



Faculty **S**enate

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SPECIAL FACULTY SENATE MEETING

THURSDAY DECEMBER 3, 1998

MEETING 1:30 P.M. – 3:00 P.M.

UC BALLROOM

AGENDA

- Discussion with Dr. Gordon Davies, President, Kentucky Council of Postsecondary Education

**Governor's Conference on Postsecondary Education Trusteeship
September 28, 1998**

***Remarks by Gordon K. Davies
President, Council on Postsecondary Education***

During the past three months I have visited 32 of the Commonwealth's 36 state-supported colleges and universities, and half of the 20 independent institutions. I have met with faculty and staff on many campuses, and with community leaders, public school educators, and elected representatives as well. While my knowledge of Kentucky is by no means deep, it is at least a mile wide.

This morning, as this important conference draws to a close, I am privileged to share with you some first impressions and then to suggest several activities in which I think we all need to be engaged during the next 8 to 10 months. As you will see, these activities presuppose different kinds of behavior within the system of postsecondary education and are intended to stimulate even more changes in behavior. I think this is essential. We shall not build distinctive colleges and universities or a distinctive system by behaving as we always have. Indeed, if we will not change our behavior, we will not be able to do several of the things I am suggesting.

First, my general impression after three months in Kentucky is very positive. There is an enormous amount of enthusiasm and energy in the institutions and communities of Kentucky. Here, as elsewhere in the country, I never visit a campus without finding exciting and creative activity among faculty and staff.

The staffs and faculty of the technical and community colleges, especially, seem anxious to cooperate in ways that will improve the programs they offer, give students more options, and make it easier for them to progress through a series of institutions toward ever-higher academic goals. People in many of these institutions seem to be waiting only for central bureaucracies to get out of their way so that they can do what needs to be done. They are talking and their relationships are very good. In some localities, they have been cooperating for years.

I found a deeply rooted belief that advanced education is the way our children and grandchildren will achieve better lives. Even without knowing exactly how or why this will happen, people believe that education beyond high school - advanced education - is our last best hope. This belief is a tremendous asset. But it also imposes an enormous responsibility upon us.

In the same localities and institutions where I found enthusiasm, energy, and creativity, I also found some disturbing signs. Chief among these are a tendency

toward turf protection and a fixation upon acquiring and owning physical assets rather than upon providing services. I now have listened to more than one discussion of whether some Kentucky city or county "belongs" to this or that university. And I have heard other discussions about who would "own" some off-campus building or another.

Who owns a building is a trivial matter. What is important is how well people are being served. Some institutions seem too anxious to protect territory while others seem inclined to offer programs at remote sites that unnecessarily duplicate those of other institutions. Both behaviors waste state money.

I also found need for greater civility within our system of colleges and universities. Sometimes we behave like a bunch of hungry children at a table. We are more intent upon stealing food off one another's plates than upon working together in order to ensure that there is enough to nourish everyone.

Governor Patton spoke last night of Kentucky's great progress during the past year and of the miles to go before we reach our goal. I shall not repeat him but add my congratulations on your collective achievements. Kentucky is on the move; there is no question of that.

But by themselves, our achievements to date are not enough to change and improve our system of advanced education. Between now and July 1999, I suggest that we must undertake several other activities.

First, we need to rationalize funding. As far as I can tell, neither the allocation of operating funds nor the appropriation of funds for capital outlay has any systematic, educational basis. As a result, funding inequities have developed across institutions and the current "base-plus-increment" approach to operating budgets only increases the inequities. In addition, the technical colleges now are part of the system and we have to seek equity in funding for them.

We also need space planning guidelines and space utilization standards. With them, the Council on Postsecondary Education could make much better recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly about the priority needs of Kentucky's colleges and universities. Without them, capital outlay decisions have little if any educational rationale. Buildings become "trophies" of success in a budget session.

Second, our relationship to the public schools should have a much higher priority than it does. The performance of children in grades K - 12 is not just someone else's problem. It is ours.

Our universities should be engaged in radical reform of teacher preparation programs. Ask about the proficiency of your institution's mathematics, science, and English teachers, as measured by national exams. Without exception, it is woeful. The

quality of Kentucky's teacher preparation programs is a good indicator of the quality of its universities.

You can help to change student behavior in middle and high schools by establishing more rigorous admissions standards at your universities. We should emphasize the need for quantitative experience in mathematics and the sciences as important for success in a technologically sophisticated society.

Our colleges and universities have strong intellectual resources and could provide leadership in setting public policy. Their strengths, and the Council's, should be directed toward public schooling and, indeed, toward the well being of children of all ages.

Third, we need to streamline the oversight of Kentucky's colleges and universities. This will require the Council to change the way it does its work and possibly to request changes in the responsibilities assigned to it by statute. We want, for instance, to deregulate the program approval process to let institutions make most of the decisions. But this will require you, as trustees and regents, to exercise more responsibility in deciding what institutions do. You will have to discharge responsibility for educating the people of Kentucky, not just for the interests of one institution.

Colleges and universities will not become distinctive by regulation or top-down control. Experience in the private sector seems to confirm that organizations that spread decision-making responsibility through all levels of management get more creative and entrepreneurial behavior as a result. The Council on Postsecondary Education should invest in good ideas, challenge institutions to do better, mediate the conflicts that are inevitable when choices have to be made among good ideas, and develop performance standards that have funding and other resource consequences.

A more market-driven approach requires that all of us ensure that educational opportunities are available to everyone. Markets are not kind to the poor or needy. It also requires us to recognize that there will be winners and losers in the competition among good ideas. We shall have to make policy decisions about the extent to which relatively less efficient providers of advanced education nonetheless serve a public purpose.

