

INTRODUCTION

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Higher education is often criticized as being slow to change, yet colleges and universities are among the only institutions, public or private, that have been able to endure for centuries. That endurance is in part linked to their ability to be both separate from and responsive to changing economic, political, and social demands. Higher education does change, but not always as rapidly as critics may like. What we teach, how we teach, and whom we teach continue to evolve. Over the last two centuries, we have layered research, service, and economic and community development upon the traditional teaching mission of the university.

One aspect, however, that has remained constant is the isolated nature of higher education, with colleges and universities competing with each other for students, faculty members, and resources. One consequence of this situation is that institutions have focused primarily on the micro-level issues on their specific campuses—a perspective that inhibits their ability to address the larger macro-level changes that are occurring.

Students now swirl through higher education. Data suggest that almost 40% of undergraduate students in the United States attend more than one higher education institution, with many of these students moving vertically and horizontally, even reversing from a four-year institution to a two-year institution (Shapiro, Dundar, Wakhungu, Yuan, & Harrell, 2015). Moreover, the conditions for successfully completing a college degree are set even before a student

reaches college, starting from the early childhood years through high school and beyond (for nontraditional students). Therefore, as is discussed in chapter 1, focusing only on the experience of a student while he or she is at a particular institution does not address the macro-level issues that inhibit the opportunity of tens of thousands of students to complete a college degree. Multicampus systems of higher education have an opportunity, because of their coordinated governance structure, to develop models through which multiple campuses work together to help students move through the postsecondary educational pipeline and earn a credential; yet such efforts are only now beginning to gain traction across the United States.

One large-scale change initiative focused on improving student success is the National Association of System Heads' Taking Student Success to Scale (TS3) initiative to bring together the collective efforts of multicampus higher education systems in the United States to move the dial on completion. In 2014, leaders of many of the nation's largest collegiate systems gathered to identify three evidenced-based interventions that they believed, if implemented across their systems, would significantly increase the number of students completing a college credential. Those interventions were 1) revising pathways into college mathematics; 2) integrating predictive analytics into advising structures; and 3) implementing high-impact practices known to keep students in college. Each participating system agreed to adopt one or more of these strategies and committed staff to participate in a national learning community with representatives of other systems. At the time of this writing, more than 20 systems have committed to participating using their own resources and the national learning communities were just launching. While data are not yet available, the group is planning a national data collaborative to track impact. If successful, the collective impact of TS3 will increase the nation's completion productivity.

Moreover, successfully addressing the most significant challenges facing humankind (e.g., climate change, water shortages, declining natural resources, etc.) requires multi-institutional teams, sometimes spread across nations. Unfortunately, such collaborations are not prevalent. One example of such a broad collaboration is Europe's Large Hadron Collider. The collider was designed to uncover the building blocks of the universe and was built by a network of more

than 10,000 scientists and engineers from hundreds of universities and labs around the world (Highfield, 2008). In this case, the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) served as the backbone of the enterprise through which all partners' activities were planned, coordinated, and funded (see chapter 1 for a discussion of backbone organizations). Such examples of large-scale collaboration remain rare, with governments and other funders too often reinforcing more isolated efforts by creating structures that reward institutions for having the single best idea and incentivize the isolation of the impact of institutions' efforts from all other activities.

Finally, there is increasing recognition of colleges' and universities' critical role as anchors within their communities, which is accompanied by rising expectations that they will become the engines of economic and social revitalization. They cannot play this role in isolation, however. To realize genuine impact on economic and social issues, colleges and universities must work collaboratively with different stakeholders within their communities. Take, for example, the low high school graduation rates that persist in many communities across the United States. Too often, higher education leaders are not present at the table when communities are seeking to address this challenge. Yet colleges and universities educate the teachers who teach in the local school districts and enroll the students who graduate from local high schools. Higher education institutions are very much part of the social and economic ecosystem and need to work with others in the community to address graduation and other K–12 education issues. Successful examples of higher education's engagement in the broader social sector are discussed in chapters 4 and 5. In a growing number of communities across the United States, higher education institutions are working with dozens of local stakeholders to collaboratively improve the educational experience of those in the K–12 educational pipeline. Yet, only a handful of these efforts to foster large-scale change have been successful. Why?

