

***Symposium on Financing Higher Education:
Putting Illinois in the National Context***

April 20, 2004

Summary and Recommendations

Sponsored by
Illinois Designated Account Purchase Program
A Division of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission
and
Illinois State University
Center for the Study of Education Policy

Acknowledgments

Thirty-two higher education policy makers, practitioners and academicians met on the campus of Illinois State University on April 20, 2004 for a symposium on the financing of higher education. This policy report, issued by the Illinois State University Center for the Study of Education Policy, is a result of their thoughtful discussion and careful deliberation during that day. We extend special gratitude to these individuals, who gave so generously of their time and many of whom provided follow-up comments and edits to this paper. The names of the 32 participants are listed on pages 16 and 17 of this paper.

Donald Heller of Pennsylvania State University's Center for Higher Education, Paul Lingenfelter of the State Higher Education Executive Officers, and William Doyle of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education led thoughtful and relevant discussions that helped to put Illinois higher education in the national context.

Illinois State University colleagues Jim Palmer and Steve Bragg also provided an overview of *Grapevine* data and Illinois State University funding. Dianne Ashby, Dean of the ISU College of Education, Larry Matejka of the Illinois Student Assistant Commission, and Dan Layzell of the Illinois Board of Higher Education served capably as reactors to the key speakers and provided added perspectives and insight to their topics.

The Center also thanks Edward R. Hines for his invaluable editing and research support throughout the process and also to ISU colleagues Jim Palmer, Steve Bragg, Deb Smitley and Ed Hines for serving on the symposium planning committee. John Presley and Dianne Ashby gave generously of their time, support and encouragement in planning the symposium. Credit is also due to Linda Wall, Kelly Peiffer, Sandra Gillilan and Christy England-Siegerdt for their assistance at the symposium.

Finally, special credit is due to Kathleen Kelly who served as a consultant to the project and who is the primary author of this paper. The Center also wishes to recognize the Illinois Designated Account Purchase Program, a division of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, for their funding support for the symposium.

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Executive Summary

As Illinois higher education looks forward to a stronger state economy and subsequent improved state support, it is time to plan for the next recession. There have been five recessions in the past 35 years, but few higher education systems have been able to develop the processes and resources for weathering the storm. At risk are the quality of academic programs and the ideal of broad affordable access to opportunity. In April 2004, a select group of higher education leaders from Illinois and around the country met at Illinois State University to examine short- and long-term trends in funding and fundamental changes in public policy. They identified critical policy issues for further discussion and alternatives to simply weathering the next storm.

Trends in Funding

- Illinois is among the states expected to have a “structural fiscal shortfall” in its tax revenues by 2010 due to a shift in economic activity from goods to lightly taxed services. The current fiscal constraints may be more long-lived than in prior recessions.
- Illinois higher education experienced higher than average two-year cuts in appropriations between fiscal years 2002 and 2004.
- Illinois continues to benefit from higher than average increases during the 1990s and remains above the national average in ten-year increases.
- Illinois colleges and universities have lost flexibility with changes in the distribution of funds within the higher education budget—increases in student financial aid and retirement with declines in funds to support operations.
- Many colleges and universities have replaced state funds with tuition and fee increases.

Critical Concerns

- The increasing share of college costs borne by students and families reflects a fundamental shift away from the principle that increasing the population's educational attainment is a public good as well as a benefit to the individual.
- Access and affordability has been threatened. High academic achievers among low-income students are discouraged from enrolling in college. They are no more likely to attend college than the lowest performing wealthy students.
- Illinois is among the states that have placed priority on need-based student financial aid programs, resisting the national trend toward merit-based programs.
- Institutional effectiveness is reduced when cuts are incremental and unpredictable.

