

## Book Review

*Reinventing Higher Education: The Promise of Innovation.*  
Ben Wildavsky, Andrew P. Kelly, and Kevin Carey (Eds.).  
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### REVIEWED BY:

Lisa J. Hatfield, MA, MAT  
Portland State University

The last chapter of *Reinventing Higher Education: The Promise of Innovation* seems to sum up the book's premise best: make sure students are learning, and hold faculty and administrators accountable for that learning. The book's eight chapters are organized into three basic themes and offer numerous examples of innovative practices across the spectrum of private, public, and for-profit institutions. The book's themes include: a look at barriers to innovation in higher education; examples of innovations currently being implemented; and a glimpse into the future of non-traditional universities. The editors incorporate contributions from authors from academia as well as the private sector. The contributors who hail from academia hold posts either in or associated with schools of business, and many of the authors advocate tenets of a business model. The contributors represent institutions such as University of Southern California (USC) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

What exactly does it mean to be innovative? Dominic J. Brewer and William G. Tierney address that question in the first chapter. They define innovation as "a new method, custom, or device – a change in the way of doing things...Innovation is linked to creativity, risk taking, and experimentation, attributes that are often lacking in large, public, or non-profit organizations" (p. 15). Innovation, as exemplified in this text, occurs most readily when following the lead of the private sector.

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This pro-business ethos of innovation is clearly supported throughout the book's chapters. For example, in the chapter titled "Creative Paths to Boosting Academic Productivity" William F. Massy likens the redesign of courses and their sequencing to business process reengineering used to increase productivity. Using the studio courses developed at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in the 1990's as an example, Massy explains that the benefits of such courses extend past learning and teaching and into the realm of accounting. At RPI, it was more cost-effective to

run one larger studio section utilizing technology than it was to have two smaller sections using a traditional lecture format. The RPI model is akin to the flipped classroom that many secondary and higher education institutions have been exploring. Another example of innovation tied to private business is given in the chapter "For-Profit Sector Innovations in Business Models and Organizational Cultures." Guilbert C. Hentschke writes that, unlike public and not-for-profit colleges and universities, for-profit higher education institutions often work with local and national employer advisory groups that listen to market performance to decide which programs to add and drop.

The private sector also is the foundation for journalist Jon Marcus's showcase of Harrisburg University of Science and Technology in Pennsylvania in the chapter "Old School: Four-Hundred Years of Resistance to Change." The for-profit institution, which has no tenure, utilizes corporate faculty from the high-tech sector as well as faculty who left tenure-track positions at other institutions. Ronald G. Ehrenberg continues this discussion of questioning the current tenure paradigm in the chapter "Rethinking the Professoriate." Capella University's faculty are judged by their students' success in achieving the institution's very specific outcomes; raises are based on performance evaluations rather than tenure status or union salary schedules. These innovative practices of evaluation and lack of tenure can also apply to traditional public and not-for-profit institutions. Ehrenberg gives the example of New York University, which has created a professional class of teaching faculty, a class deemed as equal to their research-focused peers. Public community colleges can also rethink expectations of instructors and use performance measures as one evaluative measure. Paul Osterman concludes that community colleges need to create systems that work not only toward a narrow mission but also are held accountable. "Forward progress," he writes, "requires additional resources that are aggressively linked to performance" (p. 158).

Discussion of evaluations based on the traditional teaching/research/service triumvirate continues in "Creative Paths to Boosting Academic Productivity" where Massy focuses on teaching and learning productivity, or what he calls "instructional productivity" (p. 74). Pursuing prestige through research poses a tension with teaching obligations, and so faculty tend to "satisfice" (p. 78) their teaching, meaning faculty do an average job of teaching to satisfy this piece of the tenure pie and then focus on the larger slice of research. He writes, "The implication of satisficing is 'Good enough is,' which stops continuous improvement in its tracks" (p. 78). The problem, Massy asserts, is that there is great difficulty in measuring the quality of higher educational instruction outputs, and that it is difficult to improve something one can't measure. He makes a strong point, though he himself acknowledges national efforts such as the National Survey of Student Engagement are being undertaken to begin addressing such measurement.

