



COLLEGE *and* UNIVERSITY

Educating the Modern Higher Education Administration Professional

Rating (Not Ranking) the Undergraduate Experience
Principles from a National Discussion

Rehabbing the Rankings
Fool's Errand or the Lord's Work?

**Toward Devising Measures of
Quality and Effectiveness Across All Institutions**

In Search of a Better Mousetrap
A Look at Higher Education Ranking Systems

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for College and University

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RATING

(Not Ranking) the Undergraduate Experience

Principles from a National Discussion

ON NOVEMBER 7, 2010, THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS (AACRAO) HOSTED A NATIONAL EXECUTIVE FORUM DURING ITS ANNUAL STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE. TITLED “THE COLLEGE RANKINGS DEBATE AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS: ASSESSING THE VALUE OF AN INSTITUTION’S UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE,” THE EXECUTIVE FORUM WAS DESIGNED TO STIMULATE THOUGHTFUL DISCUSSION OF AND CONSENSUS BUILDING AROUND HOW BEST TO PROVIDE THE PUBLIC WITH MEANINGFUL DATA ABOUT INSTITUTIONS’ DEDICATION TO, AND SUCCESS AT, STUDENT LEARNING. THUS, THE DESIRED OUTCOME WAS A CLEAR SET OF PRINCIPLES FOR COLLEGE ASSESSMENTS THAT WOULD LEAD TO MEANINGFUL REFORMS OF CURRENT RANKING PROGRAMS. THE DISCUSSION LEADERS AND WHITEPAPER AUTHORS WERE GEORGE KUH, CHANCELLOR’S PROFESSOR OF HIGHER EDUCATION AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR POSTSECONDARY RESEARCH AND THE COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE RESEARCH PROGRAM; JOHN PRYOR, DIRECTOR OF THE COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM (CIRP) AND MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (HERI) AT UCLA; WATSON SCOTT SWAIL, CEO OF THE EDUCATIONAL POLICY INSTITUTE (EPI); JAY GOFF, VICE PROVOST OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT AT MISSOURI UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY; BOB BONTRAGER, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF AACRAO CONSULTING AND STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES; AND AND JASON LANE, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND SENIOR RESEARCH, INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES (IGEPS) AT SUNY-ALBANY. APPROXIMATELY 75 PRACTITIONERS PARTICIPATED IN THE FORUM. PARTICIPANTS WERE ASKED TO DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY RANKING PROGRAMS. THE SUMMARY THAT FOLLOWS PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXECUTIVE FORUM’S PRIMARY AREAS OF DISCUSSION. THE CONCLUDING PRINCIPLES ARE INTENDED TO HELP GUIDE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT WOULD BETTER AID STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS.

Rankings of higher education institutions are as ubiquitous and varied as student grading procedures. In the United States, institutional rankings have been widely available for the past several decades. *U.S. News and World Report*, *Forbes*, *Princeton Review*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and more than a dozen other organizations have sought to quantify nearly every aspect of the higher education institution, from overall academic quality to “squirrel friendliness.” More recently, international rankings such as the *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (first published by the Center for World Class Universities at Shanghai Jiao Tong University) and the *Times QS World University Rankings* have garnered global media attention. These evaluation tools are designed to attract the interest of students, parents, and other stakeholders by purporting to help the lay person negotiate the maze of higher education, in part by reducing the multi-dimensionality of hundreds of institutions and their widely varying student experiences to a single number—a supposed measure of institutional quality. Producing college rankings has become big business and so is an endeavor that is unlikely to end. Nor are rankings limited to higher education: Publications annually rank high schools, hospitals, hotels, cities, states, countries, and so

forth. Rankings are a reality and will continue to influence public opinion, consumer confidence, and even public-sector funding levels. More than rankings themselves, it was concern about their influence that inspired the AACRAO-sponsored conversation. Overall, participants believed that working within the existing system would not bring about the desired change. Participants acknowledged that any new system would have to meet the demand for information that is not overly complex but that nevertheless acknowledges the multi-dimensionality of higher education institutions and their ability to serve students.

Once viewed with caution or even scorn by those within higher education, the rankings industry has seemingly entered into a co-dependent relationship with the very sector it purports to evaluate. Indeed, many higher education insiders continue to believe rankings are problematic on multiple levels; some have even attempted boycotts, such as when the Society of American Law Teachers (SALT) called for law schools to withhold their students’ LSAT scores from *U.S. News & World Report*. Nevertheless, many institutional leaders willingly pay fees for the “privilege” of displaying the logos of various ranking organizations on their Web sites in order to help increase the perceived quality of the institution. As Hoover (2010) wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

Flowers feed bees, and industries feed other industries. Higher education is no exception. Case in point: Colleges support the thriving rankings industry, led by U.S. News & World Report. In turn, this annual ratings ritual supports what one might call the tout industry, which supports colleges by helping them promote their rankings—for a fee.

Rankings have become a powerful force for change and require significant support. They are a primary means by which stakeholders evaluate institutional performance and quality. The influence of rankings extends beyond prospective students and parents, affecting institutional strategy and even national policy. Agencies and foundations utilize rankings in their decision making and prioritizing for the awarding of grant and gift funds. Employers consider rankings in their recruitment of new employees. Even some institutional governing boards utilize rankings as a measure for institutional accountability, value, and progress. Indeed, the rankings even influence themselves: According to a recent *American Journal of Education* article, a primary factor driving change in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings was the rankings. That is, the previous year's rankings seemed to influence how peer evaluators perceived the overall quality of the institutions they were charged with evaluating (Bastedo and Bowman 2010). The institutionalized influence of rankings far exceeds the original intent of helping students negotiate the college selection process. This is a somewhat surprising development given the constant questioning of rankings' often simplistic and formulaic methodologies.

Indeed, many higher education stakeholders seem to have an insatiable demand for easily accessible and uncomplicated means by which to compare and differentiate colleges and universities. The increased prestige, influence, and resources that are the result of a high ranking have resulted in turn in many colleges and universities investing their limited resources in activities believed to influence the rankings. It is worth noting that these activities do not necessarily improve learning or other student outcomes.

AACRAO'S 2010 SEM EXECUTIVE FORUM: THE COLLEGE RANKINGS DEBATE AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS: ASSESSING THE VALUE OF AN INSTITUTION'S UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

Concerned about the dominance of an evaluative system that neither fully assesses nor helps improve the undergraduate experience, AACRAO launched a national discussion about rankings. In November 2010, approximately 75 higher education administrators, scholars, and organizational leaders gathered to discuss the role, scope, and impact of institutional ranking systems. The participants—most of whom came from the United States and

Canada—shared concerns about how rankings have come to dominate discourse about institutional quality, enrollment management, and institutional improvement.

Why now?

Many of AACRAO's North American member institutions are struggling with the impacts of the massive economic downturn and fast-approaching student demographic shifts. As colleges and universities seek means by which to focus resources on core operations—for example, improving student success and alignment with societal and employer needs—chasing vague measures of quality in order to preserve public reputation could be considered imprudent stewardship of diminishing resources. Many college executive leaders and enrollment managers inquired about the development of an appropriate set of assessments that could improve institutional management not only in North America but also worldwide. The outcome of the meeting was a set of principles to guide the creation of a new evaluative system that would better aid students and parents in their decision making about where to go to college. The participants desired a system that would acknowledge the existence of hundreds of high-quality educational institutions and that there is no single best institutional model for all students. Assessment information would be concise yet would recognize the multi-faceted nature of the collegiate experience. Finally, and probably most importantly, the group concluded that merely tweaking the existing rankings scheme would not result in the wholesale change believed necessary to transform the system.

Derived from the meeting, the six principles that follow are intended to guide the creation of a rating system that meets a variety of needs for easily understandable information: that of students and parents for use in the college choice process; that of various student groups; and that of colleges and universities as they strive to identify and implement institutional changes related to improving student learning and success.

Principle 1: Rating without Ranking

Ranking systems are inherently flawed by their listing of results in a given order. They are based on the premise that an institution's key characteristics can be combined into a single number that then can be compared to the number

into which another institution's characteristics have been combined. These numbers are deemed comparable regardless of the institutions' different characteristics, goals, and even missions. A new ranking system would be subject to the same criticism as current rankings: After all, a ranking is believed to indicate relative standing among those being ranked. Some rankings are based on clear criteria, *e.g.*, the time in which one completes a race, or students' combined GPA; other criteria are more difficult to quantify, *e.g.*, one's preference for dinner or the quality of students' overall experience on campus.

A ranking based on simple methodologies can oversimplify the complexity of what is being measured. Consider, for example, the class rank of high school seniors when it is based only on a student's cumulative grade point average. Such a ranking can show who performed better or worse on coursework. But what was the relative difference between the students who were ranked first and second? Or 51st and 52nd? Is a student's performance improving or declining? How does the student who is 51st at one high school compare to the student of the same rank in the neighboring district—or state? A similar difficulty arises with regard to the rankings of colleges and universities. While there may be some agreement that there is an important and even significant difference between an institution ranked first and one ranked 101st, is there similar agreement regarding the difference between those ranked tenth and eleventh? Even if the differences between ranks can be articulated, to what extent do those differences—let alone the overall ranking—affect the success of any individual student? And, the more complex the ranking system, the less clear the relative difference between ranks becomes.

In contrast, a ratings-based system allows for the development of a multi-dimensional evaluation scheme that enables users to compare institutions without focusing on relative standing. For example, a five-point scale could be used to assess each dimension of an institution. Thus, institutions of high quality could be scored similarly. There is little point to focusing on the relative standing of an institution when that measure has little relation to a student's success in college.

A rating system also would capitalize on recent developments that have made people more accepting of multi-dimensional assessments. For example, it is now commonplace for purchasers to be provided with a set of

ratings about a given product or service. The consumer typically combines that information with her individual preferences in order to make a decision. Similarly, prospective students can combine information from a multi-dimensional rating system with their own preferences about institutional characteristics (*e.g.*, distance from home, cost, size, programmatic offerings, etc.) to generate personal rank preferences.

Principle 2: Recognize Institutional Differentiation

A core strength of successful higher education systems, particularly the one in the United States, is institutional differentiation (Brown and Lane 2003, Lane and Brown 2005). Students may choose from an array of college options, customizing their choices so as to optimize their undergraduate experience. Indeed, ample research proves that there is no one best fit for all college students (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

The American higher education system is so massive and diverse, and the institutions themselves so complex and multi-faceted, that it is understandable that students, parents, and others should want a way to easily identify colleges' and universities' overall quality. While there is an accompanying tendency to want to compare institutions, such comparisons ultimately mean nothing—especially when schools with different missions are compared. And yet the use of a single ranking system implies that there is one best college or university. The problem is that rankings imply quality and, indirectly, individual fit.

In 1973, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education launched a classification scheme to differentiate among the great diversity of institutional types. The purpose was to develop a listing of higher education institutions that would be of use to those individuals and institutions interested in researching higher education.

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education evolved into a powerful research tool whose categories have become the core of the higher education vernacular. In 2000 and 2006, the Carnegie classifications were updated and expanded to better reflect the complexity of the missions and services of institutions in each category. (It is noteworthy that even within this rating system, users began to assign prestige to institutions on the basis of which tier they belonged to; some institutions sought

to “adjust” their characteristics in order to be assigned a different classification.) Rankings fail to acknowledge the underlying premise of the Carnegie classification system: It is nearly impossible to accurately compare all higher education institutions in the United States.

A new rating system should acknowledge institutional differentiation of mission, enrollment profile, degree offerings, cost, and so forth. This would better reflect the various subsectors that exist within the U.S. higher education system. Clearer ratings *by institutional category* are far more likely than rankings to help students decide which institutions might best meet their individual needs and goals.

Principle 3: Create Common Post-Admission Milestones

In addition to acknowledging institutional diversification, a new rating system should create common milestones of student success that could be used to compare institutions within categories. Such milestones would not solely reflect inputs, such as the number of volumes in a library or students’ median or average ACT/SAT score. Rather, these milestones would provide an indicator of student success—for example, first- to second-year retention rates, four- or six-year graduation rates, or graduates’ overall employment rate. They also could be more complex, measuring students’ actual versus predicted success rates as measured by the number of Pell Grant-eligible students. (See John Pryor’s article in this issue for more information about milestones of student success.)

Principle 4: Transparency through Agreement on Definitions, Data Instruments, and Collection Processes

A common criticism of extant ranking systems is that they are not wholly transparent to the public; neither is there agreement about how to select and define those measures that are included.

Future conversations need to build consensus regarding: (1) the purpose of the new institutional assessment system; (2) how measures will be defined and calculated; and (3) the ways in which data will be collected. The success of any new system will be based on the collective buy-in and engagement of the higher education community. This will require acceptance of the legitimacy of the measures. Further, a new rating system will need to be trans-

parent. Beyond general agreement about definitions and measures, the new process will need to be open to regular scrutiny and external analysis.

Principle 5: Account for the Value-Added Features of an Educational Experience

Despite the existence of multiple ways to measure the success of a student’s collegiate experience, forum participants agreed that the new measures should take into account the “value-added” aspects of a college experience. For example, to what extent do students “grow” while in college? If all students at an institution are high achievers when they first enroll, is it any surprise that most end up being high achievers when they graduate? What if a college helps transform low-achieving students into high-performing students and career professionals? How does one compare two (or more) such institutions? And, in what ways can individual growth be measured? Group members did not determine which aspects of the collegiate experience should be measured, but they did agree that there is much more to the collegiate experience than students’ academic outcomes.

Principle 6: Governance by a Non-Profit Entity

Ultimately, an organization will have to assume responsibility for development of the new rating system. That organization should be a non-profit entity without a clear ideological viewpoint. For example, the Carnegie Foundation provides the infrastructure to support the ongoing use of the Carnegie classification system. The interest of the Foundation is in providing information, not in profiting from the endeavor.

In Canada (*MacCleans*), the United States (*U.S. News & World Report*), and the United Kingdom (*Times Higher Education*), the most popular ranking system is controlled by a for-profit press. In fact, *U.S. News* now recognizes the rankings aspect of its business as a primary revenue generator. The motives of any group—profit driven or not—should always be considered when evaluating its actions and activities. Focus group participants expressed a strong desire to avoid the potentially consumerist motivations and profit-making demands believed to characterize the existing rankings industry.

This is not to suggest that a new system should not generate revenue. The process of gathering, analyzing, and publishing information is costly; it would be naïve to expect an organization to assume responsibility for such an endeavor without having a way to support the initiative financially. Nevertheless, the long-term legitimacy and success of a new system will be determined in part by the motivations—perceived or real—of the organization that governs the process.

SUMMARY

The executive forum agreed that prospective students and the higher education community could benefit from a new means of assessing institutional effectiveness at delivering value-added undergraduate education. Such an assessment would aid the college selection process and support improved access and, ultimately, degree completion by students seeking to participate in higher education. A new rating system could benefit all types of institutions, particularly those serving low-income and traditionally under-represented students. As the speakers' white papers attest, other individuals and agencies have made this same observation and have identified their own approaches to address the issues identified above. However, those approaches have focused predominantly on research and policy. While research and policy certainly are important components, they fail to address critical practice issues associated with existing ranking programs.

Specific goals of the “new approach” recommended by the executive forum are to:

- *Create public understanding* that hundreds of quality colleges and universities exist and that they meet students' learning and developmental needs in different ways.
- *Focus on value-added outcomes* by types and numbers of successful students and by graduates' satisfaction with their overall undergraduate experience. This should mitigate the focus on traditional measures of prestige and selectivity.

- Provide students, parents, and employers with *comparative learning data and information about the particular learning objectives/skill sets that are emphasized*, thereby motivating schools to embrace their missions rather than align their efforts with current ranking systems.
- Provide a *meaningful alternative to existing ranking systems*.

The outcome of the executive forum was a set of guiding principles for a new college and university assessment system designed to aid college-bound students and their families. It is the participants' hope that the principles will be used to guide future discussions about data definitions, system processes, and implementation strategies.

Editor's Note: This discussion will be continued at AACRAO's next Strategic Enrollment Management Conference, to be held October 30 through November 2, 2011, in San Diego, CA.

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For better or worse, rankings shape public conceptions of collegiate quality. This paper reviews the history of rankings, analyzes what they represent, explores recent efforts to employ indicators in addition to institutional resources and reputation on which the most popular rankings are based, and evaluates the extent to which rankings serve their espoused purposes.

Quality...

...you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof... But if you can't say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists?... Obviously some things are better than others...but what is the "betterness?"... So round and round you go, spinning mental wheels and nowhere finding anyplace to get traction. What the hell is Quality? (Pirsig 1974, p. 184)

Rankings of institutions that award undergraduate degrees ostensibly serve at least three purposes, or so their proponents assert:

- They accurately represent or are proxies for meaningful dimensions of collegiate quality.
- They make complicated information from hundreds of colleges and universities understandable for individuals who could not otherwise do this on their own.
- They provide comparative data that motivate institutions to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience.

My charge with this paper is to (1) summarize what contemporary rankings of colleges and universities really measure and (2) in turn, determine their impact on popular

conceptions of collegiate quality. Toward this end, I selectively draw on what is known about rankings of the undergraduate experience in North America to briefly summarize the degree to which rankings are valid, meaningful, and useful.

Other efforts exist in North America to rank additional aspects of institutional performance, such as the quality of graduate programs and institutional research productivity. Except for a brief historical mention of graduate program rankings, I focus on undergraduate education. I close with some observations about the merits of recent modifications to improve on existing rankings.

In full disclosure, I come to this exercise having publicly challenged the value of rankings, except insofar as they are valuable to the institutions that year in and year out find themselves near the top of their respective heaps. In addition, so many have written so much about rankings over the past two decades—some defending their utility and others noting their shortcomings—that it is challenging to approach the topic in a fresh way. So, I proceed like Zsa Zsa Gabor's eighth husband—it will be difficult to make this interesting, but I shall do my best!

WHEN AND WHY DID ALL THIS START, ANYWAY? AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF COLLEGE RANKINGS

Rankings of institutions that award undergraduate degrees are long pre-dated by rankings of graduate programs, which first appeared in 1910. Other rankings of graduate

programs have been published; the National Research Council has twice since 1995 conducted systematic reviews of Ph.D. programs which resulted in rankings. The most recent rankings of graduate programs appeared in September 2010. It attracted a fair amount of attention, especially in the higher education media, and inspired multiple articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Education*—many of which were devoted to pointing to the rankings' shortcomings.

Early Efforts to Rate Collegiate Quality

In their 1980 monograph, *A Question of Quality: The Higher Education Ratings Game*, Lawrence and Green describe attempts to rate institutions that award baccalaureate degrees. Most of the early efforts they review are based on relatively small numbers of institutions. For example, Jordan (1963) looked at a set of quantitative indices and found that high-scoring schools had larger library collections per student and paid librarians more. (Perhaps it was this study that made the size of library collections a staple of early rating schemes.) Brown (1967) grouped colleges on eight factors, favoring faculty compensation and preparation (*i.e.*, number with the doctorate).

