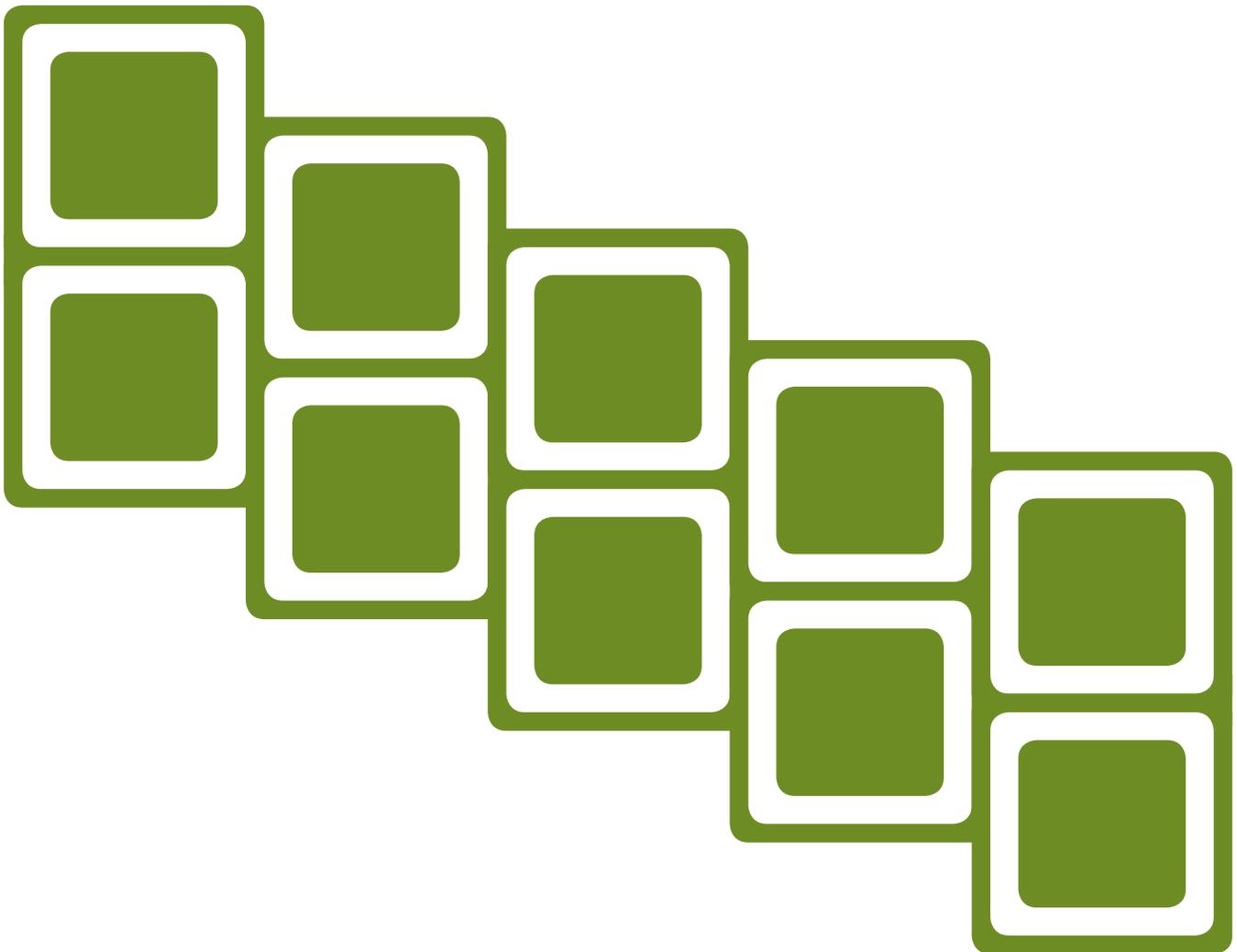


Summer Academe

Forum

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Summer Session: Present State and Future Directions

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Summer sessions at universities across North America are changing as major changes take place in higher education. In order to get a snapshot of the current state of and a sense of the future for summer session at universities and colleges, the presidents of AUSS (Rick Russo), NAASS (Gary Simon), NCCSS (Alicia Bingham), and WASSA (Tom Radmilovich) were asked to give their views in a teleconference roundtable chaired by Bill Kops, academic editor of *Summer Academe*. This forum article summarizes their perspectives on questions about summer sessions' present state and future directions.

