

Opinion

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Our colleges Everyone sees state role differently

EVERY NEWS story about the report of Gov. Blanchard's Commission on the Future of Higher Education is different. That is because its recommendations are many and far-reaching.

Everyone who reads it has a different view on what is important — soaring tuitions to some, academic standards to another, local flexibility to someone else. Pity the poor reader wading through it all!

On today's editorial page, we present the views of three chief administrators of nearby colleges attended by local people. Each agrees with much of the commission report. Each strongly dissents on some points.

LET US TRY to summarize the commission's thinking:

Michigan has long had an excellent system of research universities, general colleges and community colleges. Over the years, however, state aid has shriveled, largely due to demands for social services. Student tuitions have skyrocketed.

Enrollments are shrinking and will shrink even more. Scarce state resources must be focused more sharply, not scattered about. Someone must do that focusing — and since there is no "super board" over higher education, the governor and legislature must do it.

Meanwhile, everyone wants excellence — in research, in teaching, in learning the basics. Once the "basics" were known as the Three R's — reading, 'riting and rithmetic. Today they are the "core" curriculum and include 1) communication skills, 2) mathematics, 3) sciences, 4) social science and history, 4) foreign language and 5) computer literacy.

The feeling is almost universal that high schools, community colleges and four-year colleges must build a solid "core" of academic basics into all programs.

THE GOVERNOR'S commission has outlined an agenda for state government action. Here is its own summary:

- Affordable education, stabilized tuition, more financial aid to qualified students.
- Specified missions for each institution, ending duplication.
- New state funding policies focusing on those missions and tied to enrollments.
- New college admission standards emphasizing "core" curriculum.
- Private and foundation funding to supplement scarce state funds.
- Affirmative action and outreach to minorities, handicapped, women, older and part-time students.
- A data profile on both public and private education — enrollment trends, programs, finances, occupational supplies and demands.
- Community college responsibility for job training, retraining displaced workers and college remedial education.
- Channels to transfer innovation and technology from campus to industry.
- A Washington lobbyist for higher education.
- Cooperative arrangements between campuses to make the most of library, classroom and physical resources.
- A strict limit on most new campus construction; exceptions only where a project can contribute to the state's overall economic well-being.

Higher education clearly will be the top Michigan issue of 1985.

Local autonomy is strong tradition

By Robert F. Roelofs
president,
Oakland Community College

THIS STUDY, like so many of its type, makes a worthy contribution by synthesizing and evaluating ideas which have been pondered informally by education professionals and governmental officials for some years.

At least half of the proposals pertaining to community colleges are so logical and well enunciated that they are readily embraced by the two-year institutions. These include: a) substantial increases in student financial aid, b) enrollment-based formula funding, c) largely confining adult job training to community colleges and d) strengthening presidential leadership.

WE COMMENT further on several of these items — b, c and d.

b) Utilization of a formula in state allocation of financial support to individual colleges is the only method that approaches equity. Formula recognition of enrollment assures that colleges get compensated for, and in proportion to, their commitment to educate students.

c) Presently, Michigan is supporting at least two groups of educational institutions in adult education. Obviously, efficiency would be served by confining this role to one type of school, and it would seem sensible to have that type be one that primarily teaches adults in the first place.

d) Based upon reports heard from my colleagues around the state, many presidents are inordinately busy attempting to placate competing and overlapping authorities among various college-related individuals and bodies. The president's role should not be one of a juggler or a manipulator. Clearly assigning true management prerogatives to the president and staff would eliminate the non-productive uselessness and allow more effort to be devoted to progressive endeavors. We heartily endorse all these commission proposals.

ANOTHER GROUP of recommendations is highly questionable because it tends to diffuse responsibilities between local and centralized authority.

For example, tuition is the one major source of revenue remaining under local control. Tuition is the adjustable element needed to balance budgets. Only local judgment can determine whether district students are willing to pay a certain level of tuition in order to purchase the resulting education and services.

Equally inappropriate would be the intrusion of the State Board of Education into curricular matters, such as program expansion and degree requirements. Apparently the commission is unaware of the study, care and thought applied to new programs, core courses and all curriculum by each college faculty and staff.

Further, this suggestion rather cavalierly tends to allow the attitudes of lay people to supersede the knowledge of professional educators.

WE FULLY recognize there are both advantages and disadvantages inherent in local control and state control. There are, emphatically, only disadvantages to two sources of control contesting with each other for authority.

Michigan community colleges have an entrenched tradition of local autonomy. Since the characteristics of community colleges are adapted to their immediate districts, it is not likely that any centralized body could be effectively familiar with the differing needs of 29 districts.

