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Introduction and Overview

A few years ago, author Richard Light attended a conference of nearly one hundred college and university leaders in Aspen, Colorado. The first person to share remarks was the longtime president of a relatively small and highly successful engineering college.

As he stepped up to the podium, the president's opening statement was crisp and powerful. "I have one big idea to share. That idea is this: each college or university represented here is perfectly designed to achieve exactly the results it gets," he began. "Think about it. Is there anyone in this room who can make a compelling argument otherwise? All of us have a large number of policies, requirements, structures, and guidelines in place on our campuses. They have taken years—decades, even—to craft and implement. The results that we get, from graduation rates to our students' academic excellence to student satisfaction metrics, all reflect the impact of these *collective strategies*."

The entire large room, with leaders from many well-known campuses of all kinds, fell silent. Many had heard similar remarks about a variety of other fields. Now the application to higher education hit home hard. The president then, having fully captured the attention of his audience, added several important footnotes to his core statement. "Rather than thinking of campuses as static entities, I encourage all of us to remember they are ever-evolving organizations that shape students' outcomes. Therefore, all progress on any campus involves change in a system. Every university leader and faculty member at any campus should consistently ask themselves and each other, 'What is our strategy for continuous improvement?'"

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When the president finished his remarks, an audience member raised a hand. “This all sounds admirable of course, but what do each of your faculty members, student leaders on campus, and even you personally as president actually *do* to think in terms of continuous improvement?” The president smiled. “I believe you are not posing quite the right question,” he said. “Don’t ask what I *do*, ask what I am *part of*.”

When Light returned to Harvard and the classes that he teaches on the topic of higher education, he wove this core concept into discussions with graduate students. Light also added the idea of how he thinks about core differences between the many American colleges and universities that are genuinely pretty good, in contrast to the smaller number that are widely considered great. Set aside rankings, admissions rates, or endowment size: those American colleges and universities that are universally considered to be exceptional have at least one fundamental thing in common.

The key differentiator is that the many constituency groups—be that campus administrators, faculty, staff, or students—have achieved, or are frequently working toward, a sense of *collegial collaboration*. By that, we mean that each group feels a sense of *shared responsibility* to tangibly enhance their college or university. They are much more than passive participants, drifting around to collect a degree or paycheck. In short (and to again echo the president who spoke in Aspen), they feel that they are *part of something*.

For some years Light has been developing this philosophy of systemic change, together with various concrete and actionable steps a college or university can take, when he visits campuses across the United States. He has recently been joined by colleague and co-author Allison Jegla, who brings the perspective of a younger person focused on higher education innovation. Light and Jegla graduated from the same undergraduate institution, close to fifty years apart. When they began to talk, he as a professor and she as an experienced graduate student, they found that while some details had of course changed at their alma mater, the core philosophy of driving toward evidence-based and sustained improvement had remained steadfast over some decades.

Jegla's professional expertise also draws upon several years of interacting regularly with large numbers of students to help them to learn to think about their own futures in new and bold ways. She works actively to help them make connections with campuses that inspire them to be change agents rather than passive participants. Both authors believe strongly that when campus culture sends signals to each person at a university that they have a special opportunity to make a positive difference, and to enhance the "common good" at their campus, such a culture is especially productive. The authors' shared belief is one principle that brings together all the chapters in this book that follow.

A Framework for the Book

As a professor and longtime higher education researcher, author Richard Light has visited more than 250 colleges and universities. At each, he interacts with campus community members—including administrators, faculty, and students—to learn about how they view their chosen college or university. He asks about the things that make them feel connected to and proud of their campus, as well as those things that are deemed areas for improvement. Throughout those conversations at campuses *of all types*—public, private, wealthy, struggling, large, small, urban, rural—a surprising number of common challenges emerge, especially with regard to the student experience.

The commonalities identified through those conversations form the framework for this book. Each chapter highlights a different core challenge posed by a large number of the colleges and universities that Light has visited. In each chapter, we provide several suggestions—based both on research and our experiences visiting campuses—for *how constituency groups can come together with a shared sense of responsibility* to address the issues. We have made a special effort to include a variety of examples that we believe are genuinely inclusive of the many types of campus groups.

