



Expands Access to Quality Post-Secondary Education

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Arizona State University (ASU) is at once the youngest, largest and fastest growing of all major American research institutions, enrolling more than 69,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional students on four campuses across metropolitan Phoenix. In July 2002, ASU began its transformation as a university for the 21st century and a new paradigm for public higher education through the creation of a solution-focused institution that combines the highest level of academic excellence, inclusiveness to as broad a demographic as possible and maximum societal impact.



Predicated on excellence, access and impact, our model is conceptually framed as the “New American University,” and its objectives are inherent in eight “design aspirations” that, reduced to their essential terms, enjoin the academic community to:

1. Embrace the cultural, socioeconomic, and physical setting of the institution;
2. Become a force for societal transformation;
3. Pursue a culture of academic enterprise and knowledge entrepreneurship;
4. Conduct use-inspired research;

5. Focus on the individual in a milieu of intellectual and cultural diversity;
6. Transcend disciplinary limitations in pursuit of intellectual fusion;
7. Socially embed the university, thereby advancing social enterprise development through direct engagement; and
8. Advance global engagement. The advancement of ASU is taking place in the context of the design aspirations of the New American University.

Research universities both in the United States and around the world are the primary source of the knowledge and innovation that have driven the global economy and provided those of us in advanced nations with the standard of living that we have come to take for granted.

But in America and elsewhere, leading institutions tend to be *exclusive*—that is to say, they define their excellence based on exclusion. It is generally taken for granted that there are two types of universities: those that focus on academic excellence and discovery, and those that focus on access—providing a base level of higher education. Institutions that focus on academic excellence generally admit only the finest students, many of whom come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds and have enjoyed undeniable advantages. All others are expected to attend less competitive schools. In terms of societal outcomes, this implicit calculation is not only shortsighted, but, in the long run, it may be a fatal error. There is growing social and economic stratification between those with access to a quality higher education and those without. All too often, students who would most benefit from access to this most obvious avenue of upward mobility—those historically categorized as “disadvantaged” or “underrepresented”—are denied access either due to a lack of means or because they choose not to pursue due to a lack of

understanding of a high-quality university education.

Education is the means by which a skilled workforce is produced and the source of new knowledge capital and thus economic growth and advances in society, for the benefit of both the individual and the collective. The global economy requires skilled workers, and the wage gap between those with education and skills and those without continues to widen. More and more knowledge inputs are increasingly required to perform almost any job in the new global knowledge economy. The economic success of individuals contributes to the success of a society—in fact, it is the main driver. Without it, our nation may face a reduction in our quality of life in the next generation. To avert what sometimes appears to me an impending societal train wreck, education must become the central focus of society. In order for any nation to remain competitive, it is imperative that its universities prepare students to learn rapidly, and make them capable of integrating a broad range of disciplines in an evolving world.

If we continue to exclude a high proportion of the population from reaching their prosperity potential by excessive and sometimes arbitrary “culling,” we deprive countless individuals of opportunities to attain prosperity. We need to make more of an effort to understand how to educate greater numbers of individuals successfully, but we must also educate people to be successful. This economic dimension is intrinsic to the societal mission of colleges and universities. Individuals deprived of higher education through lack of funds represent not only personal opportunity lost, but also the loss of societal economic prosperity. Individuals deprived of college educations will likely earn lower wages and generate fewer jobs than they would have as graduates. A lack of higher education is not only a personal loss; it is a loss for all of society and the global economy.

We believe that many U.S. public universities, particularly research grade universities, have abandoned certain core elements of their public mission, and have in a sense morphed into hybrid institutions, or semi-privatized universities, that operate on a narrow band of engagement. ASU rejects the notion that excellence and access cannot be achieved in a single institution, and thus proposes the paradigm of the New American University. Our attempt to advance ASU on both agendas represents an effort to transcend this ubiquitous bifurcation and demonstrate that it is false. Our mission, as we have conceived it, is to build a comprehensive metropolitan research university that is an unparalleled combination of academic excellence and commitment to its social, economic, cultural and environmental setting. Excellence, access and impact are thus integral to our mission and integrated in a single institution.

ASU is a leader among 150 major research institutions with egalitarian admissions standards. Our approach at ASU has been to expand the capacity of the institution to meet enrollment demand, and to provide expanded educational opportunities to the many gifted and creative students who do not conform to a standard academic profile, as well as offering access to students who demonstrate every potential to succeed but lack the means to pursue a quality four-year undergraduate education. We have therefore committed ourselves to building an institution that combines the highest levels of academic excellence with access to a broad demographic, and to accomplish this at scale. Such an institution seeks

to provide the best possible education to the broadest possible spectrum of society, embracing the educational needs of the entire population—not only a select group, and not only the verbally or mathematically gifted. And its success will be measured not by who the university *excludes*, but rather by who the university *includes*, and from this inclusion will come the diversity necessary for the advancement of society. Our admissions standards are determined by our assessment of a potential student's ability to do university-level work, not by test scores or some other arbitrary indicator. Access means leaving no student outside of the institution who has the ability to do university-level work.

In support of our commitment to enhance access to quality higher education, we have established four campuses of differing focus yet equal quality across metropolitan Phoenix and populated them with the best faculty, state-of-the-art facilities and thousands of talented students from every state in the nation and 147 countries. Total enrollment of historically underserved students as a percentage of total student population has increased by 25 percent since 2003, with African American student enrollment experiencing a 64 percent increase.

Demographic diversification among ASU students is accompanied by differentiation in wealth. The average family income of the upper quintile of our students exceeds \$200,000 per year. The bottom quintile has a tenfold lower level of income, less than \$20,000 per year. ASU awarded a record \$519 million in financial aid to its students last year alone and has greatly expanded both

its investments in general financial aid, and in specific programs designed to help low-income Arizona students attend and graduate. The number of students enrolled from families below the poverty line has risen by roughly 500 percent and the number of Pell Grant recipients has grown by 56 percent since 2003. In May 2009, ASU announced the President Barack Obama Scholars program, which will more than triple the number of students from families with the greatest financial need who are eligible for financial aid that will cover the full cost of college attendance. President Obama asked other colleges and universities across the nation to follow ASU's lead in providing this type of program.

Earlier this summer, President Obama announced his American Graduation Initiative, which calls for the U.S. to once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. In response to this call to action, and consistent with its ongoing evolution as a model for a New American University, ASU is actively exploring and pursuing trajectories that will contribute meaningfully to the attainment of this goal. To learn more about our continuing and multifaceted efforts to advanced public higher education in terms of access, excellence and impact, please visit <http://newamericanuniversity.asu.edu>. 

Since July 2002, Michael M. Crow, Ph.D. has served as the 16th President of Arizona State University. Prior to joining ASU, he was executive vice provost of Columbia University, where he also was professor of science and technology policy in the School of International and Public Affairs.

