



Commission Releases Revised Report

By Judith Earley



The Commission on the Future of Higher Education released a revised draft of their report on the state of higher education in America.

In response to widespread criticism off the harsh language of the first draft, this version has toned it down.

According to a report by *Inside Higher Education*, while the second draft continues to call for improvements in the performance of America's colleges and universities, it does so with a tad less venom. The report does maintain its original opinion that the cost of higher education have grown too far and too fast, and that financial aid often does not end up in the hands of the truly needy students. Additionally, the commission found that too many high school students are under-prepared for college; consequently, they fail to thrive and are less likely to learn the skills they need to get good jobs and lead quality lives.

The original draft report was widely perceived as going out of its way to insult American colleges and universities. The second draft offers more praise and less criticism and more fully represents the views of all 19 commissioners; but does not contain an introduction or a conclusion that will set the tone for the report. Overall, the commission's fundamental recommendations remained unchanged.

In a memorandum to its members, American Council on Education president David Ward said that the second draft showed "improvements in both tone and content" over the first draft, which, he noted, was released "to the overwhelming concern of the higher education community" last month. In some ways, Ward said, he thought the second draft did not change enough; however, there were other commissioners on the other side of the argument, who expressed concern that the commission might have gone a too far in the opposite direction.

Ohio University economist Richard K. Vedder described the second draft as "a little bit of a sugar-coated version" that "doesn't grab you much." Additionally, Vedder expressed concern that the commission's report might be so soft that one would pay attention to it. In the *insidehighered.com* report, Vedder went on to say that the second draft had taken a step backward by giving less attention to the innovations of nontraditional colleges, especially for-profit ones, and by dropping references to grade inflation and the declining state of undergraduate education.

Another commissioner was quoted as saying that he believed that the draft "begins to really show what we as the commission thinks," and that the report is "headed in the right direction." But on one

point most commissioners agree: they still have a great deal of work to do in order compile a finished product that will not only open the eyes of the public to the spiraling problems of higher education, but also will provide concrete, hard hitting recommendations that guide policy makers down the road to problem solving.

The revised report can be read in its entirety on the Commission's website at:
<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>.