

Molly Corbett Broad



A leading spokesperson for American higher education, Molly Corbett Broad became the twelfth president of the American Council on Education (ACE) on May 1, 2008. She is the first woman to lead the organization since its founding in 1918. Broad came to ACE from the University of North Carolina (UNC), where she served as president from 1997 to 2006, leading UNC through a period of unprecedented enrollment growth. Due in large part to the success of the Focused Growth Initiative, minority enrollment at UNC grew at more than double the rate of the overall student body during her tenure. She also spearheaded the creation of a need-based financial aid program for in-state undergraduates and the creation of the College Foundation of North Carolina. Broad

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held a number of administrative and executive positions at several universities prior to her tenure at UNC, including, among others, senior vice-chancellorship for administration and finance as well as executive vice-chancellorship at the California State University system. Broad has written and spoken widely on strategic planning for higher education, K-16 partnerships, information technology, globalization and biotechnology. She currently holds seats on the boards of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and the Parsons Corporation. In the past she has served in several other boards and executive committees. Broad earned a General Motors Scholarship to Syracuse University, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a baccalaureate degree in economics from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. She holds a master's degree in the field from The Ohio State University.

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario for higher education governance?

The most desirable future scenario for US higher education would maintain the broad diversity of higher education institutions, with their considerable array of missions and strengths. Institutional autonomy and self regulation would remain the foundation of the governance system, but they will have to operate in a context of heightened demands for transparency and accountability.

In your opinion, what is or should be the most important objective for higher education in the future? Why?

Access to higher education is central to the economic development, innovative capacity, and social well-being of the United States, as it is to other nations. Access must be defined broadly. In the United States, that includes minority groups, low-income populations, life-long learners, and more recently, veterans. The concept of access also includes academic success. It is not sufficient to open the doors; we must help students attain their educational goals and ensure the quality of their learning experience. An essential aspect of widening access is building a stronger foundation of elementary and secondary schools and stemming the tide of high school dropouts. In short, we must see access as a systemic educational issue.

What do you consider to be the main future challenge(s) for higher education systems? Why?

1. Access: (see above)

2. Accountability: US higher education is facing significant pressure from various stakeholders — federal and state governments, employers, parents — to improve the quality of undergraduate education and to demonstrate its worth to individuals and to society. There are important lessons the United States can learn from the efforts of the Bologna process to focus on learning outcomes through the creation of qualifications frameworks at the European and national levels and in the disciplines through its "Tuning Project."

3. Affordability of higher education: Although 80 percent of US students attend public institutions, where the average tuition is \$2,361 in community colleges and \$6,185 in four-year institutions, the price of higher education has risen faster than the CPI. At the same time, median US family income has remained flat. The cost of higher education, even with almost \$150 billion available in student financial aid, is a major national concern, and is likely to be an even greater problem in the current financial downturn.

In your opinion, what would be the worst, but possible, way to tackle these future challenges? Why?

1 & 3 Access and affordability: In previous economic downturns, states have cut funding for higher education, resulting in public institutions raising tuition to make up some of the shortfall. We are already seeing state budget cuts and the detrimental results to access. Additionally, competition among institutions has led to an increase in scholarships that are not based on financial need (known as "merit aid"). Intensification of this practice also will jeopardize access.

2. Accountability: The worst, but possible, approach would be the imposition of a single federally mandated measurement of student learning. Federal imposition of a "one size fits all" measurement would undermine the rich diversity of American higher education, our successful models of shared governance and our voluntary system of accreditation. While the historic self-regulation of US colleges and universities has not been perfect, a federalized system of accountability is a far less effective alternative. A recent effort by the US Department of Education to exercise significant control over the institutional accreditation process elicited strong reaction from the higher education community. A number of efforts are underway to strengthen institutional measures of transparency and accountability; the need for higher education institutions and associations to push ahead on this front is great.

What do you consider to be the best possible way to tackle the above mentioned future challenges? Why?

1. & 3. Access and Affordability. Access to higher education is both a social and a financial issue. First, educational aspirations must develop early in young people. The United States must strengthen its primary and secondary school systems (called "K-12") — especially those that serve disadvantaged youth — and provide students with both high aspirations and the skills and capacities to realize their dreams. Higher education can play a greater role in working with primary and secondary schools, as well as community organizations and businesses, to create a more seamless "K-20" system. Higher education must also reach out to other populations, such as immigrants, veterans, and older adults. On the cost and affordability front, we will need a combination of federal and state student grants and cost-containment by higher education institutions.

2. Accountability. Higher education associations, systems, and institutions must take vigorous steps to document their policies, practices, and outcomes. As noted, there are a number of promising efforts underway, but the central nut to crack — documenting student learning outcomes — remains quite challenging. The risks are that the simpler measures (rankings, graduation rates, standardized test scores), will be used as a proxy for more comprehensive and nuanced indicators.