

**Case Study Paper Prepared for the Policy Forum on Higher Education
Access and Success in the UK and the USA**

Kentucky

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Professor Jim Lewis of the University of Durham and Dr. James Mingle, Executive Director Emeritus of the State Higher Education Executive Officers, conducted the following case study in Kentucky during the period July 9-12, 2000. Their interview schedule included meetings with the staff of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, legislative and executive branch staff and institutional representatives. Onsite visits included meetings at the Council offices in Frankfort, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System Office in Lexington. In eastern Kentucky, they visited Prestonburg Community College, the Hager Hill campus of Mayo Technical College, Hazard Community College and the London branch of Somerset Technical College. In addition, Lewis and Mingle visited the United Parcel Service Training and Education Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

Overview

1. Kentucky ranks 46th among states in the percentage of its population with a high school diploma and 42nd in the percentage of its citizens with a bachelor's degree. Its per capita income is at 81 percent of the national average and, among its 2.4 million workers, more than 1 million are judged to have sub-standard literacy skills. In the health and well-being of its children, the state ranks 41st.

2. Rather than hiding from these dismal statistics, Kentucky, under the leadership of the governor and a newly reorganized Council on Postsecondary Education, has used these data to develop a compelling set of goals and accompanying action agenda for both the state and its institutions. While there are a variety of initiatives underway, the goal of bringing Kentucky participation rates to the national average is the foundation upon which many of the other programmatic and structural changes rest. In order to reach the national average in college participation, the state estimates it must add at least 80,000 new (or retained) students to the system by 2020, many of which would be enrolled in the recently created Kentucky Community and Technical College System. (This represents a 50 percent increase in total enrollment in the state). Political leadership for these initiatives is coming from the executive branch and a small cadre of legislative leaders. Implementation of statewide goals is predominantly through the Kentucky Council and its new set of programmatic and financial incentives.

The reform agenda in Kentucky

3. The current reform initiatives in higher education can be traced back to 1996 and the election of Paul Patton (Democrat) as Governor. As the first governor in Kentucky to be elected with a potential of two terms (due to a change in the constitution), Governor Patton saw an opportunity to be more 'future oriented' than his predecessors. To his credit, he recognized that the magnitude of change facing the system could not be accomplished in one or even two terms, but would take a 20 to 25 year vision for the state. Turning the political agenda to higher education was also a logical extension of the previous governor's emphasis on K-12 reform.

4. In the Governor's view, reform of higher education is a means to an end – and that end is the raising of living standards and the quality of life in Kentucky. The slogan 'Education Pays', which can be found on literature, billboards, and bumper stickers throughout the state, captures succinctly this utilitarian view of education in Kentucky.

5. In 1997, the Legislature with the Governor's leadership passed House Bill 1, which laid out an ambitious set of goals and reforms. This bill was expanded upon with Senate Bill 1 in 2000, which focused on adult education and House Bill 572 with its emphasis on linking businesses and university research. Among the changes in these three pieces of legislation and independent action by the Council are the following:

- The abolishment of the old coordinating board and creation of a new board with expanded authority.
- The creation of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) from the branch community college system of the University of Kentucky and the technical schools formerly administered by the Workforce Development Cabinet.
- The establishment of trust funds totaling nearly \$300 million since reforms began to be administered and distributed by the Kentucky Council in order to further statewide goals.
- A mandate to create regional centers to provide access from multiple providers and implement economic development strategies.
- The creation of a 'Bucks for Brains' program to stimulate private investments in endowed faculty positions and support for them.
- Establishment of a goal to move the University of Kentucky to the 'top twenty' among public research universities and the University of Louisville to be a 'nationally recognized metropolitan university'.
- The creation of a P-16 Council to encompass both postsecondary education and the State Board of Education.
- The assumption of the role of improving 'adult literacy' by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. (Formerly the exclusive purview of the Workforce Development Cabinet and its Department of Adult Education and Literacy, and now shared jointly with the Council).
- The creation of the Kentucky Virtual University and Virtual Library.

Access goals

6. In 1998, the Kentucky Council contracted with the Rand Corporation to develop enrollment goals for the state that would bring the state to national parity by 2020. Rand concluded that undergraduate enrollment would need to rise from approximately 160,000 students in 1998 to over 240,000 in 2020.

7. State policy makers and institutional leaders believe that increases of this magnitude will only occur if both the college going rate of recent high school graduates grows and the retention of college enrollees is increased. They also hope for increases in adult enrollments as well. Only 53 percent of Kentucky's 1997 high school graduates attended college during the fall semester

following their graduation (compared to 67 percent nationally). In 1999, the percentage of first-time, full-time baccalaureate students who graduated within six years ranged from 17.7 percent to 50.8 percent at the eight public universities (the national average in public four-year institutions is 42.9 percent).

8. Much of the enrollment increase is expected to occur in the community and technical colleges. The regional state universities are also expected to grow, while the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville – the state’s two research, doctoral-granting institutions – are to remain at their current levels.

