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AUTHOR	Kezar, Adrianna J.
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ABSTRACT

Higher education's relationship with and contribution to the public good emerged as a trend in the higher education literature in 1996. Three major themes are represented: the role of higher education, public relations, and collaboration. The literature and research continue to illustrate the valuable role of higher education in the important processes that underlie our culture and society. Most often discussed in the literature is economic development; political and social development have a significantly lesser role. Helpful additions to the literature are contextual studies that examine the impact of higher education on specific communities. A report developed for the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association examines the role of higher education in the development of the workforce, focusing on such issues as employers', learners', and the public's expectations. Public relations, an increasingly problematic issue, is not well represented in the literature. This area needs more research to understand how public perception affects higher education institutions, what shapes public opinion, and how it can be changed. Collaboration was also a major theme in the literature, with discussions about collaborations with industry, with K-12 educators, and within the institution. (Contains 13 references.) (JM)

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Adrianna J. Kezar

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Higher Education Trends (1997-1999)
Higher Education and the Public Good

by Adrianna J Kezar

Higher education's relationship with and contribution to the public good emerged as a trend in the higher education literature in 1996, but it was not as significant as expected in a time of shifting priorities. The commitment of higher education after World War II to focus on research, develop science and technology, and educate a growing workforce for a new age of workers in a changing and growing economy is being questioned. This 50-year commitment has been called into question as globalization has caused campuses to evaluate their monopoly on information and science and the need to educate an even broader and still growing nontraditional workforce for the information age. Although the literature continues to explore our historic commitments to the public good, much of it is steeped in traditional arguments of educating for democracy, the importance of a tie between business/industry and higher education, and the necessity of education for economic development. Although these arguments remain compelling, the literature and research should begin to explore new commitments. Three major themes emerge in the literature: the role of higher education, public relations, and collaboration.

Traditional Economic, Political, and Social Arguments for the Role of Higher Education

The literature and research continue to illustrate the valuable role of higher education in the important processes that underlie our culture and our society. Clearly, economic development is most represented in the literature, with political and social development significantly less discussed. Although an already established assumption, it is important that this research continue, if only because public support for higher education is waning. It would be helpful if the plethora of research supporting the value of higher education were compiled. Moreover, new ways for higher education to support these goals regionally or locally - for example, through service learning or action research - should be studied.

The literature tends to make the same traditional arguments without benefit of specific examples from institutions (Paulsen). But this trend is slowly changing. For example, a report by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges describes some traditional arguments and discusses the social and economic benefits of university research, arguing that if funding for research programs is reduced, short-term savings could impose long-term costs, depriving the country of scientific breakthroughs, economic growth, and improved international competitiveness. However, the report provides specific examples from 100 institutions.

Another helpful addition to the literature is contextual studies that look at the impact of higher education on specific communities. Kevin Stokes explores the extent of the economic impact of a college or university and illustrates the relationship between a range of influences and the character of the community where it is located. For example, the regional expenditures of institutions in college towns are large, while their impact on knowledge is small; conversely, expenditures of metropolitan schools with regional reputations are small, while their impact on knowledge is great. Thus, this study is

noteworthy because it summarizes past approaches to understanding economic impact (income expenditure studies, ACE studies, economic base studies, input-output studies, econometric studies, and knowledge impact studies) and because it explores this impact on local communities. More research of this type would be helpful.

Robert Wallhaus developed a report for SHEEO that examines the role of higher education in the development of the workforce, focusing on such issues as employers', learners', and the public's expectations and the kinds of responses that colleges and universities must offer in return. The report illustrates the necessity of higher education's meeting the changing needs of learners and employers as they seek greater flexibility and more access to education and training. Institutions should respond with new instructional delivery systems, including preparation for teachers and professional development, based on the public's needs and demands (see "College Instruction" and "College Faculty"). Macro-level research exploring such changes that compares state and national studies of employers' concerns are also needed. Multilevel analyses that combine national and local results probably have the best chance of helping to develop meaningful public policy.

The literature is also concerned with higher education institutions' role of developing citizenship. For example, Laurent Daloz et al. examine the role of higher education in preparing citizens for the 21st century and in working for global good in an increasingly challenging social context. Much research is available on this topic.

Most states produce a master plan that describes the importance of higher education in meeting state goals (New Jersey State Commission on Higher Education), but there appears to be little literature on the impact of state master plans on higher education institutions. We need to understand the ways that master plans can be used to achieve institutional change. It would also be interesting to compare states' and accrediting agencies' goals to what the higher education community (institutions, associations, and regional groups) claims are its goals.

Public Relations

Public relations, an increasingly problematic issue, is not well represented in the research. Few institutions are assessing their public relations programs, and few national studies appear to focus on public relations. One exception is an article based on three studies of public opinion of higher education, undertaken through a broad survey, focus groups, and a survey of civic leaders. A second article includes five college and university public relations professionals' battle plans to respond to public concerns (Netherton et al.). This area clearly needs more research to understand how public perception affects higher education institutions, what shapes public opinion, and how it can be changed. Successful programs and practices should be shared.

Other literature, such as "Science as Golem" by Trevor Pinch et al., describes how the academy must spend more time making the public aware of the culture, values, and role of academe. More interest in this area is clearly necessary; the absence of literature could suggest apathy among higher education institutions in responding to new demands that will not go away. Pinch et al., for example, argue that the public needs to better understand expert disagreement as part of the scientific enterprise and how such research can be used for public policy. It is our responsibility as researchers to articulate how ambiguous findings and study results can be used to inform public policy. Not a new issue but one of ongoing public concern is the applicability of research supported by tax monies. Partially as a result of not embracing new public commitments, the relationship with the public has become strained. We need leadership to bring us to consensus about our commitment to the public good, which will most likely affect public relations.

Collaboration and the Public Good

Collaboration is a major theme of the literature in 1996 about higher education and the public good. Initiatives most often discussed include collaboration with business and

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industry, collaboration with K-12 education, and collaboration within the institution. Collaboration is seen as important in strengthening the role of higher education in society and higher education's meeting needs more closely. The historic isolation and autonomy of higher education are respected and encouraged to a degree, but a new emphasis on the benefits of collaboration is clearly a future direction for the research.

Stephen Bell, for example, writes about how the development and enhancement of alliances among universities, industry, and government are widely considered a prescription for strengthening the competitiveness of regional and national economies. He examines the interaction of university and industrial scientists and discusses whether the creation of Ontario's Centers of Excellence should serve as a model for research links between universities and industry. The literature also discusses several examples of collaboration between higher education and grades K-12, including working more closely with high school counselors, community service projects, and teacher education programs (Metcalf-Turner and Fischetti). Other research illustrates the benefits of departmental and collegewide collaboration on doctoral programs as they affect students' preparedness, retention, and the climate in which they work. These research results are making the public increasingly wary of faculty departmentalization, autonomy, and lack of collaboration (Anderson). Research on the impact of collaboration is slowly being undertaken, but to ascertain what the appropriate balance is, we need continued research, especially on partnerships between industries and colleges. Ideas for best practices are well represented in the literature.

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