A recurring theme throughout this book is our view that each member of a campus community—from a president or chancellor to faculty to various staff and even including students—each can play a positive role. For example, we believe the impact that student leaders

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can have for setting a constructive tone at a university is sometimes underestimated. Therefore some of our actionable and quite specific suggestions throughout this book ask students—especially student leaders—to play a central role for initiating positive change. Other suggestions invite advisors and various key staff members to take the lead by trying a new way of doing something. Certainly, many of our ideas and urgings depend upon faculty enthusiasm for making constant efforts to strengthen their students' experiences. Finally, several of the examples we offer will require leadership from the top, from a president or provost or dean, to work well. We intentionally chose all of our examples to be either no cost or very low cost. Our goal is that any campus should be able to afford to implement them.

Each idea is targeted toward increasing the chances that every student who is willing to do some work can have a successful experience, both inside the classroom and outside of the classroom as well. Considering that most students spend roughly 10 to 15 out of 168 hours per week, or less than 10 percent of their time, inside classrooms, the large amount of their time spent outside the classroom should be given the substantial attention it merits. Our hope is that our actionable suggestions will enable each member of any university community to make a positive difference not just for themselves, but also for their broader college community. We hope this book will introduce ways that any campus's leaders, faculty, and students can begin to create methods of thinking that embed the idea of working collegially toward sustained improvement into the very fabric of that campus. In keeping with the spirit of Light's campus visit conversations, we have written this book using a conversational tone.

A core assumption that we make in the forthcoming pages is that every college and university—from the wealthiest and most selective to the least—wants to create more value for students. We believe the key to strengthening *all* campuses is to identify each campus's key goals, assess current strengths and weaknesses, gather high-quality evidence about how well that university is doing, conceptualize and implement new ways of doing things, and monitor progress to ensure positive momentum. As we wrote this book, we kept in mind

the remark in Aspen by that college president: “Each college or university represented here is perfectly designed to achieve exactly the results it gets.” We would add a footnote: that every member of the campus community has the potential to affect how a college designs and implements its policies. In that spirit we offer the following chapters.

Chapter 1 explores the idea of campus culture and continuous improvement.

One of our core themes throughout this book is investigating how any university can promote a culture that stimulates and inspires continuous improvement. Just about everyone on any campus can support—in the abstract—the idea of encouraging good-spirited innovation. Yet figuring out effective ways to develop an environment where members of the campus community feel motivated to conceptualize and implement new ideas is not always so straightforward.

In Chapter 1, we highlight four quite different colleges and universities that have enhanced their campus culture in different ways. One did so through the creation of a management credential to complement its traditional liberal arts curriculum. Another conceptualized a bold project that ultimately didn’t yield the intended results. Still, we view it as a major success because of the unique way this university approached the implementation and assessment phases. A third example features a professor who—because of her personal, creative spirit and the organization of her college—was able to completely redesign the structure of a course that is notorious for being especially traditional. A final example illustrates what can happen when a university is not so successful in building a sustainable sense of community among its members. We present it as a cautionary tale of what can result when a campus culture fractures.

Of course, the examples we describe did not develop overnight. They exist only because of years of work—building trust within the campus community, establishing a system that rewards trying new things even if they don’t immediately bear fruit, and devising guidelines that are supportive but not restrictive.

Chapter 2 offers concrete suggestions for how a university can help students from under-resourced high schools navigate the “hidden curriculum.”

A dean of admissions at an Ivy League university recently told author Richard Light a simple anecdote. He fondly recalled how—coming from a working-class family in Pennsylvania and having attended a small, rural high school—he arrived as an enthusiastic, newly admitted first-year student, full of excitement on move-in day at his new university. Upon entering his room, one of four tiny bedrooms situated around a shared common area, he was warmly greeted with a smile and a handshake by one of his three roommates who had already moved in. “Welcome,” the young man began. “I assume you are my new roommate; it is a pleasure to meet you. Where did you summer this year?” It was an honest effort to try to get to know his new roommate. Light’s friend now laughs as he remembers this initial greeting—which also marked the first time he had ever heard the word “summer” used as a verb. Then the friend recalls, “I found myself wondering at that minute if ‘winter’ could also be used as a verb?”

Chapter 2 is written to help students, such as this young, newly arriving first-year student who would become a future dean of admissions, to thrive from their first day on campus at any college or university. Success at any college, and certainly at a demanding one, has two crucial aspects. The first is the inside of the classroom component: pursuing academic excellence and doing well in classes. This is of course especially true at a college that emphasizes rigorous courses with rigorous demands. The second aspect is the rest of the experience—capitalizing on campus opportunities, choosing extracurricular involvements, managing time well, developing friendships, and a vast array of other on-campus experiences.

