

A Year 'Round College Calendar: Advantages and Impediments

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Dr. Stephen Trachtenberg

The George Washington University

President

Testimony

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Stephen Joel Trachtenberg

President

The George Washington University

For

Mr. Chairman, I see that last week you gave President Bush a bust of his ancestor, James Weir, who fought in the battle of Kings Mountain – along with an ancestor of yours. You rightly called that Tennessee battle one of the “great stories of the American Revolution.”

We honor our ancestors for their bravery and courage. But we wouldn't fight wars today with the strategies of 1780.

I'm here today, to tell you that in higher education, we are trying to compete globally and conduct our business with the habits of colonial times – and earlier. We can't do that any longer.

So, Senator Alexander, and Senator Kennedy, thank you for inviting me to testify. I've submitted both a written statement for your review, and copies of a study on the year around university that we completed last year at The George Washington University.

My message in these materials is simple. We need to change. In the next few minutes let me briefly

...describe what's happened that makes change necessary...

...propose a specific change that could help keep American Universities

...competitive and cost effective

...suggest some things the federal government might do to nudge such a change along.

First, what's changed?

Numbers tell that story. For in the last half-century, there has been a quiet revolution in the number -- and diversity -- of Americans who want a college degree.

In 1952, when I started college, about 7% of men over 25 – and 5% of women -- had a four year degree. Last year it was about 27% of men and 23% of women. Only 200,000

African Americans had college degrees in 1950. Now it's 2.7 million.

There's no mystery about why. The latest Census figures show that people with only a high school diploma make about \$26,000. With a B.A., about \$50,000. With a graduate degree: \$72,000.

Meanwhile, universities have taken on roles they never had before.

We must offer courses in more and more disciplines. We are asked to continue the basic and applied research that keeps our nation in the forefront of innovation and assist job creation. We're asked to serve communities in new ways -- like the fourteen million dollars in uncompensated medical care GW provided to citizens of the District of Columbia last year.

Thus has higher education become more expensive. Our costs go up not because we're greedy, but because what we do outpaces the so-called cost of living index. For example, new security precautions and additional personnel added after the September 11 attacks drove up our expenses and our tuition.

Independent universities have relatively few sources of revenue. All universities compete with other worthy causes for scarce philanthropic dollars. Public institutions compete for the tax dollars allocated by State legislatures who are also trying to improve health care, build roads, and enhance homeland security. Universities raise tuition reluctantly because we want to offer educational opportunities to everyone who can benefit from them, not only the wealthy. Most universities and colleges have endowments insufficient to sustain excellence.

We have diligently cut costs. Faculty and staff salaries at many institutions have either been frozen or increased well below the cost of living. We've joined consortia to use our combined buying power to hold down the cost of commodities. We've outsourced services in order to obtain the best value for every dollar.

But producing a first rate college education stubbornly remains a labor-intensive process. We've had to charge more. At the University of Maryland, Senator Mikulski's alma mater, tuition increased 18% last year. In Senator Edwards' state, Clemson's tuition went up 19% this year. Nationally, tuition has increased about 5% a year over the last decade.

Is there anything more we can do to hold down costs?

There is.

The academic calendar on which we operate was created to suit an agrarian world. It fit the world of 1780, when tending crops and looking after livestock were more important than learning to read. To allow students to work on the family farm universities operated for slightly more than half the year -- generally, two 14 week semesters.

At a time when fewer than 2 percent of Americans work in agriculture -- when

agricultural production is so internationalized that we casually buy strawberries in November and corn on the cob in February -- such a system is hopelessly out of date. We need to be careful comparing universities to corporations. But when it comes to efficiency, such a comparison is apt.

Is there a business in America that would close facilities for six months while building new ones alongside them that would also run half a year?

I don't think so. But that is what states are pressed to do. They are building new campuses and buildings – and underusing the ones they've got.

Right now, such inefficiency is less evident. There is a population bulge keeping dormitories full. In ten years, that bulge will disappear. And the folly of this trend will be clear on the quads and classrooms of almost every campus.

I suggest moving instead to a program of full utilization.

Imagine that instead of two 14-week semesters we had three trimesters – with appropriate vacations. Students might be on campus for only two of the trimesters. At GW, we could increase our enrollment by at least a thousand students, yet have fewer students on campus at any one time.

Think of the advantages. Less competition for housing or classes. More income for the university. Lower tuition for students. Fewer students on the streets – ensuring the gratitude of neighbors and zoning boards.

There are other advantages. We would reduce the need to raise either private or federal or state money for as many new facilities. That would reduce the tax burden and the tuition burden. A year around calendar would enable us to increase the size of our entering classes without building new facilities – thus accommodating the growing number of students who will seek higher education and preparing for the downturn in that number in the subsequent generation.

