

WERA TASK FORCE CHARGE
Challenges and Transformations of Higher Education Worldwide
World Education Research Association
March 2012

Charge

The WERA Task Force on the Challenges and Transformations of Higher Education Worldwide is charged with examining critical issues related to higher education from a global perspective. Many of the themes are similar across nations, continents, and hemispheres despite the distinctive challenges and opportunities in specific countries and cultures. The Task Force will first identify core areas of emphasis (a) that are salient worldwide and (b) where there is a sufficient base of empirical knowledge. Then, the Task Force will undertake a synthesis of the relevant research literature and prepare a report and recommendations, with the goal of providing an overview of the state of the empirical knowledge, core trends and issues, future research directions, and relevant policy based on extant research.

Identifying and defining the issues meriting attention is a priority activity for the Task Force. Topics currently dominating discussion of higher education nationally and internationally is its expansion worldwide; quality, access, and opportunity; the demography of students at undergraduate and graduate levels (including the presence and openness to international students); rising costs and affordable models of financing; the role of state policy in shaping priorities within institutions of higher education; the structure, nature, and purposes of government funding of higher education faculty and institutions; career paths and employment patterns within higher education, in particular with respect to full-time and contingent faculty work forces; and the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of different forms of higher education assessment systems (including attention to student outcomes and faculty productivity). Other topics on an international stage for higher education are distance learning, innovative technology, and the global spread of higher education institutions across the world. In selecting among such issues, the Task Force is delegated latitude to determine how best to focus its work and set priorities.

Timetable

The Task Force is expected to have a detailed plan and outline of its work and a timetable for consideration by the WERA Council meeting in Sydney in December 2012. The Task Force will work collaboratively using e-mail, shared space on the WERA website, and (video) conference call capacity to move these projects forward and to completion. A draft report will be prepared in time for consideration at the WERA Council meeting in November/December 2013.

About Task Forces

Task forces aim to produce major research reports that can help guide or shape education research and relevant education policy on significant worldwide issues for years to come. Task force reports will be distributed widely to relevant research and policy audiences and made freely accessible on the WERA website. The reports will also form the basis of high profile, major events at WERA Focal Meetings, video broadcasts on the WERA website, and meetings with relevant organizations and agencies whose programs and policies should be shaped by these reports.