# Opportunities for AAU Leadership:
# Suggestions from an AAU Ghost

James J. Duderstadt

Fall AAU Meeting
University of California - Irvine
October 22, 2007

It is always an interesting experience for a has-been university president to be invited back to an AAU meeting from time to time, in part to observe how many things change from year to year for university presidents. For example, it is clear that the glass ceiling has been obliterated, leading to an important and refreshing diversity among your membership. While the communications activity seems as intense as always, now many of you have traded in your cell-phones for Blackberries (or perhaps soon iPhones). There are several new institutions and many new faces. But it is reassuring to see several of you remain in the saddle after the decade since I left your membership. My goodness, although he couldn't make this meeting, I understand that even Gordon Gee is still at Ohio State!

As I recall there is another characteristic of these meetings that I suspect still guides speakers: AAU presidents tend to listen best when they are talking–at least among themselves. Hence this afternoon I've decided to simply toss our a few issues–a few challenges, opportunities, and perhaps a hand grenade or two–to stimulate your discussion of the role of AAU presidents in providing leadership at the national level for American higher education. I'll draw these from several recent commissions and task forces I've been serving on, including:

- The Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education in America
- The AGB Task Force on the State of the University Presidency in American Higher Education
- The RAGS-COSEPUP-National Academy effort to boost federal investment in R&D and human capital critical to the nation's innovation capacity
- The Glion Colloquium on the globalization of higher education

- An assortment of technology-based groups I've been chairing including the NSF's Advisory Committee on Cyberinfrastructure, the National Academies IT Forum and an earlier committee on IT and the Future of the Research University

**The Spellings Commission**

As you probably recall, the Spellings Commission focused on three issues concerning American higher education:

- accessibility
- affordability
- accountability

(Actually, there was a fourth issue that was considered by one of the Commission's subcommittees that I chaired: quality. Interestingly enough, although this did not receive adequate attention in our final report, it was our group that actually framed the final broad-brushstroke recommendations of the commission.)

Let me introduce each of these issues using language directly from the Commission's report.

Accessibility:

- "Too few Americans prepare for, participate in, and complete higher education, especially those from underserved and nontraditional groups who make up an ever-greater proportion of our population."

- "The quality of secondary education is clearly a key issue here, since over the past three decades, the U.S. has slipped from 1st to 15th among OECD nations in high school graduation rates and from 1st to 12th in college graduation rates. Of 100 ninth graders today, only 70 will graduate from high school, 41 will enter college, and 18 will graduate with a baccalaureate degree within six years following secondary school."

- "Access and success in American higher education has become alarmingly dependent upon socioeconomic circumstances." Only eight percent of students from the bottom economic quartile will graduate from a four-year institution, compared to 75% of the top quartile. Low-income high school graduates scoring in the top quartile on standardized tests attend college at the lower rate than

high-income students in the lowest quartile of academic achievement. To quote Chuck Vest: "In American higher education today, it is better to be dumb and rich than to be smart and poor."

- The Commission was especially concerned by gaps in college access for underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities. This is particularly troubling in view of the reaffirmation of the importance of diversity in higher education by the Supreme Court in the 2003 Michigan cases and the ruling that race could be considered in admissions to achieve it; the evidence provided by Michigan and other institutions of the positive impact of diversity on student learning, demonstrating clearly that academic excellence and social diversity are positively correlated; and the fact that the nation's selective public universities remain determined and successful in achieving diverse campuses despite occasional public referenda aimed at constraining affirmative action efforts.

Affordability

- "Our higher education financing system is increasingly dysfunctional, characterized by rising costs, eroding public support, misguided investments, and inadequate efficiency and productivity."

- “The entire financial aid system–including federal, state, institutional, and private programs–is confusing, complex, inefficient, duplicative, and frequently does not direct aid to students who truly need it. Need-based financial aid is not keeping pace with rising tuition.”

Accountability

- "At a time when higher education has never been more important to the future of the nation, public trust and confidence in the performance and behavior of our colleges and universities is inadequate and continues to erode."