Preparing for the Next Recession

Higher education needs to resist the temptation to simply weather the storm until the economy improves and to address the following objectives:

- To set clear goals for higher education quality, access, participation, and productivity
- To assure that Illinois' tradition of providing broad access to higher education at an affordable cost is maintained
- To maintain the quality of instruction and services to students
- To enable colleges and universities to manage resources effectively through economic cycles and
- To enable entrepreneurial activities and cooperative initiatives among colleges and universities

Recommended Strategies

- Illinois higher education should initiate the public policy dialogue with governmental leaders and citizens on the central question of whether higher education is a public good. Clear goals and accountability measures should be jointly developed.
- Higher education should strengthen its position by focusing on its highest priority—educating students. Initiatives should include improving high school preparation for college, assuring good use of students' time in college, and improving four-year completion rates.
- Higher education should make a contribution to achieving the state's most critical goals including improving teacher preparation and meeting workforce education needs
- Illinois should sustain its long-term commitment to need-based financial aid. Governmental leaders and higher education should reach agreement on the appropriate balance between state support and tuition and between tuition and student financial aid.
- Accountability systems should be refined to assure that they address issues that are truly critical to governmental leaders and the citizens of Illinois.
- Higher education needs to develop the means to navigate through the inevitable highs and lows of economic cycles.

Symposium Summary and Recommendations

Introduction

Higher education is in the midst of a “perfect storm,” the dramatic convergence of rising student demand, changes in demographic characteristics of students, ebbing state support, changes in expectations for the college experience, and increasing costs. The most recent national recession has hit higher education hard, causing some states to consider drastic measures—privatizing public colleges and universities, imposing stringent accountability measures, and restricting enrollment. Yet higher education rarely makes the news, except when tuition goes up. Meanwhile, other state budget issues make headlines—escalating health care costs, failing elementary and secondary schools, and depleted state coffers.

The natural reaction for higher education is to weather the storm, making temporary cuts and postponing expenditures, until the economy cycles upward again as it inevitably will. There have been five recessions in the past 35 years, yet few higher education systems have the processes and resources to plan for economic cycles. In the future, however, it will be critical that steps be taken to plan for and deal with economic cycles. Increasing demands on states’ resources and changes in the tax structure indicate that recovery may be slow and incomplete. In addition, long-term trends reveal significant shifts in the sources of revenue for higher education, suggesting that a fundamental change in public policy has occurred. Perhaps, higher education’s challenge is not the headline-making perfect storm, but a gradual and relentless erosion of state support. At risk is the ideal of broad, affordable access to opportunities provided by higher education.

In April 2004, a select group of higher education leaders from Illinois and around the country met at Illinois State University to examine short- and long-term trends in funding and fundamental changes in public policy. They identified critical policy issues for further discussion and alternatives to weathering the storm. This paper presents a summary of the presentations and discussions.

Trends in Higher Education Funding

Higher education in Illinois and most other states is confronted with important challenges associated with the recent national recession. As tax revenues have declined, states have had to find new sources of funds, cut back on services, and/or reallocate funds to higher priorities. Several factors have caused increased competition for state funds—the aging population, escalating health care costs, homeland security requirements, and concerns about elementary and secondary schools. Because colleges and universities have tuition as an available source of funding, there may be a sense that higher education can take care of itself (Lingenfelter).

Between fiscal years 2002 and 2003, state appropriations for higher education operations showed the effects of the national recession. Figure 1 shows that twenty-eight states experienced reductions in state funding up to 17 percent (Palmer, *Grapevine*).

The reduction in state resources comes at a time when higher education is increasingly important for individual opportunity and enrollment demand is high. The state and national economies depend on a competitive workforce, and communities rely on educated citizens. Competition for high quality faculty is keen, and advances in technology require considerable investment. In addition, the fastest growing populations—minorities and the poor—are more likely to need extra support to enroll and succeed in college, services that may be difficult to provide when budgets are tight (Lingenfelter).

During an economic recession, state funding for higher education declines while enrollment in colleges and universities tends to increase as students seek credentials for employment or bide time until the economy improves. As the economy improves, jobs increase, government revenues rise and funding improves. The combined effect of changes in enrollment and resources produces “roller coaster funding,” illustrated in Figure 2, that challenges states and institutions to plan effectively. Despite these fluctuations, the trend line shows that nationally state funding for higher education has kept pace with the Consumer Price Index and enrollment growth over the past 35 years (Lingenfelter).¹

¹ The CPI is generally considered to underestimate the costs in higher education.

