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A Fundamentally New Approach to Accountability: Putting State Policy Issues First

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Presented at:

2003 ASHE Forum on Public Policy and Higher Education

Portland, Oregon

November 13, 2003



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The Public Policy Problem: Lack of Successful Approaches to Accountability in Higher Education

- Few, if any, successful models (despite years of efforts)
- Policymakers need information to guide policy and budgets, assess investments
 - Higher education is of increasing importance to civic and economic health
 - Huge challenges (growth, cost, affordability, achievement gaps, economic development)
 - Lack of data appropriate for supporting state policy and funding decisions



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California Project

- Senate commissioned a study
 - “...over-arching accountability system...that measures progress made in addressing clear and definable state policy goals.”
- November, 2002 Report
 - Study other states
 - California “accountability” efforts
 - Interviews: educators, policymakers
- Advisory group further developed framework
- Legislation to be introduced



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How is this “Fundamentally New”?

- Focus on state goals and priorities, not institutional effectiveness
- Designed explicitly to bridge “culture gap” through three key distinctions
 - State-level v institutional accountability
 - Accountability for student success v assessment of student learning
 - Accountability v performance budgeting



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The “Culture Gap”

Legislators want:

- “digestible pieces” of information
- “factoids that fit on a business card”
- no ambiguity, explanations, caveats, excuses
- “report cards”
- quick answers (term limits)
- return on investment (business techniques ok)
- consequences
- freedom to raise “member” issues

The Culture Gap (cont.)



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Educators want:

- respect for the complexity of the enterprise
- appreciation of diverse and broad missions
- qualitative indicators that defy “report cards”
- longer time-frame
- business concepts out of academia
- protection from micro-management
- continued autonomy in governance
- consistency in accountability concerns



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Bridging the Gap

Assuring that this is about:

- Collective accountability for meeting state goals
- Informing choices about public policy

And is *not* about:

- Comparing and monitoring campus performance
- Auditing expenditures
- Evaluating academic program quality
- Measuring student learning
- Replacing discretion with formulas



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Common Weaknesses in State Accountability Systems

1. Too much focus on institutional performance
 - too little on statewide performance and policy
2. Attempt to use measures of student learning in state reporting system
 - available measures not well suited for state policy
 - fail to consider governing board role in assessment
3. Lack of workable mechanisms for using data to influence budgets
 - reliance on formulaic performance budgeting
 - many states now abandoning or suspending



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Key Features of California Framework To Avoid Common Problems

1. Collective accountability for achieving state goals
2. Clear distinctions between state-level and institutional accountability, but linked
3. State-level report useful for policy and budget development
4. Institutional accountability that promotes state goal achievement
5. Shared responsibility for student learning



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State-level v Institutional Accountability

	<u>State-level accountability</u>	<u>Institutional accountability</u>
Primary purpose:	Meet state goals	Improve institutions
Appropriate interventions:	State policy	Institutional policy and practice
Appropriate level of analysis:	State/regional/ system	Institution



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State Reporting System – Example #1

Is college affordable?

- Percent of family income needed to pay, after financial aid, by income quintile

Possible interventions:

- State policy: student fee policy
- Budget policy: Cal Grant award levels
- Segmental policy: targeting institutional aid toward high need populations



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State Reporting System – Example #2

Are students achieving their educational goals?

- BA graduation rates for students beginning at community college with transfer intent
 - New measure needed

Possible interventions:

- State policy: K-16 alignment of exit/entrance
- Budget policy: invest in statewide articulation efforts
- Segmental policy: earlier identification of transfer-bound; counseling; articulation



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Institutional Accountability and Reporting

Each segment is responsible for:

- Establishing internal accountability processes
- Aligning internal priorities with state goals
- Reporting data and submitting annual report:
 1. Main priorities for each state goal area
 2. Major activities underway to address priorities
 3. Performance indicators used to track progress (not actual data)
 4. Highlights from data relevant to state policy
 5. Description of process and progress in assessing student learning



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Measure Student Success; Monitor Learning

- State reporting focuses on broad measures of student success, e.g.,
 - Rates of completion of degrees and certificates
 - Success of remediation efforts
 - Pass rates on selected licensing exams
 - Employer satisfaction with graduates
- Segments continue with qualitative assessment of student learning
 - Report annually on processes and how used to improve programs and learning

Tiered Accountability



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State Policy Goals

State Reporting System

Statewide Indicators

Regional Indicators

Segment Indicators

Annual
Report

Annual
Report

Annual
Report

Annual
Report

**CCC Reporting
System**

**CSU Reporting
System**

**UC Reporting
System**

**Independents
Reporting System**



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The Importance of Effective Accountability

- Higher education at the crossroads
 - Declining state revenues and *share* of budget
 - Value as public good seems to be declining
 - Ironic: more important to state economy
- Effective accountability may hold key to restoring public stature of higher education
 - Demonstrate connections between state investments and civic and economic health
 - New models, focused on public purposes instead of institutions, are needed