- "We urge the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education. Every one of our goals, from improving access and affordability to enhancing quality and innovation, will be more easily achieved if higher education embraces and implements serious accountability measures. "

- A couple of "insider" notes are useful in understanding this issue. First, it is useful to note that a majority of the commissioners had backgrounds in business. Hence it is understandable that they would approach the challenge of restoring public trust and confidence by applying to higher education their experience with the capital markets, proposing standards for measuring characteristics such as cost, price, and value (e.g., FASB) and transparency and full disclosure of financial performance and learning outcomes (e.g., Sarbanes-Oxley).

- However, in an effort to preserve academic integrity and quality while recognizing the great diversity of programs and institutions, the small group of commissioners with AAU ties (David Ward, Chuck Vest, Bob Zemsky, and JJD) managed to include language in our final report that insisted that faculty must be at the forefront of defining educational objectives and develop meaningful, evidence-based measures of progress toward these goals.

In the year since the Spellings Commission released its report, there has been a good deal of activity within the Department of Education and elsewhere to begin implementation of several of its recommendations, with one of the commissioners, Sarah Martinez Tucker, becoming Under Secretary of Education to lead this effort. However, thus far most of the activity has been at the treetops level rather than at the 100,000 foot level of the six primary recommendations of the Commission:

1. Reaffirming America's commitment to provide all students with the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education and calling for a major new engagement of higher education with primary and secondary education;

2. Restructuring financial student aid programs to focus upon the needs of lower income and minority students, placing a much higher priority on need-based financial aid programs (particularly the Pell Grant);

3. Calling for a new degree of transparency, disclosure, and accountability in areas such as cost structures and educational outcomes in an effort to earn greater public trust and confidence in the commitment of our institutions to the public interest;

4. Adopting a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement in higher education with a much higher priority given to experimentation and innovation;

5. Meeting the needs of an innovation-driven nation by increasing investment in areas key to economic competitiveness and national security in a global, knowledge-driven economy; and

6. Ensuring that all citizens have access to high quality educational, learning, and training opportunities throughout their lives, essentially establishing lifelong post-secondary education as a "civil right" for all Americans.

It is my belief that while many of the more detailed recommendations contained in the report will likely not survive the current administration, these broader recommendations are sufficiently important and enduring that they are likely to continue to influence the national framework for higher education for some time to come.

Furthermore, because of the cacophony of criticism and speculation following the release of the Commission's report, it is also important to note here what was NOT included as recommendations:

- No standardized testing,
- No tuition price fixing,
- No national (federal) accreditation process,
- No federalization of American higher education,
- And no "No Child Left Behind" and no "Nation at Risk"!!

Of course, there were also several positive issues that were left out of the effort. Many of us wanted to include a stronger challenge to the nation to increase its support of higher education. However, we were never able to agree on whether the glass was half-empty or half-full, that is, whether there will be any new capacity for reinvestment in higher education with public funds (particularly at the state level) or whether the private marketplace would have to provide most, if any, new resources because of the priorities demanded by an aging baby-boomer population (e.g., health care, retirement security, prisons, tax relief). In fact, we were never able to come to grips with the financial equation, the relationship between cost, price, and value of a college education.

Finally, it was clear that the Commission's efforts were focused almost entirely on undergraduate education–and general education at that–with little consideration of graduate/professional education or research. Actually, this was not exactly an oversight. You can thank the small minority of members from AAU institutions for this, since we believed it best to keep this off the table in view of the complexity of these activities and the limited experience with these issues for most of the Commission.

**Rising Above the Gathering Storm**

After many years of effort by many groups and individuals (e.g., the Science Coalition, the National Academies–particularly COSEPUP, the Council on Competitiveness, many of you, and of course, Mr. Friedman), we have finally managed to get the federal government focused on increasing its investment in the knowledge and human capital essential to competitiveness and security in an innovation-driven global economy. In its National Innovation Initiative, the Council on Competitiveness, a group of business and university leaders, highlighted innovation as the single most important factor in determining America's success throughout the 21st century. In a global, knowledge-driven economy, technological innovation–the transformation of new knowledge into products, processes, and services of value to society–is critical to competitiveness, long-term productivity growth, and an improved quality of life.