In streamlining oversight, I have suggested that the Council ask two questions about its activities:

1. Does this activity as currently performed add value to Kentucky postsecondary education?
2. Will this activity stimulate change and improvement within the system of postsecondary education?

You might ask these same questions about the activities of the institutions for which you are responsible. If the answer is "no," the activity should be stopped or made a low priority.

Fourth, we should set fair but rigorous performance objectives for colleges and universities. The allocation of funds and other resources should be linked to institutional performance.

Many states already are doing this and most are doing it poorly. I know that Kentucky has had its own unsatisfactory experiences with performance funding. But results must have consequences, or results will not matter. Our objectives need to be few and simple, and their relationship to funds and other resources needs to be reasonable and understandable.

In the short term, for example, university funding should be tied to retention and graduation rates as well as to enrollment. Ask about your institution's retention and graduation rates. Without exception, they are woeful.

Community and technical college funding should be tied to successful job placement or transfer as well as to enrollment.

In evaluating requests for capital outlay funding, as another example, priority should be given to requests from institutions that now use their space most intensively.

There are long-term standards as well. We have undertaken this reform effort in order to improve the lives of Kentuckians – better jobs, higher per capita incomes, healthier children, better schools, and stronger communities. The Council should develop ways in which we can assess whether advanced education really does help to achieve goals like these. I believe, of course, that it does. But the motives behind this reform compel us to prove it.

Finally, the Council should develop a "Consumers' Report" about Kentucky's colleges and universities for students, parents, business leaders, and others. It probably should be interactive, and it should include detailed information about what kinds of students go to our various institutions, how they are taught and by whom, what percentage of them finish their programs of study, and so on.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are a few of the things I think we need to do together. I suggest a streamline, entrepreneurial, more market-responsive approach to managing a system of postsecondary education and its colleges and universities. This approach won't work unless the colleges and universities themselves and the advocates for both institutional and local interests behave civilly and with restraint toward one another. It won't work unless you, as regents and trustees, discharge your

responsibilities with the big picture in mind, knowing that what finally matters is not acquiring resources and power but bettering the lives of everyone in Kentucky.

I propose that we break from bureaucracy because bureaucracy does not give us the capacity to respond quickly and creatively to unanticipated changes. But bureaucracy can ensure orderly processes and equitable distribution of resources, even at the cost of flexibility and creativity. If we cannot behave well toward one another, it may be impossible to relax the bureaucratic approach to postsecondary education. If we have to strengthen a bureaucratic approach, Kentucky postsecondary education probably won't get any better but we can make it more orderly.

Let's be honest about where we are and the kind of system we have. By almost every measure, Kentucky postsecondary education is at best mediocre. At best, we are in the middle of the pack.

But "mediocre" has a general meaning in higher education. Almost always, mediocre institutions are those in which excellent resources, especially people, are not used to maximum effect. The result is that the energy is dissipated, if not wasted entirely.

I am criticizing past behavior, to some extent. But more important, I am suggesting that the world has changed and is changing faster than colleges and universities everywhere. We are not alone among states, but our competitive advantage will come from recognizing and acting vigorously to create the kinds of institutions our children and grandchildren will need 20 years from now.

As telegraph wires were being strung across the west, the pony express reacted vigorously. It hired better riders and bought faster horses. But to no avail.

We are not going to create distinguished universities, community and technical colleges by doing what we always have done but just a little better.

We have an unusual, even a remarkable, opportunity to help define what institutions of advanced learning should look like in the early years of the next century. Then we have an opportunity to make Kentucky's colleges and universities leaders among them. We have many of the resources we need if we organize ourselves to make maximum use of them.

Our effort will mean nothing unless we remember why we are doing what we are doing. Let me remind you of a story told by a thinker who helped to create the intellectual traditions of western civilization. In the Republic, Plato asks us to imagine a cave in which all of humanity sits, our heads fixed toward the wall at the end of the cave and our arms and legs manacled. All we see are the shadows of objects carried

back and forth behind us in front of a large fire. These shadows are, to us, the real world.

Suppose that several of us are freed from our shackles and led up toward the mouth of the cave. What would be our reaction? We would feel pain, of course, because direct sunlight would hurt our eyes. We would feel great fear, because we can no longer see those things, those shadows, which we have taken to be real. We would be reluctant to go.

But, on reaching the mouth of the cave and looking out, we would see the sun and the moon, rivers, fields and mountains, and we would know that we had been freed to see the real world, to see the truth.

Then what, Plato asks, is our responsibility? We must, he says, go back into the cave and tell others what we have seen. They will not want to hear our message because it conflicts with the reality they know. They are apt to reject us, and even to turn against us. The Greeks killed Socrates.

But we are nonetheless called because we are privileged to have been freed from the shackles of ignorance and taken to the mouth of the cave. We are called not to rest until everyone has been freed.

Will we succeed? Not entirely. There always will be some who will not leave the comfort and security of their chains. There always will be some who will be careless of the next generation after receiving the privilege for themselves. But a great moralist once put it this way: "Perhaps we cannot make this a world in which children do not suffer. But we can lessen the number of suffering children. And if you and I do not do this, who will?"

This is a very serious business, the business in which you and I are engaged. We don't have time for petty, Mickey Mouse maneuverings against one another. We don't have assets – people, money, buildings, and equipment – to squander in foolish rivalries between cities and regions. We have a sacred trust that transcends infinitely the games and feuds that have left us mired in mediocrity.

This is not a job we have. It is a work. We are engaged in a profoundly ethical undertaking. If all of us here today and the faculty and staffs of our colleges and universities do not go back into the cave to free others from their shackles of ignorance, who will?

That's our calling. I hope you will join with me in rising to it. Thank you very much.