It has become a well-rehearsed litany. Declining public appropriations for higher education by states with reduced tax revenues and increased demands to fund healthcare, roads, prisons, and K-12 education as first-order priorities. Tuition increases that each year substantially exceed the growth of family income, threatening to put a college education beyond the reach of too many low-income students. A changing demographic profile that ought to yield an increasingly diverse college student body but is not doing so. The growing prominence and market success of private-sector/proprietary providers as well as alternative modes of educational delivery through digital technology and other means. Questions about the effectiveness of learning and the value of the education that universities and colleges provide, as measured by the rates of student persistence and graduation. A seeming gridlock that often prevents institutions from adapting to change by any means other than growing larger and adding to existing costs. And finally, an abridgment of the hope that doing a better job of documenting higher education's value would yield an increase in public support—combined with an instinct that greater public financial support will never come about without such evidence. It is a set of questions that pertains not just to effective learning and the financing of higher education but equally to the continued ability of colleges and universities to serve the public interest.

The discussions these questions have engendered are often as fractured as the list of lamentations is long. Too often, the resulting debates are without focus, frequently without apparent purpose, and, alas, too often missing the voices of university and college presidents. In previous epochs, presidential leadership was a force for change in American higher education, as university and college presidents served not just as witnesses and respondents but also as active shapers of the national dialogue.

To engage presidents more directly in what is becoming an increasingly rancorous discussion of higher education’s current priorities, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education convened a set of presidential soundings and exchanges in the spring and summer of 2010 with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education. The process included one-on-one interviews and a two-day roundtable discussion to consider higher education’s role in meeting the nation’s need for a more highly educated and skilled population in a time of dramatic change and uncertainty. In all, the process involved presidents of 28 universities and colleges—including leaders of public, proprietary, and not-for-profit institutions—complementing these federal investments were the equal and independent contributions of new state and personal endowments.

Our roundtable brought together presidents of universities and colleges across the full spectrum of higher education, including leaders of public-sector, independent, and proprietary universities and colleges. Our roundtable brought together presidents of universities and colleges across the full spectrum of higher education, including leaders of public-sector, independent, and proprietary universities and colleges.

Vision and Commitment
The irony confronting all college and university presidents, including...
In previous epochs, presidential leadership was a force for change in American higher education, as university and college presidents served not just as witnesses and respondents but also as active shapers of the national dialogue.
naturally seek to enroll students of promise among their study body, though in some cases a desire to attract the best and brightest can eclipse a commitment to educate students from a range of educational, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds including first-generation college students. Very often the strategic vision pursued is to advance an institution on the scale of public esteem—whether measured by the annual media rankings of colleges and universities or by other factors that make an institution appealing to the more advantaged and high-achieving students, to the public, and to other members of the profession generally.

The element that tends not to figure substantially in the visions and strategic plans of institutions is a concern for measurable improvement in learning. The more typical strategy is to focus an institution’s imagination, energy, and resources on becoming more selective, more attractive to the best students and faculty, rather than on configuring the institution to educate the student body of the future. While there are promising signs in some states that have mandated steps for more seamless transfer between two- and four-year institutions, many four-year institutions need to build more constructive relationships with regional community colleges to facilitate coherent progress for students who have chosen to begin their college education in a less costly institution.

Even less likely to appear in the aspirations of most four-year public and independent higher education institutions is a goal of working constructively with regional K–12 schools to foster a better understanding among students of the advantages that result from a college education, and to help students and schools identify the middle and high school courses and the habits of mind that best prepare one for college-level study. The fact that K–12 teachers are trained for their professions by the nation’s universities and colleges represents a substantial and largely missed opportunity to establish strong linkages of reciprocal engagement with teachers and their school systems, helping to realize the vision of a more seamless K–16 education.

