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Stockton Seeks Solutions to the College Opportunity, Affordability Crisis

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By Mel Fabrikant Wednesday, April 18, 2012, 08:23 PM EDT

By Darryl G. Greer, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance, William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy,

As a new book (Financing American Higher Education in the Era of Globalization) highlights that public higher education faces a crisis of confidence. For policy makers, educators and citizens, the big 21st Century issues are: who will have the opportunity to attend college; how will we finance the enterprise, and keep college affordable; and how colleges will be accountable for outcomes, and continuing trust in public investment. College is more important than ever before in a highly competitive global economy; but families and students are deeply troubled by the rising cost of college.

Richard Stockton will create a Center for Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance (HESIG) to find solutions to this challenge.

New Jersey stands out as a state that has led the nation in cuts to public colleges; where tuition is among the highest nationally because of state disinvestment; where the state provides no regular funds for facilities improvement; and rarely meets fully its labor contract obligations for salary and benefits. The result is that students pay roughly 70% of the cost of college, annually; and leave college with \$25-30,000 in debt. These trends must be reversed, if public colleges are to fulfill their missions of broad access to an affordable, quality education

HESIG aspires to be a leading New Jersey and national information resource on these critical issues. Stockton is in a unique position to serve as a model for change, with its dedication to opportunity, college completion, a distinctive interdisciplinary academic focus, and success in building regional partnerships with schools, business and others.

The mission of HESIG is to serve as an agent for constructive policy change, aligned with a public agenda, serving the public good. HESIG already has an important partner; The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, and will work in cooperation with the Office of the New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education, a member of the governor's cabinet, and others. HESIG will collect and disseminate objective information to promote sound education finance and governance policy, and will reach out directly to opinion leaders and citizens to build stronger trust in policy solutions.

Guiding principles for the Center include: higher education is a public good; opportunity to equal access to an affordable college education is paramount; and accountability for outcomes is key to strengthening public trust. The Center will achieve its mission through analysis, web-based data, publications, conferences, forums, public opinion polling, instruction and training. A Policy Council consisting of national experts and practitioners, and state and regional leaders will guide the Center's development.

Important outcomes of HESIG's work will be: better informed policy making at the school, college and state levels; better alignment of colleges' missions with competitive market trends affecting programs, student markets, price and outcomes; new models for making decisions affecting college access and affordability; and greater coherence and trust among policy makers, and citizens about the value of investment in higher education.

Darryl G. Greer, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance, William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, joined Richard Stockton College in January, 2012. From 1986-2011 Dr. Greer served as CEO, New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities, a Trenton-based nonpartisan, nonprofit organization to advocate the collective interests of New Jersey's nine state colleges and universities.

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