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*Promoting high quality, ready access, and efficient use of resources  
in Nebraska higher education.*

## Talking Points – Marshall A. Hill

### NACIQI Meeting

June 10, 2011 Alexandria, VA

#### Personal Views on the “Triad”

- Have been a strong supporter of the “triad” approach to accountability and quality assurance (federal government, states, accreditors)
  - More comprehensive approach than any of the three partners could provide alone
  - Acknowledges shared concerns, shared responsibilities
  - Provides multiple tools to address diverse issues (hopefully, the tools most appropriate to the task)
  - Provides possibilities for mutual reinforcement
  - I’ve relied on the federal government for policies and funding for financial aid, support for important education initiatives, and valuable data on our institutions and students. I’ve relied on accreditors to uphold quality and help deal with problems. That latter work, especially, has been helped by good contacts with accreditor colleagues.

Maximizing the many potential benefits of the triad is difficult, and changes in higher education have stressed each component

- All three – dealing with rapid changes in delivery methods and in institutional missions, structure, focus and control
- Accreditors – have assumed roles outside of their initial purpose of quality enhancement
- Federal government – has had to deal with explosive growth, intense political pressures
- States – statutes often lag current practice, reduced funding for engagement and oversight

Fundamental challenges for all three members of the triad – indeed, for all of higher education:

- How can we improve and broaden educational attainment while improving quality? And while under financial stress?
- How can we enable and support the innovation and flexibility in higher education that our country needs, while retaining the ability to restrain and, if needed, punish “bad actors”?

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## Points of Common Agreement

- Interactions between members of the "triad" are complex, sensitive, and don't always yield the results we need. We're all imperfect.
- Efforts of triad members are sometimes redundant, unduly stressing some institutions and adding to costs (which are passed on to students)
- Despite oversight from three perspectives, we still have abuses and shortcomings
- Although most developed countries would take a centralized approach to solving these issues, rightly or wrongly, almost no one in higher education is now arguing for an increased role for the Department of Education. I'm not nearly as opposed to that.

## Most sensitive points of stress

- Many institutions -- especially public and independent, nonprofit institutions -- believe they place a high premium on the interests of students, don't think they are part of "the problem," and have little tolerance for the processes and procedures necessary to restrain "bad actors". Hence the strong, broad opposition to the new state authorization requirements. Many institutions want the problems that they hear about to be solved, but want it done at no inconvenience to themselves.

I think that's probably understandable. It's similar to how we feel about airport security lines. We understand why we have to put up with the inconvenience, but, because we know we're not terrorists, we wish we didn't have to deal with it. We think there should be a line for those of us that are just fine, and a separate line for the people we should be worrying about.

- To some extent, earning accreditation by a "recognized" accreditor was supposed to provide that "separate line." But with accreditors carrying out tasks that seem increasingly regulatory, the special line doesn't seem so special anymore. We no longer seem able to meaningfully segment the market and use that segmentation to support our goals.

## Possible Improvements to the Triad

- Maybe we can find a better segmenting tool -- a way to adjust the path for institutions that have consistently demonstrated responsibility, financial stability, high metrics on measures we care about, and so forth. For them, the focus should be on quality enhancement.
- For less fortunate institutions -- institutions from all sectors -- we probably need to shorten the period between comprehensive accreditation reviews and develop better, more graduated responses to poor performance.