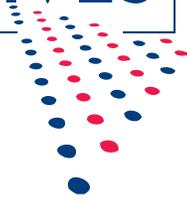


PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



2012-2013 Series:

Responding to the Commoditization of Higher Education

*A HIGHER
EDUCATION
PRESIDENTIAL
THOUGHT
LEADERSHIP
SERIES*

Editors:

Dr. Marylouise Fennell and
Dr. Scott D. Miller

Foreword:

Dr. Muriel A. Howard

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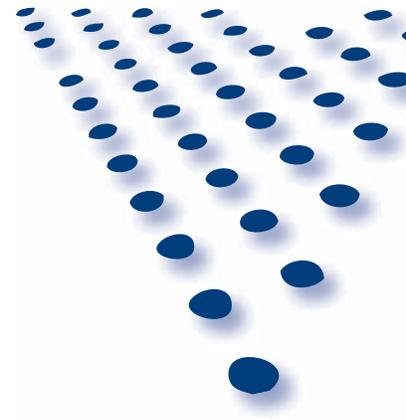
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	Dr. F. Javier Cevallos, President, Kutztown University





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Foreword

Dr. Muriel A. Howard, President, American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)

Is higher education a commodity? One would be hard pressed to find an educator who believes that higher education is a commodity to be bought and sold like a car or a sack of flour. Yet with the ever-rising costs of higher education among a litany of intensifying economic stresses, and evidence that students in the United States are falling behind in science and mathematics, pressure continues to build for the nation's colleges and universities to generate—to “produce”—an ever-increasing number of graduates, as if they were automobiles rolling off a Detroit assembly line.

The higher education-as-a-commodity mentality is increasingly omnipresent, with advertising saturating virtually every medium of our daily existence, permeating the Internet, social media outlets, and especially college campuses. Among the promises sent to prospective students is a guarantee that they can finish college in four years or less, that when they graduate they will be gainfully employed, with a beginning salary that to the casual observer is both startling and enviable.

We have seen such dramas as the gambit at the University of Virginia to function with nimble corporate swiftness, ousting a president in order to usher in a competitive age of online technology—only to see it all explode in the faces of their corporate-minded board members, who were then obliged to welcome back the very president they had fired—along with her decidedly academic style of leadership and incremental approach to institutional change management.

We all agree that colleges and universities need to adapt and to be accountable, but to equate a student's use of technology, or enrollment in classes and the ensuing payment of tuition with education itself, is like saying that the purchase of a gym membership will give you a body like Charles Atlas.

It doesn't work that way. It never has. It never will.

Yes, possession of a diploma should be indicative of a graduate's qualified possession of certain intellectual capabilities—as well as enhanced creativity, flexibility, and analytical abilities. Yes, higher education institutions have an obligation to help students achieve those goals, to change with the times, and to adapt with technology. But if a university diploma is to have any meaning at all, it must continue to be a distinction that is earned, not a commodity to be bought, and change must be guided by those who understand teaching and learning, not buying and selling.

You are about to read a series of essays that discuss the implications (which is to say, dangers) of a world that increasingly—and mistakenly—views higher education as if it were a commodity.

How did we arrive at this point? As costs have gone up and the economy has slowed down, we have seen increasing competition to enroll students. One of the results has been a tendency to treat high school students as if they were simply customers to be lured into the academic marketplace. Consulting firms and university marketing departments have been allowed to take the lead, touting higher education as if it existed only to lead consumers to more marketable skills, more impressive credentials, and higher salaries.

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Is that all there is to higher education? Is that the mentality that made American higher education and America itself great? Is that how we define the good life and the American dream? Is that even the key to the historic power of American enterprise?

Somehow we have become confused. Higher education has always existed to do more than prepare students for jobs. We do that too, but our goals have always been more expansive and loftier. We need to go no further than Bill Gates, a man who never finished his college degree, but who has become one of the world's most vocal champions for boosting postsecondary participation, and who strongly believes that agents for change come from within universities. We, after all, help students discover their individuality, their place in the world, and their unique aptitudes. At the same time, we prepare students for life, and challenge them to think beyond the confines of conventional thinking—whether that thinking is focused on philosophy, art, physics, chemistry, literature, mathematics, history, or any other subject that the mind can divine.

