

Partners for Transformation Panel
2018 Annual Conference – Presidents Program
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R. Glasper: As we have this conversation today, HLC has played many different roles over years... partner, savior, and now Partners with colleges and universities. On another point, we'll assess if this partnership is a revolution. When the Think Tank was established, we were looking at transformation. Making our institutions better and nimbler. Now we ask how innovation and quality assurance should work together. The Partners were asked to think about... What is accreditation now? Who are our partners now? What opportunities should be ceased?

To begin our discussion with our panel... What do you think are three key issues impacting this revolution in education?

M. Milliron: I think it's an interesting place, our role in higher education. In discussion, we're reflecting the experience in this room and we are facing the challenges that everyone in this room is facing. There are a couple things impacting revolution... one - compound interest. For the longest time the issue was access. Then, completion came to the forefront and agencies and others got excited about this process.

What's interesting now, is we are wrestling with compound interest... access matters and completion really matters, but a lot of conversation is about the workplace. Are students really ready for jobs and are students driving their own lives. Can the student complete and is it equitable?

Agencies are adding to the compound interest. Different levels of agencies are forcing colleges and universities to address more issues. Influencing the world of compound interest are more tools and technology. The continued development of tools and technology means there are so many more tools at hand.

And take note that we need to make sense of the significant amount of data about to come our way. The data discussion, over the last decade, has focused on reporting. Now we will be faced with data coming from the new tools and technologies. These discussions will show what works and what doesn't, and we need to get this data to the educators to identify how this works in operations. Faculty for a long time have been battle field surgeons working with little feedback of how their work relates to the student outcomes. We are now giving faculty more tools and technology showing the outcomes.

R. McMahan: Our institution is a little different. When our students enter as freshman, they enter a rotation that affects their career at the university. Our student rotation consists of 12 weeks in class and then 12 weeks in the workplace. This is their career for the entire time at the University. This gives us a unique insight into the customer (student) life. Note that it is only recently that industry refers to the student as a customer. And we know that the customer sets the value of what you do.

If you accept that definition, our end customer (the customer of the student) is the workplace and advanced colleges that accept our students. In this scenario, the compliance in quality education is frontloaded. We set up presumptive criteria and then we send the product out into marketplace and the marketplace judges quality.

But at our institution, because we send our students out every 12 weeks, we get evaluated every 12 weeks. We see this as an aggressive approach to set the degree. We get evaluated much sooner (12 weeks). This spirals our ability to innovate in some significant ways. You get out into marketplace, fail, come back for the next 12 weeks, and you evolve. Because of the increasing demand, it requires that we evolve.

B. Smith: As an alternative provider, online course in competencies, we are not a college. We partner with colleges, at a lower cost and risk for students. We've been doing this about eight years. In the early days, we were extremely controversial and radical. Now our approach is becoming increasingly more acceptable.

For at least 50 plus years, colleges have used the same business model, more or less the same. We as a society have subsidized that model. And as a result, we created the box of accreditation that supported that model.

Now there are more and more new models that don't fit that box. More and more now we look at how we adapt accreditation to that new box. How do we identify the new models for quality and innovation? It is a challenge right now to adapt.

We do not do degrees but what we do is at lower price online, because what we do not have a physical cost. With our model, the risk for starting college is lower. The student can start slowly, with a greater success and a higher rate of employability. We are now more than just colleges; we are partnering colleges or non-colleges. It's a new model. We have more partnerships now than in years past. It is these driving partnerships that is unbundling the education.

Look at this revolution, the movement from 1.0 to 3.0. It's about the job. The role of faculty is going to be revolutionary over the next few years. Whether it's accreditation or non-accreditation, we need to move people through the pipeline.

R. Glasper: But who is driving the curriculum? Business is driving curriculum and there is some concern. Concern about governance along with driving jobs and allocation for a better ROI for the state. Look at the reality of community college and jobs today. Scenario: we are still training drivers for unmanned trucks. What is happening to those who are being replaced by the unmanned truck? Who do we partner with for this reality? We need to look at what is time sensitive. What goes beyond our legislative (DC) representatives?

