

Response of the Faculty of Arizona State University to the “Arizona Higher Education Enterprise (AHEE)” Proposal

PREAMBLE: The proposal, entitled “The Arizona Higher Education Enterprise” (AHEE), submitted to the Arizona Board of Regents in September, 2010 focuses on providing broad access for an innovative, world-class university education to all segments of Arizona society. It seeks to accomplish this goal through a realignment of strategic design to enhance both “effectiveness” and “efficiency”. Specifically, it seeks to maximize the educational value provided for the resources expended. AHEE responds to the current challenges faced by Arizona universities, asked to serve an ever-growing number of students from all walks of life and to expand their research activities, but with a declining base of support coming from the state government. The faculties of Arizona universities are, therefore, directly responsible for achieving the goals of the AHEE, providing educational value, doing the research, and advancing the goals of the state of Arizona through academic programs. As such, the faculties of Arizona’s universities are full partners and collaborators in this enterprise. While we fully support the goals of the proposal, we have identified considerations that we believe will be required if those goals are to be realized. Specifically, we have determined the following critical issues to merit significant reflection.

KEY ISSUES:

- The most crucial goal of the AHEE, indeed, of higher education in Arizona, is the academic quality and performance of Arizona’s universities. While implicit in the document, we believe it should be explicit, the driving force of all that we do. Indicators and criteria of academic excellence should also be included. The metrics identified in the document are predominantly quantitative in nature, distinctly lacking qualitative components. If the goal is to maximize “effectiveness”, as well as “efficiency”, the inclusion of qualitative metrics is crucial.
- Clearly, the AHEE advocates using various alternative means and methods to provide education and degrees for our stakeholders. We embrace the expanded use of these modalities and commit ourselves to assure the highest level of academic integrity for those degrees, such that a degree from an Arizona university is recognized as being world-class.
- The AHEE mentions eliminating “underperforming academic programs by 2012” but does not include the crucially important criteria by which this assessment will be made. If these criteria are simply matters of how many degrees are issued by each program, the linkage of academic programs to the strategic directions of each university will be lost. We do not believe that such a simple numeric rubric can be uniformly or usefully applied to all academic programs for this purpose.
- An issue of significance to the Arizona Faculties Council involves the desire to revise HR policies “to enterprise mode”. It is not clear to us what is meant by this term. Further, the AHEE calls for “cafeteria” style benefit program, and greater centralization, all of which are related to the goal of “efficiency”. Although vague as to the meaning of “enterprise mode”, “efficiency” appears, in this case, to only concern cost containment. We believe that this view may compromise the other major goal of the AHEE, “effectiveness”.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS: We strongly agree that Arizona universities must respond effectively to the challenges of the 21st century, particularly and urgently, to the crisis in funding higher education. We further believe that the Arizona Higher Education Enterprise proposal is an important and innovative step forward in meeting the challenges that we face. Thus, the Arizona Faculties Council supports the AHEE and at the same time expresses concern about aspects of its implementation. Nonetheless, we very much support the direction the proposal takes and fully commit ourselves as key stakeholders in the proposal to assisting in the effective implementation of the ambitious aims of the AHEE.