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Accountability for State Policy Purposes: A Different Focus

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Presented at:

California Association for Institutional Research (CAIR)

Annual Meeting

Anaheim, CA

November 18, 2004

California State University, Sacramento



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Outline of Presentation

- Accountability in higher education
- The SB 1331 model
- California: the need for a statewide agenda and accountability
- Concluding thoughts about IR



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IT'S ABOUT TIME.....
BUT,
WHAT'S IT ABOUT?



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Accountability Defined

“The public presentation and communication of evidence about performance in relation to goals”

Source: Business Higher Education Forum



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The Accountability Problem

- Lack of successful models
- Policymakers lack information to support state policy and funding decisions
- The “Culture Gap” in higher education accountability



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Bridging the “Culture Gap”

Assuring that this is about:

- *Collective* accountability – including policymakers – for meeting state needs
- Determining how each sector can best contribute appropriate to its mission

And not about:

- Blame, embarrassment, sanctions
- Micromanagement by policymakers
- Auditing expenditures



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A Typical Situation

“A performance measurement system was designed and partially implemented in 2001. While work on improving the system continued over the next two years, significant problems with the comparability of the data across the campuses prevented the publication of performance results and agreement was never reached between the campuses and the Board on a list of performance indicators.”



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Common Obstacles to Workable State Accountability Systems

- Confusion about purpose and audience
 - Data dumps!
- Too much focus on institutions; not enough on state outcomes
- Attempts to measure student learning in a state reporting system
- Lack of workable mechanisms to link data and budget



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Effective Institutions Do Not Always Add Up to Meeting the State's Needs

- Good graduation rates at all institutions
 - But too few people getting educated
- Community colleges preparing transfers and transfers doing well at universities
 - But no room for all transfer-ready students
- High pass rates on teacher certification
 - But serious state teacher shortages

Learning Is an Important Educational Outcome but...



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The Problem:

- Good state-level measures not available
- Results of campus-level assessment not useful for state level policymaking

The Solution:

- Appropriate division of labor
- Institutions should work to improve assessment and demonstrate its value
- Policymakers should monitor assessment



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Linking Accountability and Budgets

The key question:

How best to use performance data to influence budget decisions

- Performance budgeting is but one way to do this and it has not proven very effective
- 14 states recently terminated, reduced, or suspended



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Performance Budgeting in Practice

- Arguments about targets, formulas, starting point (base), uncontrollable factors
- Raises stakes for perfect measures
- Budget constraints
 - Is performance not important when funds are scarce?
- Marginalizes “performance” (the other 98%?)
- Encourages audit mentality
- The quandary of unmet targets



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What's the Alternative?

- Use existing budget processes!
- Design reporting systems to generate data useful in budget decisions
- Make sure that the data is available to decision makers
- Help decision makers use data to make better decisions – draw connections



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The Once and Future Accountability Framework

SB 1331

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Prior Approaches: No Coordination, No Context, Too Much Data

- UC and CSU “partnerships/compacts”
 - Budget stability, not accountability
 - “performance indicators” anything but
 - No legislative buy-in
- CCC Partnership for Excellence
 - To secure additional funding
 - Typical conflict over goals, funding levels
- CPEC performance indicator report
 - Data dump: no context
- No involvement of independents



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The Context

➤ Senate commissioned a study

“...over-arching accountability system...that measures progress made in addressing clear and definable state policy goals.”

“An Accountability Framework for California Higher Education” November, 2002

➤ Subsequent steps

- Senator Alpert formed advisory group
- Final report prepared
- Legislation passed but vetoed: SB 1331

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Key Features of Framework

1. Collective accountability for achieving state goals
2. Clear distinctions between state-level and institutional accountability: “tiers”
3. State-level report useful for policy and budget development
4. Institutional accountability that promotes state goal achievement
5. Provision for monitoring student 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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Annual State-level Report



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- Organized by state goals and key questions
- A few *policy-relevant* indicators per question
- State/regional/system aggregate data
- Breakdowns: race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic and Cal Grant status where possible
- National comparisons
- Develop new indicators where necessary



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Educational Opportunity

All Californians should have reasonable and equal opportunities to attend college

Key Questions:

- Are high school graduates prepared for college?
- Are adults prepared for college?
- Is college affordable?



