

State of the Debate – Higher Education, Public Opinion, and Politics
PPG Meeting 1 • October 5, 2009

1. High Anxiety:

- Public belief in the importance of higher education is higher than ever
- Public anxiety/outrage about college costs is higher than ever
- Public pressure on politicians to do something about affordability is higher than ever
- Skepticism about value added is higher than ever (what are the outcomes and how can they be measured?)

2. Government financial support is declining; government scrutiny and intrusion are growing.

3. The Spellings Commission and other Federal Bright Ideas- Near Misses:

- Direct federal involvement in accreditation: setting goals and rigid measures of student achievement (“No College Student Left Behind”)
- Direct federal involvement in transfer of credit and forced articulation agreements
- Direct federal involvement in outcomes assessment
- Price controls
- Federal directives for endowment spending (Chuck Grassley)
- Federal curriculum mandates for teacher education
- Student unit record data system (though states are urged to create them)
- Bank employees forbidden to serve on college boards of trustees

4. The World is Flat – and getting Flatter:

- Credentials or Education – what’s the difference?
- Commodification of Content – I want what I want when and where I want it. The effect of technology on print media. Is higher education next?
- What should we be thinking about online learning? About time-to-degree? About engaged learning and other cutting edge pedagogies?