Value and Utility

Continuing these trends will inevitably result in a further separation between the prevailing nature of higher education and the most pressing needs of a nation struggling to maintain its place in a global economy. Many regard higher education as having commodified itself, having lost much of the passion and commitment that characterized an earlier time when the goals of universities and colleges were perceived to be more closely aligned with the nation’s needs for higher education. Some foresee a worst-case scenario in which higher education devolves further into a series of niche markets—in which the most selective institutions offer a boutique education to those most able to pay, in which proprietary institutions with low overhead costs attract growing numbers of students to career development programs for which there is high market demand, and in which public institutions highly dependent on declining state appropriation experience both an erosion of educational quality and a diminished appeal to potential students as tuition increases place them beyond the threshold of affordability.

One result of this increasing commodification of higher education is a weakened proclivity among parents, students, policymakers, and the general public to regard higher education as having intrinsic value—a quality in its own right that prepares students for a lifetime of learning and growth and thereby strengthens the nation’s social, moral, and civic well-being. The more prevalent disposition is to regard higher education in terms of its utilitarian purpose.

While the rationale for the support of higher education has never been devoid of practical considerations—ranging from the need to train future pastors in the 18th century, educate a rising generation in the agricultural and engineering sciences in the 19th century, or train K–12 teachers for the influx of the baby boom generation in the 1960s and ’70s—there is now far less willingness to regard universities and colleges as special kinds of institutions, deserving of respect and support as stewards and creators of knowledge.

The financial recession of the past two years has increased the public perception of higher education institutions as being more attuned to their own vitality than to the well-being of those they serve. Recent national surveys conducted by Public Agenda indicate that while most Americans consider higher education as essential for a fulfilling and economically productive life, a growing proportion of the American public perceives no essential difference between the behaviors of traditional higher education institutions and other enterprises concerned mainly with their own financial health. In a Public Agenda survey conducted in 2007, 52 percent agreed with the statement that “colleges today are like most businesses and care mainly about the bottom line.” In 2008, 55 percent assented to this statement, and by 2009, 60 percent of survey respondents conveyed this view. A declining share of the public now regards colleges and universities as institutions chiefly concerned with the quality of education they provide or the affordability of their academic programs.

In another respect, it is the tension between changing societal priorities and the seeming inertia and introspection of traditional institutions that feeds a decline in the intrinsic value accorded to higher education. Perhaps no societal institutions, including colleges and universities, can ever be perceived with the same generosity of spirit in the wake of continuing public scandals involving virtually every profession from Watergate forward. There are also many cases in which societal values themselves become fixated on matters that lead to costly and often unproductive outcomes. The U.S. has become a nation that spends more on prisons than on higher education. In higher education itself, an example of skewed priorities can be seen in the fact that in some institutions, intercollegiate sports attains a stature and appeal out of all proportion to its role in fostering a student’s educational and social development in college.

Beyond these factors, the sense of exasperation often heard among policymakers and the general public stems from a sense that many public-sector and independent universities and colleges, particularly four-year institutions, are slow to respond to emerging changes in social and economic circumstances. Too often there is a sense of disconnect between the language of legislators and the public, on the one hand, and the language of traditional higher education institutions on the other. Higher education administrators and faculty talk about the values that inform learning and the
Act, the GI Bill, and the higher education amendments that created the Pell grant program. The current assessment by legislators and other public policymakers is that higher education, given its prevailing inward focus, is not a major part of the solution to the challenges facing the nation; in fact, many perceive that, unlike K–12 schools, colleges and universities are neither in crisis nor can they be counted upon to help reshape the nation’s agenda.

Structure and Change

The financial recession of the past two years has driven home a sobering awareness that colleges and universities cannot expect to receive a substantial reinvestment of public dollars. Even if state governments were in a position to appropriate more dollars, neither higher education in general nor a state’s publicly financed colleges and universities would likely rise to the top of the list of contenders for increased public funding. While policymakers may consider higher education to be important, there are three observations about these institutions that are likely to give pause to legislators in any consideration of resource priorities:

• Universities and colleges as a whole have not been as responsive as they could have been in meeting the evolving public need for higher education, preferring instead to grow and develop on their own terms.

• Too often traditionally organized colleges and universities, both public and independent, seem incapable of innovation or change except by adding to the full range of programs currently in place.

• Many universities and colleges have not succeeded in improving either persistence or degree attainment.

