

Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE.8.05



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY  
<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/>

## AN EMERGING VIEW ON ACCOUNTABILITY IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

May 2005

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### ABSTRACT

Higher education has become the focus of increased public debate. Stewardship of public resources, student achievement or the lack thereof, relationships and “partnerships” with business and industry in the area of research, substantial increases in tuition and fees, public perception of wrong-doing in the quality of programs, and allegations of wrongdoing in financial and programmatic areas have all led to calls for greater transparency, accountability, and impartiality. At root, these issues all concern trust. This paper discusses accountability in higher education as well as the need to promote increased public trust, and focuses on the need for a balance between autonomy and accountability. It identifies the drivers for accountability at the international, national, and state levels, and offers new ways of thinking about the relationship between accountability and accreditation processes. Policymakers and educational leaders must address the accountability process in addition to nurturing the public’s trust while balancing the interactions among the responsibility of various educational actors, goals, resources, standards, and rewards/sanctions. In providing this emerging view of the issues of accountability and public trust in higher education, the paper is intended to serve as a catalyst for discussion as a means to advance the overall delivery of high quality higher education.

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### Introduction

In February 2005, the Virginia legislature approved new levels of autonomy for the 16 public colleges in the state. At face value, the legislation makes perfect sense, allowing the institutions to get out from under bureaucratic regulations that hamper their ability to respond to societal and market demands. At the same time, the institutions will be held accountable for serving the state’s needs via mission-tailored six-year plans. But when

this change is combined with other trends seen in higher education across the country—such as for-profit and virtual institutions, the use of financial aid packages to compete for students, and other states offering their institutions similar tradeoffs of autonomy for accountability—we see that higher education is heading down a path from which there may be no return. The public mission of higher education—which includes, for example, providing a high quality education to students regardless of socioeconomic status, researching new medical discoveries, and contributing to the economic, social, and cultural lives of the citizenry—is threatened as this competitive environment forces institutions to focus on revenues and prestige rather than their educational core.

Often, the biggest changes in society are the ones that build quietly and incrementally. Ten years down the line, will we look back in shock at how much has been lost?

## **Background**

There is little question that for the last several years, providers of higher education have come under increased scrutiny from government agencies, the general public, accrediting bodies and the media, and from more directly involved stakeholders. In the latter category are students, faculty, parents, alumni, the community in which the university is located, and those private individuals and institutions who donate resources.

Among the issues which have drawn the attention of these groups and agencies are:

- the value/cost ratio of higher education,
- the expectations of expanded technology and scientific "breakthroughs," and
- the so-called "paradox of public esteem."

Furthermore, colleges and universities are now counted upon to be environmentally accountable and to monitor their educational performance utilizing internal and external audits. In addition, they are expected to show a sense of responsibility by performing outreach and demonstrating a concern for and active participation in the welfare of their local communities. From the standpoint of governmental scrutiny, universities are required to demonstrate diversity, to accept responsibility for such egalitarian measures as affirmative action, and to abide by all federal and state regulations. This occurs in the face of often declining funding support for education by governmental agencies.

Private colleges are not immune to calls for greater accountability. With tuitions continually rising, students, parents, and other constituencies are demanding proof that students are getting what they are paying for and learning what they need to know. Accountability in higher education is not new. It is *déjà vu* all over again. In the late 1960s, as higher education grew to what was then considered to be unprecedented levels, and as student demonstrations concerning civil rights and other issues erupted throughout the nation, the general public became more skeptical about the role of mass higher education. Concurrently, the value of all social institutions was being questioned, and the government's role in other social concerns expanded. All of these factors, and

many more, gave significant impetus to higher education entering an era of accountability.<sup>1</sup>

Mention the term “accountability” as applied to higher education and a number of negative images immediately arise. State legislators see colleges and universities as secretive, over reactive, and quick to label any external imposition an attack on academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Conversely, campuses view public officials as uninformed and unrealistic. State officials are seen as too impulsive about intervening in their eagerness to demonstrate to taxpayers that only their timely intervention can assure quality and contain skyrocketing tuitions. Internally and externally to the academy, concerns are expressed about higher education’s departure or deviation from its historic and traditional role and mission—a change in purpose—and the underlying notion that the public’s trust is being violated.

