


Accountability in Higher Education

The View from 35,000 feet

Florida Board of Governors
Student Achievement Subcommittee

Paul E. Lingenfelter

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Accountability has been around for a long time

- Florida 1971 educational accountability act
- Florida “Fact Book” from 1968-69
- *Handbook of Academic Evaluation*, Paul L. Dressel, Jossey-Bass, 1976




So what's new?

Old Expectation

- 20% to 30%
educated to BA level
- Student mostly
(entirely) responsible
for student learning

New Expectation

- 50% to 60%
educated to BA level
- Schools and colleges
also (mostly)
responsible for
student learning



What will such unprecedented attainment require?


- Clarity about our goals
- Building student engagement and capacity
- Re-orientating the teaching process
 - From assessment for sorting and selecting
 - Toward assessment for successful learning



The Goal:

- The world's highest quality system of higher education, with
- Very high levels of successful participation

Accountability is a means toward this end.



Why is accountability hard in higher education?

- Widely different learning goals
- Different student populations
- Decentralized decision-making
- Hard to measure outcomes
 - Critical thinking
 - Creativity
 - Professional judgment



Where are the biggest pitfalls?

- Reducing standards to the easy
- Conceding too much / or too little to professional judgment
- Too many measures, too many goals
- Over-centralization, homogenization



What is being tried?

- Performance reporting and funding
- Assessment of learning on campus
- Assessment of learning environments



Performance reporting and funding – why do they under-perform?

- Papering the files
- Weak connections between policy goals and institutional practice
- Formulaic pitfalls




Assessment of Learning

- Professional exams
- College learning exams
 - CAAP and WorkKeys
 - Graduate record exams
- National Adult Literacy Survey
- Collegiate Learning Assessment



Assessment of learning environments

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)




“Public Accountability for Student Learning”

New report of the Business Higher Education Forum

Assessment: Tools to evaluate performance


Accountability: Communicating performance in terms of goals

The Goal: Increase access and close achievement gaps without diminishing quality



“Public Accountability for Student Learning”

- K-12 Standards assessment
 - All pupils taught to same standard
 - Centralized curriculum and assessment
 - Assessment and accountability easily connected




“Public Accountability for Student Learning”

K-12 approach not workable for higher education


“A single system, integrated through a common vocabulary with common metrics, [is] neither practical nor appropriate, given the diversity and decentralization of American higher education.”

p.22



“Public Accountability for Student Learning”


“There are multiple actors involved in accountability for quality in higher education. Each entity should do what it does best and with greatest legitimacy. Duplication of effort should be avoided.” *p.23*



“Public Accountability for Student Learning”

- Institutional Responsibilities
 - Set goals for learning appropriate to mission
 - Assess results
 - Communicate goals and results

p. 24



“Public Accountability for Student Learning”

- State Responsibilities
 - Set statewide goals for learning across all sectors
 - Require sector-level learning assessments
 - Focus on cross-sector student flow
 - Promote public evaluation of statewide and institutional results *p.24*



What will a good accountability system do?

One


- Focus attention on a few important results at each level of the system
- Establish ambitious standards of quality
- Be vertically integrated, without top-down control



What will a good accountability system do?

Two

-
- Engage the creativity and initiative of people whose work affects performance
 - Emphasize improving performance / monitor results
 - Celebrate achievement, address gaps



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Getting a lot closer, this is my first grandchild!

