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THE EVOLUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS FROM REGULATORS TO FACILITATORS TO LEADERS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

JONATHAN S. GAGLIARDI AND
JASON E. LANE

ABSTRACT

Long an afterthought of the American higher education ecosystem, multicampus systems are now more important than ever. These entities have the unique ability to harness the collective capacity of their constituent campuses to address some of the most pressing issues facing the United States by scaling out best practices, leveraging data and analytics, and creating platforms that optimize and personalize the higher education experience for increasingly diverse students. This focus on *systemness*, fueled by the complementary yet distinct roles of systems and campuses, has led to a series of breakthroughs that could finally move the dial on access and completion rates and position the United States once again as first in the world in educational attainment, social mobility, and economic growth.

Higher education systems are aspiring to be more than the sum of their parts. The transformative change efforts of higher education systems have focused largely on flipping the paradigm of

scale in a manner that enhances their campuses and the educational experiences of their students. Broadly speaking, systems are seeking to move beyond the *isolated* impact of campus efforts to encourage and support a *collective* impact approach that supports and facilitates meaningful and purposeful collaboration between faculty, staff, and leaders across campuses (Lane & Johnstone, 2013). Rather than perpetuating the traditional structural and cultural forms of higher education as we have come to know them, some systems are taking measures to reconfigure campus interactions in ways that meet the current and emerging needs of people, communities, and economies in the twenty-first century (Gagliardi, 2015).

One area that system leaders are increasingly focusing their efforts on is student success. However, *student success* is not a term traditionally associated with higher education systems. Students attend campuses, not systems. Campuses, not systems, grant degrees. Faculty teach on campuses, not at the system office. Alumni tend to associate with a particular campus, not the system. In their landmark study of higher education systems, Lee and Bowen (1971) found that student issues remained the prerogative of campuses and none of the multicampus system administrations in their study had designated a senior leader with responsibility for student affairs.

Yet, in recent years, a growing number of higher education systems have begun to shift their focus away from historic responsibilities for coordinating, regulating, and allocating financial resources among institutions to harnessing, leveraging, and sharing the collective assets of the campuses on behalf of the students they serve.

This shift is significant in two fundamental ways. First, while institutions have been increasingly focused on student success, it is system leaders that are uniquely situated to understand and respond to the increasing number of students moving between multiple institutions on their way toward a college degree (Lane, 2018; Soares et al., 2017). Second, systems, largely, have been structured to operate like a state agency, insuring that rules and regulations are applied and adhered to. Lee and Bowen (1971) referred to system administration as a “community of bureaucrats.” In this new orientation, systems are moving more toward capacity building and facilitation of collaboration, with a focus on supporting academic programming and student success and an acknowledgment

of engaging faculty and other stakeholders across the system in these efforts (Lane & Johnstone, 2013).

The ongoing evolution of higher education systems is a central development in US higher education and is the primary focus of this volume. Higher education systems have an integral part to play in improving student outcomes and closing equity gaps. They can be an interface that allows campuses to leverage their collective capacity and a tool for scaling out evidence-based practices. Indeed, higher education systems are increasingly working in collaboration with campuses to ensure quality, and create a more agile public higher education ecosystem by facilitating, incentivizing, and accelerating transformational changes on behalf of students and in line with state and national goals.

Still, a host of challenges confront efforts by higher education systems to spark innovation among and between their campuses. The histories of the relationships between the state and the higher education system, and the system and its individual campuses are often fraught with contention (Johnstone, 2013). Such history can make it difficult to implement a shared vision for the entire system, as well as corresponding goals and strategies. The distinctiveness and autonomy of individual campuses contrasts with the nature of higher education systems to centralize and standardize. Harmonizing these competing organizational facets is no easy task. As demonstrated in the chapters in this volume, these forces have resulted in systems playing a more facilitative leadership role, setting a broad vision and then providing support and structures to facilitate campuses moving in a similar direction, while also being able to honor and utilize their distinctiveness. And not all of these efforts have been successful—yielding their own lessons.

