



Executive Summary

Transforming Higher Education: A Competitive Advantage for North Carolina 2007 Emerging Issues Forum and Program of Work

North Carolina's institutions of higher learning will play a pivotal role in defining our state's future. Most jobs require at least some postsecondary education, but the percentage of our workforce with a college degree is shrinking. Unless it is addressed, this workforce gap will undermine the economic stability of families, companies and communities.

The Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI) assembled a broadly-constituted group of consumers of higher education to identify a series of priorities for rethinking higher education's role in economic and community development; innovation, technology and entrepreneurship; and educating all North Carolinians. During the 2007 Emerging Issues Forum, *Transforming Higher Education: A Competitive Advantage for North Carolina*, speakers reflected on these priorities, with particular emphasis on the perilous consequences of North Carolina's growing workforce gaps. A clear call emerged for business and higher education to work together to address the gaps.

The Business Committee on Higher Education

IEI responded by convening the Business Committee on Higher Education (BCHE). The Committee was co-chaired by Ann Goodnight of SAS and Bob Ingram of GlaxoSmithKline, and was comprised of 24 business leaders representing the various geographic regions and major industries statewide.

The BCHE identified and issued five recommendations for adoption by our state's higher education leaders. For each recommendation, the BCHE offered an accompanying series of specific steps to facilitate implementation.

Recommendations

- Produce graduates with an appropriate mix of soft and hard skills essential for success in the workforce, both in established businesses and in entrepreneurial ventures.
- Build awareness among all higher education students — with a particular focus on minority and at-risk populations — as well as their faculty and counselors about ever-changing workforce demands and the flexibility needed for lifetime employability and success in the 21st century economy.
- Expand the development and use of alternative delivery mechanisms, including distance learning, to reach adult and life-long learners as well as those unable to participate in traditional classes for any reason.
- Assist the K-12 system in exposing all students — with a particular focus on minority and at-risk populations — as well as their parents, teachers and counselors to ever-changing workforce demands and the flexibility needed for lifetime employability and success in the 21st century economy.
- Work with the K-12 system to align K-12 curricula with higher education entrance requirements and curricula.

In addition, the BCHE made five statements of principle on issues that the Committee membership believe need to be addressed, but which fell outside the BCHE's charge. These principles have been communicated to executive and legislative leaders in order to inform and encourage debate in the appropriate arenas.

Statements of Principle

During meetings of IEI's Business Committee on Higher Education (BCHE), members raised a variety of issues that are crucial to the future of the state but which fell beyond the purview of the committee. The BCHE was mindful that there are other arenas dedicated to pursuing solutions to these questions and respectfully requests the attention of North Carolina's executive and legislative leadership to the following issues, in the hope that they will be addressed expeditiously by the appropriate agencies and that these statements of principle will add impetus to their work.

- North Carolina must establish a permanent business committee for education that addresses both K-12 and higher education.
- K-12 education must provide students with versatile soft skills in addition to basic competencies in reading, writing and math.
- The state must enable a greater percentage of our population to graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education.
- North Carolina must make higher education accessible for all academically qualified students regardless of their immigration status.
- Establish at the cabinet level within the executive branch vehicles for enhancing opportunities for minorities, both in school and the workplace, and to measure the success of these efforts on a regular basis.

Next Steps

The BCHE's recommendations will be officially presented to leaders of private and public colleges and universities, including our community college system. The recommendations will also be presented to the UNC Tomorrow Commission at its meeting on November 7, 2007. The Commission, convened by the UNC Board of Governors, is charged with considering how the 17 campuses of the System can best meet the needs of the state and its people over the next 20 years. The 17 campuses will be expected to have internal mechanisms in place for the implementation and assessment of the Commission's recommendations by June of 2008. IEI will be actively engaged in the transformation of higher education from adoption through implementation.