

# CONVOCATION 2008

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## Concluding thoughts:

Always remember how important you are in the larger scheme of things. There can be no greater commitment than to educate our populace so that everyone has the opportunity to achieve some of those personal and professional goals we spoke of earlier. You do this. You do it with incredible success – as measured by your awards and recognitions and by the successes of your students. You continue to do it despite multiple obstacles thrown down the gauntlet of higher education.

I was appalled recently reading some responses to an essay written by CSU Long Beach President, F. King Alexander in *Insidehighered.com*. Alexander was making the case for states to keep their promises to fund public higher education institutions. When they don't, Alexander noted, the financial burdens fall on individual students or all tax payers as the Federal government funds more Pell grants and other education subsidies or loans.

Several respondents to Alexander's plea scoffed at the notion that higher education should be financially accessible to all. I think that what shocked me most was not the predictable plethora of arguments suggesting that higher education is a private good and that the beneficiaries – students – should pay full cost. I find such arguments to be wholly specious – and fervently believe that education at all levels yields a substantial and critical common good for society.

No, what shocked me was the assertion that we should stop funding the arts and humanities all together since they yield no tangible benefit; and that universities should publish cost-benefit analyses indicating what the cost of "training" would lead to in terms of income benefit in a subsequent career. I find such claims to be horrifying. Yet they were predicted by Harold T. Shapiro in *A Larger Sense of Purpose: Higher Education and Society*, written in 2005: Shapiro served as president of both Princeton University and the University of Michigan for a combined total of 20 years. Like Alexander, he admonished states to fund public higher education. Otherwise, public colleges and universities would be forced to become increasingly dependent on private streams of revenue, which **could** lead to more narrowly-focused curricula.

Based, in part, on his experiences as faculty member and president and, in part, on the 2003 Clark Kerr Lectures, Shapiro notes that public higher education plays a critical role in a free and democratic society – namely as both servant (by providing education) and as thoughtful critic (by raising those "questions that society does not want to ask" (p. 4)). He goes on to claim that public universities have both a moral and an academic obligation to society, and urges us to ensure "a more intimate connection between professional training and liberal arts – in the hope that future doctors, lawyers, and

business executives will be educated in ethics and the social sciences as well as they are in anatomy, torts, and leveraged buyouts” (book cover summary).

He explains that

It is not simply what we teach, or even what our students learn, but what kind of persons they become that really matters. We must think, therefore, about what kind of person, what kind of skills, and what goals should characterize that society, and only then inquire just what type of education or scholarly agenda contributes to these goals. Otherwise, education could be considered a private indulgence that, whatever its value to an individual, does not deserve public support (90).

In fact, several studies have demonstrated that higher education delivers not only “economic benefits in the form of higher earnings and higher state and federal tax revenues to fund tax-supported programs,” but also several intangible social benefits, including the following:

- reduced welfare dependency;
- lower crime costs;
- healthier lifestyles;
- social gains, such as increased volunteerism, charitable giving, and participation in and leadership of community organizations; and
- various immeasurable benefits, including reading to children and increased levels of participation in cultural activities.

Indeed, one study conducted by Amy L. Watts in 2001 for the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center determined that the “lifetime social benefits of a four-year degree were estimated at more than \$126,000 for men and \$96,000 for women.”

I believe, we live in a precarious time. Not only is public higher education under unwarranted attack, our world is engulfed in very public wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and somehow more invisible, but nearly catastrophic conflict in Darfur, and devastating clashes in Georgia, Chechnya, Pakistan, Mauritania, and multiple other places around the world. These times bring to mind the warnings of British economist, William Henry Beveridge, who wrote in Full Employment in a Free Society (1944) “Ignorance is an evil weed, which dictators may cultivate among their dupes, but which no democracy can afford among its citizens.”

Echoing this thought some 30 years later, Steve Biko, noted student leader, anti-apartheid activist in South Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s, who died too young at the hands of government officials, testified (5/31/1976) that “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

Though it has been said a bazillion times before, it is critical that we – YOU – continue to enlighten the minds of our students about how the world has worked and

**could** work. We must not give in to those who claim it has ever been thus. Rather, we must continue to believe our world and our communities can be better. And, we must not be timid in teaching our students how we might build a better world and better communities; we must persist in our research efforts and creative activities that can inform our efforts to “get it right” and convey our realities, our hopes, and our dreams artistically; we must continue to model good behavior as we contribute our service to multiple constituencies.

As Shapiro explains,

A particularly important quality of liberal learning is the ability to imagine how we are all to live together in a peaceful, mutually empathetic and supportive manner in the face of a wide variety of different beliefs about substantive moral issues and the empirical state of the world (90).

As we do so, stay mindful of President Teddy Roosevelt’s exhortation in his April 23, 1910 speech – “Citizenship in a Republic: The Man in the Arena” at the Sorbonne, Paris

It is not the critic who counts; not the ~~man~~ [one] who points out how the strong ~~man~~ stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the ~~man~~ [person] who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends him[/her]self in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if [s/]he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his[/her] place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

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