Table 4: Percent Changes in State Tax Appropriations for Higher Education, by State, FY02 (revised) - FY03 (revised)
(Source: Annual Grapevine Survey)

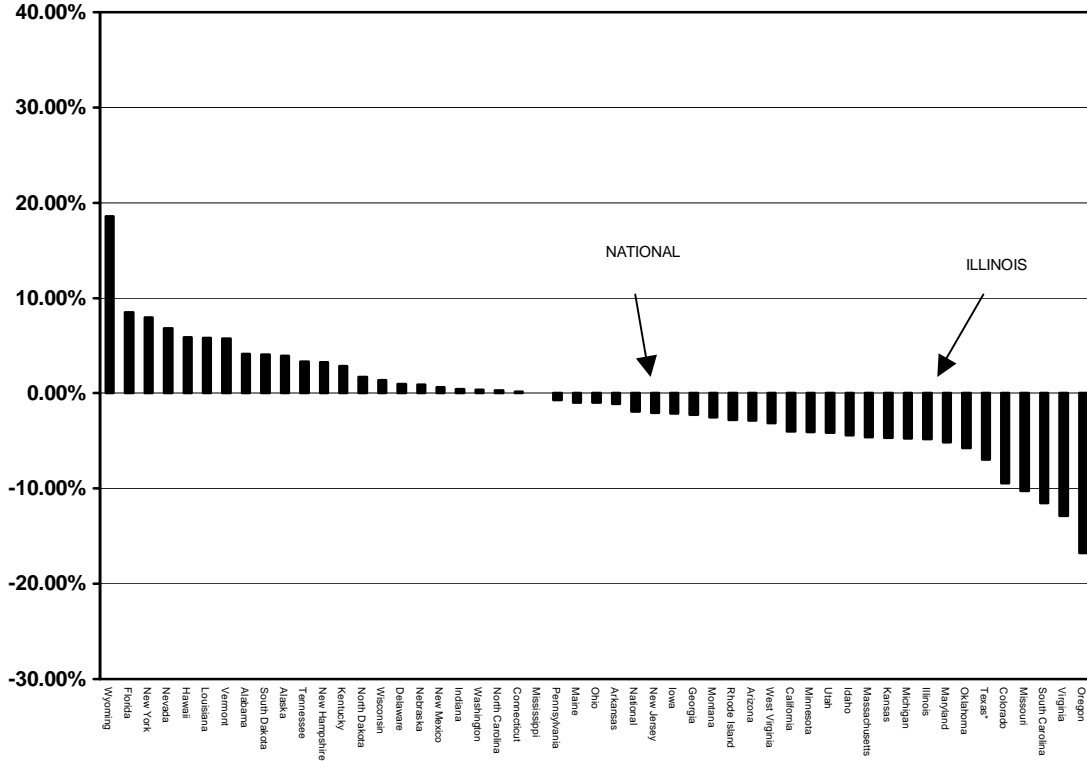
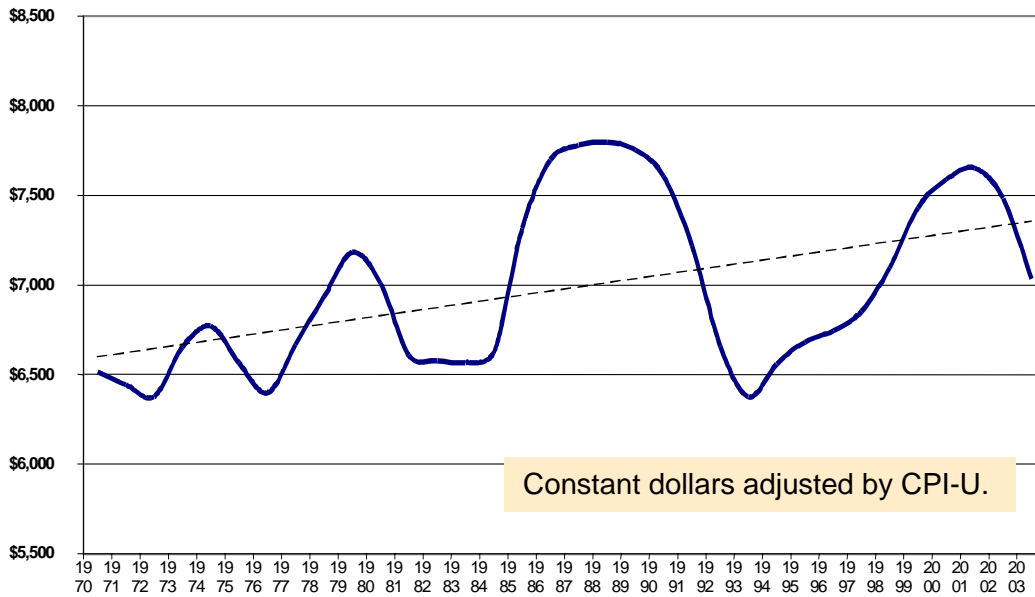


