

Chapter One

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR NEBRASKA'S FUTURE

Vision for Nebraska Higher Education

Nebraskans will reap many benefits from affordable, accessible, and high-quality higher education. Nebraska's people will value and support higher education institutions that are vital, vigorous, and visionary. Each higher education institution will fulfill its role and mission with distinction by being responsive to changing academic, workforce, societal, economic, and community development needs. Together, Nebraska's institutions will provide access to educational opportunities that meet the diverse needs of students and citizens while exercising careful and creative stewardship of available resources.

The Evolving Environment

Nebraskans often speak of the "good life" in Nebraska, made possible by good public K/12 schools, relatively safe and clean communities, a strong work ethic, and an array of higher education opportunities. Some believe this "good life" may be in jeopardy in the future given the current demographic and economic realities within the state. This *Plan* charts a course for creative and proactive leadership in education and technology that can position Nebraska for an exemplary future.

Nebraska is a geographically large state with a widely dispersed population. Minority populations are the only segment of the population projected to show any long-term growth, and that growth will be gradual compared to the rest of the nation. Nebraska's working-age population is projected to stop growing in approximately 2015. The only significant population growth will probably occur in the two metropolitan areas of the state. These demographic projections, combined with Nebraska's traditionally low unemployment rates, its aging population, and its lack of net new migration, will exacerbate existing workforce shortages and threaten the state's future economic growth.

While the state's population is projected to be relatively flat, the costs of needed local, state, and federal government services and infrastructures, including those of public higher education, will most likely grow. This places an increasing burden on the taxpayers of the state. Nebraska traditionally has one of the highest participation rates in higher education in the country. It also ranks among the top ten states in the nation in per capita state appropriation for public higher education. Many of the state's taxpayers are working in low-paying jobs compared to other states, making the tax burden even greater.

The state of Nebraska is at a pivotal point in determining its future. In this information age, higher education and technology are more important than ever before. The development of this *Plan* is timely for Nebraska and capitalizes on the educational strengths of the state. The state and its higher education institutions can work together to effectively address the problems facing Nebraska, and prepare the state and its citizens to be successful. The economic base in Nebraska may have limitations, but Nebraska's educational base is very promising and provides an opportunity to determine the state's destiny.

The following section highlights some of the major forces for change in the future along with their potential impacts on higher education and the state.

DEMOGRAPHIC FORCES

- The state as a whole will experience slow population growth, with metropolitan and other urban areas experiencing most of the growth.
- Statewide, total numbers of high school graduates are projected to drop over the next decade, with increases only in metropolitan areas and a few rural counties (primarily those with meat processing plants).
- The population will become more diverse as numbers of Hispanics and other minorities grow faster than the general population.
- Nebraska will continue to rank high compared to other states in higher education participation rates.
- Over 57 percent of Nebraska's population was between the ages of 22 and 69 in the 2000 U.S. census.
- Increasingly, Nebraska farmers and rural workers are working at second, part-time and full-time, off-the-farm jobs in order to supplement their income.
- Nationally the percent of population aged 65 and above who are employed part-time or full-time has increased.

Potential Impacts:

- Overall, institutions of higher education will see increased competition for traditional-age, in-state students.
- Nebraska institutions will intensify efforts to recruit out-of-state students and will work harder to retain Nebraska students.
- Institutions will develop new strategies and support programs for attracting and retaining minority population students.
- As more adults remain in the workforce, there will be a continuing need for access to life-long learning and retraining opportunities.
- Institutions will develop new strategies and support programs for attracting and retaining adult students who need new skills and training, many of whom will enroll part-time and take courses via distance education technology.

ECONOMIC FORCES

- Employers are demanding a workforce that can keep pace with an explosion of knowledge and rapid technological change.
- Corporations are purchasing increasing amounts of education and training services, often from third-party vendors, to fill needs quickly for employee knowledge and skills.
- Businesses are seeking technical assistance in using technology to become more productive and profitable.
- Economic growth in Nebraska is limited by shortages of workers, especially those with technical training.
- Nebraska consistently has one of the nation's lowest unemployment rates.
- Nebraska ranks low in comparison with other states in private and federal research funds, limiting opportunities for new business growth and innovation within the state.
- Agriculture is becoming more technical and diversified, with increasing emphasis on value-added processing and niche marketing.

