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Enhanced Expense Practices for Higher Education: Enduring Continuous Reductions in State Appropriation

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Abstract:

The way forward for higher education to survive and to endure reductions in state appropriations is the enrichment of practices associated with traditional expenses. Because consistent reductions in state appropriations threaten to cause major changes to educational services within Higher Education, this paper advocates enhancement to program management and changes to teaching practices without sacrificing students' expectations. In fact, these practices strengthen learning through practical and team teaching environments while promoting unity of colleges and integration of courses. Module learning and transition programs encourage students to complete degrees faster and step up to the next advance degree. Flexibility can be obtained in a traditionally rigid environment without surrendering core programs.

Keywords: higher education, funding, public policy, business school, tuition and fees

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to facilitate discussions concerning methods that Higher Education (HE) institutions can adopt to decrease their dependence on public funds. Many HE Institutions are dependent on some level of public funding for support (Dessoff, 2009; Liefner, 2003; McKinney, Shao, & Tissington, 2010; Newman, 2010)

and most institutions are not autonomous or self-supporting. With financial reporting requirements for other post-employment benefits (GASB, 2010), escalating health insurance costs, increasing operation costs and declining returns on investment portfolios, the cost of providing quality academic and research faculty and staff will compound. HE is not isolated; core components (i.e., law enforcement, fire services, social programs, public works, and public infrastructure) of government are increasing (Kallison & Cohen, 2009).

HE is not seen as a necessary expenditure, but as a means to provide economic mobility (McKinney, 2008). While most U.S. HE receive funds from private sources through cost sharing with students and general gifts (Karabel, 2005; Liefner, 2003), HE must compete for the same funds as other core components of state government (Kallison & Cohen, 2009). During economic downturns, reductions in state appropriations are almost assured. Because scarcity is the rule not the exception, public funds should be spent to support a majority of the population. There is no doubt that HE provides tremendous benefits for the general public and society at large.

While these arguments can be fought in legislative arenas, the fact is there have been persistent divestitures in state appropriations. Additionally, the ability for universities to wage long-term battles is tied to the endurance and continued returns of endowments and investments, which have significantly diminished. Thus, HE must look towards re-engineering courses and personnel. Universities should strive for practical solutions to increase efficiencies.

Unlike traditional studies, we present innovative concepts that can be used individually or integrated within a HE framework. We recognize that change brings resistance and some HE organizations require more than frameworks to change, they require legislative actions. But, any change requires a beginning point. Therefore, we outline several techniques and provide an executive overview for each technique.

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

This section presents an executive overview of practical techniques that can be used by universities to improve their efficiencies and to help endure continued divestitures in state appropriations.

2.1 Utilize Graduate Assistant Pooling

Graduate assistants ("GAs") are often underutilized. To more fully realize the potential contributions of GAs and to facilitate the learning and working environment, a central point (i.e., a person or division) or pool needs to be established to manage GAs. Many times GAs are left to manage their own time, work performance, schedules, and so on while making a minimum contribution to the HE institution. The GA pool should function much like a temporary staffing agency. GAs provide credentials, work experience, and available schedule to be matched with faculty work requests.

Requests should be matched with available GA pools. GAs would be deployed to fill requests based on the available supply and demand. GA pooling allows GAs to potentially perform a variety of tasks and to interact with faculty members while being responsive to HE needs. Another advantage is GA pooling provides greater flexibility concerning scheduling work. A few common work requests for a GA would be proctoring exams, performing literature searches, grading assignments, and special research projects. Research projects require higher skill sets and may be reserved for more experienced GAs. Directed projects, data collection and statistically analysis require advanced research skills.

2.2 Measurement of Results and Peer-Evaluations

It is important to measure results not checkmarks. While student evaluations of professors can provide some insight into teaching quality, these types of evaluations are highly subjective with students having little or no insight into HE processes. However, because students are consumers, these evaluations can have a significant influence on performance. It should be understood that students contribute to a HE institution's bottom line. To improve performance, faculty and staff should periodically conduct peer evaluations. An effective approach is for outside disciplines to help conduct evaluations. This will foster strong relations among other disciplines while providing a fresh perspective on individual performance. Peer evaluations can be part of a team and mentoring approach to develop strong HE professionals.

Focus needs to be on high quality ethical results that can significantly impact HE. We need not lower our teaching standards to obtain higher measures of customer satisfaction (i.e., student evaluations). When we lower standards, we reduce competition, innovation, motivation, and most importantly, we devalue the HE process.

