



# EACUBO AT 100 — THE VALUE PROPOSITION, THEN AND NOW

**E**ACUBO members gathered in Toronto for the annual meeting in October 2008 when U.S. and world economies unraveled. As a chief business officer at my then-university for only four months, I—like many others in attendance—felt intensely conflicted about being away from campus, but I also felt the pull to seek insights and guidance from colleagues.

That trusted network of peers first began supporting each other 100 years ago. W. O. Miller of the University of Pennsylvania recounted in a letter his experiences on the founding of the Eastern Association of College and University Business Officers (EACUBO) in 1919. He and F. H. Eckels from the University of Pittsburgh in June 1919 “expressed our feeling that a permanent organization of business officers would be a fine thing.” Over the next year these two men, plus representatives from 15 other institutions, organized “The Association of Business Officers of the Universities and Colleges of the Eastern States” and held its first annual meeting at Johns Hopkins University.



G. C. Wintringer from Princeton University then attended the 1920 meeting of what is now the Central Association of College and University Business Officers (CACUBO) and brought ideas from that organization to the fledgling group. This was the first example of cooperation between the sibling associations.

In 1923, joint meetings began with what is now the Western Association of College and University Business Officers (WACUBO). The association did not extend to the New England states until 1924, when “The Association of Business Officers of New England Educational Institutions” joined the organization. That combined group was renamed EACUBO in 1939.

There were a variety of reasons cited for EACUBO’s formation. Besides it being “a fine thing,” there “was an urgent need on the part of the representatives (the business officers) to associate with other members of their guild, to discuss their common problems, and to seek out better ways to do the things that had to be done.” Not surprisingly, the early topics of EACUBO’s meetings were budgets, accounting, and business organization.

Early in its history, in 1922, a first set of principles was published: *College and University Finance* by Trevor Arnett, who was also a frequent speaker at EACUBO meetings in the association’s early years. When noting that an early presenter wrote in regard to dining halls, “We profited by the mistakes of other places. We learned more what not to do than what to do,” EACUBO’s long-time historian, Mary M. Lai of Long Island University, observed:

- Those last remarks are very significant, with respect to the role the Eastern Association was beginning to fill in the lives of these business officers. It was not so much the formal papers presented on the programs from year to year, although the record indicated they were relevant indeed to the problems of the day. It was rather that the Association provided business officers someone to turn to, someone whom they could visit or call on a first name basis, someone who was dealing with their kind of problem too, and was willing to take time out to help. This was the real value of the Association and the friendships it engendered.

When I joined the EACUBO Workshop Committee in 1993, more than 60 years later, that real value was as alive and important as ever, and it has been a distinction of EACUBO ever since. Indeed, when that financial crisis hit in 2008, the EACUBO annual meeting provided a much-needed forum for members to compare experiences, share ideas, and—frankly—commiserate with one another during a time of extreme uncertainty. EACUBO’s records show numerous examples of the camaraderie amongst its members that solved countless problems—small to existential—for higher education in the eastern region.

Fast forward to the next decade, and EACUBO’s leaders took stock of the new realities in our industry. Could (and should) EACUBO continue a role that was valued by its members? How would it continue to be relevant and worthwhile? Under the leadership of EACUBO President Roger Stackpoole, the association commenced a thorough self-examination of its reason-for-being as well as its organizational structure and premises. Among the realities facing higher education were:

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<sup>1</sup> *Seventy-Five Years in Review, Eastern Association of College and University Business Officers, 1994, page 4.*

<sup>2</sup> *Seventy-Five Years in Review, page 8.*

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- Growing concern over access and affordability;
  - Growing concern around the sustainability of the current economics of higher education;
  - Emerging new uses of instructional technology with significant disruptive potential; and,
  - Greater need for collaboration and innovation.

Over the next two years, EACUBO developed an “envisioned future” that committed it to help our members adjust to the rapid pace of change and extend the role of the business officer to have a strategic and meaningful impact on her/his institution’s thriving in this time of uncertainty. This is demonstrated in EACUBO’s Core Purpose and Mission Statement that emanated from this collaborative work:

- **Core Purpose:** *We care about the formation of leaders to strengthen education, which contributes to a better world.*
- **Mission Statement:** *We prepare and support financial and administrative leaders as pivotal strategic partners, enabling their academic institutions to thrive.*

To a person, the leadership of EACUBO—who always have and continue to come directly from the membership itself—focus on what will help individual members grow, prosper, and make a meaningful contribution to the strategic discussions amongst the leadership of our institutions. Whether it be our mentorship program, *Next Generation Business Officer* workshop, collaborative programs with other regions and with National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO)—such as the inaugural offering of the *Women’s Leadership Forum*, which occurred in New York City recently—or its annual meeting and workshop, EACUBO offers you, its members, access to innovative ideas, creative thinkers, networking opportunities, and friendships that will continue to help you in your career and at your institution.

EACUBO continually strives in all that it does to realize its Value Proposition:

- *We help our members increase their capacity to embrace and foster new thinking, create opportunities, and generate solutions.*

Looking back 100 years, though the problems seem bigger, the requirements more complex, and the outcomes arguably more consequential, the purpose for EACUBO’s forming still holds true. It is by recommitting to our envisioned future and to you, our members, that EACUBO stays not only relevant but necessary in addressing the significant challenges we face. My own career has been shaped and aided significantly by my EACUBO experiences and colleagues.

How might yours?

J. Michael Gower  
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<sup>3</sup> *Seventy-Five Years in Review*, page 14.