Make the Most of Tomorrow:

THE CAMPUS OF THE FUTURE

by Karla Hignite

I nstitutions should not assume that since we can't predict the future we should not consider it," asserts sociologist Stephen Steele, director of the Institute for the Future at Anne Arundel Community College (AACC). "Instead, we can use our imagination to anticipate any number of possible, probable, positive, and even preventable futures." Attendees of the joint Campus of the Future conference in Hawaii this past July—hosted by APPA, the National Association of College and University Business Officers, and the Society for College and University Planning—recently did just that. They joined colleagues from their respective institution types (research, comprehensive/doctoral, and small institutions and community colleges) to identify driving forces likely to shape the future of colleges and universities and to develop scenarios depicting what they believe is most likely to occur during the next five to seven years. *(See sidebar, "Conference Results.")*

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The act of futuring encompasses a variety of ways to apply foresight and creativity to a situation that is likely to take place in the short, intermediate, or long-term future, explains Steele. "A key aim of any futuring activity is to address in imaginative and logical ways the possible reality constructions that may act as a magnet for action." The goal is to then take a proactive stance toward the future—to become change capable rather than change averse.

Shaping Tomorrow

"We all will end up somewhere in the future, even if we don't think about it intentionally," says Steele. "If our perception about a particular future is positive, we can take steps to ensure that we are prepared. If the perceived future is undesirable, that likewise can engage us to think and act to bring about a different reality."

Consider that the world has so far avoided a head-to-head nuclear exchange, says Steele. He believes that may stem in part from scenarios developed in the 1960s by Herman Kahn, a military strategist, futurist, and founder of the Hudson Institute. Kahn's scenarios depicted how horrific the future would be in the aftermath of a nuclear war, and enough consensus emerged from society at large that the world should not allow this to happen, says Steele.

A more recent example Steele points to is Al Gore's lecture series and book and movie of the same title, *An Inconvenient Truth*. "Whatever you may think about the reality or politics of global climate change, this paints one scenario with the potential to impact societal behavior and strategy going forward," says Steele.

That same shaping of behavior and strategy can happen for institutions, organizations, and communities willing to reflect seriously on potential realities. No matter the challenge, an important starting point for any futuring activity is to recognize that organizations have their own inertia, cultures, and histories. When it comes to the future, it is far too easy to simply continue with a same-as-last-year approach—perhaps with a little extra stretch or growth, says Steele. *Preferred* futures require anticipatory thinking and action.

From Scenario to Strategy

One tangible way for institutions to put a futuring activity to use is within a strategic planning context. "Fifteen years ago if you were deciding as an institution how much to spend on IT infrastructure, your response would have been different based on whether you perceived technology as becoming ubiquitous or you imagined that paper and pen would still rule," says Phyllis Grummon, SCUP director of planning and education. "The particular future you envisioned ultimately shaped how—and how quickly—your institution moved forward with everything from wiring residence halls to training faculty to teach online courses." Building scenarios can also help leaders assess institutional strengths and how to maintain core competencies no matter what unfolds, says Grummon.

Leaders can help move discussion from scenarios to strategies and strengths with questions that reflect on how institutions should respond.
- What does the future of higher education look like for our region, our type of institution, and for our individual institution?
- Which scenario is most likely to occur? Which scenario is most desirable?
- Is it to our advantage to create this future? Do we want to make any part of this scenario not happen?
- What can we as an institution do to bring about this future?
- What strategies will steer our institution successfully through this scenario?
- What actions should we take now?
- What contingencies must we prepare for?
- How does this scenario tap into our core competencies and strengths? What weaknesses must we first address?

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To be most effective, futuring activities such as scenario building must be integrated into long-term strategic planning and budgeting processes, believes Steele. "When scenarios are assessed, ranked, reflected on, and used to create actual goals, they provide a shared view about institutional priorities." That itself presumes the need to revisit the future on an ongoing basis to update plans and budgets, says Steele. At his own institution, monitoring of future forces and impacts is accomplished through collaboration between AACC's Institute for the Future and its institutional research office, but every institution can put in place an informal group of futures-focused faculty and staff, says Steele.

Building a Better Reality

One key question about futures-focused thinking is how far to expand the group of people to involve. Often, the wider you can cast your net, the better, believes Steele. "Where one individual or one department might not see a particular scenario, many will identify a trend. The idea-gathering process brings to light certain possibilities that none of us will typically see on our own." While institutions benefit from internal scenario building, including your larger local community can also yield valuable outcomes, says Steele.

In any futuring process, drivers and scenarios will emerge that seem obvious and are widely held in common, but other isolated or weak signals may also surface, says Steele. "These

aren't weak in the sense of being unimportant. It could be that they simply aren't yet recognized by a majority." Take for instance the growing use of electronic devices by K-12 students for everyday communication. Several years ago, that may not have made the radar for most of us, says Steele. Yet, the reality of those technology preferences is now spelling necessary change for how institutions of higher education must continue to adapt their approaches to teaching and customer service for the future.

