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For Immediate Release

Education leaders explore future of higher education

Lincoln, Neb. — Representatives from all sectors of education met on the campus of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln this week to focus on the future of higher education and how to anticipate and meet students' needs through 2020 and beyond.

The Department of Educational Administration at UNL co-hosted the forum with TG, a public nonprofit organization that administers the Federal Family Education Loan Program. Thirty-eight participants representing K-12 schools, community colleges, public- and private colleges and universities, and the Executive Director of the postsecondary coordinating commission attended the event.

"We wanted to offer this forum to encourage discussion and strategy development within and among all of the various educational entities," said Brent Cejda, associate professor of educational administration at UNL and coordinator of the event. "This forum provided a context for all of us to look for win-win situations that can enhance the educational experience for students across all levels."

During the forum, the discussion centered on four main areas that the participants felt would have significant impact on education over the next 20 years:

- The teaching/learning environment
- Students' cultural backgrounds and their effects on participation rates
- Higher education recruitment, retention, and time-to-degree
- Development and use of technology

"Throughout the discussion, several themes kept emerging," said Cejda. "Of primary importance is the continuing need to collaborate and cooperate with each other so that students can progress from K-12 through higher education as seamlessly as possible. We also looked at the ways that students are changing and that their educational needs are also changing."

For example, Cejda noted that a growing number of individuals are returning to community colleges already having attained a bachelor's degree, looking for specific courses for personal enrichment or professional certification. These students have very different needs than those who come to a community college through a traditional K-12 experience. In addition, students from rural areas may not have access to a traditional campus, but may be served better by distance education or online learning opportunities.

In both cases, technology can play a major role in the student experience. But these technologies (and the processes that they serve) need to be more uniformly aligned with the student's needs.

"I was particularly pleased," said Cejda, "with the participation from all levels and types of educational institutions within the state. At the end of the day, participants expressed enough interest in continuing discussion about mutually beneficial cooperation and collaboration that the Department is already looking at ways to expand and continue the dialogue."

Sue McMillin, TG president and CEO, echoed the significance of the forum. "It is not only fitting, but imperative that we take time to discuss the future of higher education given what we know about how much a college education influences the future of both individuals and society. We look forward to a continued dialogue and the actions that will result," she commented.

A report on the outcomes and recommendations from the forum will be available by Sept. 1, 2006, from TG's Web site at www.tgslc.org.

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About TG

TG is a public, nonprofit corporation that helps to create access to higher education for millions of families and students through its role as an administrator of the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP). Its vision is to be the premier source of information, financing, and assistance to help all families and students realize their educational and career dreams. Additional information about TG can be found online at <http://www.tgslc.org>.