COVID-19 AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION:
A Grantmaker's Perspective

Key Takeaways | May 2020

SPEAKERS

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

▪ Philanthropic foundations in the higher education space can make nimble, strategic investments in promising solutions. *But the amount of philanthropic funding is dwarfed by federal and state funding for higher education.* In order to bolster the public higher education sector and prevent students from falling through the cracks, **federal and state support will be critical.**

▪ Stakeholders at all levels must *act now to work with the higher education communities that we know will be most severely affected* by this pandemic. The scope of need is vast and intersectional – students of color, students without access to broadband, working students, students with children, and students at risk of food or housing insecurity all face unique challenges. **We must listen to these communities and develop supports to address their needs.**

DISCUSSION NOTES

▪ "Compassion over compliance" is a guiding principle for higher education foundations during this time, many of which are providing grantees with flexibility and emergency funding to support immediate needs.

▪ The public higher education sector is facing massive financial challenges at the state level, and there is no guarantee that state policymakers will spend political capital in order to mitigate the damage to higher education budgets.

  ❯ One emerging strategy is to build support across multiple agencies for the idea of higher education as the nexus of talent development in states, creating a pipeline that will drive progress in all aspects of state economies – including their economic responses to this pandemic.

    ‣ One example of this concept can be found in Indiana, where Governor Holcomb has established a cross-agency talent development framework through the [Governor's Workforce Cabinet](#).

    ‣ The need to advocate using an equity lens is an important component of this framework.

▪ At the regional and local levels, community stakeholders are working to develop creative, collaborative responses to the pandemic.

  ❯ Institutions of higher education (IHEs) that have already been thinking about student needs from a holistic perspective are more likely to have already built relationships with human services organizations in their communities, and are therefore better positioned to support students in the wake of the pandemic.

  ❯ Specific examples of local collaboration can be found in Detroit, where the [Detroit College Access Network](#) (DCAN) is partnering with [Get Schooled](#) to combat summer melt in the city by providing digital advising help to support students as they transition to higher education.

  ❯ DCAN has also partnered with the [Detroit Regional Chamber's](#) [Detroit Drives Degrees](#) initiative to make the economic argument of why investing in higher education is so important for the city's economic recovery, and help reconnect adults to complete college.

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- On a student level, the pandemic has the potential to bring about an unprecedented level of disruption to higher education students from marginalized backgrounds.

  - Direct service organizations are thinking creatively about how to address the many areas of immediate student need, including supporting FAFSA application and renewal efforts, advocating for Pell Grant increases, disbursing emergency grant aid, helping students seek adjustments to their financial aid packages, and more. Examples of these efforts can be found in the "Resources" section at the end of this document.

  - Despite these efforts, the scope of student need is massive. For example, a number of organizations collaborated to establish an emergency aid fund for California students through the Mission Asset Fund. The initial tranche of funding was released on April 2 and was spoken for within 36 hours. The waitlist of students who have not yet received funding is at over 60,000 students.

- Many IHEs have gone above and beyond their institutional missions to support policy responses to the pandemic – such as donating personal protective equipment (PPE), serving food through dining facilities, establishing emergency training programs, and serving as sites for COVID-19 testing activities.

- As higher education organizations pivot to new strategies for moving their missions forward, their leaders should think about how to capture and quantify lessons learned from these different approaches. Soliciting input directly from students is a key part of this process.

RESOURCES

The speakers mentioned a number of resources throughout the conversation, including:

Simpson Scarborough, April Replication of the National Student Survey

- This report contains findings from across two surveys conducted by a higher education research and marketing firm. Topline findings from the surveys include:

  - Total enrollment at four-year IHEs could decline by up to **20 percent**.

  - **41 percent** of high school seniors of color say it's likely they won't go to college in the fall, compared to **24 percent** of white high school seniors who gave the same response.

  - **32 percent** of higher education students of color say it is unlikely they will return to their college/university in the fall, compared to **22 percent** of white higher education students who gave the same response.

National College Attainment Network (NCAN), COVID-19 and FAFSA Completion, What do NCAN Members and Students Need During COVID-19

- This series of data visualizations, which NCAN updates regularly, tracks the year-over-year decline in Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completions that we have seen in the wake of the pandemic. Major conclusions to date include:

  - By April 24, 2020 there had been **55,582** fewer completed FAFSAs across the country compared to one year prior.

  - Every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico all experienced decreases in year-over-year FAFSA completions since the pandemic.

  - The decline in year-over-year completions has been steeper in high schools that are eligible for Title I funding, meaning they serve higher concentrations of low-income students than their non-Title 1 counterparts.

Edquity

- Edquity is an app that can be used to streamline the process used by IHEs to disburse funding from emergency grant aid programs to students.

- The app automates the process of determining student eligibility for emergency grant aid programs and releasing the funding – an aspect that Edquity says removes the potential for human bias affecting professional judgement.

- Students are guided through a series of questions about their eligibility and can receive aid funding within 48 hours of completing an application (if eligible).

FormSwift and the Seldin/Haring-Smith Foundation, SwiftStudent
- SwiftStudent is a new, free tool that guides students through the process of seeking an adjustment to their financial aid package.

- The demand for adjustments has increased sharply in the wake of the pandemic, as many students and their families have experienced significant changes to their economic circumstances compared to when they filled out the 2020-21 FAFSA form.

RISE, Inc., COVID 311: COVID-19 Help for College Students
- RISE has launched a portal called COVID 311 that connects higher education students with volunteer case managers who assist with finding emergency financial aid programs, applying for public benefits, and connecting with other local resources.

- IHE financial aid offices have been overwhelmed by demand in the wake of the pandemic, and this portal can alleviate some of that caseload burden.

Swipe Out Hunger
- Swipe Out Hunger is a nonprofit that works to address hunger issues among college students.

- An initiative called The Swipe Drive allows students with meal plans to donate some of their allocated meal funding ("swipes") to students who are food insecure.

- Students can still participate in this campaign, and student-led campus groups can still move this initiative forward despite campus closures.

- They also hosted a series of video conferences about what responses both student and campus leadership have developed and what resources are available.

Student Ready Strategies
- Released this guide that explores long-term effects of COVID-19 on higher education.

- The guide offers recommendations for institutions and policymakers to be student-ready for high school graduates, continuing college students, and returning adult learner populations post-pandemic.