

Higher Learning Commission Blue Ribbon Panel Tasked to Set Agenda for New Initiatives and Innovation in College and University Accreditation

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When accreditation was created, higher education looked like the wild west and required standardization. Now we are at the beginning of a revolution. How do we encourage innovation and create standards for a new era? - Arthur Levine

There is a need to rethink some higher education accreditation practices in the 21st century, according to a blue ribbon panel of education and business leaders gathered in Chicago in June. The group is tasked with offering innovative ideas on accreditation of colleges and universities as well as the accreditor's relationship with institutions.

The panel was created by regional accrediting agency the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). Named HLC Partners for Transformation, the group is conceptualizing accrediting practices that assure quality in higher education and ultimately better benefit students in today's world. Discussion at this first meeting set a direction for the future.

"Our country is moving from a national, analog, industrial economy to a global, digital information economy. And our social institutions and education system were built for the former - a world that is dying," said author and educator Arthur Levine, Ph.D., president of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, during the panel meeting.

Noting that accreditation dates back to the late 1800s, Levine added, "When accreditation was created, higher education looked like the wild west and required standardization. Now we are at the beginning of a revolution. How do we encourage innovation and create standards for a new era?"

Levine and his fellow panelists came to the meeting armed with experience, ideas and an eye on becoming a catalyst for a groundbreaking approach to accreditation.

"It would have been easy for these thought leaders to say 'regulators won't let us do this or that' and 'this hasn't been done before,'" said HLC President Barbara Gellman-Danley, Ph.D., "But we selected people specifically who would leave that mindset at the door and instead say 'what's possible?' and let that inform the narrative on accreditation that can benefit higher education as a whole."

The discussion also touched on rethinking the accrediting agency relationship with its member institutions.

"I would like to see HLC as an integral part of the transformational planning on our campus rather than only the watchdog at the end of the process. Be one of the first voices rather than the last voice," said Sylvia Jenkins, Ph.D., president of Moraine Valley Community College in Illinois.

Chris Bustamante, Ed.D., president of Rio Salado College in Arizona echoed that sentiment of partnership during the meeting.

"No single unit of education is always wholly accountable for a student's success and completion," he said. "We are we going to need to think bigger about that responsibility, especially because many students today attend multiple institutions before graduating."

Additional HLC Partners for Transformation include: Don Betz, Ph.D., president of the University of Central Oklahoma; Stephanie Davidson, Ph.D., vice chancellor, Ohio Department of Higher Education; Robert Fale, owner, Robert Fale Healthcare Consulting; Rufus Glasper, Ph.D., president and CEO, League for Innovation in the Community College; Terry Hartle, senior vice president, American Council on Education, Division of Government and Public Affairs; Robert McMahan, Ph.D., president, Kettering University; Mark Milliron, co-founder and chief learning officer, Civitas Learning; Lynda Milne, Ph.D., interim associate vice president for academic effectiveness, Inver Hills Community College; Elizabeth Sibolski, president, Middle States Commission on Higher Education; Larry Skogen, president, Bismarck State College; Burck Smith, founder and CEO, StraigherLine; Robert Stein, Ph.D., former commissioner, Missouri Higher Education Coordinating Board; Jeanie Webb, president, Rose State College; and Dave Wendler, vice president for academics emeritus, Martin Luther College.

Other members are Michael Crow, Ph.D., president, Arizona State University, Gordon Gee, Ed.D., president, West Virginia University; Martha Kanter, Ed.D., executive director, College Promise Campaign; and William Tammone, Ph.D., provost/vice president for academic affairs; Colorado Community College System.

The panel's work is partially underwritten by part of a three-year \$500,000 Lumina Foundation grant awarded last year for HLC programs to create and cultivate industry-leading practices in college and university accreditation.

About the Higher Learning Commission

The Higher Learning Commission accredits approximately 1,000 colleges and universities that have a home base in one of 19 states that stretch from West Virginia to Arizona. HLC is a private, nonprofit accrediting agency. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all.

Lumina envisions a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. The Foundation's goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.

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