What do you think? Do you agree or disagree with their perspectives? Feel free to forward your comments and viewpoints to *Summer Academe*—responses will be published in the next volume of the journal and on the NAASS website.

What is the present state of summer sessions at universities and colleges?

Summer sessions are in a state of flux, moving from their traditional role, as somewhat independent, revenue-generating units that served students who had a particular interest in taking courses during the summer, to a role that is more integrated with year-round operations and involves mainstream issues, including student recruitment and retention, time-to-graduation rates, and new program development.

While this evolution is positive, this more integrated role has the potential to undermine summer sessions as distinct entities because new budget models and a desire for control by college deans can lead to summer sessions becoming decentralized and incorporated into mainstream operations. As this begins to occur, university administrators need to be aware that such organizational changes should be made for the right reasons, rather than for a desire to pick it apart in the hopes of cashing in on past successes. When everyone is on the same page, policies are clear and expectations are known, resulting in a synergy across campus; however, any effort to decentralize can result in a breakdown of streamlined processes.

Another way of thinking about the changing role of summer sessions is to reinforce summer session programs as a problem-solving and innovating force within the university to help deal with the issues, such as reducing time to earn a degree, improving retention rates, creating capacity, and supporting enrollment management.

What are the drivers of change in the evolution of summer sessions?

The presidents identified a number of key drivers of change:

- Demographic—older students coming to campus who are looking for more flexibility in completing degrees by taking advantage of compressed and online courses
- Advanced degree requirements—many professions and accrediting bodies now demand higher degrees, resulting in adult students wanting to complete academic requirements as quickly as possible
- Competition—universities and colleges now compete for new students, both domestic and international
- Technology—students are looking for new ways to learn, specifically with online and blended courses
- Financial crisis—universities are facing reduced funding while also facing demands for greater operational efficiencies: graduating students on time and keeping operating costs low
- Increasing demands—federal financial aid funding requires more students to graduate on time

How would you characterize summer sessions in the future?

The prediction is summer sessions will continue to become more integrated into the campus structure. To successfully integrate more fully with the campus structure yet maintain a distinct identity, summer sessions will need to walk a fine line—being an exemplar for innovation, good management, and academic integrity while still using the solid business models that have served them well in the past.

A related prediction is that summer sessions will increasingly take on the role of problem solvers on their campuses. As in the past, summer sessions will remain well-positioned to introduce and offer courses and programs that support issues and initiatives facing universities: increase programs for high school students, recruit student populations in the summer that are not currently represented on campuses, and offer more varied opportunities for students, such as study abroad and internships.

While power at universities will continue to reside in academic departments, the prediction is that summer sessions will play important roles within universities. In order to do this, summer sessions will need to continue to work hard to gain prominence within the university, including finding a place at the table to engage in these strategic discussions. Working with other units, summer sessions can broaden their support to students as they transition in their academic careers and help them connect across interdisciplinary boundaries. As well, summer sessions will continue to incubate innovative programs, generate revenue, and operate with a high level of efficiency.

Whatever changes happen, summer session administrators will need to be prepared and advocate both within and outside the university to be recognized for the contribution summer sessions can make to deal with the critical issues at their universities and in higher education generally. No doubt, the future will be both challenging and exciting! This prospect is best described by Ken Burrows (2013) in a wonderful essay titled “No Country for Old Men”:

Now, in the midst of recession, with business-as-usual in doubt and the near certainty that only the deluded and complacent believe that things will go back comfortably to what they were, I think the need for leadership in and by summer sessions, and therefore by NAASS, has never been clearer and the opportunity never greater. (p. 2)

Reference

Burrows, K. (2013). No country for old men. *Summer Academe*, 7.