We focus Chapter 2 on students who specifically come to a college from under-resourced high schools. Those are high schools, whether urban or rural, that, due to financial limitations or organizational weaknesses, are not able to adequately prepare students for the two aspects of a demanding college experience. We highlight especially and emphasize the importance of high-quality advising for helping students navigate what has become known as the “hidden

curriculum.” These words characterize layers of norms and expectations that underlie much of the college experience. Some are as simple as assisting students with choosing courses in a strategic manner. Others require more sustained effort on the part of both advisors and undergraduates. In this chapter we offer a dozen quite specific suggestions for any college to consider. Each has been tried at demanding campuses. All usually work well. Each of our suggestions requires an investment of exactly zero dollars.

Chapter 3 explores the effects of students' decisions about what activities to engage with while at college.

For many undergraduates, college presents an exciting opportunity to independently manage their own time. Each student must make sometimes-difficult decisions about how to spend their precious hours both in and out of the classroom. Chapter 3 introduces both the concepts and trade-offs of *investing vs. harvesting*. We suggest ways that advisors can help students navigate the decision-making process to make productive trade-offs.

Our definition of *investing* is when students try something completely new. They make a new effort, they invest their time, and they give themselves an opportunity to see if perhaps a new talent or interest will emerge. They may try something they had always wanted to, yet never had the chance before. They might even choose to try something so new they had perhaps never even heard of it until they arrived at their college or university. Because the student doesn't yet know how good they might be or whether they will even like the new activity, *they are taking a risk*. Just like investing in the stock market, it is difficult to bank on a precise outcome in advance.

Our definition of *harvesting* is almost exactly the opposite. Harvesting is when undergraduate students continue to pursue an activity or topic at which they already know they excel: something they already have worked at and know they enjoy. Thus, they are “harvesting” the fruits of a seed that has already been planted. Often students' harvesting efforts can be the payoff of years of hard work. For example, a fantastic cross country runner from high school may well continue to pursue the sport at a college and improve his speed under

the tutelage of a college-level coach. In this way, he would be building upon his existing strengths.

On campus after campus, graduating seniors report these choices can matter a lot. Many say that juggling a healthy balance between investing and harvesting is a key to both a substantially successful and also a happy experience. Here is where campus advisors can help students who might not find it easy to make important decisions about how to achieve a constructive balance of investing and harvesting, with the goal of helping each student get the most out of their college-going experience. Chapter 3 offers several brief vignettes of what major successes in investing and harvesting can look like. We also offer a series of recommendations for colleges that may want to revise their extra-curricular policies, and to develop new low-cost advising strategies to help students make wise trade-offs. In each case the goal is for each student to achieve a healthy balance between investing and harvesting.

In Chapter 4 we pose the question, “How can a college attract students who may not even be considering our institution?”

We believe every college and university in America, public and private, large and small, rich or not so rich, selective or not, shares a common goal: to expand its reach. When author Allison Jegla was growing up in rural mid-Michigan, attending college out of state was uncommon. With solid in-state options, her experience was that students from her small, rural high school typically opted to attend familiar schools, all within the state, even if the academic rigor was not on par with the students’ abilities. This is a phenomenon defined by Caroline Hoxby from Stanford and Christopher Avery from Harvard as “undermatching.” Hoxby and Avery demonstrate how it is striking to consider that students from lower-income households who apply to colleges that match well with their achievement patterns are far more likely to reside in or near urban areas. In Chapter 4, we suggest ways that universities can increase the attention they pay to rural students—and, by extension, others who may not be considering a given school—to try to increase their numbers in the applicant pool.

Chapter 4 offers actionable suggestions to university leaders for attracting these students to campus and ensuring their perspectives are shared once there. Two examples of this are increasing support for pre-college summer program partnerships, as well as engaging current undergraduates from underrepresented areas to help with the recruitment process. Some colleges and universities, both public and private, are already doing exemplary work in this regard. We urge in Chapter 4, together with offering specific examples and a quite detailed case study, that their efforts can and should be extended far more widely.

Chapter 5 investigates how great universities encourage faculty to constantly experiment to improve their teaching effectiveness and their students' learning.

Much of the American public and even many prospective college students may not be fully aware of dramatic changes in faculty emphases at some leading universities. As recently as ten to twenty years ago, many new, young faculty members were told directly by their college's hiring committees they should focus almost entirely on *research*. Spending time interacting with undergraduates and concentrating on teaching brilliantly was hardly valued at all. At best, excellent teaching was valued as a distant second to productive exploration in their fields and producing new academic content, including articles and books. Now, to the benefit of current and future undergraduates, these emphases have changed swiftly and decisively.