Potential Impacts:

- Postsecondary institutions will need to respond rapidly to employer needs and become increasingly flexible in course content and in the use of technology in delivery of instruction.
- Institutions will see a growing demand from business for specialized knowledge and skill certifications (in professional, vocational, and technical areas such as information technology) to meet workforce needs.
- The state will consider incentives for recruiting and educating students in targeted workforce shortage areas.
- Businesses will expect increased levels of assistance from higher education in the areas of technology transfer, applied research, and technical assistance.
- Advances in information technologies will create expanded opportunities for businesses to locate production facilities at sites remote from central offices.
- It will become increasingly important for the state's primary research institutions to attract federal and private research funding.

POLITICAL FORCES

- Competition for state funding is continuing to grow.
- Provision of services for an aging population is requiring more attention and resources from state policymakers.
- Support remains strong for public institutions that demonstrate responsiveness to local, regional, and state needs.
- State and national policymakers increasingly expect measures of accountability and performance for higher education.

Potential Impacts:

- Attempts at collaboration on funding issues between higher education and K-12 education leaders may become increasingly difficult, yet no less important.
- The accountability expectations of governing boards, legislators, consumers, and accrediting agencies will result in improved institutional accountability structures.
- Postsecondary educational institutions will have a strong, vested interest in the welfare of Nebraska's economy.

TECHNOLOGICAL FORCES

- Statewide, communities and employers are demanding equitable access to broadband communications and information technologies.
- Innovations in information technologies have created a global and highly competitive higher education marketplace.
- Information technologies have vastly expanded consumer access to higher education. Distance is less relevant to off-campus postsecondary instruction for more learners.
- Technological advances have outpaced the capacity of traditional higher education institutions to use these new technologies.
- Nationally, corporations and for-profit postsecondary institutions are responding rapidly to the open market environment, greatly expanding adult opportunities for in-house corporate training, courses offered via the Internet, and other information technologies.
- A growing disparity in the use of information technology exists between the metro/urban areas and other areas of the state, partly due to uneven availability of technology and connectivity. (Rural areas are less likely to have access to high-speed Internet services and wireless communications technology.)
- Consumer and business expectations are growing for “anytime, any place” delivery of postsecondary courses to meet specific personal or business needs through multiple information technologies.

Potential Impacts:

- Connectivity of hardware and delivery systems will become essential for the state and its higher education institutions. State support will be important in developing infrastructure and connectivity to serve rural areas.
- A higher proportion of students at public institutions will use various forms of information technologies to acquire needed course work.
- Technology will provide students with access to programs and courses not otherwise available through Nebraska institutions.
- Institutions will use technology to respond to consumer forces that demand convenience and responsiveness.

- The high, up-front development costs of technologies will drive institutions to share course development costs through consortia or to purchase courses from other institutions or third party vendors.
- Pricing structures of distance-learning courses will develop to meet competition and to amortize development costs.
- Increasing use of information technologies will dramatically affect the demand for and the design and cost of higher education facilities.
- Residents of rural areas will have greater access to higher education services.

EDUCATIONAL FORCES

- The community college's expanded role in academic transfer education is attracting more traditional-age college students to their campuses.
- Nebraska has traditionally had a very high rate of participation in postsecondary education, ranking in the top ten states nationally for the percentage of high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education.
- Both the cost of education for taxpayers and price of education for students and parents are rising faster than general inflation.
- In spite of great progress in addressing deferred maintenance needs, many facilities on the campuses are aging and are in need of repair, replacement, or renovation and adaptation to new technologies.
- The role of the faculty is changing because of the use of technology to deliver courses off campus and to bring new resources into the classroom on campus.
- High schools and colleges are facing increasing demands to provide a challenging high school curriculum that allows talented high school students to take college-level courses for high school and college credit.

Potential Impacts:

- While overall enrollment in higher education is projected to remain somewhat stable, there will be enrollment shifts within sectors, particularly if more students choose to begin their education at community colleges and then transfer to four-year colleges.
- The State of Nebraska and the institutions will continue to direct funds toward maintenance, repair, replacement, and renovation of existing facilities, as well as adapting facilities to new technologies.
- As costs of education continue to escalate, institutions increasingly will look toward methods of collaboration with other institutions to become more efficient.
- More students will use student loans to fund their education and many will be employed while in college, typically adding to the time it takes them to complete their education.
- The faculty will be expected to be proficient in the use of new technologies and many will be more involved in developing technology-mediated course materials in addition to their other responsibilities.

- The faculty and institutions will increasingly look to third-party vendors to purchase courses or course modules.
- Postsecondary institutions and high schools will increasingly offer dual and concurrent enrollment programs for high school students to enrich the high school curriculum and provide a transition to college.

