

# News

## from the Illinois Board of Higher Education

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### **IBHE CHAIR URGES NEW DIRECTION IN EDUCATION PRIORITIES**

#### **College is key to meeting workforce, state economic needs, Hightman says**

CHICAGO – The state needs to change its thinking, broaden its vision, and act more strategically if it is to meet the education and workforce needs of its citizens in a rapidly changing global economy, Carrie Hightman, Chairwoman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, said today.

Hightman, addressing a statewide conference of the Illinois Association of Graduate Schools at Loyola University Chicago, told the audience that higher education must have a more prominent role in state education and economic priorities for Illinois to sustain a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

Noting that Illinois higher education is “at a critical crossroads,” Hightman said policymakers must leave the “path of complaisance” for a new direction “of opportunity, economic growth, social progress, and prosperity for the state and its citizens.”

Hightman, the former president of AT&T Illinois, was appointed Chairwoman of the Board of Higher Education by Governor Blagojevich in February 2007.

In her Loyola address, she noted that there is broad agreement that higher education has personal value to those who earn a degree – a person with a bachelor’s degree will earn 73 percent more – or about \$700,000 – over a lifetime of work than someone with just a high school diploma. Graduate degrees magnify that earnings differential.

But she also noted that there is growing skepticism that higher education is regarded as a “public good” with a measurable value to society and the state, even though statistics show that the state’s higher education system contributes \$33 billion a year to the Illinois economy,

supports nearly 400,000 jobs, and returns, on average, \$2.50 in tax revenue to state and local governments for each dollar invested in colleges and universities.

She noted that the state clearly values its higher education system because it will spend more than \$2.5 billion in public funds on colleges and universities, student financial aid, grant programs, pension benefits, and health care.

But, she asked, “Do we understand and appreciate that college is the gateway to a vibrant economy, to a healthier society, to a dynamic culture, to better schools and safer neighborhoods and more charitable, engaged citizens?”

“Does the state value higher education *enough*?”

She pointed out that state support for community colleges and public universities has fallen over the past fifteen years, and that families are bearing an increasing share of the financial burden of a college education. “In 2000, Illinois was on the honor roll in the affordability of a college education,” Hightman said. But in the 2006 national report card the state received a F in affordability. “College in Illinois has become less affordable for middle- and low-income families.”

Hightman said that such trends are the result of national and international economic forces beyond the control of the state’s elected leaders, but also urged a change of course.

“First, we need an attitude adjustment,” she noted, “an avowal of value” from elected officials, business and labor executives, civic and community leaders, and educators that “education, from preschool to graduate school, is a *public* good.

“Healthcare for all is a noble public purpose. Effective K-12 schools are a fundamental public responsibility. Jobs are a vital public goal. And an affordable, accessible college degree is an essential public good,” Hightman said.

The Chairwoman also noted that policymakers must “enlarge our vision” to regard education as a “P-20” stream, unbroken from preschool to graduate school. Such a broadened view is required, she said, to recognize both the connectedness of all levels of the education pipeline and the growing need for workers to have some postsecondary credentials to prosper in the modern economy.

Hightman praised passage of legislation to create a P-20 Council in Illinois, a broad-based group education, business, and civic stakeholders, designed to coordinate policies to promote effective schools, college access and success, evidence-based initiatives to improve student performance and transitions, lifelong learning, and affordability.

And she lauded another key legislative measure – House Joint Resolution 69 – that directs the Board of Higher Education to develop a public agenda for higher education through

creation of the Task Force on Higher Education and the Economy, an endeavor aimed at enabling state leaders to plan more strategically for the educational needs of Illinois citizens.

“We need a plan,” Hightman said. “Right now, I have more questions than answers.” For example, she asked:

- How can we expand access to college for all who need it, while maintaining high standards of quality?
- How can we ensure that college is affordable without placing a financial stranglehold on institutions?
- How can we broaden the reach of postsecondary education to nontraditional students?
- How can we balance the forces of the rapidly expanding higher education marketplace with our duty to protect consumers?
- How must colleges and universities adapt their roles and responsibilities to prepare citizens to compete in a dynamic global economy?
- How can we foster public/private partnerships to meet the needs of employers while sustaining the scholarly mission of the academy?
- Who pays and how much and for what results in the new P-20 environment of schooling?

Hightman said the public agenda envisioned in the legislative resolution, which passed unanimously by the House and Senate, will be a cornerstone for setting a new direction for higher education. “There is perhaps no greater or more urgent imperative than this,” she said.

