The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education **is a movement begun in Los Angeles in January 2011 when representatives from twenty-one states met at the invitation of the California Federation of Teachers to consider re-orienting the dominant narrative in the US about higher education. The Campaign articulates seven basic principles from the point of view of faculty, and challenges the calls for cuts, for narrowing of curricula, for simplistic measures of success, and for overly optimistic reliance on on-line teaching. It has been endorsed by the AAUP, AFT, and NEA. The Virginia Conference of the AAUP endorsed the seven principles at its meeting of April 2, 2011, and urges the Faculty Senate of Virginia and university and college Faculty Senates around the Commonwealth to do so as well. The national launch of the Campaign will take place at a press conference on May 17 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.**

--Craig Vasey, President, VA Conference, American Association of University Professors

Campaign for the Future of Higher Education

Perhaps the most widely accepted belief about higher education today is that our nation will need more college- educated people in the future than we have now or than we are on track to produce. This belief, given greater urgency by the most recent economic recession, has increasingly led to calls for transforming higher education and for embracing a wide variety of "innovations."

Without question, improving higher education should be a goal of everyone--the public, elected leaders, businesses, and those who work to provide that education.

But as conversations about specifics develop, it is crucial for discussion about change to be guided by principles that will lead us toward real improvement in American higher education. Wholesale embrace of change without careful thought and deliberation can take us in the wrong direction--not toward reforming higher education but, in fact, toward deforming precisely those aspects of American higher education that have made it the envy of the world.

There are surely no simple answers, no one model, and no "magic bullets" for meeting America's needs for broadly accessible quality higher education; but we believe that the following principles can provide a helpful framework for developing and assessing proposals for innovation or restructuring in the future.

1. **Higher Education in the 21st Century must be inclusive; it should be available to and affordable for all who can benefit from and want a college education.**

Demographic projections make it clear that the United States will not return to world leadership in higher education attainment without increasing higher education opportunities and success for all sectors of our increasingly diverse society. A vigorous democracy and a thriving economy in the future demand that we give this principle full attention when we consider proposals for change, seeking out changes that will enhance educational opportunity and success for all, including low-income communities and communities of color, and rejecting any proposals that may have unintended negative consequences for access and success.

We simply cannot risk a return to earlier times when education was rationed on the basis of race and economic status.

For this principle to be realized, higher education must also be recognized as a right and a public good rather than as a privilege and primarily a private good. High tuition, inadequate financial aid, and burdensome levels of student debt might seem more acceptable when we focus on the advantages higher education brings to the individual, but our current approach of increasing the costs of college restricts access for individuals and dampens the broader social and economic benefits of higher education.

2. **The curriculum for a quality 21st Century higher education must be broad and diverse.**

Our economy demands a population that is broadly educated for critical thinking and innovation. Narrow job training alone can condemn graduates to dead-end paths-- in low-wage jobs , unable to repay their student loans, and ill-equipped to adjust to changing job markets and careers.

The value of a broad and diverse curriculum extends beyond economics. In the increasingly interconnected world of the 21st century, we will need more people who understand its history, who can think outside of narrow boundaries, and who have the tools to function in a culturally diverse environment.

Our democracy needs a broadly educated citizenry. Civic participation cannot flourish when a liberal education is reserved for the elite, and narrow training is provided for everyone else.

3. **Quality higher education in the 21st Century will require a sufficient investment in excellent faculty who have the academic freedom, terms of employment, and institutional support needed to do state-of-the-art professional work.**

Faculty and professionals must have the academic freedom to exercise their professional judgment in educational decisions about what and how to teach in the best interests of a quality education. They must be free and secure enough in their terms of employment to stretch and challenge students, and to apply high academic standards.

Colleges and universities must also provide faculty and staff with the resources and continuing professional development to stay current in their fields and to use the best methods for enhancing student learning and success.

The growing practice of hiring faculty into full and part-time contingent positions that are not eligible for due process protections of tenure inhibits the full application of academic standards and the free exercise of professional judgment.

4. **Quality higher education in the 21st century should incorporate technology in ways that expand opportunity and maintain quality.**

Technology that enhances learning is a welcome addition to the 21st century higher education experience. The current public conversation about the use of technology in higher education, however, suffers from a lack of depth and subtlety.