B. Smith: These are big questions and have significant impact, but what's not really being talked about right now? Even if things changed... it wouldn't affect much. The bigger question is what is the role of education? What happens with the unbundling? We can't ask people to pay huge monies for character development (higher education) and not provide employability. So, what do you subsidize of the institution costs? These questions are not being addressed in the political arena.

R. McMahan: The current educational framework was built around manufacturing. As well as the accreditation process along with policies that are predicated on degree based on a bundled institution. But what we are seeing now is a fork in the road, the unbundling of institutions with crowdsourcing education. Students want to see the skills needed for employment. Companies are saying, "I care less and less about degree but want students who can address our company's needs. If public policy does not keep up with this change, policy will be left behind.

M. Milliron: Policymakers need to see and address social justice and social mobility. The conversations tend to be about economic development or social improvement, but the conversation needs to be both. There is a disconnect right now between the customer versus the workforce. There is power in these pathways of economic improvement and social justice and it's dangerous when we lean on one or the other. But now we're beginning to look at both and openly asking the questions to include equity outcomes for the student. Asking the question, what's the social mobility and economic empowerment of students? We need to embrace these concepts because in the future, it's not going to be one or the other, it will be both.

B. Smith: Vocational and personal return, social terms... we must embrace both social justice and mobility. We see jobs paying for the other items associated with education, but if I'm an online student, do I want to pay for onsite mental health?

R. McMahan: There was a study... You take the average qualified fighter pilot and add an increase in power (jet propulsion). The study found that when you add technology (power) it does not equal an improvement alone. You need to adjust because with more power is not enough for the improvement of the average skills.

When you add the unbundling of education in the customer mix, then accreditation must adapt. Because of the different options available for students, we (accreditation) must adapt.

R. Glasper: When I heard the question earlier, what keeps you up at night, and as Burck was commenting on mental health, I started thinking about the social impact. How things have changed as well as the financial aspects. We are looking at significant impacts. Is education a social concern?

M. Milliron: There is the importance of myth busting. A recent study indicated that institutions are losing 98% or more students above 2.0 GPA versus below 2.0. In actuality, 40-45% of students leaving are in the range of 3.0-4.0. We are over-emphasizing with social affects. We're unleashing new ability to those students that are not able to afford traditional institutions. We are studying the reality of this ability and myth busting. We are finding that more and more students are leaving closer to the end of the degree effort. We are now forced to address students where they are in this educational career. We see so many leaving that are near completion.

R. McMahan: What should keep us up at night is a creeping irrelevance. It's stalking us. Right now, the two most difficult issues for an institution is to close the institution and the other is to close a program. How do we re-tool? It's a statement and a sign regarding the market for education that so many renovations are occurring now.

B. Smith: My organization is working with colleges, not because we are doing something so much better, but we are making things affordable. We find that 25% of our students are re-enrollments, coming back to add skills or coming back after a life need. In a traditional college, the student would be penalized for a pause of his or her education because of a life need. My organization supports that pause for life needs.

R. Glasper: What is the opportunity to higher education in next 5-10 years and what are the obstacles? What role does the think tank play in this room and what role do we have in these discussions?

R. McMahan: Look at HLC and how we accredit. We are constantly looking at how do we change the process? What do we see coming back every 12 weeks? Students tell us how relevant their classes are for their employment.

B. Smith: We would like to address the frontload. If you want to create a new degree program, how long does that take? A year or more and opportunities come and go in that time so how do we make this happen in that timeframe. How do we backload in quality? How do you allow institutions to succeed and fail without affecting their standing? How can we help them succeed?

M. Milliron: Our process will take incremental steps. Using the data better, we can make smart decisions. This will lead to incremental success for students. As in other arenas, it's better to keep a customer (student) than get a new one. We can use online tools to answer student needs and to answer your own student needs that are asking for flexibility. The tools themselves do not answer the question of relevance. You have to experiment but most success will come from partnerships. We need to dispel the myths around the partnerships.

R. McMahan: Innovation, we need to be desperately worried about innovation. At HLC, we get excited because of challenges to accreditation. We put innovation to the side because institutions don't want to deal with those items. And why? Because they suffer from innovation fatigue. We have to develop the muscle to bring sustainable innovation.

Panel Participants

Rufus Glasper, President and CEO, League for Innovation in the Community College

Mark Milliron, Co-founder and Chief Learning Officer, Civitas Learning

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