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The Need for Change

Why Some Institutions Will Embrace New Pathways to the Bachelor's Degree

While the system of American higher education has evolved, important aspects of curriculum design and instruction have gone largely untouched for over two centuries. The social contract was, and still is, for families to send their sons and daughters to the university for a set number of years of study during which time the family would find ways to pay for the cost of the education. At the end of the college experience, the university would declare the student educated and prepared to contribute to society in a variety of meaningful ways.

The college investment, particularly through the twentieth century, yielded great opportunities for the college graduate. As the country developed, more educated and sound thinkers were required to ensure that the economy prospered. This same intellectual capital was a requisite for economic expansion of the twentieth century and fueled tremendous growth in postsecondary education.

As more and more people sought access to postsecondary education, leaders looked for ways to run their universities as cost-effective organizations. At the start of the twenty-first century, these challenges still exist as tuition and ancillary costs continue to spiral up, threatening middle-class access to higher education. This is the same middle class that fueled the unprecedented expansion in the twentieth century. These barriers are now threatening the very existence of some colleges and universities.

Students and their families are being asked to make enormous financial investments as they prepare for life and work in the twenty-first century. Unlike many professions and industries, where growth in customers and overall expansion often translates into lower costs, this has not been true for the labor-intensive business models of American higher education. The delivery model has changed little over the last two hundred years. It remains highly labor-intensive in an enterprise that is widely recognized as slow to embrace change (Noble, 2002). It is a model where most commonly the professor is the purveyor of knowledge and the students are the passive recipients of the educational experience. So challenging are the problems of cost containment and quality that Gordon Gee, president of Ohio State University, has called for “radical reformation” in the way colleges and universities are organized and operate (Fain, 2009). The choice, he says, is either “reinvention or extinction.” Gee echoes what has become a growing chorus of leaders expressing deep concern over the mounting difficulties of access to and the quality of the higher educational system.

American higher education is at a crucial juncture, with the viability of many institutions at stake. Further, the current expense structure is forcing many students and their families to consider alternative approaches for pursuing higher education (Zemsky, Wegner, & Massy, 2005). Employers are increasingly concerned that college graduates are not sufficiently prepared to enter the workforce and succeed in the knowledge economy (Alexander, 2009). And there is increasingly fierce competition between traditional nonprofit colleges and universities and for-profit educational institutions to attract students seeking to earn a college degree without going too deeply into debt. The *Condition of Education 2011* reports that 27 percent of the increase in undergraduate enrollments from 2000 to 2009 was at private for-profit institutions (Aud et al., 2011, p. 7).

The Integrated Three-Year-Degree Model presented in this book is a proven path that institutions can take to control and

reduce costs, to offer a curriculum more responsive to the needs of society and business, and to more effectively compete for students. Integrated degree programs can achieve these ends without sacrificing educational quality while at the same time enhancing institutional retention efforts.

It is becoming increasingly clear that unless fundamental changes occur soon, there is a growing danger of putting a college education out of reach for more and more of our citizens. This could have profound effects upon the nation's ability to compete in a global marketplace and negatively affect the advancement of knowledge.

The Three Cs: Cost, Competition, and Curriculum Innovation

Cost Structures Are Unsustainable

When a college education can cost as much or more than a typical middle-class family earns in one year, there is cause for concern. We know that higher education has been a primary vehicle for improved economic and social prosperity. Yet, if the cost of pursuing a college degree continues to spiral up unabated, what has become a rite of passage for many middle-class students will cease to be a realistic option. And if this occurs, many tuition-driven colleges and universities will close their doors due to the deadly combination of declining enrollments and rising costs.

With increasing frequency, traditional and nontraditional students at the graduate and undergraduate level are opting to complete degrees in both hybrid and fully asynchronous course formats (Perry, 2010). This change in preference bodes well for those for-profit institutions that emphasize speed and convenience as a prime draw for students. However, it also puts additional pressure on nonprofit colleges and universities offering the traditional four-year undergraduate experience. Although many of these

institutions now offer online educational opportunities, the financial investment required to build the necessary online capacity often means diverting limited resources from other important areas. These shifts in student preferences and the significant investment needed to achieve and maintain capacity will result in the demise of a number of institutions, particularly those with little or no margin for error.