That is the strength of American higher education. We send forth the professionals and leaders who will invent and carry out our nation's future.

There is a grave danger in viewing higher education as no more than the means to a higher-paying job. If we are merely preparing drones for the labor marketplace, we are relinquishing our historic role to inspire progress and innovation. We are also severing our ties to any meaningful understanding of the achievements of our cultural and historical past, and leaving ourselves vulnerable to repeat our failings. As a society, we will have taken a destructive step backward.

American higher education is not about producing foot soldiers for a consumer society; it is, rather, about nurturing the next generation of thinkers—those who will question the old ways of doing things and devise better ways. We need people who will approach the old problems and new challenges in fresh and innovative ways. Today, as always, we seek to inspire our students to go and catch a falling star, not merely to sell them a bill of goods.



Dr. Muriel A. Howard was named president of AASCU in April 2009. She is the first African-American to lead one of the six presidentially based higher education associations in Washington DC. She is also AASCU's first female president.

As AASCU president, Dr. Howard is an advocate for public higher education at the national level, working to influence federal policy and regulations on behalf of member colleges and universities; serving as a resource to presidents and chancellors as they address state policy and emerging campus issues; developing collaborative partnerships and initiatives that advance public higher education; directing a strategic agenda that focuses on public college and university leadership for the 21st century; and providing professional development opportunities for presidents, chancellors, and their spouses.

Dr. Howard formerly served as the president of Buffalo State College, State University of New York for more than 13 years. Prior to joining Buffalo State, she was the vice president for public services and urban affairs at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York where she served in a variety of leadership positions over a 23-year period. Dr. Howard is a graduate of the City University of New York's Richmond College and holds a master's degree in education and a doctor of philosophy in educational organization, administration, and policy from the University at Buffalo.



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Preface and Acknowledgements

Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, Senior Counsel for Council of Independent Colleges

Dr. Scott D. Miller, President of Bethany College

Higher education is facing a perfect storm. The demand for education is changing as demographic changes portend a more nontraditional student (older, employed, commuter,) than seen in the past. The supply side is all very different as online education has changed both how education is delivered and by whom. With the rising popularity of community colleges and vocational schools, private institutions find themselves competing for fewer traditional students. Public institutions are seeing an influx in students, but are physically and financially stretched to meet the need. Furthermore, an umbrella of financial stress overshadows the entire industry, with public funding waning and tuition discounting surpassing sustainable levels. With the addition of a demanding consumer and greater public scrutiny, many believe that a college education is being reduced to a commodity. Authored by notable presidents whose institutions are in the forefront of innovation, the 2012-13 series of *Presidential Perspectives* tackles how higher education is **“Responding to the Commoditization of Higher Education.”**

Now in its seventh year, *Presidential Perspectives* endures due to the generosity and innovation of ARAMARK Higher Education, a leading provider of award-winning dining, facilities management, and conference center services to colleges and universities. Each month a different presidential chapter is distributed electronically and posted on the *Presidential Perspectives* website at www.presidentialperspectives.org.

We are especially indebted to:

- **Chris Hackem**, President of ARAMARK Higher Education, for her support and sponsorship of this thoughtful leadership series
- **Bruce Alperin**, Senior Director, ARAMARK Higher Education, for his vision, guidance, and countless hours bringing this series to fruition
- **Martha Gaffney** and **Deidra Hall-Nuzum**, our special assistants, who regularly read our minds
- **Annie Miller**, Scott’s wife of 29 years, a dedicated supporter of education, who has loyally served as “First Lady” of three colleges

About the Editors



Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, is an internationally recognized management consultant in higher education. Dr. Fennell specializes in independent higher education as a mentor, counselor, search consultant, and consultant to Presidents, Administrators, and Boards of Trustees of colleges and universities, and to for-profit businesses who serve the non-profit sector. She is a partner in the search firm Hyatt-Fennell, LLC.

