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Environmental Scanning Report:

Public Perceptions of Higher Education

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Public Perceptions of Higher Education

Clark Kerr has identified the 1990s and beyond as a "time of troubles" for higher education. Coming off the heels of eras during which society and universities worked in cooperation to fulfill social demands (such as the period of great transformation following World War II), or when higher education largely inspired reshaping of American attitudes (like the cultural revolution largely begun on campuses in the 1960's), recent years have seen this give-and-take relationship change.

Society, for the first time, is in the role of initiator, turning higher education into "the defender of the status quo rather than the joint initiator, or at least cooperative partner, in the new endeavors" (Kerr 11). Kerr cites three reasons for society's new aggressiveness: it has fewer resources to spread around, has more claimants on these resources, and demands that higher education, as never before, help to support the economy (11-12). These demands, coupled with other changing social landscapes, help shape attitudes toward and perceptions and expectations of higher education in the United States.

The following environmental scan looks to publications and survey data which analyze and present public views of higher education, and identifies some current issues relevant to these perceptions.

Executive Summary

Nationally, higher education seems to enjoy high approval ratings for quality. According to data from the 2000 survey *Great Expectations: How the Public and Parents—White, African American, and Hispanic—View Higher Education*, 57 percent of Americans feel that the colleges in their state are doing a good (42%) or excellent (15%) job. An American Council on Education (ACE) report from the same year states that 74 percent of respondents rate the quality of four-year colleges and universities in the United States as excellent (17%) or good (57%). The report of the 2003 Survey of Public Opinion in Higher Education by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* concurs, notes that while respondents "widely mistrust corporations and Congress and express little confidence in their public schools, their faith in American higher education remains at extraordinary levels" (Selingo 1). This is corroborated by data from the *Great Expectations* study, which reveals that only 34 percent of those surveyed believe their public high schools are doing a good (27%) or excellent (6%) job. 41 percent feel high schools are doing a poor (13%) or fair (28%) job.

The *Great Expectations* national study reveals some major themes in the public's perceptions of higher education, themes which are largely maintained and expanded on by other sources on this subject:

- Americans agree that higher education is more important than ever for success.
- The perceived benefits of higher education—personal development, the ability to solve problems, communications and technology skills, social and communal benefits, and others—are diverse and plentiful. Higher education means more than just a diploma.

- Overall responsibility for higher educational success is believed to rest with students—but institutions should make every effort to help those who help themselves.

- Paying for higher education presents a difficult, but attainable, challenge. However, higher education funding issues remain contentious.

- Despite high levels of satisfaction with higher education, Americans don't really know a great deal about its internal administration. They are frustrated with certain elements of its more politically-charged aspects, like tenure and affirmative action in admissions.

- The issue of access to higher education is a key concern for many Americans.

Important to frame many of these observations may be the finding that, generally, the public views higher education in terms of its relationship to personal economic and employment success, rather than, for example, its significance as a *system*. According to Jennifer Sosin, manager of KRC Research and Consulting, respondents to its 2002 Kellogg Forum-commissioned survey on public perceptions of the individual and social benefits of higher education consistently reinforce the idea that, "It's not the University as an institution, or the *system* of higher education, that has an impact. It's the individuals who go through that have an impact" (London 15). How and to what degree these individuals gain access to higher education remains an important discussion point, particularly for minority and middle-income students (*Great Expectations* 24, 34). Additional issues that impact the higher education options and access available to all individuals will be discussed in this paper.

1. Higher Education: The Key to Success?

An undergraduate college degree is replacing the high school diploma as the gateway to success and the middle-class American lifestyle. The *Great Expectations* national report reveals that 77 percent of respondents say that getting a college education is more important than it was ten years ago; 87 percent feel that a college education has become as important as a high school diploma once was (1). This compares with data from a 1993 survey from the same organization, which found that 54 percent felt that "too many people are going to college instead of alternative to college, where they can learn trades like plumbing or computer repair" (Hebel A38). Nowadays, "higher education is increasingly seen as essential for economic mobility, and the focus is not just on the credential but on the personal growth, skills and perspective that students take away from a college education. At the same time, people see a highly educated population as necessary for both economic prosperity and social well-being" (*Great Expectations* x). In fact, 46 percent of respondents to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* 2003 poll agreed that a graduate or professional degree will soon be more important than a four-year degree; 18 percent strongly agreed that this will be the case ("Views on Education" 1).

