

**THE KEY TO
COMPETITIVENESS:
UNDERSTANDING
THE NEXT
GENERATION LEARNER**

**A GUIDE FOR COLLEGE
AND UNIVERSITY LEADERS**

AASCU | EDUCAUSE | MICROSOFT

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Each morning, Jason Keene wakes up in his dorm room at the University of Central Florida and peers over at his PC monitor to see how many IMs arrived while he slept. Sometimes more than 15 attempts to reach him are visible on the screen, along with various postings to the blog he's been following since the semester began in January. After a quick trip to the shower, the sophomore computer science major pulls up an eclectic mix of news, weather, sports, and information on the home page he customized using Google. He then logs onto his campus account to see if the previous day's sociology lecture is posted. He notices a reminder that there will be a quiz that day as well as another one letting him know that the paper he's writing needs to be e-mailed to a professor by midnight the next day. With a cup of instant coffee on the desk next to him, Jason IMs a few friends and then pulls up a wiki to review progress a teammate has made on a project they're doing for their computer science class.

The rest of us might be wondering when Jason is going to start his day, but if you ask Jason, he's already halfway through it. Other than the lecture that he may or may not attend—he can download the notes—he's likely to spend most of the morning in his room. By noon, he's sent a text message from his cell phone to a friend to meet him at the Student Union, where most afternoons he can be found sitting with a group of students, laptop poised on his knees, accessing notes, papers, and documents using the campus's wireless network. Back in his room, he's likely to stay up past midnight juggling notes, papers, instant messages, and an Internet-based multiplayer game he thinks he's almost beaten. He's been to the library once in the two years he's been at college, and he communicates frequently with his professors via e-mail. When it comes to research, he's more likely than not to consult Google and Wikipedia.

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While Jason is a composite of several students introduced in June 2004 at a conference titled “The Key to Competitiveness: Understanding the Next Generation Learner,” he is more the norm than the exception on today’s college campuses. As one conference participant noted, the students 18–22 years of age spoke primarily about the ways in which they communicate and maintain community but not necessarily about specific technologies. That observation supports much of the current data about college-age students, most of whom have grown up with technology and view it, not as a device or application, but as a means for communicating and maintaining relationships. The real news, however, is how little today’s college and university leaders know about Jason and his peers, and how that lack of knowledge could be hampering their ability to remain competitive.

The conference, sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), EDUCAUSE, and Microsoft Corporation and hosted by the University of Central Florida (UCF), brought together invited teams of leaders from 12 institutions to focus on how AASCU

institutions can best serve a changing student body. It provided an opportunity for participants to explore their own efforts—as well as the efforts of other state colleges and universities—to position their institutions for success by meeting new learners, exploring strategies for providing leadership to the change process, and applying systems for the measurement of outcomes.

WHO ARE OUR STUDENTS?

The conference opened with four technology parlors—led by UCF students—that offered vivid examples of student attitudes, learning styles, and priorities. One parlor featured a short documentary of UCF student interviews and depicted a variety of student needs and perceptions while demonstrating that students today, while diverse, are as a group fundamentally different than students a generation ago. In another parlor, UCF students walked the audience through an average day in their lives, offering evidence that the stereotype of the wired student is far from mythology. In yet another parlor, a small group of UCF students demonstrated a computer game

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built by a team of 42 students, giving the audience a first-hand look at the potential of computer gaming to help students learn.

Are the students at UCF a fair representation of the wider population of students? Are all in-coming students as tech savvy as the ones who presented at the technology parlors? While several of the attendees noted that they're not seeing the same kinds of students at their institutions, all were fascinated—and sometimes surprised—by what they saw and heard. Most left determined to take a better look at their own students. As one Montclair State University (N.J.) participant commented: “We were struck by the student presentations and now we want to know who are our students and who are our faculty.”

According to EDUCAUSE vice president Diana Oblinger, evidence abounds that by high school, teens regularly use the Internet to find information about college, for school research, and to communicate with their friends. As a result of being plugged in and online, teens today are well informed and influential. They regularly go online to research products and services for themselves and for their parents. And they actively participate in purchasing decisions at home.

