



## Thinking Globally, Acting Regionally

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This 50th anniversary of the New England Board of Higher Education offers an important opportunity to look forward. NEBHE's priorities over this next half century will evolve. But a few goals will always remain constant: to expand access and opportunities to a greater number of our citizens; to strengthen the bonds between campus and community; and to prepare the region for success in the global marketplace.

First, we must continue to open the doors of higher education to all students regardless of income. We know now that this challenge requires attention to students much earlier in their lives. In the '50s, families were not pre-occupied with planning for college, and not enough thought was given to connections between early childhood education and future success. If we want to expand educational opportunity to all our citizens, then we need to develop pre-K-to-16 pathways for every school district, rich and poor.

We also need to nurture our technology-based economy. Too many students, especially from disadvantaged minority groups, turn away from science careers before giving them serious consideration. Others start down the path but never complete their degrees because they lack resources, encouragement or support. With India and China producing engineers twice as fast as we do, this waste of talent is intolerable. NEBHE's Excellence through Diversity Program addresses these issues by bringing underrepresented students together with role models through its annual Science Network meeting and online clearinghouse, but a more sustained regional effort is needed.

Another important task before us is to strengthen the relationship between campuses and local communities. Colleges already offer their neighbors benefits like jobs, cultural amenities and continuing education. A conscious effort is required to expand those benefits. A good example may be found in Providence, where the Rhode Island School of Design, Johnson & Wales and Brown universities and others working through the Rhode Island Campus Compact have developed community service requirements for their undergraduates. These include initiatives to expand access to higher education and support professional development of teachers in the local community. That sort of program—combined with the colleges' reclamation of old downtown buildings—has been key to Providence's revitalization.

Healthy town-gown relations are more than just a feather in a college's cap. When the Ivory Tower comes down to the street, both win: the city gets more energy, revenue and support, while the college becomes more attractive to potential students and faculty, and better positioned to tap the wealth of real-world resources for "hands-on" learning in the community.

With regard to the global marketplace, we cannot predict the next big thing with precision. But we can prepare a highly educated, agile workforce that is able to adapt to new technologies and industries as they emerge. For example, as the content carried by our televisions, web sites, computer games and movies becomes dramatically more sophisticated and intertwined, a burgeoning digital media industry will demand creative technicians, producers, digital artists and programmers.

New England has all the pieces in place to be a leader in this industry. Our backbone of universities and IT companies have already spawned dozens of software firms throughout the region specializing in everything from special effects to "massively multiplayer" online universes. Worcester Polytechnic Institute's recently launched computer game design major combining technical programming with humanities study reflects the cultural roots of this new art form—a plus for our "Creative Region." We want New England to be the first place that comes to mind when people think of "digital media."

As we act regionally, more than ever before, we need to think globally. Our future depends upon global economic relationships and foreign immigration here at home. Cultural exchanges, such as the Yale-China Association, which recently celebrated its centennial, familiarize our students with the countries that will be our partners and competitors over the next several decades. We can do more by encouraging public and private colleges to require a year's study abroad. We need to build international cultural competency among graduates, so they can be ambassadors to the global community.

All this will require creative thinking. But that is nothing new for New England, where we live by reinventing ourselves. From textiles to biotech, clipper ships to the Internet, our fortunes have relied on our ingenuity. And they will continue to.

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