Chapter One

Excellence in Higher Education

Eight Fundamental Challenges

Higher education is a vital and indispensable sector within society, and those of us who work in colleges and universities have some of the most important jobs anywhere. The academy contributes in fundamental, pervasive, and lasting ways to the personal and professional lives of the more than thirteen million students enrolled annually in degree-granting programs, and more generally to the cultural, intellectual, and economic vitality of our communities and our society (NASULGC, 2001; NCES, 2002a).

As eloquently described by Frank Rhodes, president emeritus of Cornell, higher education "informs public understanding, cultivates public taste, and contributes to the nation's well-being as it nurtures and trains each new generation of architects, artists, authors, business leaders, engineers, farmers, lawyers, physicians, poets, scientists, social workers, and teachers as well as a steady succession of advocates, dreamers, doers, dropouts, parents, politicians, preachers, prophets, social reformers, visionaries, and volunteers who leaven, nudge, and shape the course of public life" (Rhodes, 2001, p. xi).

Our colleges and universities have always taken their academic role very seriously, and higher education institutions go to great lengths to document and evaluate their accomplishments. This is done in various ways, including accreditation reviews; disciplinary self-studies; and periodic peer evaluations of individuals, programs, and institutions. Assessments focus on student qualifications, faculty teaching and scholarship, research-funding levels, instructional programs, library holdings, computing facilities, and many other dimensions of quality. With regard to scholarship and academics, higher education institutions are the gold standard, the model to which other organizations throughout the world compare themselves and the ideal to which they aspire.

Why Isn't Higher Education More Fully Appreciated?

With all that higher education does—and does so well—why isn't support from the beneficiaries of our work much stronger? Why has public funding for higher education been relatively flat in recent years? Why is there perpetual critique by students, parents, alumni, employers, mass media, taxpayers, public officials, and other constituencies?

Complaints abound—about perceived problems of rising tuition costs, accountability, classroom crowding, difficult-to-understand teachers, outdated facilities, getting the courses needed to graduate in four years, faculty tenure, graduates unprepared for the workplace, inadequate advising, inaccessible faculty, inappropriate courses, unconcerned staff, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures . . . the list goes on. The perceived deficiencies are recurring themes in social conversation, and favorite topics of news and feature stories in the popular press.

It would seem that the scholarly tradition[1] has served society well in a great many ways. Yet for all that higher education contributes, its institutions, administrators, faculty, and staff often do not receive the level of recognition, support, and appreciation one would expect and hope for. There is, as Donald Kennedy (1997, p. 2) has observed, "a kind of dissonance between the purposes our society foresees for the university and the way the university sees itself." Increasingly, the image of the ivory tower—the protected sanctuary, disengaged from contemporary societal concerns,[2] which has been the embodiment of the scholarly tradition—is increasingly under siege in many quarters. Also being challenged is the autonomy that has been a defining characteristic of the academy.

The Academy's Response

One response for some in the academy has been to ignore or dismiss the mounting criticism, and to point out that critique of higher education is to be expected. The academy, it is argued, has always been the subject of controversy, and it always will be. Colleges and universities are, after all, institutions whose mission it is to hold up a mirror to society and to challenge conventional ways of thinking. Such purposes are seldom achieved without arousing some discomfort and discontent. From this perspective, it follows that the task facing those of us in higher education today is to insulate ourselves from the influence of outside voices. They threaten our intellectual detachment and institutional self-determination, long regarded as essential to academic excellence. Reflecting this point of view are comments by James Carey, in *The Engaged Discipline:* "Contemporary academics are often embarrassed and defensive about the invidious contrast between the academy and the 'real world'. . . . I take that distinction as a tribute, for the relevant contrast is not between the real and the imitation but between the sacred and the profane. The gates of the university mark a passage not only from the city to the campus but from the vulgar and ordinary to the hallowed and unique" (Carey, 2000, p. 6).

Indeed, a dismissal of outside perspectives may be justified by asserting the academy's superior insight about such things, or by suggesting that detractors are uninformed, unsophisticated, or poorly educated. The critics, it is often alleged, focus on the wrong things and ask the wrong questions. They don't understand higher education's mission, and they don't have all the facts. Thus time spent listening to critics—or pondering the details of their messages—is wasteful activity that simply distracts from the important work of the academy. These arguments are persuasive for some, but many in the academy find it difficult to disregard the rising chorus of discontent. Having one's institution criticized, one's work misunderstood, and one's contributions undervalued is not only disheartening and demoralizing but also difficult to ignore.

Mounting economic pressures are also hard to overlook. There is nothing particularly new about the notion of competition between institutions for students, faculty, research support, funding, prestige, and athletic prominence. Nor is there anything novel about the need for change in higher education. Indeed, the academy has been evolving in a variety of ways since colleges and universities first opened their doors to students, and the literature reminds us that each era brings its own calls for innovation and change (Koepplin and Wilson, 1985). Increasingly, however, colleges and universities are competing for scarce resources not only with one another but also with P–12 systems, for-profit educational and research providers, and even state prisons, transportation, and other publicly funded agencies. Many observers contend that the forces of change, the level of competition, and the economic pressures fueling the competitiveness are intensifying more rapidly than ever before.[3] Newman and Couturier (2001) have offered a list of some of the developments that help to explain the present circumstance:

- New educational options for students, including more than 650 for-profit degree-granting universities and colleges
- Courses and programs targeted for older, working students
- Student aid programs used to attract and recruit students
- An increased number of researchers applying for federally funded research grants
- Growing online courses and distance education opportunities
- Developing global higher education institutions such as the British Open University, Monash University of Australia, New York University, the University of Maryland, and the University of Phoenix
- Emerging corporate universities, of which there are now more than two thousand
- New collaborative arrangements between community colleges and four-year institutions
- Intercollegiate athletics (Newman and Couturier, 2001, pp. 12–13)

Confronted with daily reminders of the external critique, complexity, and growing competition for resources, many inside and outside higher education have concluded that colleges and universities have no choice but to acknowledge and adapt to the changing environment in which the academy finds itself. As Barry Munitz, former chancellor of the California State University System, comments: “Higher education (continues) . . . to manage itself as if today’s colleges and universities were still snug, little, collegial communities of 2,000 or so souls as they were in the 1920s. Colleges and universities have become huge, fragmented and very expansive enterprises” (Munitz, 1995, p. 4).