As near as I can tell, the first systematic national ranking of colleges and universities awarding baccalaureate degrees appeared in 1966 in *The College-Rater*, although Lawrence and Green do not mention it. For \$1.50 one could get a copy of *The College-Rater* which claimed to be:

"...a relative rating of the nation's colleges and universities based on an impersonal and objective evaluation resulting automatically from the application of weighted grades to certain factors and considerations with reference to each institution, which, in the opinion of the originator of The College Rater, determine the comparative general overall standing of each institution" (1966, p. 1).

The version that appeared a year later (1967) ranked schools by state, region, control (public or private), technological schools including the military academies (Cal Tech was ranked first and MIT second—some things don't change), and women's colleges (where Radcliffe topped the list followed by Bryn Mawr). The weighted factors used were as follows:

- high school rank—10 percent
- SAT/ACT scores—21 percent
- number of Rhodes, Wilson, Danforth, and NSF award recipients—5 percent
- student-faculty ratio—4 percent
- proportion of students entering graduate school—9 percent
- library collection—15 percent
- proportion of faculty with doctorates—18 percent, and
- faculty salaries—18 percent (p. 3).

Then, as now, some institutions were not listed because "insufficient information was available." Some other disclaimers are surprisingly refreshing and run counter to some of the inferences made today. To wit:

"College-Rater does not attempt to evaluate the academic excellence of a college or university... Guidelines used do not take into account the quality of the academic program, the intellectual environment, educational techniques, facilities, and other considerations. If such imponderables could be measured, the ratings would change considerably. Therefore, it should not be inferred that colleges and universities ranked ahead, are necessarily superior to those that follow" (1967, p. 3).

The 1967 edition of *College-Rater* contained an especially telling caveat: "This edition... should not be compared with the previous edition. Not only were several criteria changed, but variations were made in the negative weighting factors, and the method of formulating the mathematical point system was modified" (p. 3). It is only within recent years that various college rankings have become more transparent in this regard, though most consumers hardly seem to notice or care.

In the 1970s, several other attempts to rate colleges were made, mostly by higher education scholars. As with the graduate program rankings that preceded them, selectivity was a prominent factor, along with other available measures of resources. For example, Astin and colleagues developed and replicated a selectivity index based on SAT and ACT scores to estimate the average academic ability of an institution's entering first-year students (Astin 1965, 1971; Astin and Henson 1977). The index was predicated

on the widespread belief that colleges and universities with higher academic standards provide a higher quality academic program. Whether or not this is so, selectivity is a “good measure of [an institution’s] *perceived* quality” (Astin and Henson 1971, p. 2 [*italics added*]). As we shall see, it is this perception that for all practical purposes continues to dictate where an institution falls on national rankings.

Lawrence and Green summarize these and several other early attempts to rate undergraduate colleges that appeared prior to 1980; among the more comprehensive was by Hawes (1978). None, however, attracted more attention by higher education administrators and the media than those produced by Jack Gourman.

WHO IS JACK GOURMAN AND WHY IS HE SAYING THESE THINGS ABOUT MY COLLEGE?

A fascinating investigative article by David Webster (1984) meticulously chronicles the manner in which Gourman, an obscure political scientist at California State University–Northridge, was inexplicably able to single-handedly evaluate and assign a score to more than 1,100 colleges and universities for his first Gourman Report published in 1967, ironically the same year The College-Rater appeared. But unlike The College-Rater, Gourman’s work was cited by higher education scholars who gave it some credibility, even though Gourman consistently dodged questions about his data sources and the algorithms he used to rank not just 1,300+ institutions in his second book (1977) but departments within them. How he also obtained data to rank medical and law schools on an international scale remains a mystery.

In large part, the Gourman ratings gained attention because he kept his work in the public eye: he produced six reports between 1980 and 1984 following the publication of a 1980 book on the quality of undergraduate programs. His work on institutional and program quality is considered specious by anyone who bothered to read his work carefully—because no one could verify either how he collected and analyzed his data or the authenticity of his publisher, National Educational Standards. Efforts to contact someone at this publishing house—which according to his books had offices in Los Angeles and New York City—always came up empty (Webster 1984). I do not know how Gourman became associated with The Prince-

eton Review, but it began to publish his rankings at some point, including what was billed as the 10th edition of The Gourman Report on Undergraduate Programs (1998).

I refer to these all-but-forgotten forerunners of the most popular contemporary ranking, *U.S. News & World Report* (*U.S. News*), to show how little has changed in 60+ years. That is, for all practical purposes, institutional resources in the form of such student input characteristics as pre-college achievement scores (SAT, ACT) and faculty credentials continue to determine where a school is ranked. The only thing missing in the inaugural ratings is the reputational factor—in the form of nominations by knowledgeable observers, which by all accounts has not been demonstrated to be an improvement in terms of assessing institutional quality. The fact that highly-visible scholars contributed to the early development of institutional rating schemes that emphasized selectivity has had a lasting influence on most contemporary ranking efforts.

U.S. NEWS AND MACLEAN’S: THE TWO MOST INFLUENTIAL RANKINGS IN NORTH AMERICA

U.S. News & World Report (*U.S. News*), widely acknowledged as the flagship of college rankings, first got into the rankings business in 1983. And make no mistake, college rankings is a business—a big business. More than 100 different guidebooks and rankings are available (Hunter 1995), and millions of copies are sold each year (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, and Perez 1998). A decade ago, *U.S. News*, for example was selling more than two million copies of its rankings each year, reaching an estimated eleven million people (Dichev 2001). In 2007, within three days of the rankings release, the *U.S. News* Web site received ten million page views compared to 500,000 average views in a typical month. The printed issue incorporating its college rankings sells 50 percent more than its normal issues at the newsstand (Wikipedia 2011). Indeed, the magazine would be defunct if it was not for its annual rankings issue and various guidebooks (to solidify its market position, it has diversified its portfolio by ranking hospitals among other entities) and the public’s insatiable appetite for comparative information in the form of rankings, their validity notwithstanding. *U.S. News*’s undergraduate rankings focus only on four-year institutions. *Washington Monthly* introduced the first rank-

ings of two-year colleges, basing its ratings on results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) to the displeasure of its director, Kay McClenney, and in violation of CCSSE's published policy eschewing using CCSSE findings in rankings.¹

In Canada, *Maclean's* magazine is the rankings kingpin. Now in its 19th year of ranking, *Maclean's* places universities in one of three categories and asserts it takes into account the differences in types of institutions, levels of research funding, the diversity of offerings, and the range of graduate and professional programs. In each category, *Maclean's* ranks the institutions on a range of factors in six broad areas including student success, faculty, resources, student support and reputation. *Maclean's* has occasionally ranked institutions using their performance on NSSE where the use of these tools is even more widespread than in the US. More about this attempt later.

OTHER CONTEMPORARY RANKING SYSTEMS

"So much to measure; so little time." (post on *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 30, 2010)

In the past fifteen years, other organizations and magazines have gotten into the rankings business—in part to address the shortcomings of *U.S. News*—by emphasizing aspects of the collegiate experience not addressed in other ranking systems. *Money Magazine* (1994) was among the first to include variables possibly associated with student and institutional performance (e.g., first-to-second year persistence rate, four-year and five- and six-year graduation rates, student loan default ratio, instructional budget, student services budget). But it also included among the sixteen factors used to produce the "100 Best College Buys" that year the usual suspects: entrance exam scores, class rank, core faculty (i.e., the ratio of students to faculty members with terminal degrees—Yale was tops with 3-to-1 ratio compared with the 15-to-1 national average), and library resources (ratio of all library materials to undergraduate population—Yale again was on top with its 1,309-to-1 ratio dwarfing the 34-to-1 average). Surely a more relevant measure of collegiate quality is the number of books a typical student actually reads than the total number of library holdings.

¹ See <www.ccsse.org/survey/popups/dataDisclaimer.html>.

Following *Money Magazine's* lead, *Kiplinger* also includes student loan default rates in its rankings algorithm. What research spending and loan default rates have to do with the quality of the undergraduate experience is not clear.

Also squarely focused on money—in this instance the annual income of recent and mid-career graduates—is PayScale, which ranks institutions on information from alumni who hold only a bachelor's degree and who are full-time employees in the United States (www.payscale.com/best-colleges). Because alumni who hold post-baccalaureate degrees (master's, Ph.D., M.D, J.D and so forth) are not included (nor are graduates of military academies), colleges and universities that have large numbers of graduates who earn such degrees are significantly disadvantaged. Two salary estimates are provided: starting median salary and mid-career median salary. The 2010–11 PayScale report contains national, regional, and institutional control (public/private) rankings for 999 baccalaureate-granting institutions. A distinctive feature of PayScale's approach is a 30-year estimated Return on Investment index based on current institutional costs and salary. Using a combination of IPEDS and Carnegie classifications,² schools are assigned to one of five categories:

- Private Research University
- Liberal Arts School
- Arts and Design School
- State School (any school identified by IPEDS as being publicly funded), and
- Private School (any school identified by IPEDS as being privately funded, and not otherwise identified as one of the above).

PayScale also ranks separately schools in the following categories: (a) Engineering School (a public or private institution that IPEDS indicates grants more than 50 percent of their undergraduate degrees in math, sciences, computer science, engineering and engineering technology); (b) Ivy League School; and (c) Party School (one of the 20 schools on the 2010 Princeton Review Party School

² Multiple studies show that the earlier Carnegie classification of institutions did not differentiate among categories of colleges and universities in any meaningful way on most available process (e.g., student engagement) or outcome measures of the quality of the student experience (Kuh 2003; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). It remains to be seen whether the updated classification system (http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/lookup_listings/) is more useful for this purpose.

Ranking).³ In addition, PayScale also sorts the most popular jobs by degree and school. How PayScale finds people to complete its annual survey is not apparent from its published methodology nor is it clear whether regional cost-of-living differences are taken into account for the national rankings.

Washington Monthly is another of the more recent players in the rankings game. It is for now the only organization that tallies the numbers of ROTC participants and alumni in the Peace Corps along with research spending. As Kahlenberg (2010) put it, other guides “help students and parents decide how to spend their tuition dollars wisely,” while the *Monthly’s* objective is “to tell citizens and policy makers which colleges [are] spending their tax dollars wisely” by ranking colleges and universities based on whether they promote social mobility; research, and service. The *Monthly* further upped the ante this fall by calling out the top 200 “drop out factories,” institutions that have the highest attrition rates. Ouch.

Given several tragic, high-profile incidents of violence (e.g., Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University), campus safety is of special concern to many parents. *Reader’s Digest* (2011) responded by ranking 133 “top colleges and universities” (whatever that means) on how they handle various safety and security issues ranging from dorm rooms with self-locking doors to around-the-clock security and emergency plans. Using data compiled by Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) which draws on both a survey sent to the schools and Department of Education statistics required by the Jeanne Clery Disclosure Act, *Reader’s Digest* then used letter grades (A, B, C) to assign the institutions to one of three categories (lower, moderate and higher reported crime), ranking them within the respective category and weighting severe offenses like murder and rape more heavily. Forty-five schools got an A (leading the pack was Johns Hopkins), another 45 got Bs, and 43 graded out at C. My cursory review of the distributions suggest the bigger the school and larger the metropolitan area in which it’s located, the more likely it was to get a higher grade; to illustrate, the C category contains a disproportionate number (30) of liberal arts colleges—many

of which are in small towns—or roughly 70 percent of the group, while only 11 of the top 45 (25%) were of this kind. Knowing a fair amount about many of the colleges with C grades (in full disclosure my alma mater is one), consumers might legitimately question the degree to which they should have confidence in the algorithm used by IRE to grade institutions. But then again, one can quibble about the accuracy and utility of any of the ranking schemes reviewed here.

After this brief foray into the nature and mechanics of these rankings, one might well ask what to make of them, taken together. In “30 Ways to Rate a College,” Richards and Coddington (2010) reported the results from their examination of the measures used by six of the more visible rankings systems, including the latter three that consider both institutions in the US and other countries (see Figure 1, on page 14):

- *U.S. News & World Report*
- *Washington Monthly*
- *Forbes*
- *Kiplinger*
- *Times Higher Education*
- Academic Ranking of World Universities

They found little overlap in terms of the variables used to construct rankings across the six. Even so, as with the earliest rankings, input measures hold sway. Except for graduation rates and first-to-second year persistence rates, no learning outcome measures or estimates of whether a student is work-force ready are included in any of the rankings. In large part, this is because no reliable data are available from most or all institutions to use as proxies for such outcomes.

SO, HOW WELL DO THE RANKINGS SERVE THEIR ESPOUSED PURPOSES?

“Not everything that counts can be measured. Not everything that can be measured counts.” (Albert Einstein)

In this section I assign a letter grade to represent the degree to which the existing rankings adequately serve each of the three purposes set forth at the beginning of the paper.

³ One wonders how the Union College faculty and staff feel about their place topping the PayScale Party School list with 202 graduates reporting a median starting salary of \$46,400 and mid-career income of \$99,900. Its ROI is a very respectable 11.7 percent, a tick below MIT and Cal Tech which have the highest ROI of 12.6 percent. Who says studying engineering can’t be fun!

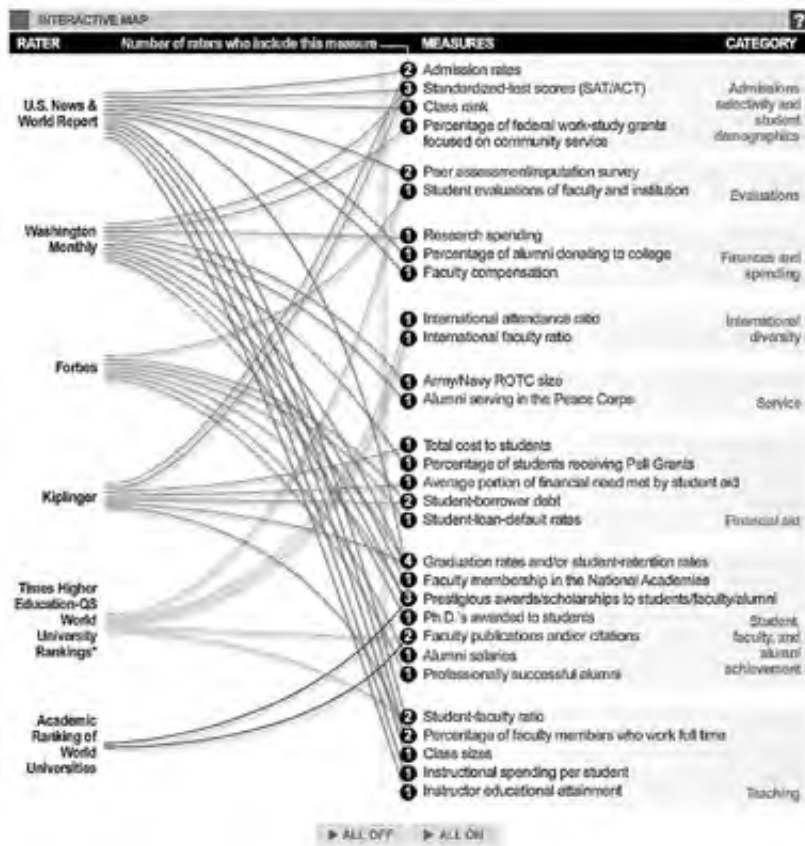


FIGURE 1. Ranking Variables Used by Six Well-Known College Rat­ers (Richards and Coddington 2010)

Do rankings accurately represent meaningful dimensions of collegiate quality?

Grade: D+

My evaluation is influenced heavily by the major players in the rankings marketplace, *U.S. News* and *Maclean's*. Both have substantive shortcomings in this area, the most serious being that they privilege institutional resources similar to those featured a half century ago in *The College-Rater*. Moreover, they also place too much significance on reputational scores provided by those who are willing to provide such information, even though it's not possible for any single individual to be knowledgeable about the programs and circumstances at so many different colleges. Let's call this "the Gourman effect"—pretending to know enough about hundreds of colleges and universities to offer an informed judgment about the quality of the undergraduate experience at each of them. And now to get "better data,"

U.S. News is inviting high school college counselors to do something similar. You decide whether this is more likely to increase the accuracy of the rankings or make it possible to create yet additional sets of ratings—best colleges in the eyes of high school counselors by region and type of institution.

The major limitation of most rankings and especially *U.S. News* is they say almost nothing about what students do during college or what happens to them as a result of their attendance. These experiences are far more important to collegiate quality than what an institution has by way of resources or reputation.

Equally important, most ranking systems including the two that dominate North America, *U.S. News* and *Maclean's*, try to be both comprehensive and heterogeneous (Gladwell 2011). That is, they use multiple measures and apply them to all types of institutions to arrive

at a single number—the ranking. This has the predictable result of typically favoring colleges and universities that have the most resources. Moreover, the cost of attendance is not part of the rankings algorithm, which as Gladwell explains privileges selectivity and affluence over efficacy—the rate at which a college graduates its students after taking into account its cost and selectivity.

To fully appreciate the limitations on the accuracy and reliability of most ranking systems, we must come to grips with the fact that one needs to know only one number to accurately predict where an institution ranks on *U.S. News*. It's the school's average SAT/ACT score of enrolled students (Webster 2001). Ernie Pascarella and I (2004) replicated Webster's analysis using only the top 50 national universities and found that the correlation between *U.S. News* rankings and institutional average SAT/ACT score was -0.89 . After taking into account the average SAT/ACT score, the other indices included in its

algorithm have little meaningful influence on where an institution appears on the list.

This is not to say that selectivity is unrelated to collegiate quality. Peers substantially influence what students do during college and what they gain in certain areas, particularly in their attitudes, values, and other dimensions of personal and social development. That is, being in the company of highly able people has salutary direct effects on how students spend their time and what they talk about. At the same time, voluminous research shows that other factors are more important to student development—working collaboratively with peers to solve problems, study abroad, service learning, doing research with a faculty member, and learning communities, to name a few (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). In fact, longitudinal data from the National Study of Student Learning and cross-sectional results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) show that institutional selectivity is a weak indicator of student exposure to good practices in undergraduate education—practices such as whether

faculty members clearly articulate course objectives, use relevant examples, identify key points, and provide class outlines (Kuh and Pascarella 2004). These kinds of practices and experiences are arguably much more important to collegiate quality than enrolled student ability alone.