A higher education public agenda, Hightman said, “will enable legislators, the Governor, and education policymakers to focus on setting priorities, coordinating policies, and devoting resources to meet the workforce and educational needs of citizens.

“And it will hold us accountable for the prudent and effective use of public dollars and justify the investment that we strongly believe the state should make in higher education in Illinois.”

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**ILLINOIS HIGHER EDUCATION:  
CHANGING DIRECTION FOR A CHANGING WORLD**

**Carrie Hightman  
Loyola University of Chicago  
October 22, 2007**

First, I would like to thank Father Garanzini and Dean Attoh for the opportunity to visit with you this afternoon and share my thoughts about the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the future of our higher education enterprise in Illinois, and what I see as some imminent challenges and opportunities.

I want to compliment Loyola University, not just because it is polite to compliment our host, but because Loyola *lives its mission* to challenge students to “learn broadly, to think critically, to serve generously, to lead with integrity and to respect diversity.” This is a wonderful institution and it is fortunate to have a leader like Father Garanzini who has been a creative and dedicated partner in working to improve education for all citizens at all levels.

I also want to pay tribute to the Graduate School at Loyola University Chicago, which fosters interdisciplinary research projects that work toward building community, promoting social justice, addressing the complex problems that confront society, and promoting global awareness. In the last year, graduate students at Loyola contributed to research activity totaling \$40 million and served as role models in baccalaureate classes and in laboratories, where they make real contributions to the academic experiences of undergraduates.

On behalf of the Board of Higher Education, we are grateful to each of you for the fine work that you do and for the absolutely pivotal role you play, not just in higher education, but in the much larger sphere of the economic vitality and social wellbeing of the state and its citizens. You train the professionals – doctors, lawyers, scientists, architects, business executives, artists, musicians and authors – who make valuable contributions to our quality of life. You conduct research that often leads to scientific breakthroughs, medical miracles, advances in technology and increased productivity. But you already know that, and you have many people on your agenda to speak about the value of and challenges confronting graduate education.

What I am here to discuss with you is a broader vision of higher education. Graduate studies are a critical cog in that larger machine, but it is the machine – which is greater and ultimately more important than the sum of its individual parts – that I want to focus on this afternoon.

I’ve entitled my remarks, “Illinois Higher Education: Changing Direction for a Changing World,” because I think we are at a critical crossroads, a place that Joe White, president of the University of Illinois, has called “the tipping point.”

What is that crossroads? One direction continues us down the path we have traveled for the past several years. It is the path of complaisance, the path of least resistance, and the path we cannot continue to pursue if we want our citizens to succeed, to compete and to prosper.

Let me be clear: I point no fingers. I did not come here to wring my hands in despair or in woe-is-us frustration. I am still a relative neophyte as a policymaker in higher education. I joined the Board of Higher Education as its Chairwoman in February of this year.

My background is in law and business. Yet, you don't need to be a Nobel economist from the University of Chicago or an MBA from Loyola or a product of one of your fine graduate schools to understand what has happened to the national and state economies since the clock chimed in a new millennium or to grasp the devastating consequences that the economic roller coaster has had on our state government and the programs and services it supports.

The past several years have been difficult for the state and the people who rely on it for essential services, and no one is at fault. We get that. I am not here to cast blame. I am here to help us look into the future . . . to set us on a new course.

As I said: I believe we are at a critical crossroads, and if we take the right direction we can get to a better place, not just for institutions of higher learning, but for their students. If we make the right choices and move in the right direction we will be able to provide a better future for those who pass through our classrooms and laboratories and graduate seminars. This will lead to opportunity, economic growth, social progress and prosperity for the state and its citizens. But we have to choose the right path.

There is no dispute – *none* – that a college degree is a valuable commodity for the individual who earns it. We know that over a lifetime of work:

- a person with a bachelor's degree will earn 73% more than a person without one;
- a person with a master's degree will earn twice what a high school graduate can expect to earn; and
- if you have a doctorate or a professional degree, your earning power will be magnified two to three times.

Without question, a college degree has personal value. You go to college, you get smarter, you gain skills and knowledge and social savvy, you become more marketable, more valuable to employers, your earning power rises, you buy the house or car or iPod of your dreams . . . depending on your aspirations and which field of graduate study you pursue.

But are there broader benefits of a college degree? Does higher education have a measurable value to society and the state? Is there anyone here who does not think that higher education adds value to our economy, our culture, and our society?