Can it be done? Of course. In Chairman Gregg's state, Dartmouth has done it for a long time. But Dartmouth is the exception; it should be the rule.

Another benefit can be quantified. Compared to fifty years ago, we offer enormous numbers of graduate and professional degrees in the United States. Just in science and engineering – which directly affect our national security and prosperity – we awarded only about 13,500 degrees; by 1996 we awarded 95,000. In the early 50s, we awarded about 6,500 doctoral degrees; by 1997 it was nearly 43,000.

If we operated all year, we might even be able to offer some bachelors degrees in three years rather than four, saving an enormous amount for students and families. If a graduate or professional degree is now the currency valued by students and rewarded by the economy, perhaps the nature of the bachelor's degree can be rethought with a view

toward awarding a meaningful degree in less time.

Finally, there are some benefits apparent only to people who see what happens every spring, as graduating students prepare resumes.

We flood the market during the summer, and starve it during the rest of the year. We're out of synch with the greatest demand for help in the retail sector. We overwhelm research laboratories, congressional offices, law firms, lobbying organizations, and friends of our families with qualified employees during the season when they're slackest because they, too, are on vacation.

All this could change – if we can summon the will to change.

Would this be easy?

Absolutely not. There is always a constituency for the way things have always been. Still, I am convinced there are ways to achieve such change. To utilize our institutions more fully, it's not necessary for students to attend each summer; attending just one mandatory summer session in four years creates new income for our institutions, opportunities to increase enrollment without building facilities, and opens up an opportunity for universities to generate new and exciting programs throughout the year.

The details, for the moment, concern me less than the idea.

The Federal Government has an important role in promoting year around education.

For example, if students could use their Pell grants and guaranteed loans for twelve months of study rather than for just nine months, we'd accommodate demand for higher education all year.

Stafford loans should have the same rules. Let's say students use their limit during the regular nine month academic year – but plan to attend the third trimester? Why not give them a loan equal to the fall disbursement right away?

I also suggest a modest appropriation, say \$5 million, for a commission and a FIPSE competition for demonstration projects. I'm certain the results would stimulate many schools to act.

If we operated on a year around calendar, some students might choose to finish school more quickly rather than take off a semester. But most will choose to either work or vacation during a winter or spring term. For those who want to study or earn credit, universities can create vibrant internships, study abroad programs, and other educational programs during the fall or spring semester students might not be in residence. If they choose to work, they'll find less competition for employment.

Let me sum up.

We need a year-round university calendar like the one most enterprises operate on.

We need federal government programs to accommodate that probability.

We need it for the sake of the nation's economy.

We need it for the sake of our national preeminence in creating and disseminating knowledge.

We need it for the sake of the communities we serve.

Members of the Committee, universities cannot be separate from their societies. They belong to them. They help define them. In this Information Age, when we all know education is a full time job, we cannot give universities a half-time appointment.

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization,” Thomas Jefferson wrote, “it expects what never was and never will be.”

That's still true.

We honor Jefferson's principles – the ones fought for by those volunteers at Kings Mountain. But we honor the principles of their century best – by making those changes necessary for ours.

And now, I'm happy to take your questions.

Stephen Joel Trachtenberg
President
The George Washington University

Stephen Joel Trachtenberg is the 15th president of The George Washington University since its founding in 1821. At George Washington since 1988, Trachtenberg was previously president and professor of public administration for eleven years at the University of Hartford. Prior to that, he was for eight years at Boston University as Dean of Arts and Sciences and Vice President.

During the Johnson administration, he was special assistant to the U.S. Education Commissioner, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Preceding his academic career, he was an attorney for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and an aide to a U.S. Congressman.

Mr. Trachtenberg's books and articles in academic and lay journals have received wide acclaim. Recognition for his contributions to education includes numerous honorary degrees. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, the Council on Foreign Relations, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Mr. Trachtenberg earned the Bachelor of

Arts degree from Columbia University in 1959, the Juris Doctor from Yale University in 1962, and the Master of Public Administration from Harvard University in 1966.

Mr. Trachtenberg is 2004 Chairman of the District of Columbia Chamber of Commerce and has been invited to serve on the White House Fellows Regional Selection Panel. For the past three years, Mr. Trachtenberg has chaired the Rhodes Scholarship Selection Committee for the District of Columbia and Maryland. In 2003 he was presented with the Albert H. Sabin Humanitarian Award. In 2002 he received the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Medal of Merit. In 2000 King Mohammed VI of Morocco decorated him as a "Grand Officier Du Wissam Al Alaoui." In 1997, the U.S. State Department gave him its Distinguished Public Service Award. In 1995, Columbia University honored him with the John Hay Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement.

He is married and has two sons.