Collectively these observations represent a call for greater agility and innovation on the part of our institutions as well as a capacity to increase substantially the proportion of citizens who both begin and complete a college education. In a more fundamental sense, the observations represent a call for higher education institutions to become more accountable for the dollars that states provide them. In the minds of many policymakers, business leaders, and the general public, higher education institutions too often seem unwilling to be held accountable for the public dollars invested on their behalf. Our institutions must accomplish what many will appear a truly daunting task of educating more students while simultaneously doing what they have largely proved unable to do for the last 50 years—curtail those habits and customs that have caused our costs to increase substantially faster than household income.

Even when our institutions want to change, the forces acting to preserve existing programs, customs, and procedures remain extraordinarily strong. The agents that can inhibit change within a college or university are both internal and external. Any proposal for a change in academic programs or personnel can expect to encounter resistance from faculty, apart from the natural instinct to protect one’s own domain, the internal argument against radical change is that it will cause the institution to lose standing among peer institutions. Board members can also align themselves with particular programs and intervene to prevent needed reform. Many public universities and colleges find another impediment to change in the strong regulatory environment state governments have created, which in some cases requires state approval for virtually any step that an institution or a set of public institutions wishes to take.

Not every institution needs to change in the same way; differences in mission will point to different courses of action in different universities and colleges. Regardless of the type of institution, however, a process of meaningful change will require strong presidential leadership in order to succeed. A practice of simply staying the course, pressing on in the hope of renewed public appropriation, is not a strategy for the future. As long as universities and colleges present themselves as being continually in need of more money, both the public and its elected officials will likely consider higher education as part of the problem, not the solution.

Different Modes of Proceeding

Even though the exemplars of meaningful change in higher education remain comparatively few, our conversation identified several instances of innovation that offer the hope of new pathways through the gridlock of conventional practice within the academy. Some of these constitute meaningful steps to work within the culture of traditional public and independent universities and colleges. Others are initiatives that essentially begin with a blank slate, setting about to create educational programs of value from the ground up.

Streamlining the curriculum. One of the prime opportunities any institution can pursue to make the pathway to a degree more straightforward and efficient is to focus the programs of study more directly on essential courses that are fundamental to the institution’s learning goals. Many colleges and universities have experienced a proliferation in course and program offerings as a result of the laissez faire environment that gave rise to dramatic curriculum expansion from the late 1960s forward. In a system that requires 120 credits to graduate, it is not uncommon to find that more than one-third of students who graduate have taken 145 or more credits. This phenomenon represents tremendous inefficiency not just for the institution but also in terms of costs that students incur in earning a four-year degree.

The array of courses listed in the catalogs of many institutions today evokes the image conveyed 25 years ago by the Association of American Colleges (now AAC&U) in its “Integrity in the College Curriculum”: that the undergraduate curriculum has become a smorgasbord in which anything goes. While the thought of making structural change in the curriculum to increase the effectiveness of students’ progress toward the degree may seem attractive in the abstract, achieving this goal is extraordinarily difficult for any traditional
college or university in the U.S. It is a goal that cannot be achieved without presidential leadership. Curricular reform requires that an institution take a deliberate step back from the array of graduation requirements both within the major and general education. Requirements for some disciplinary majors result from national accreditation standards, though in other cases a growth in the number of required units for the major may derive primarily from a department’s wish to sustain its enrollment levels.

At a time when fewer students may aspire to graduate school, it is reasonable in some cases to ask how many specialized courses for a major are actually necessary. Reducing the number of electives could also result in a more focused curriculum and a sense of shared progress among cohorts of students, who would be more likely to proceed together through the curriculum and provide mutual support in learning. Such a step could also effectively increase the institution’s capacity to staff courses in the core curriculum with full-time tenure-line faculty, yielding a reduced need for adjunct faculty and a reduction of costs. Making headway on curriculum reform must involve steps that make such a change in the faculty’s own interests. Creating a more focused and direct set of routes to the degree could reduce institutional costs and increase the likelihood of students completing their studies and graduating in a timely way.