It is certainly true that many of the characteristics of our nation that have made the United States such a leader in innovation and economic renewal remain strong: a dynamic free society that is continually renewed through immigration, the quality of American intellectual property protection and the most flexible labor laws in the world, the best regulated and most efficient capital markets in the world for taking new ideas and turning them into products and services, open trade and open borders (at least relative to most other nations), and universities and research laboratories that are the envy of the world.

Yet today, many nations are investing heavily in the foundations of modern innovation systems, while the United States has failed to give such investments the priority they deserve in recent years. As Tom Friedman stresses in his provocative book, *The World is Flat*, "The playing field is being leveled. Some three billion people who were out of the game walked, and often ran, onto a level playing field from China, India, Russia, and Central Europe, nations with rich educational heritages. The flattening of the world is moving ahead apace, and nothing is going to stop it. What can happen is a decline in our standard of living if more Americans are not empowered and educated to

participate in a world where all the knowledge centers are being connected. We have within our society all the ingredients for American individuals to thrive in such a world, but if we squander these ingredients, we will stagnate."

The concerns raised by leaders of industry, higher education, and the scientific community, culminating in the National Academies' *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* study, have stimulated the federal government to launch two major efforts aimed at sustaining U.S. capacity for innovation and entrepreneurial activities: the administration's *American Competitiveness Initiative* and Congress's *America COMPETES Act* (the latter being including an awkward acronym for "Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science".) If fully implemented, over the next decade these efforts will involve doubling federal investment in basic research in physical science and engineering; major investments in science and engineering education; tax policies designed to stimulate private sector in R&D; streamlining intellectual property policies; immigration policies that attract the best and brightest scientific minds from around the world; and building a business environment that stimulates and encourages entrepreneurship through free and flexible labor, capital, and product markets that rapidly diffuse new productive technologies.

Yet, while the early effort has been impressive, success will require heavy lifting and strong leadership by AAU presidents over many years, just as did the successful effort to double NIH funding during the past decade.

**The Glion VI Colloquium**

This past June, the sixth Glion Colloquium brought together university leaders from around the world in Glion-above-Montreux, Switzerland to consider the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities presented to higher education by the emerging global, knowledge-driven economy. The Glion VI Colloquium departed from its customary cross-Atlantic dialog by broadening participation to include a truly global representation, including university leaders representing 18 nations and five continents, to consider the globalization of higher education as both mature and developing nations make major investments in building the knowledge infrastructure–schools, universities, research institutes, high-tech industry, cyberinfrastructure, public policies and programs-necessary to achieve prosperity and security in the knowledge economy.

In parallel with a consideration of these trends, there was a strong sense that higher education is also in the early stages of globalization. Of course there has long been a tradition of international higher education through the exchange of students,

faculty, and ideas and the development of international partnerships among institutions. Yet globalization implies a far deeper interconnectedness with the world–economically, politically, and culturally. It also requires thoughtful, interdependent, and globally identified citizens. Institutional and pedagogical innovations are needed to confront these challenges and ensure that the canonical activities of universities–learning, scholarship, and engagement–remain rich, relevant, and accessible within a global context.

This is important because all too often in their efforts to achieve international scope, universities from developed nations adopt a colonial approach, establishing relationships or even campuses abroad in an effort not only to provide international experiences for their students but to tap the intellectual talent of other nations. Deepak Nayyer, former rector of the University of Delhi, reminded us of an ancient Buddhist proverb which states that "the key to the gate of heaven is also the key which could open the gate to hell". Markets and globalization provide a mix of opportunities and dangers for higher education. But the nature of higher education–and our institutions–must be shaped by higher purposes for which the university has been created and sustained throughout the last millennium.

With this caution very much in mind, one of our participants (and your colleague) Bob Berdahl suggested an important framework to guide the interactions and obligations of mature universities in the developed world toward the developing world:

- Universities should accept a fundamental purpose as enlarging human freedom.
- Universities must themselves be free institutions, free from government interference or control, places where the principles of academic freedom are understood and protected.
- In mature universities, the faculty should have a central role in the governance of the institution, the development of its curriculum and the selection of other faculty.
- Mature universities should have the goal of building the capacity of universities in the developing countries.
- The quality standards for education transmitted to developing countries should not be inferior to those of developed countries.

While universities must be responsive to the imperatives of a global economy and attendant to their local responsibilities, they must also become responsible members of the global community. In fact, there was some speculation among Glion VI participants

that we may soon see the emergence of truly global universities that not only compete in the global market place for students, faculty, and resources, but are increasingly willing to define their public purpose in terms of global needs and priorities such as environmental sustainability, public health, wealth disparities, and poverty. Such "universities in the world and of the world" might form through consortia of existing institutions, new paradigms (but as the increasingly global and technology-intensive character of the British Open University), or perhaps even existing institutions that evolve beyond the agenda or influence of their region or nation-state to assume a truly global character.

**Cyberinfrastructure and the Open Education Resources Movement**

Beyond the implications of rapidly evolving cyberinfrastructure (e.g., hardware, software, people, policies, and organizations) for knowledge-intensive institutions such as universities, an equally important issue involves an extension of the open source software development philosophy to learning resources and tools. During the past several years serious efforts have been launched, referred to collectively as the *open education resources* (OER) movement, to put previously restricted knowledge and tools into the public domain and invite community efforts in its development and use.

MIT led the way with its OpenCourseWare (OCW) initiative, placing the digital assets supporting almost 1,800 courses in the public domain on the Internet for the world to use. Millions of students, faculty, and informal users today routinely utilize these resources. Furthermore, over 150 universities have adopted the OCW paradigm to distribute their own learning assets to the world.

A number of universities and corporations have joined together to develop open-source middleware to support the instructional and scholarly activities of higher education, already used by several hundred universities around the world (e.g., Moodle, Sakai). Other institutions and consortia are actively developing open learning initiatives that provide broad public access to previously restricted learning resources.

One of the most exciting–and to some controversial–efforts is the Google Print Library project in which a number of leading universities, now numbering 25, have joined together with Google to digitize a substantial portion of their library holdings, making these available for full-text searches using Google's powerful Internet search engines. For example, Michigan expects Google to complete the scanning of its entire 8 million volume library by 2010. In fact, this past weekend the library building where my office is located was plastered with posters warning us that both the freight elevators

and loading dock (where I sometimes park) would be out of commission for the next three to four months because of trucks hauling books over to the Google scanning operation in Ann Arbor. (Worth noting here is that they expect to digitize a library containing 1.5 million volumes during this period!!!)

While there are still many copyright issues that need to be addressed, it is likely that such efforts will be able to provide full access to a significant fraction of this material to scholars and students throughout the world. In fact, the combined collection of the "G-25" consortium is estimated to contain over half of the books in the world today in over 400 languages.

Open source, open content, open learning, and other "open" technologies become the scaffolding on which to build truly global universities–what Chuck Vest terms the "meta" university. As he observes, "the incredibly large scale of education world wide; the huge diversity of cultural, political, and economic contexts; and the distribution of public and private financial resources to devote to education are too great for traditional university paradigms." Instead he suggestions that "through the array of open paradigms, we are seeing the early emergence of a meta university–a transcendent, accessible, empowering, dynamic, communally-constructed framework of open materials and platforms on which much of higher education world wide can be constructed or enhanced."

But there may be something even more profound to consider. Current computer and telecommunications technology enables billions of people to interact together and access resources (think cell-phones or Negroponte's $100 laptop computer). Within a generation, the majority of the world's written material is likely to be digitized and online. Open source software and the Open CourseWare movement will provide anyone with modest Internet or cellphone connectivity access to powerful learning tools.

Hence, one can imagine that within decades—and certainly within the lifetimes of today's students–we are likely to see the linking together of billions of people with limitless access to knowledge and learning tools, all enabled by a rapidly evolving scaffolding of cyberinfrastructure continuing to increase in power one-hundred to one-thousand fold every decade. Perhaps we are on the threshold of the emergence of a new form of civilization, as billions of world citizens interact together, no longer constrained by today's monopolies on knowledge or learning opportunities.

**The Association of Governing Board Task Force on the State of the University Presidency in American Higher Education**

Let me summarize the six issues suggested for your consideration:

1. Greatly expanding access to higher education in America (including perhaps even regarding lifelong learning as a civil right);

2. Improving the way that we finance higher education and refocusing our financial aid programs to give priority to assisting those students with need;

3. Reframing the debate over the importance of transparency, disclosure, and accounting in the financial operations and educational effectiveness of our colleges and universities in securing public trust and confidence to better acknowledge the role of the faculty and the importance of respecting institutional diversity;

4. Sustaining the momentum of recent efforts of the National Academies, the Council on Competitiveness, and higher education groups such as the AAU in achieving the federal investments in R&D and education necessary to sustain America's economic competitiveness and national security in an innovation-driven, global economy;

5. Approaching the globalization of higher education in a responsible way as global citizens rather than simply tapping new markets; and

6. Positioning (and preparing) our institutions for the disruptive impact of emerging technologies and philosophies such as the open education resources movement.

A key theme running through each of these issues is the importance of leadership, particularly at the level of the university president. And this is where it is appropriate to mention several of the conclusions and recommendations from my final committee: the AGB Task Force on the State of the University Presidency in American Higher Education.

For higher education to play the role it must during this exceptional period of challenge, opportunity, and responsibility, it must establish a stronger sense of trust and confidence on the part of the American public. Key in earning and sustaining this trust

and confidence are the university presidents, working on concert with their governing boards and faculties.

No leader comes to personify an institution in the way a president does. A president must provide academic leadership at the same time he or she must assimilate and tell the institution's story to build pride internally and support externally. The president has primary responsibility for increasing public understanding and support for the institution as a contributor to the nation's continued vitality and well-being.

Yet the ability to be an effective spokesperson for higher education in America is strongly dependent upon the support provided by governing boards and faculties (or at least their tolerance) for the voice of the president. The AGB Task Force found that the presidents of American colleges and universities today continue to face impediments in their efforts to provide capable leadership, particularly on important national issues. To strengthen the voice of the presidency and secure the ability to provide the necessary leadership during a period of considerable change, challenge, and opportunity, the task force set out three imperatives:

1. To reconnect the president with the core academic mission of the university, i.e., learning and scholarship. We must resist the tendency to view the presidency as simply just another CEO role, dominated by fund-raising or lobbying, and instead re-establish academic leadership as a president's highest priority.

2. To urge boards, faculties, and presidents themselves to view the university presidency not as a career or a profession in and of itself, but rather as a calling of immense importance, similar to those of other forms of public service.

3. To seek to establish what the AGB Task Force termed *integral leadership*: "A new style of collaborative but decisive leadership. A president must exert a presence that is purposeful and consultative, deliberative yet decisive, and capable of midcourse corrections as new challenges emerge. Integral leadership succeeds in fulfilling the multiple, disparate strands of presidential responsibility and conceives of these responsibilities as parts of a coherent whole. Leadership of this sort links the president, the faculty, and the board together in a well-functioning partnership purposefully devoted to a well-defined, broadly affirmed institutional vision."

To this I would add one more theme drawn from a recent memoir by a has-been AAU president: "Whether independently governed or state created, all of our institutions are in reality public institutions with obligations to addressing the needs of today's society. Yet they are also enduring social institutions with a duty of stewardship to generations past and a compelling obligation to take whatever actions are necessary to build and protect their capacity to serve future generations."

To be sure, it is sometimes difficult to act for the future when the demands of the present can be so powerful and the traditions of the past so difficult to change. Yet, perhaps this is the greatest challenge for our institutions and for your role as leaders of the nation's leading universities.

Thank you for this opportunity to join the AAU presidents for a discussion of these important issues.