The ability of colleges and universities to control the escalating price of tuition is obviously crucial for their survival. Yet cost containment alone is not sufficient to ensure their long-term viability. They must also be able to deliver a high-quality education where their graduates attain the knowledge and skills (that is, competencies), necessary to succeed in today's knowledge economy. And the awarding of a degree will no longer alone suffice as evidence that the necessary knowledge and skills were attained. Colleges and universities will need to develop assessment measures that clearly demonstrate the competency achievements of their graduates.

As more three-year-degree programs become available, many students will recognize the financial advantage of entering the workforce one year earlier than their four-year counterparts. The opportunity to gain a competitive advantage in the workplace will make the integrated three-year degree an even more attractive option.

Increasing Competition

Students and their families have choices, and academic major and geographic proximity are no longer the most compelling factors in selecting a college. Further, as the many nonprofits that lack brand awareness in their local markets lose enrollments to for-profit institutions, financial pressures will be further exacerbated. Higher education leaders will be forced to think in new ways in order to ensure institutional survival. For many, this means continuing to increase the annual financial aid awards, resulting in a 40–50 percent or higher discount on the annual tuition cost. Only a decade

ago, such a discount rate would have been denounced as financially irresponsible. Although this discount practice may support a short-term enrollment jump, the long-term effects will surely only make these institutions more financially vulnerable, particularly when compared to well-financed for-profit educational institutions.

Increasingly, institutions are now offering accelerated three-year-degree programs that allow students to complete a 120-credit-hour bachelor's degree (for example, forty three-credit courses) within thirty-six months. Further, many institutions that allow students to complete their degree in three years are not charging additional tuition for earlier completion, essentially giving these students a year's worth of coursework for free. Therefore, for institutions that have aggressively discounted financial aid to all students and now offer a free year's worth of tuition to students participating in an accelerated three-year-degree program, the effective discount rate will be in excess of 65 percent. This is absolutely unsustainable! Desperation is clearly driving the decision making of these institutions. Rather than focusing on discounting tuition, institutional leaders would do well to embrace new models that would afford their institution the opportunity to operate in innovative ways and create new value for the many stakeholders that make up the institution's accountability network.

The real opportunity comes when institutions offer programs and services that the general public views as necessary. The Integrated Three-Year-Degree Model is one proven example of how to create a new space from which to compete and operate, thus attracting students who seek new educational experiences. What we know is that students need learning experiences that yield identifiable and measurable outcomes, or as has been discussed, a set of appropriate competencies. No matter the profession or industry, building value for stakeholders while competing successfully takes a disciplined leadership unit that embraces change and recognizes that the competitive forces in American higher education have forever changed.

Curriculum Reform through an Integrated, Competency-Based Program Can Assure High Quality

To successfully rethink traditional measures such as seat time or contact hours, an appropriate substitute must be used, such as competencies. It is remarkable what can happen when the bond is broken between credit and seat time. Now, credits can be based upon learning outcomes rather than hours spent in the classroom. An integrated, competency-based program that is predicated upon achieving certain knowledge and skills allows the redesign of a four-year curriculum so that it can be delivered in three years without any dilution of academic quality and at a cost savings for both students and the institution (more discussion of seat time appears in Chapters 2 and 6).

While this is easier said than done, nevertheless, data supports the notion that an integrated three-year program based on competency and learning outcomes can deliver a high-quality education to students in six semesters without additional semester, summer, or weekend courses. The challenge is to identify the set of competencies and to organize and deliver a curriculum that aligns learning activities with these competencies. Moreover, robust assessment procedures are needed to assure that all the learning goals are properly met.

Implementing an integrated, competency-based three-year-degree program can be best facilitated when educational leaders and faculty rethink the process of teaching and learning. Everyone must be willing to challenge traditional assumptions about the roles of faculty and students so that faculty acting in concert can create greater integration throughout their academic disciplines. This, together with students taking greater responsibility for managing their own education, can go a long way toward ensuring the success of the program.