Figure 2: States' Tax Appropriations per Full-Time Equivalent Student in Constant 2003 Dollars, Fiscal 1970 – 2003

Sources: Annual Grapevine Survey and NCES Digest of Educational Statistics



Outlook for Recovery

[We need to] recognize that the current environment of fiscal constraint is a more long-lived phenomenon than earlier bust/boom cycles and that more comprehensive and complex responses are required (Rugg).

The wide swings in funding may be difficult to deal with, but there may be a longer-term problem resulting from increased demands for states' resources and slower tax revenue growth associated with a shift in economic activity from goods to lightly taxed services (Lingenfelter, Boyd). Illinois is among the states that are expected to have a "structural fiscal shortfall" by 2010. Illinois' shortfall is estimated to be -4.2 percent compared to the national average of -3.4 percent (Jones, Boyd).

The national recovery from the most recent recession is likely to be slower and flatter for higher education than previous recoveries. Even in the prosperous times of the late 1990s, higher education lost ground to other demands such as Medicaid and elementary and secondary education as its share of state budgets declined (Heller).

Illinois in Context

Table 1 shows that Illinois higher education experienced higher than average two-year cuts in appropriations between Fiscal Years 2002 and 2004, almost seven percent compared to four percent across all states. Among states with of similar size and higher education budgets (\$1.0 to \$2.0 billion in Fiscal Year 1994), Illinois had the largest two-year decline. However, Illinois continues to benefit from higher than average increases during the 1990s and remains above the national average in ten-year increase.

Higher education's share of Illinois general funds has declined from 13.2 percent in fiscal year 1990 to 9.4 percent in fiscal year 2005. Between fiscal years 2002 and 2005, higher education lost 15.3 percent of its state revenues compared to increases of 5.7 percent for elementary and secondary education and 5.5 percent for all other state functions. (Palmer)

Changes in Distribution of Higher Education Funds

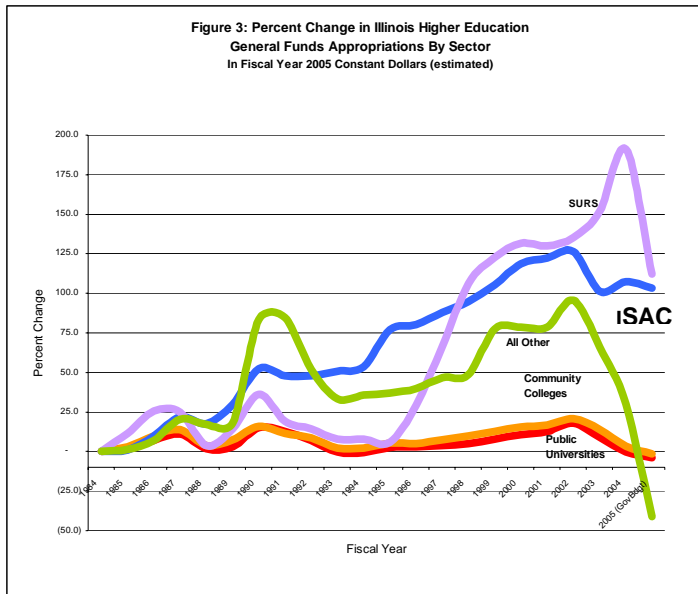
General trends do not reflect the significant shifts in funding within higher education budgets. Figure 3 shows that, in Illinois for example, funds for retirement and student financial aid have increased since Fiscal Year 1990, while state funds to support operations of public universities and community

colleges have declined substantially from fiscal years 1990 to 2005 and returned to approximate 1984 levels.² (Kangas, Bragg)