This chapter lays the foundation for the rest of this volume. It begins by describing how the evolution of higher education systems is being pushed by the changing mobility patterns and demographics of modern undergraduates and pulled by increased attention of state and national leaders on the college completion agenda. Following this, the chapter briefly traces the origins of higher education systems in the United States, with particular attention to key evolutions in their structures and functions. Next, the current state of higher education systems is discussed, including an ongoing shift toward

prioritizing student success and promoting innovation. This chapter ends by highlighting some of the key contributions of this volume.

THE PUSH AND PULL OF CHANGE

The focus of higher education systems on student success is much more than a rallying cry for change. It is a documented effort by some system governing boards and administrations to adapt policies, resources, technologies, practices, and institutional culture to facilitate greater collaboration among campuses to improve student completion numbers. These efforts range from activities focused on recruitment to retention to completion.

In fact, many state and system leaders have set systemwide goals intended to drive campus-level actions around student completion (Virginia's Community Colleges, n.d.; SUNY, n.d.; California State University, n.d.; Ma & Hartley, 2017):

- Virginia's Community College system committed to tripling completions by 2021.
- California State University System has committed to significantly increasing graduation rates for new and transfer students as well as eliminating all achievement gaps by 2025.
- The State University of New York committed to moving the number of completions each year from 93,000 in 2015 to 150,000 in 2025.
- Utah's Board of Regents adopted a goal of increasing completion in Utah's System of Higher Education to 28 awards (i.e., certificates or degrees) per 100 full-time equivalent students by the year 2025.

The goals themselves are not as important as the fact that such goals are being set by systems. They indicate a clear shift of system leaders toward focusing on student success; moreover, the only way to achieve these goals is for institutions and systems to arrange themselves in more integrated ways in order to collectively

facilitate student success. Yet, what is driving this interest in student completion by system leaders?

One of the major pressures pulling systems into this space has been the significant focus of elected leaders, the media, and funders on the “completion crisis”—essentially, the United States is falling behind internationally in terms of the education level of its citizenry. According to the 2019 *Education at a Glance* report (OECD, 2019), the United States ranks eleventh in the proportion of 25–34-year-olds with a postsecondary education credential. Forty years ago, the United States led the world in being the most well-educated country. The national inability to significantly improve access and completion rates (along with the pandemic impact) has exacerbated a workforce gap. Prior to the pandemic, the U. S. was set to have a shortage of about five million college-educated workers by 2020 (Carnevale et al., 2014). That gap has only worsened since the pandemic, with many opting for early retirement or reconsidering employment options; yet the need remains for most workers to have some college.

The fact that so many countries have outpaced the United States’ ability to educate a large proportion of our citizens led to several leaders in the public and private sectors calling for reform. In his first State of the Union address, President Obama made it a national goal that “by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world” (CNN, 2010). The Lumina Foundation (n.d.) “committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025.” And, within two years of Obama’s call to increase completion, at least 19 states had established their own goals to meet their contributions to achieve this new national priority and by 2019 nearly every state had set or was considering a state goal of having at least 55 percent of their citizens earn a postsecondary credential by 2025—meaning that governors and other elected state officials began leading some of the most significant reform efforts and necessitating that system leaders follow along (Education Commission of the States, 2017).

These efforts had some effect. The percentage of working adults in the United States with a college degree increased. Between 2008 and 2017, the percentage of 25–65-year-olds with a credential beyond high school increased from 37.9 to 47.6 percent.¹ While

progress is good, the country had not reclaimed its position as first in the world in college-educated adults by 2020. It also means that without dramatic progress, the United States will be short of Lumina's 2025 goal (Lumina Foundation, 2019).