In other words, selectivity and effective educational practices are largely independent, given that between 80 to 100 percent of the institution-level variance and 95 to 100 percent of the student-level variance in engagement in the effective educational practices measured by NSSE and other tools cannot be explained by an institution's selectivity. This is consistent with the substantial body of evidence showing that the selectivity of the institution contributes minimally to learning and cognitive growth during college (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). As Pascarella (2001) concluded:

Since their measures of what constitutes “the best” in undergraduate education are based primarily on resources and reputation, and not on the within-college experiences that we know really make a difference, a

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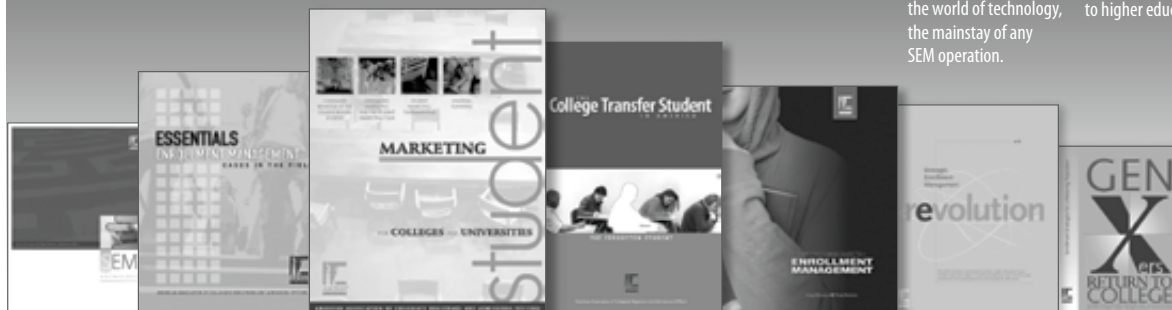
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more accurate, if less marketable, title for their enterprise might be “America’s Most Advantaged Colleges” (p. 21).

Unfortunately, the “race to the top” via the selectivity avenue often is a perverse incentive to raise admissions standards, which in turn intensifies the competition for the limited pool of the “best” students. The academic selectivity of an undergraduate student body is all but impossible to change in any appreciable way unless large amounts of scholarship money are available—funds that often go to students from families that can afford to pay for college. Few public and private institutions can win at such a game. In an odd sort of way, the current economic climate surely discourages virtually any institution from moving in this direction. Most troubling, efforts “to move up in the rankings” expend energy and resources that schools could more effectively spend on innovative, educationally productive activities.

Maclean’s was not included in the Richards and Codrington analysis, nor was PayScale, which has pretty good coverage with almost 1,000 schools (though its reliability is unknown due to the lack of information about how it finds and obtains information from alumni). This is too bad in the first instance because *Maclean’s* threatened to sue Canadian universities to obtain their scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), one of the few measures used by hundreds of institutions that arguably is related to the quality of the undergraduate experience. *U.S. News* initially waved off NSSE as irrelevant because too few schools had used it. For a time it did ask schools to send in their answers to selected questions and reported them in a side bar in its annual fall rankings magazine.

In fairness, in order to include meaningful measures of desired learning outcomes in their algorithms, ranking outfits need valid, reliable data from large numbers of colleges and universities that have the same or comparable measures. While nascent efforts are underway (such as the Voluntary System of Accountability—VSA—about which I will say a little more later), we are a long, long way from realizing that goal—assuming institutions would even part with that information. Except for PayScale and *Washington Monthly’s* forays into some post-college indicators, estimates of collegiate quality lack meaningful data about the connections between where and what graduates

studied and what they did with their education at various stages after college. Granted, alumni studies are fraught with methodological challenges, especially when inferring causal links between what happened during college and post-college performance. Nevertheless, we need to address this lacuna in data collection. One promising initiative that might be resurrected or built upon is the now-dormant Collegiate Results Survey.⁴

Do rankings make complicated information from hundreds of colleges and universities understandable for individuals who could not otherwise do this on their own?

Grade: C+

Yes, the rankings reduce a host of measurable and ineffable (and sometimes unknowable) factors to a single number, simplifying matters for prospective students, their parents, and others. Like it or not, they are among the most frequently used and referenced print and media sources of information used by a subset of students in selecting a college (Hossler and Foley 1995). McDonough and her colleagues (1998) estimated that each year 400,000 prospective students and their parents refer to guidebooks and rankings when choosing a college, typically to confirm or eliminate colleges during the choice process (Hossler and Foley 1995; McDonough *et al.* 1998). Many college and universities regularly include information from guidebooks and rankings in their promotional materials (Hossler 2000; Hunter 1995).

The key question is whether the information on which the rankings are based represents something that will make a difference to the quality of the educational experience. On balance, most rankings do not serve this purpose. “Rankings are not benign. They enshrine very particular ideologies, and, at a time when American higher education is facing a crisis of accessibility and affordability, we have adopted a de-facto standard of college quality that is uninterested in both of those factors” (Gladwell 2011 p. 74). Equally worrisome is that prospective students, and their parents, tend to accept at face value (presuming validity) the information contained in guidebooks and rankings (Hunter 1995). Also problematic is that without a search engine that can manage and sort through the differ-

⁴ See <www.stanford.edu/group/ncpi/unspeficied/students_parents_toolkit/cr.html>.

ent variables in the growing number of ranking schemes, it will be nigh impossible for prospective students and others to systematically integrate and draw meaningful conclusions from them.

Do rankings provide comparative data that motivate institutions to improve?

Grade: D-

Because of the nature of what the rankings have traditionally privileged—resources and reputation—there is little evidence that rankings encourage institutions to make policies or introduce programs and practices that promote greater levels of student learning and personal development. Indeed, institutions have acted in self-interest in their efforts to move up in the rankings—but perversely so, by artificially inflating certain factors used in the rankings, as noted by Hossler (2000), Hossler and Foley (1995), and others.

The most direct route to moving up in the rankings is to manipulate an institution's reported selectivity measure. For example, in the early 1990s, some institutions found it advantageous to remove students conditionally admitted when calculating their average SAT scores, making these schools appear more selective than they actually were. Of course, this had the effect of boosting their position in the rankings. Another way some institutions artificially increased their selectivity was to tweak the admitted—applied ratio by adding anyone to the applicant pool (denominator) who had returned a postcard or otherwise requested information about the college. There are other ways to game a ranking system. For example, the *U.S. News* ranking algorithm includes a measure of alumni participation in the annual fund. By eliminating from the denominator graduates for whom the school does not have current contact information, an institution can make the giving ratio more favorable.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

"If it can't be measured, don't." (Swail 2010)

We value what we measure. And that's what makes rankings so popular. They systematically package available information to look like something important, so we focus attention on it. Nowhere is this more evident than in looking at how college rankings have shaped the public

perception of collegiate quality. This is an instructive example of two social phenomena: the law of primacy in social influence and the irresistible pull of prestige. In the former, the first persuasive argument presented on behalf of a position tends to hold sway in the absence of alternative explanations. To wit: When scholars over decades point to institutional selectivity as a reasonable proxy for quality and a national magazine declares it is measuring collegiate quality using selectivity and other "good data," and puts forth a single number based on these data, people buy into the system in large part because there's no available alternative. Furthermore, when the list of institutions bunched at the top of the ratings ooze with status and prestige, consumer confidence is validated.

The good news is that parents, prospective students, and the media are beginning to understand the serious limitations of magazine ratings and are asking more meaningful questions as they seek to distinguish among institutions. To their credit, established ranking systems such as *U.S. News* and *Maclean's* have responded by adding measures of persistence and graduation rates⁵ and acknowledging the importance of student engagement and learning outcomes. However, as noted earlier, until large numbers of colleges and universities are willing to share their results on similar instruments, these measures cannot be used in a ranking alongside measures that are common to all schools.

These advances aside, rankings will continue to be problematic if institutions are assigned a place in the list essentially because of their selectivity. We need some straight talk in the national media and public discussions about the deleterious grip that selectivity has had on our perceptions of what constitutes collegiate quality. It's educationally indefensible and bad public policy (Kuh and Pascarella 2004).

Just a few years ago there was a groundswell of espoused interest in boycotting the *U.S. News* rankings, a movement that involved a non-trivial number of selective liberal arts colleges (mostly Annapolis group members), championed by Lloyd Thacker under the umbrella of his Education Conservancy. But more recently the resistance seems to

⁵ *U.S. News* now adjusts persistence and graduation rates for institutional selectivity, making this measure more defensible as a proxy for this aspect of collegiate quality. At the same time, because it has no other alternative but to use the NCAA-inspired and federally endorsed IPEDS algorithm that includes only first-time full-time enrolled students, the measure is necessarily flawed as it disadvantages many institutions that serve part-time and transfer students.

have softened. Influential figures such as Jamie Merisotis, president of Lumina Foundation for Education, has been quoted (I presume accurately) as saying, “The reason rankings are popular is that they actually serve a purpose. [They] are basically reflecting the market’s desire for more information” (Kahlenberg 2010).

To be sure, the public wants and deserves more and better information. But I am not convinced that better rankings (assuming they can become “better”) are the answer. I’d much prefer more fulsome institutional self-disclosures about student learning outcomes and other measures that are congenial to an institution’s mission and its fulfillment of its promises to students as to what they can expect and gain from the school’s educational program. The aforementioned Voluntary System of Accountability championed by the Association of Public Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) is a step in the right direction, but still experimental. Other similar efforts are underway in the two-year sector and the independent college sector (although the latter is especially weak with regard to learning outcomes data). Moreover, very few institutions make these results accessible to external audiences (Jankowski and Makela 2010). One promising template institutions can use to publicly display measures of student accomplishment is the Transparency Framework developed by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (2011).

So we have a long way to go before we have meaningful, comparable information about things that matter to student learning and other desired outcomes across the postsecondary sectors. We need to focus on developing indicators that more accurately represent what happens to students during college and what they do after college, and we need to make this information available in a responsible way so that prospective students, policymakers, and institutional leaders can use it to make decisions that can improve student learning. Of course, there are significant challenges associated with doing so, which I describe elsewhere (Kuh 2007).

What could or should happen now with the rankings is up to policy makers, higher education scholars, and the media. This is not a question of eschewing the good while waiting for the perfect. Rankings promise neither the good nor the perfect. If you are not yet persuaded, consider the following comment posted after the Richards

and Coddington (2010) analysis appeared as we ponder next steps:

All of the rankings systems could do with a review of how the American Kennel Club judges dogs. Each dog is judged according to its breed standard and how closely it conforms to the ideal for that particular breed rather than against each other since comparing a Schnauzer to a Great Dane is rather senseless. It makes no sense to create overall “best in the country” or “best in the world” rankings since obviously comparing Rice to Reed or Penn State to Warren Wilson generates some ridiculous conclusions. What students and parents (whom these rankings are supposed to be for) need to know is “what type of college is best for me or my student” and “of the colleges that have that type of mission, which ones best live up to the ideals that their particular type implies”. The argument then shifts away from issues like selectivity, foundation strength, and number of new buildings (which are administrative functions), and back to the faculty realms of research opportunities, quality of instruction, pedagogy, etc.

To borrow from another world, right now we’re still left asking who is a better athletic team, the Dodgers, the Patriots, the Redwings, or the Lakers?

Although well-intentioned, attempts to develop a valid collegiate rankings system are doomed to be a fool’s errand, not the Lord’s work.

RESOURCES

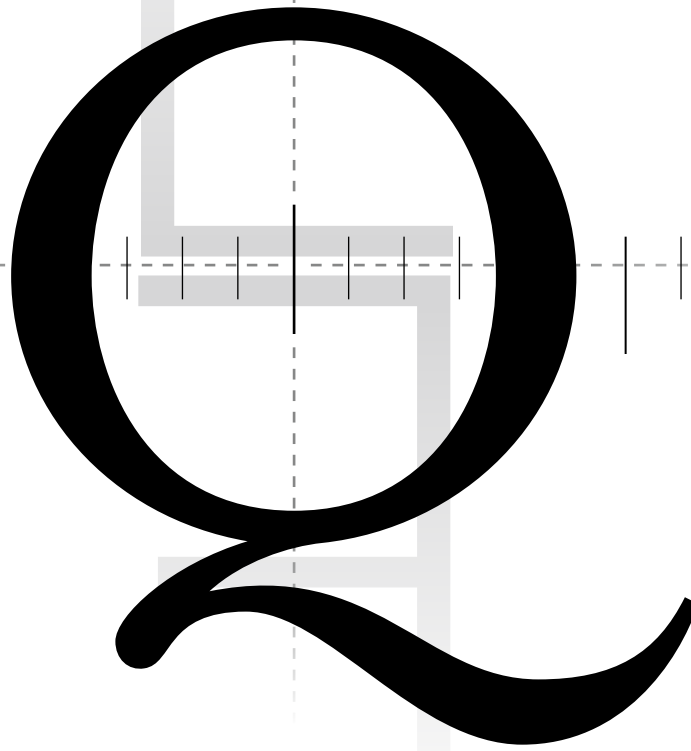
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Toward Devising Measures of



Quality AND **Effectiveness** ACROSS ALL INSTITUTIONS

The primary users of the current college ranking systems do not seem to be high-school students and families, but college presidents, board members, and development officers. As structured, the commercial ranking systems imply a precision that is not corroborated by research on what matters in college, nor can college quality be accurately summed to a single number. We propose a model that informs college choice for incoming students focusing on what the research tells us really matters and allows for nuances of effectiveness by using a multi-rank system.

Before proposing a new strategy for ranking colleges, we need to first think very carefully about the purpose of such rankings. Obviously they are meant to summarize relevant information and provide a way to gauge quality. The underlying premise behind these ranking systems is that they can be used to help prospective college students, and whoever helps with their college decisions, find the right college for them to attend. Yet according to our research we have conducted at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, only about 18 percent (less than one out of five) of 2009 entering first-time full-time students attending four-year colleges reported that “rankings from national magazines” were very important in deciding which college to attend. Of the 22 reasons we asked students about choosing their particular college, the college rankings “ranked” eleventh. Most importantly, researchers have found that mostly high income, high ability students use the rankings while students who attend local colleges, delayed-entry, and nontraditional students were least likely to use the rank-

ings (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole and Perez 1998). McDonough and her colleagues estimated in 1998 that 6.7 million copies of ranking magazines were sold. In 1998 there were 1.6 million full-time students entering the colleges that are ranked in these magazines. Either each student that went to college that year bought 4.2 magazines a piece, or the market is elsewhere.

If fewer than one in five students rated the rankings as very important in selecting their particular college, and they perhaps only purchased 24 percent of the magazines, who buys the rest? For whom are the rankings important? From the perspective of an institutional researcher, the people who seem to pay the most attention to these rankings are presidents, board members, development officers, and alumni, the latter two perhaps fueling the fire under the former. Enormous amounts of time are spent on college campuses nationwide dissecting, comparing, and trying to replicate the various rankings. In 2009 Clemson University made the ranking news in a different way, because it was suggested by a former member of the staff that after careful analysis of the rankings, Clemson made drastic changes strategically calculated to boost their place in the rankings, and not in the name of good university management. Although the focus of the story was on what Clemson had done, not many in the field would believe such tactics were only employed at that one university. And while certainly this is an extreme case, many more administrators would tell you that discussions actually occur regarding how their institution might look better in the coming year without changing their educational practices, but finding ways to influence the “reputational” ratings.

So let’s recognize then that different audiences look to the rankings for different things. Presidents compare themselves with their peer and aspirant groups, using the

rankings in conversations with alumni and other prospective donors. Deans use the rankings as part of conversations to lure faculty. State legislatures use the rankings as an indication of money well, or not well, spent. And then there are the prospective students and their families. Not to mention the media, who seem most of all enthralled with the rankings they themselves produce.

The rankings are intending to be a “consumer report,” but there are many dimensions to college quality that fit the needs of entering college students and parents attempting to make a decision that will incur a great deal of debt. Many more considerations are relevant. Are the majors you are considering offered? If you change your major, as half of graduating seniors have done, will there be enough breadth to satisfy you? Do students interact with faculty on campus? What kind of sense of belonging is there? Is there a culture of transfer there or are students planning to stay? Does the campus recognize diversity as important? Do students, faculty and staff believe that working toward social good is a core value? So many questions go into making such an important decision that in the end it is unique to the student wanting to go to college.

Some ranking systems have recently begun to recognize this, as the market expands with new rankings that attempt to cover new markets by being unique. *U.S. News* is the premier ranking system in terms of the presence it demands, with its overall ranking system mysteriously changing year to year and calculated to keep us on the edge of our seats as to who will be top this year. Harvard? Yale? Princeton? Cal Tech? *Washington Monthly* has taken an interesting tactic by looking at schools from three points of view, which, as described on their Web site, as the following: “social mobility (recruiting and graduating low-income students), research (producing cutting-edge scholarship and PhDs), and service (encouraging students to give something back to their country).” And this is where we think the future lies in rankings systems that are useful to various constituencies: in detailed examinations of institutions focused on particular aspects that students, presidents, alumni, development offices and legislatures can use or not use depending on their particular needs.

Another point about the rankings: the calculations that are used in ranking cannot be held secret, as if they were the “secret recipe” for KFC crispy chicken. Only if the consumers of the rankings know exactly what goes into

them can we know if they are useful or not. A related observation, as an aside, is how interesting it is that colleges and universities put so many resources, both in terms of personnel time and tracking systems, into completing all the very detailed questionnaires that go to the ranking systems, then put more resources into trying to figure out how they are calculated, and then spend even more time and money playing down the disappointing ranking that they essentially funded.

This leads directly into our next point: whomever owns the ranking controls the rankings. Are we content to continue to let the media, whose primary concern is selling magazines, wield so much influence in the institutional quality debate? Does what sells magazines necessarily make for the type of ranking system we would want when choosing a school for our sons or daughters? Not necessarily. We know that change in the rankings is what gets attention. We all know that change does not occur quickly in higher education. If anything, we are a deliberate bunch. Yet what seems to sell magazines is change, newsworthiness. “Harvard is number one, again” does not sell magazines. Remember the buzz when Cal Tech broke into the number one spot in 2000, jumping up from ninth place the previous year? That jump was significantly influenced by changes *U.S. News* made in the scoring system. After more changes, Cal Tech is down to number 7 this year. It makes sense, then, that a group without a profit motive be responsible for any new ranking system we might devise, so as not to confuse selling magazines with judging quality.

Finally, approximately half of students attending college attend a community college in the United States. They are not well represented overall in the rankings. Community College Week puts out a very basic list of community colleges ranked by how many and what type of certificates and degrees they award each year. *Washington Monthly* actually provides a fairly interesting ranking system based in part on student data from Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and graduation rates from the U.S. Department of Education. However, they then use a formula (which, to their credit they publicize) to mix all this together and come up with the usual list of ranked colleges.

In summary, we propose that there be a multidimensional ranking system to better serve the various needs and stakeholders interested in advancing improvement

in higher education. Such a system should be focused on various aspects of quality and produce separate sets of summary information that are not weighted into one final number that obscures the important details that make our many colleges and universities unique. This ranking system would be designed to inform college choice for incoming students, focused on what the research tells us really matters, not what is easier to count. Such a ranking system would include broad access, four-year institutions and community colleges. There would be clear transparency in any calculations that are used to judge quality, and such a system would be managed by a non-profit organization that also performs research. These are the broader concepts to consider, and in the following we will provide examples.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL RANKING

Using multiple criteria from a variety of sources of data would ideally provide a broader picture of the quality of institutions in terms of research, teaching and service that can be disaggregated by size, selectivity, and location. Such a multi-dimensional ranking system could be manipulated by users—free of charge. The data-based initiatives of National Academies’ Data-Based Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States,¹ for example, provides public access to an “unparalleled” data set to assess the quality and effectiveness of research doctorate programs in the United States. In another example, a consortium of European research and policy organizations are developing U-Multi-Rank² to assist with the transparency of international universities and academic programs.