9. KCTCS officials expressed optimism that they would not only meet, but exceed their enrollment goals. The system plans to begin awarding degree credit for a substantial amount of business and industry training activities. Such a change would support the workforce development mission of the system and recognize that such courses teach many of the same skills that are offered through traditional degree credit courses.

System-wide strategies to increase access

10. In our meetings with state and system level officials in Kentucky, we identified the following strategies and programs aimed at improving access and retention.

a. Enrollment incentives in the Trust Funds. The Kentucky Council is exploring a variety of options for providing financial incentives to increase enrollment and retention. Among the issues being considered is changing the ‘census’ date toward the end of the term and providing supplements for students enrolled from targeted counties where participation is low (both of these ideas have been borrowed from the UK).

b. Development and expansion of Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU): Touted as one of the most successful startups of a virtual university in the United States, KYVU has grown from initial 236 students in the Fall of 1999 to nearly 1,600 students (and over 1,800 class enrollments) in the Spring of 2000. Nineteen different institutions in the state are offering courses through KYVU, which serves as registrar and counseling center for these students. Over 90 percent of these students however are concurrently enrolled in traditional classes, suggesting that much of this enrollment is not among new students, but from those seeking the convenience provided by asynchronous delivery. The ratio of female to male is 2 to 1. KYVU has recently begun offering a complete online associate degree, which is expected to increase the distant-only student population. It also expects to play an important role in the adult literacy initiatives of the Council by training literacy teachers.

c. Coordination of the adult literacy role. The legislature extended this role to the Council on Postsecondary Education during the 2000 legislative session, a move that is unique in the U.S., where typically such initiatives are handled by state departments of education or ‘workforce development’ offices. The Council and its staff supported this legislation in recognition that their ambitious access goals were unlikely to be reached

without greater attention to adult literacy. The director of the Kentucky initiative has a joint appointment with the Workforce Development Cabinet and the Council. In addition to funds historically devoted to adult education, the Council has secured \$19 million in additional support for a two-year effort. The current effort is serving only about 50,000 adults of the 1 million who need literacy training, so the Council is seeking ways to 'scale up' the initiative given the magnitude of the problem. Training instructors, using technology, and gaining greater employer commitment are on the agenda. The state program director also believes that linking literacy to 'parenting skills' has the potential to create interest.

d. Development of regional centers and incentive funds for workforce development. In the view of Council staff and the Governor, access and economic goals are closely linked. 'A job at the other end of the educational experience must be an integral part of our enrollment management strategy' observed one of our interviewees. The council's policies in this regard are notable and diverse. In the case of KCTCS, the Council approved five new regional postsecondary education centers, which will be developed by community and technical colleges in cooperation with comprehensive universities. The purpose of these centers is to focus on regional economic development, community service, and instructional delivery of programs via the internet and interactive video. Another aspect of this strategy is the use of the new incentive trust funds for regional excellence and workforce development. For example Kentucky State University (an historically black institution) received \$1.2 million for its Aquaculture Program. Another example is the 'Rural Innovation Fund' aimed at assisting small and medium size businesses in developing prototypes and bringing products to market. Another example can be founded at Northern Kentucky University where they are working closely with KCTCS to develop baccalaureate and graduate capacities to match occupational and technical programs at the two-year level.

e. Performance benchmarks. The Kentucky Council has assumed the primary responsibility of charting the progress of the state toward reaching national goals in such areas as income growth, graduation and retention rates, transfer, and reducing the volume of remediation (sub-collegiate level work taken by college students). It also has conducted focus groups with a variety of constituents around the state including students, alumni, parents, and employers. The Council is focusing on five questions to use as indicators or measures of progress: Are more Kentuckians ready for college? Are more students enrolling? Are more students advancing through the system? Are we preparing Kentuckians for life and work? Are Kentucky's communities and economy benefiting?

f. New student financial aid commitments. Kentucky uses lottery funds to support both a merit-based and need-based financial aid program. Sixty percent of the \$150 million in annual revenue from the lottery is devoted to need-based programs and the remainder to a merit-based program tied to high school grade point averages. Students earn financial aid credits year by year according to their grade point average up to a total of \$3,000 which can be used in both public and independent colleges in Kentucky and in selected out-of-state institutions, primarily in the South.

g. Inspiring institutional response. Promotional materials from the Council include a concise report from institutions and sectors as to their response to the state agenda. For example, Morehead State University's response includes specific targets for increasing distance education enrollments and transfers from KCTCS.

Institutional responses to the statewide agenda and the access goal

11. Our study in Kentucky included a number of campus visits in different parts of the state, including the rural mountainous region of Eastern Kentucky and urban metropolitan institutions in the city of Louisville. We found an unusually deep understanding and appreciation for the leadership provided by the Governor and the well-articulated action plan of the Council. This was especially the case regarding the need to raise participation and retention rates.

