

## *Summary of Testimony*

### **Testimonies provided by:**

#### **Associations and Accreditation Organizations:**

1. American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU)
2. Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)
3. Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT)
4. Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB)
5. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)
6. Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
7. The Education Trust
8. Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
9. National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU)

#### **State Higher Education Agencies, Organizations or Systems:**

10. California Accountability Advisory Group
11. Florida Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement
12. Florida Department of Education
13. Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
14. Midwestern Higher Education Compact (describing North Dakota)
15. North Carolina – University of North Carolina System
16. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
17. South Carolina Commission on Higher Education
18. South Dakota Board of Regents
19. Tennessee Higher Education Commission
20. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
21. Texas – The University of Texas System
22. Virginia – State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

#### **Research and Advisory Group:**

23. Joseph C. Burke, Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government
24. Margaret A. Miller, National Forum on College-Level Learning
25. Nancy Shulock, Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy
26. Jane V. Wellman, Institute for Higher Education Policy

## **Overview and Guide to the Testimony**

In March 2004, on behalf of the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, SHEEO distributed an invitation to higher education organizations, state-level agencies or systems, research institutes, and experts in the field to provide testimony in the form of brief written statements. As of the end of April, twenty-six statements were received. These statements accompanied by tables and other supporting materials are enclosed as received in the order indicated below. The statements are grouped into three broad categories. Each category and statement is briefly described below to provide a guide and quick reference to the actual statements that follow.

### **Associations and Accreditation Organizations**

Nine higher education associations or accrediting organizations provided a statement or position paper to the National Commission articulating specific organizational, sector or substantive concerns relative to public accountability. Statements were received from:

- The **American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)**, on behalf of 430 member campuses and university systems, addresses the “disconnect” between current enrollment patterns relative to student age and educational objectives, and the limitations of “existing metrics,” particularly graduation rates as used in federal data collections. AASCU partnered with community colleges and land-grant universities to develop more detailed and flexible student progression indicators through a Joint Commission on Accountability Reporting (JCAR), which is outlined and referenced.
- The **Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)** advocates a strategy for community-wide educational accountability through “a small set of widely-endorsed key learning outcomes.” As outlined in a recent *Greater Expectations* project and report, AAC&U supports the development and public reporting of common indicators of students’ “higher order capabilities, knowledge, judgment, and responsibility,” to be cultivated and assessed in context of programs, disciplines and institutions.
- The **Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT)** summarizes several organizational initiatives to assist community college boards as they discharge their roles as publicly accountable trustees. These include studies to document the return on investments in community colleges, technology-based tools for responding to changing labor force needs, and principles for ensuring fiduciary oversight.
- The **Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB)** highlights two recent reports, the AGB *Statement on Institutional Governance* and *Governing in the Public Interest*, that together address the need for boards to maintain a balance between institutional autonomy and self-governance while being responsive to community and national needs. Balancing these interests using “dashboard” indicators and appropriate board actions, the AGB reports assert, is essential for maintaining the quality and integrity of colleges and universities, as well as for lessening the likelihood of inappropriate regulatory or political intrusion.
- The **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)** points out the growing proportions of adult learners in postsecondary education and the workforce, and cautions against over-reliance on traditional measures such as “pipeline” analogies and time-to-degree. CAEL supports public policies, including those for accountability, that recognize life-long learning patterns and encourage adult-appropriate practices.

- The **Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)** advocates strengthening the roles of institutional accreditation, including its usefulness to policymakers and its roles in improving public accountability. CHEA recommends a national policy on accountability (based on CHEA positions for federal HEA reauthorization), the development of collaborative or joint state-accreditation accountability models, and enhanced student protection from diploma and accreditation “mills.”
- **The Education Trust**, based on its experience since the early 1990s, advocates education-wide accountability systems that reflect both proven principles and core educational needs. Proven principles include focusing on results rather than processes, few rather than many indicators, and goals that cause educators to look beyond current strategies and practices. Key substantive needs include expanding access, improving student success, and high-quality teacher preparation and performance.
- The **Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools** addresses the limitations of the traditional regulatory “triad” in light of growing demands for accountability “intricately interwoven with various political and economic agendas” within a rapidly changing postsecondary education marketplace. HLC urges the National Commission “to recommend a legislative moratorium on higher education accountability for two years so a national task force, charged with creating a policy framework for accountability, could bring some order and consistency to defining accountability in higher education.”
- The **National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU)**, on behalf of 24 state-based associations of private colleges and universities as well as its institutional members, argues that “appropriate accountability” requires a clear “balance between autonomy, needs and goals of the institution, and the public’s need for information.” As outlined in a 1994 NAICU report documenting the ways independent institutions respond to public needs, “appropriate accountability” is exercised through “self-governance, legal and fiscal responsibility, and peer review.” Communicating information to stakeholders is important, but policymakers must guard against accountability mechanisms that undermine institutional diversity and student privacy.

