

Master of Arts Higher Education Administration Course Synthesis

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Background

Throughout my studies in the Higher Education Administration program, my goal has been to improve my knowledge of higher education in and of itself so that I can better serve my students and therefore my community. Closing out the program and reviewing all of the material covered, it became very evident to me that all of these courses completed in this program have shared one common theme that is twofold, and that is that notable strides that has been made in the higher education realm and that progress is essential to better our students of tomorrow. In each course taken, this theme was on display in some form or fashion.

From understanding the foundations of the higher education system in the United States to understanding the many laws and court rulings that have affected both students and institutions of higher education, it is clear that the idea of progression, has guided our path. From simple colonial colleges teaching religious based education to sprawling campuses integrated with diversity and stately character, the higher education landscape continues to evolve and progress still today. I firmly believe the goal of higher education be to enrich the mind, explore new philosophies, and encourage the involvement and betterment of the society around us.

Foundations of Higher Education

The first ideas of higher education in Colonial America were religious in nature, and mainly focused on education of the wealthy. “The colonial college was an insurance policy that these favored young men would acquire not only literacy but also a sense of leadership and service by about their twentieth birthday” (Thelin, 2019, pp. 73-74). Primarily focused on the liberal arts, what wasn’t taught in collegiate institutions during Colonia America were different

skills and trades. Fields such as law or medicine, were not early adopted portions of the curriculum. (Thelin, 2019, p. 66).

Instead, many students studied under former ministers and were taught more about how a young man was supposed to behave and how to act. In addition, oration was a huge component of some of the earliest higher education institutions. This system produced very few graduates and these higher education institutions had very poor retention rates. It would take a lot of time, effort, and money to see the spread of the American university to what it is today.

That help came in 1862 when the Morrill Act of 1862 was passed granting states western lands that could be sold for proceeds in that the proceeds would be used for the implementation or furtherance of an institution of learning. Not only did the Morrill Act(s) stimulate the system, it was the first time that the federal government truly got involved in higher education. “While these historians agree that educational reform was paramount, they also argue that the Morrill Act was a watermark for federal involvement in higher education” (Key, 1996). This act, and the subsequent Morrill Act of 1890 revitalized a dying system of higher education in the United States and ignited a whole new host of tenets into the system including research, collegiate sports, and other student-centered activities.

Perhaps one of the most fundamental ways progression has been seen in the higher education system is through that of diversity. As mentioned previously, the early system did not favor the unhealthy and certainly did not allow for blacks or other minorities to receive education. The turn of the American Civil War brought about Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well as several new regulations, such as that in the Morrill Act of 1890, that focused on the equal access for all to the American education system; totally ridding the notion of “separate, but equal.”

Higher Education Diversity

One of the most important and relevant courses completed during in this program revolves around race and gender in higher education. While racial diversity and equal rights molestations have plagued the United States news cycle for some time, I had become increasingly complacent on the issue and failed to see its impact, especially in the educational system. Minnich defines the root problem as “as the dominant few defining themselves not only as the inclusive kind of human but as the norm and the ideal” (Minnich, 2005, p. 88). Merely viewing the retention of minorities in higher education should raise alarm. In addition, we need to ensure that we keep focused on retention with these minority and gender groups as well. “Hobson-Horton and Owens (2004) noted that 70% of all African American students enrolled in 4-year college programs drop out, whereas only 45% of Caucasian American students drop out.”

I specifically spent a lot of time in this course tying these new methods of thought into personal practice at my institution and in role as a Program Coordinator when it comes to the recruitment of minorities into health sciences related education. Looking at the underrepresentation of minority groups in emergency medical services; and therefore, emergency medical services in higher education, it’s clear to me that one of the easiest ways we can make a change is to do better at our retention and recruitment efforts. This starts by ensuring that we being as inclusive as possible and using the correct approach to begin to dispel the long-standing notion discussed herein that emergency medical services, public service, and occupational health in and of itself is not for a specific group of individuals.

One of the greatest joys from this course was performing a job shadow of Dr. Christa Martin, Access and Diversity Director at Columbia State Community College. I asked her about her passion for this office and what it provides to students and she responded that, “No matter the

reason a student comes to Columbia State, we all come here to make Columbia State a better place” and that “every student needs to recognize their place in that”. This portion of this course proved to me not only how far higher education has progressed in the United States in general, but also how my philosophy of education needed to change to ensure that I was being inclusive of every student seeking an education in my classroom.

Higher Education Law

The last major course completed in the Higher Education Administration program that elevated the idea of progression was Laws and Ethics in Higher Education. Not only did this course cover laws and court rulings applicable to higher education, but it improved my understanding of many of the laws and regulations that affect me as a practitioner in education. Studying tort law, the privacy rights of students (FERPA), and dabbling into First Amendment law, much of the semester was spent gaining an understanding of how the educational system has been affected, and some ways reformed, by United States federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

First Amendment

While several weeks were devoted to the study of First Amendment law as it relates to both faculty and students, I gained a much better understanding of the idea that while I enjoy First Amendment protections in a public institutional setting, I am not necessarily free from all of the consequences made using a First Amendment justification. We discussed the idea however that a student’s tenure in higher education should be a safe place to discuss different ideas and beliefs respectfully. “The cognitive dissonance that can be created through spirited debate can enliven a campus community of scholars” (Blanchard, 2013).

Title IX

Another popular collegiate topic of discussion covered was Title IX, a law based on equal rights. A component that has become increasingly discussed in the higher education realm in recent years centers around sexual assault especially now in the #metoo era. One of the aspects I like of the recently released updates to Title IX regulations is the right to cross examine. The pundits in the Anderson (2020) article discuss advocacy groups being against this allowance as it may retraumatize the victims of sexual assault. Title IX is something that while having been around for some time now is still a newer concept to the higher education system in the United States.

A Final Word

I have enjoyed my studies at Louisiana State University (LSU) and am humbled to complete the Higher Education Administration Program under such distinguished faculty. My time spent at LSU has taught me a lot about how the higher education system in the United States works. I came in with a goal of learning more about different components of the system and while doing so developed new methods of thought and updated philosophies that will change my practice.

These courses presented are just a few of those that I feel helped me to see the progression of higher education in the United States from its earliest beginnings to now. Looking back on colonial Harvard, it is hard to imagine that anyone could have guessed that the system would have grown to what it is today.

References

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