12. In our visits we found a number of constructive institutional strategies aimed at improving access and student success. They may be categorized as follows.

a. Greater coordination across institutions. External observers of the reform agenda in Kentucky have often pointed to the dramatic reorganization of the two-year sector as the most important change in recent years. Critics of the old system charged that the University of Kentucky had neglected its 'branches', preventing them from evolving into a 'true community college system'. From inside the system however, the most powerful aspect of the KCTCS creation has been the closer coordination between community colleges and technical institutions, where there is considerable overlap of academic and training functions as well as close physical proximity. Rather than forcing mergers, which are often disruptive, the KCTCS administration is looking for opportunities for consolidation as senior administrators retire. The Council's policies are also encouraging collaboration. At the local level, in places like Prestonsburg and Somerset, faculties of community colleges and technical colleges are beginning to work together and coordinate their activities.

b. Upgrading of technical college offerings and closer links with industry standards. Inclusion of the technical college system into a postsecondary structure and financing system will result in the upgrading of curriculum and the implementation of more transferable academic degree programs and certificates. More importantly, KCTCS officials are committed to the implementation of industry-developed standards to guide program offerings.

c. Strengthened relationships with business partners. American community colleges are well noted for their attention to the needs of their business clients. Specific job training and start-up help for new companies is often part of the incentive package offered by a state to companies considering relocation. In most states, including Kentucky, this has historically been a 'target of opportunity' approach. Whether it was chicken processors, call centers, or microchip manufacturers, the education system has been at their disposal. In recent years Kentucky has become more strategic in the targeting of its partnerships and the relationship has become more reciprocal, with employers making significant investments in education and training themselves. The premier example in Kentucky is

Metropolitan College in Louisville, which is a partnership between the University of Louisville, Jefferson County Community College, Jefferson Technical College, and the United Parcel Service (UPS), whose national distribution headquarters is located near the Louisville airport. Faced with enormous turnover among workers, UPS sought help from these postsecondary institutions in recruiting and retaining students. The company now provides about \$1.5 million per year to cover tuition, housing, and textbook costs of student employees along with significant in-kind contributions, including an education facility at the distribution center. The institutions have responded by adding courses in the evening to accommodate night shift workers, providing a dormitory and a variety of student support activities. The success of the program in terms of enrollment retention and job retention has far exceeded expectations. Over 80 percent of students are now completing both their academic and work commitment. Work retention among Metro college employees is nearly double what it is for non-college employees. Most recently UPS expanded its recruitment to individuals in the eastern Kentucky region.

d. Improved recruitment, counseling and advising. Without exception, campus representatives expressed the importance of a 'personal touch' in recruiting and retaining students. At the same time, we found many individuals frustrated with the lack of support for student services and the wide range of non-academic problems with which they were faced. As in northeast England, this often was viewed as predominantly a 'male' problem. In the words of one interviewee, many Kentucky males are 'go-getters' – they drop the wife off at work in the morning and 'go get her' in the evening! Academic problems and those related with failure and dropout are often combined with a difficult mix of other problems – health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and the conditions of instability that result from poverty. Generally, college officials expressed reluctance, due both to tradition and lack of funds, to take on this broader set of issues. At the same time they realized that without confronting these issues, their efforts would be limited.

e. Higher expectations and more attention to remedial services. While the Kentucky Council has turned admissions policy over to the campuses, a number of state policy changes are stimulating attention to standards and remediation. Increased graduation requirements at the high school level beginning in 2002 will add to this move. In our visit to Hazard Community College (in eastern Kentucky) the academic dean was struggling with the impact of the KCTCS mandate to use a common assessment instrument (ACT Compass) and the Council's requirement for common cut-off scores across the state for remedial placement. 'How' she wondered, 'am I going to tell a school official that his daughter who received A's and B's in high school must now take remedial courses?' (She noted that 75 percent of the students at Hazard would be taking remedial or developmental courses with the new standards.) The P-16 Council has also focused on higher expectations both through the improvement of teacher education programs and better communication of expectations to students and parents.

Conclusion

13. Kentucky presents an example of how, through political leadership and effective coordination, a state or region can build a focused public agenda around the access/economic development themes. The leadership of the state first built a political awareness of the nature of the problem ('education is key to prosperity and we lag far behind') and then implemented both structural and programmatic changes to respond to this felt need. The development of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System and greater emphasis on business-higher education partnerships are the most important elements of this strategy. While it is too early to conclude that Kentucky will attain its ambitious goals, the reforms implemented appear to have significantly changed the level of expectations for the postsecondary system in Kentucky.

Sources of further information

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education and institutional representatives kindly provided us with a variety of written materials, some of which are listed below. For further information, we recommend the Council website at www.cpe.state.ky.us.

2020 Vision: An Agenda for Kentucky's System of Postsecondary Education. Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 1998.

Action Agenda: 1999-2004: Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

Metropolitan College: Annual Report, Milestones and Achievements July 1, 1998 – June 30, 1999.

'Kentucky's Grand Agenda' National Crosstalk. Vol. 8 No.3 Summer 2000 (See www.highereducation.org).