

Meera Sitharam, University of Florida, Nov. 2012.

The report <http://www.slideshare.net/FLHigherEd/working-draft-brtf4dot1> claims to follow the philosophy of Irwin Fuller's article <http://www.slideshare.net/FLHigherEd/virtuous-and-viscious-cycles-of-higher-ed-in-economic-development> that says: increased investment is needed before universities can compete to bring in research and other funding; broad educational and research infrastructure is needed, cannot target too much, since ability to predict is limited; assessment of institutional strength is needed, don't invest in anything just because it is fashionable.

Question

Where does the report every use Fuller's article's advice beyond lip service?

The BRTF has 4 recommendations EACH for Accountability, Funding and Governance. The language is obscure, imprecise and sometimes repetitive, but here are key things being pushed. Here is a *partial summary* of these recommendations, with questions at the end of each.

(i) The BOG should now exercise direct coordination of the different missions and strategic plans of the various universities and colleges, exercise "*predictive analytics*" to correlate university outputs with state workforce needs, controlling the resource allocation to the universities, monitoring of Universities' performance for *return on investment*, as well as playing a direct role in appointing presidents, (but it says something to the effect that BOG should not meddle on internal workings of universities to attain their goals - "*high task, low relationship*" which I think is a euphemism for what we currently see between the central admin and the colleges at UF).

Questions:

Who will appoint the BOG?

How will they ensure representation from different universities and different groups of stakeholders public, students and parents, industry, alumni, faculty, administrators?

How will they ensure qualified BOG members (they have to be extremely data savvy policy wonks and be able to perform very challenging "*predictive analytics*")?

How many hours a week will each spend on BOG duties?

Oversight of the BOG? Checks and balances?

(ii) Scott's goals should be incorporated into the metrics of all universities: increasing number of students graduated; increasing bachelors degrees in *strategic areas of emphasis*; percent of graduates employed or continuing studies upon graduation; percentage of graduates with high paying jobs; cost to graduates; and cost for graduation (institutional efficiencies that lower the cost to graduation; I think this is where the online is hidden). But they also say "*while increasing or maintaining quality*"

Questions:

Does anyone care what the graduates actually learned ?
Is quality equated to employment rate and pay?
Many entrepreneurs start out in low-paid self-employment. Does self-employment count?
The best in academics choose to go into academics, not necessarily the best paid profession. How is active choice of a lower paid job factored in?

What about ability of a graduate to adapt to labor market changes?
(Doesn't high-quality, adaptive STEM labor requires critical thinking and people skills_ <http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-wi12/humphreys.cfm> Gainesville's Mindtree has made explicit comments to this effect as well.)
Is it ok if the graduates leave the state?
Who will ensure accuracy of reporting about graduates' starting pay?
How will the state determine "strategic areas of emphasis."

Aren't companies ready to train workers for highly specific skills? Should one instead focus on helping companies with their apprenticeship programs? http://www.floridamep.org/press/pr2011_jun08.html
<http://business.time.com/2012/06/04/the-skills-gap-myth-why-companies-cant-find-good-people/>

Who vets *predictive analytics* correlating universities' outputs to strategic areas with skills shortages and workforce needs etc. (highly dynamic variables that vary much faster than degree durations) ?
(See lessons learnt from failed Australian experience <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4053438.html>)
How will their correlation of higher ed policy to workforce needs be vetted?
How will they be held accountable for bad incentives and decisions -- such decisions can set the State of Florida back several years!

(v) Certificates count -- Diplomas and other post-secondary degrees are very important and overemphasis on bachelors and masters degrees should be avoided (here may be another place where the online degree is hidden). Effectiveness of remedial education will be emphasized and evaluated.

Questions:

How is the "relative importance" of 1-year, 2-year, 4-year, masters and doctoral degrees determined?
A 1-year degree may guarantee relatively high pay employment now, but may not have staying power as the labor market changes - not as much as a 4-year degree or higher.
In what novel way will the "effectiveness" of remedial education be measured?
The breakdown in the STEM pipeline starts in Elementary and Middle school according to this US govt report on skills shortages.
http://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=6aaa7e1f-9586-47be-82e7-326f47658320
Does the BRTF report make universities responsible for this part of the pipeline too -- or should state resources be mobilized to directly address this?

(iii) State funds \$15K per bachelor's degree.

Tuition hikes are discouraged unless absolutely necessary.

Differential tuition will be allowed, but temporary tuition freeze for state- or university-determined *strategic or mission critical* degrees, with state-appropriation offsetting the difference (temporary, until labor goals are met).

Questions:

Florida's investment in higher ed is much lower than other states. Isn't this penny-wise and pound foolish? I.e, doesn't starvation throttle Return on Investment?

Already, at UF, some non-STEM departments with high SCH, low-facilities cost are subsidizing some STEM depts with low SCH and high facilities cost. What justifies even further subsidies?

Doesn't this fly in the face of market economics to incentivize degrees with already high market demand, by lowering their price?

Is the state/university better than the market at divining what constitutes a strategic or mission critical degree?

(iv) Performance funding and accountability for universities. First each university will be asked to define their mission of at most 4-5 goals on which they will be evaluated using appropriate metrics. They cannot get performance funding for other metrics not related to their mission list. This ensures mission separation. This is to prevent "mission creep" and "gaming the metrics" (I am sure this will go down to unit level and to the level of individual faculty, but I have seen no direct mention of performance pay).

Questions:

Who vets the BOG's predictive analysis and correlation of higher ed policy and performance metrics to workforce needs?

Specifically, determination of universities' mission *differentiation* as opposed to mission *creep*?

Any metric can be gamed - without buy-in. Can it not?

Do the performance metrics measure what they are supposed to measure? *Mission-critical* degrees - how are they justified?

How will decision-makers be held accountable for bad decisions -- such decisions can set the State of Florida back several years!

(vii) Derisive comments responding to potential objections; about why throwing money at the problem won't work; universities have to develop a culture of thrift and careful inspection of correlation between spending and outcomes. Universities will have to innovate in their running, not solely innovate within faculty's research. Students wanting "college to be a lifestyle etc.." is brattish - they should instead consider college solely as a place to study and get a degree.

What about 800 UF student organizations, where students learn hands-on how to organize, manage, collaboratively decide?

Does the "lifestyle" bashing include Greek organizations? Gators?

(viii) some other stuff