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IAUP Newsletter

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Differentiating Universities



At the President's Retreat sponsored by NAC (North American Council) in Chicago, George Dehne, President of GDA Integrated Services, spoke about Differentiating Universities.

Mr. Dehne defined distinctiveness as those special attributes or factors that give an institution an identity for which it is known, admired, and valued. When present, it gives a competitive advantage for attracting students of choice, financial support, and public favor. Distinctions are not necessarily unique, but they must distinguish an institution within its region, its size, or its institutional type.

Based on his experience, Mr. Dehne has found that only 1 of 3 think they have a valuable distinction but don't, and 1 of 3 have valuable distinctions but don't know what they are.

Distinctions may be institutional (Brown University's open curriculum), academic tone (intellectual rigor at the University of Chicago), curriculum (co-ops at Northeastern University), academic majors (auto restoration at McPherson College), out of class experiences (St. Lawrence University's residential colleges), location, athletics, or religious affiliation.

In developing distinctions, institutions should recognize that distinctions are often just "repackaging" what you are already doing. Still, one needs to survey constituents, get confirmation of a distinction from an outside source, and then test the impact of any proposed initiative on target audiences.

There are also significant hurdles to publicly creating a distinction, including the egalitarian nature of higher education, the need for greater resources, and the fear that such a designation will change the nature of the institution. Once established, however, an institution can use its distinctiveness to find prospective donors with an interest in the program/activity, seek undergraduate students nationwide with an interest in that program/activity, develop a center or institute around the activity, or align the activity with other worthy institutions having similar interests.

GEORGE DEHNE has recently developed a short survey on a variety of major world issues. Your participation will contribute greatly to the international public's appreciation of the leaders of their higher education institutions. University leaders have an important voice to shape public discourse, but only if that voice is heard. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and submit your answers. You can be sure your answers will be kept confidential: <http://www.surveymhost.com/iaupglobal/>

This survey and the resulting analysis is one way for the international community of university leaders to make their views known. If you would like to see the results of the survey, please enter your name and email address at the end

of the survey. To ensure confidentiality, your name will not be connected to your completed survey.

George Dehne is president of George Dehne & Associates, Inc., which is comprised of two divisions, GDA Research and GDA Integrated Services. GDA Research focuses on market research and consulting, specializing in creating strategies for admissions, financial aid and public relations. GDA Integrated Services offers a complete line of services for student recruitment and public relations ranging from direct mail and telemarketing to audio-video and publication production. Together, the two divisions have worked with more than 300 colleges and universities throughout the United States.

IAUP - International Association of University Presidents
809 United Nations Plaza,
New York, NY 10017-3580 - U.S.A.