For those new to futuring, looking too far ahead may seem overwhelming, says Steele. As an institution engages in ongoing futuring activities, it's most helpful to look near and far—as far out as 25 years, suggests Steele. "Most institutions can't act on what they may envision 25 hence, because it's too fuzzy." Even so, entertaining that cone of uncertainty is quite valuable in setting a course even for the short term, argues Steele.

"Consider the possibility that artificial intelligence will replace your faculty," says Steele. In a five- to seven-year time frame, that would seem laughable to most people. But when you try to imagine how education delivery might occur 20 years from now, there may be greater consensus about the likelihood that this could happen at least on some level. "Current planners may not focus on artificial intelligence

today, but they need to have that idea out there so they continue thinking about it and adjusting for it for the long term," says Steele.

Another example is considering the possibility that additional physical infrastructure won't be needed on many campuses because of an increased prevalence of online and distance learning. In an online world, what should a learning environment look like, and who will populate that learning environment? "We have to increasingly think in those terms with the infrastructure and budget decisions we make today," says Steele.

Proactive Posture

An academy without walls may seem a frightening prospect to many, but institution leaders don't have to be frightened about the next era of higher education if they begin thinking about potential futures and responses to remain relevant, says Steele. For him, the best way to develop good strategies is to have many ideas.

Tapping the collective brainpower of all individuals within an organization or a community provides a powerful resource for shaping the future you want, says Steele. "Good leadership demands futures thinking."

Conference Results

In total, 1,004 Campus of the Future conference attendees participated in the scenario-building exercise. Representation included approximately 30 percent from research institutions, 28 percent from comprehensive/doctoral institutions, 27 percent from small institutions, and 15 percent from community colleges. The exercise asked participants to identify key drivers of change, develop scenarios based on the intersection of two prominent drivers, and select which of the four resulting scenarios they believed most likely to occur during the next five to seven years. Several sub-themes of note emerged from the scenarios developed: the likelihood of future mergers or consolidation among institutions, a need for institutional branding, and survival going to those institutions that are most technologically fit.

"Not knowing how this might play out with such a large group, we were pleased that there did emerge some consensus in terms of major drivers of change identified," says Susan Jurow, NACUBO senior vice president of professional development and communications. Jurow was likewise pleased that participants expressed strong interest in applying a similar scenario-building technique on their campuses.

Themes. As a whole, participants selected *rising student expectations* as the top driving force of change. (When combined with the related driving force of *rising consumer expectations,* the general notion of "rising expectations" was a clear concern.) Across all types of institution, driving forces consistently picked as top shapers of the future included *increased competition, technological change,* and *population changes.* In building their scenarios, many groups paired technological change and *increased competition* as the two key forces driving change in their institutions.

Nuance. Some groups reworded the driving forces provided to expand or clarify the focus of their scenarios. For instance, the "global" concept from *global economy* became global outreach, global resource demands, global access and competition for students and faculty, and globalization in general. Most groups that marked *energy* and *environment* as driving forces combined the two in their scenarios. Many groups that combined *rising student expectations* and *rising consumer expectations* in fact expanded the category to more broadly include *stakeholder* expectations to cover consumers, students, faculty, staff, parents, donors, and the community at large. Many also revised the wording from *rising* expectations to *shifting* or *emerging* expectations. Likewise, some specified enrollment *challenges,* not *enrollment declines* only. And finally, many expanded the concept of *population changes* to include concepts of changing demographics in general, such as an *aging workforce* (a separate category on the worksheet) and the diversity of students, faculty, and staff.

Off-the-list thinking. In building their scenarios, participants were encouraged to add to the list of driving forces provided on the worksheet. Here are some of the additional forces indicated by type of institution.

- *Research institutions:* human capital development, knowledge decentralization, increasing obsolescence, academic capitalism, delivery mechanisms, public policy regarding scientific research, availability of qualified students and staff, economic development, and increased competition for faculty.
- *Comprehensive/doctoral institutions:* diverse student needs, competition for talent, sustainability, increasing importance of experiential learning, local market environment and climate, productivity, market forces changing education delivery, and skills necessary to deliver education.
- *Small institutions:* faculty/staff housing, external expectations, affordability, impact of governing boards/trustees on operations, delivery of education services, institutional inertia, and collaborative learning.
- *Community colleges:* expectation of 24/7 access, sustainability, lack of preparation in K-12 students, institutional rigidity, developing more commitments from external stakeholders, market forces, delivery of learning, ever-changing community needs/demands, workforce development needs, program offerings, minority access, and facilities expansion.■

Institution Scenarios

After selecting two driving forces, conference participants developed scenarios based on the intersection of those forces along a high/low axis and then identified the scenario they believed would be most likely to occur during the next five to seven years. What follows is a sampling of scenarios developed by institution type.

