

FROM IDEA TO FRUITION: A STATE REPORT CARD FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

By David Breneman

EARLY IN THE LIFE of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, President Patrick M. Callan and Vice President Joni E. Finney organized several meetings across the country to solicit ideas regarding the agenda for their new organization. Several months later I was asked to review the minutes of those sessions and select those ideas that seemed most promising. The publication of a state report card had been suggested at one of the national meetings, and I argued that this was the most compelling concept that had emerged. After further review, Pat and Joni asked me to chair a small feasibility committee to see whether such a document could be

produced. Thus began our serious study of the topic.

The Report Card Feasibility Study Panel (Emerson Elliott, Margaret Miller, Richard Wagner, and myself) met for the first time with staff in July 1998 at the Boar's Head Inn in Charlottesville, Virginia. Together, we made several decisions: to focus on opportunity and achievement, to limit our initial effort to undergraduate education, to concentrate on performance, and to make the states the units of analysis. We blocked out the six broad categories under which the indicators are compiled and helped to suggest the indicators them-

selves, as well as the types and sources of data that might be available. We realized that any data we would use would have to be available in comparable format for each of the 50 states; in other words, national data alone would not work. As noted elsewhere in this report, finding sufficient and reliable state-level data was one of the major challenges, and in those early meetings we were far from certain that enough would be available to allow us to prepare a report card. The volume that

you hold in your hand suggests that we were indeed successful in that effort.

We also talked about the unique features of higher education that make state comparisons difficult. For example, states differ in the scope and scale of their private and community college sectors, and these clearly make a difference. Furthermore, higher education is not compulsory, and there is substantial movement of students across state lines. We worried about giving credit to states that import substantial numbers of students, as well as penalizing those that export students. Could fair comparisons be made in these cases? We began to realize why no other organization had tried to prepare a higher education report card.

As work progressed, however, we began to see solutions for most of the problems we had anticipated, and we had a growing sense that this project could be done well and responsibly. Our confidence prompted the committee to recommend to the National Center's Board of Directors in April 1999 that the effort be undertaken. We proposed that the National Center—as an independent organization free from special-interest constituencies and whose mission focuses on the improvement of public policies on higher education—was the organization best poised to successfully complete the project. After much thoughtful discussion, the board approved the further development of the report card.

Our feasibility committee was then broadened with the appointment of several expert members to a National Advisory Panel for the Report Card, which helped the National Center immensely during the long, hard days of data development and analysis. The advisory panel met twice as a full group, in December 1999 and in April 2000, reviewing and commenting critically on each of the indicators. We formed several ad hoc



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subcommittees to examine particular issues; for example, one subcommittee worked on the issue of indicator weights, testing sensitivity and related matters. Another helped to test the indicators for unintended or undesirable incentives that we might unwittingly be putting forward to the states; for example, would we unintentionally be rewarding states that had a large number of high school dropouts? (The answer: no.) As chair of the advisory panel, I thank the members for their thoughtful and devoted efforts to help make this the best report possible. Many others also helped in numerous ways to answer questions and to test results, and their contributions are cited elsewhere.

Finally, in May 2000, we presented the Board of Directors with a solid recommendation that the first report card be completed and published, and after thorough discussion, the board approved. All of us who have been involved in this effort from the beginning are delighted to see the final product. We look forward to extensive and thoughtful discussions with educators and state policymakers regarding the implications of this report and the changes that states might make in order to improve their performance.

A final word on what we hope will follow from this publication. Several of us see *Measuring Up 2000* as a method of drawing attention to the increasingly important role played by higher education in the economy and to the central importance of state policy in determining the access

and opportunity provided to state residents. The report is released not as a plea for additional funding, but rather as an incentive for careful, objective inquiry into the opportunities made available to the residents of each state. We worry that higher education has not received careful policy review in recent years, and we hope that this report will encourage thoughtful discussion about higher education in each state.