There are a number of factors pushing system leaders to support a more collaborative multicampus approach to increasing completion numbers. To be certain, all systems are different in terms of their size, scale, complexity, political environment, financial stability, and governance authority. Yet, many systems are facing diminished or stagnating resources, necessitating new ways to share resources or find greater economies of scale. And there is a growing recognition that limited resources may be better used to scale out evidence-based practices, instead of continuing to fund new, unproven, and isolated projects. The most significant of the push factors are likely the changing demographics and mobility patterns of college students.

Much of the country is anticipating declines in the number of students graduating from high school (with some areas declining by more than 15% by 2028), signaling a shift to more diverse and more nontraditional students (Bransberger & Michaelau, 2016). In fact, the modern undergraduate student population is already incredibly (and increasingly) diverse and contrasts with the description provided by anecdotal wisdom of the "traditional student" being a white, 18–22-year-old, full-time student. In fact, nearly 6 in 10 (58%) undergraduates are now post-traditional learners (Soares et al., 2017). These post-traditional students tend to be older, full-time employed, financially independent, and/or connected to the military. In comparison to other undergraduates, these students are more likely to be women, nonwhite, and to have dependents. Post-traditional learners are also four times more likely than other undergraduates to already have a postsecondary credential, and more than 12 times as likely to live off campus (Soares et al., 2017). The needs of these post-traditional learners differ greatly from the "traditional" undergraduate. This necessitates campuses developing new and different modes for supporting students as they work toward a college degree.

More than more diverse, they are also more mobile. For example, the National Student Clearinghouse found that 38 percent of the 2.8 million students entering college for the first time in fall 2011 transferred to a different institution at least once within

six years (Shapiro et al., 2018). Between 2011 and 2017, 47.32 percent of transfer students changed institutions more than once (Shapiro et al., 2018). Within the State University of New York system, nearly half of all baccalaureate graduates attend at least two institutions before completing (Lane, 2018). Moreover, in the process of transferring students lose credit, which can be costly and ultimately lengthen time to degree. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO 2017), students who transferred from 2004 to 2009 lost an average of 43 percent of their credits. Simply put, the success of modern undergraduates is no longer the domain of an isolated campus; it depends on a more collaborative approach that marries the best of what the nation's diverse colleges and universities have to offer.

WHY SYSTEMS?

The multicampus system is one of the dominant organizational features of US higher education, though they have often been overlooked as a potential leader in improving student success and completion. According to the National Association of System Heads (NASHE) there are more than 50 multicampus systems of higher education operating in 37 states.² The size and scope of these systems range significantly. For example, the Southern Illinois University has two degree-granting institutions with approximately 20,000 students, while SUNY is comprised of 64 two-year and four-year degree-granting institutions serving nearly 600,000 students in credit-bearing courses. Some states also have more than one system in place. New York, for example, is home to both the City University of New York and the State University of New York. In Texas, there are seven distinct multicampus systems of higher education. Collectively, they have an unprecedented opportunity to affect change.

At the time of this writing, 23 of these systems have joined the Taking Student Success to Scale (TS3) initiative, designed to support systems in implementing evidence-based practices that positively impact retention and completion. In 2014–2015, these systems collectively served 3.1 million undergraduate students, or about 18 percent of the entire undergraduate population in the United States. In that same year, students in this systems earned approximately

530,000 undergraduate degrees and certificates, or about 20 percent of the national number. So, this one network of 23 systems has the potential to reach one in five of every undergraduate student in the US. And this network represents fewer than half of all systems in the US. There are no other structures in the United States that collectively govern so many institutions and oversee the educational opportunities of so many students.

THE ROAD TO SYSTEMS

To understand the current effort to redesign the work of higher education systems, it is important to understand their historical evolution. Public higher education multicampus systems were designed to bring efficiency and effectiveness to the governance of a growing public postsecondary education sector, coordinate access to higher education for the state's citizens, and ensure the alignment of institutions with the needs, goals, and aspirations of the states that created and funded them. With rare exception, such as the creation of the University of the State of New York in 1784,³ the emergence of public coordination of higher education through centralized governance, multicampus systems did not occur until the late nineteenth century (McGuinness, 2013). However, these entities have important roots that can be traced back to the origins of higher education in the United States.