The overarching point from Chapter 5 is that outstanding colleges and universities now encourage faculty to do systematic inquiry about how to teach their subjects most effectively. To illustrate briefly, the proportion of classes at most excellent universities that were taught using a traditional lecture format just twenty years ago was more than 70 percent. Now, that proportion has dropped to under 50 percent. We anticipate it will continue to drop. Sustained research led by faculty members has demonstrated that classes using lectures are on average less engaging for students. Lectures rarely encourage students' active learning. They rarely lead to students' participation. They often do not maximize learning outcomes.

Chapter 5 presents data on topics including whether cold-calling (calling on students to speak up in class even when they haven't raised their hand and asked to speak) leads to students coming to classes better prepared. We explore if asking students in a class to post thoughts or responses online before a class session, but after doing a reading or a homework assignment, enhances their actual learning in any measurable way. We examine whether a faculty member's establishing some personal connection with each student in a lecture-based class improves their students' engagement. Each of these experiments requires little, if any, financial investment for a university to undertake. The good news is that building such experimentation into ongoing classroom teaching can really pay dividends for enhancing students' engagement and learning.

Chapter 6 is oriented around how universities can determine how much their students are learning.

Strings of A's and A minuses on a grade transcript convey a picture of a successful student. This is excellent. We salute that student. May they prosper. Yet how can others, whether employers, or graduate schools, or any other organization that sees a grade transcript, actually know what a student knows? How can anyone know what a student actually can do? Many campuses—from the most widely known to the least—are now instituting learning goals for majors, academic departments, and often for individual courses. Professors are increasingly asked to specify how they define student success in their classes: what substantive topics, broad ideas, and ways of thinking they hope students will grasp as a result of participating. Chapter 6 conveys a way to constructively think about answering the question, "How well is each college or university succeeding in genuinely achieving its own goals?"

The word *assessment* emerges as a key idea in Chapter 6. Most people view assessment as a synonym for "standardized testing." Many faculty especially dislike the term assessment, because they believe that much of standardized testing cannot pick up the subtleties and innuendoes of what goes on in their classrooms. That is not at all what we propose in this book. *Our entire discussion is completely devoid of any reference to any standardized testing.* Standardized testing simply

never comes up in this book. Instead, we believe that since one of the main goals of a university is to teach students, any strong campus needs to think more broadly about how to develop reliable ways to understand how much its students are actually learning. One possibility is designing a methodology to collect information about some element of interest that university leaders care about (for example, whether students can think analytically about key moments in history or have improved their capacity to write effectively while at college).

These findings then can become the grist for faculty discussions about what curricular changes might over time be helpful or constructive for facilitating students' learning. One kind of assessment asks students *what they know now*. A second type gets at the measure of the *value added for students* while they are at the university. A third kind strives to compare *students' responses to different types of questions about their experiences*—both the good and perhaps the not good—while at college. These responses can help a university to initiate plans for systematic and sustained improvement.

Chapter 7 highlights strategies for asking students about their experiences on campus and acting upon their feedback.

Some campuses are beginning to systematically ask undergraduates about their experiences on campus. This is not meant as any sort of test. Rather, it is done to get a clearer sense from the students' own perspectives about what is working well for them versus not working so well. All campuses routinely tout the importance of treating all students with respect. What better way to treat students with respect than to ask them about their experiences, invite their feedback and suggestions, rigorously analyze and synthesize what they say, *and then to take their observations seriously?*

For some colleges and universities, ideas from students have quickly led to constructive and often simple changes in their campus fabric. To illustrate, one campus routinely asks second-semester first-year students, "What is the best bit of advice you got here on campus this year?" They also ask those same students, "Now that you have been

here for nearly a year, what advice do you *wish* someone had given to you when you first arrived, but never did?” Clearly, if large numbers of students point to especially valuable or generalizable bits of advice—for example, that they wish someone had pressed them to take at least one small class per semester so they could get to actually interact with and know a minimum of one faculty person better—this can help many advisors to steer future incoming students in a more productive direction.

A bonus here is that some students actually suggest entirely new and imaginative ideas that go far beyond details of advising. For example, Chapter 7 presents a student initiative at Harvard that aimed to introduce undergraduates to a far wider set of faculty members than they might otherwise meet during their time on campus. To help readers get started, this chapter offers a variety of specific questions that any campus could choose to ask its students.