Dr. Fennell brings a unique perspective to her specialty—namely, an intimate knowledge and respect of the presidency and higher education administration. She has served as President of Carlow University; as Assistant Dean of the Graduate Division of the University of St. Joseph; and has been a tenured faculty member, Department Chair, Division Chair, founder and Director of the Counseling Institute, Director of the Pastoral Ministry Institute, and founder and Director of the Cross Cultural Counseling Symposium. Prior to these assignments she served in teaching/clinical/positions at the University of Hartford and Boston University. Dr. Fennell is the first graduate of the University of Hartford to be named a college president. In 1999, Governor Tom Ridge named Dr. Fennell a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Fennell received her degrees in Education, and Counselor Education from the Diocesan Sisters College (B.A.), University of Hartford (Masters of Education) (Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies), and Boston University (Doctor in Education).

She is the Senior Counsel for The Council of Independent Colleges and has been the chief consultant for the Association of Private Universities of Central America. She has assisted the Central American Universities in the establishment of an accreditation system and is the author of the Central American Accreditation Guidelines for Excellence in Education. Dr. Fennell is presently serving as Executive Director of the Interamerican Consortium of Higher Education (CIDES). She is a consultant to numerous associations, colleges, and universities.

Honors bestowed on Dr. Fennell include the Peace Through Education Award from the SAGE Scholarship Program, the Distinguished Alumni Award of the University of Hartford, the Athena Award, Pittsburgh Leadership Award in Education, The Mercy Higher Education Colloquium Leadership Award, Pennsylvania Hardworking Women Award, Pittsburgh Women of the Year Award, Pittsburgh Woman in Education Award, Outstanding Black Catholic Service Award, Pi Lamda Theta Distinguished Research Award, Award of Service to Women and Children, and the Boston University Outstanding Alumni Award as well as approximately 45 honorary doctoral degrees and numerous awards from universities and colleges throughout the world.

Dr. Fennell is presently serving or has served on numerous boards including Huntington Bancshares Incorporated, Clarke College, Robert Morris University, Mercy College of Ohio, The Art Institute of Pittsburgh (Chair), The Art Institute of Los Angeles (Chair), The Art Institute of Charlotte (Chair), The Art Institute Online (Chair), The Art Institute of Seattle, Asher School of Business (Chair), Bradley College of the Visual Arts (Chair), The Art Institute of New York City, The Art Institute of Seattle, The Art Institute of Portland(OR) and has been Vice Chair of the McGillick Education Foundation, and Chair of the Western Pennsylvania Health System Foundation, and Educational Management Foundation. She has been a Director of SKY Financial Group, Standard Mortgage Corporation (GA), Frontier Financial, Three Rivers Bancorp, Omni Staffing Service, as well as a past trustee of more than fifty boards. She was the first woman to be elected to the Board of Directors of the Duquesne Club which was founded in 1873.

About the Editors



Dr. Scott D. Miller is the President and M.M. Cochran Professor of Leadership Studies at Bethany College in West Virginia.

Now in his 22nd year as a college Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Miller served for 10 1/2 years (1997–2007) as President and DuPont Professor of Leadership Studies at Wesley College in Delaware. He also has served as President of Lincoln Memorial University (1991–97). Before being named President there, he served as Executive Vice President (1988–91) and Vice President for Development (1984–88). A native of Pennsylvania, he is a former Director of College Relations and Alumni Affairs at Rio Grande College (now University) and a former journalist in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Dr. Miller earned his B.A. in Communications from West Virginia Wesleyan College, M.A. in Educational Administration from the University of Dayton, Ed.S. in Higher Education Administration from Vanderbilt University, and Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from The Union Institute & University. He holds a Presidential Medal of Honor from Universidad InterAmericana of Costa Rica-Panama and the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from West Virginia Wesleyan College.