Both examples are models that are objective and are touted as a “stakeholder driven approach,” providing relevant information to academics, students, administrators, policy-makers on various levels, providers of funding, business leaders, researchers, or the general public. Each holds promise in that a variety of stakeholders are consulted to improve, use and update the current ranking systems to address quality concerns. Most importantly, independent research organizations have collected the data about institutional effectiveness and continue to consult widely with stakeholders on its development and use. Instead of increasing competition at the very top of the ranking systems, such a system recognizes that users have very specific needs

in identifying and comparing programs of study and that many of them face regional or local, not national, choices.

One criticism of multidimensional ranking is that it is not “newsworthy” to report these rankings, since it is dependent on the comparable preferences of the user. Another criticism is that it is too much information. Multi-dimensional ranking systems have worked to make the data on quality more user-friendly by including demonstrations and examples for users to click and point for results, or retrieve underlying data if they choose to do so. More effective user interfaces can be developed. The important point, however, is that there are a greater variety of institutions that might meet specific student or administrator needs in comparing quality. Institutions are not uni-dimensional organizations, and quality can be ascertained in many areas. Similarly, as the next section details, students are best served by quality at the local level which, in turn, is related to meeting national priorities.

MAKING INFORMATION LOCAL AND RELEVANT TO STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES

A recent qualitative study of broad access institutions at HERI verified that the top reason students select institutions is based on “location, location, and location” (Project on Diverse Learning Environments: Creating Conditions for Student Success). The national norms for college freshmen indicate that slightly more than half of all entering freshmen choose four-year colleges that are less than 100 miles from home—this proportion is even higher if students rely on community colleges and respective agreements with local four-year institutions. Providing more information about local colleges is important to the population of students who attend these types of institutions. National CIRP Freshman Survey data show that students attending four-year colleges tell us that the top reason they choose a college is due to a “very good academic reputation.” But a close second for students electing to attend low-selectivity public institutions has to do with costs (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Palucki Blake and Tran 2010). Students electing to attend college close to home do so, in large part, in order to save on costs. Because most of the low-cost institutions are primarily teaching institutions, one important element is whether there is sufficient attention to teaching innovation and improvement of quality.

¹ See <www.nap.edu/rdp/>.

² See <www.u-multirank.eu>.

INDICATORS OF TEACHING AND SERVICE ACTIVITY

The existence of organized training for teaching among faculty and for graduate assistants would be an important indication of the commitment to undergraduate education and improvement of essential labor force skills within an institution. Because virtually all teaching faculty must present evidence of teaching achievements and quality, and promotions are based on student evaluations, it may also be possible to devise a common question on the quality of instruction across all teaching evaluation systems to obtain standard information about the quality of instruction across institutions. Most institutions currently have the capacity to report the quality of teaching by discipline because they use standard forms for evaluation and promotion within institutions. Currently, the national faculty survey administered triennially by HERI also provides data reported on pedagogical practices that are more student-centered in their focus. Nearly 500 institutions participate, or are part of random samples of faculty that are drawn to ensure representation of a variety of institutional types for the national norms (DeAngelo, *et. al.* 2007). Institutions can choose to survey their entire faculty and/or HERI often takes a random sample to supplement the information to produce aggregates of faculty behavior to use in analysis of contextual effects on student development. For example, faculty use of student-centered pedagogy (teaching) or civic-minded practice (items that capture research, teaching and service behaviors in relation to the community) can be used in predicting undergraduate student outcomes. Both of these measures advance the teaching and public service mission of the institution. Institutions currently collect this information in various forms and could also report it to improve measures of teaching quality and service.

DEGREE COMPLETION AND INSTITUTIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

Several national priorities receiving a great deal of attention are institutional productivity in terms of degree completion and degree completion in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields necessary for maintaining American competitiveness in science and innovation. President Obama has emphasized the importance of attaining a college degree, stating that by 2020, this nation will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (White House Office of the

Press Secretary 2009). Obama also identified three overarching priorities for STEM education: increasing STEM literacy so all students can think critically in these subject areas; improving the quality of math and science teaching so American students no longer are outperformed by those in other nations; and expanding STEM education and career opportunities for underrepresented groups, including women and minorities. This suggests that greater attention will be devoted to factors that increase degree productivity among postsecondary institutions, an issue that is not only important to students seeking to achieve their educational goals but also to national interests.

Most of the research on degree productivity has advanced beyond using the raw numbers of degree attainments, and increasingly sophisticated models are providing better information about institutional productivity. Institutions should not be judged (or compared with each other) on the basis of their degree completion rates (as *Washington Monthly* does with their ranking of “dropout factories”) unless “input” information on their entering students is also taken into account (Astin and Oseguera 2005). Most recently, *U.S. News* began to report institutions performing better at degree attainment than expected based on the number of Pell grant recipients. While we applaud this step, it doesn’t go far enough as only national universities and liberal arts colleges were compared along this dimension, when degree completion is now a national priority. Degree attainment can be evaluated taking into account the key factors that predict degree completion, including: high school GPA, race/ethnicity, gender, income of students (not simply Pell grant recipients), and key entering characteristics that are available on admissions applications shown to be relevant to retention. SAT and ACT are related to retention in the first year but tests are a weaker predictor of six-year degree completion once high school GPA is taken into account (Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson 2009). Some institutions do not require test scores but require high school transcript information to obtain HSGPA. The addition of a set of variables on the CIRP Freshman Survey improve prediction (some information may also be readily available to campuses) such as initial major indicated, the likelihood of transfer, living at home vs. on campus, or becoming involved in activities on campus. That is, these “inputs” need to be taken into account to obtain an indi-



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opportunity
for Change...

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS

cator of whether a campus is doing better than expected in degree attainment relative to the student population it attracts. Students need to know if they go to a particular institution, they will be successful. In short, this quality indicator provides recognition to broad access institutions for doing better with some of the most difficult populations to educate, which is aligned with national priorities.

Another factor that is not taken into account in rankings is the degree of student enrollment mobility a campus experiences, some of which is facilitated by their own policies and has much to do with the preparation and characteristics of the student body. Particular mobility patterns indicate a slower time to degree, but eventual completion, because several campuses are now working with local institutions to provide a more streamlined path that is both economical (allowing students to take remedial courses at other institutions at a lower cost) and ensures they eventually obtain a degree from the original four-year institution. Some campuses have proactively worked with student mobility through counseling and also agreements with neighboring institutions, while others have not attended to student mobility issues even though they are greatly affected by the phenomenon. One measure to include in a quality dimension to distinguish between institutional practices on degree completion may be the proportion of “returning learners” that complete degrees.

We could even take this section of the ratings further and provide detailed information on certain areas. With regard to STEM, recent studies indicate that postsecondary institutions are relatively inefficient in producing STEM degree recipients (Eagan 2010). This contrasts with national priorities to increase the science and technological skills of the workforce, with particular attention to the growing number of minorities in higher education (National Academies 2010). Given the difficulties in the first year, many aspirants leave STEM fields due to previous preparation or introductory classes present a significant barrier to students from continuing in STEM. This is another area where an indicator of institutions that do better than expected in STEM productivity relative to the types of students they attract would indicate the institution is investing in the talent development of its students. One measure might include proportion of majors relative to initial degree aspirants, as increasing numbers of students who major in STEM ensures a much higher rate of degree

productivity in STEM (Eagan 2010). Students indicate initial majors at college entry on admissions applications and also on the CIRP Freshmen Survey administered at orientation. The number of faculty that involve undergraduates in their research projects also is a key indicator of opportunities for success in STEM, as is the availability of a structured program for student support in STEM careers (often funded by NIH, NSF, or Howard Hughes Medical Institutes). Research has shown that opportunities for research with faculty is a key predictor of retention in STEM and graduate/professional school access (Eagan 2010; Chang, Cerna, Han and Sàenz 2008).

Expansion and diversification of the workforce at every level is important, in STEM and in many other fields. Currently, the diversity indicator used in the *U.S. News* Ranking includes Asian students. It would be ideal to include a diversity dimension of the ranking that would include equity indicators to identify institutions that have successfully attracted and graduated underrepresented groups (Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans). This would involve developing an equity measure for degree attainments. Thus, it would indicate institutions that do not simply attract a diverse student body but also do much better at graduating them at nearly equal rates. It would also provide a necessarily broader treatment of diversity issues. When asked how Cal Tech could be considered the top university in 2000 when only 1 percent of its students were black, *U.S. News* Director of Research Robert Morse, was quoted as saying “Would it be better if Cal Tech had more blacks? Yes, but it did not count as an academic issue” (Klein 1999).

CONCLUSION: MOVING FROM A MARKET-DRIVEN TO HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM-DRIVEN RANKING

In summary, we need to adopt a system of assessing comparable institutional quality along many dimensions that better serve the needs of the higher education system in the United States. This means developing a multi-dimensional ranking system, using a variety of indicators that stakeholders can help develop, provide feedback, and assist in the collection of data. Attention should be given to the kinds of indicators that do not disadvantage institutions with less selective admissions or diverse student bodies, but is focused on improving all institutions for all students.

In 1985, during another era of assessment and accountability in education, Alexander Astin wrote about using a talent development model as an approach to both improving educational excellence and educational equity. It was an attempt to move away from rankings that emphasized reputation and resource-based perspectives on excellence. Astin wrote, “true excellence lies in the institution’s ability to affect its students and faculty favorably, to enhance intellectual and scholarly development, and to make a positive difference in their lives.” (1985, pp. 60–61).

Given the increasingly diverse student bodies at many colleges, this model is more important today for both students in college and national interests. We need to develop and “own” the ranking system so that it is not tied to the market, but tied to the needs of society, improvement needs of the higher education system, and national priorities. This would involve transferring ownership or developing a new system so that educational communities can focus on improvement of both the criteria and also improve the information that goes into the rankings—so that all colleges and universities work to improve student success.

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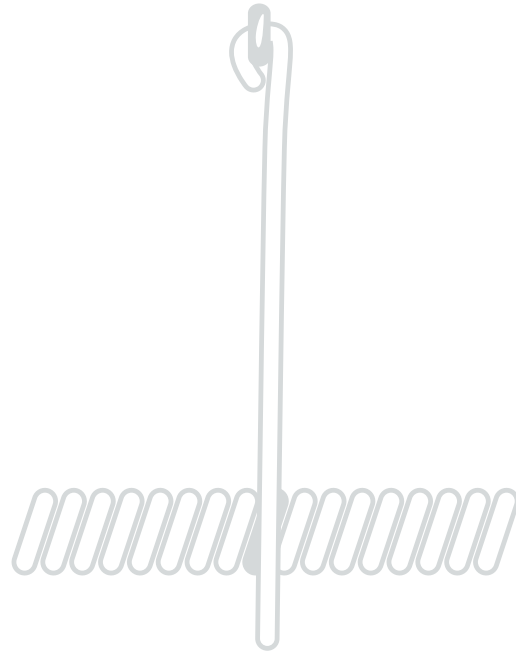
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In SEARCH *of a* BETTER MOUSETRAP

A LOOK AT **Higher Education Ranking Systems**

College rankings create much talk and discussion in the higher education arena. This love/hate relationship has not necessarily resulted in better rankings, but rather, more rankings. This paper looks at some of the measures and pitfalls of the current rankings systems, and proposes areas for improvement through a better focus on teaching and learning and workforce outcomes for graduates.



Domestic and international rankings of higher education continue to evolve and garner greater interest from educators, administrators, policymakers, students, and parents. With each annual release of rankings from *U.S. News & World Report* (*U.S. News*), *MacLean's* (Canada), Times Higher Education, QS World University Rankings, and Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Academic Ranking of World Universities comes increased media awareness and scrutiny on the meaning and impact of these data.

The information used to produce these ranking instruments is hamstrung by relatively limited availability of accessible, reliable, and comparable information. As Kuh (2011) describes in a recent paper, ranking systems focus primarily on inputs (*e.g.*, freshman SAT) rather than outputs (*e.g.*, job placement). Measuring the quality of an institution via what goes in rather than what comes out certainly limits the efficacy of such analysis. But until additional data on student outcomes are made available, the true utility of these rankings will remain suspect.

Of course, while these methodological issues are important to academics and researchers, the true consumers of this information—most notably students, parents,

and policymakers—find these methodological details simply to be ignorable background noise; consumers are most interested in knowing which schools are the best. In a complex web of higher education systems, ranking in a hierarchical manner is seemingly of limited utility. However, to consumers of these goods, rankings are rich data that impact decisions, money, and policy.

I argue that the institutional ranking process is better seen as an analytical game than as a tool of great utility for public policy and/or college choice. Regardless, institutional rankings are not likely to disappear any time soon. In fact, it is more prudent to suggest that rankings will grow in use and importance over time. Given that reality, the purpose of this paper is to provide reflection on current ranking systems and to serve as a foundation for discussing how to possibly improve rankings and ensure greater validity, reliability, and therefore utility.

WHAT ARE UNIVERSITY RANKINGS?

University rankings, or league tables as they are often referred to internationally, are mechanisms that use available information to rank order institutions of higher educa-

tion based on criteria defined by the ranking organization. The purpose of ranking systems is to quantify—down to a single number—the relative quality of institutions. The process of reducing institutions to one number makes most of researchers and academics cringe, because we fully understand that the complexities of institutions of higher education cannot be boiled down to a single 2- or 3-digit number. Even the Times Higher Education Supplement, producer of the *World University Rankings*, admits that higher education institutions are “extraordinarily complex organisations” and that it is “rather crude to reduce universities to a single number.” (Times Higher Education 2010).¹ As a result, institutional rankings have become contentious and oft-debated in the higher education arena over the course of the last quarter century: first in the U.S. and Canada, and now encapsulating a global audience.

THE HISTORY AND RISE OF RANKING SYSTEMS

Ranking systems are not a new phenomena. In the United States, rankings have been around in some form since the 1800s (Kuh 2011), but it was the rankings developed by the *U.S. News & World Report* (*U.S. News*) in the early 1980s that truly stoked the rankings fire. Salmi and Bassett (2009) suggest that rankings grew out of an apparent need for transparency and greater levels of accountability. In truth, the creation of rankings in the United States was initially fueled by an insatiable appetite for higher education by the baby boomer generation. The growth of rankings has been further fueled by the massification of the U.S. higher education system in the mid-1900s and the emergence of baby boomers as the “helicopter parent,” hovering over their children’s educational achievements and future. By the early 1980s, *U.S. News* was able to capitalize on the demand for more information about colleges and universities.

Ranking systems are only able to rank institutions based on widely available data from institutions and governments. Perhaps the main reason the United States began ranking institutions early on is the vast information collected by the federal government. The U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System² (IPEDS) collects information on almost ev-

ery college and university in the nation. Now, on the international stage, the flat and global knowledge economy has produced an increased appetite for higher education rankings. In the prior era, the world traveled to the United States and Britain for higher education. However, the flattening of our new world has pushed the expansion of higher education in most industrial countries.

This global massification of higher education has resulted in a new “arms race” in the post-Cold War era: the battle for higher education supremacy. As the world began to catch up to the United States in other areas of commerce, such as manufacturing, communications, and engineering, they began to see the need for better systems of postsecondary education to create the type of workforce that could compete with the U.S. Despite much criticism of the United States from abroad on a variety of issues, it is a widely held belief that the system of higher education in the United States is the best in the world. Foreign governments simply put 2+2 together: a great higher education system must be linked to a great economy. And with that, the arms race began.

WHY USE RANKINGS?

I argue that the first and most important consumer of ranking information is not the student, as many suggest. In fact, data from UCLA’s Higher Education Resource Institute (HERI) found that only 18 percent of students said that college rankings were important in the college choice process (Hurtado and Pryor 2011). Rather, it is the parent, in large part because they often are the monetary source for their child’s education and are the driving force behind the collection of information and the weighing of variables. It is widely believed that many parents push *their* children to attend institution of *their* choice, based on *their* beliefs and knowledge, with students only tangentially involved in the decision-making process.

Of course, this does not hold true for all parents. Some parents, especially those who never went to college, are simply happy to see their child make the great leap to the postsecondary world. To them, rankings matter little. The rankings of this discussion serve the needs of a select group of parents that have (a) gone to college, (b) are more likely working in professional fields, and (c) have enough disposable income or available financial resources to pay for colleges in the elite area of the college rankings.

¹ See <www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2010-2011/analysis-methodology.html>.

² See <<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>>.

The second stakeholder with a viable interest in rankings is university leadership. While most administrators are quick to denounce the importance of *U.S. News* and other rankings (particularly when the rankings are poor or declining), they are also the first to send out an alumni fundraising letter with the announcement of their rank on *U.S. News* when they have experienced increased or high rankings. In fact, advertising a ranking is the most broadly used method of fundraising for those schools which happen to be in the top 25 or 50 institutions of a category. I have personally held conversations with CEOs and other high-level administrators at institutions that are intently focused on raising their institution's rank in *U.S. News*. If they are 27th, they want to be in the top 25; and if they are 17, they want to be 16. To them, rankings matter because they are directly correlated with perception of excellence, which in turn correlates with increase student enrollment, offering further opportunity to raise tuition and fees, develop additional research capacity and attract resources, and garner additional government funds. In the end, rankings are about money and little else.

The third stakeholder is the policymaker. Policymakers are interested in the rankings for many reasons. Higher education is a market chip for economic growth and is a valuable commodity for research dollars and investment. There is a vested interest in having state or regional universities rank high, as they tend to spur additional technological development, corporate investment, and federal support. Although there are limited data on this issue, it is likely that rankings have had a significant impact on higher education in many states due to competition generated by the rankings.

The impact of rankings on public policy has been more dramatic outside of the U.S. China, for instance, has been very specific and open about its intentions to challenge the United States in higher education. One of their primary, stated goals is to increase the number of Chinese institutions in Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Academic Ranking of World Universities. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, India, and South Korea also represent a host of nations looking toward the rankings as a lever for economic stimulus and international competitiveness. To them, rankings matter because they want to be perceived as the purveyor of the best higher education in the world.

Recent activities suggest that they are well on their way toward this goal.

WHAT DO RANKING SYSTEMS REALLY MEASURE?

As previously mentioned, IPEDS collects information on almost every postsecondary institution in the US. In fact, in order to participate in the federal student aid system (*i.e.*, be able to provide federal grants and loans to students), institutions *must* complete the IPEDS series of surveys each year or they risk losing their ability to provide federally-sponsored student aid. This possibility is the death-knell of almost any postsecondary institution.

Other organizations that survey institutions, specifically the College Board, *U.S. News*, and Peterson's, formed the Common Data Set (CDS) Initiative in order to streamline data collection efforts and simplify the submission process for institutions. These organizations, working in concert with the U.S. Department of Education and IPEDS, share their information in order to reduce the potential burden on institutions from multiple surveys. Even the competitors in the U.S. play well together.