Table 1: Percent Change in State Tax Funds for Higher Education Operating Expenses Selected States				
Sorted by 10-year change	10-Year change	8-year change	2-year change	1-year change
	FY1994-2004	FY1994-2002	FY2002-2004	FY2003-2004
Florida	77.1	68.0	5.4	-2.8
Georgia	61.6	65.0	-2.1	0.2
Illinois	50.4%	61.6%	-6.9%	-2.2%
North Carolina	50.1	49.8	0.0	-1.7
All States	46.7	52.9	-4.0	-2.1
Ohio	41.4	41.7	-0.2	0.8
Michigan	33.4	44.8	-6.7	-2.8
New Jersey	32.9	34.6	-1.2	0.9
Pennsylvania	27.7	32.8	-3.8	-3.2
Minnesota	27.6	36.9	-6.7	-2.8

Source: *Grapevine*, www.coe.ilstu.edu/grapvine/50state.htm

Although public colleges and universities benefit from the retirement system and receive a portion of student financial aid funds through students, institutional flexibility to allocate funds to various programs and services has been reduced significantly as funds for student aid and retirement are



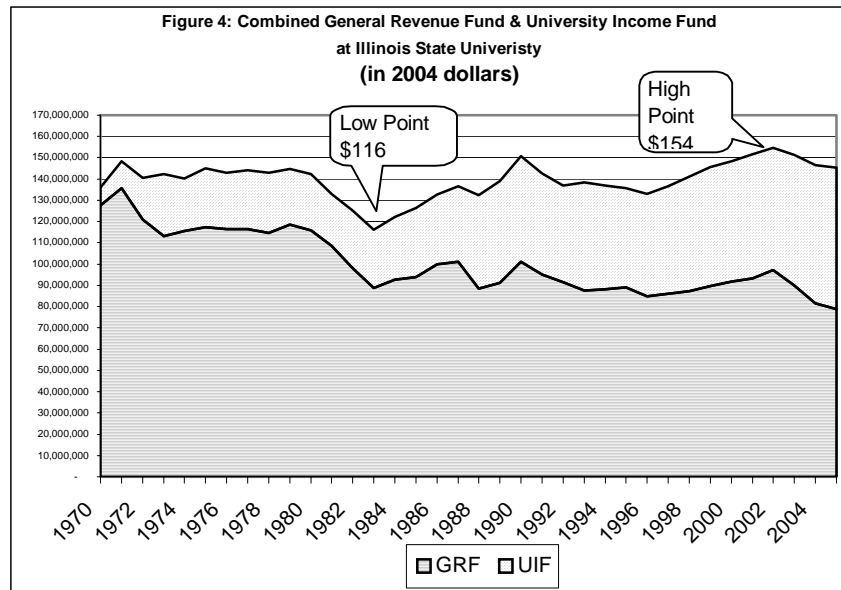
appropriated to other entities. State general funds, along with tuition, are the primary sources of support for instruction. Although colleges and universities have sources of funds other than the state general revenues and tuition, (e.g., student fee revenue, federal and state grants), most are restricted and cannot be reallocated to support instruction (Rugg). Because restricted funds associated with recreation and residential

facilities, for example, must be spent on those functions and cannot be reallocated to instruction, campuses may experience fundamental shift in priorities on campus from the academic mission to other activities (Bragg).

² 1990, when a temporary income tax increase was made permanent and dedicated to education, was a high point in funding.

Replacing State Funds with Tuition

Many colleges and universities have increased tuition (university income funds) to replace general revenue funds and cover increased costs. Combined, tuition and state funds primarily support the instructional mission. As shown in Figure 4, for example, total funds have remained relatively stable at Illinois State University, averaging about \$140 million per year in 2004 constant dollars. In the 1970s, general revenue funds represented over 90 percent of the total of state general funds and tuition, while in 2004 it represents slightly over half. (Bragg)



Performance and Accountability

The current fiscal situation in Illinois and in other states make it imperative that publicly supported activities such as higher education are able to demonstrate a return on the investment made – there are too many worthy priorities seeking these increasingly limited resources available (Layzell).

