

Renewing the Covenant: Ten Years After the Kellogg Commission

Graham B. Spanier

Remarks by the President of The Pennsylvania State University at the 11th Annual National Outreach Scholarship Conference, Monday, October 4, 2010.

I am honored to be here today, and it is a great pleasure to see the success of this conference that had such humble beginnings at Penn State. It is a credit to Jim Ryan, former vice president for outreach and cooperative extension at Penn State, Bobby Moser, vice president of agricultural administration at Ohio State, and Kevin Reilly, the University of Wisconsin System president, that this conference and the National Outreach Scholarship Partnership have found such success over the years.

Ten years ago I capped off my tenure as chair of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities with the publication of our sixth and final report: *Renewing the Covenant: Learning, Discovery and Engagement in a New Age and Different World*. That project began in January 1996, and it was a very memorable experience. I like to compare it to sleeping with an elephant. The elephant doesn't mean you any harm, but you still don't get much sleep.

Higher education has continued to see its share of crisis and change over the past decade since the Commission formally adjourned. A quick search for "higher education crisis" on Google News came up with 3,120 results—for a one-month period. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* proposed a new curriculum for higher education: "Reading, Writing, Radical Change." A Louisiana newspaper observed that "college is taking a turn for the worse." *The Boston Globe* noted "a crisis of spiraling tuition." And that's the good news.

Shifting demographics, rising costs of operations, a changing competitive landscape, reductions in state appropriations, pressures for accountability, and a widespread economic decline characterize the environment in which today's colleges and universities operate. These pressures will clearly require institutions of higher education to find new ways to improve teaching and learning, to advance discovery and creativity, and to serve our many constituents while becoming more efficient. They also present an opportunity to

renew the Covenant we set forth 10 years ago and to strengthen the partnership between the public and the public's universities.

Ten years ago the Kellogg Commission called on public universities to "return to our roots" and become the transformational institutions they were intended to be. By focusing on the student experience, student access, the engaged institution, a learning society, and campus culture, the goal was to address learning, discovery, and engagement and to become truly "student centered."

"[C]ompared to 5 years ago, there is more emphasis on engaged learning, undergraduate research, and the first-year experiences that support the transition to college."

To this end I have seen much success at many colleges and universities across the nation. Last year a survey of members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that, compared with 5 years ago, there is more emphasis on engaged learning, undergraduate research, and the first-year experiences that support the transition to college. There has also been more attention to providing amenities to college students, such as improved residence halls, additional mental and physical

health providers, exercise facilities, and better food. Yet, despite all the progress, there is still much work to be done, and as we move forward engagement must be part of the equation.

By engagement, I mean the synthesis of teaching, research, and service functions that are productively and actively involved with our communities. This goes beyond Cooperative Extension, conventional outreach, and most conceptions of public service. Embedded in the engagement idea is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity—partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table. Cooperation is the key.

As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."

Renewing the Covenant means reaffirming our "focus on universities as genuine learning communities" that are "student-centered" and that "put students first." We also need to recommit to the basic elements set forth 10 years ago and create institutions that model equality, academic achievement, civic responsibility,

research excellence, interdisciplinary problem-solving, accountability, and ongoing evaluation.

Like so many things in life, this is easier said than done. That's why I want to devote the remainder of my remarks to offering five strategies for advancing engagement at colleges and universities.

First and foremost, each institution needs to focus on activities that play to its strengths. We cannot be all things to all people, so we need to prune activities that don't have a measurable impact or do not align with core academic strengths. By harnessing our institutional energy and expertise, we can most effectively respond to pressing issues and contribute to public discussions and debate as a trusted partner.

“By harnessing our institutional energy and expertise, we can most effectively respond to pressing issues and contribute to public discussions and debate as a trusted partner.”

For example, many Pennsylvanians are currently struggling with the rush to drill for gas in the Marcellus Shale that is so prevalent in the Appalachian Basin. The Shale presents an unprecedented opportunity for economic growth in the state, but many questions remain about the environmental, societal, and economic impacts. As the state's land-grant university, Penn State stepped up to serve as an “honest broker” through research, education, training, and extension. With a broad range of research expertise in such relevant disciplines as energy, geology, hydrology, soil science, forestry, economics, environmental policy, and sociology, and an established outreach delivery system, Penn State is uniquely positioned to work closely with the natural-gas industry, other institutions, legislators, and the citizens of Pennsylvania.

