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What is higher education?

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What is higher education? (DRAFT COPY 10/1/2001)

"The problems that exist in the world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking we were at when we created them." – Albert Einstein

What is higher education? It is a key tool to our gaining the level of thinking Einstein describes – the level of thinking needed to solve the problems that exist in the world today. I am not saying higher education is the only thing that prepares people to think – far from it. But higher education, if it does what it is meant to do, prepares us with a solid base of skills to think critically and analytically to deal successfully with an ever-changing world. It instills in us the desire and ability to be lifelong learners, able to grow and participate as members of both local and global communities. Learning skills, critical analysis skills, skills that allow us to deal with and be successful in the ever-changing world around us are the skills higher education must provide.

Einstein also said that *"education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school,"* and while we may smile at that, it is worth true consideration. As knowledge explodes in our world today, making old information obsolete as new is discovered, it is imperative that we learn how to learn, how to

think, how to make connections we wouldn't otherwise make. When higher education gives us that, it gives us a key to unlock the complexities of our fast-paced, interrelated world. Knowing how to learn, how to think critically, how to recognize similarities and differences and make connections, how to examine what needs to be done and do it, allows us to envision the future and to work toward it.

Higher education isn't an end in itself; it's a benchmark on life's learning continuum. If it's successful, it also is a beginning – a beginning that allows us to start again and again whenever we have something new to learn, and to do so with the self-assurance that we can master this, as well as with a lively curiosity, and an eagerness to develop our skills further.