In the colonial era, colleges existed at the nexus of their respective communities, governments, and religions (McClendon, 2003; Thelin, 2019). Institutions like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale each received land donations and tax levies, among other benefits, from their particular colonies. These institutions represented an early form of public-private partnership, which Thelin (2019) dubbed "state-church colleges" (p. 13) because of the degree to which the colonies and churches exerted control over and provided support to these institutions. In fact, the development of lay governing boards comprised of external stakeholders that have legal authority for the college and, in theory, serve as a buffer and a connection between the outside world and the academic organization remain the dominant governance paradigm for higher education in the United States today.

A major factor during this era was the evolution of the church-state model into what we know today as a clear differentiation between public and private institutions. After the Revolutionary War, state governments (as opposed to the federal government) retained primary authority over the colleges within their borders.⁴ State governments sought to exert greater control over the colonial colleges, who resisted believing that they were private institutions that should not fall under direct control of the state. Eventually, the distinction between public and private higher education was outlined by the 1819 US Supreme Court *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* decision, which overturned efforts by the New Hampshire legislature to place Dartmouth College under greater public control. In addition to making the distinction between a public and private institution, the decision also sparked backlash from state legislatures, which quickly went about forming new institutions more directly under their control.

During the early nineteenth century a host of forces converged to tie the states and higher education together more tightly. As the nation's population grew and migrated westward into new territories, the United States experienced significant growth in the number of higher education institutions. For example, from 1800 to 1850 roughly 700 public and private institutions were founded. However, the instability of the era meant that only 250 of those institutions lasted until 1861 (Thelin, 2019). This era was marked by limited coordination in terms of state governance, with historians Brubacher and Rudy (2002, p. 427) arguing that a distinguishing aspect of this era was its "un-systematized diversity."

The growth in the number of institutions and the number of students, as well as the expanding responsibilities of state governments, led many states to explore alternative modes of governance that allowed for what they hoped would be greater coordination among public colleges and universities in terms of the use of state resources, provision of academic programs, and responding to state needs (McGuiness, 2013). At the same time, the strong tradition of having lay governing boards overseeing higher education institutions limited the options available to them. The result in many states was the creation of governing boards that had some level of institutional authority but were responsible for multiple institutions, not just a single campus.

Since their emergence in the late nineteenth century, public higher education multicampus systems have continued to develop and evolve. The move toward centralized governance structures has ebbed and flowed over the last 150 years, but the overall movement has been toward greater coordination, not less. McGuiness (2013) identified six distinct eras of public higher education system evolution, which we list here. To this list we add a description of a new era, one in which the current focus of systems on student success and completion is occurring.

Period 1: Progressive Era (1880s to World War I). Many states moved from isolated governing boards to multicampus governing and coordinating board systems. The intent was to create a structure to govern the growing number of public institutions and associated state investment more efficiently and effectively. An additional effect was to create a buffer between the institutions and the elected officials that allowed for a difference management of the tension between local and regional politics.

Period 2: Consolidation Era (World War I to World War II). The advent of World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II created disruptive social, political, and economic conditions. Many states that did not already have them created statewide governing bodies as a means to insulate public higher education from overt external interference, in particular limiting the extent to which the governor or state legislatures could directly control and impact higher education.

Period 3: Capacity Building, Expansion, and Standardization (World War II to the 1970s). Demand for higher education grew significantly in the aftermath of World War II. States further developed or revised consolidated governance models in response to the massification movement, so as to provide postsecondary learning opportunities that met minimum standards to larger portions of their populations. In addition, the 1965 Higher Education Act required states to identify ways to achieve greater efficiencies in the use

of state and federal investments in higher education. By the 1970s nearly every state had some sort of statewide governing or coordinating body, though their powers varied markedly between states.

