

What's Your Role in The Future of Higher Education?

Perception may be 90% of reality but reality is largely based on where you're perched on the academic ladder. The scenery and priorities differ depending on whether you're a follower or in a leadership position.

Never before has the landscape of higher education been so fluid and uncertain. Today's leaders—no matter where they are in an organization—need a sense of optimism for the future as well as the ability to chart a new direction through the rough waters of current challenges.

Followers need to support their leaders, keeping them apprised of the potential opportunities and the pitfalls.

Dr. Lucie Lapovsky identified the challenges in the current educational climate and offered possible solutions in a presentation at the Women's Leadership Institute held in November 2011 in Dana Point CA. The former president of New York's Mercy College, she is the principal of Lapovsky Consulting and chairs the National Council for Research on Women.



**Dr. Lucie
Lapovsky**

She has been VP of finance at Maryland's Goucher College, a former women's college where she received her bachelor's degree, and also worked at the University of Maryland-College Park, where she earned a master's and PhD in economics.

What are you worried about?

As a leader or a follower, what are the things keeping you up at night? Wherever you are in the hierarchy, there's no denying finances are a serious challenge—few schools have all the resources they need.

A lack of accountability has contributed to the hit higher education took during this economic crisis. We've fallen off our pedestal because we've always had a difficult time demonstrating the value of higher education.

It's become worse since for-profit schools stepped into the fray with a new perspective, becoming a disruption to traditional schools. They can be more efficient, often charging less tuition than both private schools and out-of-state tuition at public schools.

Meanwhile, public schools have to deal with unreal perceptions on the part of legislators and governors. They're coping with unexpected double-digit budget cuts despite contracts, leases and other legal commitments.

California's public schools face a cap on enrollment and have adjusted their admission standards. Students have run headlong into these new standards and are applying to their private counterparts.

While private schools aren't tied to state dollars, their budgets do rely partially on endowment income—which has been hit hard by the gyrating stock market—and on tuition revenues, which are reduced because more students need financial aid. Many are facing spending cuts and liquidity issues.

To overcome budget issues, public schools are looking to draw more out-of-state students for more tuition dollars. But if classes are full, students must stay longer, cost-

ing the state more money than the added revenue they bring in.

Private schools with excess capacity find that the cost of adding another student is minimal. They pay faculty the same amount to teach a class of 10 or 30 students. To solve their shortfalls, private schools are looking at more tuition discounting.

All options on the table

When the financial crisis first hit, cost cutting came from the administrative side; now it's the faculty's turn. Leaders are considering a variety of new and controversial initiatives to cope with the financial exigencies, although a school's culture will dictate what faculty will support.

Options include public-private partnerships, hosting conferences and building wireless towers on campus. Revamping schedules is under consideration.

Brigham Young University's Idaho campus holds classes year-round. George Washington University had similar plans, but faculty nixed it. The University of Florida accepts new students for the spring term and summer school. Dartmouth requires sophomores to remain on campus during the summer.

"At Mercy College we offered the same class during the day and at night for nurses and policemen whose shifts kept changing," said Lapovsky. The course was synchronized so students didn't miss anything when switching class times.

Some educational leaders have overcome their squeamishness about partnering with for-profit schools. Lamar University in Texas contracted with a for-profit company to put its master's degree in education online. The company helped with program design and marketing while Lamar provided the faculty and accreditation.

This win-win-win solution gave students access to financial aid and the company served its client well. The school earned \$2.6 million in revenue sharing.

Lamar is now the fastest growing master's of education program in the country, going from 211th in the nation to 7th in just 18 months.

This type of partnership represents a whole new line of revenue for schools.

It also calls for leaders to rethink educational delivery and faculty and consider alternatives.

Don't think these methods are only for schools starting at a financial crisis. Harvard's campus is full during the summer with programs for executives and high school students. It offers online courses and leverages everything it can despite its huge endowment and very competitive traditional admissions program. The school's multiple access points or "back doors" provide open access.

MIT, which also offers open access, has found that 20% of the users are professors at other colleges and universities.

Without growth, schools stagnate. But with no money to expand physical facilities, leaders are seeking other ways to grow.