By college, students fall into an interesting set of demographic patterns. What has long been regarded as nontraditional—older students, part-time students, working students, even women in college—has become traditional. More than half of all undergraduates are women, one third are nonwhite, 80 percent are employed (almost 40 percent are employed full time), and 43 percent are over the age of 24.

Students between the ages of 18–22 bring to higher education characteristics that are much different from their older peers and siblings. Born between 1982 and 2001, these students, sometimes called millennials or Net geners, tend to be experiential learners who are comfortable in groups and who learn better in active and social environments. By and large, they think it's cool to be smart, they're ambitious and career oriented, they have busy schedules, they're respectful of social conventions and institutions, and they're fascinated by new technologies.

It is unclear whether the Net generation is pushing innovations in communications technologies (because of their fascination with it) or if advances in communications technologies are influencing the Net generation. That discussion is not nearly as relevant as their perceptions of the role

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technology plays in their lives. Evidence of those perceptions appeared through all of the technology parlor presentations. Whereas the older peers and siblings of these students may regard technology as important, this generation regards it as oxygen. They see no other way to work, form and maintain relationships, or pursue their education. They are digitally literate, mobile, and always connected. Although their parents fear that technology will have an isolating effect on their kids' lives, Net geners are highly social and they perceive technology as an efficient—and natural—way to engage in social interaction. They don't necessarily believe that classroom time should be replaced by technology, but they expect their learning experience to be enhanced by technology. They expect lectures, notes, and syllabi to be available for download. They count on being able to reach their professors online 24/7, they want campus business systems to be automated, and they expect to have their customer service needs met in a seamless manner.

Older learners make up a very different yet equally important demographic for higher education. Representing 43 percent of the undergraduate marketplace, students over 22 years old are highly customer-service oriented and they have specific

expectations about courses, institutions, and degrees. Very often life events trigger their need for education, such as divorce, job loss, the end of child rearing, or a death in the family. However, older students can be just as acculturated to technology as their younger peers. Comfort with technology is not always age related.

For many of today's students, learning is not about technology; rather, one has a learning experience with the help of technology. Thus, learning is regarded as a social activity with a technology component.

Creating the connection between student characteristics and college and university functions will be a critical step in campuses remaining competitive (*see example on page 5*).

While getting first-hand exposure to students proved useful to attendees, the remainder of the conference was spent figuring out how to use what we know about today's students to move forward at our institutions. By and large, attendees agreed that the experience helped them understand that they need to listen to students. Many institutions—such as UCF and the University of West Florida—are doing this successfully through regular

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surveys of students and faculty. Others are applying what they know about students to the creation of new learning environments and business systems that enable students to participate more fully in their education, such as course management systems, wireless classrooms and social spaces, integration of e-portfolios, and automated registration systems. Attendees also learned that they need to provide guidance in establishing academic standards for students who are comfortable enough with technology to turn to Google when faced with a research project but who should more likely be exposed to better research

tools. In general, they learned that they must do a better job of making choices based on fact rather than assumption, be more responsive to student needs, and they must do this while staying true to their academic and social missions.

While understanding the learning styles and perceptions of students is critical to the creation of better and more successful learning environments, a change in student demographics or perceptions is not always followed by changes at the institutional level. As pointed out by numerous presenters at the conference, the kind of

Student Characteristic

Increasing importance of out-of-class experience.

High level of comfort with collaboration.

Net geners feel that the online world is a community but they value the face-to-face experience in courses.

Need for mobility.

Desire for customer service.

Potential Implication

Attention needs to be paid to the design of informal spaces.

Attention needs to be paid to the design (or redesign) of classroom space.

Attention should be paid to what components of the course experience leverage online and face-to-face activity.

Invest in wireless systems to satisfy student need to be able to access courses, communities, and resources from anywhere.

Adult students in particular have specific learning needs and objectives and a high level of expectation that their academic and business needs be met efficiently.