It is important to temper these statistics with the knowledge that, according to the *Great Expectations* survey, 67 percent of the general public still feel that there are ways to succeed in today's world without a college degree—but less African American (54%) and Hispanic high school parents (34%) feel this way than white high school parents (66%). Despite survey respondent's awareness "that people of all ages now enroll in higher education…when most people think of higher education, they are most concerned with what happens to recent high

school graduates" (2). American parents want their children to attend college, "and when they say they want a college education for their children, they most frequently mean an education in a four-year college" (3).

51 percent of those reporting in the *Chronicle's* 2003 poll concur, indicating that a four-year college degree is essential for success in our society ("Views On Education" 1). Race and age seem to have an influence on the degree to which respondents value the diploma: 82 percent of Asian-Americans felt a degree is "essential, while only 48 percent of white respondents said so" (Selingo 2). According to the *Great Expectations* report, "most white parents feel that although higher education is important, it is not absolutely necessary. By more than a two-to-one margin (66% to 32%), white parents agree that there are still ways to succeed in American society without a college education…when we interviewed Hispanic and African American parents, however, the picture changes substantially" (6). In the *Chronicle* 2003 poll, 60 percent of black and 59 percent of Hispanics said a four-year degree is essential. The value of a degree seems to increase among younger respondents: 39 percent of those born prior to 1940 felt a degree was essential, while 62 percent of those born after 1970 felt that it was (Selingo 2-3).

2. *Perceived Benefits of Higher Education: Student Goals and Social Roles*

Learning specific skills and experiencing personal development are part of the academic exercise. The *Great Expectations* national survey identifies some specific skills students should gain from the college experience. Among those considered by a large portion of respondents to be absolutely essential are: an improved ability to solve problems and think analytically (63%), learning high-tech skills (61%), specific expertise and knowledge in the careers they've chosen (60%), and speaking and writing skills (57%). While a significant majority of the survey respondents (41%) felt that potential "'employers just get impressed by a college degree,' the majority (52%) feel that the reason for the higher salaries [often correspondent to higher education degrees] is that 'a college degree means someone has skills and accomplishment'" (10). Though focus groups had some difficulty identifying specific skills, "there was a palpable sense that colleges are expected to deliver much more than a degree" (10). Some specific skills—like the importance of learning interpersonal skills and honing self-direction are indicated. 71 percent of respondents of the *Great Expectation's* survey felt that gaining a sense of maturity and learning how to manage on their own was absolutely essential for the college student; 68 percent felt similarly about students' gaining ability to get along with people different from themselves.

Respondents to the Kellogg Forum survey "consistently spoke of higher education in terms of its private, economic benefits to the individual. By and large, the purpose of higher education was seen as securing better jobs and career opportunities. It also confers a range of social benefits…such as access to innovative thinkers, exposure to different ideas and perspectives, and opportunities to meet people. But, again, these were measured in largely private terms," that is, assessing the role that higher education plays in educating those in society who will go on to do good things (London 14).

According to this survey, public perceptions of the benefits of higher education can be broken down into two categories: economic and social. But to say that the public is concerned only with the individual benefits of a college education may be oversimplifying the matter. Though the individual benefits are numerous, the survey also lists some perceived benefits for the community and society at large. It may behoove the University to continue considering the role it plays, or can play, in realizing these benefits on and around the Scranton campus:

Individual Benefits:	Provides better jobs & career opportunities Leads to higher salaries & improved benefits Creates more discretionary income Provides more life choices Offers new social opportunities Confers sense of accomplishment Broadens the mind
Communal Benefits:	Stimulates local economy Attracts qualified job pool to area Brings new businesses to area Organizes and draws cultural events Unifies community around sports teams Provides access to public health and other services
Societal Benefits:	Creates and sustains business Increases tax revenues Boosts consumer spending Promotes technological innovation Encourages appreciation for diversity Promotes cultural and sporting events Enables innovative medical research Advances knowledge and ideas Develops social, political, and cultural leaders

Source: KRC Research & Consulting,
Kellogg Forum Report (2000), page 15

So, generally, what role(s) does the public want higher education to fill? *The Chronicle's* Survey of Public Opinion in Higher Education (2003) reports that 71 percent of respondents want higher education to prepare its undergraduates for a career, 65 percent want it to provide education to adults so they can get better jobs, 63 percent feel that one of the most important roles for a college to perform was to help elementary and high schools to do a better job teaching children, and 65 percent felt the offering of a broad-based general education program was important (Hebel 5). Respondents urged universities to emphasize less "economic development and research missions, which their presidents often emphasize, and more on the basics: general education, adult education, leadership and responsibility, and teacher training" (Selingo 1).

Though higher education seems to be pleasing much of the nation, there are other gaps between what the public values and what institutions provide. Results from the 2003 *Chronicle* survey reveal that almost three in five Americans "think it is very important for colleges to offer a broad-based general education to undergraduates, and 63 percent believe that colleges should help elementary and secondary schools teach children better" (Selingo 2). 65 percent believe that among the most important objectives for colleges is to provide education to adults so they qualify for better jobs. Information from an American Council on Education (ACE) survey from 2000 reveals that 69 percent of respondents believed four-year colleges and universities were doing a good or excellent job in education and training provided to working adults. But, in 2003, Partrick Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education noted: "If you made a list of what higher education has devalued over the last quarter-century, it certainly would

include general education, adult education, and teacher education…Most colleges have given up on general education" (Selingo 2). The gap, in this particular case, may be widening.

A closer look at perceived social rewards reflects on the public image and involvement of higher education. A recent report from the Futures Project at Brown University discusses the place of public good in higher education, and its role in civic responsibility. As reflected in the Kellogg Forum report, in a number of University of Minnesota-sponsored forums, participants revealed a "very clear role for higher education in addressing public concerns. The key was how the question was framed" (London 17). Harry Boyte, Co-Director of the University's Center for Democracy and Citizenship notes: "When we asked, 'What does the university have to do to contribute to the public good?' it didn't elicit much of a response. But when we asked, 'Is there a common set of problems in society that we all share?' everybody said 'Yes.' When we asked, 'Can the University of Minnesota be involved?' there was a resounding affirmation, a strong sense that the university has a formative, shaping power to impact larger social questions" (London 17).

These findings seem to bear out when individuals were asked some questions about their view of college and university presidents. The report of a 2000 survey conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), *Taking Stock: How Americans Judge Quality, Affordability, and Leadership at U.S. Colleges and Universities* reveals that "Thirty-six percent of the current survey respondents said that they 'very often' or 'somewhat often' hear or read about college and university presidents and issues involving them (11 percent and 25 percent, respectively). However, a far greater percentage—65 percent—said they seldom or almost never hear about college presidents (30 percent and 35 percent, respectively)" (ACE 17). Fifty-seven percent of respondents "said that when college presidents speak publicly about issues, their first concern is their institutions—only 18 percent said they had the 'best interest of their students in mind' and a miniscule 4 percent cited 'the best interests of the public'" (ACE 18). 52 percent of respondents to this survey felt that college and university presidents had "just the right amount" of influence of issues of regional and/or national importance. The changing role of presidential leadership on and outside college campuses has been a topic of interest in other venues over recent years. A 2002 *Washington Post* article, "It's Lowly at the Top: What Became of the Great College Presidents?" by Jay Mathews, hinted to the growing role of fund-raising in governing presidential agendas; a February 2002 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* by Theodore Hesburgh, president emeritus of Notre Dame, struck an appeal to presidents to weigh in on public issues.