Despite these sometimes-negative images, accountability does serve important public purposes. It is a public-oriented process that seeks to assure public constituents of the value, effectiveness, and quality of higher education. It not only informs the public about institutional performance, but also is an opportunity for colleges and universities to show institutional commitment to continued progress over time.

### **Drivers for Accountability**

Accountability pressures on institutions of higher education have been driven in recent years from a variety of sources and stakeholders. These “drivers” include the concerns of policy makers, elected leaders, and educational leaders (sometimes even by higher education boards) about higher education’s role and responsibilities, quality and performance, and its perceived rising costs.

#### **At the international level...**

- UNESCO’s 1998 Statement from its World Conference on Higher Education included the following: “*The academic freedoms of higher education institutions and their wide autonomy—which have to be strengthened and protected—are essential if these institutions are to carry out their mission. Autonomy presupposes accountability to society.* Institutional autonomy and academic freedoms are necessary for the effective functioning of the higher education system, for the strengthening of its capacity to change and anticipate, for the carrying out of its watch-tower or observatory functions, for the assertion of its moral authority in the debate on the great ethical problems and the major issues of global significance, but also for its development as a place where democracy can be practiced and promoted. It must be added that the academic freedoms which, in a way, serve as a justification and basis for the critical function of higher education presuppose the observance of certain principles and norms, while laying upon higher education institutions the duty of objectivity, impartiality and intellectual rigor.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Brubacher and Rudy Willis, *Higher Education in Transition*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 388-9.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “Towards An Agenda 21 For Higher Education: World Conference On Higher Education” (Paris, July 1998), 14.

**At the national level...**

- A focus on instructional productivity and fiscal management has prompted a national debate on the primary roles of America's colleges and universities. Political leaders, parents, and students have expressed concerns that the high costs of university education are not matched by educational outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Such discussion has resulted in several national initiatives. Prompted by federal Student-Right-to-Know legislation in 1992, the Joint Commission for Accountability Reporting (JCAR) developed recommendations to standardize reporting formats for student progression, graduation rates, costs, and faculty activity.<sup>4</sup>

As another example, in 1998, the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) began requiring nationally standardized reporting of student retention and graduation. Colleges and universities across the nation have been put on notice that they can no longer avoid accountability questions.

"Accountability" was one of the flashpoint words in the battles over higher education in the most recent legislative session in Congress. As lawmakers in Washington tried, and failed, to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, they raised various concerns, including: Have colleges been held adequately accountable for their quality and performance? Are institutions affordable? Accessible? Should they be required to meet certain performance goals and be punished if they do not?

**At the state level...**

- The demands for accountability have resulted in myriad legislative acts. By last fall (2004), 44 of the states had initiated some form of accountability mandate—including, in some states, reports on faculty activity, legislation, and governing board requirements.<sup>5</sup> These mandates have required institutional reporting ranging from required annual reporting on faculty workload by campus with state funding tied to "standard" loads (Maryland) to governing board requests to develop plans for improving faculty teaching loads (Iowa). A substantial proportion of other states reported that although no specific mandate had been issued, there were increasing requests for information on academic productivity from government agencies and governing boards.<sup>6</sup> These concerns have led to mandates to colleges and universities for systematic reporting on specified educational outcomes, or performance indicators, which can include measures of institutional efficiency and productivity.

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<sup>3</sup> See Ernest L. Boyer, *Basic School: A Community For Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1995).

<sup>4</sup> See American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), "Accountability and Student Success: Bridging the Gap," Testimony of Constantine W. (Deno) Curris, President, prepared for the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, May 10, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See Joseph C. Burke and Henrik Minassians, "Performance Reporting: The Preferred 'No Cost' Accountability Program, the Sixth Annual Report" (New York: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> See Beatrice Baldwin, "Linking Instructional Productivity Measures and Fiscal Policy: Accountability in Higher Education," American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, March 24-28, 1997.