The current fiscal problems have been accompanied by increased demands for accountability from higher education for quality, service, and good management of state resources. The development of accountability systems for K-12 education, from 1985 through implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, provides an indication of what may be in store for higher education. Current congressional hearings on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act have emphasized accountability measures similar to those developed for K-12. (Ashby)

Illinois' higher education system thus far does well in national comparisons. *Measuring Up*, a national series of studies measuring important elements—

preparation, participation, affordability, and benefits to the state—have shown that Illinois has one of the strongest higher education systems in the country (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2002). “In particular, Illinois’ significant investment in need-based student aid (MAP) and a large, comprehensive community college system have contributed to its relatively strong performance in the areas of participation and affordability (Layzell).” Preliminary information from a study that compares funding with *Measuring Up* performance measures indicates that Illinois higher education provides good value—high performance for an average investment of state resources in higher education (Doyle).

Critical Concerns

As the nation and Illinois begin to emerge from the recession, some critical policy concerns have emerged—a shift in public policy, long-term effects on access and affordability, and the lack of processes and methods to deal with roller coaster funding associated with economic cycles for institutions and systems.

Fundamental Public Policy Questioned

Interest in higher education is high and we are seeing record enrollments. However, it seems that the public thinks of higher education as a personal benefit, not as a public good (Presley).

The growth of the public higher education during the latter half of the 20th century was based on the widely held belief that higher education was a public good. A high level of educational attainment among the population was viewed as essential for a prosperous economy and educated citizens contribute to the quality of life in communities. However, there are indications that this perception has changed. Higher education is increasingly seen more as a personal benefit—preparation for a career and increased lifetime earnings—than as a public good. The increasing share of college costs borne by students and families may reflect this changed perception but, nevertheless, this trend represents a *de facto* change in public policy.

Whether or not there has been a fundamental shift in public policy, many believe that the declining state support reflects a lower priority for higher education as competing demands for state funds gain importance. “Higher education is an easy target for states seeking to balance their budgets” (Symposium Participant).

Access and Affordability Threatened

What this [Table 2] means is dumb rich kids go to college at the same rate as smart poor kids (Heller).

College participation rates have increased across all income levels in the past 35 years. However, the gaps remain in participation rates and degree attainment between poor and rich and between minority and white students (Heller). Nationally, student financial aid has not kept pace with tuition and fee increases.

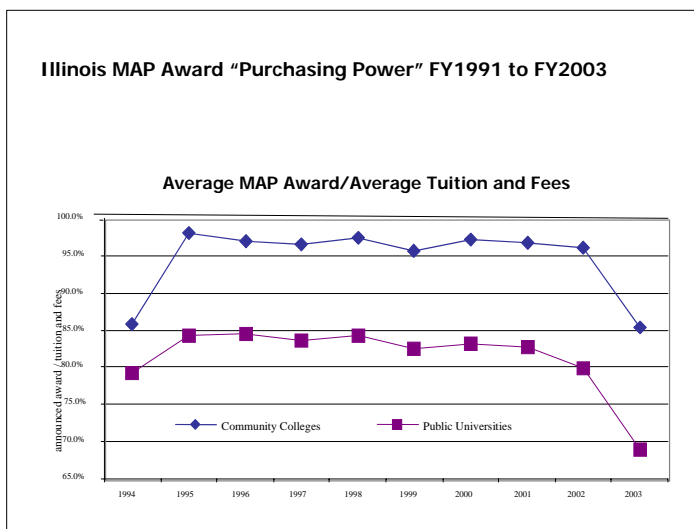
Table 2 shows that low-income students are less likely to attend college; the highest academic achievers among low-income students are no more likely to attend college than the lowest performing students from the highest income group. Once in college, poor students often need to work part time, stop out, borrow—all detrimental to persistence and degree completion. Affordability—a balance of cost and student financial aid—is a major factor in college attendance and persistence for low-income students. (Heller)

Table 2: Percentage of 1992 High School Graduates Attending College in 1994			
By Achievement Test and Socioeconomic Status Quartile		SES Quartile	
		Lowest	Highest
Achievement Quartile	Highest	78%	97%
	Lowest	36%	77%

Source: *Access Denied*, U.S. Department of Education, February 2001

Despite concerns about access for low-income students, there has been a national trend toward merit-based aid programs, which tend to serve middle class students rather than the poor. "In Georgia, 90% of the students receiving Hope Scholarships would have gone to college anyway. Meanwhile the education gap between white and African Americans increases." (Heller)

