

## CHAPTER I

# Introduction

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For most of our professional lives, the two of us have been attracted to research and writing projects that could provide us with opportunities to serve the public good. Most of these projects have involved some aspect of American higher education with a special focus on students, faculty, structure, policies, educational programs, outcomes, and the system as a whole. While a good deal of our work has been concerned with how higher education can better contribute to the lives of all students, we have been particularly concerned with issues of equity as they affect women, minorities and other underrepresented and marginalized groups.

For us, the notion of “higher education and the public good” has always involved the question of how colleges and universities can more effectively contribute to the solution of our myriad social problems and to improving the quality of life both in America as well as in the world at large. In pursuit of these goals, a central issue is how institutions and systems of institutions can “transform” themselves to become more effective instruments for serving the larger society.

An opportunity to work directly on the challenge of how to foster institutional transformation was presented to us nearly 10 years ago when John Burkhardt, then a program officer at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and now the director of the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good at the University of Michigan, invited us to become part of a study group that became known as the Kellogg Forum on Higher Education Transformation (KFHET).

KFHET’s main purpose was to contribute to our understanding of the institutional change process and to promote institutional transformations that enhance higher education’s capacity to serve the public good. The KFHET study group’s work spanned almost five years (1997–2001) and eventually led to the founding of the National Forum, currently housed at the University of Michigan.

From its inception, KFHET recognized the importance of transcending disciplinary and institutional boundaries. The study group comprised representatives from four higher education research organizations (the American Council on Education, the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at Michigan, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education, and UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute [HERI]) and five higher education institutions (Alverno College, the Minnesota State College System, Olivet College, Portland State University, and the University of Arizona). The group included both practitioners and scholars representing several different disciplines as well as positional roles within higher education ranging from provost to president. We were also fortunate in being able to involve a cadre of talented younger scholars, primarily doctoral students, who became partners both in the KFHET research enterprise as well as in all of the deliberations of the group as a whole.

As the work of the KFHET group evolved into what subsequently became known as the Kellogg Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good (and now the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good), it became increasingly apparent that younger scholars could play a critical role in furthering the work of our study group. There was, in other words, a felt need and a consensus from all quarters that mentoring our inheritors in this work was an essential and necessary next step. These considerations led to the decision to organize an Intergenerational Research Symposium on Higher Education for the Public Good. Thus, under the continuing sponsorship of the National Forum, the two of us, in collaboration with a number of colleagues from HERI and from the Michigan Center, organized such a symposium that took place in November of 2002. In many ways, this volume of scholarly papers has its origins to that symposium that took place almost four years ago.

The symposium comprised 45 participants, including 14 senior scholars, six mid-career scholars, 23 emerging/rising scholars and two representatives of philanthropic foundations. The four areas of scholarly inquiry identified as the most critical ones for analysis and discussion were: Access and Equity, Faculty Roles and Performance, Student Development, and University-Community Partnerships. Our deliberations centered around five questions:

1. What do we know about each area?
2. How do we facilitate further research in each area?
3. What is the role of funding in shaping research agendas?
4. How do we most effectively disseminate findings from the research in each area?
5. How do we best develop the next generation of scholars?

The two primary goals of the symposium were to create a research agenda that could serve the public good and to develop mentoring relationships and collaborations between senior scholars and emerging/rising scholars.

The two-and-a-half days of animated deliberations generated a great deal of creative thinking, enthusiasm, and optimism. We were able to learn from each other and to identify creative research questions and strategies but, most importantly, we succeeded in nurturing new connections and relationships that transcended the boundaries of age and status. Many of the professional and personal relationships among those who were part of the intergenerational symposium have persisted and evolved over the past four years.

Several of us, for example, organized and participated in sessions held as part of the national conferences of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (2002) and the American Educational Research Association (2005). A number of us also prepared research proposals for funding, and even though the proposals did not get funded, they served the purpose of further nurturing cross-generational relationships. We know of a number of stories that can be told of how the symposium served as the starting point for intergenerational connections among scholars that persist today.

This volume, which represents another outcome of those early efforts to ensure that the legacy is passed on, is further testimony to the importance of encouraging and supporting our inheritors to continue research and writing that serves the public good.

All fourteen contributors to this volume represent the new generation of scholars who are not only very talented, but who also care to do research and to write about critical issues facing higher education and society at large.

We salute each of you for your creative thinking, for the diligence and dedication with which you carried out this work, and for your passion and caring.

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