



Making Reform Work

Robert Zemsky

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Making Reform Work is a practical narrative of ideas that begins by describing who is saying what about American higher education—who's angry, who's disappointed, and why. Most of the pleas for changing American colleges and universities that originate outside the academy are lamentations on a small number of too often repeated themes. The critique from within the academy focuses on issues principally involving money and the power of the market to change colleges and universities. Sandwiched between these perspectives is a public that still has faith in an enterprise that it really doesn't understand.

Robert Zemsky, one of a select group of scholars who participated in Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings's 2005 Commission on the Future of Higher Education, signed off on the commission's report with reluctance. In *Making Reform Work* he presents the ideas he believes *should* have come from that group to forge a practical agenda for change. Zemsky argues that improving higher education will require enlisting faculty leadership, on the one hand, and, on the other, a strategy for changing the higher education system writ large.

Directing his attention from what can't be done to what can be done, Zemsky provides numerous suggestions. These include a renewed effort to help students' performance in high schools and a stronger focus on the science of active learning, not just teaching methods. He concludes by suggesting a series of dislodging events—for example, making a three-year baccalaureate the standard undergraduate degree, congressional rethinking of student aid in the wake of the loan scandal, and a change in the rules governing endowments—that could break the gridlock that today holds higher education reform captive.

Making Reform Work offers three rules for successful college and university transformation: don't vilify, don't play games, and come to the table with a well-thought-out strategy rather than a sharply worded lamentation.

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