2.3 Practical Teaching

Many business executives and professionals enjoy serving as guest lecturers for classes. This provides a rich environment for practical learning and application of theory while providing HE with free labor. The executive gets to advertise products and services while recruiting potential job seekers from captive audiences. In addition, meetings outside the traditional classroom can enrich learning by illustrating practical applications of academic models. These authentic experiences enhance lectures and strengthen relationships between HE and organizations within the community.

Work in conjunction with the organization when planning guest lectures since you need to allow time for preparation and planning. Don't expect an organization to substitute for you. Use a team approach to facilitate learning. Also, allow the organization to invite individuals outside the classroom. After all, the organization is using its resources and facilities and should receive some benefit. Prior to meeting outside the university, obtain prior approval and check liability and logistical aspects before contacting an organization.

2.4 Redundant Course Offerings

Statistics for social sciences, for business, for criminal justice, and separate statistic classes for various other disciplines is an inefficient use of resources and can be counter-productive. A statistics core course with an applied disciple statistics lab/course could be held concurrently or consecutively. The advantage of this approach is that it helps promote unity within a HE setting while exposing students to other fields as the general course can be taught by any qualified faculty member. This helps lead to more interdisciplinary cooperation among colleges and departments. The figure below illustrates this concept.

An academic core that becomes the control point for all disciplines and programs should handle common courses. From the academic core, disciplines are attached followed by programs and certificates. An academic core should be responsible for setting minimum standards for all students. Disciplines should meet these minimum standards while establishing and maintaining a focus within the respective discipline, which would be expressed in the form of degree programs and certificates.

2.5 Modules and Team Teaching

Modules and block learning can provide an opportunity to increase enrollment. Students commuting farther distances or students having work obligations may prefer taking a course that meets eight times over a semester. Each meeting would follow a specific format of two three-hour instructional periods. In addition, multiple instructors working

as a team could present information and facilitate discussions to a greater number of students. This learning environment should reflect the working environment. Especially in a knowledge based society, we rely on numerous perspectives for information.

Just as a strong organization relies on the diversity of a workforce, faculty from other disciples may be utilized in team teaching to provide a richer and deeper learning environment. For example, an economics discussion on the underground economy could incorporate faculty members from several disciplines such as criminal justice, law, and psychology. This multi-disciplinary course would provide an effective format for other related instructional programs.

The figure below illustrates the matrix concept of team teaching using modules. The economics module uses fifteen core lectures, workshops, and tutoring sessions as noted by the columns. By using this format overseen by a module supervisor, the number of students attending lectures may be exponentially increased. From the figure, GROUP designates that a lecture will be attended by approximately 250 students. Using this strategy in teaching, a university can leverage a faculty member's research strengths through module core assignments thereby increasing the overall educational quality. To provide individual attention to students, team leaders facilitate learning in tutoring sessions and workshops to groups of fifty or less students as noted by the rows labeled Track A to E. Additionally, this format is flexible as modules may be added or deleted with more tutoring sessions and workshops or expanded beyond fifteen. This environment may be optimal for distance learning.

2.6 Transition (Step-Up) Programs

Associate programs should feed into undergraduate programs which can blend into graduate programs. These degrees can be augmented with various certificate programs. We refer to this as a step-up program as the student advances to a higher degree within relatively short time frames. Because program costs are a critical decision cue for students, program compression can save money while providing students steps for growth and periodic recognition for accomplishments.

General courses should be consistent for an associate and bachelor's degree. For example, a humanities course should not be designed just for an associate degree. Associate degree courses need to be designed to transfer into bachelor degree programs. An associate degree should be viewed as a solid foundation for a higher degree, a step-up. Requiring a student with an associate degree to take additional courses can increase a student's cost and lengthen the time to complete a degree. Like HE, a student who faces scarcity and opportunity cost can alter his/her decision.

In addition to providing a smoother transition between degrees, a student may need to work. By providing the ability to transition, student employment opportunities may be expanded. An additional benefit of the step-up process involves improved assessment measures. Through improved graduation rates, universities are able to document positive achievements of certain learning objectives. Research has shown students (about 30%)

commonly drop out within the first year of college (see Bowler, 2009; see also Babad, Icekson, & Yelinek, 2008; Barefoot, 2004; Bennett, 2003). By utilizing the associate degree as a feeder program for the bachelor's degree, more of these students should complete their bachelor's degree.