Period 4: The Rise of Decentralization (1980s). During the 1980s there was pushback against “centralized state control” in many countries and across public sectors. The movement was toward introducing more businesslike principles into government operations. For higher education in some states, this resulted in reconfiguring the governance of higher education toward greater institutional autonomy and flexibility (and, thus, toward more decentralized governance models). This led some states to pass sweeping reforms intended to grant individual campuses more control over key functions (e.g., tuition setting, contracting, human resources). These moves were intended to enhance the capability of public institutions to tailor their offerings to local needs and to manage institutional resources more effectively.

Period 5: Restructuring amid a Changing State Role (1990s–Early 2000s). During this era, some states moved toward more decentralization, while others swung toward more centralization. States began to apportion financial support in more targeted ways, with an emphasis on research and economic development, seeking to invest in higher education in ways that advanced a “public agenda” often directed at the state’s long-term economic competitiveness. Previously, state funding was focused on building higher education infrastructure and capacity to meet growing demands for access through general fund appropriations. This era was marked by the emergence of funds tied to specific policy goals and performance.

Period 6: Responses to Recession and Slow Economic Recovery (Early 2000s–Early 2010s). In the wake of the recession of 1999–2001 and the Great Recession of 2008–2010 states intensified their efforts to alter governance structures. Many of the prominent themes of this era centered on cost

reductions and efficiencies, such as centralizing back-office functions, reducing duplicative programs and offerings, and creating economies of scale.

Period 7: Collective Impact and Student Success (Early 2010s–Present). In addition to the preceding eras mapped out by McGuiness (2013), we believe that the current era of systems is differentiated from previous eras due to the refocusing of the work of systems away from being simply allocators, regulators, and coordinators to focusing on facilitative leadership that brings campuses together to work on shared problems through the distribution of best practices, processes of co-learning and co-problem-solving, and sharing of resources. The most important shift in this era is a new focus of systems on student success and equity.

In period 7, rather than (or in addition to) system administrations focusing on institutional coordination, there is greater focus on developing policies and practices that support student learning and student success. The result is that there are fewer fights over where authority lies as system administrations focus on cross-cutting issues instead of trying to replicate the responsibilities of campuses (see also chapter 9). The recognition of the complementary yet distinct roles of systems and campuses has been important. It is this shift toward facilitative leadership to drive student success through collective action of campuses that is the focus of this volume and the included case studies.

For example, SUNY recently developed a systemwide seamless transfer policy, intended to allow students to transfer easily among the system's 64 campuses (Lane, 2018). The initiative was driven by an analysis of student mobility data that demonstrated that students move in a multidirectional fashion. As such, the existing policy framework based on unidirectional, upward, vertical articulation agreements needed to be reconfigured to reflect the attendance patterns of students as shown by the data. To do that effectively, a complex negotiation between system leadership, campus administrators, and shared governance groups took place to identify transfer paths based on shared understanding of foundational knowledge while allowing for campus distinctiveness. The focus was on harnessing system resources to meet the demands of increasing student

mobility and accelerate time to degree. Supporting multidirectional transfer patterns at both the two-year and four-year levels is the kind of innovative initiative that could only be accomplished by a system.

This volume provides an overview of several initiatives that represent the type of collective impact approach that is discussed in this volume, and they were selected as they were part of a collaborative effort funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. What is important to note is that while these particular initiatives had varying levels of sustainability, the systems that birthed them have remained largely committed to advancing student success. So, while projects may ebb and flow, the overall direction of systems appears to remain headed toward increased collaboration to support student success.

REALIGNING HIGHER EDUCATION TOWARD COMPLETION THROUGH SYSTEMS

Higher education systems are useful tools for encouraging colleges and universities to realign from a focus on student access to a focus on student completion. By providing shared services, setting systemwide priorities, driving innovation, and coordinating alternative pathways that include online learning, systems and campuses are leveraging one another in new and exciting ways. The current emphasis on degree attainment has redistributed the responsibility of social mobility and economic growth more equally among research universities, comprehensive institutions, and community colleges. Due to their ability to serve as laboratories for innovation, hubs for analysis, and gatherers of organizational and environmental intelligence, systems are able to advance innovations, create new resource strategies, foster enabling policy environments, and identify economies of scale that may be crucial for addressing the national need for increasing attainment of a high-quality academic credential. The examples from this volume illustrate the vital role that systems play in innovating and scaling, as well as the challenges that lay before those pursuing such a path.