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Participation

California higher education should serve a large and diverse population

Key Questions:

- How many attend college?
- Are we able to enroll all eligible students who wish to attend?
- Does the college environment support diversity in all its forms?



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Student Success

California higher education should prepare students well for life and work

Key Questions:

- Are students achieving their educational goals?
- Are students learning?
- Are students and employers satisfied with what our colleges provide?



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Public Benefits

California higher education should benefit the state and its people

Key Questions:

- Does college improve individual quality of life?
- Does higher education enhance the state's economic prosperity?
- Does higher education have a positive impact on social and civic life?



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Each Segment is Responsible for:

- Aligning internal priorities with state goals
- Ensuring institutional effectiveness
- 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 relevant to state policy
 5. Description of learning goals, assessment process and progress



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Principles

1. Purpose of state-level accountability

To help policymakers design, maintain, and fund an education system that meets state goals and guides segments toward maintaining effective institutions consistent with state goals

2. Institutional accountability and governance

Monitoring performance of individual colleges is responsibility of governing boards

3. Linking state and institutional accountability

Segments should conduct institutional accountability within framework of state goals



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Principles

4. Outcomes information

State reporting system should have only data that help policymakers evaluate funding/policy options

5. Student learning

Assessment of student learning is the responsibility of the segments; state should monitor those assessment processes

6. Relating accountability to budgets

Data should help identify priorities for funding with data-driven discussions about budget sufficiency and priorities becoming routine part of existing processes



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Principles

7. Making the data useful

Data should be communicated publicly in a concise manner that conveys clearly the relevance of each measure to state policy choices

8. Sustaining the system

A strong, competent, and independent steward is needed to build and maintain system so as to earn support of policymakers and educators alike



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California Dreamin' (Time to Wake Up!)

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Current Status

- SB 1331 vetoed
- No *apparent* role by Governor/Secretary
- CPEC moving ahead without support
- Huge battles over student-level data
- Governor continuing separate partnerships
- New district-level mandate for CCC
- Where is the state agenda???



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“Facing Reality: California Needs a Statewide Agenda to Improve Higher Education Outcomes”

<http://www.csus.edu/ihe/Pages/Publications.html>

Conclusions:

- California is under-performing
- CA lacks sense of urgency found elsewhere
- Diagnosis and data analysis is not occurring
- No emerging leadership



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Why California Needs a State Agenda and Accountability System

From *Measuring Up*:

