



# VIEWS & VISIONS

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## The Role of Higher Education Today

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David M. Mariner has served Waynesburg University since 1999. In his current position as the dean of graduate and professional studies, which he has held since 2010, he oversees graduate and professional programs in business, counseling, education and nursing.

In addition, he serves on the board of directors for the Southpointe CEO Association and on the comprehensive planning committee for Peters Township School District.

Mr. Mariner completed his bachelor of science degree in chemistry from Westminster College. He also holds a master of business administration degree from Waynesburg University. He currently is completing a doctor of philosophy degree in instructional management and leadership at Robert Morris University.

*All the pleasure in life is in general ideas. But all the use of life is in specific solutions, which cannot be reached through generalities any more than a picture can be painted by knowing some rules of the method. They are reached by insight, tact, and specific knowledge.*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

The one constant in the process of higher education is the ability of the institution to provide a pathway for students to undergo a “transfer of knowledge,” or the ability of the student to “learn.” Higher education does not focus on the ability of a student to memorize data or retain information. Of course, this is part of the process, but higher education is more concerned with changing the way a student processes this type of information. According to Joseph Graff, former Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies at Waynesburg University, “We challenge our students to think critically, and our programs impact the way that students read, write, think and communicate.”

Higher education in the United States continues to be driven by capitalistic competition. There are approximately 3,900 public and private



colleges and universities across the country that compete for faculty, students, facilities and financial stability. In recent years, the ability to recruit, matriculate, retain and graduate students is increasingly competitive and difficult. Institutions are no longer just evaluated on the basis of inputs, but rather on the outputs or the ability of the institution to document evidence of effective outcomes from the learning experience as defined by internal and external stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, employers and community members.

The challenges of this paradigm in higher education will continue into the future, as institutions must create a transparent system of accountability in order to be effective and sustainable. Institutions must be able to clearly articulate and document the outcomes of the learning experience through the mission of the institution. Institutions must be able to define unique goals for each program, as well as





50 percent of the graduates earning an annual income in excess of \$75,000. In addition, all students must complete the Major Fields Test (MFT) as a graduation requirement. The MFT is a standardized exam used as an outcome assessment tool to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum. The MFT also provides national comparative data in order to help rank Waynesburg's program with other MBA programs around the globe. The graduating class of 2013 scored comparatively with the national average for all students completing the exam.

In the past year, Waynesburg University partnered with employers in the energy sector to develop a concentration in energy management for the Master of Business Administration Program. Through a collaborative process, Waynesburg designed a program to meet the needs of the energy community. This type of design, using internal and external stakeholders, serves as an example of an effective model being used for program implementation. The future of higher education will depend on the ability of an institution to work collaboratively with the employers and the community as well as the internal populations of administration, students and faculty. ▽

establish standards on which the program will be held accountable. Ultimately, an institution will be able to demonstrate a commitment to this paradigm by involving a range of stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The 2002 National Center for Education Statistics reported that nearly 47 percent of enrollees in U.S. higher education institutions could be classified as adult learners. In addition, the adult student is financially independent and employed full-time. Many adult students have dependents of their own. Considering that the age of the "traditional" student falls between 18 and 22 years old, it can be estimated that nearly 20 percent of the overall adult population in the United States is currently involved in some facet of adult learning. The adult student market has become a critical component to enrollment management.

More than a decade ago, Waynesburg University made the decision to design and implement academic programs in business, counseling, education and nursing that would meet the needs of the adult student living and working in the Pittsburgh region. Today, the University's graduate and professional programs are headquartered from an off-

campus regional site in the Southpointe Technology Park, which is in the heart of the energy sector in southwestern Pennsylvania. As opposed to the traditional campus located in Waynesburg, the Southpointe Center has more of a corporate atmosphere.

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The Master of Business Administration Program at Waynesburg University was implemented in the early 1980s and has evolved into the third-largest program in the Pittsburgh region in terms of enrollment, according to the Pittsburgh Business Times. Not only does the enrollment identify a healthy graduate program, but the outputs of the program are equally impressive. To date, the MBA program at Waynesburg University boasts a 97 percent employment rate, with nearly