To be successful in the increasingly complex, demanding, and competitive setting, it is argued, the academy must recognize the leadership challenges it faces and devote increasing attention to expectations and concerns articulated by the external constituencies that provide the moral and financial support necessary to our functioning. The list of such groups is a long one: present and potential students, parents, alumni, members of advisory and oversight groups, employers, public officials, community groups, taxpayers, funding agencies, donors, and the general public. From this perspective, colleges and universities are viewed as providers of educational services. As with other service providers, changes in marketplace needs and expectations create intensifying demands and emerging opportunities. Organizations must adapt or risk obsolescence and atrophy.

Academic Excellence Versus Marketplace Expectations

For many in the academy—particularly some members of the faculty—discourse that positions higher education institutions in a marketplace or service context is not likely to be enthusiastically received.[4] In essence, the concern is that these images and metaphors lead inevitably to corporate models for the academy. They are seen as promoting an inappropriate emphasis on marketing, consumerism, and corporate management approaches, all of which are regarded as fundamental threats to the traditions of academic excellence. Trout (1997a), for example, writes: “In the marketplace, consumerism implies that the desires of the customer reign supreme . . . and that the customer should be easily satisfied. . . . When this . . . model is applied to higher education, however, it not only distorts the teacher/student mentoring relationship but renders meaningless such traditional notions as hard work, responsibility, and standards of excellence” (Trout, 1997a, p. 50).

Noble (2001) discusses specific issues related to the commercialization of intellectual property but does so in the context of much broader concerns. He argues passionately of the need to reaffirm “the traditional ideals of academic purpose and promise . . . and to recapture the ideological, rhetorical, and political initiative and the moral high ground in the debates about higher education in order to reinvigorate a noncommercial conception of higher education and to reconsecrate the intrinsic rather than the mere utility value of universities" (Noble, 2001, p. 32). From this perspective, the "faculty represent the last line of defense against the wholesale commercialization of academia, of which the commodification of instruction is just the latest manifestation" (Noble, 2001, p. 32).

Critical Challenges

The conflict of perspective and priority is a very real one, and the stakes are high if we are to become what the Kellogg Commission describes as the architects of change rather than its victims (Kellogg Commission, 1997). Is the academy best served today by redoubling its commitment to the traditional academic model in spite of the growing critique and the competitive realities of the marketplace? Or must colleges and universities focus their attention on identifying and responding to the needs and expectations of the contemporary marketplace? Should the academy reaffirm its commitment to academic quality, or realign priorities to more effectively meet changing marketplace demands and expectations?

Customary and appealing though it may be to pose such options as mutually exclusive alternatives, they need not be. A first step in reconciling what are often presented as irreconcilable differences is achieved by the simple act of replacing *or* with *and,* and asserting the necessity, if not the virtue, of simultaneously pursuing the goals of academic quality and the expectations of the marketplace. A further step is to reconceptualize the conflict between the academic quality model and the marketplace capacity model not so much as a *problem* to be solved or eliminated but as a potentially creative and productive *tension* to be better understood, valued, and perhaps even nurtured in order to propel the academy to a new and higher standard of excellence.

That said, how does one proceed with reconciliation, and how can we more effectively make use of the tension between the two models? For most of us in the academy, the benefits and values of the traditional perspectives on higher education purpose are clear, and always have been. What may be less apparent are the reasons some of our constituencies do not fully embrace this model as we do, and what might be done to constructively resolve differences that often seem to be irreconcilable. As Kennedy (1997, p. 14) has noted, "it seems strange and unfair to those who live and work in [colleges and universities] that the public view is so negative when the record of accomplishment seems so strong."

Listening methodically to the voices of one's critics is seldom a joyous endeavor, for many of the reasons alluded to previously. In this case, however, it is the place the analysis must begin. Indeed, it seems quite likely that the future of the academy could depend on how we as a community are able to understand our critics and respond to the challenges they pose. This does not necessarily imply that the academy should set its course on the basis of external points of view. With a more informed understanding of contrasting views come various options for addressing gaps. Institutional change is one such option. The development of more effective communication strategies to enhance stakeholder commitment to the academy's traditional values is another, and the negotiation of more appropriate and aligned expectations by all involved is a third. In each case, the gap between what is anticipated and what is actually encountered is diminished, and dissatisfaction is reduced or eliminated. It seems clear that unless we begin to devote greater attention to our critics and their criticisms, the full measure of support and appreciation the academy desires will drift increasingly out of reach.

It is not a difficult matter to construct a lengthy list of the specific concerns that are voiced by external constituents, many of which have been noted previously in this chapter. The common complaints, however, seem often to be symptoms and manifestations of what are quite often far more basic issues:

- Broadening public appreciation for the work of the academy
- Increasing our understanding of the needs of workplaces
- Becoming more effective learning organizations
- Integrating assessment, planning, and improvement
- Enhancing collaboration and community
- Recognizing that everyone in the institution is a teacher
- Devoting more attention and resources to leadership
- More broadly framing our vision of excellence

Broadening Public Appreciation for the Work of the Academy

Beyond classroom teaching, the work of higher education is not well understood or fully appreciated by many of our publics. All too often, for instance, faculty members find themselves explaining what they do, that they don't really have summers "off," and why an answer to the question "How many hours are you teaching this semester?" isn't a full description of their work responsibilities. College and university administrators and staff find themselves not only explaining their own work and justifying the activities of the faculty but also describing the reasons many colleges and universities need to have bureaucracies as extensive as those of many towns or municipalities. In this context, it is probably not surprising that 63 percent of the respondents in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* national survey (Selingo, 2003) said colleges could cut their costs without adversely affecting quality.