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This focus on teaching is not only seen in the physical classroom but in digital spaces as well. Peter Stokes, the executive vice president and chief research officer for the private research and consulting company Eduventures, advocates a decentering of faculty and a centering of students in the chapter “What Online Learning Can Teach Us about Higher Education.” Stokes’s emphasis on the positive disruption of the online environment in forcing educators to reconsider what we know about the traditional classroom and traditional learning is a loud message to hear. Some of this positive disruption is already taking place such as through massive open online courses (MOOCs) and courses administered through a flipped teaching model.

The clearest example of the need to reconsider traditional education models is seen in the book’s last chapter, “The Mayo Clinic of Higher Ed” authored by editor Kevin Carey. He highlights the University of Minnesota-Rochester (UMR), “a campus based on the idea that most of what we know about how a public university should operate is wrong, and that it can be done better, for modest amounts of money, right away” (p. 226). UMR demonstrates innovative practices in teaching and tenure practices. UMR faculty from different disciplines collaborated to create a sequenced curriculum map, and the institution has a relationship with the nearby Mayo Clinic so doctors and researchers are guest lecturers, and students have access to surgical mannequins, Mayo Clinic labs, and other facilities. The senior year for UMR students is dedicated to a personalized capstone experience. Tenure at UMR is based on teaching, research in the academic disciplines, and research *about* teaching. These ideas are sound for effective learning and teaching, and, fortunately, some of these ideas are happening at other institutions as well. This concluding chapter brings together all the impactful innovations shared in the ones preceding it and shows that with visionary leadership, such positive impact on student learning can indeed happen in a public university.

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This focus on assessment of student learning, as reiterated in the final chapter, needs to underscore all innovative practices and provokes the reader to consider questions related to assessment of learning outcomes. Specifically readers may ask themselves, what should students be able to demonstrate to show success in learning and teaching or how should faculty be able to demonstrate their growth in learning and teaching? If

decisions are indeed based on desired outcomes, higher education would be truly innovative.

Private businesses constantly assess and strive to improve their operations to ensure they earn a profit. This mentality, if applied appropriately to education, can undoubtedly help in nurturing and creating students who are learners. If one substitutes business operations and profits with outcomes and learning, the importance of constant review becomes more understandable. Large public institutions can take the good of a private business model and apply it to credit hours, teaching loads, and research requirements.

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The foundational ideas of mapping UMR’s curriculum that Carey shares may not be pervasive in higher education, but have been a part of K-12 education for years. Similarly, K-12 education focused at length on student learning outcomes, and now with the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012), 45 states have agreed to work toward outcomes that ensure students are college and career ready. This false dichotomy of college or career also needs to be addressed by those in higher education. In the first chapter, Brewer and Tierney write, “Currently, we know very little about what works in college instruction and curriculum,” (p. 38). However, many teaching and learning centers in higher education do know what works, and K-12 models also can be used as guides for what can work.

Assessment practitioners need to understand the practices and trends that exist outside their institutions, and this does not mean simply conducting an analysis of peer schools. As *Reinventing Higher Education* clearly underscores, assessment professionals should look beyond campus, explore what innovations are taking place in the private sector as well as in K-12 education, and apply the best from all sectors to students and their learning. This text seeks to present possibilities of some of these efforts, with the best example of holistic success happening at UMR.

The text would make an even more persuasive argument if it did not consistently make broad general assumptions. For example, some of the writers dismiss current instruction in higher education as purely “traditional” (i.e., lecture) and assume unfairly that students are being taught via rote memorization only. Another often-made generalization is the emphasis on prestige as a powerful driver in maintaining the status quo. True, the elite colleges are prestigious and perhaps always will be; however, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), the

United States is home to nearly 4,600 public and private institutions of higher learning and only a few are considered prestigious. However, all of these institutions, prestigious or not, need to ensure students are learning.

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*Reinventing Higher Education: The Promise of Innovation* offers thought-provoking commentary addressing some of the very large elephants in many conversations having to do with improving higher education. The ideas that are presented in the book's eight chapters are not necessarily new; however, they are innovative in that they challenge historical paradigms in a collective manner. As long as all stakeholders, regardless of title or department, keep talking and working toward student learning and measurement of student learning, these conversations will be headed in the right direction.

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