Report on the AASCU Academic Affairs Winter Meeting,

San Antonio, TX; February 10-11, 2012

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Thanks to VP Ginny Horvath, I was able to attend and participate in the Academic Affairs Winter Meeting of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, held in San Antonio, Texas.

The one thing that impressed me the most about this conference was the general and genuine sense of concern and commitment these provosts have towards their institutions. Our name tags identified us by name and institution, not by title. As we gathered around the table for breakfast, for lunch, for plenary and concurrent sessions, we were all individuals with one overall concern: the challenges that Higher Education faces in the 21st century. Each and every person I met spoke with great urgency of how he or she could strengthen their institution so as to better serve their students. The fact that the majority of the presenters were faculty at different ranks from different institutions speaks loudly of the overall commitment to teaching and learning at the center of our mission.

The following is a summary of the sessions I attended and what I learned from the conference.

Friday, February 10, 2012

- Friday morning started with an unusual plenary session entitled **"Innovation, Innovators and the Future of Higher Education"** presided by the organization's vice-president, George L. Mehaffy. After a short introduction, people around the table were given nomination forms for the "Higher Education Innovation Initiative" (HEII). HEII will be, like the Red Balloons, a series of events where people will present their innovative ideas on three specific areas: data analytics with emphasis on learning, course design and redesign, and institutional transformation. After spending 20-30 minutes tweeting, texting, filling out our ideas, Mehaffy opened the floor for discussion. Among some of the initiatives currently underway at various institutions is a "Professional Leadership Development Program" in which the universities hire a company which specializes in coaching leadership in private sectors. The campuses haved engaged in an 18 month training process aimed at chairs but open to faculty at large who might be interested in future leadership roles. Another campus is experimenting with a "Learning Organization Model" in which faculty and staff come to the table as learners.

- The first session I attended was **"Entrepreneurship, The Curriculum and Faculty Development."** I went to this session more out of distrust. What does entrepreneurship have to do with the curriculum or with faculty development? It turned out to be one of the most fascinating and inspiring sessions I attended. Richard Dunfee, from Grant Resource Center at AASCU, provided some background. First, in spite of the economy, the budgets of

research agencies have remained pretty much the same if not increased slightly. He also provided new definitions for entrepreneurship: a belief system and way of thinking that use creativity and innovation to solve problems throughout society. He also spoke of new paradigms in liberal arts education: productive citizens, productive careers, productive economies. Entrepreneurship could be a way of improving the "town and gown relationships." Another interesting piece of information is that 92% net of new jobs are created by establishments with 9 or fewer employees and the explosion of self-employment. More and more, people who cannot find jobs are figuring out ways of generating income in some sort of self-employment.

James L. Stappleton, executive director of the Douglass C. Greene Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Southeast Missouri State University presented about the initiatives of that center. All programs have to be interdisciplinary in nature, every college should have at least one program. The programs consists of 9 hours of content courses and 9 hours of experiential learning. Experiential learning has to connect faculty, students and the community. There are programs in Fine Arts Entrepreneurship, Theatre and Dance, TV Animation, Film Festival, Health, Global Entrepreneurship, etc. The most resistance has come from the business school! The center has been recently recognized as one of the most active in the country. By the way, they are situated in a rural area of Missouri.

Vicki Golich from Metropolitan State College of Denver followed with comments about their Center for Innovation in which they have developed programs such as "Hotel and Hospitality Learning Center," the "Franchise Program" in which students learn how to acquire, establish and run a franchise. Students graduate with a plan/proposal for a franchise. The center also serves as the incubator for new programs, where courses can be offered for a couple of years before going through the whole approval process. They started programs such as Aviation Physics, Fire Sciences, Women's Studies, under this center until they grew and proved they had the demand and support to be a program of their own.

Carlos Vargas-Aburto, from Kutztown University in Kutztown, PA spoke of the very rural area of the university and the large, poor latino population. The university has developed the "Latino Business Resource Center" taught entirely in Spanish. Aside from courses in Spanish, the latino population is provided with courses on finances, business planning, etc. By the time they graduate, they have a business plan and an application for business loans, many of which have been granted. Now this rural community is re-energized with businesses owned by latinos. The English department established an Institute for Advocacy and an online press to go with it.

- An interesting twist to this conference is that they invited corporations in education business who can sponsor a lunch while presenting their products/services. I attended "Attacking the Higher Education Cost Spiral through a Bold New Approach to Textbooks" presented by Flat World Knowledge. An interesting statistic is that 2/3 of college costs are non/tuition items such as textbooks, room and board, etc. They introduced the concept of "open books" which

must have five "Rs": be reusable, be able to be revised, be able to be redistributed, be able to remix, and rights to free access. "Open books" are not online texts, free, poor quality, or peer produced. It is difficult for me to summarize their presentation, but what impressed me the most was the argument that the best way to keep the textbook cost low is to provide the students with flexibility in whether they get the printed version, the e-book, a PDF file, self-print, download on Kindle, etc. I was also struck by the number of students who don't get the textbooks because of finances and; of course, do not perform well in the courses!

- After lunch, I attended a session on "Taking the Curriculum to Task: Blended Learning and CLA in the Classroom" by Daniel Kulmala from Fort Hays State University in Kansas. In order to address the issue of assessing learning rather than testing learning and of assessing academic skills (such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and written communication) in real life settings, the university adopted "Performance Task Assignments" that could be developed in all kinds of courses and the use of a rubric campus wise. They provided us samples of these performance tasks such as "reducing obesity in a community," the construction of coal plants, even deciding on meal plans vs. laundry plans on campus. Students are provided with all kinds of materials (charts, memos, newspaper articles, government data, etc.) and answer a couple of questions. Students feel the assignments are meaningful and develop confidence in their skills to solve real life issues.