The work of higher education is not well understood, and constituents often have incomplete or incorrect impressions of our day-to-day responsibilities, our roles, our institutions, and the principles that guide the work of the academy. Many of the questions one often hears from those outside the academy are quite straightforward: Why don't colleges and universities focus their efforts exclusively on instruction and advising? In what ways are instruction, scholarship, and outreach complementary endeavors when they seem like distinct activities that compete against one another for resources? Why do faculty members in some institutions teach only one or two (and sometimes no) classes in a semester? How is it possible for some members of faculty to come to work only two days a week? Why aren't popular magazine rating systems necessarily a good way to judge the quality of a college? Why are there so many part-time instructors and foreign teaching assistants? Why are some departments understaffed and turning interested students away, while other departments have a large number of faculty and very little student demand?

There is ample evidence that many of our constituents do not have answers to these questions, and where they do, the answers are often not the ones we wish they had. The problem is not that we are unable to address these issues at length, but rather that we often don't have concise, uncomplicated answers to give that respond to the fundamental concerns motivating them. Often, what is required are brief and compelling answers that can be shared in the two, three, or four sentences that most nonacademics are willing to invest in listening to us talk about such matters. We need answers that can be given during an elevator ride, or while exchanging pleasantries at a social or neighborhood gathering with acquaintances or friends from business, health care, or government.

The responsibility for the communication failure, and the fix, falls squarely on the shoulders of all of us. It is tempting to look to people who are employed in university public affairs and public information offices to correct this problem; clearly, professionals in these departments have an important role to play. However, the nature and magnitude of the problem is such that it cannot be meaningfully addressed by a single department within an institution, or a series of brochures or public service advertisements on television, no matter how well-crafted and persuasive. Meaningfully addressing this challenge requires the collective and concerted effort of all who work in or value higher education.

To be effective ambassadors for the higher education community, we all need to be adept at translating our *own* understandings of our purposes and priorities into messages that speak more clearly and directly to the needs and concerns of our beneficiaries and the publics to whom we look for support. Given our values, our commitment, and our expertise in teaching-and-learning and research, there is no group better prepared than ours to excel in this kind of effort. Others expect higher educators to have these capabilities, and the expectation seems quite reasonable. This work is an important component of our teaching and public service, and we should seek out opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue with those who question, misunderstand, and criticize. In these efforts, as institutions and individuals, we must aspire to the same level of excellence that we do in other academic endeavors. The goal is a simple one: to foster mutually beneficial dialogue and enhanced understanding of the multiple perspectives of higher education, its purposes, and its priorities.

Increasing Our Understanding of the Needs of Workplaces

With the exception of community and career colleges, higher education generally does not devote a great deal of time or effort to thinking about the needs of the contemporary workplace. This is particularly true in the arts and humanities and other "nonprofessional" disciplines. This is often quite troubling to external constituencies, many of whom—92 percent, according to one recent study (Selingo, 2003)—believe it is one of the most fundamental reasons for the existence of higher education. Researchers at one university found that 80 percent of entering students felt career preparation was a very important goal for attending college, yet only 20 percent of the faculty shared this view (Kuh, 2001b; Sax, Astin, Arredondo, and Korn, 1996). Our inattention to these matters often confronts many of our stakeholders—students, parents, employers, and alumni in particular—as a particularly poignant demonstration of higher education's arrogance and self-preoccupation, and as confirmation of our lack of interest in the realities of the external world.

It does not seem unreasonable to expect that higher education would be vitally interested in the educational needs of contemporary workplaces. Since most students eventually work in one sector or another, an understanding of needed workplace capabilities would seem to be a priority among all disciplines, liberal arts as well as professional disciplines. This same logic suggests that college faculty and staff would be resolute in their efforts to determine whether graduates leave their institution with the disciplinary knowledge, skills, and competencies that are appropriate for workplace effectiveness and leadership. It would also seem that colleges and universities would want to know how well curricular and cocurricular programs prepare students in these areas, and how the relevant teaching-and-learning processes could be enhanced. For reasons that are somewhat difficult to grasp—and nearly impossible to explain to our beneficiaries—we generally do very little systematic analysis of these topics.

The goal of a higher education is clearly not limited to vocational training. Still, most would agree that there should be an important connection between the knowledge and skills that are being cultivated in universities and the ability of graduates to make meaningful contributions through the various work-related activities in which they will engage over the course of their lifetimes. Even among those who do not regard workplace preparation as a primary goal of higher education, there is the possibility—perhaps the responsibility—of explaining this point of view, since it is not necessarily well understood or appreciated by our publics.

There is a good deal being written on the topic of workplace competence in the popular and professional press. The general conclusions of these writings, and inferences that can be drawn from them, are quite interesting and point to the value of further and more systematic attention to the subject. First, it is interesting to note that there is a reasonable level of agreement on many of the capabilities that are valued in the workplace. Second, many of the topics judged to be critical to success in the workplace—ethics, critical reasoning, leadership, written and oral communication, group and collaborative skills, cultural and cross-cultural understanding—are not domain-specific subjects but instead fall within the realm of the arts and humanities (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Ruben and DeAngelis, 1998). Parenthetically, many of these same competencies that are identified as important in occupational settings are generally viewed as equally important in other interpersonal, group, and social contexts. Third, writings in the area point to the value of student life and cocurricular programs as an important complement to traditional coursework.

In sum, there is a reasonably good level of agreement on many of the needed competencies, and many, if not most, of the workplace needs identified in the literature are consistent with the goals of university programs—not only in professional schools but also in the humanities. Generally speaking, however, this compatibility and correspondence are often not well recognized by the academy or by external constituencies, because of differences in language, level of analysis, and publication venue. There is no question that more systematic research is needed on these topics. Equally important is increased dialogue on this topic among faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, and employers. Such exchanges would clarify areas of difference, broaden the awareness of shared perspectives and goals, and encourage new collaboration in research.

Becoming More Effective Learning Organizations

Nothing is more basic to the purposes of the academy than the development of environments that value and support learning. A learning community need not be defined by the boundaries of a campus, nor limited to the years one is enrolled in classes. Rather, the values of learning that the academy endorses are lifelong pursuits, and the role colleges and universities are playing in support of these endeavors is increasingly expansive. Again, in the words of the Kellogg Commission, it should be a fundamental goal of the academy to "ensure that the remarkable growth in demand for education throughout the lifetime of virtually every citizen can be satisfied [and to] . . . demonstrate that we can meet this need at the highest level of quality imaginable, along with the greatest efficiency possible" (Kellogg Commission, 1999a, viii).