As readers progress through this volume, it is important to view the included case studies through that particular lens. First, a case study is bounded by both space and time (Yin, 2005). The cases

included in this volume are snapshots of initiatives from particular systems for a particular period of time. These cases purposefully focus on the early stages of each initiative, so that readers are able to learn from these efforts to design and implement system-level initiatives focused on improving student success. These initiatives continued beyond the duration covered in this volume. Some of them continued to grow, some transformed, some ceased to exist. We have attempted to include the most relevant aspects of the epilogues to these cases in chapters 2 and 9; however, readers will inevitably be aware of developments not included herein. What is important for this volume is to recognize that while not all of the cases may have achieved their original goals, each are early endeavors of systemness that inform our understanding of this work and serve as examples of the type of work that we now see often occurring in multicampus systems across the country.

Second, approaching student success initiatives from a system perspective is very different than analyzing it within a single institution framework. Our intention here is to assess the system dynamics associated with such approaches; however, we do acknowledge that the ultimate impact of each effort takes place on a campus. Lane (2019) has suggested that system initiatives for student success have three key sets of drivers: 1) governing board drivers, 2) system administrative drivers, 3) institutional drivers. The case studies each address these drivers in different ways, though the majority of the focus is on the governing and system administration drivers. That said, within the institutional drivers, it is important to understand the particular nature of the students within that institution. While we do not delve into the decades of research into student development (see Pascarella & Tenerzini, 2005; Mayhew et al., 2016), we acknowledge that the ultimate success of each of these efforts will be their ability to contextualize efforts based on the needs of students and future research will be needed to understand how system-level efforts vary among various student groups.

This volume is based on the idea that the American higher education ecosystem can be more fluid and dynamic in order to better serve contemporary students, and that systems are uniquely poised to facilitate such a transformation. The authors examine their own system-led efforts at creating the structural, policy, and cultural changes that boost student outcomes and close attainment

gaps. It is organized into four parts. First, part 1 (chapters 1 and 2) provides an analysis of the factors influencing shifts in higher education systems and a model for intentional innovation in higher education systems. Part 2 (chapters 3–5) of the volume examines system-led efforts at reimagining educational delivery. Part 3 (chapters 6–7) focuses on how systems are building innovative infrastructures, and part 4 (chapters 8 and 9) provides frameworks for designing and implementing large-scale change.

Balancing the need for consensus about what constitutes quality with the reality that decisions around programs and content are best made locally is a theme that emerges throughout this volume. In chapter 3, Audrey Hovanesian of the California State University (CSU) system, and Ken O'Donnell of CSU Dominguez Hills report on the efforts to scale high-impact practices (HIPs). After recognizing the success of a select few campuses in scaling HIPs, CSU used its convening power to establish minimum HIP standards, which led to the creation of a template that campuses could adopt to their local contexts. This eventually led to the placement of HIPs on student transcripts, which led to better data and more rapid cycle innovation and scaling.

In chapter 4, Houston Davis, formerly of the University System of Georgia (now of University of Central Arkansas), and Myk Garn of USG describe how the University System of Georgia sought out ways to preserve academic quality, improve affordability, and shorten time to degree. Through its New Learning Models 2030 Task Force, the USG worked across its 29 institutions to better serve over 300,000 students through a shared focus on meaningful degree opportunities, a focus on providing a better education for at-risk students, and creating new efficiencies through such means as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), open educational resources, reinvented academic and student supports, and more refined assessments brought to bear by data and analytics.