This kind of rethinking includes a renewed emphasis on student acquisition of knowledge and skills (that is, competencies) and greater emphasis on measuring and demonstrating learning

outcomes. To achieve this, there must be a commitment to engage in ongoing internal and external assessment efforts. Colleges and universities must develop and implement a comprehensive set of formative and summative evaluation measures to demonstrate that students are achieving the intended outcomes and that the curriculum content of the new model is both relevant and responsive to the needs of society. Data and analyses from these assessment efforts need to be widely shared with interested stakeholders, particularly students and their families.

A number of important value-added dimensions can help ensure the success of an integrated, competency-based three-year model. The synergy produced by incorporating student cohorts and learning communities along with faculty learning communities, academic themes, virtual collaborative environments, and active teaching and learning can go a long way toward successful program implementation.

In short, an integrated, competency-based three-year-degree model is a viable and attractive approach for addressing the three Cs: meeting cost challenges while maintaining academic quality and addressing concerns about the preparedness of graduates. The three-year model also addresses the challenges that families face in affording a bachelor's degree.

A Look Back

As Allen (1973) reminds us, the three-year-degree discussion today is not a new one. Indeed, midway through the nineteenth century, Harvard and Yale had each launched formal three-year-degree programs. One of their motives was to respond to growing concerns that American higher education was in need of structural changes. Some people argued that not everyone should be required to complete four years of college-level training. For the remainder of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century, new institutions such as Johns Hopkins, Clark University, University of Chicago, and Antioch College all pondered how to

design the undergraduate experience. In fact, President William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago suggested that any structural change should include the secondary education system as well as postsecondary education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

Both Johns Hopkins and Clark University began by offering graduate-level programs. Johns Hopkins moved rapidly to develop undergraduate programs, while Clark University waited for well over a decade before more cautiously doing so. Its first program, interestingly enough, was a three-year-degree program. At the University of Chicago, President Harper was in favor of offering some form of a redesigned curriculum, but he was not in favor of a three-year-degree offering. Rather, the university needed to recognize that students would bring to the institution different needs and desires (Allen, 1973). Antioch College began with a very interesting yet different model: the academic year was broken into blocks of academic study followed by an equal period when students would work full-time. This approach demonstrated a clear commitment to the importance of both theory and practice (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

Much of the fourth, fifth, and sixth decades of the twentieth century were marked by war and social upheaval, but it was also a time when American higher education experienced tremendous growth across all facets of the academy. This period, 1945–1975, has been referred to as the golden age (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). With this growth came much discussion about curriculum and instructional innovation and the need for structural reform. One of many topics revisited at this time was idea of the three-year baccalaureate degree.

Allen (1973) reported in an article titled “The 3 Year Baccalaureate” that thirty colleges and universities were offering three-year programs in 1973, and another nineteen institutions were considering such programs. Clearly, at least the perceived need for a new pathway had gained the attention of many educational leaders by the mid-1970s. On further review of these programs, Allen found that they all fell within one of four categories: the

compression model, the early admission model, the credit-by-examination model, and the restructuring model.

The compression model, as Allen (1973) states, “is not a new curricular contribution” (p. 67). Rather, it is a well-worn approach whereby students complete the curriculum at a faster pace. The early admission model is comparable to what is referred to today as the dual enrollment or concurrent enrollment program. This approach allows high school students to complete college-level courses for credit. These arrangements are specific between colleges and universities and individual private high schools or public school districts. Currently there are dozens of partnerships across the United States as well as a number of pieces of pending legislation calling for more opportunities to be made available to a larger pool of students. The credit-by-examination approach allows high school students to sit for select national exams. Many might recognize this approach in today’s environment as the advanced placement process and referred to as “AP credit.” The final approach, the restructuring model, clearly requires the most radical changes in the curriculum. This approach requires educational leaders to support a complete overhaul, or restructuring, of the curriculum. In today’s curriculum language, this approach most closely aligns with the Integrated, Competency-Based Model that is discussed throughout this book.

New Model Needed

The challenge and opportunity for today’s university leaders is to consider new ways to create a learning environment that embraces the best practices from other countries and industries and ensures that the intellectual potential of students can be maximized while controlling costs and protecting academic integrity (Twigg, 2003). New models and constructs are needed in order to conceive different pathways for learning and degree attainment. What also seems apparent is that the changes occurring across the academy will

not be limited to the traditional 18- to 22-year-old undergraduate population. Indeed, the degree-attainment opportunities for adult learners will also undergo changes in the years ahead, with some of these changes facilitated by technological advancements and others by increased and intense competition among institutions for enrollments across delivery systems (Dolence & Norris, 1995).

