

Preface

As I write this in 2011 the principal focus of both US political parties is on job creation. What can be done to reduce the 9.0 percent unemployment rate? What can be done to get the American economy growing at a higher rate? In addition there is much discussion about what should be done to reduce spending, particularly on Medicare and social security. The message of the monograph that follows is the political focus of both parties is wrong headed. It's not about jobs. It is about education. In today's Knowledge Economy the country with the highest quality post-secondary education will generate the new ideas that have economic value, the entrepreneurs who see around the corners ahead and create new markets for new products. The 47 million citizens who are high-school drop-outs do not have the skills to participate in the Knowledge Economy. Yes, many high school drop-outs are employed, but in minimum wage jobs rather than high value added economic activities. This is the unacceptable state our economy and society is in today. Skill deficits are also the real problem underlying the almost 10 percent unemployment figure in the United States. A high quality education is also a necessary condition for citizenship in a new global age in which uncertainty, rapid change, and emergence of new problems all occur simultaneously. Listening to the speeches of public and private leaders one does not get the sense that education policy is central to their concerns. This is a huge mistake.

In the chapters that follow I pursue topics such as sizing the problem in undergraduate education using public goods theory, the new limits of education policy, governance, assessment and accountability, and business models in the face of disruptive forces. These topics may seem like they are not central to the main functions of higher education – research and teaching and learning – but I will show why they are relevant. I aim to deal with each topic on its own, but also in a larger context. I have benefited by working out some of the ideas previously in print. Chapter 6 is based on R. Benjamin, A. Hauptman, R. Hersh, and R. Lempert (2002), *The Road Less Traveled: Redesigning the Higher Education System of Nevada* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, March, DRU-2508-CAE). Parts of Chapter 7 are adapted from R. Benjamin and S. Carroll (1998), 'The Implications of the Changed Environment for Governance in Higher

Education', in W. Tierney (ed.), *The Responsive University: Restructuring for High Performance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 92–119) and R. Benjamin and S. Carroll (1996), 'Impediments and Imperatives in Redesigning Higher Education' (*Educational Administration Quarterly*, December, pp. 705–719). Chapter 10 is based upon R. Benjamin and S. Klein, 'Assessment Versus Accountability: Notes for Reconciliation in Higher Education: Notes for Reconciliation' (UNESCO Forum Commission Paper, Paris, France: UNESCO, 2007). Chapter 12 is based on 'The Environment of American Higher Education: A Constellation of Changes' (*The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 585, January, 2003, pp. 8–30). I am grateful for permission from the publishers to use these materials here.