To achieve these noble purposes, colleges and universities must themselves be effective learning environments, what David Garvin (1998) describes as "organizations skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insight" (p. 51). Organizational learning requires clarity of goals, supportive facilities and work processes, effective evaluation, and most fundamentally openness and receptivity to a range of information and information sources.

Goal Clarification and Evaluation

The clarification of goals and evaluation of the impact of the academy's work is one of our most formidable and enduring challenges as a learning organization (Gardiner, 1994). The importance of the task has increased with the introduction of new educational programs and services and new educational technologies, serving increasingly varied constituencies.

The need to clearly articulate goals and develop corresponding measures to evaluate the extent to which they are being met is being given particular urgency by demands for greater accountability and performance measurement. In 1997, eighteen states were using performance-based assessments in funding or budgeting for higher education; in 2000, nearly three quarters had such a program (Burke and Serban, 1997; Burke and Minassians, 2001; Rockefeller Institute, 2000).

There is little argument about the importance of evaluating the work of colleges and universities. But given the complexity of the academy's mission and of the measurement issues involved, questions about what to evaluate and how to make these evaluations are matters of long-standing debate and controversy. Those within the academy understand better than others that many of the most important areas to assess in relation to research, instruction, and outreach are often the least amenable to straightforward quantitative analysis (Astin, 1993). How does one assess the value and impact of a course or program, a residential learning experience, an advising program, participation in cocurricular campus programs, or interactions with faculty or staff? How do we measure the contribution of a program or institution to occupational preparation, aesthetic appreciation, civic engagement, or lifelong learning? How does a course, department, or institution assess its impact relative to others in any of these regards?

The same complexity is apparent in evaluating research and scholarly contribution. It is considerably more difficult to discern the long-term significance and impact of one's work for academic peers or for society generally than it is to calculate the number of single and coauthored publications, dollar level of grant funding, and professional activities—as important as these indicators may be in their own right.

The tasks are no less daunting in other areas of institutional functioning. If we hope to have the traditional concerns of higher education appropriately reflected in evaluation systems that are developed and used, our attention and expertise are needed. It is instructive to note, for example, the five most commonly employed performance indicators in eight states that were leaders in instituting performance-based measures: (1) retention and graduation rates; (2) faculty teaching load; (3) licensure test scores; (4) successful transfer rates; and (5) the use of technology, telecommunications, and distance learning (Burke, 1997). As Joseph Burke, director of the Rockefeller Institute, Public Higher Education Program, observes, these performance indicators ". . . respond to external complaints about the quality and quantity of faculty teaching and student learning, the preoccupation with graduate studies and research and neglect of undergraduate education, the lack of priorities and productivity, the allowance of mission creep and program sprawl, and the swelling of administrative positions and support staff" (1997, p. 19).

If such measures do not fully represent the goals of the academy, it is incumbent upon members of the higher education community to become much more involved in the dialogue on what's worth measuring, why, and how. Critique and commentary alone do not lead to the development of more comprehensive and useful measures of excellence.

Supportive and Facilitative Processes

On campuses across the country, we find many striking examples of innovative facilities and processes that support learning. Among these are new and more flexible learning spaces, online information and library services, high-tech classrooms, widely accessible computing facilities, wired residence facilities, Web page support and enhancement of classes, and an increasing array of distance learning and lifelong learning programs and services. There are many other advances, such as the creation of increased opportunities for student involvement in faculty research activities, collegewide first-year courses, a renewed emphasis on undergraduate teaching, and new programs to promote improvements in classroom instruction and to support student learning.

Alongside our examples of best practice, we also find a significant number of anything-but-best-practices, many of which we have come to simply take for granted over the years: buildings, classrooms, and classroom furniture that look and feel very much like those used by previous generations of students, academic and academic support units operating on schedules that don't correspond well to the needs of today's learners, transportation and parking problems that limit ease of access, and so on. Additionally, there are perennial problems of multiple sections of the same course that vary widely, sequences of prerequisite courses that don't articulate well with one another, uneven courses and instructor quality, and more.

Receptivity to a Range of Information and Information Sources

A third issue of concern for the academy is openness to learning from other organizations and other sectors. When talking with faculty and staff, one hears a great deal about the uniqueness of each academic or administrative unit. Passions are even stronger when it comes to discussing similarities and differences between higher education and other sectors, as for example between higher education and health care or government, and especially between higher education and business.

Learning organizations are characterized by active efforts to look beyond their own departmental, institutional, and sector boundaries in the quest for knowledge and insight—"to act with the benefit of knowing how others have addressed similar issues and opportunities . . ." (Burtha, 2002, n.p.). Certainly every academic and administrative department is unique in many respects, but there are also many commonalities across organizations, and these similarities provide the potential for learning directly and by analogy.

The use of comparisons and peer review has always been fundamental in evaluating education and improving scholarship. "Benchmarking," as it is often termed in the parlance of contemporary organizational studies—has also been useful in identifying and sharing effective practices in academic and student life areas (Schuh and Bender, 2002; Jackson and Lund, 2000; Qayoumi, 2000).

The approach can be equally useful as it relates to organizational practices (Doerfel and Ruben, 2002). Even when there is agreement on the value of comparisons with other colleges and universities, there is often resistance to the idea that higher education can benefit from comparison with other sectors. The major barrier is the common perception that higher education is *different* from other organizations. But there are any number of areas where there are fundamental similarities, even if not obviously so. Consider, for example, a problem faced by a university admissions department: the goal is to improve the handling of applications so that your prospective students can easily check on the status of their applications. But the objective is to do this without assigning a large staff to respond to phone inquiries. Where do you look for a model? The most obvious place is other colleges and universities, of course. But what if they are not handling this any more effectively or efficiently than your institution? The guidance that comes from leading businesses when it comes to analyzing and improving processes is this: think more broadly. Think about your problem in generic terms. Look to the best (Camp, 1995).