Although we are blessed, to a degree, with rich datasets, the Achilles heel of rankings in the United States and beyond is the sophistication of available data. This is where most criticism of rankings fall. As Kuh (2011) states, most rankings indicators are input-level data rather than output. Vedder (2008), in denouncing *U.S. News's* ranking system, said that "They're roughly equivalent to evaluating a chef based on the ingredients he or she uses."

A brief analysis of what goes in to some of the major ranking systems helps us understand the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts. *U.S. News* creates several types of university rankings, from undergraduate, to graduate, to international. Regarding their basic undergraduate analysis, here are the categories and weights used to create their numerical index:³

- **Undergraduate Academic Reputation** (22.5%). Peer and professional surveys are administered to solicit feedback on the reputation of the institution. This is a viable and appropriate measure, but is also based entirely on subjective data.

³ For brevity, only weights for "National Universities" are provided. See <<http://www.usnews.com/articles/education/best-colleges/2010/08/17/how-us-news-calculates-the-college-rankings.html?PageNr=4> for additional information>.

- **Graduation and Freshman Retention** (20%). Uses freshman retention rate (fall-to-fall) and six-year graduation rates, via IPEDS data. Arguably one of the better indicators used in *U.S. News*, but hamstrung by not providing any consideration of student academic ability.
- **Graduation Rate Performance** (7.5%; for National Universities and National Liberal Arts Colleges only). This is an interesting calculation developed to measure whether an institution does “better” than expected by comparing predicted versus actual graduation. An important measure to balance the gross data provided through IPEDS because of the variance of institutions and students.
- **Faculty Resources** (20%). Indicators include class size, faculty pay, and faculty degree status (terminal). Because so many factors impact these areas, this is a weak indicator. As stated previously, there is limited research supporting class size, but using it as a proxy for how much human resource is available per student is of some interest.
- **Student Selectivity** (15%). Completely input-based data on ACT and SAT test scores, high school class ranking, and acceptance/admit rates. This indicator illustrates how attractive an institution is by the apparent “quality” of the student who attends.
- **Financial Resources** (10%). A calculation of spending per student, which again is a proxy for the level of service provided to students. Meaningful, but input based.
- **Alumni Giving Rate** (5%). This indicator is meant to serve as a proxy for student satisfaction by the percentage of alumni that give back to their alma mater. In lieu of the limited information available, this is interesting but extraordinarily weak. Many institutions have figured out how to game this indicator by automatically creating alumni contributions through special fees. Thus, it becomes of less utility for the rankings.

On the international level, *U.S. News*, Times Higher Education, and other ranking systems utilize similar indicators as posted above. As described, the U.S. analysis benefits greatly from the availability of data from IPEDS data and the Common Data Set. The Canadian rankings, conducted by *MacLean's*, is severely handicapped in comparison to *U.S. News* because of the lack of similar data. In Canada, the federal government does not collect information like IPEDS. International rankings, by comparison,

are even more limited by data since the common denominator for analysis is reduced to only those data universally available at the institutional level.

U.S. News, in its *World University Rankings* analysis, for instance, focuses on data that measure the following (with the subsequent weights):

- Academic Peer Review (40%)
- Employer Review (10%)
- Student-to-Faculty-Ratio (20%)
- Citations per Faculty Member (20%)
- International Faculty (5%)
- International Students (5%)

Similarly, the Times Higher Education Supplement's ranking system gives one-third of its rankings weight to published citations of faculty, 30 percent on research indicators, and 30 percent on teaching.

These indicators beg several questions: Is it clear that having international faculty necessarily makes a school a better place to learn? Does having a higher percentage of institutional (foreign) students improve the outcomes of students? Does having a lower student-to-faculty ratio illustrate a better learning environment, even though there exists no significant research suggesting that to be the case? What do peer and employer reviews really tell us about an institution? And finally, do the number of citations per faculty member provide an accurate measure of institutional quality, or just how much focus faculty spend on publication rather than teaching?

Current ranking systems utilize mainly input measures such as institutional resources (*i.e.*, faculty salaries, library resources, number of faculty with terminal degrees), but with the exception of graduation rates and, in the case of *Money* magazine, first-to-second-year persistence rate (Kuh 2011), very few ranking systems include indicators of student performance and learning.

If the primary purpose of the university is to provide an educational vehicle for students, shouldn't the education of those students be the primary indicator of institutional quality?

BUILDING A BETTER MOUSETRAP

U.S. News takes considerable abuse for what they do. I argue that most of this is undeserved. The magazine is not the “bad apple.” Rather, *U.S. News* has simply cre-

ated instruments and information based on data that are both universal and available. In 2010, I attended the annual Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) conference in Washington, DC, where Bob Morse of *U.S. News* received significant criticism for their rankings system. Morse shot back, “If you can make a better system, make it better.” To be fair, *U.S. News* has been very inclusive in the development of their system. They are misrepresented as the Wizard behind the curtain, hiding all their cards from the public, which just isn’t so.

Unless the type of data collected changes significantly, the evolution of college rankings will be stagnant. “In fairness, in order to include meaningful measures of desired learning outcomes in their algorithms, ranking outfits need valid, reliable data from large numbers of colleges and universities that have the same or comparable measures,” states Kuh (2011, p. 16). Without an injection of new information, there is very little that can improve the ranking systems.

If we want a better ranking system, what type of information do we need? If we wish to move to an output-based ranking of higher education, what type of data will provide us with more valid indicators of institutional excellence and success? I suggest two major areas for consideration and exploration.

Quality of Teaching and Learning

Currently, “quality” in *U.S. News* is quantified via surveys of peers and professionals, which are, to a degree, useful indicators. But there are no indicators on the absolute quality of how teachers teach and how students learn. However, there have been several recent efforts to collect data domestically and internationally to rectify this omission.

On the domestic side, the *Collegiate Learning Assessment* (CLA), developed by the Council for Aid to Education (CAE), which, at the time, was a subsidiary of the RAND Corporation, is an effort to quantify learning on campus. The CLA is essentially a student-level inventory to measure the “critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and writing skills of college and university students” (CLA 2010). The purpose is so that schools can see how their students, as a group, compare to students at other schools. CLA also builds in professional development and support activities to help institutions and departments improve their teaching practices. To date,

over 400 institutions have worked with the CLA. Lumina Foundation for Education recently funded a longitudinal study of the CLA,⁴ and there is also an instrument being developed for community colleges.

Other domestic data collection efforts include ACT’s *Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency*⁵ (CAAP), which measures student academic achievement on a nationally normed basis, and the National Science Foundation’s *Critical Thinking Assessment Test*⁶ (CAT).

A recent development generating much discussion is OECD’s AHELO Project. AHELO (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes), supported in part by Lumina Foundation for Education, is being designed to measure student learning to inform universities, students, policymakers, and employers about quality of teaching and learning. The instrument to measure student learning will include emphasis on generic skills (*e.g.*, critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, written communication); discipline-specific skills (in economics and engineering); and contextual information (*e.g.*, institutional indicators, such as equipment and facilities, research, etc.).

The development of the AHELO metrics is currently underway, with a pilot of 150 institutions in 15 countries slated to begin in July 2011. If the pilot is successful, OECD will consider what they call a “full-scale AHELO.” The American Council on Education (ACE), the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) are all sponsors of AHELO.

Whether any or all of these developments impact college ranking systems remains to be seen, but these are steps down the appropriate path. If we want to truly measure institutional quality, we need to measure teaching and learning.

Workplace Indicators

For the most part, workplace indicators, such as earnings and employment status of former students, are not part of any ranking efforts. But if we want to measure the ultimate output of higher education via success in the workforce, we need to add these types of indicators to the analysis.

⁴ See this article summarizing the longitudinal findings: <www.collegiatelearningassessment.org/files/CLA_Lumina_Longitudinal_Study_Summary_Findings.pdf>.

⁵ See <www.act.org/caap>.

⁶ See <www.ntech.edu/cat/home/>.

Resources for International Admissions

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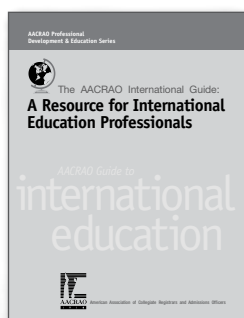
AACRAO's International Education Services (IES) serves as a resource center for matters on international education and exchange. All of the evaluators in IES have worked for a number of years at institutions evaluating foreign educational credentials for admission purposes. Our staff of professionals has evaluated thousands of foreign educational credentials, and has an average of 20 years of previous evaluation experience before joining AACRAO, with no staff member having less than seven years of experience. Our extensive archives, built up over 35 years, enable AACRAO to accurately research any educational credential in great depth. Historically, this service started with the AACRAO-US Agency for International Development (US-AID) Cooperative Agreement that began in the mid-1960s.

The Foreign Education Credential Service provides evaluations of educational credentials from all countries of the world, assuring consistent assessment of the qualifications of those persons educated outside the United States. The Foreign Education Credential Service is trusted in the field, and our evaluation reports are designed to help any reader to understand foreign academic credentials.

If you are looking for an easily accessible up-to-date electronic resource on foreign educational systems, the AACRAO *Electronic Database for Global Education* (EDGE) provides a wealth of information for each country profile in a convenient and consistent form. EDGE is a valuable and trusted tool for both novice and experienced international admissions personnel. The database is being expanded regularly and updated as educational systems change. For more information and to subscribe online visit aacraoedge.aacrao.org/register.



A Item #9019



B Item #0103



C Item #9018



D Item #9026



E Item #6538

A FOREIGN EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS REQUIRED

Looking for a concise and easily referenced source for information on credentials and other documentation that would be required for entry from a given country to a specified level of study? The fifth edition of Foreign Educational Credentials indicates, in a convenient and consistent form, the educational credentials which should be available for applicants from over 200 countries.

Item #9019 \$100 nonmembers | \$75 members (2003)

B THE AACRAO INTERNATIONAL GUIDE: A RESOURCE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

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Item #0103 \$80 nonmembers | \$60 members (2001)

C THE AACRAO INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE ADMISSIONS GUIDE

A companion to The AACRAO International Guide: A Resource for International Educational Professionals, this volume provides a hands-on approach to enable you to determine the admissibility of applicants from abroad to your graduate degree and non-degree programs. A critical addition to any international educational library.

Item #9018 \$75 nonmember | \$50 members (2003)

D AUSTRALIA: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A guide for United States admissions officers to the structure and content of the educational system of Australia, including descriptions of the state and territorial public school systems. Also includes a formal set of comparability and placement recommendations based upon the author's research.

Item #9026 \$95 nonmembers | \$70 members (2004)

E BRAZIL

A study of the structure and content of the educational system of Brazil, including extensive descriptions of undergraduate and technical programs. Also includes specific regional and country-wide statistics, and the author's recommendations on the evaluation of foreign educational credentials.

Item #6538 \$85 nonmembers | \$60 members (2004)

F THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

A study of the educational system of the People's Republic of China, from preschool to higher education. Includes information on entrance examinations, vocational education, and a thorough guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.

Item #6536 \$85 nonmembers | \$60 members (2000)

INDIA

A study of the educational system of India, including the different types of universities, computer and management education, and a detailed list of professional associations in India. Also includes guidelines to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.

Item #5342 \$85 nonmembers | \$60 members (1998)

G KYRGYZSTAN

The Educational System of Kyrgyzstan describes the current educational structure of Kyrgyzstan and serves as a guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States. This monograph contains information on both secondary and higher education, grading scales and a directory of post-secondary institutions in Kyrgyzstan. It also covers transitional issues, fraud and academic corruption.

Item #9020 \$45 nonmembers | \$30 members (2003)

H PHILIPPINES

A study of the educational system of the Philippines from basic to higher education, with information on academic and vocational degrees, and non-traditional education, including Islamic education. Serves as a valuable guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States, with information on accrediting agencies and professional education associations in the Philippines.

Item #6537 \$85 nonmembers | \$60 members (2001)

ROMANIA

A study of the educational system of Romania. Includes an extensive list of sample diplomas, and detailed guidelines for admissions officers in the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.

Item #5339 \$75 nonmembers | \$50 members (1998)

TAIWAN

An extensive guide to the structure and content of the educational system of Taiwan, from kindergarten through graduate and professional studies. Includes detailed information about schools recognized and not recognized by the Ministry of Education, a vital guide for any admissions officer considering incoming students from Taiwan.

Item #6539 \$95 nonmembers | \$70 members (2004)

I THAILAND

A study of the educational system of Thailand and guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States. Covers preschool education onwards, with a particular emphasis on higher education studies, including degrees and teaching methods. Includes information about teacher training, technical and vocational educational and health studies.

Item #5341 \$75 nonmembers | \$50 members (1998)

J UNITED KINGDOM

Offers guidance on the structure and content of the United Kingdom's education system. The five-chapter guide includes a historical look at major legislative and policy changes affecting the system as a whole, and offers details on the country's Further Education, Secondary Education, and Professional Qualifications frameworks. Additionally, helpful reference information can be found in the book's five appendices, including: a key to system-related acronyms; listings of the UK's higher education institutions and further education colleges; details on the National Qualifications Framework; and a comprehensive listing of professional bodies and learned societies.

Item #9027 \$95 nonmembers | \$70 members (2006)

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F Item #6536



G Item #9020



H Item #6537



I Item #5341



J Item #9027

U.S. News does provide some level of information in their Best Graduate Schools rankings, depending on the discipline. For instance, in their analysis of business schools, *U.S. News* is able to collect average starting salary and employment rates. Similarly, their law school analysis uses employment rates of graduates and bar passage rates. However, they have no similar indicators for graduate schools in other schools such as education or engineering.

Ultimately, we need indicators such as those used in the business school analysis. It would be helpful to know the percentage of students who gain employment after graduating from a school, the type of employment (*e.g.*, full- or part-time), and also whether it is in a field relative to the individual's degree.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There are surely many other areas that we could focus on in developing new and better rankings of higher education institutions, but our focus should stay on the development of better outcome indicators so we can use input variables only for clarifying analysis. Further development and collection of data that enhances our understanding of the learning process at an institution and what students do post-graduation are important for all consumers of rankings data.

The remaining challenge is providing greater utility of rankings. The major rankings systems are all static. That is, they are represented by a number in a list. The next generation of rankings needs to be more flexible, allowing students, parents, and others to manipulate data based on their interests and needs. Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper created the "Campus Navigator," which al-

lowed students and parents to compare institutions based on criteria important to them. This type of flexibility that provides more power to the user is important to explore.

In the end, the development and refinement of rankings systems depends on who the user is. For students and parents, it needs to provide enough information in a user-friendly manner to help with their college choice. For the administrators, it needs to provide factual, comparative information to help them improve education—rather than focusing on simply gaining market advantage. And for policymakers, the better mousetrap needs to provide details that can help craft and maneuver public policy to improve higher education for all.

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The Trifecta of Student Support Services: Helping Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Succeed in Postsecondary Education

BY REBECCA HANSEN

Anecdotal evidence suggests that each year, more and more students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) apply to and are accepted into universities. Given the increased prevalence of ASDs, it is inevitable that your institution will soon be providing support to students with this diagnosis. Identifying students who need support may be challenging; a student may not exhibit behaviors readily recognizable as symptomatic of an ASD; or may choose not to disclose their diagnoses. How can your institution prepare itself to meet the needs of students with ASDs? This article describes three primary areas of student support services that can aide students with ASDs and ensure that they are afforded the same opportunities to succeed in higher education as their peers without ASDs. Specifically, we describe the level of support one university provides for students on the autism spectrum. Even as it continues to evolve, the College Program for Students with Asperger's Syndrome (College Program) at Marshall University is meeting the needs of students with ASDs in the areas of academics, independent living, and social skills.

THE COLLEGE PROGRAM

Nestled within the community of Huntington, West Virginia, Marshall University is home to a program many families find to be a lifesaver for their children on the

autism spectrum. The College Program is housed within the West Virginia Autism Training Center, a legislatively funded, statewide agency that serves families with children diagnosed with ASDs. The College Program operates within the College of Education and Human Services—a natural fit. As very few postsecondary programs cater to the specific needs of students with Asperger's Syndrome, or other conditions on the autism spectrum, the College Program is a pioneer in the field: It has provided support in the areas of academics, independent living, and social skills since 2002. Many institutions send representatives to our campus to meet with administrative staff and so benefit from our expertise.

Although the College Program does not advertise its student support services, it receives hundreds of applications each year. This seems to be a byproduct of the program's ongoing advocacy at the national level for individualized student support within higher education; of its reputation being spread at conferences and workshops; and, of course, of families learning about it via the Internet. The College Program currently supports 33 full-time Marshall University students; accepting approximately, eight to ten students each fall. The number of students accepted each year varies according to program resources and the number of students who will be graduating.

The College Program's admissions process is separate from that of the university. Because we believe in a positive behavioral support approach, families are included in all aspects of the admissions process and explore holistic themes. For example, during the required informal, in-person interview, we ask a series of questions that address seven different domains of skill sets. These domains range from academic ability to personal insight. The prospective student may or may not possess these skills upon entrance to the university. Gauging how vulnerable a student with an ASD may be on campus is vital to knowing how best to support him.

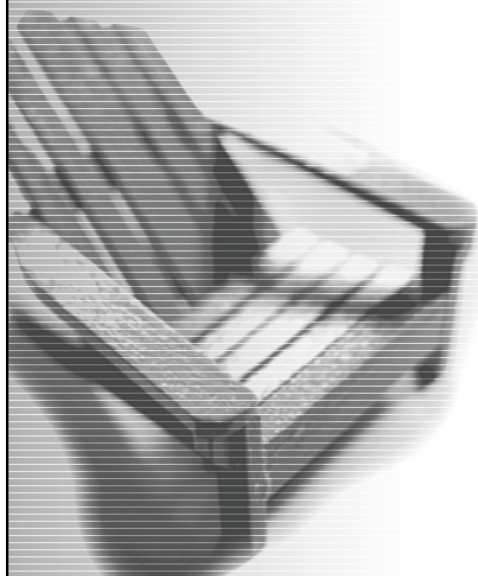
Factors that determine whether an applicant is accepted include his level of ability and staff members' sense that the applicant could be successful at another institution. Our goal is to provide services that are not only necessary but that can enable the student to reach his full potential—an opportunity that might not be possible without individualized student support services. Program costs

range from \$1,800 to \$3,600 per semester, depending on the level of support necessary. Although some agencies cover this cost, most families have to pay for the specialized services themselves.

How can your institution identify—and educate administrative faculty and staff—about the growing population of students with autism spectrum disorders? While some universities do not have the opportunity to be affiliated with a statewide service, or operate as an extension of a University College, it is possible to provide students with appropriate support through a disability services office and/or a student affairs department.

The remainder of this article describes how the College Program utilizes the natural supports of the university to assist students in enjoying a typical postsecondary education experience. The first step is to consider student support services as they relate particularly to academics, social skills, and independent living skills.

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ACADEMICS

"I made a perfect score on the SATs, so Harvard accepted me. But then I was kicked out."