Second, colleges and universities need to advance access for nontraditional students. We are serving the most diverse group of students that higher education has ever seen. Moreover, between 1980 and 2000, total minority college and university enrollment surged by 122%, and now approximately 37% of the nation's students are minorities. In the 1960s, approximately 40% of college students were female; today women make up 57% of traditional college students. The newest data also indicate that for the first time, women earned more than 50% of doctoral degrees in the USA, up from 44% 10 years ago, and women earned 60% of master's degrees.

We must reach out to this new generation of students with flexible programming and alternate means of delivery. Penn State has over 34,000 nontraditional students, who attend continuing education classes or our World Campus.

In addition, technology has transformed the way today's students live, work, and play, which brings me to my third point: the need to leverage technology and media to expand reach, foster communities, and engage students. Today's students have never "rolled down" a window, cut and paste has never involved scissors, and the World Wide Web has been accessible since they were born. They have always known 24/7 accessibility, interactivity, and high-speed connections, and they're not about to do without them in college. Mobile phones represent a ubiquitous influence. At last count there were four billion mobile cellular subscribers on the planet. Virtually all students have cell phones, a growing portion with Internet access. With the growth of mobile broadband, these portable, personal devices are becoming the technology of choice for communicating, surfing the web, taking and sharing photos, and making videos.

We can use technology to provide rich, interactive content to tell our stories and showcase our research. Mobile learning, video podcasts with Extension educators in the field, and online programming can expand our reach around the world. Technology can also be used to successfully build social networks around major conference attendees and to create online communities of scholars and special interest groups.

Fourth, there is still a common perception among faculty that when it comes to tenure and promotion, a dossier will be evaluated on three things and three things alone: research, research, and research. Yet the hallmark of engaged scholarship is that it incorporates teaching, research, and service. As leaders we need to push for the inclusion of engaged scholarship in the promotion and tenure process. The Magrath Engagement Award is one way to recognize and reward exemplary projects and people; we need others as well. We must find new ways to provide meaningful support for faculty who develop interdisciplinary responses to societal issues, who cultivate opportunities and create incentives to engage undergraduates in scholarship work. This can go beyond academic departments to involve each institution's leadership in undergraduate education, outreach, and student affairs.

Finally, I want to address the critical question of how do we pay for this? The public must play a role. In fact, we need the

information-age equivalent of the original land-grant enactment; new seed funds to create partnerships between public higher education and public K-12 schools; and a federal tax policy to encourage more private sector partnerships with universities. We also must be more entrepreneurial and find new partners and revenue streams, including federal grants, foundations, private philanthropy, and fee for services. Dollar for dollar, colleges and universities provide exceptional returns for every dollar invested, and we need to make our case with measurable outcomes whenever possible.

“Dollar for dollar, colleges and universities provide exceptional returns for every dollar invested, and we need to make our case with measurable outcomes whenever possible.”

In conclusion, I want to reiterate my belief that higher education is not an ivory tower, but an enterprise that both influences and is influenced by profound trends in society. I want to emphasize that for us as educators with an important mission of engagement, the opportunities for our colleges and universities to make a difference have never been greater. And the need has never been more pressing.

I call on you to renew that Covenant set forth by the Kellogg Commission and to go beyond outreach and service to “engagement.” An engaged university can enrich and expand opportunities for faculty and students through internships, off-campus experiences, and service-learning. Moreover, it can serve our communities in new and unexpected ways.

Endnote

1. In 2001, The Pennsylvania State University Vice President James Ryan, The Ohio State University Vice President Bobby Moser, and University of Wisconsin-Extension Chancellor Kevin Reilly came together to sponsor the first Outreach Scholarship Conference. At that time they stated, “The partnership between our three institutions, and the conferences that come out of it, will help all colleges and universities achieve greater levels of engagement...Our goal is to provide practical tools for implementing real change in higher education.”

About the Author

Graham B. Spanier was appointed Penn State's 16th president in 1995. His prior positions include chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and provost and vice president for academic affairs at Oregon State University. He holds academic appointments as professor of human development and family studies, sociology, demography, and family and community medicine. President Spanier has chaired the Association of American Universities, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, the Big Ten Conference Council of Presidents/Chancellors, and the NCAA Division I Board of Directors. In addition, he led the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities.