

# Connecting

By Todd Bloom *learning to life*

American higher education throughout its history has focused on developing the leaders of tomorrow and preparing students to achieve their life's ambitions. The look and sometimes the feel of institutions has changed through the years, but the goal has stayed the same. For *public* higher education, its roots are developing future citizens who will contribute to advancing our society and economy. The Morrill Land-Grant Act, which helped launch many of today's public research universities, was meant to strengthen our nation during the civil war, one of our country's darkest times. Since then, the U.S. has depended on public institutions to lead our country forward; the GI Bill, for example, empowered one of our greatest generations to establish the U.S. as the dominant world economy.

A constant throughout the years has been the mission of public higher education, which has emphasized research, teaching and service. All three institutional hallmarks place high value on student learning and societal contribution. However, recent pressures on higher education institutions have, in some ways, unexpectedly shifted the focus of these education organizations. Rather than signifying the importance of the experience a student has within an institution as a means to achieving his or her goals, there is now an emphasis on completion (or the first job) as the end goal.

A degree, certificate, or any measure of college completion must be viewed within the context of student preparation for a lifetime of learning—advancing students' personal goals while improving society as a whole. Higher education isn't just a means to an end, it's a means to a means—it can never be about the simple production of degrees. Education institutions are not widget-producing companies, and an education does not end when a student walks across the podium or starts the first day on the job.

Too often, the national conversation concerning the present and future of higher education gets lost in this public debate on outcomes, access and affordability. While these issues are critical and cannot be overlooked, the simple purpose of higher education gets muddled. We must not lose perspective and understanding of the enormous value of higher education to both the individual and society.

Creating clear connections for students between formal education and life provides powerful and motivating learning relevancy, which drives the very concept of student success that is under so much pressure to be measured. These connections are initiated and reinforced through high quality student advising, mentorships, internships, and other authentic and experiential opportunities for students to see connections between their learning and life after college.

In today's economy, the importance of a comprehensive postsecondary experience has never been greater in elevating personal achievement and societal productivity. As it has been throughout our history, public higher education remains one of our nation's most valuable assets and the envy of countries around the globe. While the higher education model and pressures on it may change over time, the focus on furthering individual and societal knowledge must endure. **P**

## About Hobsons

*Hobsons is the world's leader in connecting learning to life. Through our unique advising and admissions products, we help more than 12 million students around the globe identify their strengths, explore careers, create academic plans, and find the right college match. We partner with more than 10,000 schools, colleges, and universities to better prepare students for success.*

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**Higher Expectations** is a section of *Public Purpose* that asks various higher education constituents the simple question: What do you and your industry expect, need or want from the nation's public colleges and universities?

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