

Partners for Transformation: Subcommittee on Revolution of Post-secondary Education: The Unbundling

May 14, 2018 – Conference Call

Welcome and Background

The focus of this meeting was to identify the issues that it wants to present at the Partners for Transformation June meeting. The subcommittee also discussed the “so what” of its ideas and then using the Partners’ feedback will write a white paper.

A Continuum

Participants confirmed the thoughts in the March 2018 meeting notes and agreed that the two high level themes of the revolution in post-secondary education are granularity and pricing.

After a lengthy discussion, the concept of a continuum emerged. At one end of the continuum is the institution-oriented status of higher education and accreditation. At the other end of the continuum is a student driven approach.

Issues identified in March such as credit hours vs. outcomes, the changing student body, alternate providers, curriculum, faculty role, shared services, etc. could be described at various continuum points. At a point along the continuum is the market driven approach where business and industry are involved in ensuring currency with curriculum and approach, as well as influencing faculty roles.

The model asks where higher education and accreditation are now, what they could be in the future, and what the implications of moving along the continuum are.

The Student-Driven Endpoint

Rationale. The changing nature of the student body is the basis for the student-driven endpoint on the continuum. Time and price influence students’ decisions on whether to take the risk of earning a post-secondary education credential. They may not need a two or four-year degree, may not want or need the full campus life experience, but may be looking for a shorter and more compact experience at the best price. In other words, they are shopping around to get what they want at the price they want with services unbundled. Alternate providers are now available to accommodate some of the students’ needs.

Description. Students decide their right price and risk fit (time and granularity). They choose according to their needs. This endpoint is focused on outcomes (not credit hours).

There is a need to set commonly understood outcomes regardless of delivery modality and a need to have some commonality of assessment tools. It may be HLC’s role to define these levels of quality. The way to evaluate standards may be to essentially set bright lines/acceptable levels of what a student must reach. It may be that national tests/certifications will be developed.

The Mastery Transcript Consortium’s work (mastery.org) that is working on “the development and dissemination of an alternative model of assessment, crediting and transcript generation” for high schools may be a resource. A comment was also offered that it may be time for the development of students’ personal learning accounts instead of institutional transcripts.

With an emphasis on outcomes and valid assessment methods, faculty qualifications, shared services and other current accreditation concerns wouldn't matter. In other words, it doesn't matter how one gets there as long as the outcome is reached.

Providers need to align with commonly understood outcomes, so students can see what is expected to determine what credentials would be necessary for employment. Accreditation is concerned about certifying the quality of the providers' outcomes. This endpoint allows for many different providers and many different curricular models or levels of granularity.

But how would this scenario get funded? Perhaps funding could be through individual student learning accounts that define, track, and confirm the path to a student's end goal.

Other Endpoints

Status Quo. Opposite the student-driven endpoint is the status quo, the institution-driven endpoint. Higher education institutions develop curriculum, price it, and deliver it to students based on institutional decisions. Standards are presently institutionally-normed about what constitutes a degree. Accreditors evaluate institutions according to how well they defined and measured their institution-determined outcomes.

Innovating Institutions. Institutions may innovate with delivery modes, with length of sessions, with beginning new programs, etc. The ten institutions participating in the Innovation Zone project are perhaps examples of this point on the continuum. They are setting their own outcomes for their experiments with HLC holding them accountable for those outcomes. Depending on the level of experimentation, they may need HLC to intercede with the U.S. Department of Education. President Gellman-Danley is working with national legislators to allow accreditors the ability to approve institutions' experiments.

In sum, we might think of multiple anchor points on the continuum such as – *status quo* – *institutional innovation* – *market-driven* - *systemic innovation (student-driven)*. The iterative or modular progress on the continuum could be mapped over time. This model requires a disaggregated approach to accreditation with accreditation giving innovations “air cover” while still assuring quality.

Need for Pilots

Recognizing that innovation can be broader than just institutional innovation, there is a feeling we need to pilot various points on the continuum. Pilots for various continuum points could help ameliorate political pushback and could focus on various issues including the role of faculty, alternate providers, student personal learning accounts, etc. It is difficult to gauge how accreditation could accommodate the various innovative points on the continuum, but its role would be clearer after some pilot projects.

Next Steps

Rufus and Burck will develop an initial thought paper and circulate it among the subcommittee members for input. This will prepare the subcommittee for its presentation at the June Partners for Transformation meeting.

Questions?

Please contact luminaproject@hlcommission.org.

Participants

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