In this case, thinking generically leads to the realization that the so-called applicant status checking problem could be more broadly conceptualized as a tracking problem. Who does tracking the best? Arguably, Federal Express or UPS. Studying their systems and how they track packages could lead a university to develop a

Web-based tracking system for prospective students that embodies the same features as a package-tracking process.[5] A university learning from a delivery service; who would have thought?

For colleges and universities, there is often a great deal to learn even from what seem like quite different organizations. Theme parks—Disneyland or Disney World, for example—could be a valuable source of organizational learning when it comes to identifying effective approaches for welcoming and managing large groups of people, handling a wait, and maintaining consistently high standards of cleanliness and courtesy. There are also a number of institutions outside of higher education from which valuable lessons can be learned when it comes to using technology to support instruction, mobilizing resources to collaborate on research projects, and designing and maintaining teaching-and-learning environments.

A preoccupation with uniqueness and the differences between our own institutions and others (or other sectors) can be a significant barrier to organizational learning. To the extent that colleges and universities—and their constituent departments—are conceived to be wholly unique, they have nothing to learn from others. This is certainly not the ideal posture for an institution where discovery, teaching, and learning are core values. Colleges and universities should be society's best examples of learning organizations, the standard of excellence when it comes to establishing clear goals, supportive work processes and facilities, and openness and receptivity to learning from any and all sources.

Integrating Assessment, Planning, and Improvement

A fourth challenge is the integration of assessment, planning, and improvement activities. The issue is not that there is an absence of assessment, planning, or improvement activity within higher education. To the contrary, most universities have institutional research departments that collect and organize data to meet various reporting needs. Assessment also occurs within academic units, where the quality of programs, courses, faculty, and students is addressed in a variety of ways, among them disciplinary self-studies and accreditation review processes. Planning and improvement activities may also be a part of the work of many other administrative, student life, and service departments within an institution.

The challenge here is that assessment, planning, and improvement are often not as well integrated as they might be, and typically episodic rather than continuous. Moreover, the focus of assessment, planning, and improvement is generally on individual faculty members, programs, or services, rather than on organizations—(departments, divisions, colleges). It is often the case, also, that information and insights gained through assessment are not fully, effectively, or efficiently translated into improvements, and they may not be coordinated or aligned throughout the university (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 1999). These concerns are not new to higher education; the frameworks adopted by the regional accrediting associations have evolved in recent years to address these issues more directly (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2002; North Central Accrediting Association, 2002; Spangehl, 2003).

Awareness of the need for integrated approaches to assessment, planning, and improvement activities is not unique to higher education, and considerable effort has been directed toward these challenges in other sectors. One particularly powerful framework is that embodied in the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards program (Baldrige National Quality Program, 2002a, 2002e). The Baldrige program, initially developed in 1987 for use in the business sector, is sponsored by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to address three basic goals:

1. To identify criteria for organizational effectiveness
2. To recognize leading organizations
3. To promote dissemination of effective practices

The Baldrige program has been an extremely influential force in organizational improvement efforts in the United States and internationally. Since 1988, almost eight hundred organizations have submitted applications for awards, nearly sixty have received recognition for their accomplishments, and the framework serves as the prototype for awards programs in forty-three states and ten regional or local programs (Baldrige National Quality Program, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d). The program also serves as a model for many international programs (Johnson, 2002).

In recent years, efforts have been made to apply the Baldrige framework to education. The intention has been to do so in a manner that avoids what has been described as the tendency of colleagues and universities to borrow innovations and jargon developed in other settings and to apply them uncritically to the work of the academy (Allen and Chaffee, 1981; Birnbaum, 2001). In 1995, a broadly oriented education version of the Baldrige framework was developed by NIST. In that same year, *Excellence in Higher Education* (*EHE*)—a version of the Baldrige framework tailored especially to the needs, language, and culture of higher education—was developed (Ruben, 1995b, 2000b, 2001c, 2003a, 2003c; Ruben and Lehr, 1997). The Baldrige criteria and approach have also had a significant impact on professional school and regional accreditation. Of particular note is the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP), introduced by the North Central Association as an optional accreditation process (Spangehl, 2000, 2003).[6]

EHE and other Baldrige-based frameworks encourage critical self-examination and learning in seven areas: leadership, strategic planning, external (stakeholder) focus, measurement and knowledge utilization, workforce and workplace focus, effectiveness of work processes, and organizational outcomes and achievements compared with peers and leaders. The approach identifies organizational strengths and needs, helps define priorities, encourages immediate and continuous improvement, creates a common language for dialogue among faculty and staff across the institution, and focuses attention on factors associated with the quest for collective excellence. Of particular importance in this context, Baldrige-based approaches give colleges and universities a well-tested and integrated approach to assessment, planning, and improvement.

Enhancing Collaboration and Community

Another fundamental challenge facing the academy is the need to increase commitment to collaboration and community. The need exists *within* departments, but it is most pronounced *across* academic and administrative department lines. This is a complex and important topic, and one that has a number of facets. Faculty are socialized into a culture that positions them at the center of the institution, linked directly to the instructional, research, and public service mission of the university; hence the rationale for the phrase “the faculty are the university.”[7] Unfortunately, this is a way of thinking and talking that can marginalize other university employees, foster resentment, contribute to a fundamental cultural divide, and undermine efforts to promote a shared sense of purpose and community.

Dramatizing the point is this letter to the editor published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Paul Irgang, a member of the physical plant staff at a large university, comments on the problem from the staff perspective:

> At colleges and universities . . . physical plant employees are often unappreciated and undervalued, the campus equivalent to Ralph Ellison’s “invisible man.”
>
> Those who work in academe inhabit an unofficial, yet undeniable caste system. Tenured Ph.D.’s constitute the Brahmin sect, followed by untenured faculty and staff members, and research associates, librarians, secretaries, food-service personnel, and finally, the untouchables: physical-plant employees. . . .
>
> Here at U.M., my colleagues and I are most appreciated whenever a hurricane . . . approaches campus. It is usually during this “emergency-preparation phase” that our dean provides us with a free catered lunch and unlimited kudos [Irgang, 2000, p. B8].

These challenges in higher education are not limited solely to overcoming the gap *between* faculty and staff cultures. It is also not uncommon to find role- and discipline-based cultural divisions within each of these groups, as when the faculty member in the sciences questions the value of a humanities department, or a social scientist wonders out loud about the contributions of this or that professional school, and so on. Then there are the academic advisors throughout our institutions, each of whom has his or her own hierarchical view of the academic landscape. As Carey has noted, “borders . . . are . . . firmly entrenched between departments and disciplines, students and teachers, administrators, researchers and faculty and above all, between types of faculty: adjuncts, assistants, part time, tenured, and tenure track” (Carey, 2000, p. 12).

All too often, personal prejudices, role-based stereotyping, and disciplinary profiling have damaging consequences and undermine the standard of excellence to which we aspire. They interfere with our ability to work together effectively, reveal themselves in interactions with our constituents in ways that undermine our ability to serve, and diminish the stature of our institutions. Here, too, there are great ironies, as we look in the mirror and find ourselves confronted with practices that are so at odds with our core values and with the very concept of a university. To change our institutions, we need to change the conversation (R. Dickeson, personal correspondence, Aug. 2001). Universities *are* communities—what Tierney (1993) calls communities of differences—not simply collections of disparate disciplines and scholars, technical specialties, administrators and staff. We need to regularly remind ourselves what it means to be responsible, contributing members of these communities (C. H. Cermak, personal correspondence, Nov. 2001).

There are certainly a number of examples in every institution in which faculty and staff members work together across cultural lines in pursuit of common purposes. Our challenge is to create many more boundary-spanning and community-building activities like these on our campuses—activities that reaffirm our common purposes, increase institutional cohesion, and call into question the patterns of thought and action that undermine it. In these collective endeavors, quality means that the *whole* must be something more than the simple sum of the distinguished parts.

Recognizing That Everyone in the Institution Is a Teacher

A sixth challenge is recognizing that we are all teachers. Each day, at institutions of higher education all over the country, tens of thousands of faculty members enter classrooms to help discharge a key element in the mission of their institution: the sharing of knowledge.

At every college and university in the country, there are also many more employees of the institution who are not faculty. So what in the world do all those nonfaculty people do? We know, of course, that they fulfill a variety of functions necessary to the operation of the institution and the support of its core mission, but in truth their roles are much more fundamental: they are teachers. We are all teachers—not only the full-time and part-time faculty and TAs, but also each and every administrator and staff member. Some teach in the classroom; some teach through student life programs; and many more teach in the dorms, the dining halls, the buses, and the administrative offices. We teach through every single interaction with students, guests, and one another as we engage in thousands of interpersonal encounters daily on our campuses. We are all the face of higher education, and the voice of its values.

Many students come to college or university at a time in their lives when they are first assuming responsibility for the management of their lives—living away from home, paying their own bills, overseeing their own health care, and in some cases living and interacting for the first time with people with whom they may have little in common. Clearly, they are gaining important knowledge inside the classroom. But they are also being taught poignant and enduring lessons outside the classroom as they watch how faculty and staff relate to them and to one another; strive to understand and adapt to institutional policies and procedures; and learn how a large, complex system functions (Light, 2001; Ruben, 1995d).

Together, faculty, administrators, and staff provide lessons for the next generation of teachers, government workers, corporate managers, and health care providers. What kinds of organizations and environments are they learning how to create? We *are* teaching—and students *are* learning—but what? What kinds of behaviors are we collectively reinforcing? How confident are we that our lessons are formulated by design, rather than by default? Are we teaching the values and practices that are needed to create the world we want to exist, or merely reproducing spare parts for a world whose frustrations we know all too well?

We should devote more effort to thinking about our collective teaching function, and to studying the kinds of learning that result. Perhaps one of our most fundamental tensions as it relates to teaching-and-learning is the fact that the instructional goals and intentions of the teachers on the one hand and the learning agenda, "goals," and learning outcomes of students on the other hand may not necessarily or automatically align particularly well. Improving our understanding of "teacher-learner" communication processes and beginning to explore the implications of the shared instructional role of administrators, faculty, and staff constitute an important challenge to be addressed in our efforts to reconcile competing perspectives on higher education, and to achieve the level of excellence that justifies our claim to leadership in this area.

Devoting More Attention and Resources to Leadership

Given the many pressing challenges facing the academy, perhaps no need is greater than for strong leadership at all levels of higher education: board members, presidents, senior administrators, deans, directors, chairs, faculty, and all members of the academic community who serve in a leadership capacity of one type or another. The tasks confronting leaders are daunting in many respects. The unique character of the academy presents unique opportunities, but also special challenges.

Well-developed leadership capacities are essential in any organization. The recognition of the importance of leadership and of the scope of the requisite knowledge and skills has led business, health care, and government to invest substantial time and resources in this area. The leadership challenges in higher education are arguably more complex and difficult than in other sectors. In most private sector organizations leaders possess considerable authority. Typically, reporting lines are clear; the goals and measures of organizational success, the so-called bottom line, is well defined; and the people in leadership roles throughout an organization have considerable resources, incentives, and sanctions available to motivate and encourage organizational innovation, advancement, and change.

In higher education, where independence is prized and shared governance is highly valued, the leadership challenge is enormous. It requires of individuals with insight and competence not simply to create and articulate vision, goals, and action plans but also to meaningfully engage one's colleagues throughout the institution—and sometimes external stakeholders—in the process of their formulation. For all the deliberations, delays, and difficulties that collaboration involves, failure to adopt this value sometimes leads to less useful ideas, and almost always to resisting implementation—even when the ideas are not particularly contentious. In higher education leadership, the maxim "pay now or pay later" truly applies.

Despite the incredible challenges associated with developing effective leaders in higher education, historically little attention has been devoted to this issue. It has generally been assumed that distinguished faculty or staff would quite naturally make equally distinguished leaders. The record demonstrates, however, that the knowledge and competencies needed for excellence in leadership are not capabilities that faculty or staff members naturally possess simply because they are outstanding teachers, scholars, or subject matter experts. The needed capabilities go well beyond the intellectual capability, subject matter expertise, and experience that come with mastery in one academic, technical, or occupational field.[8] Also critical are knowledge and competencies in collaborative decision making, planning, process analysis, interpersonal and organizational communication, consensus building, conflict resolution, and various other organizational and people skills.

There is a substantial body of academic and professional literature about leadership, and relevant concepts and competencies can be taught and learned as with other subject matters. We promote continuous and lifelong learning for others, recognizing that new learning needs come with changing life responsibilities. To address this most critical need in higher education, we must devote more attention to leadership issues within the academy; this can begin by applying the same continuing education philosophy and resources to leadership development for internal groups that we so enthusiastically advocate for others outside the academy.

More Broadly Framing Our Vision of Excellence

Perhaps the most fundamental and pervasive challenge confronting higher education has to do with the way we conceive of excellence, and the vision to which we aspire as a consequence. How we think about excellence has fundamental implications for illuminating and reconciling differences in perspective and priority within the academy.

Academic Excellence

Colleges and universities have long been regarded as the gold standard when it comes to academics, as noted earlier. As described by Frederick Balderston: "The university is . . . society's main repository of systematic knowledge and its main contributor to tomorrow's scientific and humanistic understanding. [It] . . . is designed precisely for that mission. . . . Other types of enterprises and institutions may therefore need to pay special attention to the university as the archetype of the organization where discovery and transmission of knowledge are both the reasons for existence and the occasion for enduring satisfaction" (1995, p. xvi).

Even with regard to academics, as we know, there are challenges that confront us in the pursuit of excellence. There are questions about mission balance and mission creep, the roles of tenure-track and part-time faculty, access and diversity, the appropriate extent of faculty participation in continuing education initiatives, the relationship between academic matters and student life issues, alignment between faculty incentives and institutional goals, the proper role of athletics, and any number of other issues.

However, beyond issues related to academics and academic excellence—where the consensus is that higher education generally performs with distinction—there are at least two other dimensions of excellence where we fall considerably short of that standard. For lack of better labels, these can be termed *service* excellence and *operational* excellence.

Service Excellence

The term *service excellence*[9] can be used to refer to the complex set of communication processes through which we create and maintain relationships with those with whom we interact through our instruction, research, public outreach, and also through our administrative, student life, service, and other activities. *Service* is a way of talking about *all forms of interaction* between the academy and its many constituencies—what the Kellogg Commission has called *engagement* (Kellogg Commission, 1999b).

To clarify the concept of excellence in service, consider simple examples of situations where it is notable by its absence:

> A faculty member is in her office carefully preparing material for a class lecture. When a student arrives at her door during office hours with the hope of discussing a question from class, she reacts to the interruption abruptly and with annoyance. She tells the student that this is not a good time and to come back later.

The professor here is hard at work maintaining higher education's reputation for *academic* excellence. Unfortunately, at the same time, she's making a less exemplary contribution to *service* excellence.

And another:

> Just before graduation day, a student and his family gather eagerly around the dining room table to open a letter from the university that the student attends. The student begins to read to all assembled what they hope will be a note of congratulations from the dean.
>
> The letter reads: "Dear Student: Your diploma will be withheld because of an outstanding parking violation. In order to receive your diploma, you are required to first satisfy this obligation." It is signed "The Parking Department."

The issue in this case is not whether the student should meet his financial responsibilities to the institution, of course, but rather how we communicate those obligations so that we don't undermine our broader set of goals.

Both situations illustrate the challenges of excellence in service, communication, and relationship development. Events like these help to explain why some of our beneficiaries fail to fully appreciate the work of higher education. When such situations occur—and most would agree that they occur much more often than we would like in many institutions—students and others who are touched by the event may be left with a tainted impression of their college or university experience, and too few kind thoughts about the institution, its faculty, and its staff. Unfortunately, many of the manifestations of academic excellence are deferred and intangible; deficiencies in the area of service are generally immediate and visible. In extreme cases, an accumulation of negative experiences can result in students concluding that graduating—and other positive outcomes they associate with their college experience—are things they did *in spite of* our efforts, rather than *because* of them.

Unfortunately, it doesn't take many negative experiences to create an impression, leave a lasting memory, or sour a relationship; negative events are far more likely to be remembered and retold than those that are positive.[10] What this means is that not-so-wonderful encounters have a disproportionately large impact, not only on the individuals who experience them but also on an organization's reputation and on stakeholders' images of our departments, our institutions, and higher education in general.

Collectively, these impressions can have a significant influence on applicant preferences, patterns of financial and moral support, attitudes toward higher education, and perhaps even attitudes toward learning.

It is important to point out that the fundamental issue is *not* one of treating students—or family members, visitors, or members of the public—in a particular way because they are *customers,* but rather because they are *people.* Casting the issue solely in marketplace terms is an all-too-convenient way of dismissing what are in actuality much more basic issues of human relationships, respect, and dignity—issues that should be basic to the work we do and the values we espouse.

Operational Excellence

A second dimension of relevance is *operational excellence,* matters having to do with the effectiveness and efficiency of how our institutions function. Operational issues affect external constituencies—students, parents, visitors, and others not employed by the institution—and they also affect internal users, such as faculty and staff.

Here are two examples:

> An eager transfer student and her parents find themselves traveling from one administrative office to another to pay the tuition, secure the appropriate forms to register, have previous course work evaluated, and secure library or parking privileges; ultimately they learn that there are no spaces left in any of the required courses she'll need for the major she came to the university to pursue.

> A faculty member finds that the process for peer review and action on a new course being proposed to the college could take nine months, and require the same faculty members to review the same course proposal several times as members of different committees and constituted bodies.

Beyond the impact of the delays and frustrations involved, operational impediments such as these mitigate against academic and service excellence. Dysfunctional work processes create waste and rework, undermine faculty and staff morale, and in many cases interfere with our ability to efficiently achieve our academic goals and serve our external constituencies effectively. Like issues of service, their impact is often quite immediate and tangible.

