporation that partners with all types of postsecondary institutions to improve student success. He is also senior fellow and distinguished professor emeritus at the University of South Carolina (USC). A leading expert on the first-year experience and high-impact practices in undergraduate education, Gardner was the founding executive director at USC of both the widely replicated University 101 course from 1974 to 1999 and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition from 1986 to 1999, the host of the popular annual conference on The First-Year Experience. One of the most prolific scholars of American higher education, Gardner has written about and developed interventions to improve the success of other undergraduate populations, especially sophomores, transfers, and seniors. In recognition of his contributions, he is the recipient of 12 honorary degrees, including from his employer of three decades, the University of South Carolina, where much earlier in his career he was awarded the university's outstanding teaching award.

Charles Schroeder is one of the nation's leading student affairs administrators, having served as chief student affairs officer at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Mercer

University, Saint Louis University, and the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he also was a full professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. He has published more than 85 articles and books on higher education, including the coedited volume *Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls* (Jossey-Bass, 1994). He was the founder and first executive editor of *About Campus: Enriching the Student Learning Experience*, a journal published bimonthly by Wiley and ACPA-College Student Educators International. He also was part of the 12-member study group that drafted *Principles of Good Practices for Student Affairs*, published by ACPA and NASPA. Schroeder has served two terms as president of the American College Personnel Association and received both the Esther Lloyd-Jones Professional Service Award and the Contributions to Knowledge Award from that organization. Schroeder currently provides consulting services to a range of colleges and universities.

Leo M. Lambert is in his eighteenth year as president of Elon University. He has advanced two ambitious strategic plans to establish Elon as a premier liberal arts university. Elon's enrollment has grown by 40% since Lambert arrived in 1999, and the university has earned accolades as one of the most productive campuses for both Fulbright graduates and Peace Corps volunteers. During his tenure, Elon has added new schools of law and health sciences, constructed 100 new buildings, begun a major initiative to develop the residential campus, and earned Phi Beta Kappa status. Lambert has been a champion for college access, establishing Elon's Center for Access and Success and the Elon Academy. He has also been a proponent of multifaith initiatives at the university, including the construction of the Numen

Lumen Pavilion, Elon's multifaith center. During his career, he has been active on the boards of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, North Carolina Campus Compact, the American Association for Higher Education, and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and also on committees of the NCAA.

Betsy O. Barefoot is a prominent scholar of higher education, having served for 11 years as the codirector for research and publications in the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina. As noted already, she is the cofounder of the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, and she serves as its senior scholar. Barefoot has co-authored a number of publications, including the 2005 Jossey-Bass books *Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College* and *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for the First Year of College*. She has also edited *The First Year and Beyond: Rethinking the Challenge of Collegiate Transition*, a 2008 volume of *New Directions for Higher Education*. Currently, she serves as coeditor for the *New Directions for Higher Education* series. She has also served as a consultant to more than 100 college and universities in the United States and internationally.

INTRODUCTION

IN 2004, PROFESSOR GEORGE KELLER OF THE UNIVERSITY of Pennsylvania wrote a short volume that focused on Elon University, *Transforming a College: The Story of a Little-Known College's Strategic Climb to National Distinction* (Johns Hopkins University Press). Keller believed there was a dearth of good case study literature that could inform change across the American higher education landscape. He aimed to write an accessible volume about institutional transformation that could be read on a flight from New York to Chicago. The first edition was printed many times, in part to fulfill requests for bulk orders—entire boards of trustees and college faculties used the book as a common reading and then applied Keller's ideas and lessons to their own contexts. Seven years after Keller's passing in 2007, the editorial staff of Johns Hopkins University Press asked Elon's president, Leo M. Lambert, to write a new foreword and a substantial afterword for a second edition, bringing the story up to date with Elon's 125th anniversary celebration in 2014.

Elon University has been a connecting factor in the writing of this volume as well. Two of the authors (Felten and Lambert) are Elon faculty members and administrators, two are the parent and stepparent of a 1998 alumnus (Gardner and

Barefoot), and Schroeder has been a close friend and advisor to the institution.

While Keller focused heavily on the question of strategy—how to move an institution forward dramatically given finite resources—the authors of the present volume ask a different pair of questions: What matters most in the undergraduate experience? What is possible when colleges and universities focus on what matters most?

This volume differs from Keller's in another important way. Rather than restrict the scope of this examination to one case study or a limited set of institutions, this volume highlights examples of good practice from colleges and universities across the spectrum of U.S. higher education, both public and private and large and small and ranging from the highly selective to those with open access.

Given the wide variety of institutions and students in higher education, we must envision the undergraduate experience broadly. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, some 17.3 million students enrolled as undergraduates in the United States in fall 2015; nearly half of those were enrolled at two-year institutions. The majority of students in American higher education are under age 25 years, but more than 40% are older than that. Today's undergraduates vary in a wide range of other important ways, too, including race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational background. And these students attend a rich array of institutions, from community colleges to research universities, from residential campuses to fully online institutions, and from liberal arts colleges to technical institutes. This diversity profoundly shapes

both an individual student's undergraduate experience, in and beyond the curriculum, and the mission and scope of a college or university. Despite that variation, in this book we will argue that certain core themes are essential for all undergraduate students and institutions.