Shared Values and Beliefs

Moving toward this *Plan's* vision for postsecondary education will benefit Nebraskans now and in the future. The vision is based on the following values and beliefs that the Coordinating Commission shares with the leaders of Nebraska higher education institutions and their governing board members:

- All Nebraska citizens deserve reasonable and affordable access to higher education opportunities appropriate to their individual needs and abilities, unrestricted by age, culture, disability, color, national origin, gender, economic status, or geographic location.
- Nebraska's citizens benefit from a comprehensive network of diverse and high-quality postsecondary education institutions that maintain distinct, but complementary, roles and missions.
- The state benefits when Nebraska institutions focus resources on unique areas of excellence in which they can bring major benefits to the state and to students.
- A cooperative relationship between higher education and K/12 education is needed to ensure that students enter higher education prepared to succeed.
- Higher education has an important role in supporting the State of Nebraska's economic development goals by contributing to a competent and competitive workforce for our state and by ensuring lifelong learning and training opportunities for our citizens.
- Higher education's ability to apply information technology effectively to respond rapidly to changing student, employer, and state needs is critical to its success.
- Nebraska's public institutions rely on State of Nebraska funding policies that are fair and predictable and offer appropriate levels of support to enable the institutions to meet the educational needs of students and the state.
- Nebraska public institutions are accountable to the State for making wise use of resources for programs, services, and facilities as well as for avoiding unnecessary duplication.

Major Statewide Goals

The following major statewide goals are critical to the achievement of this *Plan's* vision for higher education in Nebraska. Accomplishing these goals will require substantial cooperative effort on the part of all persons involved with higher education in the state. Further discussion of each major statewide goal and strategies for the accomplishment of each major goal form the framework for chapters two through six of this *Plan*:

Meeting the Needs of Students (Chapter Two)

- ◆ **Nebraska institutions and policymakers will seek methods to increase participation and success in higher education, including low-income and underrepresented populations, and to ensure that access to higher education institutions' programs and services is not restricted by factors such as geographic location, economic status, age, culture, disability, color, national origin, or gender.**
- ◆ **Nebraska's postsecondary institutions will be student-centered and will offer lifelong learning opportunities that are responsive to students' needs.**
- ◆ **Postsecondary education institutions will provide appropriate support services to help all students reach their educational goals, regardless of where or how the instruction is delivered.**
- ◆ **Nebraska colleges and universities will provide their graduates with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed as capable employees and responsible citizens.**

Meeting the Needs of the State (Chapter Three)

- ◆ **Higher education in Nebraska will be responsive to the workforce development and ongoing training needs of employers and industries to sustain a knowledgeable, trained and skilled workforce in both rural and urban areas of the state.**
- ◆ **Institutions will contribute to the health and prosperity of the people and to the vitality of the state through research and development efforts, technology transfer and technical assistance, and by attracting external funds to support these activities.**
- ◆ **Higher education will serve the state by preparing individuals for productive, fulfilling lives and by developing and nurturing the citizens and future leaders of Nebraska.**

- ◆ **Postsecondary education institutions will assess evolving needs and priorities in a timely manner and will be prepared to change and adopt new methods and technologies to address the evolving needs and priorities of the students and people of Nebraska.**

Meeting Needs by Building Exemplary Institutions (Chapter Four)

- ◆ **Each Nebraska institution will fulfill its role and mission in an exemplary manner and will compare favorably with peer institutions.**
- ◆ **Nebraska will value higher education and support its investment in public higher education through fair and reliable funding policies that provide appropriate levels of support to enable institutions to excel and meet the educational needs of the state and its students.**
- ◆ **Higher education in Nebraska will be effective in meeting the needs of students and the state, will be efficient in its expenditure of the state's resources, and will be accountable for developing and sustaining exemplary teaching, learning, research, and public service.**

Meeting Educational Needs through Partnerships and Collaboration (Chapter Five)

- ◆ **Higher education institutions will work as partners with one another and with other entities whenever appropriate to share resources and deliver programs cooperatively to enhance learning opportunities for Nebraska residents.**
- ◆ **Higher education will work effectively with elementary and secondary schools to improve teaching and learning at all levels of education and to facilitate the transition from one level of education to another.**

Facilities Planning to Meet Educational Needs (Chapter Six)

- ◆ **Nebraskans will advocate a physical environment for each of its public postsecondary institutions that is supportive of role and mission; is well utilized and effectively accommodates space needs; is safe, accessible, cost effective, and well maintained; and is flexible to adapt to future changes in programs and technologies.**