This project is grounded in the belief that K–12 and higher education are part of a single system, heavily influenced by state policies, and that both systems must work together if Americans are to benefit from wise investment in human potential. All those involved have labored long and hard, and we eagerly await the response of those who read it, think carefully about its implications, and take steps to improve higher education.

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GRADING STUDENT LEARNING: BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME

By Peter Ewell

IMAGINE RECEIVING a report card that contained letter grades for your child's conduct and preparation for school but nothing about performance in English or math. Policymakers and the public will face a similar situation in this inaugural issue of *Measuring Up*. The National Center's decision to award all states an Incomplete in the area of student learning is wise for many reasons. But including this "subject" in the first place highlights a significant gap in our ability as a nation to say something meaningful about what or how much our students learn in college.

Why Fifty Incompletes?

The decision not to award a letter grade in student learning is the right one because there are no common benchmarks that would allow meaningful state-to-state comparisons. This is not to say that individual states know nothing about student learning at higher levels within their own borders. Nor does

it mean that there has been no interest in academic achievement at the national level.

Since about the mid-1980s, states have been seriously concerned about examining what students learn in college. But how the states act on this concern varies substantially. Most approach the task indirectly by asking each public college and university to administer a locally designed or locally chosen assessment and to report on what they find. Often this is

done in loose partnership with regional accrediting bodies, all of which require colleges and universities to undertake some kind of student assessment.

Fewer than ten states administer a common test to large numbers of college students—and these states do so for different reasons. Some, like Florida (and to some extent, Texas and South Dakota), want to ensure that all students

have the necessary knowledge and skills to progress through the system. Others, like Tennessee (and to some extent Missouri and Wisconsin), want to collect data in order to take stock of—and sometimes to reward—institutional performance. Still others examine students in only one area of study (for example, Georgia, in writing) or test students in one postsecondary sector (for example, community and technical colleges in West Virginia or state universities in California).

Such variations in scope and purpose mean that states employ very different methods when they assess college students, if they do so at all. And because states can mandate testing only in the public colleges and universities that they operate, they have no authority to assess students enrolled at private institutions. This range of variation doesn't mean that the states are doing nothing—though some are, in truth, doing nothing—but that the many different things they may be doing cannot be aggregated or compared.

We have seen periodic national interest in establishing common benchmarks for collegiate learning. The National Education Goals, which were proposed in 1990, included a provision that graduates of U.S. colleges in 2000 "will have increased markedly in their ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems." A four-year effort to design a national assessment system to measure these outcomes produced many good ideas and even a few workable prototypes. But consensus was hard to achieve about how and whether to proceed with what would have been an expensive and controversial enterprise, and the U.S. Department of Education proposal to undertake the project was never funded.

A few existing data sources provide some basis for estimating collegiate proficiency. For example, the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) conducted in 1992 can be used to estimate some higher-level literacy skills for college graduates. Aggregated results of the 1992 NALS, in fact, are included in the Educational Benefits grade in *Measuring Up 2000*. Also, large numbers of college students take statewide or nationwide examinations (professional licensure and professional school admissions tests, tests for aspiring K–12 teachers, and graduate school admissions exams). None of these, of course, were designed as national benchmarking tools, and the students who take them are neither broadly representative nor comparable across states. But this has not

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stopped some commentators from trying—with appropriate caveats—to make sense of them.

An Incomplete grade for all states is thus entirely appropriate, given the information we have. Some states are doing some things, and much of the “homework” needed to provide a national benchmark has already been completed. A prominent, but inadequate, grade might spur further action.

Why Is This Hard?

National data on academic achievement have been available for K–12 students for many years through assessments like the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and most states use standardized achievement tests to examine primary and secondary school students, either for benchmarking purposes or to certify progress. Why haven’t we done the same for “grade 16”? There are at least four reasons.