**Applying digital technology.**

Beyond its ability to support distance education, digital technology creates the capacity to rethink the processes of teaching and learning. Digital tools infuse the interactions between students and faculty in traditional college courses, creating a variety of modes for instruction and dialogue both within and outside of class. Technology creates avenues for faculty members to engage students in different ways, and to create new teaching materials in digital form. A generation of students has come of age in the presence of technology, and these students fully expect that their own learning process will involve digital means of interaction with the faculty, their student peers, and sources of knowledge.

The power of the Internet has created an environment of unmediated access to information, in contrast to an earlier time when higher education and the academic disciplines served essentially as stewards of important knowledge. One of the essential skills higher education must impart to students in the digital age is the ability to think critically, to discern the value of information they encounter, and to make responsible choices based on what they have discovered. Some institutions have taken a further step in applying the tools of technology to rethink fundamentally the teaching and learning process. Such innovations often emphasize project-based learning and concept mastery over the sheer memorization of content which can easily become outdated.

Regardless of how far an institution chooses to pursue the avenues to improve learning through technology and alternative pedagogies, there is a need to mentor faculty members in the use of these tools to meet the learning needs of current and future students. Working effectively in these modes can result in increased student success in learning and graduation.

**Learning from private-sector institutions.**

The dramatic and steady growth in the number of proprietary institutions of higher education through the past decade makes clear that these institutions have introduced a viable and important set of options to higher education. Private-sector institutions do not experience the constraints that often inhibit change in traditional colleges and universities; they have proven themselves particularly adept in addressing the needs of adult learners who must combine education with work and other responsibilities. The enrollments of proprietary institutions now approach 12 percent of all postsecondary education enrollments in the U.S. To be certain, there are pointed questions and increasingly vociferous disagreements—among policymakers, higher education leaders, and members of our own roundtable—concerning potential abuses in recruitment and financial aid practices as well as the quality and utility of some program offerings in proprietary institutions. Yet proprietary institutions have clearly found ways to respond to shifting demand for higher education with greater alacrity than traditional public-sector or independent institutions.

The increased flexibility of proprietary colleges and universities derives principally from their different traditions of ownership and decision-making. In proprietary institutions, it is the institution, rather than the faculty, that owns the curriculum. The institution can set standards for instructional quality and method, and then scale its programs up in multiple settings. The institution has no obligation to offer a full range of courses, and it need not continue a program if the market demand has diminished. The profits that proprietary institutions earn are allocated not just to shareholders and taxes but also to capital expenditures to enhance the learning environment of students. Private-sector institutions also have proven themselves more proficient than most traditional colleges and universities in applying technology to achieve their educational purposes.

The difference everyone focuses on, however, is that faculty in private-sector enterprises generally do not receive tenure or even the assurance of continued employment. While proprietary institutions do employ some full-time professors, the appeal made to most faculty is very much a “pull” strategy—one that attracts faculty members through incentives—the prospect of auxiliary income, linked in some cases with the opportunity to approach the teaching and learning process in different ways with different students. Many of those who serve as instructors at private-sector institutions are also tenure-line faculty members at traditional universities and colleges; and it is sometimes observed that faculty members who are strong and vocal advocates of academic governance in their “home” institutions are more amenable to policy changes...
implemented by the managers in a proprietary setting.

We do not believe the issue is tenure per se—it is a practice that has served higher education well in preserving and strengthening the independence of the faculty-scholar. We do believe, however, that the active consideration of other forms of contractual relationships between those who teach and the institutions they serve is long past due.

Creating revenue-generating centers within not-for-profit institutions.

A promising strategy to serve public purposes and generate an alternative source of revenue is to establish self-funding units within a traditional public or independent institution. One possibility is to create a program of adult continuing education within a public or independent university or college. Often these units are able to explore different models and reconfigure themselves to address emerging needs and opportunities in ways that the traditional academic program cannot. Because they serve primarily students who are seeking educational skills and certification for employment, these units may not elicit the full respect of an institution’s more traditional academic departments.