In few places is the use of big data and analytics to drive innovation more apparent than the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), which former TBR vice president for academic affairs Tristan Denley (now of the University System of Georgia), writes about in chapter 5. By combining principles of behavioral economics, massive volumes of data and sophisticated analyses, and most importantly, people who care about students, TBR led the creation of a massive

analytics infrastructure that has created unprecedented gains in access and completion while making a major dent in equity gaps. Only through careful campus partnerships, vision, and attention to the intended—and unintended—consequences of using big data was TBR able to scale predictive analytics across its campuses. TBR recognized that predictive analytics is not to be used as a replacement for teaching, learning, and advising but rather as a tool to augment the human elements of each of those functions.

These kind of data-driven educational innovations can be difficult to implement. The University of Texas System (UTS) created its Total Education Experience (TE_x) to bring transformational models of education that are student focused and industry aligned in such a fashion that creates a more personalized and meaningful education for every student. Steven Mintz, formerly of the University of Texas at Austin, details the opportunities and challenges in transforming curricular design, pedagogy, delivery models, student lifecycle services, and learning analytics in chapter 6.

Cultural divides also appear throughout the volume. The University System of Maryland's (USM) Course Redesign Initiative is an example of how to bridge them. In chapter 7, Jo Boughman and M. J. Bishop of the USM detail how to cultivate and enable a more innovative academic culture. By using complex adaptive systems theory, and generative, unifying, and convergent leadership, the USM created meaningful change that was embraced by its constituent campuses despite facing a host of challenges.

Rebecca Martin of the National Association of System Heads (NASH) and Jason Lane, a former senior leader in the SUNY System (and currently of Miami University in Ohio) (both founding members of the Taking Student Success to Scale (TS3) Steering Committee), use the Collective Impact framework to examine lessons from efforts to leverage networks of systems to affect student success in chapter 8. One key element of this effort is the realization among systems that they must simultaneously facilitate innovation among their campuses while also transforming themselves.

Finally, chapter 9, by Lane and Gagliardi, presents the innovation cube, a framework for understanding and executing large-scale change based on the analysis of the cases included in this volume. We find that focusing on three key aspects (capacity building, strategy

and policy, and structure) is important for addressing the challenges and opportunities facing systems and their campuses as they try to reconfigure US higher education in ways that put students first.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEMS

Given the myriad pressures faced by multicampus systems in a constantly changing environment, the ability to effectively leverage the process of organizational learning is growing in importance. Yet, the internal and external complexities faced by multicampus systems can create barriers to such a process. Competing interests of diverse campuses and academic units—which are largely driven by resource dependency, prestige, and a desire for autonomy—can impede the ability of the multicampus system to learn from its member campuses (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Consequently, efforts to create shared services, to promote collaborations, and to share best practices among member campuses can be met with resistance to ongoing transformational efforts led by the multicampus system office, limiting their effectiveness. Externally, government and private-sector pressures that include emphasizing metrics and outcomes like the Postsecondary Institutional Ratings System (PIRS)—which eventually became the College Scorecard; an emphasis on aligning educational supply and workforce demands; and performance or incentive funding initiatives that prioritize rapid change are orientations that systems and institutions are unaccustomed to.

The many permutations of multicampus system traits and initiatives lend themselves to a process of change that is evolutionary, not disruptive (Drucker, 1985; Johnson & Rush, 1995; Kirzner, 1973). The combination of internal pressures, external demands, and contrasting organizational cultures results in incremental change that has implications for the process of organizational learning for multicampus systems and their institutions in the following areas:

1. **Scale as an information resource.** The scale of activity in a large system can have a multiplier effect, especially in an era of big data. Systems by definition have access to

information that can serve as a resource for understanding and improvement. What the campus scales up, the system can scale out, thus magnifying impact.