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enterprisewide change necessary to break down old ways of doing business requires leadership, new organizational structures, and constant measurement.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN TRANSFORMATION

Leadership means a lot of things: It is the role of the president in setting the course of the institution; it is the role of academic officers to fulfill the goals of the president and to provide leadership to faculty, staff, and administrators; it is the role of faculty to lead students in their social and academic education; and it is the role of students to apply their learning to their lives. As several presenters noted, academic leaders who recognize new trends in student perceptions, attitudes, and needs are more likely to be successful in their efforts at transformation.

For 12 years, President John Hitt has led the University of Central Florida through its most significant period of growth. During his tenure, enrollment has grown from 20,000 to 44,000 students. In order to manage the

growth wisely, Hitt needed to help UCF develop its identity and its position in the marketplace. In doing so, he made it possible for the institution to attract students and to push for the kinds of academic outcomes that are consistent with the institution's mission. Hitt learned the importance of evaluating the options and then deciding what niche the institution fills. "Finding out who you are as an institution is critical," says Hitt. "Leaders need to set directions of travel and instill a sense of motion. And they need to help people feel good about what they're doing."

What niche does UCF fill and how does it respond to learners? First, as a metropolitan university, Hitt understands that the institution needs to play a broad role related to community; it has a responsibility to provide economic opportunities to the regional population. Second, with an expanding residential population, the institution needed to be able to serve a growing population of diverse students in a way that would not limit its ability to offer a high-quality education. That means leveraging technology to increase access through a wide range of face-to-face, web-based, and blended courses. Speaking

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in an interview with EDUCAUSE's Carole Barone, Hitt credited UCF's success both to an agile decision-making process that empowers senior leaders at the institution and a clear and decisive plan that dovetails with the university's mission. The result is that the institution has become a model for innovative growth by keeping true to its mission and applying technology solutions to manage growth. Students, faculty, and staff are regularly surveyed; educational outcomes are tracked and measured; and by these measures and more, UCF is growing and improving quality.

Hitt created successful conditions by setting what he called "five reasonable goals" for the institution's strategic plan; a short list of goals that he describes as "easy to understand." Those goals, he said, should also inform the institution's budget. "You can't divorce the goals from the budget process," he said. Once the plan was finalized, teams were put together and the expectation of trust instilled. "The president," said Hitt, "sets the expectation that the work will be done in teams, but then he or she must follow through and reinforce that

notion by establishing a reward system that recognizes the right behaviors."

With so much talk of consumerism and customer service in higher education, Hitt visibly bristles at the idea that to become or remain competitive, institutions should allow themselves to become mere product-and-service providers. Instead, he offered that the university should be viewed less as a store and more as a gym. "At a gym," he says, "you join to gain access to health, wellness, and fitness, which you get if you're diligent and you work hard. But results are not guaranteed." The same is true of higher education: what a student buys is access to learning.

UCF has been successful, not only in its ability to grow and remain true to its identity, but also in its desire to provide a quality education to an ever-expanding and diverse population. That success, however, carries consequences. While SAT scores among UCF's in-coming freshman are rising, the institution's ability to accept less-successful students is limited, a fact that causes Hitt some discomfort. "State universities are here to provide education, not to turn students away."

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Even with buy-in from leaders, change does not happen without the ability to challenge assumptions. Exposure to tech-savvy and sophisticated students challenged many assumptions on the part of attendees, forcing them to think about the ways they are moving forward on their campuses. But attendees were also asked to look at their assumptions about pedagogy, technology, and the types of investments they're making.

ENTERPRISEWIDE CHANGE BEGINS WITH THE FUNDAMENTALS

Many institutional leaders are uncomfortable with technology issues. It is not unusual for presidents, provosts, or others to assume that they lack the technical expertise to make Information Technology (IT) decisions. While it makes little sense for them to be in the position of selecting a hardware configuration or software system, institutional leaders do play a vital role when it comes to IT. Throughout much of his career, Brian Hawkins, president of EDUCAUSE, has been helping colleges and universities

transform higher education through information technology. At “The Key to Competitive” conference, he helped attendees debunk some common myths about IT, thereby uncovering a number of fundamental business concepts that can poise an institution for success.