An example of a transition program: An associate degree would consist of 60 semester hours that included the general education curriculum and the discipline as a minor. Building onto an associate degree, an undergraduate degree would require an additional 60 hours for a total of 120 hours. This additional 60 hours would include the major of the discipline including higher level general education courses such as foreign languages and additional science and social science courses and up to 12 hours of graduate courses. For a Master's Degree, the graduate courses taken for the undergraduate requirements shall satisfy a portion of the graduate work with a stipulation that 24 hours are to be completed. Additionally, optional certificates of twelve hours each can be an ad-hoc upon the undergraduate or graduate degree.

[FIGURE 3 OMITTED]

2.7 Unity in College

Unity in College, not divisions within divisions, should be the standard. Colleges do not need invisible curtains among faculty and staff. The environment should not foster an "US" versus "THEM" attitude. HE spends a lot of resources on recruiting, promoting

diversity, building programs and relationship and should not just cut staff when funds dwindle (Hoffmann, 2009). We need to fully realize the potential of each team member, staff and faculty alike. Divisions or silos tend to promote disharmony and further encourage inefficiencies with the College.

Faculty can have lead roles in modules while taking secondary and supporting roles in other modules. Continued contributions to learning should be the rule, not the exception. With persistent reductions in state funding, HE needs to devise team teaching structures that help improve efficiencies within the University. Administrators should constantly strive to unify structures and provide optimal allocation of limited resources.

CONCLUSION

While some universities are able to temporarily endure persistent budget cuts within education, continued endurance cannot be sustained indefinitely. In fact, without significant program changes, HE can expect significant declines in enrollment as costs are shifted to students, especially with other educational institutions offering a cheaper education within a compressed time frame (Barefoot, 2004; Bennett, 2003). The traditional HE institutions must adapt to modern practices or be subject to major challenges for it very survival.

Technology has provided opportunities for distance learning and increased productivity that new entrants into HE can take advantage of to gain a competitive edge against other institutions (Bowler, 2009).. While HE should not reduce the quality of programs or the

expectations of students in response to decreased resources (Bennett, 2003), HE should consider re-engineering processes to enhance productivity that allows costs to be minimized (Barefoot, 2004; McKinney, Shao, & Tissington, 2010).

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Figure 1: Matrix of Statistics Course Requirements

Statistics Matrix for Courses	Accounting	Biology
General Statistics	*	*
Applied Stat for Business	*	
Applied Stat for Social Sciences		
Applied Stat for Pure Science		*

Statistics Matrix for Courses	Business	Chemistry
General Statistics	*	*
Applied Stat for Business	*	
Applied Stat for Social Sciences		
Applied Stat for Pure Science		*

Statistics Matrix for Courses	Criminal Justice	Economics
General Statistics	*	*
Applied Stat for Business		*
Applied Stat for Social Sciences	*	
Applied Stat for Pure Science		

Statistics Matrix for Courses	Finance	Mathematics
General Statistics	*	*
Applied Stat for Business	*	
Applied Stat for Social Sciences		
Applied Stat for Pure Science		*

Statistics Matrix for Courses	Psychology	Sociology
General Statistics	*	*
Applied Stat for Business		
Applied Stat for Social Sciences	*	*
Applied Stat for Pure Science		

Figure 2: Economics Module using Team Teaching

ECONOMICS MODULE	Introduction & Overview	History of Economics	Breakout Session
HOURS	3	3	3
TRACK A	GROUP	GROUP	A
TRACK B	GROUP	GROUP	B
TRACK C	GROUP	GROUP	C
TRACK D	GROUP	GROUP	D
TRACK E	GROUP	GROUP	E

ECONOMICS MODULE	Tutoring Session	MACRO Principals	MICRO Principals
HOURS	3	3	3
TRACK A	A	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK B	B	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK C	C	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK D	D	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK E	E	GROUP	GROUP

ECONOMICS MODULE	Supply & Demand Lecture	MACRO Workshop Supply & Demand	MICRO Workshop Supply & Demand
HOURS	3	3	3
TRACK A	GROUP	A	A
TRACK B	GROUP	B	B
TRACK C	GROUP	C	C
TRACK D	GROUP	D	D
TRACK E	GROUP	E	E

ECONOMICS MODULE	Labor Markets	Capital Markets	Monetary Policy
HOURS	3	3	3
TRACK A	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK B	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK C	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK D	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK E	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP

ECONOMICS MODULE	International Trade	Local Economies	Decision Theory
HOURS	3	3	3
TRACK A	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK B	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK C	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK D	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP
TRACK E	GROUP	GROUP	GROUP

Note: Each track is 50 students. Minimum instructional time is 45 hours for 3 credits.

Breakout sessions and tutoring session are added within the existing framework.