

## STATEWIDE ADVOCACY

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With the title of this panel *Statewide Advocacy*, I was reminded of last year's meeting when I arrived with a press clipping whose headline was "Regents Advocacy Criticized," and I wondered if you really wanted to trust my opinion on the topic.

At previous Merrill conferences, I've talked about the differences between academic culture and the culture of a governing board, and differences between academia and the legislative culture. This year, I'd like to continue that theme by talking about what somebody like me does and why they persist in doing it. Also, how we could all help my job line up more closely with life at the universities.

I'm the State Higher Education Officer – SHEEO – for Kansas. There is at least one higher education officer per state. They go by lots of names. In most cases, the duties involve coordination (interpreted by too many as simply reducing unnecessary duplication); program administration; leadership; and advocacy. I admit that I knew relatively little about these types of positions before I assumed mine, and my experience is that most of my colleagues in higher education are in a similar situation.

My comments today will be in the form of advice to future SHEEO's, but first, I should share with you some of my personal biases:

1. All of the real activity happens on campus. If we are about education, research and service to the state, then nothing much happens in our office. It takes place at the colleges and universities.
2. Research and universities lead states. By necessity, states must support lots of different activities, including Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade education, social services, and prisons; but none of these will shape the future of the state and its economy. Higher education alone, and especially the research universities, can fill that role.
3. One size doesn't fit all. It is often a difficult notion to sell, but all institutions should not be treated the same. Some should have resources and opportunities that others do not. Just as campuses must be wise about where they invest, knowing that spreading money thinly across the campus is not the best strategy, so too states must be willing to target resources strategically among their institutions.
4. We can always do better at working together. Expanding collaborative efforts is not only important to our political image, but it is also the right

thing to do. That said, we are almost always doing better at working together than others give us credit for.

With that backdrop, here is the advice I'd give to future state higher education officers:

1. Resist the state culture and the natural tendency toward bureaucracy. In state government, programs are often federally funded or legislatively directed to address a concern or to satisfy an individual's concerns. Too often, these become entities unto themselves. This, of course, is different from campus, where "program" generally means academic program, with internal integrity in concept, tradition, and values. Program in this sense is simply the outward realization of a set of ideas. SHEEO offices, like other state offices, house "programs" (in the state agency sense) and they tend to take on lives of their own. They also tend to impose their structure on the other activities of the organization.
2. Force the campus culture onto the enterprise of the higher education office. If you don't actively push campus culture into the environment in the state capital, the values of the campus will be overcome by those of state government. This can be accomplished in several ways, not the least of which is the people you hire. They must, whenever possible, have real campus experience; the more engaged in the academic aspects of campus, the better. But even with that, the leader must constantly restate the campus values to keep them a priority in the office.
3. Understand the priority that state government puts on reports and documentation. The big difference between academia and state government is the time put into documentation. In higher education, we don't prioritize reporting. We're generally too wrapped up in our research to spend a lot of time producing regular full-color documents describing our results. University Relations works hard to capture what is going on, but if someone were to ask any single scientist to discuss her research today and then again next week, they'd get different answers because the activities in academia change constantly. So the task of a University Relations Office is almost impossible. As a result, however, we are at a disadvantage in state government, because we do not have the same visibility as other groups.
4. Resist the natural tendency to minimize negative effects and make short-term sacrifices. Recognize that compromise is the order of the day, but when you let things go over time, it has a cumulative effect that leads to real problems. This is most easily seen in the budget. It becomes too easy to accept a several hundred thousand, or several million-dollar budget cut when you're removed from the full impact of that cut.
5. Communicate. You can't spend too much time doing this. I joke that my job is to drive around the state and talk on the phone – usually at the same time. As academics, we feel that the issues and challenges of academic life make it difficult to take time to talk with people or write

reports. The SHEEO has that primary responsibility and, given the priorities of others in academe, must shoulder significant responsibilities for communicating information on all aspects of the higher education enterprise to a wide constituency.

As with any good state official, I'm also here to ask for something! For the good of the operation, I would ask each of you to become engaged in the process of staffing your state higher education office. I would never have considered this position if David Shulenburg and Kathleen McCluskey-Fawcett hadn't asked me to consider a position in the Board Office four years ago. But, I'm eternally grateful to them for thinking of me, because these have been the most rewarding years of my professional career. Having served in the role, I am now more convinced than ever that we need the right people in Topeka to get things done. You and others must help identify those who can do these very important jobs.

During the past two days, we have spent a lot of time talking about communication and the need to help the broader public understand what we do and how we can be helpful in any number of arenas. In that vein, I would also suggest that the Merrill Center hold a Research Summit focused on educating the editorial boards of regional newspapers. The summit should include the six CEO's of the universities represented here, the editors of the newspapers in the major cities in the area (i.e. St. Louis, Kansas City, Wichita, Des Moines, Omaha) along with editors from our university cities. The purpose of the Summit should focus on increasing the collective awareness of our research operations in the Midwest and on the various shared needs and challenges that we face. It could help us address a number of issues – for example, the indirect cost recovery rate from the USDA that arguably affects us more than any other group in the nation. With the right leadership, the press could be our ally in helping to move our region ahead.