First, there is relatively little consensus about what the core outcomes of a college education ought to be. Institutions of higher education differ by design in both clientele and mission, and policymakers are aware of and largely support such differences. True, all colleges and universities offer “general education” courses, which are supposed to be teaching similar skills and knowledge. But except for having acquired communications skills and a basic set of quantitative abilities, graduates in different majors at different institutions arguably *ought* to look different. Coming to an agreement about performance standards for core generic abilities like “critical thinking” and “problem-solving” is thus a formidable task for both educators and policymakers.

Second, performance on any college-level exit assessment depends a lot on the abilities that students had when they arrived on campus. This means that “outcomes measures” for many institutions say more about how selective their admissions policy is than about what students learn while attending them. Admittedly, this difficulty is less troublesome when we look at *state*-level outcomes. But in most states, debates about whether to assess college students’ achievement have focused on measuring *institution*-level performance—sometimes for high-stakes purposes like performance funding. As might be expected, many colleges and universities have little interest in going down that path.

A third challenge is how to create assessment instruments that can measure the abilities that constitute successful performance for college graduates. Educators and employers agree that the requisite abilities are too complex to be measured by multiple-choice tests. An appropriate assessment would require students to write extensively, solve open-ended problems, and perform real-life tasks. We now know a lot about how to create these kinds of tests, but commercial test-makers have been understandably reluctant to do so until there is a demand for them—and the first two difficulties

have up to now restricted demand. As a result, the inventory of standardized tests designed for large-scale assessments of the outcomes of higher education is quite limited. Perhaps more strikingly in the light of a burgeoning “assessment movement” in higher education, most of these tests are over ten years old. This means that adequate assessments need to be created largely from scratch, at considerable expense, and no state has yet been willing to foot the bill.

Finally, the few states that have statewide testing programs find it hard to create conditions under which students will do their best. This problem has also been encountered in K–12, but a more generalized culture of student compliance tends to mitigate its effects. Motivating young adults and older returning students to show up for an examination that does not affect their coursework—let alone motivating them to try hard when they do—is not an easy task.

What Might Be Done?

Taken together, these obstacles have proven formidable enough to deter most states from directly assessing student learning. Even if these obstacles were overcome, there are few incentives for states to cooperate in creating assessments that would allow meaningful state-to-state comparisons.

One thing *not* to do is to reward states for doing mindless testing using old and inadequate instruments. States have good reasons for choosing different paths in assessing student learning, and their testing programs have quite different goals. Moreover, states are unlikely (and largely unable) to enforce any assessment requirement that would involve testing students who attend private institutions—a substantial portion of the enrollment in some states.

Experience drawn from the widespread practice of standardized exit testing in K–12 suggests that there are serious side effects to an ill-considered common-testing approach: restricted access, “dumbed down” curricula, and teaching to the test. For these good reasons (and some bad ones as well), colleges and universities strongly resist proposals for exit testing. When public institutions are simply avoiding responsibility, states need to take firm and direct action. (Indeed, the next edition of *Measuring Up* might examine how well states are doing in this matter.) But the inescapable conclusion is that national benchmarks for student learning are not going to result from state-level efforts any time soon.

National initiatives appear both more appropriate and more promising. For example, if all goes well, a new National Assessment of Adult Literacy will be administered in 2002. A proposal is now on the table to administer the survey to

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samples of college sophomores and seniors in addition to the general population, and the tasks used to assess these students will reflect authentic college-level abilities. This assessment is likely to yield valid results for selected states, and these can provide a starting point for an analysis of student learning. Collecting data through a national initiative will also prevent inappropriate comparisons among different kinds of institutions, because the small sample sizes preclude the compilation of institution-level results. Comparing *states*, on the other

hand, appears both feasible and justifiable, because every state ought to have an appropriate mix of institutions within its borders. If all goes well, the results will be available for a future edition of *Measuring Up*.

Meanwhile, we must resume work on a responsible national assessment initiative for higher education. We know a lot more now than we did in the early 1990s about how to create task-based assessments that reflect the complexity of college-level work, and we

can use new technologies to create highly interactive and challenging assessments. More than ever, such an assessment initiative is more a matter of political will rather than technical ability.

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But a national assessment would solve only half our problem. To make real progress, institutions and faculty must reassert responsibility for the integrity of the degrees that they award. In our diverse system of higher education, we will always rely on local assessments to certify student learning. But we can attain greater uniformity in local standards by establishing clear benchmarks for achievement in key subject areas and by periodically examining typical examples of student work. This is what other countries do routinely, through national qualifications exams and external examiners.

National benchmarks and aligned local standards of achievement in core competencies are within our reach and can play an important role in improving performance. If we want to, we can make progress on both in time for the next edition of *Measuring Up*.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By Thomas Ehrlich

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT is a powerful predictor of civic engagement. The more education people have, the more likely it is that they will participate in civic affairs. This has been a widespread belief among political scientists since at least the end of World War II. In 1995 three distinguished professors of political science, Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Scholozman and Henry E. Brady, provided convincing empirical evidence for this belief in their book *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. They surveyed some 15,000 individuals and conducted 2,500 personal interviews as the basis for their analyses of which Americans become active in civic affairs and how they do so.

The authors were concerned with civic involvement generally, but they focused especially on political engagement. For America, politics is a crucially important dimension of civic life. Our democracy depends on an informed and engaged citizenry, one that acquires the knowledge and skills needed to become politically involved and then participates actively. *Voice and Equality* analyzed nine types of political activity: voting, campaign work, campaign contributions, contacting an official, protests, informal community work, membership on a local board, affiliation with a political organization, and contribution to a political cause. One could debate the presence or absence of one or more categories on this list, but in sum they reflect the range of activities that make our democracy work.

Unfortunately, the “civic returns” category in *Measuring Up 2000* includes information on only one of those political activities, voting, because state-by-state data on the other activities are not available. Voting is essential to representative democracy. But unless voting is accompanied by the other political activities, it reduces citizenship to a superficial and relatively passive activity. We can hope that a broader range of political and civic activities will be sampled in subsequent editions of *Measuring Up*. In particular, we can hope that the connections between higher education and civic engagement will become clearer on a state-by-state comparative basis. This will require gathering much more information than is now available.

In the interim, it is well past time to have a sustained national dialogue about the public purposes of higher education. Education for civic responsibility is not the only

public purpose that should be promoted, but it is an especially important one these days because the current data on civic life in this country are devastating, particularly the data tracking the decline in political participation by young people. We need extended public discussions about the roles and responsibilities of higher education in helping to reverse these dangerous trends.

Measuring Up 2000 should be a sharp prod to provoke those discussions.

Given the compelling evidence presented in *Voice and Equality* and other studies that education enhances civic participation in general, and political participation in particular, we might expect that political participation would have steadily increased over the past decades, as Americans became increasingly better educated. On any scale, the expansion of higher education in the United States has been remarkable. Starting with the GI Bill at the end of World War II, increasing numbers of students have gone from high school straight to college, and expanding numbers have chosen college later in life. Today about 3,800 colleges and universities serve some 14.3 million students across the country.

In the face of this boom in higher education, it is all the more disturbing that civic participation is actually declining—not expanding—in America, and that political participation is falling off precipitously. The most recent addition to a lengthy series of studies to confirm this grim reality is also the most extensive, *Bowling Alone*, by Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard. Putnam chronicles a pattern of declining civic participation in America and concludes that



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this trend has accelerated since 1985. Using data from Roper surveys, he examines 12 civic activities, similar to those considered in *Voice and Equality*. Across the 12, participation declined by an average of 10% between 1973–74 and 1983–84, and by 24% between 1983–84 and 1993–94. Putnam also reports that the share of the American public totally uninvolved in any of the 12 civic activities rose by nearly one-third over those 20 years.

In absolute terms, Putnam found that the declines were greatest among the better educated. Among those who had attended college, participation in public meetings fell from 34% to 18%. Because the less educated were less involved to begin with, their participation dropped even lower, from 20% to 8% among those who had a high school education, and from 7% to 3% among those who had not attended high school. Thus despite the rapid rise in educational attainment, Americans have steadily become less and less likely to participate in civic affairs.

This is bad news. But the most disturbing trend of all is that each succeeding generation shows less interest and involvement in political activities. Political disaffection is especially pronounced among young adults. Younger

Americans vote less often than their elders do, show lower levels of social trust and have less knowledge of politics.

Disdain for politics does not mean lack of civic concern, however. A recent study by the Panetta Institute at California State University at Monterey Bay, for example, indicates that nearly three-quarters of college students (73%) have done volunteer work in the past two years, and most (62%) more than once. Those students understand that their communities face real needs and that they can help meet

those needs. But they do not see politics as an effective means for change, according to studies by Professor Linda Sax of UCLA. They may well believe strongly in a cause such as improving the environment, but they are skeptical that politics and politicians can further that cause. Too often they fail to understand that if they want not only to assist at a community kitchen but also to help eliminate the need for that kitchen, then they must work to change public policy, and that politics—in one form or another—is the primary vehicle in American democracy for effecting public policy.

On college campuses, political discussion has declined sharply. Annual surveys indicate that the percentage of college freshmen who report frequently discussing politics dropped from a high of 30% in 1968 to 15% in 1995. Similar decreases are revealed in the percentage of those who believe it is important to keep up-to-date with political affairs or those who

have worked on a political campaign. This mounting political apathy bodes ill for the future of American democracy.

What can be done by colleges and universities to reverse these disturbing trends and to help generations of young people appreciate the value of and necessity for political participation? And how might future editions of *Measuring Up* best highlight statewide successes when they do occur? Campuses should not be expected to promote a single type of civic or political engagement, but they should prepare their graduates to become engaged citizens who provide the time, attention, understanding, and action to further collective civic goals. Institutions of higher education should help students to recognize themselves as members of a larger social fabric, to consider social problems to be at least partly their own, to see the civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate. At the same time, *Measuring Up* needs better, stronger indicators of civic and political engagement for every state, so that we can better understand what is and is not happening in these realms.

There is some good news. The presidents of some 300 campuses, under the aegis of Campus Compact, have signed a “Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education,” a pledge to strengthen civic learning on their campuses. A recent study sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching offers evidence that some American colleges and universities do take seriously the civic education of their students. For a relatively small number of campuses, this commitment shapes many or most aspects of undergraduate life and constitutes an institution-wide approach to civic learning. For many others, strong programs designed to encourage civic development exist within campus environments that do not have a comprehensive emphasis on that goal.

Service learning—academic study closely tied to community service through structured reflection—is a particularly important pedagogy for promoting civic responsibility, especially when used with collaborative learning and problem-based learning, two other modes of active learning. Service learning connects thought and feeling in a deliberate way, creating a context in which students can explore how they feel about what they are thinking and what they think about how they feel; through guided reflection, it offers students opportunities to explore the relationship between their academic learning and their civic values and commitments.

The Department of Political Science at Swarthmore, for example, sponsors the Democracy Project, which is organized to deepen students’ understanding of and commitment to democratic citizenship in a multicultural society through participation in community activities. The Democracy Project has a three-course core and focuses on case studies of democracy in practice, and the integration of theory and

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practice through internships, community service and simulation. A course on the nature of politics, taught regularly at Rutgers University for large numbers of students, also combines readings in political theory and action, community service in political settings, and structured reflection to link the two.