Beyond "The Ivory Tower": Virtue and Necessity

The term *ivory tower* was apparently first used in 1837, in a poem by Charles Augustine Sainte-Beuve (1869). In its original usage, the ivory tower referred to a kind of sanctuary, a retreat from the realities of the day. According to the dictionary, today the phrase refers to "a condition of seclusion or separation from the world; protection or shelter from the harsh realities of life."

The ivory tower presents an image of the academy as a place that is different and disconnected, a sort of academic fantasyland where students prepare for their transition into the so-called real world. When they depart, they leave behind the faculty who are the perpetual guardians of the light in this scholarly enclave on the hill. It's an interesting image.

Indeed, colleges and universities do strive to maintain a protected environment, one where we pursue the noblest of goals—research and discovery, teaching and learning. And yet at a time when we are confronted with diverse perspectives and priorities, the academy can and should embody much more, and in so doing respond genuinely to the expressed concerns of external constituencies.

This book is devoted to an exploration of important issues around which there is often substantial polarization and disagreement. These differences in point of view—and in the underlying understanding of the purposes of the academy they imply—may appear irreconcilable, much as Thomas Kuhn (1970) had in mind when he discussed the problem of incommensurable paradigms. Tensions are unmistakable between those who are alarmed about the erosion of commitment to traditional academic values and those who are focused on the realities and opportunities of the rapidly changing external environment. In this instance, however, these differences need not be irreconcilable; indeed, there is considerable danger in allowing ourselves the luxury of creating rhetoric or reality that suggests that they can or should be.

Colleges and universities must embody the values of both continuity and change (J. J. Seneca, personal communication, 2002).

This is not a simple call for improved public relations, but a call for a fresh look at what excellence in higher education ought to mean as we begin a new millennium. This is a period when information technologies are creating many new opportunities for enhancing scholarship in all fields. Yet it is also a time when, because of these same technologies, the academy is no longer the sole proprietor of knowledge, and no longer the sole arbiter in its quality or dissemination. It is a time when a remarkable array of new teaching-and-learning opportunities are presenting themselves, when higher education is no longer confined to our campuses, to a particular time of day, or to particular demographic groups. But it is also a time when there is increasing competition from other institutions and other sectors, a period of increasing pressures for productivity, accountability, and responsiveness to constituent needs. It is, finally, a period in which effective human interaction and satisfying relationships continue to be of vital importance and increasingly difficult to achieve and maintain.

The academy needs a new, more encompassing vision of excellence—a vision that takes account of opposing views of higher education's purpose and underscores the importance, interdependence, and useful tensions among the goals of academic excellence *and* those of service and operational excellence. It should identify the academy as a place that not only *advances* knowledge but also one that *applies, test*s, and *uses* that knowledge—one that practices what we teach, and that genuinely aspires to excellence in all that we do.

Notes

1. This phrase was introduced by Harold Innis in the title of a paper delivered during World War II at the University of New Brunswick. His "plea for the university tradition" cautioned against influence from constituencies and forces external to the university. See discussion by Carey (2000), Noble (2001), Scott (2002), and Slaughter (2001).
2. See Wolff, (1992, p. xxx), who indicates that "at its best . . . [the university must be] a protected sanctuary . . . preserved for undergraduate liberal education"; and Carey (2000), who argues for disengagement and "the independence of the university . . . keeping its internal needs and nature at the forefront" (p. 6), so that the university can execute its responsibility of standing in opposition to the dominant forces and fashion of public opinion at any particular point in time.

3. For example, see Collis (2001); Marchese (1998); Meister (1994); Newman and Couturier (2001); Frank (2001); Shulman and Bowen (2001); Ramsden (1998); Rhodes (2001); Selingo (1999); Winston (2001).
4. Apprehension about the influence of business on the academy is anything but new. In 1918, T. Veblen (1957, p. 65) wrote: "the intrusion of business principles in the universities goes to weaken and retard the pursuit of learning, and therefore to defeat the ends for which a university is maintained. This result follows, primarily, from the substitution of impersonal, mechanical relations, standards and tests, in the place of personal conference, guidance and association between teachers and students; and also from the imposition of a mechanically standardized routine upon the members of the staff, whereby any disinterested preoccupation with scholarly or scientific inquiry is thrown into the background and falls in abeyance." Current writings that voice concerns about the influence of business on higher education include McMillan and Cheney (1996), Noble (2001), Schwartzman (1995), Scott (2002), Slaughter (2001), and Trout (1997a).
5. This approach was used by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, Rutgers University.
6. See discussion by Biemiller (2000). The North Central Association accredits colleges and universities in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.
7. George O'Brien (1998, p. 15) presents this account of the origin of the phrase: when General Dwight Eisenhower, who served as president of Columbia University from 1948 to 1953, first addressed the faculty, he opened his remarks by commenting how pleased he was to be meeting with "employees" of the university. Professor I. I. Rabi, a distinguished senior faculty member and later Nobel Prize winner, responded, "Sir, the faculty are not the employees of Columbia University, the faculty is Columbia University."
8. Authors who have dealt with these issues include Cherniss and Goleman (2001); Daly and Wiemann (1994); Goleman (1997, 1998a, 1998b); O'Hair, Friedrich, Wiemann, and Wiemann (1997); Kealey and Ruben (1983); Ruben and Kealey (1979).
9. There is no fully satisfactory term or phrase to convey this idea. Whether one selects "engagement," "interaction," "relationship," or "service" there is a potential for misinterpretation. The reference to "service" and "service excellence" used by the author in Ruben (2001c) and earlier (in "The Ivory Tower—2000: Images, Ironies and Opportunities," Rutgers University Daniel Gorenstein Memorial

Lecture, Apr. 17, 2000) is being continued here for purposes of consistency. The intended meaning of *service* in this context is generic, referring to the full range of interactions that occur between colleges and universities and their constituencies, and not the more limited usage of the term, as implied by "public service" or "support services." The concept is discussed in detail in Chapter Nine.

10. According to studies conducted by the Technical Assistance Research Program (TARP) for the White House Office of Consumer Affairs, the average consumer who has a problem with an organization tells nine to ten people. The research also indicates that organizations don't hear from 96 percent of those who are dissatisfied. See discussion in Albrecht and Zemke (1985).