Well known nationally for his contributions to higher education, he was one of 17 presidents nationwide featured in a Kaufman Foundation-funded book, *The Entrepreneurial College President* (American Council on Education/Praeger Series on Higher Education, 2004). Dr. Miller and the Wesley story were one of four amazing transformational stories featured in the book *The Small College Guide to Financial Health* (National Association of College & University Business Officers, 2002) and one of six featured in *The Small College Guide to Financial Health: Weathering Turbulent Times* (NACUBO, 2009). He was extensively interviewed in *The First 120 Days: What A New President Must Do* (Jerold Panas, 2008). He is a regular columnist for *College Planning and Management*, *The Huffington Post*, and *The State Journal*. He is also the author of a widely distributed e-newsletter, *The President's Letter*, which addresses a wide variety of higher education issues.

He is Chair of the Board of Directors of Academic Search, Inc. and Vice Chair of the American Academic Leadership Institute, both based in Washington, D.C.

Both Drs. Fennell and Miller serve as consultants to college and university presidents and boards and are regular columnists to *College Planning and Management* magazine.



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About the Publisher

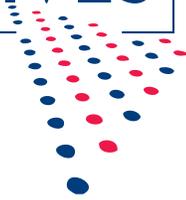
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Chapter **1**: **Against the Windmills:**
*The Commoditization of
Higher Education*

Against the Windmills: The Commoditization of Higher Education

Dr. F. Javier Cevallos, President, Kutztown University

When I was a faculty member, my field of research included the great narrative by Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote, so it is appropriate to begin this piece referring to it. In one of his many “adventures,” Don Quixote sees two great clouds of dust approaching from opposite sides, and immediately concludes that two great armies are facing each other in battle. The armies, of course, are two herds of sheep, and the battle ends with the poor knight errand badly wounded by the shepherds. His loyal companion, Sancho Panza, can’t contain himself:

“Didn’t I tell you, Don Quixote, sir,” he said, “to turn back for they were not armies you were going to attack, but flocks of sheep?”

“What a way that scoundrel of an enchanter, my enemy, has of transforming things and making them invisible! You must know, Sancho, that it is a very easy thing for enchanters to give things whatever appearance they please. For this wicked sorcerer, my persecutor, being envious of the glory he saw I was sure to gain for this battle, has turned the hostile squadrons into flocks of sheep.” (Don Quixote, Part I, Chapter XVIII)

The entire narrative, like this passage, is based on the deluded knight errand refusing to accept reality, pretending that he lived in a different world, and when things didn’t work out (which was of course always the case) the blame laid not in his actions, but in the works of the evil enchanters that changed things to take away his triumph and glory. The landscape for higher education has changed significantly over the last decade. Confronted with dwindling federal and state resources, institutions all over the country have had to make significant changes and adapt to a “new normal.” Indeed, external forces play a significant role in what we do. But it would be a mistake to only focus—and blame—those external “evil enchanters” and fail to look internally at what we do, and how we can continue to fulfill our educational mission. And significant changes are happening with our traditional and nontraditional students alike.

“Commoditization, thus, means that our stakeholders do not perceive a difference between the ‘outcome/product/service’ we offer, and those offered by our peers or competitors.”



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We are all familiar with the changes the Millennials bring with them. Chief among those is a sense that higher education is no longer a privilege, or even a right, but rather a commodity that can be acquired in many ways and under many delivery systems. Commoditization, thus, means that our stakeholders do not perceive a difference between the 'outcome/product/service' we offer, and those offered by our peers or competitors. If we focus only on specific course content or acquiring a specific set of skills, of course they are correct. The rising costs of higher education also contribute to the sense that anyone can simply buy an education. Millennials also bring unparalleled technology savvy, and when combined with the concept of education as a commodity, this creates a totally different environment, one which challenges some of our most dearly held traditions. At the Middle State Association Conference December 2011, John Cavanaugh, Chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, pointed out the challenges we will face as a result of the whole new development of free, high quality and assessable content provided online by some of the most distinguished institutions in the nation, such as MIT and Stanford (you can find it in *Inside Higher Ed*, www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/12/14/cavanaugh-essay-how-accreditation-must-change-era-open-resources). As free online courses continue to increase in quantity and quality, education becomes more of a commodity, something to be easily acquired, and the expectation is that it will also be, in some way, traded: a degree can easily become a patchwork of courses taken in dozens of institutions.