While collaboration is typically a rallying cry for change, often few results are actually realized via collaborative processes. It is easy to gather to discuss change and then expect others to do the work that will accomplish the desired outcomes, but collaboration to identify needed changes must be followed by collaboration to

implement those changes. This volume focuses on this very issue: What is the science behind large-scale change? While there can be multiple ways to effect change, the strategy that has been labeled *collective impact* (CI) has proven to be successful in large-scale change efforts as diverse as improving high school graduation rates, cleaning polluted water sources, and tackling childhood obesity.

In this volume, contributors discuss changing one's mindset from that of isolated organization-specific results to one of collective impact—sharing data, ideas, and processes that work so that they might be applied in as many contexts as possible. Economist John Maynard Keynes (1935) once said, “The difficulty lies not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones” (p. 5). In the case of higher education, the challenge is not to recognize the value of acting collectively but to be willing to set aside the expectations of acting in isolation.

The intention of this volume is to confront the notion of isolated impact, unpack some of the challenges associated with change, and provide readers with the tools that are necessary to engage in collective impact. In the first chapter, Jason Lane, B. Alex Finsel, and Taya Owens, from the State University of New York, provide an introduction to collective impact, illustrating the need to move from competition to collaboration to impact. Beyond recognizing the need to shift the way in which people view the world, leaders will need to facilitate a shift in the way in which their organizations work. In the second chapter, Scott Keller and Carolyn Aiken, both of McKinsey & Company, critically examine many of the myths associated with change management and provide readers with insights about how to manage change in their own organizations.

In chapter 3, Jonathan Gagliardi, deputy director of the National Association of System Heads, explores in more depth the tendency of higher education institutions to operate in isolation. He argues that higher education systems provide a natural foundation for addressing many of the macro-level challenges now confronting them.

Chapter 4, co-authored by Jeff Edmondson, managing director of Strive, and Nancy Zimpher, former chancellor of the University of Cincinnati, explains how they created the Strive Partnership using a process that would come to be labeled “collective impact.” This effort focused on plugging the holes in the cradle-to-career

pipeline in Cincinnati by pulling together multiple community partners, creating a shared vision, and aligning their collective efforts and resources toward achieving mutually agreed upon goals. The Strive Partnership has often been held up as an exemplar of the collective impact model; but Edmondson and Zimpher also push against what they call the “sanitized” version portrayed in various write-ups and explain the daily struggles associated with this work.

In chapter 5, David Weerts, director of the Jandris Center for Innovative Higher Education; Chris Rasmussen, vice president of the Association of Governing Boards; and Virajita Singh, a senior research fellow with the College of Design and assistant vice provost for equity and diversity at the University of Minnesota, explain how they have borrowed lessons from design thinking to implement collective impact strategies. They share lessons learned from the Higher Education Redesign Initiative, a Minnesota-based project that has engaged multiple partners across sectors to create new models of educational delivery to improve the success of diverse learners.

Juliette Price, interim director of Albany Promise, provides in chapter 6 a case study of how the community in Albany, New York, used the collective impact model to replicate the Strive model by laying out how the model needed to be adapted for that context. Given that the focus of this volume is on higher education, Price pays special attention to the role that local higher education leaders and institutions played in supporting the development of the network.

The seventh and final chapter is extracted from a panel discussion at the fourth annual SUNY Critical Issues in Higher Education conference that was moderated by David Leonhardt of the *New York Times*. The panelists were Jeff Edmondson (StriveTogether), Jason Helgeson (New York State Department of Health), Danette Howard (Lumina Foundation), James Kvaal (White House), Becky Margiotta (100,000 Homes Campaign), and Joe McCannon (100,000 Lives Campaign). Each panelist has in-depth experience with large-scale change, and through their discussion they bring to life the challenges and opportunities associated with collective impact.

Higher education is an enduring part of the social fabric of the United States and beyond. Many challenges lie ahead, and some of them are quite daunting. But if we can shift our way of think-

ing from isolated interests to collaborative goals and ultimately to collective impact, we can change the world.

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