

STATE OF COLORADO



DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION
Colorado Commission on Higher Education

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D. Rico Munn
Executive Director

December 15, 2010

Senate President Shaffer, Speaker of the House McNulty, and members of the General Assembly,

On behalf of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), I am pleased to submit to you this letter and the attached report: "***The Degree Dividend***: Building our economy and preserving our Quality of Life." These documents are submitted to fulfill CCHE's responsibility pursuant to 23-1-108(1.5)(a).

Colorado's system of higher education faces an unprecedented challenge to its funding. As a result, CCHE recognizes that a Master Plan for the system must be looked at as a process rather than as a static document. CCHE broadly views this as a three part process:

1. Adopting of a comprehensive strategic plan;
2. Narrowing strategic strategies to develop specific institution level plans; and,
3. Ongoing evaluation to maintain accountability and to address changing conditions.

At its December 2, 2010 meeting, the CCHE completed the first part of this by formally adopting a strategic plan. The development of ***The Degree Dividend*** was a collaborative effort that met statutory requirements to inform CCHE's master plan (CRS 23-1-108 (1.5)(a)), and included broad statewide stakeholder contribution. Specifically, the effort was led by a bi-partisan steering committee, appointed by Governor Bill Ritter (the Higher Education Strategic Planning Committee or "HESP") with representation from business and industry, nonprofit organizations and members of the CCHE. In addition, four subcommittees were organized with broader representation and charged with addressing specific issues:

- **Mission & Governance:** charged with identifying the proper role, mission and governance structure of the state's higher education system;
- **Pipeline:** charged with addressing the role of the system in decreasing remediation, expanding transition programs, removing barriers for nontraditional learners, and increase completion;
- **Accessibility:** charged with addressing the role of the state and institutions in continuing to provide access to students, particularly those most vulnerable groups which include ethnic minorities, low income, and those with geographic barriers; and
- **Sustainability:** charged with making recommendations related to Colorado higher education funding as it relates to state goals.

Membership of the four subcommittees included additional business and non-profit leaders, chamber of commerce CEOs, members of the CCHE, members of the HESP, and self-selected representatives from each sector of higher education (community colleges, private institutions, research institutions, and state colleges). These 35 subcommittee members included seven current presidents, six institutional executive staff, and five CCHE members. In addition, the strategic planning process was supported by a bi-partisan statewide legislative advisory group comprised of, with one exception, current members of the General Assembly (Sen. Bacon, Sen. King, Rep. Massey, Rep. Middleton, Rep. McCann, Rep. Summers and Sen. Schwartz.)

The Degree Dividend is organized around two critical levers: addressing the historic decline in funding of higher education and increasing degree/certificate completion statewide. To address those levers, ***The Degree Dividend*** makes four key recommendations, and provides key strategies to support each recommendation:

Recommendation 1- Affordability- creation of a sustainable funding source for higher education at a level that is competitive nationally and investing in financial aid.

- Maximizing College Opportunity Funds
- Linking funds to measurable progress
- Maintaining fee for service programs for prioritized graduate programs
- Continue to implement efficiencies
- Create state fund to match locally raised dollars
- State funding should be considered with a system perspective

Recommendation 2- Access- increase access for all Coloradans- focus on pathways, retention and completion

- Support multiple entry points into college
- Allow for flexible pathways to completion
- Make college affordable for all students who meet admission requirements
- Provide support structures for students to stay on track and complete programs

Recommendation 3- Quality- systemic improvement in the educational pipeline

- Focus on college earlier
- Increase alignment and collaboration across P20 and workforce
- Expand effective remediation efforts
- Common data and assessment
- Address capacity to meet demands

Recommendation 4-Accountability- structuring the system of higher education to allow for the advancement of state priorities

- Maintain current governance structure
- Enhance responsibility and authority of the CCHE
- Review institutional missions within 18 months
- Implement performance funding

- Require consultation with the CCHE in appointment of the ED of the CDHE

The CCHE believes that this work product provides a framework that will guide future discussions of higher education that must take place in the very near term. The CCHE adopted a draft of ***The Degree Dividend*** at its October 7, 2010 meeting, after soliciting feedback and comments from institutional governing boards from October 8-22, 2010, per statutory requirements.

Consequently, we believe that the next steps in moving the state's system of higher education forward will be in transforming current momentum into reaching consensus with campus leaders and institutional governing boards and then developing explicit implementation plans regarding the recommendations found in ***The Degree Dividend***. Obviously, most of this work will take place after the inauguration of Governor-elect Hickenlooper and Lt. Governor-elect Garcia. Therefore, to maintain the current momentum toward creating a coherent and permanent state master plan, the CCHE and the Department of Higher Education are currently developing a matrix that aligns the goals and recommendations set forth in ***The Degree Dividend*** with current policy, legislation, and practice throughout the state, which will assist in creating a seamless and uninterrupted transition for the incoming administration.

The adoption of ***The Degree Dividend*** is only the beginning of much work to be done. It will take cooperation and collaboration from across the state, the incoming executive administration, and the support of the legislature as we finalize the implementation phase of a lasting master plan that will pay dividends to the state for many years to come. The CCHE stands as a ready partner with you and the Hickenlooper/Garcia administration and appreciates your support.

Sincerely,

James T. Polsfut
Chairman, Colorado Commission on Higher Education