Myth 1—If I can find a good Chief Information Officer (CIO), these problems would go away.

Too much focus is given to the role of the CIO, according to Hawkins. An organization that is successful with IT has the involvement of the entire executive cabinet. Reinforcing a concept described in the premeeting readings*, relegating or abdicating IT issues to the CIO in isolation rarely leads to effective change. For example, network security certainly involves IT, but ensuring IT security on campus also calls for the involvement of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), the academic leadership, and legal counsel because security raises critical risk management, policy, ethical, and legal issues that impact virtually all parts of the institution.

Hawkins believes that too much emphasis can be placed on a particular role—in this case the CIO—and not enough emphasis

* Contact AASCU for information on the premeeting readings.

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placed on the decision-making structure. As in all good business practices, critical issues must be shared. CIOs may or may not report to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), but it is increasingly important to include IT in discussions at the executive cabinet level.

Myth 2—IT will make us more competitive.

Like most businesses in the past 10 or 15 years, the lure of IT as a competitive edge has overtaken—and in some cases overrun—good decision making in higher education. As Hawkins points out, being ahead in IT isn't necessarily a good thing; for one, it's prohibitively expensive and few institutions can afford the price tag, not to mention it might be inconsistent with institutional goals. As Hawkins, Hitt, and others emphasized, what institutions need to think about is what specific goals are critical to the university and what role IT can play in achieving those goals.

Although there is an ethos that greater investment in technology makes a campus more competitive, Hawkins advocates that institutional leaders evaluate what dimensions of IT, as perceived by students and parents, actually differentiate the college experience. Instead of accepting the IT-competitiveness premise on face value, campuses should assess their sources of information and make sure that IT investments are consistent with

institutional goals, and support areas in which they choose to compete.

Myth 3—IT investments will save us money.

If you are investing in IT to save money, think again. Unlike many businesses that are creating efficiencies by replacing labor with technology, higher education has yet to see savings from IT investments. The labor-intensive nature of higher education, and the reluctance to change institutional practices have thus far stymied attempts to capture such savings. However, unlike business, in higher education the goal may not be to save money. The goal may be to use technology to serve a broader clientele, to avoid costs (such as having to construct new buildings), or to do more complex research, and so on. Presidents, provosts, and institutional leaders must take the lead in defining the goals that drive IT use.

As John Hitt noted in his interview with Carole Barone, first an institution needs to decide what it is and where it fits into the marketplace. From there, IT investments can be made consistent with the institution's goals. Hawkins advises that the goal for IT must be explicit; investments should not be made in technology for its own sake. IT is rarely applied as a cost-saving measure.

Three IT myths were sufficient to illustrate that while institutional leaders need not

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make specific decisions about IT, they have a critical role in setting priorities, reinforcing sound decision-making practices, and ensuring that investments support the university's overall goals.

AFTER THE PLAN . . . THEN WHAT?

Most of the conference attendees were in the process of integrating technology into the university plan or already implementing IT strategic plans. In many cases, exposure to the student technology parlors shifted attendees' perspectives on their plans, causing them to reevaluate their priorities. Many spoke of an increased awareness of rethinking designs for learning spaces, such as lecture halls, libraries, and dorm rooms. One attendee noted that the meeting helped them focus on their use of space and how they handle instruction. Others saw a need to review their plans to be sure that they were doing proper assessment. As an attendee from Eastern Michigan University said: "We learned that we have many important elements in place, that we've achieved a good sense of alignment between our strategic plan and our IT plan, and that we've had a good experience with

online courses. We've also learned that in terms of academic affairs, our IT piece is about machine replacement and not about academic issues. So we've labeled the problem and now we'll use student surveys. We'll leverage our strengths in online education and use those people as exemplars. We also need to ramp up faculty development activities. Mostly, we see that we need to engage governance around academic standards and IT."