This student was accepted at Harvard at least in part because of his high level of academic ability. Yet problems arose when symptoms of his Asperger's Syndrome began to interfere with his progress. The rigor of a college curriculum can produce a level of anxiety that may overwhelm a student who has difficulty with executive functioning skills. Like the vast majority of students with ASDs, the former Ivy League student struggled with time management and organization. Further, being expected to communicate within a classroom setting and then to return to the dorm to complete 60-plus hours of homework weekly proved overwhelming. His grades dropped quickly, to the point at which he was put on academic probation and asked to leave.

Almost all universities offer tutoring services that all students can access and utilize. The particular challenge in supporting students on the autism spectrum is getting them to the tutoring center and knowing how to help them organize their assignments in such a way that they are continually reminded of what is expected and when work is due. Should this be the responsibility of a tutoring center? Maybe. Tutoring services provide support in terms of helping students learn content, but why not extend the support by working to ensure that students actually submit the assignments they complete? Often, students with ASDs find that the most challenging aspect of higher education is submitting assignments on time. Students may not submit their assignments at all if they believe the deadline has passed or that their work is not up to par.

Many students with ASDs have tremendous academic ability. They are being accepted by colleges and universities, but often are failing to achieve their full potential because of inadequate support. Most college applications invite, but do not require students, to disclose any psychological diagnosis. Many students choose not to disclose this information, fearing that it may preclude them from being accepted. Although disclosure on college applications is a matter of debate, it nevertheless is important to understand that once a psychological condition is disclosed, it is the responsibility of the institution to provide support that provides the student with the best opportunity

for success. Retention rates surely would increase if proper student service supports were in place.

SOCIAL SKILLS

"During our first dorm floor meeting, the resident advisor asked if there was something special that we wanted to share about ourselves, so I lifted both of my legs behind my ears and said, 'Can anyone do this!?!'"

What is your institution doing to promote socialization on campus and in the community? Universities typically offer a plethora of options for freshmen. Involving students early and often is a top goal of our College Program and student activity programming boards. However, the key factor is not necessarily the availability or even the number of activities that are offered but rather how university staff encourage students to become involved. Not knowing when and where clubs and organizations meet can prevent a student with an ASD from participating and, ultimately, from having a fulfilling college experience. Time spent in class combined with time spent completing the work required for each course accounts for only part of the week. Work and family obligations aside, the average freshman has an overwhelming amount of free time. Having the skills necessary to manage this free time is vital to a student's success in higher education.

Remember our Harvard student? The College Program found a way to involve him in the community; this gave him a newfound level of confidence that enabled him to venture out of the comfort zone of his dormitory and into a broader social environment. Investing time and energy in identifying students' interests and in matching those interests with related activities is the best way to support students with ASDs socially.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

"I think they are putting laxatives in the breakfast food around here!"

Have your students ever lived away from home? Do they know how to do laundry, take medications properly, interact with others, and manage money? Most freshmen do not have the skills necessary to do all (or any) of these activities. They are being introduced to independent living

skills for the first time and need appropriate support to identify and to learn what they may need assistance with.

The level of support that residence life services offers is just as important to students with autism spectrum disorders as proper academic and social support. Think: If your comfort level at home is skewed, are you able to produce top-quality work? It is no different for students with ASDs. The level of comfort and understanding made available to students is essential to their college experience. The key is balance. Allowing students the time and space necessary to unwind yet knowing when to nudge them out of their comfort zone is a challenge. By better understanding their conditions, staff can discern how to negotiate this fine line. Educating staff members as to the specific needs of students on the autism spectrum is fundamental to providing such students with appropriate support.

The College Program collaborates with residence services not only to provide them information about about autism spectrum disorders, but also to implement techniques designed to help students with ASDs socialize appropriately in a dorm setting. For example, a student on the autism spectrum may require specialized training to understand certain social rules—*e.g.*, dressing etiquette. A student on the autism spectrum may perceive a common living area as an extension of his dorm room and so may enter the common area wearing only his boxer shorts. Providing resident advisors with visual cues to post in inconspicuous places throughout a dormitory can help students with social challenges understand and follow rules that guide social interactions.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

All of these types of student support services—academic, social, and independent living—can be integrated. For example, professors may offer students extra credit for getting involved on campus and within the community. Student affairs may cooperate with residence life to develop programs that encourage students with ASDs to become involved in the community. Such efforts are of tremendous benefit to the student with an ASD who is too nervous to speak in a course in which points are awarded for participation. The College Program often requests these kinds of accommodations from university administration; they not only help students achieve better grades but also help ensure that they have a fulfilling college experience.

Higher education institutions can collaborate with student support service departments to ensure that all students, regardless of disability, have the opportunity to succeed. Services must extend beyond disability student support. By promoting awareness and working collaboratively, universities can produce graduates who have had a fulfilling college experience and who are better prepared to be productive members of the workforce and society.

It is inevitable that students with ASDs are going to be a part of every university nationwide. Families will continue to advocate for their sons and daughters with ASDs to attend universities that understand their conditions and provide the supports necessary to ensure that they are successful.

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Creating a Successful Training Program for Frontline Staff: The University of Minnesota's Integrated Student Services Model

BY HEATHER L. PETERSON AND CARRIE L. OTTO

Successfully preparing frontline counseling staff in an integrated student services model is a challenge—one that management staff in One Stop Student Services at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UMTC) have been fine-tuning for almost ten years. The effort has required collaboration across units in a series of trial and error attempts involving multiple training methods, resources, materials, and personnel. As a result of their dedication to clear goal setting and continuous improvement, One Stop staff have crafted new as well as refresher counselor training programs with measurable outcomes of success. This article describes the formal program for cross-training new counseling staff and for keeping existing staff continuously refreshed on “hot” topics throughout the year. Items of particular focus are the goals and structure of the training program, trainers, and integrating customer service and soft skills into the core of training. The article concludes with a description of ways in which the training programs have been evaluated to measure success.

The University of Minnesota is among the largest public research institutions in the country: It enrolls approximately 52,000 students on the UMTC campus alone and offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs on five campuses. In 2002, UMTC implemented a One Stop Student Services Center, an organizational

model to streamline student contact and interactions required to conduct registration, financial aid, billing, payments, and student records processes. Administrative oversight of One Stop Student Services is provided by Academic Support Resources within the Office of Undergraduate Education. Academic Support Resources is the department that oversees the offices of the registrar, student finance, and classroom management. All four offices collaborate to support students' success; One Stop Student Services Center staff are the “public face” of those services.

One Stop counselors are full-time professional staff with experience, skills, and expertise in registration, financial aid, billing, payments, and student records. Counselors' professional administrative classification presumes use of professional judgment with regard to university policies, as, for example, those pertaining to overriding registration holds and waiving fees. In the initial stages of hiring, counselors were trained by “shadowing” department staff as they performed unfamiliar tasks, learned on the job, and taught one another in a classroom environment. According to one of the first counselors to be trained in this way, “It was always the plan to do formal training, but shadowing in the beginning helped build relationships and was proof of the concept that we could be taught all that we were expected to know. The in-class

time was needed to solidify the information as well as the culture we were trying to create” (Dana 2010). For the new integrated model to succeed, counselors needed to be specialists, rather than generalists; this would require an in-depth and well-supported training experience.

GOALS

Staff training is a forum for communicating customer service standards and professional expectations; it cultivates value and meaning within each individual employee as well as teamwork within the office. The goals of the One Stop Student Services training program thus go beyond teaching day-to-day responsibilities. Rather, the goals are to:

- Provide new staff with a strong knowledge base;
- Inform current staff of new or changing policies and procedures;
- Maintain accurate, holistic, and user-friendly training material;
- Ensure consistent, efficient, and high-quality service for all customers;
- Foster collaboration among multiple units;
- Prepare staff for future advancement opportunities; and
- Increase satisfaction of the university community.

STRUCTURE

Content Organization

Having established the goals of the training program, the next obvious hurdles were to identify the content to be covered in training and the ways in which it would be delivered. Collaboration across units determined that training should be centered on the student life cycle (that is, “the way the student experiences UMTC”). The life cycle reinforces the cross-functional and specialist mentality of the One Stop counselor’s job description. For example, if a student asks to cancel a class, a counselor can discuss with certainty not only the cancellation itself but also how the canceled credits will affect the student’s financial aid and billing. The new counselor training program establishes the student life cycle in the context both of one academic year and of the lifespan of the student’s career at the university. A recently hired counselor said, “Higher education is very cyclical, so the life cycle helped me focus on what was important to discuss with students and on how all

topics fit together, depending on the time of year” (Love 2010). The refresher training program takes a more immediate, monthly view of what is happening on campus and aims to deliver content relating to that part of the student life cycle that will unfold over the coming month. One counselor shared, “We really need the refresher/renewing training as more seasonal topics return or as changes to existing programs arise. We are able to be more consistent and confident in our service to students” (Kamrath 2010).

Delivery Methods

The goals and content of the One Stop Student Services training program are fundamental to its structure. The question, then, becomes “How do you deliver 300 pages’ worth of complex material to new staff and ensure their retention of knowledge while maintaining their motivation?” Throughout eight years of fine-tuning the program, the training team’s attention to trainees’ various personalities and learning styles enabled it to adapt teaching methods so as to ensure a well-rounded and successful training experience. Although it would be impossible to tailor the training to each individual, the eight-week program includes various training delivery methods: lecture in a hands-on computer lab; role playing and review scenarios; mentoring; shadowing; individual self-paced activities; and informational meetings. (See Figure 1, on page 43, for a breakdown of the amount of time devoted to each delivery method.)

The training team begins to establish new trainees’ knowledge base by utilizing a lecture format. However, lecture alone precludes opportunity for trainees to apply the knowledge they gain. Thus, reviewing materials and role playing are deemed the most effective part of the program. A recently hired counselor said, “The review time during the training process was very helpful. It helped me utilize the content we were learning, which enabled me to retain it better” (Taff 2010). Another element of One Stop’s new counselor training is *shadowing*: New staff watch experienced staff for the first half of training and then reverse roles once a certain comfort level has been attained. Recently, more time has been invested in creating a mentor program intended to acquaint new staff with other support staff and resources on campus; to help them better understand and utilize customer service standards; and to involve them in other informal learning opportunities. Finally, a phase-in approach to the various points

of customer contact (e.g., email, in person, call center) was introduced. One counselor said, “The two-week interval when we worked at the counter should be a standard experience for new trainees; it helped solidify what we’d learned so far and provided us with the opportunity to start interacting with students” (Muller 2010).

By 2004 the need for a refresher training program became apparent. Given the amount of seasonal and changing content each year, management determined that the only way to stay ahead of counselors’ learning needs was to formalize a system of refresher training. Key people from each supporting unit met to discuss training topics, scheduling, and material and to decide who would facilitate the training sessions.

Now, the training coordinator considers the experience of the staff and the quantity of change occurring before determining how training should be delivered. As staff move into the cycle of refresher training, the need both to gain knowledge quickly and to maintain customer service during the regular work day result in more emphasis on staff meetings, e-mails, and short lectures in a hands-on computer lab and less on informal training methods. (See Figure 2 for a breakdown of the amount of time devoted to each training method.)

TRAINING TEAM QUALITIES

Training team performance is critical to the success of the One Stop counselor training program. Successful trainers are current staff who are experts in the integrated subject areas; empathetic toward staff and students; able to speak in public and to present material logically; highly organized; and diplomatic, particularly when seeking support from the university community. Not only do the trainers have counselor responsibilities themselves, but they also are respected staff members who are willing to put forth additional effort in order to uphold and deliver the training program goals.

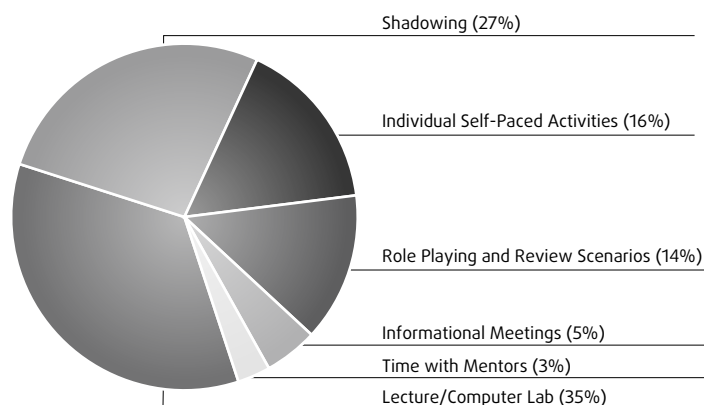


FIGURE 1. Percentage of Time Devoted to Various Training Delivery Methods: New Counselor Program

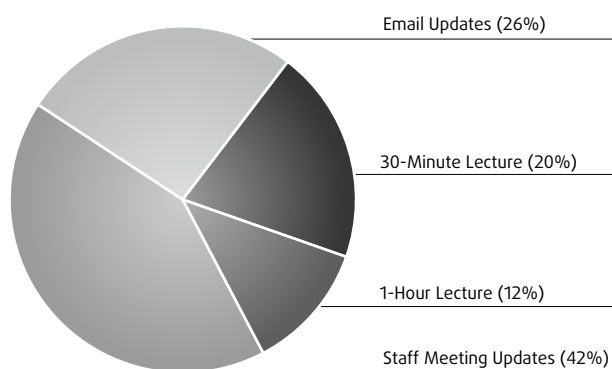


FIGURE 2. Percentage of Time Devoted to Various Training Delivery Methods: Refresher Training Program

Table 1 (on page 44) describes how UMTC One Stop has designed its training team. Because of limited resources, all team members train in addition to fulfilling their other job responsibilities. Thus, one training coordinator is assigned to new staff while another is responsible for providing refresher training to current staff. Both coordinators also are part of the management team. Three trainers are chosen to provide new staff training on the basis of the criteria described above. Staff members from other academic support resources units aid the training team in a number of ways: For the new counselor program, they review material for accuracy; for refresher training, they typically serve as the trainer for the particular topic of review. This

Table 1.

Roles and Responsibilities of the UMTC One Stop Training Team

Role	Responsibilities
Training Coordinator(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Determine appropriate training needs. ▶ Make enhancements to training program. ▶ Schedule training sessions. ▶ Orient new hires to training program. ▶ Assist with updating/developing training materials. ▶ Facilitate training sessions.
Trainer(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Update/develop material. ▶ Facilitate training. ▶ Monitor new hires' progress. ▶ Provide a collaborative and cohesive learning environment.
Mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Answer new staff members' questions. ▶ Support new staff in becoming team members. ▶ Familiarize new staff with the campus. ▶ Serve as informal trainer.
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Trust in the training team to maintain knowledge and service standards. ▶ Support decisions. ▶ Make suggestions for future program improvements. ▶ Uphold accountability of training responsibilities as listed in job descriptions and performance evaluations.

collaborative effort provides a cohesive learning environment such that counselors can integrate the three business areas (registration, financial aid, and billing), allowing for more seamless customer service for students. Mentorship is an additional role that supports new counselors informally. Counselors who have recently completed training themselves are particularly successful as mentors because of their own experience and keen awareness of the intensity of the training program. Mentors include staff who do not participate in any of the other three training roles (*i.e.*, coordinator, trainer, management). Finally, one of management's roles is to formalize the way in which training fits within each employee's job description and performance so the program is given priority and resources are allocated accordingly.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

World-class customer service is a core value that guides the work of One Stop Student Services every day. The best opportunity for successful service delivery begins with

hiring. Hiring the right people—people who then participate in a strong training program—is key to receiving high approval ratings on our annual student surveys. In addition, surveys provide constructive commentary that helps us identify opportunities for improvement.

In 2008 three staff members attended “Disney’s Approach to Quality Service,” a program offered by the Disney Institute, a leader in customer service training. As a result of this exceptional experience, the staff members adopted a more purposeful approach toward “soft skills” training. For example, staff now have a better understanding of the importance of documenting customer service standards and expectations and are newly committed to finding ways to fully integrate those standards into the training program. Customer service standards and expectations are infused into the counselor training manual as quick tips and through role-playing scenarios and phone evaluations. Other soft skills training relates to such areas as professionalism, dealing with

difficult students, servicing students with disabilities, and cultural sensitivity. Since these standards were adopted, One Stop counselors have gained a much clearer and more consistent understanding of what is expected of them not only at the beginning of but also throughout their tenure in One Stop Student Services. A number of comments on the 2010 student satisfaction survey specifically mentioned One Stop’s quality standards: “friendly,” “empathetic,” “knowledgeable,” and “efficient.” Improved services were noted within one year of implementing these quality standards.

CONCLUSION

The success of the new counselor and refresher training programs is measured by various evaluations, testing each individual counselor’s knowledge on paper and through role playing, observing performance, and staff as well as student surveys. Our use of mixed methods of evaluation results in a more reliable measure of learning and adds value to the training program’s specific learning activities

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(Lockheed 2009). At the midpoint of training, the training coordinator conducts informal interviews to determine whether any immediate improvements are needed. Counselors who complete their initial training are asked to complete a questionnaire that solicits feedback specific to how well the training prepared them to be successful in their job. Evaluations also are distributed after each refresher training session as a means of assessing the trainer's performance and knowledge of the topic, the helpfulness of the training material, the timeliness of the session, and the necessity of the training.

During the past nine years, One Stop Student Services management staff and trainers at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities have continued to redefine and improve training programs that reinforce customer service goals even as they cultivate a dynamic knowledge base. High-quality training programs have proven to be an essential business construct that equips frontline counselors to be consistent in their delivery of individualized yet professionally sound counseling that complies with University of Minnesota policies and procedures. The training is successful because of shared goals, validated program structures, the magnitude of the work of the training team, the valued help of the supporting units, and a steadfast focus on high-quality customer service. One Stop staff have a highly developed sense of teamwork and dedication to

one another, largely because they all are trained in the same way and take pride in their shared knowledge. "The people are very nice, know what to do, and are very well trained! I give them many thanks!" (UMTC 2006). The training programs are making a positive difference for UMTC students.

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Increasing Accessibility: Lessons Learned in Retaining Special Population Students in Canada

BY CLAYTON SMITH AND SUSAN GOTTHEIL

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In Canada, changing demographics and increased competition—as well as social values based on equity—have inspired efforts to increase the postsecondary education participation rates of youths from under-represented/under-served groups.

Despite its population having the highest level of educational attainment among those of OECD countries, Canada appears to have made little progress in terms of narrowing “access gaps” and improving student retention rates. Provincial governments increasingly are funding a variety of targeted initiatives intended to encourage colleges and universities to enroll more special population students. This has proven challenging, however, as many institutions have neither holistic retention programs nor well-developed planning for such students. Consequently, access and success have become important public issues in Canada.

A recent survey (Smith and Gottheil 2008) found that the under-served student groups served by Canadian colleges and universities are diverse. The groups of greatest interest include Aboriginal/First Nations/Inuit, recent

immigrant, Asian, northern Canadian, rural, first-generation, low-income, francophone, and black students as well as students with disabilities. Using the strategic enrollment management conceptual framework, we focus on four of these groups: low-income, first-generation, Aboriginal, and francophone students. We describe each group and review specific barriers to postsecondary education (PSE) access as well as factors contributing to attrition. Finally, we offer six “lessons learned” to guide education leaders as they explore ways to better meet the needs of special population students.

