



A SCHEV UPDATE

A Quarterly Newsletter from the State Council of Higher Education

July 2007
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Staff Commentary: Good News for our Camel

When I tell people that I am the director of policy studies at SCHEV, they usually say “OK, but what do you actually do?” My response always casts my duties metaphorically – scout; sentinel; prognosticator; assistant navigator; and/or jack-of-all-trades (or polymath, if I’m trying to impress or confuse). In using one or more of these evocative terms, I am trying to convey environmental scanning, opportunity assessment, qualitative forecasting, and integrative thinking, advising and reporting without killing our fledgling conversation with a string of boring jargon.

At its most basic level, my job is to observe higher education broadly and to share my informed interpretations for the benefit of the State Council and the Commonwealth. After 18 months of work, I have two overarching observations that I would like to share:

1. Regardless of the question, education – and specifically, higher education – is *the* answer. Global competitiveness? Quality of life? Economic development? Education! College degrees!
2. Regardless of the answer, how to fix education – and specifically, how to fix higher education – is *the* question. Increase student aid/affordability! Broaden access! Improve student learning! Increase accountability/transparency! What should higher education be doing better these days? What can be done to fix it?

Even though little explanation is offered of why or how education is the great panacea, Tom Friedman’s 2005 book, *The World is Flat*, appears to be the latest straw that the back of the education camel cannot withstand. In its wake, the U.S. Secretary of Education and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) convened national commissions to investigate, respectively, higher education’s future and how to transform it. A policy colleague describes the post-secondary camel’s prognosis thusly: “The good news is ... higher education is becoming more important. The bad news is ... higher education is becoming more important.”

The work and report of the federal Spellings Commission received much more attention than did that of the NCSL’s Blue Ribbon Commission. However, given the November power shift in Congress and the numbered days of the Bush administration, the Spelling Commission’s report may become more of an issue-identifying process document than a blueprint for specific outcomes. The NCSL report, on the other hand, remains ripe with potential.

It is the 50 states, after all, that bear primary responsibility for public higher education, and the NCSL Commission report was prepared by and for state legislators (Senator John Chichester was a member). At the upcoming NCSL annual meeting, higher education will be a point of focus in a way that it has never been before. This focus may prove to be more good and/or bad news for the camel’s back.

Note the NCSL report’s 15 recommendations to states and legislatures: (1) define clear state goals; (2) identify state’s strengths/weaknesses; (3) know state’s demographic trends for next 10-30 years; (4) identify place/structure to sustain the public agenda; (5) hold institutions accountable for performance; (6) rethink funding; (7) rethink student aid; (8) help reduce borrowing/debt; (9) recommit to access; (10) recommit to success; (11) embrace innovation; (12) encourage partnerships; (13) transform 12th grade; (14) don’t neglect adult learners; and (15) focus on productivity.

Do these objectives sound familiar? The NCSL Blue Ribbon Commission’s 2006 recommendations bear striking resemblance to the goals of Virginia’s 2005 Restructuring Act and SCHEV’s associated 2007 strategic plan for higher education, entitled *Advancing Virginia: Access, Alignment, Investment*. These recommendations are also similar to ongoing bipartisan efforts in the General Assembly and joint efforts by Governor Kaine, executive agencies, and the legislature.

Apparently, Virginia’s home remedy for higher education is just what the doctor ordered – which should be good news for our camel!

*Dr. Alan Edwards
SCHEV Policy Studies Director*



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SCHEV Sponsors Celebration of W&L's Shepherd Poverty Program

SCHEV concluded a yearlong celebration of its 50th anniversary in March by sponsoring a program honoring Washington and Lee University's renowned Shepherd Program for the Interdisciplinary Study of Poverty and Human Capability.

The Shepherd Program was established at Washington and Lee in 1997 with support from Nancy and Tom Shepherd (W&L Class of 1952), who attended the March event. The program offers a sustained combination of academic studies and service learning to inform students of all disciplines about poverty. The Shepherd Alliance joins students from Berea College, Bonner Scholar Schools, Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Washington and Lee University in summer work with agencies that seek to benefit impoverished members of society.



W&L alumnus and founding contributor Tom Shepherd pictured with Shepherd Program participants Sam Wilmoth and Quiana McKenzie at the March event

"SCHEV was excited to highlight this extraordinary program as part of the agency's yearlong efforts to celebrate the successes of the Commonwealth's public and private higher education institutions," says Daniel J. LaVista, SCHEV Executive Director. "Perhaps no other curriculum embodies the ideals of access and quality in quite the same way as the academic and practical experience of the Shepherd Program."

The event took place on the Washington and Lee University campus in Lexington, Virginia. Speakers included David Bradley, executive director of the National Community Action Foundation, as well as Washington and Lee administrators, faculty, and students. United States Senator John W. Warner, a 1949 graduate of Washington and Lee, also participated in the program. Speaking via pre-recorded DVD,

Sen. Warner commended his alma mater and the students who participate in this exciting learning opportunity.

SCHEV was represented by Executive Director Daniel LaVista; Outreach Committee Chair and Director of Washington and Lee's Summer Scholars Program, Mimi Elrod; as well as several agency staff members.

For more information about the Shepherd Program for the Interdisciplinary Study of Poverty and Human Capability, please visit <http://shepherdapps.wlu.edu/default.asp>.



W&L President Kenneth Ruscio



SCHEV Executive Director Daniel LaVista



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The 2007-13 Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Virginia at a Glance

In 2006, SCHEV assembled a panel including college presidents and administrators, leaders of industry, legislators, community representatives, financial experts, and those on the cutting edge of academic innovation to help create a strategic plan for higher education in Virginia. The result is a comprehensive plan with 12 goals that address three main areas, outlined below. For more information or to read the entire plan, visit the SCHEV web site at www.schev.edu.

ACCESS

Enhancing Access

1. Enhance Access Through P-16 Curricular Alignment
2. Enhance Access Through Improved Coordination of Information

Enhancing Affordability

3. Enhance Affordability Through Financial Aid Advocacy
4. Enhance Affordability Through Education and Investment Incentives

ALIGNMENT

Enhancing Alignment with P-12 Education

5. Improve College Readiness Through Strengthened P-16 Cooperation and Communication
6. Strengthen P-16 Coordination Through Expanded Data Collection and Analysis

Enhancing Alignment with Workforce Needs

7. Support State Workforce Needs Through Strengthened Participation in Post-Secondary Education
8. Conduct a Comprehensive Economic Impact Study of Higher Education
9. Improve Alignment Between Higher Education and the Commonwealth's Workforce Needs

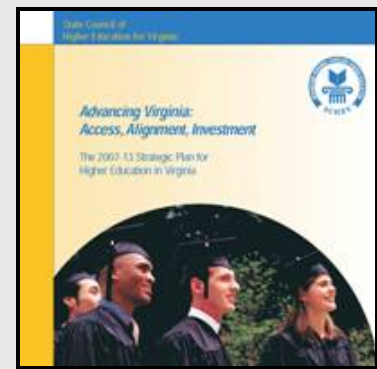
Enhancing Academic Quality

10. Strengthen Academic Program Quality and Accountability Through Assessment

INVESTMENT

Enhancing Research

11. Enhance Research Through Investment in Targeted Consortia
12. Enhance Research Through Investment in Infrastructure



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State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

SCHEV is the Commonwealth's coordinating body for Virginia's system of higher education. The agency provides policy guidance and budget recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly, and is a resource for information on Virginia colleges and universities on higher education issues.