The expansion of the Internet coupled with heavy investments by colleges and universities in technology infrastructure have positioned many campuses to become sophisticated content distributors, offering courses and degrees available anytime and anywhere around the world. This shift in delivery strategy is shattering the traditional face-to-face delivery model that has influenced and produced generations of graduates. This shift is forcing institutional leaders, especially those of small and endowment-poor colleges, to seek new models that will allow them to maintain financial viability while controlling costs so that access for students remains readily available. Although online education has dominated the landscape in recent years and shows no signs of slowing down, other programmatic ideas have been proposed for years and are now just being implemented. Indeed, Senator Lamar Alexander, a former university president and U.S. Secretary of Education, suggests that it is time for colleges and universities to find ways to cut costs by thinking in different ways such as offering three-year-degree programs (Alexander, 2009; Lederman, 2009).

Three-Year-Degree Models

Implementing three-year-degree curricula is not a new idea. As reported by Allen (1973), institutions have examined this issue at different periods over the last 150 years. In fact, several schools, such as Hartwick College and Bates College, have offered three-year programs for many years (Keller, 2008).

Today, three-year programs have been slow to catch on even though “this recession has lasted longer than the median length of the 10 previous recessions that have occurred since World War II” (Labonte, 2009). Prior to 2010, fewer than thirty colleges and

universities offered three-year-degree programs, and all but one were degree options that offered either an accelerated program or a prior-experience format. Appendix A provides an up-to-date listing of three-year-degree programs at the time of publication. Table 1.1 presents an overview of the approaches that provide an opportunity for students to complete their bachelor's degree in three years. The table examines each of the models from the vantage point of seven key attributes, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7 along with the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three-year-degree models.

Accelerated Three-Year Model

The accelerated approach is attractive for institutions because it requires little change in the way that educational content is designed and delivered to students. Typically, the compression of content takes the form of delivering traditional courses in less time, thus requiring students to accelerate seat time during a shorter delivery window. Further acceleration often appears in the requirements to complete a particular program of study. Examples include taking classes through some nontraditional means, such as nights, weekends, summers, online, and intersession terms. One obvious benefit of an accelerated option to students is that they are able to complete a bachelor's degree in three years. Supporters of the accelerated approach point to the fact that graduates are able to enter the workforce a year before their contemporaries. Yet at many institutions that offer the accelerated model, students still must pay the four-year tuition price; a few examples are Lipscomb University, Florida State University, and the University of South Dakota. In a sense, students are permitted to use a faster conveyor belt in order to complete program requirements but at no real cost savings, except ancillary expenses such as room and board of the extra year in school.

Institutions that choose to charge only three years of tuition effectively bear the costs of providing four years' worth of resources

Table 1.1. Institutional Comparisons and Implications of Three-Year-Degree Models

Program Attributes	Accelerated Curriculum Model	Prior Learning Model	Integrated Curriculum Model
View of the Curriculum	Curriculum advancements are marginal and incremental.	Curriculum credit for prior learning is awarded through a variety of methods.	Curriculum advancements are a breakthrough.
Curriculum Restructuring or Redesign	No integration of curriculum—focus remains on seat time.	No integration of curriculum in spite of recognition of the importance of prior learning experiences.	Integrated curriculum—focus is on “learning” and the demonstration of competencies.
Administrative Needs for the Program	The focus is on management activities and fits with the current administrative/business model.	The focus is on administrative review and related activities required to certify prior learning.	The focus is on systems changes and leadership activities and requires a new view of the administrative/business model.
Enrollment Strategy Approach	The institution (in some cases) cuts profit margins in order to compete for new enrollments.	The institution generates little if any revenue from the review of prior learning content but attracts new enrollments.	The institution protects profit margins and competes in a new space that brings in new and different students.

