

Part Four: 1998 – Present

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In the early part of the 21st Century, we find ourselves more concerned than satisfied with the direction of American higher education. The widening income gap and related disparities in educational opportunity and health care pose significant threats to our social fabric. In our K-12 system, students from the upper quartile in income are eight times more likely to attend college than those in the lowest quartile (Mortenson, 2010). Median family income has declined 5.4% since the year 2000, while tuition and fees continue to rise steadily in both public and private postsecondary education (Mortenson, 2010). These trends are not sustainable.

Federal and state governments are unlikely to increase financial aid funding for postsecondary education, especially following the prolonged economic collapse of 2008. College and universities increasingly will be left to their own creativity and strategic planning—and the same holds true for students.

At the same time, colleges and universities are under political pressure and public scrutiny to improve their graduation rates. Congressional hearings in the summer of 2010 highlighted the significant debt burden assumed by students attending for-profit institutions, and noted specifically the dire financial conditions for the high-debt students who never complete their degree programs. While these hearings focused on the for-profit sector, this dynamic is increasingly a problem for students in the non-profit side of higher education, both public and private.

In an era of limited institutional resources, traditional and non-traditional partnerships are about to become more important. These partnerships will be more complex than student internships in various organizations, and will include detailed business plans, revenue and expense sharing, co-branding, digital partnerships, and shared market analysis, as well as new ventures that might re-define faculty and administrative work responsibilities. In addition, as digital technology becomes ever more pervasive, powerful, timely, and affordable, that technology will change our patterns of work and our assumptions about markets, program delivery and student engagement.

In the five essays that follow, these and other themes emerge. Nesbit's description of Lesley's independent study master's degree program has its origins in the Open Education practices of the late 1960's, engaging students with mentors in degree design and the studies to earn that degree. This unique program thrusts the student into the community for a two to three-year learning experience, supported by mentors within and beyond academia. The assumption is that expertise and experience exist beyond colleges and universities, and that most topics worthy of graduate students are more appropriately studied and experienced in context, not on a campus. The partnership among the student, the university, and individuals in the community makes this approach work.

One of the most significant partnerships in Lesley's history has been the 1998 merger with the Art Institute of Boston (AIB). Fertitta and Lanza provide a detailed account of the conditions that led to this merger, the concerns that the smaller AIB had about becoming a school within Lesley University, and an appraisal of the merger impact thus far. This case study illustrates the benefits to both parties when a partnership works, and also makes clear that sustaining a meaningful partnership is not a one-time event, but a continuing challenge to realize benefits and constrain any (unintended) negative effects.

The tension between deep expertise and interdisciplinary study is part of the history of most programs. In their description of the development of Lesley's two MFA programs, Barry, Cramer, and Pocorobba, show how a faculty can design programs that are accessible to adult learners, but also establish a standard of quality. These low-residency programs rely upon the interaction of artists and experts with the engaged graduate students, and also upon the interaction of the students with one another to create a viable learning community. In each program, students develop areas of focus, while the presence of other students with different foci is seen as programmatic strength, not program dilution.

The essay on "community-embedded practice" describes the details necessary to make a meaningful and effective connection between the classroom and the community. Bromfield, Cattaneo, Deane, Miller, and Roffman identify the importance of a field training office, identification of internship sites, clinical (field) supervisors, site supervisors, and faculty. In these partnerships between academic programs and the professional field, each party must live up to the expectations of the other. When we talk about such partnerships, we make them sound obvious, reasonable and beneficial to all parties. What we often don't describe are the details, the faculty and staff work, and the deep commitment to transformative learning that effective internships require.

The final essay brings us full circle. It is more detailed than the words of Edith Lesley, but it addresses a topic with which she was familiar and to which she was committed: the arts. Diaz and Donovan, building from the tradition of Edith Lesley and many others who preceded them, argue that the arts "offer even more to our students than the aesthetic qualities so recognized and cherished in the arts. They offer a way of thinking that stimulates innovation, curiosity and new ways of being in the world." Here you can learn how contemporary faculty are driven to make art an experience for all students, to empower all teachers (not just art teachers) to integrate art into their and their students' days, and to do so in ways that develop critical skills and imagination. It involves partnerships, planning, new delivery models and addressing complex issues such as student assessment and standardized testing.

In each of these essays, we witness faculty engaged with the world beyond higher education, assessing how to customize learning experiences for students to provide opportunities for deep learning. And we also witness students who are seeking to have an impact on the world through their own pedagogy, their writing, their art, or their daily work in business and non-profit organizations. These essays are unique because we are able to get behind official

curriculum and accreditation reports to see some of the considerations that drive this complex faculty/student relationship.

Reference List

Mortenson, T. (2010). *Postsecondary education opportunity*. October 2010, Number 220; and December 2010, Number 222. Oskaloosa, Iowa. www.postsecondary.org.