An experiment at the University of Michigan underscores the importance of actively engaging students in the civic processes that they are studying. In a course on contemporary issues in American politics, the faculty randomly selected one group of students and asked them to become involved in community service related to local politics, in addition to doing the reading and written assignments for the course; the other students were asked to complete only the traditional assignments. The students in the service-learning sections not only earned better grades (by blind grading) and reported that they enjoyed the class more but they also became much more aware of political and social problems and more interested in acting on their heightened awareness. Several national studies about service learning have supported these findings.

It has become a commonplace to bemoan the loss of civic responsibility in America, particularly among young people, and to urge increased attention to civic education at every level. If the issue is viewed solely as proselytizing students to vote and pay attention to politics, the role of higher education is inevitably a modest one. But John Dewey, the preeminent American public philosopher of the 20th century, taught us that much more is at stake. Dewey viewed American

democracy and education as inexorably intertwined. The issue for Dewey was not simply that our citizenry must be educated in order to choose political leaders responsibly and to hold those leaders accountable. Much more important, he conceived of our democratic society as one in which citizens should interact with each other, learn from each other, grow with each other, and together make their communities more than the sum of their parts.

It is these dimensions of American democracy and civic life that are in danger. If American democracy is to live up to its ideals, we must have a sustained public dialogue on the public purposes of higher education, particularly on how best to educate future generations of responsible and engaged citizens. This will not happen unless business and civic leaders, policymakers, and concerned citizens from every sector speak out about what they expect from our institutions of higher education. If they view those institutions as having important public purposes, including educating students for lives of civic responsibility, they must join in public discourse about how to make that goal a reality.

The adage that democracy is not a spectator sport has long been a cliché, but many young people today are not even watching from the sidelines. We must direct public attention to what higher education can do to change that.

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UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS

By Robert McCabe

AS WE BEGIN the 21st century, information technology is transforming the world at a breathtaking pace. Our future economy will be built on information-based industries that need a broadly based, highly skilled workforce. Eighty percent of new jobs will require some postsecondary education but, unfortunately, only 42% of today's students leave high school with the necessary skills to begin college-level work. America's

greatest strength is its commitment to the value and importance of every individual; the nation benefits when everyone's talents are fully developed.

More than ever, our future depends on advances in education. Public school performance must be dramatically improved so that more students graduate from high school with college-entry skills. America's changing demography, however, threatens to overwhelm an already strained education system. In the coming years, schools will enroll more children from poor, educationally disadvantaged families and from homes in which English is not the primary language.

With high expectations, state school reforms are aggressively addressing educational problems. To date, however, they are having limited success. Of particular concern is the fact that the schools have been unable to help large numbers of African American and Hispanic students from falling behind. The schools must do more to ensure that students of all ethnicities develop their academic skills.

Even with aggressive school reforms in place in many states, every year over one million academically underprepared students enter higher education and are in need of developmental,

or remedial, education services. These services yield important benefits. Each year, with an expenditure of only one percent of higher education budgets, more than half a million college students successfully complete remediation, and after remediation they do as well in standard college courses as those students who begin fully prepared. While only one in six earns a bachelor's degree, one-third earn an occupational associate degree or certificate. Others go directly into the workforce, and most are employed in technical or office careers. Providing effective developmental programs that give underprepared students the opportunity to qualify for good jobs is an essential mission for American higher education.

Measuring Up 2000 provides the states with a valuable overview of the status of higher education. The picture, however, is incomplete because it does not address the effectiveness of programs for underprepared students. These important programs are often given a low priority and inadequate support. Unfortunately, state-level data on the performance of underprepared students are not available for this edition of *Measuring Up*. If we are to have a complete understanding of how well higher education serves the needs of American society, the states must collect data on their postsecondary developmental education programs.