Leadership View	Institutional leaders resist change and are wedded to traditional delivery models and cost structures.	Institutional leaders view the process of prior learning as an administrative activity.	Institutional leaders see opportunities that come with embracing change and implementing new delivery models that promote new revenue streams.
Cost Structure	The degree path (course work) is faster, yet delivery costs are similar or the same; in some cases, the institution waives the revenue of the final ten courses.	The degree path is faster in that students may receive credit for up to ten courses (some institutions may even permit more), thus saving tuition expense and time.	The degree path is different and faster, yet delivery costs are significantly reduced.
Savings for Students and Families	No change in the continued rising costs of postsecondary education; in most cases little or no savings is passed on to families.	If students qualify, they could save time and financial resources.	A key shift in the way postsecondary education is organized and delivered, with savings passed on to families.

but reap revenue for only three. This is a financial loss for the university although a savings for the students. This is also a potentially risky practice in that as three-year programs grow in popularity, students who remain on a four-year track will demand the same discount afforded to their three-year counterparts. Some of the many institutions engaging in this practice include Grace College in Indiana, Arcadia University in Pennsylvania, and Lynn University in Florida.

Prior-Experience Three-Year Model

A model that differs from the accelerated option gives students credit for prior knowledge and life experience. The amount of credit is determined by some form of prior-learning assessment (PLA). The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL, 2009) defines PLA as “the process by which many colleges evaluate for academic credit the college-level knowledge and skills an individual has gained outside of the classroom.” This is similar to using a College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) to assess acquired knowledge. Other types of assessment include portfolios, evaluation of training programs via the American Council on Education (ACE), advanced placement (AP) exams, and institutional exams developed by subject-matter experts on the faculty. A major advantage of the PLA approach is that students receive credit toward degree completion without the tuition expense or seat time, although they may still incur small fees to cover the cost of administration and processing. This model has limited viability because only a select group of students is able to qualify.

Integrated, Competency-Based Three-Year Model

The third model employs an integrated, competency-based curriculum approach. A predetermined set of competencies are foundational to the students’ educational experience. In addition to the set of competencies, the curriculum is redesigned and integrated

wherever possible to maximize student learning opportunities throughout their entire educational experience. Teaching faculty that participate in the program receive an orientation outlining the curriculum design and are mindful of the program competencies, as well as accreditation standards and expectations. Utilizing a collaborative approach, faculty members deliver courses over a period of six semesters (120 credits), with no summer sessions or winter intersessions needed. The content is configured in a way that facilitates collaboration by faculty across disciplines.

The competencies serve as guideposts for the content of all the academic experiences within the curriculum. Because the development of competencies occurs at varying levels of intensity throughout the three years, a key strategy is the use of master planning documents for each academic experience. For each of the educational experiences, an academic plan is developed that details the overarching strategy for addressing the competencies within the experience along with specific implementing activities that the faculty can employ. These academic plans are regularly reviewed and updated as part of an ongoing assessment of the program. The academic plans serve as the basis for the development of model syllabi that demonstrate the relationship between the academic requirements, assignments, and the competencies.

For reasons that will become evident in Chapters 2 and 3, we use the term *module* instead of *course* when speaking of the integrated three-year-degree program. Each module that a student takes has an academic plan developed by faculty experts. These academic plans provide a strategic framework allowing faculty, administrators, accreditation organizations, and other interested parties to see how each of the courses in a given semester or year support the program-level competencies and learning outcomes. These academic plans and model syllabi are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Each semester concludes with an innovative week-long, credit-bearing “integrating experience.” These experiences place students in academic work teams in which they are given challenging case-based problems related to their major. Teaching faculty hold

special consulting hours to provide guidance and support to the student teams.

Integration of academic content throughout the three years is achieved in a number of ways, including program themes, joint assignments across modules and between various disciplines, end-of-semester integrating experiences, and experiential learning opportunities. During the last week of each of the first four semesters, students engage in a team-intensive activity exercising their newly acquired knowledge and skills to address real-world case studies. Each experience focuses on the competencies stressed during the semester and culminates with a formal presentation to the faculty and invited members from the internal university community as well as invited guests.

Accelerated versus Integrated, Competency-Based Models

A major perceived advantage of the accelerated three-year model is that very little curriculum modification needs to occur. In fact, in most instances the curriculum does not change at all. Only the time frame for delivering the curriculum is modified in order to meet the thirty-six-month timetable. So for traditional institutions, launching an accelerated curriculum might be politically feasible although it might not be the most attractive scenario for potential students. Because curriculum changes can be very time-consuming and must navigate various university governance mechanisms, working with a curriculum that is already in place more easily meets faculty needs and stays within many administrators' comfort zone.