Chapter 8 explores how to promote positive interactions among students from different backgrounds.

Many of America’s strong residential colleges and universities are ideally positioned to make the most of students’ diverse backgrounds and to promote constructive interactions across the campus community. When asked, students on leading campuses report that they were happy to observe from the very first day that most of their fellow students share certain basic core values and strengths. Like themselves, many of their fellow students (a) work hard; (b) are very good at something; (c) care deeply about education; (d) come to classes prepared; and (e) are on campus because they have earned it both with past accomplishments and with future promise. Otherwise, regardless of their background, students wouldn’t have been accepted to the college. When they focus on these shared values and goals, colleges can help students make the most of their background differences and capitalize on the positive effects these differences can have for learning. Colleges should be, and often in fact are, places where—in the optimal scenario—everyone learns, assumptions are tested, and often even unlikely friendships are formed.

To capitalize on this optimistic perspective, college and university administrators need to make organizational decisions about how to inspire constructive collaboration among different groups on campus. Chapter 8 describes differences—sometimes dramatic differences—among campuses in how they choose to develop their campus culture along this dimension. It also addresses a question that many campus leaders find particularly challenging: How can we acknowledge students’ identities while being careful not to pigeonhole them into narrow categories?

For example, labeling *all* first-generation college students as young people who are “at risk” (which some colleges routinely do), or designating them as students who should immediately all be put into some sort of special group with special needs, may indeed fit the needs and wishes of some modest fraction of such individuals. For some students this form of “identity” may be terrific and exactly what they want. Yet for many others, it does not respect how they wish to be perceived at their new home. Their own self-definition has frankly little or nothing to do with being the first generation in their family to attend college. They identify themselves and think of themselves in other ways.

Chapter 8 shares both evidence and illustrations of how various colleges and universities have identified and created ways for students from a variety of backgrounds to thrive on their campuses. This is an area of ongoing exploration for many colleges. One of the main points that we emphasize in Chapter 8 is the importance of everyone bringing lots of goodwill to this enterprise. From the first day. This is not a trivial point. There are so many colleges working hard to get this right.

Chapter 9 suggests ideas for a great university to build a strategy for lifelong learning and lifelong engagement.

Every year, prospective college students pack conference rooms in admissions offices at institutions across the country. They then follow hot on the heels of their campus tour guide as he or she highlights unique elements of that particular college. Many of their questions focus on the experience they will have during their time on campus. Aside from broad inquiries about career prospects of different majors

at a college, few of the students' questions revolve around how the college will affect their lives after graduation. Students and most parents, perhaps understandably, focus almost entirely on the next four years and often completely ignore the fifty that come after that. Why? Perhaps it is because lifelong learning and lifelong engagement with an institution has not been most campuses' key value proposition. We think this presents a significant opportunity for colleges to differentiate themselves. It offers each campus a chance to convey an honest, heightened sense of long-term worth to prospective undergraduates.

In Chapter 9, we present ideas about how colleges and universities can extend their value for students through high-quality lifelong learning and extended engagement opportunities. Do we anticipate that *all* alumni will eagerly participate in lifelong engagement opportunities? We do not. Yet even if a modest fraction choose to do so, these activities can be hugely impactful both for the alumni and the institution.

We argue in Chapter 9 that college leaders may very well see positive returns from thoughtful lifelong engagement programs that affect their other institutional priorities as well. The colleges and universities that will become exemplars for lifelong learning for the rest of America's campuses will be those that create rigorous, widespread programming to engage students throughout many phases of their lives—perhaps even beginning before a student even sets foot in his or her first college classroom. We offer in Chapter 9 specific suggestions for how any college or university can begin to plant the seed of a lifelong partnership between each student and their university, beginning even before a student starts their first year. Our impression is that as of now, hardly any universities have implemented this way of thinking.

Chapter 10 looks at how universities can prepare students to become globally minded in an increasingly interconnected world.

It is difficult to find a college or university president of a major campus who does not routinely include “teaching our students to think globally” as a major campus goal. Yet if we ask campus leaders, faculty members, and students how best to do this, their answers vary

enormously. Should encouraging undergraduates to participate in a study abroad program be a cornerstone? Many campuses seem to think so. Still, undergraduates should consider that there are many alternatives. For example, a steadily growing number of students—the number is soaring at some universities—are choosing to spend their summers working abroad rather than signing up for a study semester abroad during the normal school year. By living abroad during a time when classes are not in session, they still can experience living in a different culture for three months and possibly even earn some money. A second reason is that increasing numbers of students don't want to miss out on the rigorous and demanding advanced courses on their home campus, which for many are what attracted them to their chosen school in the first place.