I didn't see any hands go up, but let's allow the facts to speak for themselves:

- FACT: Illinois higher education generates \$33 billion-a-year in economic activity in the state.
- FACT: More than 380,000 jobs in Illinois are dependent, directly or indirectly, on colleges and universities.
- FACT: More than 800,000 students are enrolled in Illinois colleges and universities this year. It would take an investment of \$65 billion today to equal the extra earnings that *this year of college* will bring these students over their lifetime of work.
- FACT: Counting taxes on increased earnings, wealth and spending by college grads, each dollar invested in higher education will return approximately \$2.50 to state and local governments.

So, as we attorneys like to say, case closed, right? Not so fast. If higher education is such an economic pearl to the state of Illinois, then why haven't we exactly been feeling the love? Why do we quibble and quarrel over what amounts to chump change in a multi-billion dollar state budget?

Clearly, the State of Illinois values its higher education system – it will spend more than \$2.5 billion this year on colleges and universities, financial aid and grant programs, pension benefits and health care. But does the state value higher education enough? Or has the State of Illinois – as seems to be the case in some states – in effect made a policy decision that, in the words of one public university president: “Public higher education is no longer considered part of the public good.”

Can this be true?

Do we believe – as a culture and a society – in the *public* good of higher education? Do we understand and appreciate that college is the gateway to a vibrant economy, to a healthier society, to a dynamic culture, to better schools and safer neighborhoods and more charitable, engaged citizens?

Here are some additional facts, not so salubrious:

- FACT: When adjusted for inflation, state support for public universities in fiscal 2008 is \$97 million, or 6%, less than in fiscal 1993; for community colleges, 4% less (excluding adult ed); for state grant programs, 38% less.

- **FACT:** In fiscal 1993, state support comprised 73% of public university resources; today, it is 55%. In contrast, 15 years ago, tuition made up about a quarter of university resources; today, it is nearly half. State general fund support for community colleges has demonstrated a similar, if less severe, trend line.
- **FACT:** It is true that many states have experienced similar fiscal trauma, and while state support for Illinois higher education during the economic downturn is generally in line with our Midwestern neighbors, we have lagged far behind the national average of increases in state resources devoted to higher education between 2000 and 2007.
- **FACT:** In 1990, about 13 cents of every state general fund dollar went to higher education, while nearly 27 cents of every dollar went to elementary/secondary schools. Today, less than 8 cents on the general fund dollar goes to higher ed, while just over 31 cents is spent on the K-12 system. Since 1990, state tax appropriations to higher education have fallen by more than 17%; appropriations to elementary/secondary schools have risen 63%.
- **FACT:** In 2000, Illinois was on the honor roll in affordability of a college education, in the first Measuring Up report card issued by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. In 2006, we received an F, and while I won't bore you with the grisly details of that demise, the conclusion is downright chilling: College in Illinois has become less affordable for middle and low income families.

Where do these facts lead us? One path is the gnashing of teeth and the wringing of hands. Rather than go that route, I would suggest we try a different path. Here's what I propose.

**First, we need an attitude adjustment.**

We need an avowal of value – a clear, forceful, enthusiastic, unequivocal, shout-it-from-the-rooftops declaration from our elected officials, our business and labor executives, our civic and community leaders, our teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, instructors, professors, provosts, presidents, boards of trustees that education, from preschool to graduate school, is a public good.

Not because we need to feel good about who we are and what we do, but because saying it is the first step in committing to it.

Healthcare for all is a noble public purpose. Effective K-12 schools are a fundamental public responsibility. Jobs are a vital public goal. So too is an affordable, accessible college degree an essential public good.

We need to say it, believe it, and make sure that our elected officials buy into this principle so that it becomes a guiding principle for our policies, our budgets and our priorities.

**Second, we must enlarge our vision.**

Earlier, I noted that graduate education is an important cog in the higher education machine. For a long time, many in higher education have regarded that machine, if you will, as a self-perpetuating and increasingly self-sustaining enterprise. So long as the K-12 system continued to churn out graduates – no matter how well or ill-prepared – we would keep producing college graduates no matter how many might fall by the wayside along the way.

We must enlarge that vision, not only for self-preservation but because such a parochial view of the world is no longer realistic, is no longer productive, and certainly no longer serves the interests of the state or its citizens.

This past spring the General Assembly passed, and in September the Governor signed, House Bill 1648, colloquially known as the “P-20 Council” bill. P, as in preschool. 20, as in graduate school. Council, as in a statewide vehicle to drive policy, develop initiatives, coordinate agendas, and generally make sense of a “system” of 840-some school districts and 184 public and private, two-year and four-year, nonprofit and proprietary colleges and universities.

It will be a broad-based council comprised of a comprehensive and balanced group of educational stakeholders, including legislators, elementary and higher education faculty, staff and policymakers, parents, and business and civic leaders.

The council will do many things, including:

- focus on college access and success – promoting high standards, a rigorous curriculum and readiness for college;
- use data to drive its agenda;
- promote lifelong learning – a necessity in today’s economy; and
- help ease the transition to college and reduce remediation, which will reduce tuition costs.

This is an enormous step forward for Illinois. It will lead us to broaden our vision, to be inclusive, to seek systemic solutions to common challenges and forge partnerships to get the job done. It will remind all that higher education is just as important as K-12 in meeting the needs of the state’s citizens, a fact that has too often been overlooked by policymakers.

I'm sad to report that thirty other states have beaten us to the punch in creating P-20 councils, but I'm pleased that we'll finally be there with them and I congratulate the Governor and members of the General Assembly for their foresight in approving this important legislation.

**Third, we need a plan.**

Right now, I have more questions than answers, and it's not just because I'm relatively new to this endeavor. There are so many questions because our society is changing so quickly, the higher education landscape is being transformed so dramatically, and the needs of our state and the obligations confronting public officials are so great and so urgent.

Here are some of the questions I've been asking:

- How can we expand access to college for all who need it, while maintaining high standards of quality?
- How can we ensure that college is affordable without placing a financial stranglehold on institutions?
- How can we broaden the reach of postsecondary education to nontraditional students who, for whatever reason, cannot access college through traditional means and venues?
- How can we balance the forces of the rapidly expanding higher education marketplace with our duty to protect consumers?
- How must colleges and universities adapt their roles and responsibilities to prepare citizens to compete in a dynamic global economy?
- How can we foster public/private partnerships to meet the needs of employers while sustaining the scholarly mission of the academy?
- Who pays, how much, and for what results in the new P-20 environment of schooling?
- Where do departments of graduate education and our research endeavors fit into the mix?
- How can higher education demonstrate that it is a rightful resident at the table of the public good in Illinois?

I'm pleased to report that we now have a directive from Springfield that we need to develop answers to all of those questions, and they have put a process in place for us to do so. House Joint Resolution 69, passed by the General Assembly this past spring, directs the Board of Higher Education to develop a master plan and public agenda for

higher education through creation of the Task Force on the Economy and Higher Education.

There is perhaps no greater or more urgent imperative than meeting this directive, for several reasons.

First, society is changing. Demographic trends reveal a population that is aging and becoming rapidly and dramatically more diverse.

Second, the economy is changing. Competition for jobs is now global and the nature of work has been transformed significantly, with the majority of the fastest-growing and highest-paid jobs requiring at least 2 years of postsecondary education.

Third, higher education is changing. The growth of nontraditional students, students of ethnic diversity and those with disabilities is altering the face of postsecondary education.

Fourth, technology is driving change, revolutionizing teaching and learning, and opening virtual doors that bring both new opportunities for access to higher education and new challenges in protecting consumers in the postsecondary marketplace.

Finally, there is a convergence of the state's economic and educational needs with the mission of higher education. What we do best is what the state now needs most – education, training, innovation and entrepreneurialism.

So what must we do? I believe we must prepare students for the modern workplace and the academic rigors of college better than we have in the past. We must ensure access to college for the rising number of nontraditional students. We must keep college affordable. We must improve articulation to college and degree completion. We must build a connected P-20 system. We must document, track and analyze data on student performance. We must keep our higher education assets as competitive as possible.

Development of a higher education public agenda will help ensure that policymakers are working together to meet these explicit goals. It will clarify each sector's role in higher education and highlight opportunities for more effective collaboration. It will fill the gaps where critical information is not being collected and ensure development of a comprehensive data system to improve student achievement, maximize use of resources and strengthen competitiveness for grants. It will enable legislators, the Governor, and education policymakers to focus on setting priorities, coordinating policies and devoting resources to meet the workforce and educational needs of the state. Importantly, it will hold us accountable for the prudent and effective use of public dollars and justify the investment that we strongly believe the state should make in higher education in Illinois.

So, we really are at a crossroads. The world has changed and is changing. Illinois higher education can help the state and its citizens meet the challenges, satisfy the demands, overcome the disruptions, and seize the opportunities that this changed world presents.

I ask for your assistance, your leadership, your commitment – as I will be asking for the help of others both within the higher education community and outside it – as the Illinois Board of Higher Education works to move the state in a new direction.

Thank you for your attention, and best wishes for a successful conference.