



Office of the President

Aug. 17, 2010

Dear Chairmen Lyons and Monfort:

We appreciate the time and effort the Higher Education Strategic Planning Steering Committee has invested in creating an open and thoughtful planning process. The challenges identified by the Committee are indeed daunting, and we applaud the five goals you have set forth. As you continue your deliberations on how best to achieve these goals, we respectfully ask that you consider the following:

1. The environment in which Colorado public higher education institutions operate is subject to competitive forces beyond the State's control.

We endorse the concept of a market-based approach to funding public institutions and holding them accountable for how they use public funding. However, it is absolutely crucial that this approach not assume the "market" for Colorado's public colleges and universities is a closed system limited to other Colorado public institutions. Colorado residents have access to literally thousands of private educational opportunities, many of them for-profit ventures. Any attempt to regulate competition among public institutions without considering other entities "competing" for the same students will have significant negative consequences on public institutions.

2. Public research universities play a vital societal and economic role in Colorado.

The twin pillars of higher education policy are access to high-quality undergraduate education and the economic and social development engine embodied by research universities. Neither of these can exist without consideration of the other. The research and graduate education programs at Colorado's public research universities address state needs, drive economic development, provide public services and outreach that enrich the communities where they are located, and augment the quality of these institutions' undergraduate programs.

In addition to being the state's primary preparer of education professionals, UNC is a specialized graduate research university with expertise in the field of education. Many of our faculty focus on applied research. The University is home, for example, to more than a dozen centers where graduate faculty from a variety of disciplines are engaged in groundbreaking education-related research. Our National Institute for Nursing

Education and Scholarship, National Center for Severe and Sensory Disabilities, Tointon Institute for Educational Change, Center for Integrated Arts Education, Mathematics and Science Teaching Institute, and Center for the Education and Study of Gifted, Talented, Creative Learners are recognized at both the state and national levels for their contributions to the field of education.

UNC's graduate programs are a natural extension of its comprehensive undergraduate programs, and serve the needs of our students and the state. The University followed a common path for the evolution of a former normal school into a 21st century public university, adding programs in other public service professions, such as nursing, as well as core arts and sciences to the undergraduate and graduate curriculum. In the narrow sense, about half of the graduate programs UNC offers are in the traditionally defined field of K-12 education and licensure, but this narrow definition of education is outdated. Professional educators at all levels, including K-12, are now being asked to do master's and doctoral work in content areas as well as pedagogy, and preparation for professions in public health, nursing, business, criminal justice and public administration, to name a few, often includes an education component. The preparation of faculty and leaders for post-secondary education is also a crucial function of UNC graduate programs. Our doctoral programs prepare graduates for faculty status at colleges and universities, and master's programs qualify graduates to teach at the community college level.

3. Colorado should invest its limited higher education funds using a two-pronged approach that supports student access and addresses matters of state priority.

Colorado can harness the positive power of competition among institutions with a two-pronged funding approach similar to the federal government's investment in access through financial aid programs and in national priorities through research and program dollars. This approach is somewhat similar to the original intent, but not the implementation, of the College Opportunity Fund legislation in Colorado. The COF stipend was designed to foster healthy competition among institutions by funding students rather than institutions, and the fee-for-service contracts were intended to support state priorities.

UNC serves the dual and complementary roles of research university and access provider to underserved students. In addition to the research and graduate education functions described above, we are committed to educating the citizens of Colorado. If the United States is to reverse its rapidly eroding competitive position in the world in terms of percent of population with a post-secondary degree, we must not only educate a greater percentage of our population than ever before, but also recruit and support students who are less prepared for post-secondary education than in the past. UNC fulfills its public mission in part by recruiting, welcoming and supporting students who are not the academic elite. We educate students in the fundamental Latin sense of "leading out" their potential, even if they are not perfectly primed for college success when they arrive at UNC.

While the funding model used during the 2009-10 fiscal year to reduce higher education general fund appropriations is far from ideal, it does reflect a rough balance between the competing interests of high-enrollment institutions that offer undergraduate education and the economic and social development engines embodied by research universities.

4. Colorado cannot afford to take a centralized command-and-control approach to regulating its public higher education institutions.

There is no question that the 19th century model of state-managed, state-funded higher education institutions is broken. As the higher education marketplace grows exponentially more complex, state governments no longer have the necessary management expertise to operate efficient and effective higher education institutions, nor can they afford to invest limited state funding in inefficient bureaucracies.

Colorado's ability to invest in higher education is permanently changed. But no matter the amount of funding available for higher education, the central question to be answered is this: What do the people of Colorado need and expect from their investment in higher education? If we as a state are to continue offering residents high-quality post-secondary education and providing the economic and societal benefits associated with public research universities, we must redefine accountability for public dollars in terms of institutional outcomes rather than the details of institutional operations.

As we work toward common goals, we must consider not only each institution's unique capacity to contribute to those goals, but also the transactional costs that will result from policies intended to ensure the most efficient and effective expenditure of public dollars.

We appreciate your time and look forward to continuing our dialogue as the Steering Committee completes its draft report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Norton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kay Norton
President