In the coming decades, the role of higher education in teaching students who enter with academic deficiencies will expand and become increasingly important. The workplace of tomorrow will be quite different from today—the result of both revolutionary and evolutionary changes. Revolutionary changes will occur, as new jobs will require markedly different and higher competencies. Existing jobs will continue to evolve, requiring different behaviors and job skills from those employees now possess. Simple jobs will become “high-performance” jobs that will require workers to have the ability to reason through complex processes rather than follow rote instructions or complete the discrete steps of larger processes. These workers will need higher-order information skills as a foundation for lifelong learning.

In the global economy, business and industry will set up operations wherever the costs are lowest. Manufacturing is already moving from the United States to countries with lower wages. This trend is expected to continue. Sustaining America's future will depend on innovations in the knowledge

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industries and on developing a more productive workforce. Brainpower and technology can multiply individual productivity to compensate for higher wages and help America retain global competitiveness. The countries that remain competitive in the 21st century will be those with the highest overall literacy and educational levels and those with a strong “bottom third” of its population, such as Germany and Japan. We are a long way from developing the broad base of highly skilled workers that is needed in the information age.

Demographic changes are also having a dramatic impact on our society. The American population is becoming older. The members of the baby-boom generation—the 76 million people born between the end of World War II and 1964—are approaching their late 50s. Today there are 35 million Americans age 65 and older; by 2030 there will be more than 69 million in that age group. About 160 million Americans are now in their prime work years, and that number is expected to remain constant through 2030. But if the economy is to remain strong as the population grays, the productivity of working-age adults must improve in order to support the aging population.

America’s population is also becoming more ethnically diverse. For example, in 1970 roughly 9 million Americans were of Hispanic origin (about 4% of the population); today there are 30 million Hispanic Americans (11% of the population); by 2005 there will be more than 36 million; and by 2050 Hispanic Americans will constitute almost one-quarter of the population. This growth reflects both the birthrates of Hispanic American women (which are higher than those of non-Hispanic American women) as well as immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean. Most of these immigrants, who account for more than half of all immigrants to the United States, arrive with limited academic skills.

Changes in family life are also having an effect on children: Only half of children and teenagers live in a two-parent household; more children (33% in 1994 compared to 5% in 1960) are born to unmarried women; and children who are in two-parent households spend less time with their parents because, in most cases, both parents work.

Moreover, one-parent households tend to have lower incomes, and poverty is the primary cause of educational underpreparation. Children from low-income families begin their lives with many disadvantages: poor parental care, lack of early education, inadequate health care, and unstimulating household environments.

The higher levels of poverty among Hispanic American and African American households are reflected in the data on academic performance: 25% of Hispanic American teenagers and 13% of African American teenagers drop out of high school, compared to about 8% of white non-Hispanic teens. The disparities persist at higher levels of education: Hispanic

Americans comprise about 14% of the 15- to 19-year-old population, but they earn only 7% of the associate degrees and 6% of the bachelor’s degrees. African Americans are about 16% of the 15- to 19-year-old population, yet earn only 10% of the associate degrees and 9% of the bachelor’s degrees. White non-Hispanics comprise 70% of the 15- to 19-year-old population yet earn 83% of the associate degrees and 86% of the bachelor’s degrees. Hispanic Americans and African Americans lose ground at each step of the educational ladder, from high school graduation and college enrollment to degrees and certificates earned.

To summarize, Americans must develop high information skills and become increasingly productive in order to keep our industries globally competitive, to offset lower wages in some other countries and to support an aging population. In the years to come, a larger percentage of Americans will go on to college (not necessarily to complete a four-year degree), and more of these young people will begin college with poor preparation and academic deficiencies. Colleges will have the responsibility of raising educational attainment for this more diverse and less prepared student population.

Because America needs all of its citizens prepared for the information-rich environment of the 21st century, access to higher education must be a pillar of educational policy. In order to be successful, students must be adequately prepared for the college classes in which they enroll. Students who have academic deficiencies must receive remedial help before they begin standard college courses. Our college and university programs, if they are to maintain their quality, must offer effective developmental education. Access and developmental education are inseparable.

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