Part of the challenge is to create the incentives—to exercise the “pull strategy”—that helps faculty members see the benefits that result from the ability to innovate expeditiously in continuing education programs. A program of this kind can operate as a limited liability company (LLC), in effect combining attributes of a not-for-profit mission with a unit that generates revenue to cover its costs and provide incentives for faculty to participate. In such an arrangement, state funds may well support the university’s core undergraduate and graduate programs, while the adult education classes are funded entirely from that program’s own tuitions. While faculty members are not typically required to teach in an institution’s continuing education program, there are incentives for them to act in ways that benefit the public interest as well as their own professional development.

Presidents to Presidents: Making Personal Commitments

In our willingness to take on the significant challenges facing higher education, at times speaking what others might well consider the unspeakable, we drew strength from our very diversity. Our roundtable brought together presidents of universities and colleges across the full spectrum of higher education, including leaders of public-sector, independent, and proprietary universities and colleges. Our conversation exemplified the extent to which there is essential agreement among different sectors of higher education in the assessment of current challenges and in the kinds of actions institutions can take to address those challenges. At the same time, none of these challenges can be effectively addressed without the strong leadership that presidents must provide. The actions that we propose require a strong personal commitment of presidents to pursue as key goals in their professional lives. Our recommendations are made in the first person plural: By speaking in this collective voice, we underscore the need for a kind of presidential leadership that is willing to work collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals, within and across higher education institutions.

As we hope we have made clear, we understand that the issues confronting higher education are both substantial and often divisive. What American higher education will require in the decade ahead is a willingness to rethink its deeply embedded structures. There will need to be changes in how our institutions both budget our resources and teach our students. Institutions will need to explore and take advantage of new models, drawing from promising instances of innovative approaches to change within traditional public and independent institutions, as well as from private-sector providers that constitute a vital and growing share of higher education. Institutions will need to consider curriculum reform as a core element both for improving educational attainment and containing costs. Even more broadly, colleges and universities need to evaluate and determine what they teach, how they teach it, and how they evaluate learning success.

Responding successfully to these challenges will result in a roster of institutions that are less homogeneous, more distinctive in character and structure, as each sets about to improve the learning of its students while constraining what it costs to deliver an effective and quality education. While no president can single-handedly ensure this result, no institution will likely succeed in both improving student learning and containing costs without presidential leadership. The same paradox applies to the question of ensuring that American higher education comes to be truly representative of the national body politic. No amount of presidential exhortation will close the attainment gap—yet no institution on its own is likely to contribute to the necessary re-making of the nation’s collective student body in the absence of strong leadership on the part of its chief executive.

Here, then, is our collective agenda for presidential action:

Be a Public Advocate for the Beneficial Impact of Higher Education

• Convene the conversations—within your institution and with higher education’s external stakeholders—that focus on higher education’s sustaining commitment to advance public well-being by providing a high-quality, affordable education to a changing population of learners.
• Articulate the need for public institutions to have sufficient flexibility within state regulatory structures to pursue alternative approaches to fulfilling their mission in a changing financial, demographic, and learning environment.
• Make a personal commitment to reach communities of young people who are underrepresented in higher education. Visit schools, churches, com-
munity organizations, and other venues to convey both the benefits that result from a higher education and the kinds of courses in middle and high school that prepare students for college success.

• Make a concerted effort to tell your institution’s story, particularly as it relates to achieving public purposes. Cite examples—to legislators, and to the public in general—of how your institution has transformed the lives of graduates.

**Develop Partnerships with Other Stakeholders**

• Lead the efforts within your institution to strengthen partnerships with K–12 schools, building on the fact that colleges and universities train the nation’s K–12 teachers for their professions. Work with leaders of K–12 schools to develop ways of helping more students understand both the benefits of a college education and the steps needed to prepare for college study through the middle and high school years.

• Forge meaningful linkages with K–12 schools that can help advance education at all levels. Without presuming that higher education can “fix” the challenges confronting K–12 schools, presidents should provide public support and offer assistance as requested by K–12 leaders to ensure that more students are able to read, write, and perform arithmetic functions by fourth grade. This benchmark offers a telling measure of students’ likelihood of achieving educational success, in school or in college. In taking these steps, a president affirms that program completion is a full system problem involving higher education as well as K–12 schools.