More recently, states have tied a portion of state funding to institutional performance. State governments with proliferating demands and limited budgets are increasingly requiring public colleges to demonstrate that they are serving important economic and social needs. Before state lawmakers appropriate resources for higher education, they want to know if their spending will help meet key goals.

- The State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) note in a survey that accountability has been an important policy issue for over a decade; its members rank it as the third most important priority issue facing public higher education for the immediate future, a testament to the staying power of the issue.

For most colleges and universities, accountability is a critical process. It can clarify how effectively public dollars are spent, lead to a better understanding of mutual responsibilities, and build respect between institutions and the State.

### **Autonomy and Accountability: A Search for Balance**

A few universities are included in their states' constitutions—5 states include them; California is among them with the University of California included in Article 9, Section 9 of the State Constitution. While the autonomy granted to an institution of higher education was significant at the time of its origins, and probably up through the 1960s, it has less meaning today as governors, legislatures, and finance departments have developed “the power of the purse” in sophisticated ways. At the same time, the historic aspects of autonomy impact how colleges and universities respond to and address increasing calls for accountability,

In 1990, as the new president of the University of Tennessee, Lamar Alexander (who went on to become Secretary of Education and a U.S. Senator) was trying to understand what had made American colleges and universities the best in the world, he asked David Gardner, then the president of the University of California, why his university has such a tradition of excellence. “First,” said Gardner, “*autonomy*. The California constitution created four branches of government, with the university being the fourth. The legislature basically turns over money to us without many rules about how to spend it.” Gardner, according to Alexander, went on to draw attention to the importance of faculty and their dedication to excellence, as well as “...generous amounts of federal—and state—money...”<sup>7</sup>

The need to safeguard and recognize the important value and principle of academic freedom in the classroom and in research and scholarly writing argues strongly for substantial autonomy of higher education. Yet, amidst increasing calls for accountability, the states and higher education must seek a balance between autonomy and accountability. Absent the achievement of balance, higher education will find itself dealing with the increased efforts undertaken by external bodies and political interests, including intrusive behavior, micromanagement, and bureaucratic substitution for professional judgment.

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<sup>7</sup> Lamar Alexander, “Putting Parents in Charge.” *Education Next*, Summer 2004, 1.

Additionally, policy makers—particularly elected officials—are an important component of a state’s accountability system as they, too, are to be held accountable for their role, or lack thereof, in ensuring that there is effective and clear public policy in place, accompanied by fiscal support for the state’s goals and objectives through its higher education enterprise. Absent such a component in a state system of accountability for higher education, the state is seen as neglecting its role and responsibility.

However, autonomy in higher education with respect to the state is, in the contemporary setting, only part of the total picture of institutional freedom. Higher education is increasingly subject to pressures from sources other than the state: market forces, competition for students and staff, and the commercial interests in commissioned research. For good and bad, such a trend will reduce the traditional values of the state-higher education relationship, yet public trust will continue to be an important issue to be addressed by both parties—the state and higher education.

As William Zumeta has indicated, “If a contemporary but balanced accountability regime is to be developed, more trust must be built and sustained among the key players: faculty, institutional administrations, governing and coordinating boards, elected policymakers, state budget officials, the media, and ultimately the public.”<sup>8</sup> Such a balance can only be achieved where there is leadership, vision, and trust among and between the important players in the state and its institutions of higher education. This balance will require clarity, understanding, and foresight. It also will require embracing the past, navigating the present, and understanding the future. Without transcending current boundaries—through collaboration and cooperation embedded in a process of communication, and by reaching across the extended state and higher education enterprise through a process that is unifying in its intent—there will continue to be a diminution of support and trust in higher education and the elected officials entrusted to represent the public interest.

In recent years, discussions about accountability for higher education have become both common and contentious. Many reasons for this have been advanced, but virtually all can be related to two factors: declining public resources and the sense that colleges and universities are ill-prepared to meet the needs of the 21st century. Policy leaders at both the state and federal levels have struggled to improve higher education’s responsiveness to these conditions through a range of increasingly proactive initiatives. But they have experienced growing frustration about the inability of their actions to change the ways colleges and universities behave. A new political climate also has emerged emphasizing deregulation and government down-sizing. Both conditions have decisively shaped the way policymakers approach conversations about accountability.

