




Preserve the dream

**Expanding and enhancing the
university system architecture**
By Ernest Calderón



Growing up in the small mining town of Morenci, Arizona, I dreamed of one day attending college. Not all dreams come true, but mine did! It became a reality when I moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, and enrolled as an undergraduate student at Northern Arizona University (NAU).

When I began my studies at NAU, I was deeply inspired; inspired by the thousands of other NAU students who, like me, were pursuing a college education. I was inspired by the gifted faculty who was teaching me and inspired by the clear knowledge that a college degree would make a major difference in my life.

I couldn't have been prouder than when I completed my degree at NAU. Being the first in my family to graduate from college, I was extremely grateful that they encouraged and supported my hopes and dreams.

Little did I know that down the road I would become a member and president of the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR), which oversees Arizona's three public universities. Now, in concert with my distinguished board colleagues, I have the opportunity to help keep the dream of a college education alive for thousands of Arizonans.

To do so, ABOR and our three university presidents are working on a major, multifaceted initiative to reform our university system architecture. Our goal is to provide students with lower-cost options for pursuing a degree in settings and at sites that primarily focus on undergraduate education.

Before talking about the specific reforms, let me first provide some context and address some of the issues facing the Latino community.

In just the past five years, Arizona's three public universities have made great strides relative to Hispanic enrollments and undergraduate degrees awarded. Since fall 2005, Hispanic enrollments have grown by 35 percent, with the total number increasing from 12,390 to 16,719 today. Undergraduate degrees awarded to Hispanic students have increased by approximately 26 percent, jumping from 2,156

in 2004-2005 to 2,710 in 2008-2009.

But, as a university system and as a community, we cannot rest on our laurels. There is much more work to be done. Notwithstanding the dramatic increase in Hispanic enrollments, too few Hispanics in Arizona between the ages of 18 to 24 attend one of our universities – a population estimated at 211,000 in 2008.

It is very heartening to note, however, that a nationwide survey by the Oppenheimer Funds, Inc. reflected that Hispanic Americans are strongly committed to achieving the American dream of a college education. According to *Hispanic Business* magazine, the survey revealed that nearly all of those Hispanics polled – 95 percent – said they view sending their children to college as an “essential part of the American Dream,” on par with homeownership and a comfortable retirement.

In fact, the survey revealed a particularly strong commitment to and optimism about higher education among Hispanics, which was greater, in many respects, than the general population. The results showed that 72 percent of Hispanics viewed college as within reach for anyone who wants to go, compared with 63 percent of non-Hispanics.

This latter point is very significant since a college education is more important today than ever. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2016 – just six short years away – 21.7 percent of jobs will require a bachelor's degree or more, and another 19.2 percent will require a community college degree as a minimum entry to the workforce. Clearly, achieving a higher education is as essential as Latino families believe.

Realizing this, in March 2009, after an extensive process, the Arizona Board of Regents approved a long-term strategic plan, called *2020 Vision*. The plan focuses, in large part, on increasing degree production and making Arizona nationally competitive by the year 2020. Specifically, we would like to double the annual number of bachelor's degrees

produced by 2020. However, we realistically know that we will face many challenges as we strive to achieve this.

In many ways, the *2020 Vision* extends beyond our ambition for the university system since our success depends heavily on increasing the educational pipeline. That is, if we are to substantially increase degree production, significantly more students must graduate from Arizona's high schools and significantly more community college students must transfer to our universities.


This is a particular concern for Latino high school students. A joint study by the Arizona Latino Research Enterprise (ALRE) and Arizona State University (ASU), *The State of Latino Arizona*, reports that Latinos are struggling to achieve the academic success of their Asian and white peers. The report reflects that Hispanic high school students graduated at a rate of 64.7 percent in 2007, whereas their Asian and white counterparts graduated at a rate of 85.5 percent and 81.3 percent, respectively.

ABOR and the university presidents know that we have an important role to play in strengthening the education pipeline. And, we will continue to share in this responsibility through collaborative programs and partnerships with both the K-12 and community college sectors.

But there also is much we can do within the university system to increase degree production and make it more affordable and accessible.

In April, Governor Jan Brewer asked ABOR to review its current business model and focus on making a college education more affordable, accountable and predictable. She defined affordability as “giving students choices and financial certainty that recognizes differences in the types of degrees, types of institutions, and the location of our students.”

Fortunately, ABOR already had undertaken a critical initiative that was greatly aligned with the governor's goals and her charge to ABOR. Specifically, the regents had asked the university presidents to develop



plans to reform our system architecture, creating additional lower-cost pathways to earn a college degree.

Using existing infrastructure as a foundation and leveraging the investment of Arizona communities, the new system architecture calls for

- **Deeply integrated community college-based 2+2 branch campuses;**
- **Regional universities in partnership with community colleges;**
- **New baccalaureate campuses, and**
- **Collaborative Arizona Public University Centers, with high-demand baccalaureate degrees ultimately available in every Arizona county.**

While the universities have partnered with community colleges on traditional 2+2 models for years, we recognize that new models are needed if we are to substantially ramp up baccalaureate degree production.

To this point, I also have proposed creating 3+1 programs that would keep students pursuing high-demand degrees at the community college a year longer, paying community college tuition. In the fourth year, students would transfer to the university, pay university tuition and earn, in the end, a baccalaureate degree from one of our universities.

And, of course, we want to continue to increase our online degree offerings, enabling Arizonans to pursue a college education at any place within Arizona at any time.

Some of these innovations are already coming to fruition. For example, in partnership with Yavapai College, Northern Arizona University will be offering four-year degrees in Prescott Valley. This new regional university, NAU-Yavapai, opened this fall with continuing students from Yavapai College, and more students and more course offerings are expected in January.

This came on the heels of a program unveiled earlier by NAU and Coconino Community College, CC2NAU, which is distinguished by its tailored, intensive advising and a seamless transition from the community college to the university.

The University of Arizona (UA) and ASU are also exploring innovative, alternative partnerships with community colleges across the state. For example, the UA plans to extend its model of transfer-free, 2+2 partnerships with community colleges, offering undergraduate and limited masters programs through branches or learning centers in target counties. And, ASU is in the planning stages of establishing baccalaureate campuses, to be called the Colleges @ ASU, focusing on high-demand degree programs.

Last November, we were very pleased

to learn that the Lumina Foundation for Education had awarded Arizona a grant of up to \$1.5 million over a four-year period to help us expand lower cost options for delivering bachelor's degree programs. Arizona's grant was one of only seven awarded nationally by the Lumina Foundation.

We are just beginning our reforms. It certainly will take considerable time, energy, and, yes, some additional resources to fully implement our plans. But, the payoff will be tremendous for parents, students, the state, and our local communities.

The message that I want to send to Latinos and all Arizonans is that you *can* and *will* be able to reach your educational goals. When ABOR and the universities implement all of the reforms, greater numbers of students should be able to achieve the American Dream. And, unless they choose to do so, they won't have to move away from their hometown, like I needed to do, to seek a bachelor's degree.

It is my hope that each and every university student who starts down the road of a college education will be every bit as excited and inspired as I was when I walked through the doors of NAU. Without a doubt, it was a life-changing experience for me.

Ernest Calderón is president of the Arizona Board of Regents.



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