We chose to profile certain programs and institutions based on our own experiences and on the scholarly literature. We also looked for models of excellence that could be replicated at different types of institutions, with a bias toward those that have well-established outcomes and that do not require vast resources to sustain. Indeed, we sought to find what the surgeon and author Atul Gawande (2007) calls “the positive deviance idea—the idea of building on capabilities people already had rather than telling them how they had to change” (p. 25).

Our Hopes for This Book

As you read this book, we hope you will approach our themes and examples with your mind tuned toward positive deviance. The institutions and programs you will read about may differ substantially from your own. You may well not want to do precisely what they are doing, but we encourage you to reflect on the issues and practices in your own particular context. If you think critically and creatively, we are confident that you will be able to identify positive steps forward that work for your distinct situation and discover allies who are moving in the same direction.

As was the case with the Keller volume, we hope that this book will be read and discussed by institutional teams of faculty,

staff, administrators, alumni, students, trustees, and community partners. We also hope that as a reader, you will pause at the end of each chapter, wrestle with the questions we pose, and discuss with colleagues how undergraduate education might be reimagined in ways both big and small in your own role and at your institution.

Accessing This Book's Online Materials

We have created a website to support your use of this book for retreats, courses, and discussions. On that site you will find resources you may use including print-ready handouts and presentation-ready slides with the Core Themes, Action Principles, and Questions for Reflection. The site also has short video interviews that elaborate on the book, and other helpful resources.

www.TheUndergraduateExperience.org

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WHAT MATTERS MOST

Recent books on higher education typically begin by playing a variation on a familiar tune. Students are adrift. Institutions are underperforming and are also turning students into smart but soulless sheep. Colleges are in need of fundamental redesign. Financial models are in disarray. Technological disruptions are on the horizon, or perhaps the revolution is already here. Two recent book titles frame the situation simply: *Is American Higher Education in Crisis?* (Blumenstyk, 2015). No, things are worse than that because we are witnessing *The End of College* (Carey, 2015).

Although the problems facing higher education are serious, this narrative of peril and constraint obscures something crucial: Excellence abounds at colleges and universities, and not just at the most elite institutions. Looking across the landscape of higher education, we see many instances of effective practices and powerful outcomes. Undergraduates are learning, faculty and staff are working together toward aspirational goals, programs are meeting evolving needs, institutional fundamentals are stable, and the future looks bright. Although the headlines may tell a different story, in many places higher education is flourishing.

This book analyzes the common characteristics of diverse programs and institutions that are successfully navigating the challenges facing higher education. A close look at such schools

highlights the promise of college while it also raises fundamental questions about the practices and purposes of undergraduate education today and tomorrow:

- The Stella and Charles Guttman Community College, the newest collegiate part of the City University of New York (CUNY), was created to enact the best research-based practices on student learning and success. Although Guttman's aim is appealing, it must pursue that goal in an environment layered with complex regulations, funding restrictions, strict labor practices, and other factors that have derailed many well-intended educational initiatives. Guttman raises the question of whether excellent undergraduate education for all students can be the central organizing principle today. Are we in higher education capable of significantly changing our practices and our institutions to meet this goal?
- Georgetown University, a global research university in Washington, D.C., that differs in nearly every way from Guttman, since 2013 has been systematically exploring a surprisingly similar question: Is it possible to design a research university "that would have liberal education values at its center but be appropriate for the world of 2030 and beyond" (Georgetown University, 2015)? In other words, how can today's undergraduate education evolve to meet the needs of students and communities in the future?
- The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) graduates more African-American

undergraduates who go on to earn PhDs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields than any other predominantly white university in the country. UMBC's Meyerhoff Scholars Program is central to those results. For nearly three decades, this program has provided a comprehensive set of challenges to and supports for its students (Summers & Hrabowksi, 2006). The results are unparalleled. The consistent success of Meyerhoff students raises a disquieting question for other higher education institutions: If UMBC can prepare traditionally underserved students for academic success, why are so many other institutions struggling to reach that same goal?

- The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), a comprehensive university of more than 23,000 students, has returned to the roots of U.S. public colleges and universities to focus on enhancing students' social mobility through its high-quality programs. UTEP's story prompts us to ask whether all higher education institutions can and should address persistent social, economic, environmental, and other challenges in our communities and across our world. What is the role of undergraduate education in addressing the most pressing concerns of our students and our planet?
- Elon University in North Carolina is a private, primarily undergraduate institution of 6,500 students that over the past three decades has grown from a regional institution of fewer than 4,000 students to one that

attracts 80% of its students from out of state and has dramatically enhanced its academic profile. Elon's story raises challenging questions for leaders in higher education: If this institution was able to transform itself profoundly, why have so many other colleges and universities not changed in meaningful ways? What does it take to transform a college and then to sustain and build even further on that transformation?

- Arizona State University, the largest research university in the nation, is exploring the boundaries of time and place in undergraduate education by simultaneously rooting some academic programs in specific local communities and environments while launching others online to enable students from anywhere to learn at their own convenience. Arizona State is asking important questions about when and where excellent education can happen. How do time and place matter in undergraduate education?
- Governors State University (GSU), a 5,500-student public institution in Illinois, began by offering only upper-division courses and programs. Now GSU has launched a new model for the first two years of the collegiate experience by building a curriculum and learning spaces that are linked to three central themes: civic engagement, global citizenship, and sustainability. GSU aims toward a truly integrated undergraduate education. Can higher education be more than a collection of individual credits and experiences? Is the value of a degree more than the sum of its parts?