Struggling hard to make ends meet, institutional leaders meanwhile are in growing rebellion against what they perceive as overly bureaucratic approaches to achieving accountability. At the most basic level, they see complex, overlapping, and duplicative systems of reporting and assessment that are unnecessarily expensive in terms of time and resources. In addition, they view with alarm a growing shift away from established institution-centered measures, such as accreditation, and toward government-mandated,

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<sup>8</sup> William Zumeta, “Public Policy and Accountability in Higher Education: Lessons from the Past and Present for the New Millennium,” in Donald E. Heller, *The States and Public Higher Education Policy: Affordability, Access, and Accountability* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 186.

standards-driven accountability systems they believe threaten institutional diversity and autonomy. Protecting these perceived historic virtues of American higher education is the principal agenda they bring to the accountability table.

Amidst the calls for accountability there continue to be voices raised relating to the historic recognition of autonomy and institutional independence. Concerns focus attention on the mounting intrusiveness, intervention, and micromanagement of states in the affairs of its institutions of higher education, whether by statute or through the power of the budget. And, at the national level, there are mounting concerns about efforts to overhaul the higher education data collection system to include what is referred to as a “unit record” system whereby each institution would submit records on individual students, including such details as Social Security number, gender, ethnicity, data of birth, tuition, loans, grant awards, permanent and local addresses, number of courses, and number of credit hours.

### **Public Trust**

Central to the condition of the higher education sector in this nation is its social contract—a need to have political and social legitimacy—and the respect and confidence of the people that it serves and their elected representative bodies. The roots of such a relationship are typically historic, yet have stood the test of time. Such a relationship is referred to as *the public trust*.

In his comparative perspective on accreditation processes and their fundamental links to higher education, Martin Trow articulates what the *public trust* is and why it is an integral component of an effective higher education system, and an accountable one:

[One] of the fundamental links between higher education and society is trust—that is, the provision of support, by either public or private bodies, without the requirement that the institution either provide specific goods and services in return for that support, or account specifically and in detail for the use of those funds....Trust is also the central element in the very significant contributions by private organizations and individuals to American colleges and universities both public and private, for which no accountability is demanded. Trust, indeed, is the basis of the very large measure of autonomy of colleges and universities anywhere which are able to raise substantial sums of private money, or which are funded by governments which voluntarily delegate much of their power over the institutions, and thus give to the institutions a large measure of autonomy in the use of the funds they provide.<sup>9</sup>

### **New Accountability**

With considerable authority and autonomy granted by statute or a state’s constitution, and absent a strong regulatory or coordinating agency or centralized college or

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Trow, “Trust, Markets and Accountability in Higher Education: A Comparative Perspective,” Berkeley, University of California, June 12, 1996 (<http://ishi.lib.berkeley.edu/cshe/publications/papers/papers/ROP.Trow.Trust.1.96.pdf>), 3.

university system, colleges and universities must assure elected officials—as representatives of the public—that they are responsible stewards of the public’s money and can deliver quality education at an affordable price. In essence, they must demonstrate that they are accountable, responsible, and trustworthy. In all states, including California, autonomy and accountability are interrelated.

A search for balance between autonomy and accountability is important as the nature of accountability is undergoing a change, particularly as it relates to where it is and where it is going. Equally important is the relationship between accreditation and accountability.