### **State Higher Education Agencies, Organizations, or Systems**

Eleven states provided statements and supporting materials to the National Commission on their statewide accountability systems, including two states from which two agencies provided materials. These statements represent differing starting points in addressing accountability and are framed and articulated in varying ways. All 13 state or system statements, however, reflect high levels of attention to accountability and an ongoing commitment to develop responsive and effective accountability systems. Several statements reflect on the “lessons learned” from various initiatives or approaches states have taken to accountability over the past decade.

- **California** has not had a well-established state-level higher education accountability system, relying instead on separate public reporting mechanisms for each of the three public institution systems. The California statement summarizes the design developed by the *California Accountability Advisory Group* and subsequently incorporated into **SB 1331**, the *California Postsecondary Education Accountability Act of 2004*, introduced in the current session and being considered in committee. The design builds on a set of four statewide goals and reflects principles of collective responsibility, distinct roles for both state-level and institutional accountability, public reporting to inform policy and budget development, and state-level monitoring of student success through institution-level assessment of learning and other student outcomes.

- **Florida** has a history of accountability and performance initiatives starting in the early 1990s, many of which were directed at all state government functions or grew out of K-12 education accountability and workforce development strategies. Testimony provided by the *Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement* highlights this history and outlines the design principles for a K-20 accountability system currently under development. The statement prepared by the *Florida Department of Education, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education*, provides an overview of how accountability initiatives have affected community colleges and workforce development, and the technical and collaborative issues to be addressed.
- **Kentucky** developed a comprehensive accountability framework following major structural and policy reforms in postsecondary education during the late 1990s. The framework is structured around five key questions designed to monitor how well student, community, and state needs are served. This “public agenda” is translated into 19 Key Indicators of Progress that incorporate specific, measurable objectives for monitoring progress in each of the five areas, and toward the overall goal of substantially increasing overall student enrollment and success by 2015. Institutions are held accountable for their contributions in key areas through progress reports, available through the website and annual accountability reports of the *Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education*.
- **North Carolina** has a history of statewide data collection and use going back to the 1970s through both the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System. These rich data sources are applied to both policy development and accountability reporting in a variety of ways. The testimony provided by the *University System* focuses specifically on how research, monitoring and accountability have contributed to improvements in college participation, equity, and student preparation and success.
- **North Dakota**, described in the testimony prepared by the *Midwestern Higher Education Compact*, developed its accountability system to match and monitor the recommendations of the North Dakota Higher Education Roundtable. The Roundtable, a 1999 initiative of state legislative, government, education and private sector leaders, called for a more entrepreneurial and accountable public university system as a means to enhance the state’s economy and quality of life. This context and the accountability measures subsequently developed are reviewed in the testimony prepared by Larry Isaak, president of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, who until recently was Chancellor of the North Dakota University System.
- **Oklahoma**, with extensive higher education-wide data and research, uses accountability as a framework for specific policy and programmatic initiatives as well as for a set of regular reports and other public “products.” Testimony prepared by the *State Regents for Higher Education* outlines pre-collegiate, academic preparation, and financial aid initiatives, the results from which are monitored and reported through appropriate indicators. The State Regents also publish a *Higher Education Report Card* that measures progress against state-level performance goals and peer comparisons.
- **South Carolina** testimony describes the state’s eight-year effort to design and implement legislatively mandated statewide accountability for higher education that tied the allocation of state funding to institutional performance. The statement prepared by the *South Carolina Commission on Higher Education* examines the lessons learned during this period, which currently are driving substantial reconsideration and redesign of accountability policies and practices.
- **South Dakota** has developed a comprehensive policy framework to improve public university system performance and achieve results relative to identifiable student and public needs. The *Board of Regents* routinely provides information to elected officials and the public across these areas as a

