

Trends in Higher Education Today Which Impact Engineering Education

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This lecture will attempt to outline some of the most important trends in higher education, which set the context for and have an impact on engineering schools today. The emphasis will be on trends in the United States in general and the State of Illinois in particular. While the recent events in higher education in Illinois will be emphasized, those trends are a part of a world wide transition in the development and delivery of academic programs which has the potential for transforming teaching and research in every field.

Particular attention is devoted to recent developments in distance education in Illinois. The challenge of the private not-for-profit and for-profit companies coming into a state and offering both undergraduate and graduate courses and degrees is examined. These entrepreneurial corporations are taking particular aim at the high student demand fields such as engineering education. Their effect on the large public residential universities, which have traditionally taught most of the students in the United States, has the potential to be particularly profound.

Questions of authority to deliver degree programs, the accountability of these corporations to any public body, assessment of the product delivered, employment status of the faculty, and quality control are raised although the answers are not at all clear.

The potential for a negative impact on the traditional universities and the challenge to faculty development especially must be addressed. If addressed successfully, there are many opportunities to serve underserved students and areas in the United States and throughout the world afforded by the new technology. The potential for enhancing collaborative research is also particularly promising. Recent developments in Illinois will be discussed as they illustrate generic trends. All of these topics should be of interest to a worldwide gathering such as the International Conference on Engineering Education.