Peter Ewell—who is an informed and insightful observer of higher education and public policy as well as being utilized by many states and institutions of higher education to provide advice and counsel on policies involving accountability, accreditation, and quality assurance—believes the fact that the nature of accreditation’s first purpose—“accountability”—has been experiencing a fundamental redefinition that will radically challenge the kinds of public assurances of institutional quality that accrediting organizations will be called upon to make. “Put simply,” according to Ewell, “this redefinition changes the definition of accountability from adequate processes to publicly-acceptable performance and results.”<sup>10</sup>

At least four recent events signal and illustrate this change:

- the creation of the Commission on Accountability for Higher Education by the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), which delivered its report on March 10, 2005;<sup>11</sup>
- the report of the Business-Higher Education Forum (co-chaired by CSU Chancellor Charlie Reed) issued in 2004 (*Public Accountability for Student Learning in Higher Education*) that calls for all institutions to be far more aggressive in collecting and reporting information about educational results;<sup>12</sup>
- the release last fall of the National Center on Public Policy in Higher Education’s third fifty-state report card (*Measuring Up*), that for the first time provided comparative data on the progress states have made over the last decade and provided preliminary public data on student learning outcomes;<sup>13</sup> and
- the publication of a new accountability proposal by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), entitled *Our Students’ Best Work: A Framework for Accountability Worthy of Our Mission*, that calls upon colleges and universities to publicly state learning outcomes for all academic programs together with credible public evidence of their attainment.<sup>14</sup>

All four of these, together with deliberations about the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that will begin again this year, go well beyond a “minimum standards”

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<sup>10</sup> Peter T. Ewell, “The Changing Nature of Accountability in Higher Education,” Western Association of Colleges and Universities Retreat, November 2004, 2.

<sup>11</sup> SHEEO, 2005—NO REFERENCE FOR THIS

<sup>12</sup> See Business-Higher Education Forum, *Public Accountability for Student Learning in Higher Education: Issues and Options* (Washington, D.C.: 2004).

<sup>13</sup> See National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up 2004* (San Jose: 15 September 2004).

<sup>14</sup> See Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Our Students’ Best Work: A Framework for Accountability Worthy of Our Mission* (Washington, D.C.: 2004).



conception of accountability. Ewell goes on to say that “these ... initiatives are indicative of a broader set of trends in higher education occurring worldwide.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Selective Elements of this Emerging View of Accountability**

Among the trends contained in the emerging view of accountability are these three main ingredients.

**Performance.** The first and most notable aspect of this evolving conception of institutional accountability is how overwhelmingly it is centered on results. This convergence mirrors a decade of transition in the notion of quality assurance—reflected in other arenas ranging from business to medicine—from inputs and processes to absolute performance as the critical marker of accountability.

Accreditation has gradually accommodated this view of the centrality of institutional performance, and most regions now similarly reflect this trend in their growing emphasis on providing evidence of student learning outcomes in accreditation reviews.

**Transparency.** A second important dimension of this emerging concept of accountability is its emphasis on openness and public disclosure. Like the performance dimension, this reflects accountability trends beyond higher education—in this case the new emphasis on transparency for business enterprises that comes in the wake of the Enron accounting scandal. This dimension is also reflected in the work of the SHEEO Accountability Commission and the Business-Higher Education Forum, both of which emphasize the need for institutions of higher education—both public and private—to increasingly make public their performances, as well as to be more publicly transparent in the ways they do business. Transparency is central to the recent accountability proposal advanced by AACU as well, which calls for prominent public posting of assessed student capstone performances through such media as institutional websites. This is also an area in which there has been considerable recent play in the regional accreditation community.

But the notion of transparency as an emerging element of accountability goes well beyond simply making the results of periodic reviews more accessible. Taken in its emerging spirit, it implies that an institution of integrity will be most accountable when it conducts its most important business openly, so that its key stakeholders can see how (and how well) it routinely operates. Considerable accountability to stakeholders is in this way achieved because the institution’s assets and actions can be readily “audited” by anybody at any time, simply because it does so much of its most important collective business in a spirit of openness and inclusion.

**Culture of Evidence.** A final dimension of the emerging notion of accountability is more difficult to describe, as it combines qualities of institutional responsiveness and organizational self-awareness. It is what some refer to as a “culture of evidence”—the disposition of the institution to consider evidence routinely at all levels when planning and contemplating action. From this perspective, an institution demonstrates accountability when it holds itself unremittingly responsible for learning about itself and

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<sup>15</sup> Peter T. