

## Response

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I want to get to the discussion section of this morning's session, but before I do that, I would like to offer some of my own thoughts.

Both Dr. Moeser and Dr. Perlman talked about change. Change at their universities, often as a result of actions they took, and change in higher education overall. I think we all agree that much of the change we've seen in the past several decades has been positive.

Access to higher education is greater, especially for first-generation students, women and people of color - enabling them to receive the sort of education once reserved for a more select few.

Our research endeavors are even more expansive, leading to new discoveries, new ideas and new ways of thinking, as well as spurring an even greater rate of change. And the services we provide to our communities are broader - from opportunities in culture and the arts, to medical care for the uninsured.

Of course, some of the change we've experienced has been driven by the simple fact that expectations for public research universities are themselves much higher than they once were. National public research universities are asked to generate and spin off research, train the workforce, drive the economy, enhance quality of life, and keep this country competitive in the world.

That's a tall order. Especially during a time when we're facing new challenges. Some of those challenges are technological, such as the rise of online education. While creating new opportunities for expanded access, it

also has created new competitors and threatens to turn higher education into just another commodity.

Some of those challenges are demographic. States like Kansas - and I would anticipate Nebraska - are experiencing a decline in the number of high school graduates as the population ages. That reduces the traditional pool of potential students.

At the same time, we are seeing growth in the number of Latino students in our K-12 schools. Many of them will be first-generation college students if given the opportunity to attend college, and they will face the same barriers to higher education that all first-generation students face.

And some of our challenges are financial. Chancellor Perlman talked about death from a thousand little cuts. Well, at KU we have had two big cuts over the last two years. I haven't checked to see how to say that in Mandarin Chinese, but those cuts have

totaled more than \$40 million when the mandates are factored in. They're just as damaging as hundreds of little slices.

This situation is faced by research universities around the nation. In many instances their financial situations are more dire than ours. But in every instance, the financial and other challenges we face are calling into question the future of public research universities.

This is an issue we talked about at my inaugural symposium in April. It is one being tackled by AAU, and the APLU launched its Future of Public Research Universities initiative last fall. And at the request of Congress, the National Research Council is also undertaking a study that seeks to answer the question:

"What are the top ten actions that Congress, the federal government, state governments, research universities, and others could take to assure the ability of the American research university to maintain the excellence in research and doctoral education needed to help the United States compete, prosper, and achieve national goals for health, energy, the environment, and security in the global community of the 21st century?"

Not an insignificant question --- but one they intend to answer by May of next year.

In the meantime, each of our institutions is called upon to answer the many challenges I've outlined - as well as others.

Both of our speakers' comments point to the need to focus, to carve out areas of excellence, and to be hard-nosed in setting a course and staying on it. At the same time, there is a need to think

big and be expansive, but to not try and do too many things at once.

That forces difficult decisions, especially when it comes to allocation of resources such as money and time. At KU we are focusing on enhancing the quality of our undergraduate education. That will require us to expect more of our incoming students, but also more of ourselves as recruiters, teachers and mentors. It will also require us to take a hard look at everything, from advising to our general education requirements.

The latter is something I helped tackle at The University of North Carolina, which gives me some idea of the scale of that task. But we have to do these things if we want to ensure more students finish what they start when they come to KU.

We also must address the challenge of graduate education, particularly how we provide funding to our doctoral students that allows them to succeed in the many roles we ask them to take on. Universities demand a lot of them - as teachers, researchers, and students - and don't always give them the proper support in the process.

And we must increase our scholarly output, but not just in research areas that are grant-based. The full spectrum of scholarly and creative activities must be promoted. I share Dr. Moeser's concern about the importance of ensuring that the humanities and humanistic social sciences not be left behind in a drive for research in the sciences that is more easily commercialized.

On this last point - before we can even move forward on increasing our output, we're finding that we have to do a better job of measuring it. Current

measures like grant awards or papers don't give a complete picture. And without a complete picture, we can't identify the departments that need to improve their performance, let alone identify those units that are doing a good job already and can serve as models.

And as we deal with these challenges, we are at the same time seeking to convince parents, students, legislators, business leaders, alumni, donors and others of the importance of public research universities to the future of the nation and the prosperity of our states. I think both Dr. Moeser and Dr. Perlman would agree that it is a surprisingly difficult task.

Some of what we do is easy to measure:

- The number of students who graduate from KU - more than 7,000 a year.
- The amount of research funding we bring in - more than \$200 million a year.
- The research discoveries that lead to new companies - 17 active start-ups in Kansas alone.

Those are easy, but they're just numbers. They don't have the same emotional resonance as the things we do that are not possible to quantify: The lives changed - and the lives saved. The true economic impact of our graduates and our research. What our economy, our nation, or our society would be like without the work we do. Those are more compelling cases, but they're also harder to make.

And in the midst of making those cases, we can still have our voices drowned out by the thrill of a big basketball victory, or the drama of conference realignment. Now - the public still supports higher education and parents still want their children to be educated, though they may want there to be more of a focus on skills directly related to employment, as opposed to education for the sake of being educated - which poses another challenge to liberal arts education.

Yet even in the midst of the recession - we still see the public willing to invest in higher education. Two years ago at the height of the financial crisis, the voters of Johnson County, Kansas took the remarkable step of passing a local sales tax increase dedicated to funding education and research through a partnership with KU and K-State.

We've also seen strong support for our cancer center from the Kansas Bioscience Authority, even during a time when the State has been cutting back. Public support is there, even during a time of reduced resources - though more than ever they expect us to justify their investment.

Universities face challenges - of that there is no doubt. But as a starting point for our discussion, I'd like to ask our guests if they think times are more difficult than usual for public research universities. Is there anything uniquely different and challenging about today? Or are we just facing new versions of long-standing problems?