As CIO, Joel Hartman has helped UCF navigate success through the belief that neither plans nor technologies create transformation, people do. To successfully implement a plan, Hartman suggests looking at the leaders, workers, teams, and organizational structures that will be needed to fulfill its goals. "A system approach is always best," says Hartman, "because in this way, the institution has a sense of what's it's doing; it's not just a collection of good ideas waiting for a payoff."

While technology provides the context for both a plan and for the implementation of a plan, Hartman names faculty issues, organizational issues, and evaluation as especially important to the process.

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Faculty Issues

According to Hartman, faculty are a challenge, so UCF has studied and evaluated various faculty types to better understand how to engage them in the transformation process. UCF determined a need to accept faculty need for assistance; make the use of technology “safe” for faculty; create incentives, recognition and rewards; and set clear expectations. According to Hartman, coming at transformation through faculty is not a good approach; an institutional approach is better. But the faculty issues—such as intellectual property, increased workload, promotion and tenure, and support—are real.

Organizational Issues

In most cases, says Hartman, the existing organizational structures are likely to be inadequate when it comes to implementing a plan. Leaders should be prepared to restructure or create new organizational units (what Hartman refers to as the blending of the two ITs—information and instructional technologies) and to pursue systemic, scalable processes. He emphasizes that a mechanism for implementing a campus dialog is most important. Institutional planning should inform IT planning, which should inform

assessment and user feedback, which should inform institutional planning.

Evaluation

A good plan for assessment requires an institution-wide approach, concrete goals and metrics, and dedicated resources. Chuck Dzuiban, director of UCF’s Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness, has worked with Hartman for more than eight years to gather data for planning and the assessment. Data, though, is not information, he says. “Sometimes the only way to tell the story is through narrative.”

UCF’s transformation resulted in the development of different categories of courses: Web classes, blended courses (using both face-to-face and online environments), and face-to-face courses. How does an institution measure the effectiveness of their courses and programs? One institutional measure is grading, but grades vary widely among disciplines. Through UCF’s data gathering and evaluation system, they can tell where the applications of technology in courses work and where they don’t.

Dzuiban’s data gathering has yielded some surprising results, highlighting the differences among students. For example, he found that students of the “boomer”

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generation are decidedly more satisfied with online learning than are Net Geners, who are less satisfied with online learning than their older Gen-x peers. In all cases, the quality of interaction in online courses was rated better than the quality of face-to-face courses. Student success rates tend to be highest in courses that blend face-to-face and online environments. By and large, students polled at UCF feel the university is accommodating their needs, helping them become more active learners, and preparing them for a lifetime of learning.

The importance of data gathering and evaluation became central to discussions at the conference, particularly as they relate to learning about students and measuring faculty support needs. As an attendee from Lamar University in Texas pointed out, “We learned from the get-go that we don’t have the information, even to see the differences between students then and now. So we’ll start by putting together a reasonable survey.” Another articulated the need to turn data into information: “We discovered things we haven’t considered before, such as the importance of doing more assessment. And while we’re data rich, we see that we may be information poor. We need to do a better job of knowing how to use the data.”

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE BY GETTING INTO ALIGNMENT

Creating a campus approach that incorporates key functions

One essential ingredient for successful transformation is the ability of the institution’s leadership to create clear priorities and align people and resources with those priorities. Alignment emerged as a key issue for attendees at the conference, particularly the integration of technology into university systems, such as teaching and learning, assessment, and business systems that pose an institution for growth and change.

John Cavanaugh’s experience, although president of the University of West Florida, is informed by creating change from the middle. From that vantage point, Cavanaugh has seen that leaders who are successful at moving the institution forward are the ones who take a top-down approach to assessment. That means having stakeholders engaged from the start of the planning process and putting into place a wide range of assessment measures, including administrative assessment; faculty, student, and staff surveys; and focus groups. Equally important is the

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establishment of an institutional planning council, an institutional budget the council can review, a conversant president who can make decisions and prioritize, and a communications strategy that is carefully planned.

There are a number of challenges when trying to achieve alignment, not the least of which is lining up the IT plan with the institutional strategic plan and budget. Getting that done requires buy-in from the administration, the deans, and the faculty. “It’s necessary to figure out what culture change may be necessary in this process,” Cavanaugh says, “as well as what support structures need to be put into place.” Those support structures are likely to include faculty development, design and development of programs and courses or new business initiatives, interfacing with the IT division in support for e-learning and e-business initiatives, and development and deployment of student support services.

Like most institutional leaders, Cavanaugh has had his share of experiences wrestling with the silo syndrome—various departments and university functions that don’t naturally interoperate, thereby making it more difficult to achieve cooperation and alignment. How does one overcome the silo problem? First, Cavanaugh suggests

that university leaders use their powers of persuasion to encourage cooperation. He cited the example of the Teaching and Learning with Technology Roundtables as one effective solution. “By bringing major players to the table,” he says, “it’s possible to get key people who carry weight to explain what IT means to them.” Second is to bring together major IT people from each silo. “In my case, I brought the most contentious people to the table and made available money that was contingent on them getting along,” he said. This helped Cavanaugh create a “united front” environment that he could own.

Cavanaugh was also able to see that when you flip the silo problem, what you get are groups of dedicated players, each of whom has a stake in both the plan and the announcement of the plan. By getting those who are essentially operating out of self interest invested in the plan, you can stack the deck in favor of success.

Cavanaugh also suggests hiring IT people who have credibility. In his case, with a high-level staff primarily made up of engineers, Cavanaugh hired a CIO with a degree in engineering. This helped raise the level of trust in the CIO’s abilities. Finally, Cavanaugh suggests launching an aggressive public relations campaign

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that sells the plan to faculty and staff as part of the rollout, such as an IT fair. “We gave away prizes, poked fun at ourselves, and generally created an environment of enthusiasm,” he said.

By following these basic points, Cavanaugh believes the chances for success can be greatly increased, perhaps even resulting in major transformation in one year. “Never stop talking about the issue,” he suggests. “And always celebrate the successes.”

Aligning Faculty with the Campus Technology Plan

In the world of faculty and technology, Richard Lynde, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs at Montclair State University (N.J.), believes that early adopters fall into two categories: Senior faculty who are interested in technology and new faculty. But to engage all faculty in transformation, Lynde believes it’s essential to get faculty closer to those they are teaching, as in the case of the technology parlors presented at the meeting.

Lynde also believes that senior leaders need to understand what they’re expecting from their faculty. “We’re asking them to roll out a whole new pedagogy, so they need to learn a whole new style and some new technology,” he said. In the world of

technology-enhanced education, there is more than just PowerPoint and e-mail. Technology is quickly changing the entire culture of teaching. “What’s the concept of office hours anymore?” asked Lynde. “How do faculty deal with 24/7 contact with students? We’re asking them to turn their teaching life upside down.” This is especially difficult when you factor in the vast differences in needs that exist among learners.

Lynde acknowledges a number of driving forces in the transformation process. One is the extent to which students have become media savvy and therefore are capable of approaching learning as a plug-and-play experience. No longer is teaching and learning a sequential process; faculty are still adjusting to this fundamental change. The second driving force is the need for faculty to think about assessment and outcomes. Finally, there are the roles and needs of faculty.

To engage and inspire faculty to participate in the transformation process, institutional leaders need to change the culture in which they operate. In the simplest terms, this means addressing rewards and recognitions. Tenure, for example, is not aligned with faculty who spend a lot of time on online learning. This is changing

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at Montclair State University, which 10 years ago redefined scholarship on campus. Today, a scholarly activity is one that focuses on teaching rather than just research, though they still require faculty to have their work recognized by peers.