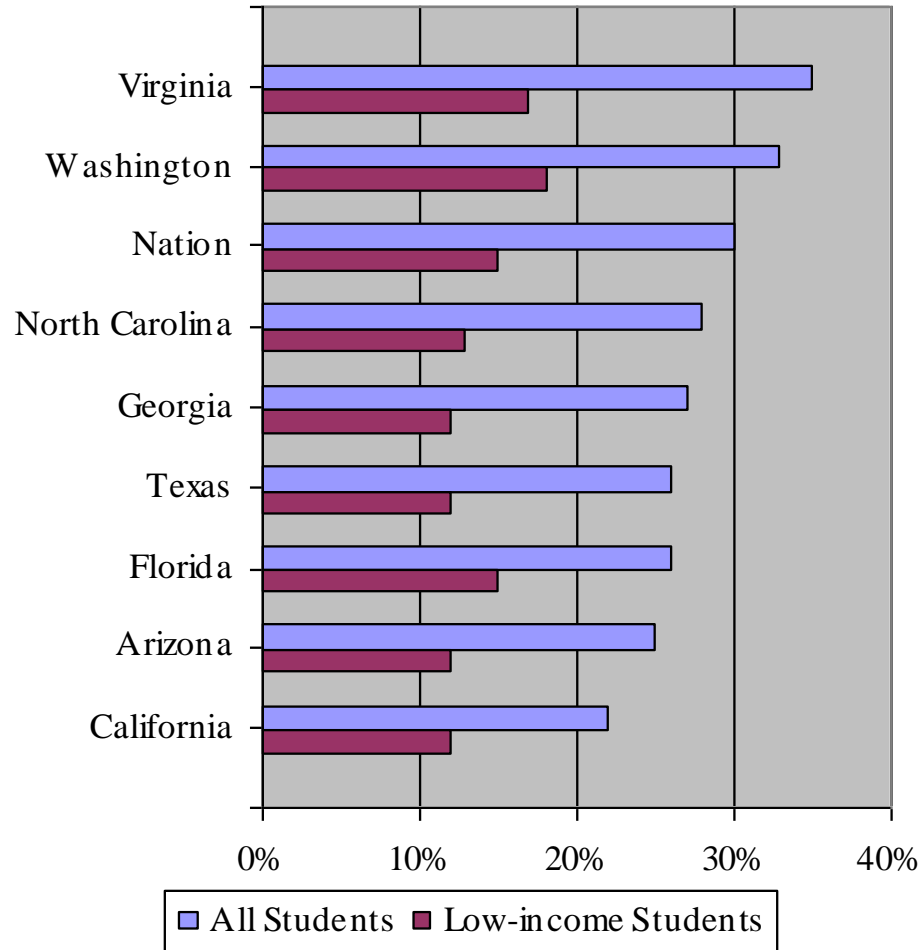
- Biggest problems
 - High school preparation
 - Chance for college – direct entry
 - Completion rates
 - Huge gaps across populations



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Figure 1

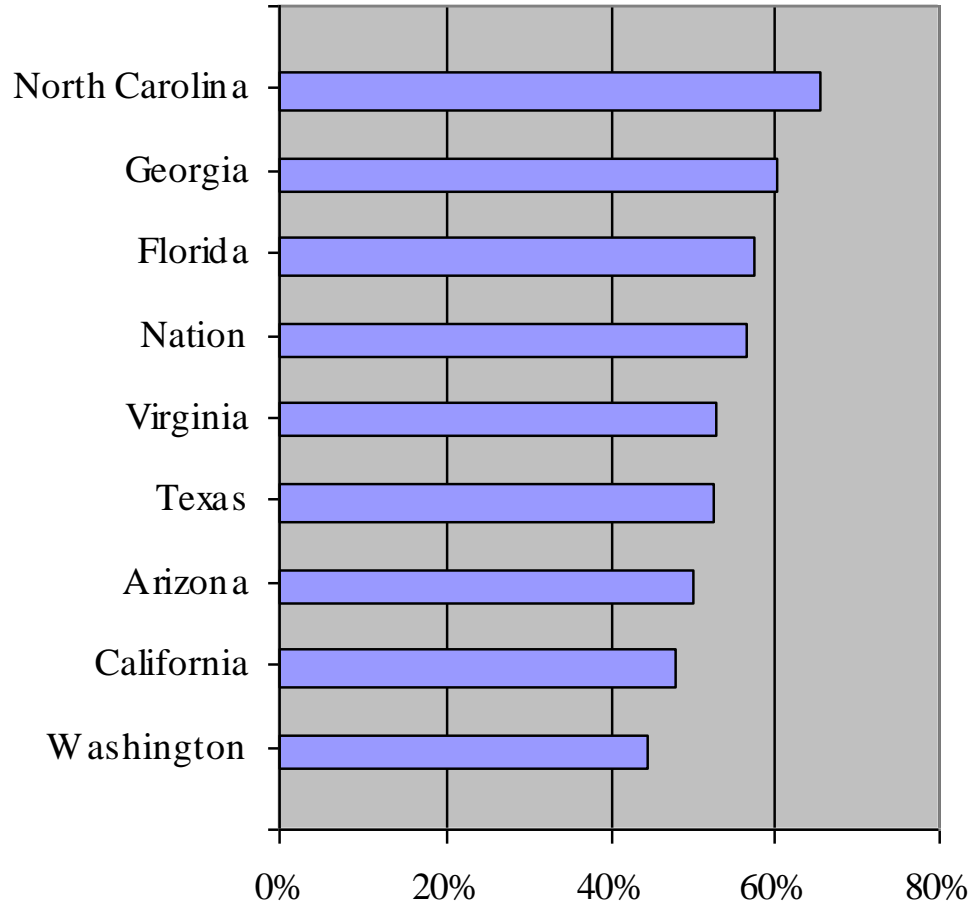
Percent of 8th Graders at or above Proficient
in Reading, 2003