On the other hand, designing and implementing an integrated, competency-based, or outcomes-focused, curriculum model requires faculty to collaborate and to be flexible in their pedagogical approaches. An integrated model requires that traditional courses be thought of in new ways, such as modules that are premised upon the principles of student knowledge acquisition and skill development. Further, an integrated curriculum is premised on a set of programmatic and school-based competencies. These

competencies influence and in some cases drive the choices of content acquisition, delivery, and demonstration.

Building an integrated curriculum can by its very nature be labor-intensive and will likely meet with resistance at some institutions. On the other hand, creating an integrated curriculum can inspire faculty to collaborate and think of education in new ways, such as placing the student at the center of learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Tagg, 2003). Implementing an integrated curriculum also demands that administrators think in new ways regarding programmatic delivery needs such as classroom space, awarding of credit hours, and the coordination of the course registration processes. The curriculum redesign also requires the support of key institutional leaders in order for the curriculum to survive the academic governance process.

Changing the Way We Think about Higher Education

Changing the way we think about the design and delivery of the higher education experience demands that university leaders think in new ways. This means that modules will look different in an integrated curriculum than in a traditional three-credit, one-hour-and-15-minutes, twice-per-week course. For example, faculty may deem it educationally beneficial for students to spend more class time on a particular subject area. Thus the module might be delivered in a two-hour class that meets four days a week over seven weeks as opposed to the more typical two-day-a-week, one-hour-and-15-minute class that meets for fifteen weeks.

Accelerated-curriculum models fit more easily into a traditional administrative mindset because typical tuition and seat-time practices remain undisturbed. On the other hand, an integrated curriculum requires administrative leaders who are willing to break decades of traditional practices in order to create new value for their students. Providing the leadership to promote true innovation is no easy task. As Collins (2001) reminds us, “good is the

enemy of great,” and many institutional administrators are happy to be just “good enough.”

One of the clear challenges facing university presidents and other senior leaders is to envision new ways in which to construct the college experience—ways that promote learning and create new value for their students. Successfully meeting this challenge requires a willingness to examine long-held assumptions regarding administrative practices such as credit hours and seat time. Instead, a new focus on learning, competency attainment, and demonstration should drive how we design and deliver the curriculum.

As competition increases, more colleges and universities will look to offer new ways for students to earn a bachelor’s degree. The accelerated model will be attractive given that initially, institutions will see the model as a means of retaining tuition income because students will be required to complete the same number of courses. Yet many universities already offer full-time students the option of adding up to one course above the standard load (that is, six instead of five three-credit courses per semester) at no additional cost. These students can shave six courses off the total in six semesters, thereby needing to complete the remaining four courses by some alternative means, such as night school, intersession term, and summers.

In these scenarios, institutions will lose tuition revenue without cutting delivery costs, thus speeding up the downward financial spiral. Many institutions will need more students in order to balance their budget. Thus, many small, less-selective institutions will experience increased pressure to lower entrance requirements as a means of attracting more students. At the same time, these institutions will feel growing pressure from the competition whose size or scale will continue to increase price pressure in the market place—pricing more cheaply for credit courses.

Reducing Price for Students and Costs to Institutions

The integrated, competency-based model will be particularly attractive and useful to small and mid-sized institutions that seek to

enhance current enrollments or that are interested in attracting new enrollment segments. In the subsequent chapters, readers will learn how institutions can launch an integrated, competency-based program that reduces delivery costs.

This book puts forth an already proven model of a three-year integrated, competency-based curriculum that by design offers students a faster pathway to graduation while protecting tuition revenues. This model significantly reduces delivery costs by integrating content and focusing on learning outcomes and the attainment of program competencies. Philosophically, the act of learning supersedes seat time. This model eliminates unnecessary redundancies within the curriculum, and it adds semester-ending credit bearing summative experiences. This model does more than rearrange existing curriculum; it leads to a complete redesign that enables institutions to pass along a 25 percent savings to students and their sponsors. It is a win-win for all concerned.