- "Creating New Models for Language Instruction" was a session sponsored by Rosetta Stone and the reason Dr. Horvath invited me to attend. The room was packed with both administrators and faculty. George Mehaffy began with a brief statement that the AASCU invitation and explorations of partnerships with Rosetta Stone are not an attempt to substitute but to enrich, strengthen, and provide sustainable language programs in this current economic climate. In fact, he pointed out the irony of having this discussion in Texas, where the Department of Education is considering eliminating language programs.

The RS staff introduced themselves and went on to comment that 70% of the inquiries they receive are from students who could not get into a class or needed to get ready for a job interview. With only a clipboard, the Rosetta Stone staff asked what were the issues and concerns for language education. Among the issues: the contradictions of "globalized" campus with shrinking language programs, small enrollments, demands for specialized needs such as nursing, etc, how to improve learning outcomes, the certification of language teachers, the need for critical languages (such as Arabic, Chinese, etc), the need for professional applications such as Spanish for farmers, the demand for proficiency in a very short time, the integration of cultural proficiency, etc. We were then divided by tables and assigned one of these topics. Our table was one of the last one, and we were left with a hodgepodge of issues. A faculty member from SouthEast Missouri University stated that

although there is no language requirement, their program is growing tremendously. They have also developed a new program in "Global Language Geography." Others spoke of the need to involve professional organizations. We all use technology to supplement instruction. Is there a way of bumping it up? It was also stated that students who experience success early in the language process develop long-lasting interest in language learning. We also need to make others aware that students in language courses are doing more than learning language, they are developing writing and analytical skills as they write essays and discuss contemporary issues, they are learning about geography, history, arts and sciences.

After the discussion in our table went back and forth, a couple of provosts who had been silent, told us that their challenge is how to maintain the language programs considering low enrollment and economic cuts. A provost from a small college in Arizona put down two sticky notes with two questions: "how to do things differently" and "whether to do it at all." And he explained, it is no longer how to do things differently, how to strengthen the language programs, but whether to offer them at all, including Spanish. The other provost agreed with his dilemma. For me this was the most sobering moment of the whole conference.

Saturday, February 11, 2012

Saturday morning I "crashed" the breakfast for provosts of color. Mickey L. Burnin, president of Bowie State University, made a short presentation about the "culture of success" among students of color at Bowie and the high rate of retention and graduation they have. We then looked at and discussed various scenarios. What I thought was interesting about the discussion was that it was not about one office such as EDP, in our campus, but a whole campus effort, from Student Affairs to Academics, from faculty to staff, promoting such culture.

➕ "Student Success Does Not Arise By Chance" was the plenary session that opened the conference on Saturday morning. Vincent Tinto from Syracuse University made this presentation. Through his research, Tinto has identified several attributes of successful retention programs. (1) Clear and high expectations: These should be communicated through advising. Syllabus should be consistent in both words and the actions of the professors. What we do that first day of class sets the tone and the expectations for the rest of the semester! How do we invigorate that first day of classes? Are faculty clear on what their expectations are? Tinto spoke of the need for orientation for all faculty, especially adjunct in May, June, July, and August. (2) Support in and outside the classroom. Support has to be connected and embedded in the classroom. Support has to contextualize the basic skills to the content of the course. At U of Washington, a "skills" instructor works together with the course instructor as students work on projects, research, etc. (3) Use of assessment and feedback: The most important issue is feedback. The whole point of an "early warning" system is that it is "early." For example, he uses the one-minute essay in the classroom where students can ask a particular question they want to know more about and ask about

something which they are still confused and need clarification. He can address those right away or in the next class. (4) Involvement and Engagement: the value of contact between faculty, staff, and students. Do we know whom to contact when a student needs help? (5) Coherent pathways of learning: to build on momemtum of a students' learning. For example, identify certain benchmarks in a student's progress such as declaring a major, completing of number of hours, completion or demonstration of certain basic skills and rewarding those intermediate points of success. These benchmarks also allow for intervention for those students who are not completing them.

- "Redesigning Concurrent Enrollment Hybrid Courses-The Utah TICE: Charles A. Wight, Dean of the Graduate School at U of Utah presented this project for which they received a grant from the state. The goals of this project were to (1) increase access to college courses, (2) increase students' preparation for college, (3) focus on General Education courses, (4) ensure high quality through common assessments, (5) strengthen course articulations between high schools and universities. They initially worked on courses in Art, Psychology, Chemistry, English and Math. They invited high school teachers to team with university faculty. Each project consisted of (1) defining expected learning outcomes, (2) designing assessments for core outcomes, (3) deciding what part of the instruction, which activities will be online and which one were better for in-class, and (4) professional training for instructors. Wight explained that online learning lends itself to differentiated learning, to more thoughtful responses, to the "pause/rewind/replay" strategy that can be very valuable to students. Face to face instruction is better to recognize confusion on students' faces, to convey enthusiasm and relevancy, to develop interpersonal relations, etc. Interestingly because he referred to Bloom's taxonomy of learning and pointed out that online instruction lends itself better to the lower levels of knowledge, comprehension, application and face-to-face instruction lends itself for the higher modes such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation. Asked about the cost of the project, Wight explained he had not been able to spend but one fourth of the grant. They are hoping to develop 20 such courses.

Unfortunately, we were flying back Saturday afternoon and were not able to attend the rest of the sessions.

Sincerely submitted by *Carmen S. Rivera*, February 29, 2012