The discussion about free online learning, known as Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC), has taken a new turn in the last few weeks with Harvard joining the group. It is hard to argue about the validity of online education when, together with MIT, the two institutions decide to invest a large amount of money in the enterprise and create edX. Change is in the air, but the process is long, and challenging, and in many cases the most important players in the game, the faculty, refuse to believe it is happening. Like Don Quixote's refusal to accept reality, old style arguments, brandished by some faculty (although many more do embrace the new opportunities) and faculty unions, about class size, personal interaction, and quality education, still cling to the idea of one mode of teaching while the world of technology creates a myriad of new possibilities.

The opposite of commoditization is differentiation. I think differentiation is something we will need to achieve if we're going to be viable moving forward. The great challenge is to find what makes us different, and how we can market our uniqueness. At least for the foreseeable future, there will always be a role for our traditional universities. High school graduates will continue to attend our campuses, live in our residence halls, participate in campus life, and more importantly, open their minds to the benefits of a college education. But the number of traditional students will continue to dwindle, as more students will transition from community colleges, return to school after serving in the military, or just decide to enroll on a part-time basis. And both traditional and nontraditional students will look at us and expect that we will adapt to their needs, not the other way around.

Thus, our priority has to focus on student learning. An excellent example of how to shift our focus is found in the book by Richard P. Keeling and Richard H. Hersh, *We're Losing Our Minds*. For generations our teaching has emphasized what we thought students needed to learn, not what they actually learned. The recent emphasis



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on assessment and student learning outcomes is a welcome and needed step. We also need to revamp our grading system, which was developed as a mechanism to exclude and filter rather than to verify knowledge acquisition. A passing grade of 70 percent, for example, means that we don't care about the 30 percent the student didn't learn. In the past, it was easy to ignore this fact. In the global economy we live in, it is not an acceptable outcome. The huge advances in classroom technology can help us bridge this gap. Clickers, online quizzes, social media interactions, and online support can all help a professor work on the 30 percent the student in the example didn't get and instead of just assigning a passing grade ensure that real learning has happened. And why not take advantage of the free materials distributed through the MOOCs? What an incredible opportunity to complement a class lecture, or lab demonstration!

To conclude, I reassert my firm belief that colleges and universities will continue to play a crucial role in our country and the world. At the same time, it would be naïve to ignore that our current and future students have their own ways of learning, and we need to adapt our teaching to their reality. The exponential changes in technology offer new and unique possibilities and the institutions that adapt and take advantage of the new opportunities will thrive. The challenges we face are similar to Don Quixote's windmills: No amount of squinting on our part will turn them into giants.

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I would like to acknowledge the help of Mr. Jerry Silberman, Kutztown University, with this chapter.



Dr. F. Javier Cevallos was born in Cuenca, Ecuador, and moved to the United States incrementally; first to the Caribbean Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Cevallos earned his bachelor's degree in 1976 at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez.

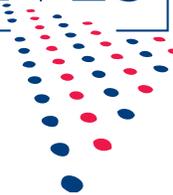
From Puerto Rico, Cevallos moved to Illinois where he earned his master's and doctoral degrees in 1978 and 1981, respectively, from the University of Illinois at Urbana. His area of research is Latin American literature, with particular emphasis on the Colonial era.

He began his career in education in 1981 as an assistant professor of Spanish at the University of Maine at Orono. In 1984, he moved to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where he was promoted to associate professor in 1988 and to full professor in 1992. In 1994, he was asked to serve as faculty advisor to the provost. In 1996, he was selected as a Fellow by the American Council on Education (ACE). Cevallos spent his fellowship at Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Connecticut.

Upon his return to UMass, Cevallos became chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Soon after, he was appointed Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, a post he held until he was appointed President of Kutztown University in 2002.

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