Too often the discussion begins with the unexamined assumption that "technology" and "the internet" are not already being incorporated into higher education in significant ways. Anyone who has spent any time in a college or university recently would dispute the assumption that underpins many demands for "innovation" in this area.

Even more significant, the technology debate would be improved if we made a more careful distinction between **education** and the **transfer of information**. Undoubtedly, the internet has already revolutionized the latter in universities and in the wider world. But education, which involves the development of higher level skills of assessment, critique, and expression, is a complex process that is often more challenging to produce in digital formats.
This latter point is related to another common assumption made when discussing online education—that it will save vast sums of money. When online technologies are used for higher levels of teaching rather than simply for rote learning or transfer of information, cost savings quickly evaporate. In fact, many faculty who are proponents of and experts in online education argue that teaching a good online course is **more** labor-intensive and thus **more** costly than more traditional formats.

In short, the role of online formats and other technological innovations in higher education are vastly more complex than the current public discussion would suggest. Issues of access (will some students be shortchanged simply because they don't own a good computer or have access to high-speed internet), success (will online formats work for under-prepared students who also deserve a chance for success?), equity, and quality need a deeper analysis if we are to have the kind of higher education we will need in the 21st century.

5. **Quality education in the 21st Century will require the pursuit of real efficiencies and the avoidance of false economies.**

Not every cut in costs in a business—or in a college-- is a real efficiency.

Many of the cuts colleges and universities have made during this current economic crisis—cutting classes, increasing class sizes, closing departments, slashing curricula, and reducing support services for students have helped campuses balance their budgets in the short-term, but the long-term costs of these cuts have not been adequately acknowledged or discussed.

In fact, the economic pressure to cut budgets and the political pressure to define all cuts as "efficiencies" currently makes it almost impossible to open a conversation about the hidden costs of various cuts.

We propose that the public discussion of increasing efficiency and productivity in higher education start here: a real efficiency that should be pursued will not only cut costs but also enhance or at least not harm the principles of a quality higher education for the 21st century outlined in this document.

6. **Quality higher education in the 21st Century will require substantially more public investment over current levels.**

Money will not solve all of higher education's problems, but adequate public investment in an enterprise so crucial to the country's future well-being simply must be provided.

Assurances that "we can do more with less" may play well politically, but they will not move us toward affordable, quality higher education in the 21st century.

In fact, failure of leaders in higher education and in government to highlight the currently perilous level of public investment in higher education does the country a grave disservice, for it allows the public to believe we can achieve world leadership in higher education or even maintain our current levels of achievement by simply accepting the status quo.

7. **Quality higher education in the 21st century cannot be measured by a standardized, simplistic set of metrics.**

Simplistic measures of success in K-12 that are the legacy of No Child Left Behind have not served our country or our children well. We should not make the same mistakes in higher education.

Unfortunately, graduation rates, in isolation, appear to be gaining ascendency as **the** national measure of higher education success. While we agree with the goal of significantly increasing the number of people with college degrees and certificates, this trend is disturbing because a national drive toward that goal—to the exclusion of others--can threaten important principles, including inclusiveness and access, that are crucial for the kind of higher education we will need in the 21st century.

A more fruitful direction would recognize that educational success, like human health, is a complex systemic process that requires a rich data picture (of both qualitative and quantitative measures) for full assessment. For higher education to flourish, all our leaders—in government and in education—must avoid the lure of reductionist measures and simplistic goals that will foster a false sense of progress now but bitter disappointment at the results in the future.

Conclusion: Change in American higher education in the 21st Century is both inevitable and desirable.

Change **is**, in fact, a commonplace in every college and university worthy of the name.

Historically, our colleges and universities have offered an ever-changing array of programs, courses, and teaching formats. Instead of seeing that rich diversity as a "luxury" we can no longer afford or as a "problem" to be fixed, we should see it as a strength that should be preserved and fostered. It is the environment in which higher education teaching and research flourish best.

As we examine proposals for change in higher education in the coming decades, we should build on the traditions, principles, and vision that have characterized American higher education at its best. We believe that using the principles discussed here to inform the national conversation can lead us toward an American higher education system in the 21st century that will serve our nation well and be a source of pride.

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