

Final Reflective Essay

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In the latter half of this course, I have learned about budgeting practices, worldwide higher education, power and politics in the budgeting process, and the projected future of higher education finance. Looking at these themes, I have reflected on three works from the course. First, I reviewed Kretovics ninth chapter, “Defense Against the Dark Arts” (2009). Then, I reviewed the Issue Brief, “Financing Higher Education: A Myriad of Problems, A Myriad of Solutions” (2009). Lastly, I discussed Hauptman’s article, “Challenging 10 Claims About Higher Education’s Decline” (2013).

In Kretovics’ ninth chapter, he deliberated the role that politics play in institutional finance. Kretovics (2009) discussed micro politics in higher education. Micro politics refer to the political atmosphere within an institution for funding (Kretovics, 2009). Kretovics (2009) gave the readers directions on how to use the political system of an institution as a tool to reach the goals of their respective departments. First, Kretovics (2009) defined power in higher education. He stated, “The effective use of power is getting things done through others” (Kretovics, 2009, p. 196). The use of power leads to politics in an institution, when the powerful are attempting to pursue different goals (Kretovics, 2009). Kretovics (2009) gave instructions on how to develop power and how to politically use the power as an administrator. He also discussed the importance of relationship building and establishing a reputation (Kretovics, 2009). He explained how to use this power to accomplish the goals of your department, such as reading the boss and knowing when to approach and when to back off (Kretovics, 2009). Lastly, he gives instructions on how to improve political savvy (Kretovics, 2009).

This chapter was one of the most important for me, as I have never been taught how to “play the game.” Most decisions made in an office are political. Though Kretovics paints this in a positive light, I have had very little experience in which political influence has resulted in the

best decision for the institution. Rather, political decisions usually benefit one employee or one department. I do agree with Kretovics, though, in his assessment that micro politics run an institution. If an administrator is to gain a position, as well as be effective in the position, he or she must know how to use politics to their advantage.

More than anything I have read in this course, this chapter had the most value for me as a future administrator. I believe that every person who is seeking any administrative role should read this chapter. Not only did it give me ideas on how to become political, it provided instructions as well as what not to do. Simply smiling and being nice will not produce the results that I desire, and I know this from experience. I must build relationships, and utilize those networks to further the agenda that will be the most effective. There are many steps I need to take in order to become more politically perceptive within my institution, and now I have a roadmap.

The next piece I chose to review is similar to the first only in the political name. This second article evaluated the macro politics of a country, and how this affects the higher education system in the country. The authors in this issue brief compared the financial burdens and actions of higher education in four different countries: the United States, Mongolia, Ukraine, and South Africa (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2009). The authors answered two questions of each country. First, “To what extent does the country’s postsecondary finance strategy affect educational quality?” (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2009, p. 2). Secondly, “Are the existing policies effective? How might they be improved?” (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2009, p. 2). Each country showed policy and policy development that reflected their current sociopolitical state (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2009). Based upon this state, and the answer to the two questions above, the authors also created suggestions

for the advancement of worldwide higher education. These recommendations included needs analyses, significant policy construction, creating policy with the knowledge of available financial resources, and understanding the threats to the new policy (Institute for Higher Education, 2009).

More often, in the United States, we are comparing our higher education systems to those of other countries. Ours is very different, as it is not centralized nationally. This complicates government funding, because the funding is directed from the state governments rather than federal governments. This will also not allow us to nationalize higher education, as is the norm in most other countries. This Issue Brief caused me to think about a country creating a system of higher education rather than inheriting one, as we do from traditional European countries. Developing countries that are creating, or greatly amending their system of higher education, such as South Africa and Ukraine, have a unique challenge. However, they also have a unique opportunity. They can learn from the financial mistakes of other countries, such as the struggles in the developed higher education systems, and attempt to fix them before they become issues.

I agree with the authors' findings in that before you can create an effective higher education system or policy, you must know the operational needs of said system. Though this advice was designed for policy makers, it can be practically applied to any department that creates any type of policy. For example, in the admissions office, before you create an application flow, you must first determine the needs of the applicants and the employees. Then, once you determine the best way to create the flow that will benefit everyone, you can implement it. I believe too many administrators take a "trial and error" approach when it comes to implementing new practices in an office, and this usually diminishes production and effectiveness.

Lastly, I reviewed an article warning of misconceptions within higher education. Similar to the previous Issue Brief, Hauptman (2013) discussed how the United States truly lines up with other countries as far as their higher education systems. This article sums up the ten most popular arguments in the media surrounding the demise of higher education in the United States. Hauptman (2013) discussed the validity of each argument and the relevant facts that accompany each point. Hauptman (2013) deliberated government-funding changes, both state and federal. He also touched on myths surrounding tuition prices and inflation rates (Hauptman, 2013). He debated the effects of higher cost of higher education, as well as completion rates in the United States compared to other countries (Hauptman, 2013). Lastly, he argued about attainment rates in the United States (Hauptman, 2013).

Hauptman does an excellent job of compiling all the arguments regarding higher education, and addressing each issue. He uses data and facts to support his view on each argument. As a higher education professional, I find the article comprehensive and easy to read. As he presents each argument, he either agrees or disagrees, and I agree with a majority of his assessments. He debunks myths regarding the attainment of our students and their comparison to students around the world. He has done well at defending American Higher Education in relation to higher education worldwide. However, when it comes to finances, Hauptman (2013) selectively presents his facts to support his viewpoint. For example, he claims that states are not really disinvesting in higher education and the trend is not as drastic as it seems (Hauptman, 2013). I disagree with this sentiment, as the state budgets show otherwise. There are more students enrolling in colleges and less funding per student from the state. The states are certainly providing less funding for institutions, which financially, is the definition of disinvesting.

As an administrator, it is vital to consider the future as well as the present. As a future administrator, I cannot be successful without considering how the future of higher education will affect my office, department, and institution. Administrators must always be aware of trends, future predictions, and misleading facts in their field.

Financing higher education has been a hot button issue for decades. Before I took this course, the higher education finance debate had become white noise. I had heard so much about it that I did not pay attention anymore. However, after taking this course, I have learned that there is much more to finance than government funding. Institutions have much more power in their finances than is first apparent, and employees can make a difference in their departmental budgets. Institutions have options to fundraise or manipulate their revenues outside of their government funding. Similarly, they can also change their expenditures to reflect what they believe is important. Additionally, an institutional budget is a complicated document that is constantly changing, with many people play a role in its formation and alteration.

As an administrator, I will be much more prepared to step into a budgetary role after taking this course. I have the knowledge and resources to create an effective budget and the expertise to utilize the people who can help me the most. Administrators play many roles when it comes to the budget. They make their departmental budget, they monitor their department's spending, they help in the institutional budget, they work with other administrators to make large purchases, and many other vital areas around the institution. Now that I have taken this class, I feel prepared to step into an administrator role in terms of financial management. I have gained the knowledge of each role in an institutional budget, as well as best practices regarding said budget. The biggest challenge for any administrative role is that of working with a budget. Because I have taken this class, I am very well prepared to become an effective administrator.

References

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