2. **Institutional Diversity allows for incremental and organic innovation.** The variety of institutions that comprise the system can serve as laboratories for innovation and allow small-scale testing of options that can serve the system as a whole.
3. **Structures for the dissemination of knowledge and customized delivery.** The system has established structures to collect and disseminate knowledge about its activities. These can serve to inform institutions and policymakers about the potential of reforms to support articulated goals.
4. **Standardization for efficiency and optimization.** The capacity of the system to identify best practices and minimum standards of quality can lead to greater efficiency and ensure quality. As new ideas emerge and are vetted, they can be quickly implemented as system initiatives, preventing redundant or archaic practices from remaining entrenched. Resulting savings can then be reinvested to support the other three elements.
5. **Creating platforms that the user can shape.** Through collaboration with campuses, the system is ideally situated to identify areas of convergence across multiple campuses, allowing pockets of campuses to work together in pursuit of their most important priorities. This is far different from the heavy-handed and mandate-centric approach systems became known for among campus constituents, which has contributed to lingering ill will that is only now being overcome.

Historically, systems have pulled hard levers, including money and policy, in order to do this. Given the increasing scarcity of resources, and ineffectiveness of broad-brush policies, systems have shifted, pulling soft levers in order to generate buy-in, share ownership, and to defer to local decision-making at the campus level where possible.

These include convening and engaging stakeholders, aligning interests and priorities, promoting best practices, leveraging data, and creating investment and incentive funds. Systems can use their perch to identify service gaps that make it difficult for the contemporary student to earn a credential and reap the full benefits of a higher education.

Furthermore, senior leaders and staff must understand the social, political, and economic environments that have an effect on the value propositions, resource strategies, processes, and revenue formulas that are required of them and their institutions. A deeper understanding of the processes of learning and change can ultimately identify what is scalable and what is not, leading to more flexible and dynamic networked organizations of systems and campuses that can flex to any challenge. This process facilitates innovation by developing a more systemic and comprehensive process for getting the buy-in required for change among key constituents. This information can be used to critically evaluate systems as organizational solutions to a set of problems facing US higher education (such as student completion, global competitiveness, and financial stress).

CONCLUSION

Higher education systems are creating stronger partnerships with their institutions based on community-centered design. Through a focus on better and more integrated data, evidence, and collective impact, higher education systems are advancing student centered and self-managed education; transforming educational delivery and student success; fostering innovative approaches and policies among institutions; building and enhancing a more cohesive infrastructure that promotes diverse pathways toward completion, as well as equitable access and outcomes; and fundamentally creating innovative higher education business models. Systems are becoming more dynamic, serving as interfacing organizations by using the uniqueness of the campuses they govern to offer solutions to the most pressing social and economic challenges of today. Indeed, there are promising signs that a new, more dynamic era of higher education is emerging, however quietly, right under our noses by these silent innovators we know as higher education systems.

CHAPTER 1 TAKEAWAYS

- Higher education multicampus systems are emerging as an important means for advancing student success efforts.
- Significant numbers of students now accumulate credits from multiple institutions before they complete their degree program (if they complete at all).
- Systems call for development of policy and practice based on how students now experience higher education, transcending institutional boundaries.
- Systems are moving beyond traditional roles as regulator, allocator, and coordinator toward more facilitative leadership, working with and across campuses to execute and sustain change.

NOTES

1. Note that beginning in 2014, workforce credentials began to be included in the total of postsecondary credentials.
2. This includes only systems that have system leadership and administration that is distinct from the leadership of a campus. For example, the Pennsylvania State University has 24 campuses throughout the state but is not included in this count as the president of the flagship campus (located in University Park) also serves as the head of network of campuses.
3. USNY is an umbrella licensing and accreditation body created by the state constitution that sets standards for all education programs pre-K through graduate education in New York. It is still in existence at the time of this writing.
4. The omission of any mention of education from the U.S. Constitution and the eventual passage of the 10th Amendment, which reserved all powers not enumerated in the Constitution for state authority, reinforced that higher education was primarily a state issue (Brubacher, 1967; McClendon, 2003; Millard, 1979).