Centralized organizations can and do possess enlightened conceptions of statewide conditions and requirements. Ironically, that attribute becomes a handicap when it is used to attempt to mold the various areas of the state to a single pattern.

While local responsibility appears to be the preferable alternative, if there is reason for, and insistence upon, concentration of authority in one source, abandoning local governance would be preferable to a dual and thus self-defeating system.

Finally, as far as Oakland Community College itself is concerned, because less than one-fourth of its financial resources are contributed by the state, it would be incongruous to have the state become the dominant force in influencing its administrative or academic direction.

Don't stifle small schools

By Joseph Champagne
president, Oakland University

GENERALLY REGARDED as one of the finest in the United States, Michigan's system of higher education is suffering from our state's fiscal problems.

While the report of the governor's commission has many praiseworthy features, it also falls in many respects.

On the positive side, it calls for long-needed higher education improvements. It emphasizes that good public higher education must be affordable and accessible to the people, high in quality and relevant.

It must contribute to intellectual richness, and to the nature and quality of economic life. It focuses on the need for this state to invest more heavily in its human resources.

BUT THE REPORT fails to recognize the positive accomplishments of the individual institutions and could retard their creativity.

I take exception to its recommendation of a five-tier classification for higher education: 1) nationally recognized research universities, 2) general state universities, 3) regional state colleges (OU), 4)

technical colleges (Ferris, Lake Superior and 5) community colleges.

I would not dispute a system which recognizes the University of Michigan as the flagship state university, flanked by Wayne State and Michigan State.

Beyond that I would categorize all other four-year institutions as what they really are — the state college and university network, pure and simple. Finally, there exists the system of community colleges.

This three-fold classification is publicly understandable and politically defensible. Why go into an elaborate, confusing, ill-conceived, five-tiered scheme?

THE REPORT FAILS to acknowledge the vital importance of the 12 smaller state colleges and universities to economic development. It implies the economic role is the sacred territory of a select few universities.

I categorically disagree with this elitist philosophy. The distinction between technology development and economic development has clearly eluded the commission.

Many smaller universities foster economic growth in their regions. If fully implemented, this report has the potential to stifle their momentum. Witness Oakland University's contribution through the creation of the Oakland Technology Park.

over-emphasized universities' contributions to economic development.

"The report places a heavy emphasis on the role of higher education as an instrument for directly obtaining economic recovery and economic growth in Michigan," Jenkins said.

"While this is an important element in the missions of our colleges and universities, the report seems to neglect the equally important aspect of having an educated citizenry for reasons other than the state's economic health," the U-M-D chancellor said.

In addition, Jenkins said, the emphasis on economic development focuses primarily on the state's "Big Three" research campuses — U-M's Ann Arbor campus, Wayne State University and Michigan State University. "The report spells out in some detail the role which these institutions should play in the system. For the other 12 four-year campuses, including UM-D, the report is somewhat vague."

The report makes several good points and has a few weaknesses, Jenkins said.

THE STRENGTHS include:

- A needed focus on the public higher education system in the state.
- A discussion on the concern for access to higher education, although this discussion is "not strong enough."

All colleges and universities must be full partners in economic development, but a few will and should take the leadership in technology development.

THE REPORT also calls for a return to enrollment-driven funding, but fails to point out the urgency of this need.

At present, a number of universities are funded for thousands of students that do not exist because of their enrollment declines. Several other institutions are not funded for students that do exist on their campuses.

This report should have recommended immediate catch-up funding for those under-funded institutions.

THE REPORT recommends no new construction of facilities unless they meet certain guidelines . . .

What is more essential to a university than an adequate library? I know of one university not included in the recommendations that has no library building!

Additionally, Oakland University's library was designed for 4,000 students, but its student body approximates 12,000. For nearly 10 years, OU has been requesting funds to expand the Kresge Library. While the state has approved the project, it never has approved the funds.

The report is a very good beginning, but only that.

State report 'vague' to UM-D

From the University of Michigan-Dearborn news service.

UM-D CHANCELLOR William A. Jenkins termed the report of the Governor's Commission on Higher Education "somewhat vague" in its application to regional universities.

And he underscored that the report called for no campus closings — a widespread interpretation. Some political observers are reading the report to mean shutting down some campuses such as UM-Dearborn.

"The report does not specifically call for any closings," he said, "and it would be inappropriate to implement its recommendations on that false assumption."

"Ultimately, the governor and the Legislature must act before any of the recommendations can be fulfilled," Jenkins said.

WHILE ENDORSING most of the general findings of the report, Jenkins said it

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With '84
OBSERVER AND
ECCENTRIC PAPERS



Roelofs



Champagne



Jenkins