The integrated, competency-based model offers a legitimate response to the criticism of the continued high expenses of postsecondary education. Addressing the issue of cost while improving quality will prove to be the formula that saves many colleges and universities over the next several decades. But will institutional leaders be able to leave their comfort zones and challenge many of the basic assumptions that American higher education has held on to for so long? It seems to be clearer now than ever before that institutions need to embrace new practices or pay the ultimate price for their lack of will.

As the knowledge economy continues to rapidly expand, college graduates will need new skill sets in order to participate and successfully compete. Colleges and universities can and should play a central role in the preparation of citizens but only if the institutions have rethought the way that students acquire, tie together, and demonstrate new knowledge. Compartmentalized and silo-driven learning, so often redundant, is no longer meeting organizations' needs in today's global marketplace. The integrated, competency-based model that is discussed in detail in this book offers a proven

approach that answers the growing chorus of concerns being expressed by business leaders, government officials, students, their sponsors, and academicians. The learning process can and must change in ways that improve its effectiveness while offering a clear solution to the continued escalating tuition crisis.

Three-Year Degrees in a Global Context

Today, there still remains substantial confusion as to what a three-year degree equals when comparing degree programs of various countries from around the world. For example, some believe that a three-year bachelor's program in the United States would be similar to degrees long offered in Europe and other countries globally. Although it is true that many Europeans can and do earn their bachelor's degree in three years, it is important to note that these students have participated in a system that requires thirteen years of elementary and secondary education: examples include the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy. Indeed, in these instances the European model introduces students to many components of general education/liberal arts before they begin their bachelor's degree work. As a result, the bachelor's degree earned in Europe can be much more technical or professionally focused. Yet educators in the United Kingdom are quick to point out that the graduates of the system are equally if not better prepared for a well-rounded life, given the rigorous exit examination process that is required of all students.

In Europe today, forty-seven countries have agreed to the Bologna Process, a nongovernmental initiative designed to provide students with a more standardized or common educational experience (European Higher Education Area, 2011). One of the proposed benefits of the Bologna Process is to improve transferability of students' educational experiences across Europe. However, in some parts of Europe, students participate in a twelve-year elementary and secondary experience as opposed to the thirteen years of pre-university education. The harmonizing that is sought through

the Bologna Process will be tested in these situations. Yet if the Bologna Process is successful, some have suggested that such a shift in educational strategy will assist Europe in regaining its educational might. In order to achieve the aims of the Bologna Process, countries will need to adopt common frameworks and measurable learning outcomes (Gaston, 2010).

In India, liberal arts degrees and courses receive less emphasis than subjects in technology, engineering, and business. Earning a bachelor's degree in technology or a bachelor's degree in engineering (both of which are four-year programs) provides students with a strong technical foundation. Students who then go on to earn an MBA from a different university compete strongly in the professional marketplace. Still, many three-year bachelor's degrees are available to students, such as the Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Science, and Bachelor of Arts. However, U.S. institutions often require students with these degrees to complete an additional thirty credits of general education in order to earn a U.S. bachelor's degree.

The educational approach in India has been influenced by the rapid growth of that country's population. Because of the many thousands of outsourced jobs that have come to India from around the world, there is a premium on the development of technical skills and practical applications.

In Southeast Asia, the educational systems continue to show the influence of other nations: the British system in Malaysia, the French system in Vietnam, and the U.S. system in both Thailand and China. With that said, there remain fairly significant differences in the specific educational practices employed around the region. For example, outcomes assessment is not often used to demonstrate educational success. Rather, country-wide proficiency examinations have been used for decades in order to determine which students will have access to limited university educational opportunities. More recently, countries such as Thailand and China have placed greater emphasis on advancing their university-level

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educational systems in order to compete more effectively in the global economy.

Educational systems vary from country to country and have been developed and shaped over many decades by a multitude of factors including governmental structure, economic need, cultural norms, and political beliefs of the ruling party. What seems to be clearer today is that world leaders see the importance of strengthening regional educational systems in order to advance the opportunities that come with increased globalization. These proposed alliances have exciting possibilities, particularly with the Bologna process, given that one of its core focuses is on developing measurable outcomes. This approach will be discussed as this book examines the details of the integrated curriculum model and its reliance on competency demonstration (Keller, 2008; Wildavsky, 2010).