3. Running with the Ball—Responsibility for Student Success

How Americans view higher education may be largely dependent upon how they view K-12. Though personal motivation is almost universally seen as an essential component for student success, when it comes to K-12 education, "the public also believes that schools and classroom teachers have a great deal of responsibility for student problems" ("Doing Comparatively Well" 4). The converse seems to be true for higher education, where the "public blames the problems on the consumer, rather than on the producer…With virtual unanimity (91% to 7%), people think that the benefit of a college education depends on how much effort the student puts into it as opposed to the quality of the college the student is attending" (5). This is reinforced by findings of the 2000 *Great Expectations* survey, which notes that "when people talk about K-12 education, they tend to stress the contributions that schools can make to the success of students," yet "most people believe that success in higher education has more to do with the effort the student brings to the college experience and much less to do with the quality of the college" (15). 88 percent of the survey respondents believe that student effort is the key factor to student benefit from higher education (15). If a student begins to struggle, 71 percent of *Great Expectations* respondents

think it is the student's own responsibility to get back on track; yet, 56 percent believe the institution has responsibility in assisting them through tutoring options. In the case of dropouts, most students blame themselves. How much effort a student puts into the process is also important to Americans thinking about questions of financial aid. The vast majority (85%) of respondents to the *Great Expectations* survey believe that aid should go to motivated students first rather than those who work less hard (18).

But, despite the responsibility of students to forge their own success, institutional quality does remain important, and may be a primary factor in getting students in the door of an institution. How higher education assures quality—its assessment processes—may have a lot to do with the market performance of institutions. As data from Brown University's Futures Project shows, the public's knowledge of "quality in higher education is imperfect" (Newman 8). Bridging the gap between what the public doesn't understand about institutional quality and performance and what it should know may be valuable market currency for an institution. The Project argues that "current measures of quality, found around the world, focus on inputs—number of tenured faculty, financial stability—that do not provide meaningful information about the outcomes of the student learning process" (8).

Community colleges are also getting in on the accountability action. According to results from the 2003 *Chronicle of Higher Education* poll, "Community colleges are moving into the mainstream of what Americans think of when they think higher education…they are no longer the third cousin" (Selingo 3). These institutions are beginning to account for themselves to a greater degree than ever before. In 2002, the first-ever comprehensive quality analysis of community colleges was conducted by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. As community college enrollments continue to swell, coordinators of the survey hope that they can "be a tool for helping to demystify this population for college officials, policy makers, and even parents" (Evelyn 5).

4. Financing the Endeavor

The *Great Expectations* report shows that "there is virtual consensus (93%) that the nation should not allow the price of a higher education to keep qualified and motivated students from going to college" (8). Seventy-three percent of respondents want college administrators to "control costs and spend money efficiently," topping the list of items they want administrators to focus on accomplishing; "there is also strong support for the view that administrators should keep tuition from rising, with 60% rating this as absolutely essential" (13). The majority (60%) of respondents to the ACE survey in 2000 felt that most colleges and universities do not try to keep the amount they charge at an affordable level for families like theirs; 71% feel that colleges and universities can cut the cost of tuition without lowering the quality of education students receive (34). Though only a minority (39%) feels that a four-year college education is affordable for most Americans, majorities feel that both the federal government and colleges and universities themselves make a lot of financial aid available (34).

While many Americans seem to believe that institutions should do their part to keep costs down and the government should do their part to help subsidize the cost of participation in higher education, the *Chronicle* 2003 poll findings show that "Nowadays…a majority of Americans believe that the cost of a college education should be paid by students and their families. Higher education has been transformed from a public good, supported by taxpayers, to a private good, mainly supported by individuals" (Selingo 6). Two-thirds of *Chronicle* poll respondents felt this way; and, "while many of the same respondents want the state and federal governments to spend more on higher education, only 11 percent said the states should pay the largest share of college costs. Slight more, 17 percent, said the federal government should pay the bulk of the bill" (4-5).

But these results should be tempered by a simple fact about surveys—answers given largely depend on the way questions are asked. Though newer data like that from the *Chronicle* and ACE polls reveal that families feel they hold increasing responsibility for funding higher education for their own, studies through the 1990's showed "large majorities of about 80% in favor of a range of government efforts to help students pay for higher education, including student loans, tax reductions or credits for higher education costs, and writing off college costs in exchange for community service jobs…But, polls that asked respondents to choose among programs reported differences in public support. Public Agenda surveys in 1993, 1998, and 1999 found strongest support for work study opportunities (between 73 and 80%) and tax breaks (between 73 and 75%), but significantly less for student loans (57%) and, especially, direct grant money to students (between 43 and 48%). [Jacobs 3]. Pennsylvanians are most likely to support student loans, "with 65% saying the federal government should use loans more often," as opposed to the 57 percent of the rest of the nation ("How Pennsylvanians View Education" 5). Pennsylvanians also differ from national norms in their belief that it is harder for a middle-class student to afford higher education than a low-income student; 49 percent of Pennsylvanians surveyed think this is the case. As a woman from a Bala Cynwyd focus group says, "'I think the lower income person has it easier. There's so many things for low income. There are programs out there where you can get money for your books and for transportation. If you're middle income, you're not gonna have the extra income to buy those books"' ("How Pennsylvanians" …5).

The Chronicle's 2003 "Attitudes About Higher Education" argues that more and more Americans feel they have a better sense of what a college education actually costs. In asking respondents what amount they felt was a "high price" for one year (inclusive of all associated costs) at a four-year college or university, the *Chronicle* offered seven staggered amount brackets. In gauging the price of the four-year publics, "the largest group of respondents" though still only one-quarter (28 percent), "said $10,000 to $15,000 annually. This year, the average cost to attend a public institution is $12,841, according to the College Board. As for private institutions, the largest segment of respondents (again, just only one quarter), 29 percent, put the cost at $20,000 to $30,000. This year, the average price tag of a private college is $26,677" (Selingo 4). Data from an earlier ACE (2000) concurs, but suggests that although more people feel they know what a college education costs, a "knowledge gap" still exists. Findings from both these studies suggest that even though they may know more, Americans still don't know a lot about college costs and pricing.

Americans may also incorrectly estimate their ability to pay for higher education, or have a true sense of what aid is available. American higher education might actually be "perceived to be both better and wealthier than probably is" (Davies 2). Public colleges and universities are facing major funding crises. To help ease the crunch, the sticker price for four-year publics has surged overall to "its highest rate in three decades in 2003-4, rising 14 percent over the previous year," according to data from the College Board released in mid-October of last year (Farrell 1). Two year-publics are up just about the same amount; private four-years have increased their price tag by 6 percent in the same year. Some higher education officials are concerned over the startling increase in private loan volume students and their families are generating to help pay for their education—"unless federal aid increases or we see an increase in [federal loan] limits, the amount of private loans will continue to grow" (4). And, as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes, "state and federal budget problems threaten all of higher education, not just public institutions. All private colleges are subject to state regulation, and most also depend significantly upon federal and state financial-aid programs" (Davies 1-2).

Still, most respondents to the *Chronicle* poll think that a four-year college education is always (40%) or usually (35%) worth the price. That more respondents think they know more about college costs, as displayed by the *Chronicle* findings, may help explain why parents and students are more willing to foot the bill. Better anticipation of the fees one can expect may ideally help lead to planning and preparing to meet those costs. Interesting to note—the largest group of the *Chronicle* poll's respondents themselves had a four-year bachelor's degree (30%), mostly earned from a large public state college or university (48%). Of those who have children currently in higher education, the largest group (40%) are themselves enrolled in a large public state college or university.

5. Other Internal and External Issues

Technology: 59 percent of *Chronicle* poll respondents believe that sometime in the next ten years, students who want a college education will take most of their courses over the Internet ("Views on Education" 2). Americans use technology more and more in their everyday life; technology has permeated all levels of educational instruction, and high levels of technological capability on college campuses is increasingly viewed as essential, not optional, by incoming cohorts of students. Distance learning is a growing part of this enterprise, and, though at first glimpse it may be considered imperative for meeting the needs of the non-traditional and adult learner (a group about whom concern is second only to concern about low-income students in the *Great Expectations* survey [25]), distance learning does meet some resistance from the public. A plurality (41%) of respondents to the survey feel that taking classes over the Internet is a good idea for all types of students, and "helpful for busy adult learners" (35). But, they also show concern that this type of learning may disrupt one of the elements of higher education they view as essential: face-to-face interaction (35).

Internal Politics: Despite an apparent thirst for colleges and universities to participate more fully in national cultural and political dialogues, the public seems concerned over the internal politics in higher education. "The biggest criticism of colleges in the poll involves the perception that they are playing politics or unfairly favoring some groups of students over others" (Selingo 5). Two issues that crop up consistently are the subjects of faculty tenure and affirmative action in admissions.

Gaining a prominent place at the nation's debate table through the much publicized court case involving the University of Michigan last year, the issue of affirmative action in college admissions is a hot topic for the public and within collegiate administrative circles. Recently, the University of Texas at Austin announced plans to restore affirmative action to its admissions process after survey data showed that white students dominate "most smaller, discussion-sized classes, which have few if any African American or Hispanic students" (Irving 1). Officials at the institution believe that "this discovery vividly illustrates a problem that the Supreme Court majority wants the nation's campuses to address—the lack of a 'critical mass' of underrepresented minority students, enough so that they 'do not feel isolated or like spokespersons for their race'" (Irving 1). According to *Chronicle* data, nearly four in five Americans feel that it's important or very important for colleges to prepare minority student to become successful. But, "64 percent of respondents said they disagreed or strongly disagreed that colleges should admit minority students with lower grade-point averages and standardized-test scores than those of other applicants. Only 3 percent of white respondents strongly support the use of racial preferences in college admissions, compared with 24 percent of black respondents and 8 percent of Hispanic respondents" (Selingo 5). But the public might be sending mixed messages. *Chronicle* data also reveals that 10 percent of respondents strongly agree and 48 percent agree that "affirmative-action programs at colleges and universities contribute to the well-being of society" ("Views on Education" 1).

The issue of faculty tenure has faced similar scrutiny in recent years. Though those polled in the *Chronicle* 2003 survey "seem to support the goals of tenure and affirmative action, [they] disagree with colleges' methods of achieving them" (Selingo 5). 8 percent of respondents to the poll strongly agree and 45 percent agree that tenure for professors protects academic freedom. Only 6 percent strongly agree and 26 percent agree that experienced professor should be granted a job for life as long as they commit no serious misconduct ("Views on Education" 2). But, to what degree the average American understands the system(s) of tenure may be unclear. According to a past law professor and past chairman of the American Association of University Professors' committee on academic freedom and tenure has stated, "saying that tenure is a job for life is pejorative and just the worst way to characterize academic tenure" (Selingo 5).

K-12 Differences: This possible lack of understanding may be symptomatic of a larger, more general "knowledge gap" between what concerns Americans have about higher education and how much they know about the subject. Again, the ways in which the public perceives the inner workings and issues surrounding higher education may be heavily based on their comparison of it to something they all have experienced and believe they know a lot about—K-12 education. The following table highlights some major differences in public perceptions of these two entities:

Table 1. "Major Differences Between Attitudes Toward K-12 vs. Higher Education"*

	K-12	Higher Education
Knowledge	High. People know, or think they know, a lot about K-12.	Highest measured "knowledge gap" (defined as difference between how concerned people are and how much they know about a subject.
Quality	Public schools get low marks from the public, especially on specific items.	Generally perceived as a world-class product.
Responsibility	People see individual motivation as important in K-12 education, but the public also sees problems with K-12 students as, at least partially, the responsibility of the school.	Individual students (rather than colleges) are seen as being responsible for student problems.
Who pays?	Perceived as paid for by local community.	Perceived as paid for by individual consumers.
Safety, discipline, the basics	Top public concerns. Large gaps between how important these items are to the public and how effective people think the schools are in delivering them.	Colleges are seen as safe, with the major physical threats coming from outside higher education. Colleges' problems with the basics are blamed on poor preparation in K-12.
Access	Taken for granted by the public.	Tremendous concern to public: the worry is that many qualified students can't attend. Leaders are much less concerned.
Alternatives	Low public interest in privatization, growing interest in vouchers, charter schools.	Lack of clear distinction between public and private, comfort with state support for private colleges, and, among leaders, a growing interest in for-profit alternatives.