Brigham Young University's residential campus in Idaho eliminated its athletic teams because of cost. Other

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schools are considering the same. A consortium of 12 Boston schools including Harvard and Wellesley share services.

Once a struggling school, Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) now has a big call center and an online campus. It also started its "Advantage Program," which operates in a building 30 minutes down the road from the main campus. The program offers no athletics or student activities. Classes have a small student-to-faculty ratio. Writing is embedded in other classes.

Without most of the amenities offered at the main campus, SNHU can offer classes for \$10,000 a year. After completing a two-year program in liberal arts, students can continue on for a bachelor's degree at the main campus, at one of the school's satellite centers or online.

Price is what schools charge students. Price is also the money it takes to support them.

Schools are following some of the practices of their for-profit competitors. Most for-profits streamline the curriculum and offer 10 choices rather than 100, which leads to fewer open seats, like the airlines are doing now. Does every school need to offer all the same programs, the same departments or the same majors?

The value of research is being questioned as to how much it actually contributes to the knowledge base versus being just required for tenure? Do all faculty need to do research or are there other things that can be measured to assess value for tenure?

Most (75%) of today's students report wanting to go to college to get a job. Leaders are open to accepting experiential credits, allowing dual enrollment while in high school or signing articulation agreements with community colleges.

There will always be a demand for full-time residential programs for those who can afford them. But many groups—minorities, adults, single mothers—don't have the time or the money to enroll in a full-time traditional program.

Asking the tough questions

Financial issues have cast new light on access and on the role of the faculty, and it's not pretty. In research universities, faculty teach one to three courses a year compared to their counterparts at community colleges who often teach 10.

There are discussions surrounding course design. Does every faculty member need to design her own course?

Faculty at Western Governor's University UT, an online school formed by 19 Western governors, share syllabi and texts. These courses are taught over multiple years with some occasional tweaking.

Other schools have outsourced grading. (This encourages faculty to assign more and longer writing assignments, since they know they won't have to grade them.) Schools are relying on adjuncts to teach general courses. Some schools are building campuses abroad despite faculty reservations.

Enlightened faculty see change as the wave of the future: a way to expand the school, their department and to internationalize the student body.

All faculty need to understand education's new focus and be more open-minded about the future. But they're often not aware of the big picture.

"They tend to believe the way they're currently operating is good," said Lapovsky. "There are some faculty who are willing to try new ways of doing things and see that the future requires change. They want to get onboard and do exciting things."

Faculty need to be willing to link what students are learning to the real world. How does a major in philosophy translate into a successful career?

How about quality?

With all of these threats to traditional higher education and twists on the conventional route of educational delivery, there's still the elephant in the room: quality.

For-profit schools used to be considered the second-rate stepchild of higher education. No longer.

There are many reports of faculty teaching at both a traditional school and online for a for-profit. A Stanford University CA professor who fought to teach an online course saw 300,000 students sign up for it. The genie is out of the bottle and won't go back in.

With situations like this, is it any wonder accreditors and state governments are saying, "Show me the proof" that a non-profit school is better than a for-profit one?

More and more, accreditors are asking,

"What is the value of the degree?" Accountability is now their mantra.

Schools better be able to answer that question with concrete examples. Assessments can show a school's contributions. Identifying who your school's graduates are and what they're doing with their degrees will help support your case.

Learning outcomes and various measurements such as GRE scores, Fulbrights, the number of students in graduate school and job placement rates are some ways of measuring effectiveness.

Everyone must play a role in letting lawmakers and the public know that higher education needs to be shielded from drastic cuts. The statistics really are in our favor.

College graduates have only a 5% unemployment rate. They earn between \$600,000 and \$1.3 million more than high school graduates over a lifetime.

The future of higher education will likely include keeping campus facilities full year-round. Schools will maintain their reputations by not trying to be all things to everyone. Faculty will have to get onboard with different educational delivery strategies.

Academe will have to admit that tuition prices are unsustainable and find ways to curb increases. But schools can't lower prices without an increase in other revenue.

What will your contribution be to help higher education survive today's challenges? How you do your job will affect what the world of higher education will look like in 2020.

Prophets see the future. Others need to follow. Which one will you be? 📖

—MLS

Lucie@lapovsky.com or 917.690.1958

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