



Focus on the Future

Guest Predictions: L. David Eaton

Guest Predictions is a regular feature in which we ask leaders in a number of professions questions that affect us all.

L. David Eaton is Vice President of Enrollment Management at the State University of New York at New Paltz. He received his Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and his Master's degree in Public Administration from Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Michigan. He continued graduate study and research at the Rockefeller School of Public Affairs in Albany.

He has been the principal architect of New Paltz's new student recruitment and marketing strategies. For the past four years, he has led the institution's efforts to establish a comprehensive brand marketing strategy for the campus.

Additionally, Mr. Eaton has been involved with the development of overseas programs and exchange agreements.

Q: What changes in your professional environment in the past 3-5 years have you found to be the most beneficial?

A: The "echo" of the Baby Boom has resulted in a steady increase in the number of college-bound students and, consequently, growth in the customer base for American colleges and universities. At the basic level, the benefit has been to insure a steady source of tuition and fee income as institutions have had little difficulty meeting enrollment targets and, from a qualitative perspective, many institutions have become more selective in their admission, which has had a positive impact on public perception of institutional quality.

Q: What changes have been the most troubling to you?

A: The economy of American higher education has become problematic. Particularly for public universities, the erosion of state support combined with escalating costs has resulted in a higher education price tag that is very difficult for many students and their families to meet. In order to attain their educational goals, many students will have accumulated a substantial educational debt-load that will make it difficult for them to invest in the American dream as they enter their early professional careers.

Q: How will globalization (e.g. the emergence of new global powers, such as China and India) affect your professional area in the near term?

A: America's preeminence as the world's leading system of higher education is being challenged by both Western nations and countries with emerging economies. China, for example, is funding a rapid expansion of its higher education system, while U.S. universities are reeling from losses in state aid and investment income. As this dynamic further increases cost of attendance at American universities, the nation's institutions become less competitive in the robust and lucrative market for international students.

Q: What significant challenges might be anticipated in your professional area in the next few years?

A: As the U.S. economy recovers from this recession, higher education will continue to cope with diminished resources for at least the next year or two. The greater challenge, however, will be in approximately four years, which will usher in a gradual decline in the number of high school graduates, accompanied by growth in the proportion them who come from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Q: What are the greatest challenges confronting young professionals in Western culture today?

A: Recovering from a global recession will provide both challenges and opportunities for young professionals. To be successful, they will need to be constantly learning and adapting as the professional lives they lead will demand flexibility, innovation, and the continuing acquisition of new knowledge and skills. The organizations within which they work will, likewise, need to be flexible and capable of swiftly responding to changes in technology and the external environment.