Research Institutions

- *Changing student expectations* (high) *and external mandates* (high): External mandates hamstring universities and prevent them from meeting expectations of increasingly demanding students and the research choices of faculty. Result: Further proliferation of alternative types and locations of institutions or shrinkage of the role of American research universities as students and faculty seek more accommodating environments to achieve objectives. Student and faculty makeup will change as more go overseas, yielding more niche institutions at home.
- *Increased competition* (high) and *energy/environment* (high): More international students stay in their home countries. International competition soars, with dramatic failures of some universities. Institutions will have to prioritize, focus on education, and outsource other functions. Competition for faculty becomes fierce. Some institutions share faculty, close down some majors. Organizations combine for economies of scale. Universities are forced to move quickly toward sustainable, efficient buildings. More housing is needed since fewer students want to commute.

Comprehensive/Doctoral Institutions

- *Increased competition* (high) and *technological change* (low): Competition is fierce since institutions can't succeed at utilizing technology. Some institutions soar, some flop. The gap widens. Some small private and state systems fold. Several regional systems grow mega, including SUNY and California.
- *Population changes* (high) and *technological change* (high): Immigration laws and patterns continue to introduce large numbers of new students from other cultures who may not speak English as a first language. Technological changes put pressures on

institutions in terms of providing current infrastructure, equipment, and training for students. Student learning stratifies as brightest students keep up and less trained fall behind.

Small Institutions

- *Rising student expectations* (high) and *increased government regulation* (high): The only institutions that can afford to meet both forces are the elite and very wealthy, creating a class-divided education system. Two types of institutions emerge: those providing student-centered education and those delivering training while meeting the administrative requirements of governmental regulations. For institutions forced to deal with administrative requirements (and where student expectations take a back seat), dollars are shifted from faculty and student services to administrative/regulatory compliance staff. Institutions resemble the DMV.
- *Rising consumer expectations* (high) and *technological change* (low): Small colleges will prosper because they are better able to deliver on expectations. Desire for human interaction, increased socialization, and citizenship responsibility to the world means a focus on technology as a tool. Institutions can catch up with technology, focus resources on other things.

Community Colleges

- *Increased competition* (high) and *technological change* (high): For survival mode, institutions must be nimble and early adopters, with large investments in technology. Would need to operate within a true business model, willing to invest in risk, and create collaborative partnerships with private organizations to maintain cutting-edge technology.
- *Enrollment declines* (high) and *global economy* (high): With declining enrollment, little opportunity exists to turn enrollment around within local economy. Community colleges risk becoming irrelevant. Flexibility and agility are required to answer demand for skill-set enhancement. As enrollments decline, community colleges may explore international markets, which change and challenge their existing roles.■

How to Bring the Future Home

Get your campus charged up for what's beyond the horizon. Focused "what if" thinking can help your institution shape its future reality.

Focus on Process

From the outset, planning for the Campus of the Future scenario-building exercise was based on the premise that process is as important as product. "Because of the unique makeup of this joint conference, we wanted an experiential learning activity that would encourage colleagues from different institution roles to interact and share perspectives," says SCUP's Phyllis Grummon.

One decision made upfront to streamline the process was to provide participants with a list of driving forces so they would not have to brainstorm them from scratch, though participants were encouraged to add to the list. Logistical decisions ranged from the ideal number of participants per group to the number of tables per room. A more weighty decision centered on how to categorize participants. "We decided to organize by type of institution," says NACUBO's Susan Jurow. "Dividing participants by geographic region or by size of institution might have produced different outcomes that would have been equally interesting, but we were curious to see how responses would vary by institution type."

Early on, the conference program advisory committee met with representatives from the National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education (NCCI) to design and fine-tune the idea and to right size the exercise in a way that would be workable. NCCI also provided many of the small group facilitators to keep participants on pace throughout the 90-minute process. Prior to the conference, Jurow and Grummon tested the exercise with various groups from NACUBO and SCUP. "The benefit for institutions is that they can go far beyond the initial discussion we could accommodate at the conference," says Jurow. Adds Grummon: "Even if you don't do anything beyond creating scenarios, getting people to think about the future in other than reactive terms allows them to start developing a positive mindset about the future."

More Methods and Techniques

Following are a handful of other futures-focused resources to guide your campus activities.

- *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World,* by Peter Schwartz, is considered by many as the ultimate resource for futures thinking and scenario building (Doubleday, 1991). Another good book is *Learning From the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios,* edited by Liam Fahey and Robert M. Randall (John Wiley & Sons, 1998).
- In addition to the scenario-building approach, many other methods exist for gathering ideas and data to think strategically about the future and to position institutions to succeed in their planning efforts. One great resource is the World Future Society, which provides an overview of methods at www.wfs.org/futuringmethods.htm.
- Descriptions of a scenario-building process at the University of Michigan are available at www.si.umich.edu/V2010/scenproc.html.
- Descriptions of techniques from a University of Arizona course are available at www.ag.arizona.edu/futures/tou/sem2-techniques.html.
- The Institute for the Future at Anne Arundel Community College provides resources, courses, and services. Go to www.aacc.edu/future.■