UNDER-SERVED POPULATIONS

Aboriginal Canadians represent 3.8 percent of the total Canadian population; approximately 62 percent of these are North American Indian, 30 percent are Métis, and 5 percent are Inuit. The population is heterogeneous and diverse: Spread among more than 1,000 communities, they speak a dozen languages. More than 70 percent of the Aboriginal population live “off reserve;” 54 percent reside in urban areas. The Canadian Aboriginal population is much younger than the Canadian population as a whole: Almost half are younger than 25 years of age (Statistics Canada 2008). Among youths between the ages of 20 and 24 years, 40.3 percent have not completed high

school—compared to 12.5 percent of their non-Aboriginal peers (Statistics Canada 2008). By age 20, non-Aboriginal youths are three times more likely than Aboriginal youths to be enrolled in PSE. Attrition among those Aboriginal youths who do enroll in PSE is 33 to 56 percent greater than among the general student population (Baldwin and Parkin 2007, Parkin and Baldwin 2009). Overall, 7.7 percent of Aboriginal Canadians have a university credential, compared to 23.4 percent of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada 2008). Aboriginal Canadians have a higher rate of participation in the community college system than they do in universities.

First-generation students are those whose parents have not attended a PSE institution. Some 81 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds whose parents have a university education participate in PSE. This compares to only 53 percent of young people whose parents did not continue their education beyond high school (Parkin and Baldwin 2009). Even when differences in high school preparation are taken into account, first-generation students are less likely than their peers to earn PSE degrees (Lee and Wiley 2007). Parental education—not parental income—is a key driver of PSE participation in general and of university enrollment in particular (Finnie and Mueller 2008). Canadian immigration policy's favoring of immigrant applicants with higher education credentials over those without such credentials helps to explain why the children of some Canadian immigrant populations are more likely than Canadian-born youths to attend university.¹

Low-income students are defined generally as those whose families earn less than \$25,000 (Canadian) annually. According to the Canadian Council on Learning (2009), 58.5 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds from families earning less than \$25,000 per year participated in PSE in 2006. This compares to 80.9 percent of youths of the same age from families earning more than \$100,000 per year.

Canadian students whose first language is French are less likely than their English-speaking counterparts to complete high school and earn a university degree. A recent Quebec study (D'Amours 2010) found that anglophones are twice as likely as francophones to perceive a university degree as a key to success. The roughly 10 per-

cent gap in university attainment between francophone and anglophone Quebecers persists because francophones have not increased their education levels at a higher rate than their anglophone counterparts; thus, the relative gap remains unchanged.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In an effort to better understand how these special populations' participate in PSE, a strategic enrollment management (SEM) framework can be used. Hossler and Bean (1990) define SEM as follows:

Enrollment management can be defined as an organizational concept and a set of systematic activities designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollments. Organized by strategic planning and supported by institutional research, enrollment management activities concern student college choice, transition to college, student attrition and retention, and student outcomes (p. 5).

The traditional perspective focuses on the beginning stages of the student enrollment cycle. In contrast, the SEM framework takes a more comprehensive view. It stresses the full student success continuum and emphasizes the importance of the interrelationships among recruitment/marketing activities, curriculum and pedagogy, academic support programs, and the on-campus student experience. (See Figure 1, on page 49.)

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Barriers to PSE access for special population students can be categorized as academic, aspirational, financial, geographic, and institutional and as relating to family and community, language and literacy, self-esteem, and confidence (Wright *et al.* 2008).

A core factor of success in PSE relates to academic preparation. The College Board (Burton and Ramist 2001) found that students who participate in a rigorous academic curriculum are most likely to attend and succeed in PSE. As in the United States, many special population students in Canada have poor high school grades, have not completed admission prerequisites, and lack "hard" and "soft" skills. Some have attended high schools with less academic rigor. An increasing number do not attend PSE immediately af-

¹ Participation patterns vary by source country: Youths from Asian and African immigrant groups enroll at higher rates than youths from Caribbean and South American immigrant groups.

ter high school and so have gaps in their education and training.

Typically, students who pursue higher education have a career or life aspiration that requires a PSE degree or diploma. In contrast, many special population students lack such goals. These students often lack information about the benefits of PSE as well as support from teachers and guidance counselors.

The expense of PSE, including tuition, fees, and the cost of living, tends to be of great concern for under-served populations. These students often unwittingly inflate the cost of PSE even as they under-value the outcomes associated with attending college or university (Gupta *et al.* 2009).

Many special population students are particularly concerned about distance and related travel costs between home and the nearest PSE institution. Geographic barriers, combined with often being the first in their family to participate in PSE, are especially problematic for Northern Canadians, rural students, and Aboriginal Canadians.

Some of the reasons these students do not pursue post-secondary education have to do with how colleges and universities operate. Institutional programs do not always correspond with students' educational needs or interests. Many first-generation students find admissions and financial aid criteria and procedures overly complex and are unsure how to access academic counseling and other support services. Too many institutions assume that prospective students have a clear understanding of the value of higher education and lifelong learning—yet, as previously mentioned, many special population students question whether such education is necessary.

Community and family support are crucial to students' decisions to pursue PSE. Students whose parents did not attend or succeed in PSE lack appropriate role models. The enforced cultural assimilation and overall legacy of

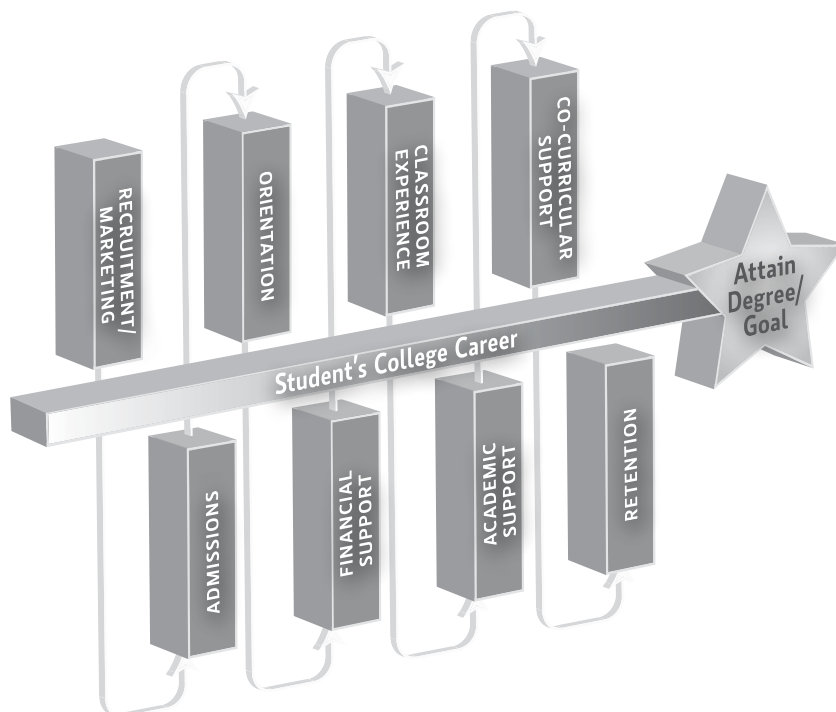


FIGURE 1. *The Student Success Continuum* (Bontrager and Smith 2009)

the residential school system are of special concern to Aboriginal Canadians, who are only one generation removed from having been forcibly separated from their families.²

Many Aboriginal students from rural and northern communities grew up speaking English or French as their second language. In this respect, they are similar to some of the new immigrant populations. Often, the need for members of these groups to learn one of Canada's two official languages—through ESL courses—constitutes a barrier to accessing PSE.

Much has been written recently with regard to the relationship of social and emotional intelligence to PSE attendance and success (Parker *et al.* 2006). It is not surprising that students with higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence are more likely to believe they can be successful in PSE.

All of these factors contribute to special population students' belief that PSE is not an option for them.

² As many as 80,000 "alumni" of residential schools are alive today. About one-third of Aboriginal youth have parents who went to the schools (Ottawa Citizen, "Schools of Their Own", December 2009).

ATTRITION FACTORS

Factors that contribute to attrition are similar—and sometimes identical—to those that hinder prospective students' access to PSE. They include academic preparation and performance, financial support, family and work responsibilities, family and community support, language proficiency, educational aspirations and motivation, sense of well-being, and student engagement (Wright *et al.* 2008).

Students who begin their PSE studies without sufficient academic preparation tend to question their abilities. As their self-confidence is undermined, many choose not to seek needed academic support services and instead adopt a passive approach to their studies. The result is poor academic performance and eventual withdrawal from higher education.

In addition, many special population students either are uncertain of their goals or have misdirected expectations. As a result, the programs of study they choose may not reflect their true interests, and/or may be inconsistent with their career plans. When their educational programs prove to not match their expectations, some students question their PSE plans altogether and drop out.

Some students begin their studies without clearly understanding how they will manage the costs of higher education (Gupta *et al.* 2009). Institutional financial aid often is “front-loaded” in the first year of study (that is, it is used as a recruitment incentive); students find as the years progress that they have insufficient funds to support themselves—let alone their families and dependents. This compounds the debt aversion that is characteristic of many low-income, immigrant, and first-generation students—a characteristic that too often prevents them from exploring the full range of financial aid sources.

Some communities that have little personal experience of PSE are less supportive of members of their community who express interest in attending college or university. Particularly in Canadian Aboriginal communities, there is concern that PSE attendance will result in declines in community values and affinity.

Many students from the groups we are discussing begin their PSE studies one or more years after leaving high school. Time management becomes a significant challenge as many students must balance family and work responsibilities with those relating to their education. Family members who are not supportive of an individual

attending class and completing homework assignments impede the student's continued enrollment in PSE.

Students who lack language proficiency and/or literacy skills must enroll in English as a Second Language coursework either before or in addition to coursework relating to their particular area of study. They often must work harder to be successful in their programs than those who have language proficiency. Students who lack ready access to their home community or family members may begin to feel isolated. Some experience high levels of stress. Racist attitudes and low levels of cultural understanding on campus also can have considerable adverse effects on the willingness of some students to remain in school.

As a result of many of the factors described above, students from special population groups are less inclined to be active participants in in-class learning and in out-of-class activities. Pike and Kuh (2005) found that first-generation students, in particular, have significantly lower levels of student engagement than their peers.

LESSONS LEARNED

Canadian colleges and universities offer a multitude of programs and services geared toward student retention; a number are targeted specifically to under-served populations. Those programs found to support students' academic success—for example, Pathways to Education, Foundations for Success, Future to Discover, and the University of Victoria's LE, NONET program³—have a number of elements in common. Among them are:

- Early, proactive, and “intrusive” intervention;
- Bridge and transition programs;
- Financial aid and support;
- Peer support developed intentionally within a cohort;
- Connections to community role models and mentors;
- Faculty and/or staff coaches to provide guidance, help set clear goals, and direct students toward appropriate resources for support (as needed);
- Attention to the particular needs of students from special populations and support to help them integrate into the campus community; and
- A holistic approach to student support that addresses academic, social, emotional, and financial needs.

³ More information on these promising initiatives can be found in the reports of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

It is clear that the many barriers to student access and success interact with and compound one another. Researchers working under the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation highlighted three key areas: financial support; inadequate academic preparation and motivation; and insufficient information, guidance, and encouragement (Parkin and Baldwin 2009). Institutions should study the following lessons as they seek to eliminate the barriers to access and to ameliorate the attrition factors faced by special population students:

Lesson #1:

Access and success should not be targeted in isolation.

The barriers and obstacles to access and success are the same. Placing too much emphasis on access can be problematic if students ultimately fail to meet their educational goals. It is important to remember the holistic SEM framework and to address *all* elements of the student enrollment cycle.

Lesson #2:

Providing financial support—even if it is in the form of need-based grants rather than student loans—is not enough.

The financial barriers to PSE participation are compounded by other factors, including academic performance, individual behavior, and environmental circumstances. A holistic and integrated approach to enhancing student access and success should attend to a range of needs—academic, social, emotional, and financial.

Lesson #3:

Students' experiences of the enrollment funnel and of the enrollment cycle differ by group.

Retention strategies need to be customized to meet the needs of each special population group. The strategies also must take into account the diversity *within* each group—for example, socioeconomic status, age, and individual experience. Always, we must be wary of making assumptions and stereotyping students.

Lesson #4:

In addition to offering specialized/targeted student support programs and services (as outlined above), we must work to integrate

under-represented groups into regular campus programming and activities.

We need to create connectivity and ensure that we do not create silos for each special population group. Rather, the goal is to create welcoming and supportive campus communities that serve all students. The entire campus community must work together to support special student populations and to make them feel a part of the academic community. This requires outreach, cultural sensitivity, and awareness of the specific historical, economic, and social barriers faced by special populations.

Lesson #5: We need to make a longer-term resource commitment to ensure that the strategies we put in place have a lasting impact on student access, retention, and academic success.

We need to work with external community groups to provide students with role models and mentorship opportunities. We also need to ensure that families receive clear and accurate information about financial aid, academic programs and opportunities, and the benefits of postsecondary education; doing so is critical to developing trust.

Lesson #6: Assessment is key to determining the success of initiatives we undertake, but data often prove difficult to collect.

Targeted communities sometimes are reluctant to self-identify, making it difficult to set goals for enhancing recruitment and retention of these groups.

CONCLUSION

Concern for the access and success of special population students has become an important public issue throughout Canada, with differing groups having become the focus of attention in individual regions and jurisdictions. In recent years, we have learned much about the challenges that confront students at various stages of the enrollment funnel. Many of the factors that inhibit enrollment by special population students also inhibit their academic success once they do enroll. Many PSE institutions thus have begun to implement retention initiatives in support of special population students.

What remains missing is any clear assessment of which efforts are most effective. Institutions should consider

publishing their institutional assessment studies. Further, multi-institutional research should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of specific strategies in different regions of the country and at different types of institutions.

Finally, we need to give more consideration to integrated activities that address the numerous access and attrition factors that prevent more special population students from achieving academic success. Only then will we maximize our efforts in support of the academic success of special population students.

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The New Academic Structure: How Hong Kong Prepares Young People to Thrive in the 21st Century

BY CHEUNG KWOK-WAH

Globalization, the explosive growth of knowledge, the advent of information technology, and the development of a knowledge-based economy are leading to unprecedented worldwide changes. Hong Kong's continued cultural, social, and economic development will depend on whether its population can rise to these challenges and make the best use of the opportunities ahead. Hong Kong's citizens will need to develop their adaptability, creativity, independent thinking, and lifelong learning capabilities. How will Hong Kong prepare young people to face these challenges in the 21st century?

To address the requirements of an increasingly diverse and complex environment, Hong Kong needs to establish a vibrant and flexible education system that will enable every citizen to attain all-round development and lifelong learning. Hong Kong's education system needs to provide multiple pathways for further studies and career development that articulate well with international higher education and the manpower requirements of the 21st century. With this in mind, Hong Kong began in September 2009 to implement the New Academic Structure (NAS). In the past, upon completion of a two-year education at Secondary 4 and Secondary 5, students had to sit for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). Only approximately one-third of Secondary 5 students

qualified to articulate to Secondary 6 and Secondary 7. In contrast, under the NAS, all students have the opportunity to undertake a three-year school curriculum at the senior secondary level. With this education reform, all students in Hong Kong are entitled to twelve years of free schooling: six years of primary education plus six years of secondary education.

KEY FEATURES OF THE NEW SENIOR SECONDARY CURRICULUM

The New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum offers a broad and balanced curriculum to nurture students' diverse talents and increase their potential. It is designed to broaden students' knowledge base; expand their horizons; enhance their language and mathematical abilities, adaptability, creativity, independent thinking, interpersonal skills, and life-long learning capabilities; as well as cultivate positive values and attitudes toward whole-person development.

The NSS curriculum requires students to take four core subjects: Chinese, English, Mathematics, and Liberal Studies, and choose two to three out of twenty designated NSS elective subjects, a wide spectrum of Applied Learning (ApL) courses, and/or six other language courses (*e.g.*, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Hindi, and Urdu) according to their interests, abilities, and needs. Apart from

the required core and elective subjects, students also are required to gain in Other Learning Experiences (OLE) as part of their whole-person development.

Liberal Studies is an NSS core subject that builds on what students learned in basic education (Primary 1 through Secondary 3). It is intended to broaden students' knowledge base; raise their social, national, and global awareness; and develop their multi-perspective and critical thinking skills as they adopt a multidisciplinary enquiry approach to exploring issues pertaining to the human condition in a wide range of context. Students are required as part of their coursework to conduct an Independent Enquiry Study that helps cultivate their "learning to learn" abilities through the development of essential skills such as information/data collection and processing, comprehension, analysis, creative and critical thinking, and evaluation.

While essential learning is provided in the core subjects, a broad spectrum of NSS elective subjects cater to students' diverse interests, needs, and abilities. Elective subjects range from traditional subjects such as Science,

History, and Geography to Music, Visual Arts, Health Management, and Social Care.

Given that not all students benefit most from theoretical learning, ApL courses offer practical learning experiences. These courses link directly to different professional and vocational fields that reflect the economic and social needs of Hong Kong. In acknowledgment of students' diverse learning needs, a wide range of ApL courses are available as elective subjects in Secondary 5 and Secondary 6.

Complementing the NSS curriculum's core and elective subjects, OLE is an essential component that enables students to acquire non-academic learning experiences for whole-person development during and outside of school hours. OLE opportunities are in five areas: moral and civic education, community service, career-related experiences, aesthetics development, and physical development. Students are encouraged to compile a Student Learning Profile (SLP) that provides a comprehensive picture of the full range of their achievements and abilities. The SLP presents a student's academic performance in school, other learn-

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ing experiences, awards/achievements outside of school, self-reflection on learning experiences, and a description of career goals.

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING SYSTEMS

The NAS requires students to sit for a new public examination, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, upon completion of a six-year secondary education. The HKDSE Examination, to be administered for the first time in 2012, will replace the existing HKCEE and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination.

Taking advantage of the full range of assessment tools, the NAS utilizes various approaches to assess learning outcomes and to inform further instruction. For example, a standards-referenced system will be adopted to report students' assessment results for the four core and for the twenty NSS subjects. This system will measure candidates' results against a set of five prescribed levels of achievement. (Level 5 will represent the highest level of knowledge and skills attained and level 1 the lowest.) A set of descriptors will define what a typical candidate performing at each level can do. That is, candidates' results will indicate standards achieved in terms of knowledge and skills, regardless of the performance of other candidates taking the same examination. Of candidates who attain level 5, those with the best performance will be annotated by ** and those with the next best performance by *; this additional "coding" will serve as a useful reference for tertiary institutions and employers.