**Source*: "Doing Comparatively Well," 3

Interestingly, the disparate views of K-12 and higher education held by the public may offer an opportunity for the two to work more closely together: "…There is a widely held concern among the leadership community that the K-12 schools are not adequately preparing student for higher education. For their part, K-12 educators often point out that one of their biggest problems is that colleges and universities are not doing an adequate job of training teachers" ("Doing Comparatively Well" 19).

Access: As Table 1 on the preceding page shows, access is a growing concern in public perceptions of higher education. According to the National Education Association Higher Education Research Center, there are four components to access: geographic access, legal access, academic access, and financial access ("Access and Choice" 1). Geographic and legal access have been dealt with to a large degree; the huge surge in construction of higher education institutions when the baby-boomers went to college in the 1960's helped bring education to areas it had not been before. "The civil rights gains in the same era put an end to legal barriers to education posed by segregation, although attacks on affirmative action may raise new barriers" (1); current questions about the status of resident aliens in the nation may also contribute to discussions of who can legally enroll in a college or university. Academic and financial access are issues with which the nation still struggles. Bridging the gap between what Americans perceive as relatively poor K-12 education (and its impact on students' readiness for higher education) and assessing the academic readiness of growing populations of adult and non-traditional learners who are returning to higher education in ever-increasing numbers will be important. Rising costs of higher education (in many cases, generally exceeding the rate of increase in the Consumer Price Index, a common measure of inflation) [Rooney 1], may become a barrier to access for some demographics, especially if not tempered with gains in financial aid. "There's no question that when tuition prices go up, it tends to discourage kids from lower-income families from going to college" (Rooney 3); it may also discourage the adult student, who may find creating room in their budget for their own education a lessening priority, particularly if employer benefits packages cut education-related benefits. Growing debt-burden for middle-income students may make them see higher education as a poor investment. Current students perceptions of cost also include concerns over budget slashing: cites a freshman at Dartmouth, "the cuts are definitely a bigger concern than the tuition hike…They're talking about cutting classes across departments. They already tried to cut the entire swimming-and-diving team. The tuition increase is a sort of problem, but our tuition is already so high, a small increase doesn't seem like a big deal" (Rooney 2).

Ultimately, as the NEA points out, "Access is only half the issue. The other half is graduation" ("Access and Choice" 3). Evaluating ways to encourage student persistence and degree completion will remain essential. Remediation is a key issue, not so much for parents (according to the *Great Expectations* findings), but for those in leadership positions. When presented with a list of sixteen possible problems facing higher education, leaders surveyed in the Great Expectations poll top the list with concern that too many new students require remedial education (88 percent gauging it as serious or somewhat serious problem) [29].

Conclusion

Those making the decision to explore higher education are faced with a multitude of options and choices. As the Futures Project reminds us: "the introduction of competition has fundamentally changed the higher education system. Gone are the days of strict catchment areas—geographic and intellectual—that traditionally defined a school's typical pool of students. Now, up against tuition discounting, virtual education, and new competitors, colleges and universities vie with one another for students more than ever before. To be a formidable competitor in these times

requires, among other skills, responsiveness, flexibility, speed—attributes not typically ascribed to the academy" (Newman 10). The public we wish to tap for students is itself becoming more and more diverse, with different needs, and, as Clark Kerr points out, different demands.
In addition to their social and economic expectations, others have pointed out that many ideas the public has about higher education also stem largely from their views of K-12. In order to maximize its market share and agility, the University may wish to discover what is brewing in the pipeline.

Resources

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