Alignment with the Changing Nature of Students

According to Price Pritchett's book *Managing Sideways*, "Change is 30 percent logical and 70 percent emotional. The soft stuff is the hard stuff." As senior vice chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs at the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, Linda Baer has spent years examining and evaluating priorities, alignment, assessment, and partnerships. From her perspective, working toward future transformation requires us to embrace the challenges of the past.

In the past, she says, the challenges of higher education involved the social contract, socialization, social mobility, social responsibility, scholarship, and social changes. "Campuses have always been a hot-bed of social changes," she says. "They were always the marketplace of ideas, yet they were regarded as safe and cloistered."

Today, things are different. The challenges of the present take the form of accessibility,

quality, affordability, technology, globalization, diversity, and highly competitive environments. "We have to align these," says Baer. "Yet how do we do that while moving into the future?"

Baer suggests looking first at the priorities of the present and aligning those with the future. Teaching and learning has become a priority, as has the impact of globalization. Today we have a pervasive e-environment and the Web that offer tremendous value. Among students, and for leaders, human relationships have critical importance. We need to know how to work partnerships and collaborations to leverage all resources. As Don Norris, author of *Transforming e-Knowledge*, writes, "During changing times we experience the past, present and future all at the same time."

SUMMARY

While the fundamental mission of the university hasn't changed, the world around it is changing. Evidence of that change is most visible in students, both in terms of their demographics as well as their perceptions and expectations. When we stop meeting student needs, or when we cling to assumptions about what is necessary in an educational environment,

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we compromise our value. So how do we maintain our core mission while adapting to the changes around us?

The answer is to recognize the trends and changes and decide where the institution fits. Then create a vision for what success will look like and chart a course that leads there. Change may be driven by cultural or demographic shifts but success is accomplished through planning and leadership. As EDUCAUSE's Diana Oblinger points out, too many institutions are finding that resistance to change and failures in leadership lead to crisis. Citing Gary Hamel and Liisa Alikangas, who wrote about organizational change and resilience in the September 2003 issue of *Harvard Business Review*, resilience is a characteristic of successful businesses. "It's not about rebounding from a setback," they write. "It's about continuously anticipating and adjusting to deep, secular trends.... It's about having the capacity to change before the case for change becomes desperately obvious." More to the point, Hamel and Alikangas point out that "a turnaround is a transformation tragically delayed." This is an important observation for higher education institutions, many of which have been operating successfully for a hundred years or more but are now

being challenged to change. Unless higher education leaders are willing to see that what they face now are not temporary budget crises or added pressures as a result of adopting new technologies—unless they see that they must respond to new student trends—they risk losing their competitive edge.

The key themes of the "Key to Competitiveness" meeting were three-fold: know your students; take a look at your leadership and organizational structures; and measure everything.

Running through all three themes was the conviction that information technology is a tool and not a goal. How leaders harness the potential of IT to achieve their goals is central to remaining competitive.

So what should institutional leaders do? The following steps offer a structure for maintaining a competitive edge during both the development of plans for transformation and the process of transformation.

- **Mission:** What is our mission? Can everyone at the institution articulate it?
- **Relevance:** Why is this plan relevant to the institution?

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- **Challenging Assumptions:** What do we know about our students and faculty? What types of research, focus groups, and surveys should we put into place to get regular data? How can we turn the data into information?
- **Teamwork:** Whom do I need to work with to get results? What teams are necessary to achieve results? What do I need to do to create a climate of cooperation?
- **Faculty Support:** What kind of support is available? How can we get faculty buy-in through support?
- **Create a Culture of Evidence:** How do we know that we're making a difference?

Most important, institutional leaders need to look beyond their own

institutions and experiences for ways to shape their institutions' future. The conference experience itself proved to be an important catalyst for change for attendees. Participants learned that by going outside their core group of campus leaders, and by observing what their peers are doing to transform their institutions, they're better able to make adjustments and move forward. As John Hammang of AASCU commented following the meeting, "Participants acquired perspective and a new context simply by being there." George Mehaffy concluded saying, "It is our hope that institutional leaders will continue to challenge their own assumptions as they move toward a successful—and more competitive—future."

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September 2004