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Illinois is among the states that have placed priority on need-based student financial aid programs. In the past, the need-based Monetary Award Program (MAP) kept pace with tuition increases. However, last year, MAP lost 10% of its resource base and 50,000 eligible students were denied grants due to lack of funds. Many of these students attended community colleges and urban universities, where students tend to make

college decisions and apply for financial aid later in the cycle. Many students who received grants found that their financial aid covered less of their tuition and fees as it had in 2002. A total of \$150 million would be required to return MAP to 2002 funding levels. (Matejka)

Institutional Effectiveness Reduced

There is always hope that we can weather the storm. Small amounts are reallocated and cuts are made in drips and dribbles. Decisions would have been very different if we had known that we would eventually cut \$19 million. (Bragg)

During a recession, when state revenues are in doubt, budget decisions at the state level tend to be incremental and, occasionally unpredictable. Cuts may be made when the budget is developed but funds may be withheld or rescinded during the course of the year and/or costs may be shifted into institutional budgets. However, institutions tend to operate with an expectation of stability of resources; the possibility of mid-year cuts makes it difficult to plan. Rather than planning systematically, as they most likely would if the full scope of cuts were known, to assure that institutional priorities are achieved, institutions may postpone expenditures, rescind funds from departments, hold positions unfilled, and hope that funds will be restored in the next budget cycle.

Recommended Strategies

Higher education needs to resist the temptation to simply weather the storm until the economy improves and to address the following objectives:

- To set clear goals for higher education quality, access, participation, and productivity
- To assure that Illinois' tradition of providing broad access to higher education at an affordable cost is maintained
- To maintain the quality of instruction and services to students
- To enable colleges and universities to manage resources effectively through economic cycles and
- To enable entrepreneurial activities and cooperative initiatives among colleges and universities

Participants in the Symposium suggested several strategies for achieving these objectives.

Initiate the Dialogue

No solution will be effective if there is not commitment: commitment from institutions to focus on priorities, be productive, and hold tuition increases to the CPI; commitment from state government to stabilize the roller-coaster funding and support planning; and commitment from students to be prepared, use their time well, and pay their fair share (Doyle).

There are indications of a fundamental shift in public policy on higher education, but the essential dialogue has not taken place. Public agreement needs to be reached on the central question of whether higher education is a public good or primarily a benefit to individuals. Clear goals should be jointly developed and appropriate accountability measures identified. Higher education needs to provide the leadership for initiating the dialogue, perhaps through a citizens' commission and improved dialogue with governmental leaders. It may be the appropriate time for the Illinois Board of Higher Education to initiate a blue ribbon committee comprising governmental leaders, representatives of public and private colleges and universities, higher education academicians, and state policy makers to examine future directions for higher education funding in Illinois. The committee would examine trends beyond the annual budget and develop new fiscal policy guidelines suited to the higher education environment in the 21st century.

Concerns have been expressed that higher education has become decentralized and fragmented in the past decade. "Strong coordination is needed more than ever before; instead we see weakened coordinating boards across the country" (Symposium Participant). The Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Student Assistance Commission, and the leadership of public and private colleges and universities need to come together to develop a unified agenda for higher education and seek support from governmental leaders and citizens. As a start, regular meetings of the Public-Private Leadership should be reinstated on a regular basis to identify common concerns and develop shared initiatives.

Focus on Priorities

Higher education can strengthen its position with governmental leaders and the general public by focusing on its highest priority—educating students. Initiatives might include improving high school preparation for college, particularly for low-income students; promoting good use of students' time in college; and developing policies to improve four-year completion rates. Policies that encourage students to complete college in a timely manner can save money for both students and the state. Expanding pre-college credit generating programs such as Advanced Placement, dual credit, and International Baccalaureate and increasing the number of credit hours that can be taken for a flat tuition rate are examples of steps that might be taken (Symposium Participant).

By paying attention to how students, particularly non-traditional student, use the system, higher education can develop ways to better serve students and help them stay connected and complete their programs. For-profit degree-granting institution may have some lessons to offer. They have established a programmatic niche. They offer a narrow standardized curriculum; faculty's time is dedicated to teaching; convenient schedules and locations are offered; and degree completion and job placement are emphasized.

Higher education can also make a contribution to achieving the state's most critical goals including improving teacher preparation and meeting workforce education needs (Lingenfelter).

Assure Affordability

We need to preserve our national identity as the land of opportunity by working to provide more opportunities for low-income families (England-Siegerdt).

Sustaining the strong, long-term commitment to need-based financial aid is the most critical factor in assuring access and affordability to Illinois' diverse population (Heller). Higher education should also reach agreement with governmental leaders on the appropriate balance between state support and tuition and the balance between tuition and financial aid. Consideration might be given to tying tuition increases to an index such as family income (Doyle).

As student financial aid policies are developed, consideration needs to be given to the needs of non-traditional students and how they use the system, attending multiple institutions (sometimes concurrently), stopping out and returning, and other non-traditional attendance patterns (Palmer). Consideration might be given to new models for student financial aid such as Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program, through which pre-high school students are promised full-tuition scholarships in exchange for a pledge to complete high school with satisfactory grades, avoid drugs and crime, and apply to college and for financial aid on time. (Heller).

Refine Accountability

Institutions should be more responsive to calls for accountability. There has been much concern about calls for documenting faculty productivity—is what we do so mysterious that it can't be measured? Is everything we do of good value? (Palmer)

There is a concern that "the constituencies—students and parents, faculty, administrators, media, politicians, public administrative agencies, business and industry leaders, taxpayers—do not share a vocabulary of aspiration, excellence, management, or even accountability..." (Symposium Participant). This concern is readily apparent in discussions about accountability. On one hand, higher education believes it is the "most assessed and most accountable" public entity. On the other hand, governmental leaders express frustration at what they see as higher education's reluctance to demonstrate quality and productivity.

Higher education needs to respond to calls for accountability and have a continuing dialogue with government leaders. Accountability requirements

should be examined to assure that they address issues that are truly critical. Reporting requirements should be reviewed to assure that each level—academic unit, campus, system, coordinating board, and government—has the optimum information for decision-making at that level. Requirements that do not address important issues should be eliminated. Consideration might be given to developing new indices and measures that make the case for Illinois higher education more effectively.

Part of the dialogue must be to establish a common language as well as a set of common goals. If there are things about higher education that are not understood well enough by governmental leaders and the general public, as is often suggested, then it is higher education's responsibility to provide the information and explanations as needed.

Improve Planning and Management Capabilities

Higher education needs to be in a position to navigate its way through the inevitable highs and lows of economic cycles rather than merely weathering the storms. The cycles themselves should be considered the norm and processes and methods developed to provide stability at the campus level (Doyle). Colleges and universities should continue to develop ways to function more efficiently using technology, sharing resources, and participating in cooperative ventures. Consideration might be given to changes to policies on procurement, carryover of general revenue funds and subsidization across fund sources (Bragg). Further, as accountability mechanisms are reexamined, burdensome regulator and reporting requirements should be ameliorated.

Some states have taken steps to privatize higher education, trading funding for reduced regulation and changing the legal status of institutions. The gradual shift of higher education support from the state to tuition suggests that a process of privatization has begun. However, few believe that complete privatization is a feasible choice for Illinois. "Higher education has never been self-supporting; it has always relied on patronage" (Palmer).

Symposium Follow-up

The participants in the Symposium on Financing Higher Education believed that the dialogues should continue within higher education, and between higher education and governmental leaders. As a start, this report will be circulated among higher education and governmental leaders. A Web site with presenters' materials and other resources will be developed at <http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/edpolctr/HigherEdSymposium.htm>. Further, similar symposia should be convened on a regular basis to assess the condition of state and national economies and higher education fiscal policies.

Topics for a research agenda were suggested: analyzing and articulating the societal benefits of higher education; examining what happens to college-

qualified low-income students, both those who attend college and those who do not; studying how states handle student financial aid in times of recession; and examining accountability and organizational models used in other states and countries.

In the next few months, the Center for the Study of Education Policy will extend the work of symposium presenters and participants. Contacts with governmental and higher education leaders will be initiated, policy priorities noted, and responsibilities and leadership identified.

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Center for the Study of Education Policy
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