Given that not all skills can be effectively assessed by paper-and-pen examinations and that continuous assessment is conducive to ongoing learning, School-based Assessment (SBA) will be introduced progressively beginning in 2012. The SBA will be administered in schools and will be evaluated by subject teachers. The SBA results will be moderated by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) to ensure fairness to students and as part of an effort to help reflect students' actual abilities; this will enhance the fairness particularly for students who perform well on the SBA but not on the public examination.

LOCAL RECOGNITION

An examination's usefulness is reflected in part in its recognition by society. So how is this new qualification, the HKDSE, being received locally? Hong Kong's publicly-

funded universities have announced that they will recognize the HKDSE for admission to their undergraduate programs. The minimum requirement for admission to most universities is four core subjects plus one or two elective subjects, though some universities require four core subjects plus two elective subjects. Most university programs will require applicants to attain level 3 in Chinese and English, and level 2 in Mathematics and Liberal Studies; similarly, applicants must attain a level 2 or level 3 in their elective subjects. Individual institutions, faculties, and/or programs may determine additional admission requirements. In addition, the SLP is considered to have good reference value.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Beyond local recognition, the HKDSE Examination also has secured positive recognition from various overseas benchmarking agencies. The HKEAA has commissioned the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) of the United Kingdom to conduct benchmarking studies on the HKDSE qualification. Already, the HKDSE Examination has been included in the UCAS Tariff System. Generally, levels 3, 4, and 5 on the HKDSE qualification are comparable to grades E, C, and A, respectively, on the GCE AL Examination. To date, Oxford and some other UK universities have confirmed admitting students with the HKDSE qualification to their three-year undergraduate degree programs.

The Australian government has recognized the HKDSE as equivalent to the Australian Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. Positive responses have also been received from other countries including United States, Canada, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and India. The Education Bureau of Hong Kong (EDB) and HKEAA have begun to compile the specific admission requirements of overseas institutions for holders of the HKDSE qualification. This information has been uploaded to the EDB and HKEAA Web sites and more information will be uploaded progressively.

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS

Already having secured positive local and international recognition, the HKDSE allows students to choose different pathways in accordance with their examination results. For example, students with satisfactory HKDSE Examina-

tion results may enroll in a four-year undergraduate programs at a local university. Alternatively, they may enroll in postsecondary courses or other programs offered by local institutions. Students who wish to further their studies abroad may apply for admission to overseas universities.

BENEFITS OF THE NEW ACADEMIC STRUCTURE

The NAS provides multiple pathways to higher education and the workplace so that every student has an opportunity to succeed. The change from a structure of seven-year secondary education plus three-year higher education to that of six-year secondary education plus four-year higher education facilitates articulation with a number of key national systems. The four-year higher education structure also allows students to expand their knowledge base so as to support specialized learning.

Unlike the old curriculum, which required early specialization into arts, science, technical, or commercial streams, the broader and more balanced NSS curriculum caters to learner diversity in order to expand students' potential. Results of the Survey on New Senior Secondary Subject Information, conducted by the EDB in 2009, show that students take more than 1,000 subject combinations. While the majority of students take two to three elective subjects, only 28 percent take all elective subjects from a single Key Learning Area. This indicates that the traditional channeling of students into either the arts or science stream is rapidly reduced. The NSS curriculum

also provides students with opportunities to foster whole-person development and lifelong learning as well as to achieve enhanced language and mathematical abilities, a broadened knowledge base, and increased competence in critical thinking, independent learning, and interpersonal skills. Finally, rather than having to take two public examinations during their secondary school years, students under the NAS will have to sit for only one public examination at the end of their secondary education; time and opportunity for learning will increase accordingly.

The NAS will help develop human resources by cultivating the knowledge and capabilities necessary to meet the unique challenges of the 21st century. It also will provide students with multiple pathways toward a productive future: studying locally, entering the workforce, or articulating to overseas education systems. The NAS represents education reform that develops human resources and promotes cross-fertilization of knowledge and globalization of education.

(For further information, visit www.edb.gov.hk/nas/en.)

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From the Classroom to the Boardroom: Schools Adopt Digital and Sustainable Practices Across All Levels

BY MARC DANIELS

To the members of the incoming class of 2015, the online college application process is just another part of their digital lives. But what about the class of 1965, whose graduates now serve as college and university trustees and who did not grow up in the digital age? How have colleges and universities managed the transition to the digital age in both the classroom and the boardroom despite working with groups of such disparate digital backgrounds?

Significant responsibility for the transition from paper to online can be traced to the college admissions office. By instituting online applications, admissions offices fundamentally altered the way in which college admissions works. Always on the forefront of developing and implementing new technology for the benefit of faculty and students, admissions officers went digital, streamlining the applications cycle, decreasing overhead expenses, and reducing the administrative burden of sorting and filing thousands of papers.

With the numbers of college applications increasing for both undergraduate and graduate programs, the environmental impact of online applications is more important than ever. According to *The New York Times*, one-third of fall 2009 freshmen had applied to six or more colleges, and fewer and fewer apply using paper forms (Zipkin 2010). Eighty percent applied online in 2009, up from 58 percent

only three years earlier, according to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC 2010).

Consider Harvard by way of example: Students around the world submit applications in droves each year. For its most recent class—that of 2014—Harvard's undergraduate school received slightly fewer than 30,500 applications. The school's complete application, available for download from the admissions Web site, is 25 pages. Should every one of the 30,500 students have applied using the now-dated paper application process, Harvard's applications alone would have totaled more than 750,000 pages.

MOVING FROM STUDENTS TO TRUSTEES

Following the initial push, to implement online admissions programs, a number of schools are taking the digital transition to a whole new level: the boardroom. Slowly but surely, boards of trustees at colleges and universities across the country are going digital, housing their information in “online board portals,” virtual meeting rooms that enable trustees to conduct meetings online and thereby help to reduce travel demands, shrink administrative budgets, and reduce the environmental impact of conducting important business.

Schools are continuing to prove that it is possible to make environmentally friendly changes that improve the

day-to-day activities essential to serving students. With online board portals' ability to meet the needs of large corporate boards as well as local small businesses, academic institutions of all sizes are beginning to significantly increase their utilization of this digital "tool."

For many schools, the use of an online board portal fits into an overall mission to "go green" and reduce their environmental impact. For large statewide institutions such as the University of Tennessee, a board portal allows for a meeting to take place across the entire system if necessary, reducing the time and travel demands placed on trustees. The University of Tennessee-Knoxville, for example, instituted an online board portal as part of a campus-wide push toward sustainability called "Make Orange Green," which includes environmental practices, recycling information, and ways for students and faculty to become involved.

The environmental impact of transitioning from traditional board meetings to online models is significant, both in terms of tangible goods (such as paper) and economics. According to the U.S. Forest Service, a single tree will generate \$162,000 worth of economic impact during its 50-year lifespan in the form of air pollution controls, recycled water, soil erosion controls, and oxygen generation. With the typical board using the equivalent of 17 trees per year on board materials alone, schools can incur savings of more than \$2.75 million in environmental impact each year through the use of online board portals. Similar to

the environmental savings realized when applications first were accepted online, board portals are providing schools with an opportunity to implement improved best practices while maintaining the highest level of service to current and future students.

APPLYING THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

Many schools already have implemented online board portal technology; it is expected that one day all boards of trustees will use a portal to conduct their daily activities. In the future, board portals will be viewed as yet another tool for providing sustainable business practices at institutions of higher learning. Board portals are the next logical step along the digital path that began with the online application process.

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UNLOCKING THE GATES: HOW AND WHY LEADING UNIVERSITIES ARE OPENING UP ACCESS TO THEIR COURSES

BY TAYLOR WALSH
PRINCETON, N.J., PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011, 296 PP.

Reviewed by Peter Hess

Unlocking the Gates is a book about “online courseware,” which is created, says author Taylor Walsh, when “traditional degree-granting institutions convert course materials originally designed for their own undergraduates into non-credit-bearing online versions for the general public” (2010). Walsh (2010) looks closely at seven “projects initiated by elite universities to share online course materials with the public and unlock their gates to the world.” The examples were chosen in part by virtue of the “stature and prestige of the universities involved [which] ensured that the outcomes, whether positive or negative, would have repercussions across higher education.” For the most part, *Unlocking the Gates* eschews the theoretical in favor of the concrete and specific. To facilitate understanding of the book’s focus, this review summarizes the case studies as well as the conclusions Walsh draws from them.

Fathom and *AllLearn* were projects that came to fruition at the height of the dot-com boom; they shared the ambition, energy, and myopia of the time. *Fathom*, though

spun off as an independent entity, originally was conceived in the upper echelons of the administration at Columbia University. *AllLearn* was a project undertaken by a consortium of top-tier universities, including Oxford, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale. Although *Fathom* was organized as a for-profit corporation and *AllLearn* as a not-for-profit organization (its founders hoped it would be self-sustaining), the main source of revenue for both entities was to be subscriptions to non-credit online courses. The target audience for both was the general public, and both projects hoped to appeal particularly to alumni of the participating institutions. Walsh identifies many factors that contributed to the ultimate failure of *Fathom* and *AllLearn* but avers that “the most common reason that leaders of both endeavors cite for the closures was...that there was not a sufficient market for fee-based online enrichment [non-credit] courses”; this theory has yet to be disproven.

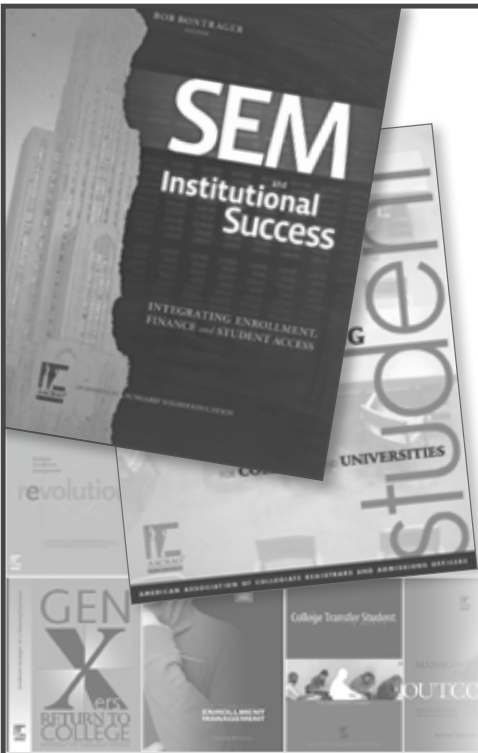
During the 1990s, as the Internet juggernaut was gathering steam and bringing disruptive change to other sectors, many concluded that higher education also was ripe for transformation. MIT, which had a reputation for technology leadership to uphold, wanted to be at the forefront of that change. As former Provost Robert Brown said to Walsh in an interview, “There was a sense that other institutions were going to eclipse us if MIT did not develop

a[n]...ambitious online project” (Walsh 2010, p. 58). As MIT’s leaders contemplated their options, Fathom, All-Learn, and similar failed efforts by Cornell, Temple, and others provided clear evidence that restricting access to online course materials and requiring people to pay for the privilege of viewing them was a flawed business model. Thus they conceived of OpenCourseWare (OCW) as a public resource offered by MIT free of charge to the world.

The plan for OpenCourseWare was that it would include not just exemplary materials from a few MIT courses but also “web-based versions of syllabi, lecture notes, reading lists, assignments, and other materials for virtually all” (Walsh 2010) of them. By several measures, OpenCourseWare has been a great success. At the time of Walsh’s writing, more than 2,000 MIT courses were represented in OCW, approaching 100 percent of the Institute’s course offerings. Traffic statistics counted more than 100 million visits total and an access rate of a million visits a month, which “far outpaces that of the other initiatives” profiled in the book. Walsh cites “more press mentions” for OCW

“than all of the other open programs profiled here combined.” Like its other statistics, OCW’s price tag is impressive: Start-up funding from the Carnegie and Mellon Foundations was \$26 million; by July 2009, OCW had cost \$33.7 million, of which MIT’s contribution was \$6.5 million. Ongoing costs, which will not be foundation funded, are projected to be \$4 million annually. OpenCourseWare is not just *an* example of online courseware; it is the defining example. If OCW didn’t exist, or if it had been less successful, there might not have been sufficient cause to write or publish a book like *Unlocking the Gates*.

Carnegie-Mellon’s Open Learning Initiative (OLI) differs from the other initiatives profiled in the book in that “OLI is the only one that has pursued a more interactive educational model focused on learning outcomes.” OLI course modules are designed from the outset for web-based delivery. Carnegie-Mellon faculty members create them as part of a team that includes “a software engineer, a designer with expertise in human-computer interaction, and learning scientists.” Assessment is “seamlessly




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integrated into course content.” The OLI model “tends to support courses aimed at skill acquisition” where “progress can be evaluated objectively and in which there is a single correct answer.” OLI’s courses are rare and precious: At the time of the book’s writing, there were only fourteen OLI courses with a per-course cost of approximately \$500,000. The Hewlett Foundation provided OLI with a start-up grant of \$5.65 million.

Of the learning initiatives profiled in the book, OLI probably comes closest to meeting the current U.S. Administration’s vision of a model that can provide an effective, verifiable, online educational experience to a broad spectrum of under-served students. In fact, people with ties to the OLI project have been working with the Administration on its *National Educational Technology Plan*. OLI is ahead of that curve, already having embarked on a grant-funded program, CC-OLI, to provide OLI-style modules for use in community college courses that have low completion rates.

Open Yale Courses (OYC) was launched in 2007 to “faithfully capture the Yale experience for the home user.” Unlike MIT’s OpenCourseWare and Carnegie Mellon’s Open Learning Initiative, both of which convert content derived from undergraduate courses into quite a different form, OYC strives to represent Yale courses in as close a way as possible to “the real thing.” The OYC approach is to post on the Web complete introductory courses taught by a diverse group of “mediagenic” instructors and presented in a consistent format featuring video and audio recordings of every lecture as well as searchable transcripts, syllabuses, reading lists, assignments, and problem sets. OYC proponents take pride in the product’s high production values. Courses are “weighted more heavily toward the social sciences and humanities,” considered by many to be Yale’s strengths. Walsh tells of two Yale professors who created an OYC course and subsequently stopped teaching the live edition; instead, they refer undergraduates to the OYC version. One said, “I will never teach this course again.” One price of quality is volume: At the time of the book’s publication, only 25 OYC courses were online. Those have been viewed by 850,000 visitors from 190 countries.

While OYC courses typically are offered for enrichment rather than for credit, Yale has established “partnerships with ten universities around the world” to “utilize the [OYC] materials as a formal, structured part of their own

[for-credit] curricula.” The revenue-generating possibility of such arrangements has not escaped notice, and Yale is amenable to the possibility of expanding the program should it become clear that the University could gain outside financial support for this purpose. However, terms of the \$3 million Hewlett Foundation grant that funded the existing OYC courses dictate that those must always remain free.

[W]ebcast.berkeley began as one professor’s research project. Although it subsequently was absorbed into a department, the unit carries on in a style reflective of its spare beginnings, operating with a small staff, a tight budget, and no foundation funding. Despite those limitations, webcast.berkeley aspires to be comprehensive. In spring 2010 it included a collection of recordings from nearly 550 courses. As with other operations, “output” trumps embellishments. Recordings typically are unedited and are posted without supporting materials such as assignments and transcripts. Participation by academic departments is voluntary. However, webcast.berkeley recovers some of its costs by charging departments for the courses it posts. The primary mission of webcast.berkeley is to provide Berkeley’s students with a study aid, but the fact that it “provides a window for the world into the Berkeley educational experience” has come to be regarded by the administration as a valuable secondary benefit. Clearly, the quality of the product is sufficiently good. In these troubled financial times, continuation of the program may depend more on whether university leadership views it as “an essential tool for outreach” than as a valuable study aid.

India’s National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) has ambitions of scale far beyond any other program discussed here. At the top of India’s system of higher education are eight very selective and highly regarded government-supported schools: the seven India Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the India Institute of Science (IIS). These schools are of indisputable quality. The other public and private schools that teach engineering and science are well below the IITs in terms of quality of instruction and prestige. NPTEL was created to lessen the gap between the IITs and the IIS and other technical schools and to address concerns about whether the education received by the great majority of India’s science and engineering students meets basic standards of adequacy. NPTEL’s mission is to “digitally capture IIT courses for

use by students and faculty from the country's other (non-IIT) science and engineering colleges." The goal is to create "a collection of all the key engineering course materials that a majority of Indian students need." NPTEL produces both Web and video courses. Although online courses lack interactive features and feedback, they are otherwise comprehensive. NPTEL lecture videos are not merely lecture captures but are designed to optimize each instructor's connection with online students. All NPTEL courses are peer-reviewed before they are posted. By 2007, when Phase I was completed, NPTEL had produced 239 courses, 110 of which had full video; Phase II includes plans for 600 more, 400 of which will include video.

In the Conclusion of *Unlocking the Gates*, Walsh expands on six principles derived from the case studies:

- Differences between breadth and depth reflect projects' vastly different ambitions—and intended audiences.
- These initiatives were motivated more by the availability of intellectual resources at the respective universities than by any external constituencies' identified specific need. In other words, these projects have been driven primarily by supply, not demand.
- To date, market research on and data-driven assessments of online courseware have been relatively circumscribed, limiting any ability to determine their overall impact.
- Though founded as altruistic gestures toward the outside world, some of the free and open courseware projects have yielded significant reputational benefits to their founding universities.
- Long-term financial sustainability remains an unresolved issue for most of the free and open courseware projects examined in this book.
- By offering content only, without human interaction or university credit, online courseware enables "host" universities to explore opportunities afforded by the Internet without threatening their core values.

These conclusions are modest compared to the often-publicized great expectations of online learning. Rather

than predicting an unbounded future for online courseware, they suggest instead the limitations and pressures that currently constrain the field.

Walsh's epilogue looks to the future and is more optimistic. It refers to "transformative opportunities that online instruction might hold...in the long run." For example, "Lecture capture could potentially enable more substantial curricular change." Walsh admits her partiality to the OLI approach: "OLI seems to offer the greatest potential for large-scale transformative change [demonstrating] that online teaching can achieve learning outcomes at least equal to those in a traditional classroom." But, she writes, "Carnegie Mellon has not used what it has learned from OLI to re-engineer its approach to introductory courses for its own students." This seems to be major theme and complaint of her analysis: "Highly selective universities have served as willing producers of online courseware content, but they have not elected to put it to transformative use on their own campuses." If, as Walsh says elsewhere, the "highly selective institutions discussed here chose to make online education more central to their instructional models...that move would also be a highly visible vote of confidence in online education itself."

Walsh's fundamental idealism and optimism are nowhere more evident than in her title. "Unlocking the Gates" strongly suggests that technology is on the verge of extending real educational opportunity to the portion of the population that has long been underserved. That goal has engaged—and eluded—many dedicated policy makers, engineers, and educators for most of the last century. Whether the Internet will provide the means to break through long-standing barriers to higher education remains to be seen. In the meantime, balanced, thoughtful, and thorough analysis is essential if Web technology is to achieve whatever potential it may have. *Unlocking the Gates* gives us precisely that.

About the Author

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