For some campuses, another way of looking at global-mindedness may mean different methods of teaching about various world cultures here in the United States. Some campuses create specific, focused classes to expose students to international cultures. Other campuses work hard to tuck in an international component to a broad array of more traditional academic fields and classes. These include disciplines ranging from humanities to social sciences and even to some physical sciences.

We pose the question in Chapter 10 to our readers, “How would you know if your campus is succeeding, in terms of helping undergraduates learn to think globally, beyond the more parochial borders of our nation or even a region of the country?” We offer very specific suggestions and even some sample questions that a university can ask its graduating seniors. The responses from students to these questions will tell university leaders how well they are doing with helping their students learn to “think globally.”

Chapter 10 offers actual findings from several universities, where the outcomes for students about learning global thinking turn out to be dramatically different. Whether the news about students' level of global thinking at any campus is good or not so good, the faculty at those campuses then become empowered to decide, based on firm and concrete data, if they want to initiate any curricular changes. It is this critical step, the gathering of reliable evidence, that can help to facilitate constructive faculty discussions about potential

curricular and pedagogical changes to lead to steady improvements in student outcomes.

Chapter 11 offers a series of specific suggestions to universities that would like to get started implementing some ideas from this book.

We conclude in Chapter 11 by listing several principles to help any college or university begin implementing new ideas as productively as possible. We know that campuses face many challenges on a daily basis. It can be overwhelming to know which novel projects to start or where to dedicate new or additional effort to innovate. As a result, based on our in-depth experiences with dozens of universities, we offer in Chapter 11 several basic ideas for campus leaders, faculty, staff members, and even for students, to get started.

Since Chapter 11 is our closing chapter, readers will have encountered many suggestions throughout this book. They all are presented in “actionable” format. Nearly all of them are—literally—either no cost or low cost. Many of them have already been successfully implemented across at least several campuses. Those are the reasons we chose to include these recommendations rather than others. The ideas generally require someone on a campus, whether the president or a professor or a student leader, to make an effort and get a useful innovation started, often in a small-scale way, to see how well it works for enhancing students’ experiences. In our concluding chapter, we convey that sometimes when initiating a new idea and then gathering preliminary evidence about how well it works, “less can be more.”

Put another way, if we want to invite students’ feedback and responses to their experiences with first-year advising, and if this project is initiated at a large, public university with eight thousand first-year students, is it really necessary to begin our efforts by asking all eight thousand first-year students the same list of questions? We believe not. In fact, we *strongly* believe not. Perhaps start with a truly small fraction of those eight thousand. For example, choose a random sample of just one hundred first-year students. Even that modest number usually will be enough to identify key ideas or experiences—either positive or negative—that are widespread among students.

Our bottom line for getting started is a simple idea. It is just that: “get started.” Implement a pilot project. Earn buy-in from faculty, staff, and students. Treasure the small gains and make adjustments (or even big changes) throughout, over a period of time. The important element is to constantly be striving for improvement. This ongoing process demonstrates to all campus community members that they are part of something that is ever evolving, something that they themselves can help shape. Our experience is that this process results in most every person at a university—whether a campus leader or faculty member or staff or even a student—feeling wonderfully empowered to contribute to their university in the best sense.

A Final Note

In most classes, as with the daily work of many university leaders and certainly most faculty members, the focus often tends to be on various specific details. How do we engage students with physics especially well? What is the best way to pair students into small peer-advising groups? How much time are students spending on their economics or biology homework? These details are important. They certainly matter. We will touch upon many of them frequently throughout this book. Yet often each detail comprises a stand-alone question. We encourage efforts to think more broadly. Every college leader and nearly every faculty member can describe how they are striving for excellence on multiple dimensions. But those definitions of excellence usually are linked to relatively narrow details, as opposed to embedding broader, systemic changes that constitute a constant striving for improvement.

In summary, *an overarching theme that guides this book is that excellence is not about being something. It is about becoming something.* Achieving excellence for any college will always be *ongoing*. It will always be *aspirational*. It will always be a journey. Goals will never fully be reached. The effort for continuous improvement will never fully end. Every campus has the responsibility to strive toward always becoming a better university. If the suggestions and collegial ways of thinking we offer in this book help some universities to push forward on that journey, we will view it as a grand success.

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