• Establish strong partnerships among two- and four-year institutions in the local region to minimize the hurdles students often encounter in the transfer process.

**Lead Your Institution in Understanding Challenges and Making Needed Change**

• Draw the attention of faculty to the changing environment for higher education and the implications of those changes for your institution in the future. The issues of higher education quality, affordability, and capacity must be topics of active discussion inside your institution as well as without.

• Lead your faculty in understanding the changing composition of higher education’s student body—in terms of ethnicity, financial circumstance, modes of learning, and goals after graduation—and the implications of those changes for higher education in the decades ahead.

• Work to shed new light on the common, though mistaken, assumptions about the cyclical rebounding from a financial recession. Actively counter the perception within your institution that the most fitting strategy is to hunker down and await the return of more favorable economic circumstances rather than engage in meaningful structural change.

• Provide strong leadership to eliminate some of the obstacles that prevent your institution from doing the right thing in fulfillment of core educational and social values. For example, impress on tenure committees the need to take account of the important service that an African American faculty member contributes to your institutional mission in being a mentor to minority students.

• Lead the charge in bringing the full power of institutional commitment to beneficial actions that too often exist as isolated boutiques or cottage industries within your institution. Commit your institution to goals that lend themselves to measurement and accountability for achieving a public purpose—for example, a goal of enrolling a certain percentage of the student body who are first-generation college students, and actively supporting their educational progress and success.

**Provide Strong Leadership for the Improvement of Learning**

• Provide professional development opportunities and support for faculty members who seek to improve your institution’s graduation rate. Support faculty efforts to develop evaluation procedures and intervention strategies that can increase the rate of student persistence and success.

• Support the measures of persistence and sustained learning as criteria for institutional effectiveness. Lead your institution in such actions as adopting a Head Start program for tutoring students preparing for college.

• Commit your institution to adopt better means of assessing the teaching and learning process—what happens “inside the box.” Higher education can no longer expect to win public support through an assurance that “inside the black box, amazing things happen to students.” Commit your institution to voluntary accountability reporting that demonstrates how it is meeting its educational goals.

**A Continued Journey**

Though it was not without tough-minded candor that we confronted the challenges facing the nation’s colleges and universities, our roundtable conversation nonetheless gave cause for optimism. Our exchanges over two days reaffirmed the essential mission and purpose of our universities and colleges to serve the nation’s public well-being through education and the creation of new knowledge. Different though our institutions are in some respects, they share a common heritage and commitment to serving public purpose. The changes our institutions have experienced and will continue to face are substantial, and the pathways to meeting those challenges are neither simple nor straightforward. Most of our institutions bring strong commitments to faculty autonomy, curriculum, collegial governance, and organizational structure. These traditions have contributed substantially to higher education’s achievements while helping ensure the freedom of academic pursuit and the integrity of institutional decision-making.

Presidential leadership of the kind we describe does not mean issuing proclamations and expecting broad compliance; it means working productively with faculty members, providing them with information on changes within society and higher education, and gaining their trust as partners in a shared effort to ensure the continued vitality and well-being of the institution. The specific actions presidents must take to lead the process of transformation will differ by institution as each confronts the need for change in the context of its particular values and culture. We are convinced that with strong and effective presidential leadership of this kind, colleges and universities will continue to progress on a course that stresses commitment to quality and inclusiveness, even in an environment of reduced public resources.

