



Checklist for Change: Making American Higher Education a Sustainable Enterprise

Robert Zemsky

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Almost every day American higher education is making news with a list of problems that includes the incoherent nature of the curriculum, the resistance of the faculty to change, and the influential role of the federal government both through major investments in student aid and intrusive policies. *Checklist for Change* not only diagnoses these problems, but also provides constructive recommendations for practical change.

Robert Zemsky details the complications that have impeded every credible reform intended to change American higher education. He demythologizes such initiatives as the Morrill Act, the GI Bill, and the Higher Education Act of 1972, shedding new light on their origins and the ways they have shaped higher education in unanticipated and not commonly understood ways. Next, he addresses overly simplistic arguments about the causes of the problems we face and builds a convincing argument that well-intentioned actions have combined to create the current mess for which everyone is to blame.

Using provocative case studies, Zemsky describes the reforms being implemented at a few institutions with the hope that these might serve as harbingers of the kinds of change needed: the University of Minnesota at Rochester's compact curriculum in the health sciences only, Whittier College's emphasis on learning outcomes, and the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's coherent overall curriculum.

In conclusion, Zemsky describes the principal changes that must occur not singly but in combination. These include a fundamental recasting of federal financial aid; new mechanisms for better channeling the competition among colleges and universities; recasting the undergraduate curriculum; and a stronger, more collective faculty voice in governance that defines not why, but how the enterprise must change.

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