means to provide accountability. The testimony lists program initiatives and reporting mechanisms across four broad policy areas. These encompass performance-funding incentives relative to enhance student access and preparation, a rising junior-year proficiency examination to gauge academic quality and performance, and various student outcome and institutional performance indicators.

- **Tennessee** has a long-standing performance-based component in its higher education funding system. To allocate these funds, various assessment mechanisms have been developed relative to institutional performance, including campus-based student assessment. Testimony prepared by the *Tennessee Higher Education Commission* outlines this performance funding component and the resulting accountability to policymakers across five common indicators of performance.
- **Texas** has made substantial investments in statewide accountability systems and more recently in university system and institutional-level accountability reporting. Testimony prepared by the *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board* describes the general principles for this reporting and the specific initiative, Closing the Gaps by 2015, which provides the framework of state goals for higher education participation, success, excellence and research. Testimony by the *University of Texas System* outlines the first annual Accountability and Performance Report, published by the Board of Regents in March 2004, which contains comprehensive data on student access and success, university functions (teaching, research and health services), community collaboration, and organizational productivity across all system institutions. Even with these ongoing efforts, interest in accountability remains high in Texas, as demonstrated by an early 2004 executive order from the Governor calling for the development of accountability systems by each public university.
- **Virginia** initiated a new accountability tool, the Reports of Institutional Effectiveness (ROIE), in 1999 in response to the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education. ROIE were mandated by law in 2000. Testimony prepared by the *State Council of Higher Education for Virginia* outlines the research and development, content, system-wide performance measures, institution-specific measures, and core competencies included in these reports. The accompanying core competency assessments build on previous collaboration in assessing components and competencies associated with collegiate learning. These components of accountability reporting are used to examine transfer, retention, graduation and other aspects of institutional effectiveness and system performance.

### **Research and Advisory Group**

SHEEO has requested five leading researchers and policy analysts to provide specific materials and assistance to the National Commission on Higher Education Accountability. These individuals, their institutional affiliations, and areas of expertise are listed below. Four of these advisors have prepared written statements for Commission, included as the last section of testimony, which they will highlight as part of the May 10 meeting.

- **Joseph C. Burke**, The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, has done extensive research and writing on performance reporting and performance-based budgeting and funding in higher education, including several national surveys. He is editor and contributor to *Accountability in Higher Education: Balancing Public, Academic, and Market Demands* (forthcoming from Jossey-Bass). Burke's written testimony to the Commission provides a brief overview of different types of accountability reporting and uses, and outlines a framework of core indicators.

- **Peter T. Ewell**, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), is a leading researcher, consultant and developer of systems and practices for student assessment at national state, and institution levels. He also has written extensively on how learning assessment contributes to broader accountability strategies. Ewell will review materials provided to the Commission and provide a written statement as well as other types of assistance at a later date.
- **Margaret A. Miller**, National Forum on College-Level Learning, has led state and national initiatives to develop multi-institution student learning assessments in several contexts. Miller’s statement to the Commission describes the development of a model to assess the knowledge and skills of college graduates, and the experience gained in implementing this model in five states—Kentucky, Illinois, Nevada, Oklahoma, and South Carolina.
- **Nancy Shulock**, Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, California State University, Sacramento, is a leading researcher on accountability systems, whose work is central to the design of the new accountability structure currently in proposed legislation introduced in California. Shulock’s statement reviews the California and national contexts, and outlines her key findings on effective state accountability systems.
- **Jane V. Wellman**, The Institute for Higher Education Policy, is a researcher and consultant on financing and policy, and was the lead consultant-author for the recent Business-Higher Education Forum report on *Public Accountability for Student Learning in Higher Education*. Wellman’s statement provides an overview of the background, content, and recommendations of that report.

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