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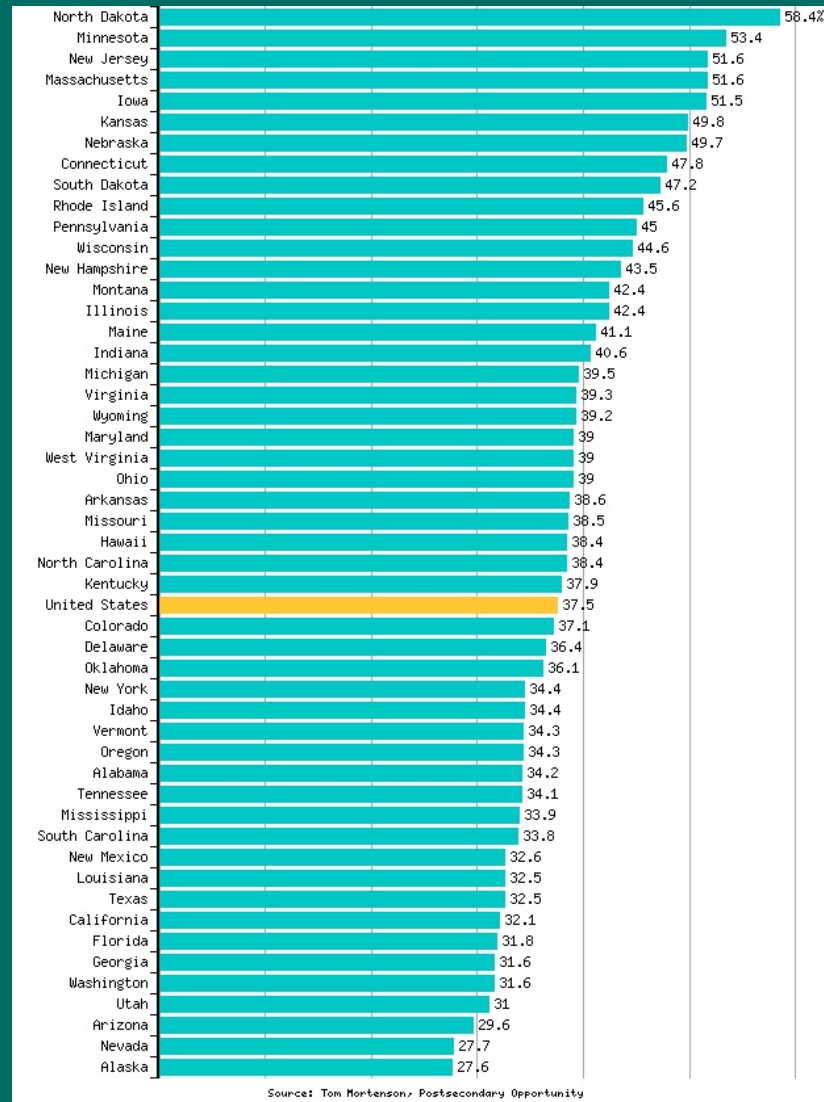
Figure 6
Percent of High School Graduates Going
Directly to College





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9th Graders Chance for College by Age 18

