

Governance

HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS FOR UNIVERSITY GOVERNORS AND TRUSTEES

An Important Step for Transparency

At the December meeting of the UNC Board of Governors, Chairman John Fennebresque implemented a new transparency measure.

For the first time, members voted by show of hands instead of voice votes for all votes that were not unanimous. That means that individual votes will be recorded in the minutes. Such a procedure has become important now that fewer votes are unanimous than in the past.

This change will provide more accurate information to trustees, university employees, state legislators, and North Carolina citizens. Since videos of meetings of the BOG are not available roll call votes in the minutes are the next best way to provide voting information. The new measure will improve policy-making, since board members who know they will be “on the record” are likely to consider issues more carefully.

Kudos to the Board and to Chairman Fennebresque for this commitment to accuracy, transparency, and accountability.

■ Jenna A. Robinson



Photo: NativeTexan55 (Wikimedia Commons)

Western Governors University is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, but its students attend online. Several state governments have created cooperative programs with WGU.

Western Governors University: One State at a Time

Jenna A. Robinson

Five states have brought in Western Governors University to make sure that the state has a low-cost online university that provides academic quality.

In 2010 former Indiana governor Mitch Daniels established WGU Indiana by executive order. Former Texas governor Rick Perry and the Washington State legislature established their own state WGU institutions in 2011. Tennessee and Missouri followed in 2013.

In Indiana and Texas, the governor’s executive order instructed agencies and officials of the state to “work cooperatively” with Western Governors to establish the school and to eliminate any barriers to its success. They also specified that WGU would receive no state funding.

The state of Washington’s path was different. In 2011, the Washington State Legislature passed “An act establishing the first Washington

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nonprofit online university,” to create WGU Washington.

These state institutions use WGU’s academic model—known as competency-based—but customized it for each state.

WGU was founded in 1997 by 19 U.S. governors (most of them from the West) to help working adults. Its model differs dramatically from that of “brick and mortar” schools. Instead of focusing on seat time, students at WGU schools demonstrate their skills and knowledge in required subject areas at a pace that suits them. As WGU’s website puts it, “Already have experience? Great! You can use it to complete assessments as soon as you’re ready.”

The concept is simple: WGU students start with the end-of-course assessment. If they earn a B or better on the test, then they don’t have to take that class but they get credit for it anyway. Students can pass as many courses as they want during each six-month term. And since WGU students are mostly adult learners—the average WGU Indiana student is 37 years old—many have experience that they can apply. The average time to graduation is less than two years.

The competency-based system makes WGU’s already-low tuition even more attractive. Since 2008, WGU has kept its charges at \$2,980 per term in tuition and just \$145 in fees—about the same amount as in-state tuition and fees at East Carolina University. But WGU’s tuition also includes all of a student’s reading materials (a value of around \$1,100 dollars per year).

And although the state programs are still new, positive outcomes are already appearing. WGU’s website shows that by June 2014, just four years after WGU Indiana opened, it had already graduated 1,400 students. Given its current initial enrollment of fewer than 2000, that’s impressive. Even better, according to a presentation given by WGU Indiana Chancellor Allison Barber in 2014, 99 percent of the university’s employer partners say that they want more WGU Indiana graduates.

WGU institutions in all four other states are also reporting early success, according to their websites and other news sources. In the National Survey of Student Engagement, students at all WGU schools praised their experiences in several important areas—including quality of interactions with faculty and academic support. And the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) recently ranked WGU’s secondary math education program first in the nation, citing its quality, accessibility, and outstanding student teaching experiences. ■



Graduates Aren’t Ready for Work

A new report released by the Association of American Colleges and Universities reveals that employers don’t think university graduates are ready to enter the business world.

Proportions of employers who believe that recent college graduates are well prepared in each area:

- Working effectively in teams 37%
- Staying current on technologies 37%
- Ethical judgment and decision-making 30%
- Locating, organizing, evaluating information 29%
- Oral communication 28%
- Working with numbers/statistics 28%
- Written communication 27%
- Critical/analytical thinking 26%
- Being innovative/creative 25%

The report is based on an online survey of 400 executives conducted in November and December by Hart Research Associates.

Searching for a President: No Rose-Colored Glasses

Jane S. Shaw

The search for a new president of the University of North Carolina has begun. Even though Tom Ross does not step down till January 1, 2016, names are already being suggested.

But the search has a long way to go. Fortunately, the Board of Governors is changing the cumbersome process of the past, with its multiple committees for different stages of the search.

But finding a president is not easy. Even though board members are somewhat like-minded (most are Republican and relatively conservative) there are many potential missteps along the way.

Presidencies Derailed, a 2013 book from Johns Hopkins Press, offers cautionary advice. Many difficulties during a president's tenure can be traced to flaws in the search process, the authors say.

The writers know higher education. Stephen J. Trachtenberg is the former president of George Washington University (and before that, the University of Hartford); Gerald B. Kauvar is his special assistant; and E. Grady Bogue was chancellor of Louisiana State University in Shreveport and interim chancellor of University of Tennessee-Chattanooga.

They define a “derailment” as a president's abrupt departure from office, or a departure before his or her term of office is completed. The three studied 25 presidential derailments in the United States, all of which took place in one year, 2009.

Searches often begin with a rosy glow of optimism. Committee members hope to find the “perfect person”—the one person out there who exactly fits the job. But there is no perfect candidate. (And even if there were, that candidate might not accept the offer!)

The goal is to find a real person, with strengths and weaknesses, who will suit this particular institution—a multi-campus, public university, heavily reliant on state appropriations.

Here are some suggestions that I think are worth paying attention to:

- The search committee should be small. Campus constituencies should be brought into the process, but not serve on the committee.



Photo: Ani Garrigo, Daily Tarheel staff

Tom Ross, current UNC-system president, hugs a colleague after a news conference Friday. Ross will step down in January 2016.

- The committee should have a few people who have experience in hiring high-level personnel—and seek help from other board members who have that experience.
- The committee should know the university. It should “compose a job description that is not only accurate and complete but that also reflects institutional realities and aspirations,” write Trachtenberg et al.
- Once candidates are identified, the search intensifies. “The more information a search committee can harvest about a candidate's interpersonal skills, the better,” they write. That means conducting early background checks and even listening to gossip.
- The committee should not be bedazzled by a candidate's coming from a “name” institution and should not fall into “group think.”

The job is not over once the president is chosen. The board must clarify the role of the spouse, be candid about the university's finances, and draw the management boundaries between the president and the board.

But that's not the end, either. The board must be ready to ease the new leader into the job—and when the first crisis comes, as it will, be prepared to back the president up.

Even so, authors of *Presidencies Derailed* say, success partly depends on luck. “The goal is not selection perfection but risk mitigation.” ■

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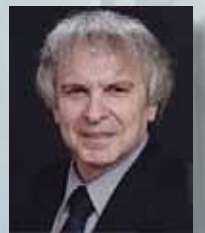
Do You Agree?

“With the declining importance [beginning in the late 19th century] of literature and the humanities within the ever-expanding list of college offerings ... there was a clear loss of educational cohesiveness and shared educational mission.

...This loss of coherence and civilizing mission, and the resulting bewilderment and sense of drift that it produced in many students, became the target of many critics of American higher education, especially in the years from the early twentieth century to the present.”

Russell K. Nieli

From Christian Gentleman to Bewildered Seeker: The Transformation of Higher Education in America. Pope Center, 2007



The goal of this newsletter from the Pope Center is to help university trustees and governors to be more effective leaders in higher education.

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