It is often observed that no other country has equaled the United States in the rich capacity and diversity of its higher education institutions. Colleges and universities have been part of the fabric of this nation and a strong factor in many of its spectacular achievements through the 20th century. Yet higher education’s seminal contributions in the past do not guarantee its success in educating a student population that is larger, more diverse in culture, ethnicity, educational and economic background—and one that differs from previous generations in its modes of learning and sequencing of higher education. Quite simply, more of the past cannot suffice for serving the nation’s educational needs in the future. College and university presidents must take the lead in reminding their faculty of the primary role of higher education in ensuring the nation’s continued economic productivity, civic engagement, and competitive strength in the years ahead. Nothing less than the sustaining, forceful leadership of presidents is required to advance the heritage of higher education in the 21st century.
This essay derives from a Presidential Roundtable convened in July 2010 in Leesburg, Virginia, by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. The National Center has focused primarily on policy issues concerning higher education access, affordability, and learning effectiveness within state contexts. Among the Center’s seminal contributions to the public policy dialogue are the series of state-by-state report cards, *Measuring Up*, a series of policy essays, as well as its work with Public Agenda to gauge public opinion about higher education’s contribution to the nation’s public purposes.

The National Center, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education, launched an initiative to bring university and college presidents more directly into the national dialogue concerning the challenges and prospects facing higher education. The process began with individual interviews of presidents of 28 higher education institutions, including heads of state university systems, public research universities, public comprehensive institutions, community colleges, private-sector institutions, and independent colleges and universities. A summary document recounting the thinking of presidents on several key questions was prepared and distributed to all of those who had been interviewed. That summary served as background for the roundtable discussion.

The following individuals were participants in this roundtable and helped shape the resulting essay’s central themes:

- Robert Atwell
  - President Emeritus
  - American Council on Education
- Gene Block
  - Chancellor
  - University of California, Los Angeles
- David Breneman
  - University Professor
  - University of Virginia
- Patrick Callan
  - President
  - National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
- Richard Celeste
  - President
  - Colorado College
- Donald Farish
  - President
  - Rowan University
- Joni Finney
  - Vice President
  - National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
  - Practice Professor
  - University of Pennsylvania
- Frank Friedman
  - President
  - Piedmont Virginia Community College
- Daniel Hamburger
  - President and CEO
  - DeVry Inc.
- Catharine Hill
  - President
  - Vassar College
- John Immerwahr
  - Professor of Philosophy
  - Villanova University
- Richard W. Lariviere
  - President
  - University of Oregon
- Richard Legon
  - President
  - Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
- Stephen Lehmkuhle
  - Chancellor
  - University of Minnesota Rochester
- David Maxwell
  - President
  - Drake University
- Jane McAuliffe
  - President
  - Bryn Mawr College
- Gail Mellow
  - President
  - LaGuardia Community College
- Charles Read
  - Chancellor
  - The California State University
- Noreen Savelle
  - Executive Assistant
  - National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
- Craig D. Swenson
  - Chancellor
  - Argosy University System
- James C. Votruba
  - President
  - Northern Kentucky University
- Gregory Wegner
  - Managing Editor, *Policy Perspectives*
  - Knight Higher Education Collaborative
  - University of Pennsylvania
- Robert Zemsky
  - Professor and Chair
  - The Learning Alliance for Higher Education
  - University of Pennsylvania
- Nancy Zimpher
  - Chancellor
  - State University of New York
- Paul Zingg
  - President
  - California State University, Chico

The following presidents were interviewed for the Presidential Roundtable:

- Edward Ayers
  - President
  - University of Richmond
- Donald Eastman
  - President
  - Eckerd College
- John Fry
  - President
  - Franklin & Marshall College
- Gordon Gee
  - President
  - The Ohio State University
- John Hitt
  - President
  - University of Central Florida
- Freeman Hrabowski, III
  - President
  - University of Maryland, Baltimore County
- Mark Huddleston
  - President
  - University of New Hampshire
- William Kirwan
  - Chancellor
  - University System of Maryland
- Robert Menddenhall
  - President
  - Western Governors University
- Diana Natalicio
  - President
  - University of Texas at El Paso
- Eduardo Padrón
  - College President
  - Miami Dade College
- John Schlegel, S.J.
  - President
  - Creighton University

The interviews of presidents were conducted by Robert Atwell, David Breneman, John Immerwahr, and Robert Zemsky. David Breneman prepared a summary of themes from the interviews of presidents, which provided foundations for the Presidential Roundtable discussion. The Presidential Roundtable was facilitated by Robert Zemsky, and the essay developed from the roundtable discussion was drafted by Gregory Wegner and Robert Zemsky.