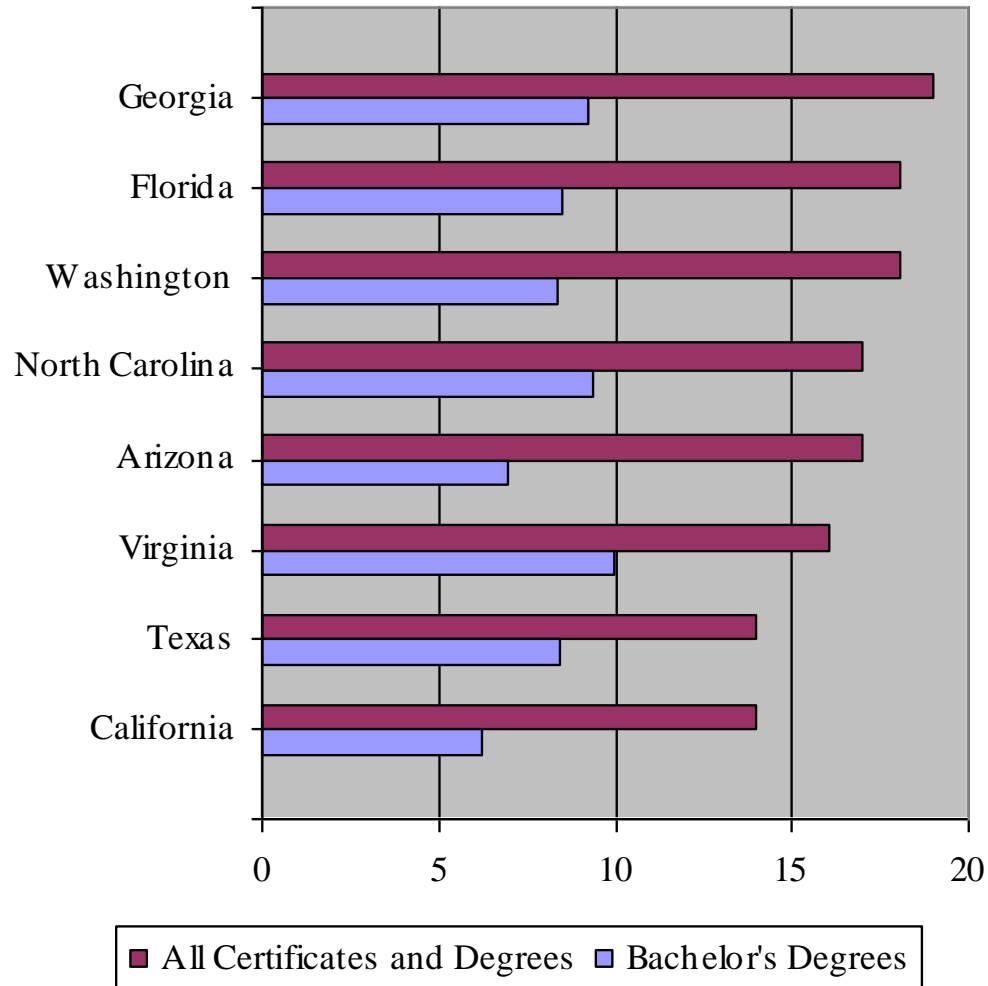


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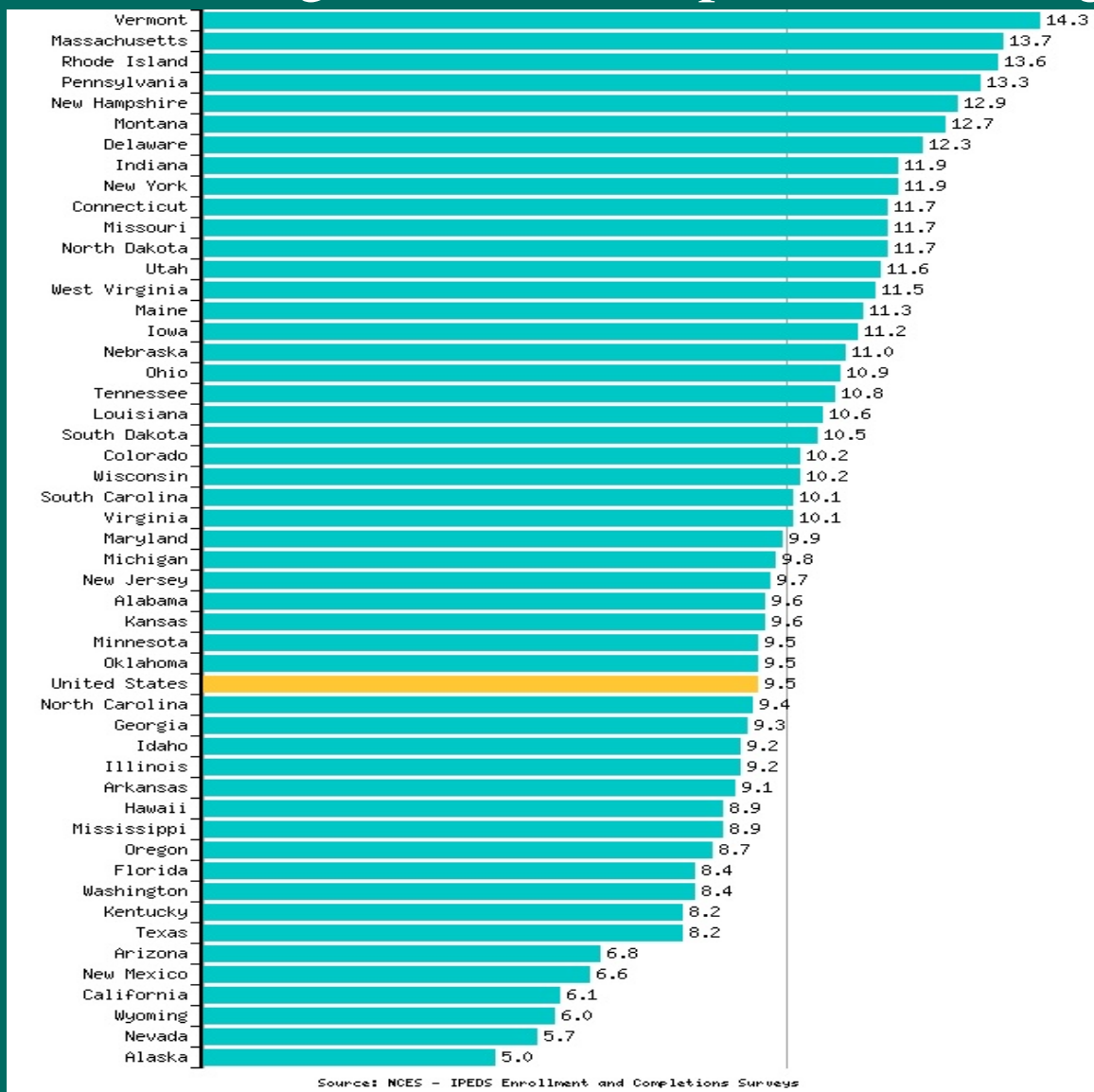
Figure 7
Degrees Awarded Per 100 Undergraduates, 2002





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Bachelors Degrees Awarded per 100 Undergraduates



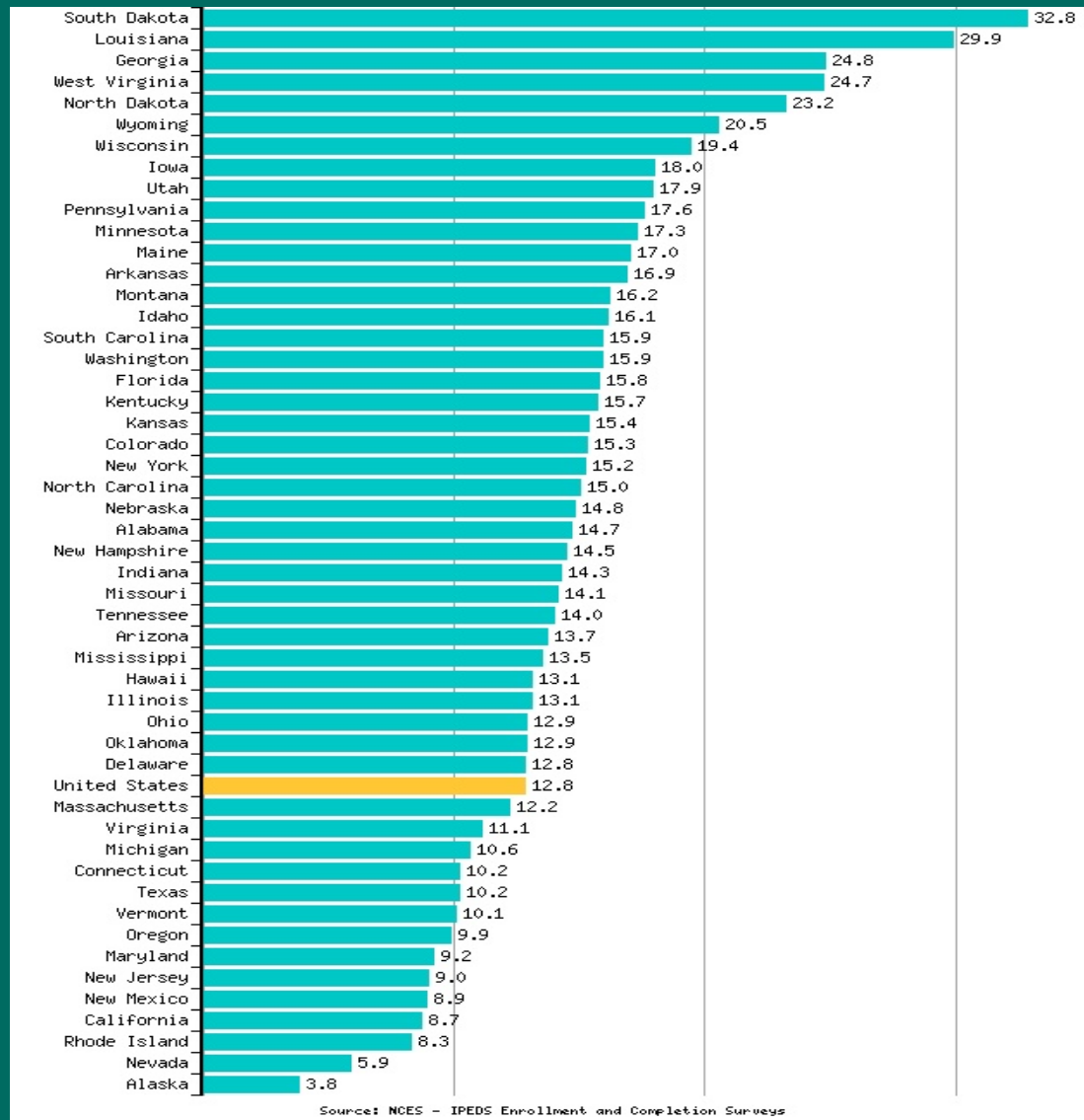
Source: NCES - IPEDS Enrollment and Completions Surveys

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Certificates Awarded per 100 Enrolled in 2-years



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Implications for Institutional Research

The big picture:

- Be clear about audience and purpose
- Multiple purposes = > separate systems
- Always ask the “so what” question
- Start with questions; then look for data
- Resist campus-specific “measures”
- Continue to look for better indicators of social benefit and link to economic health



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Implications for Institutional Research

How you use data:

- Set limits on indicators
- Tell a story with data – demonstrate how the right kind of data can be useful
- Accept that measures are imperfect and build systems accordingly
- Use data with judgment, not *false* precision
- Be flexible



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Implications for Institutional Research

Toward collective accountability:

- Focus on connections across institutions
- Develop partnerships across segments
- Build trust around principled use of data and work with all who share those principles



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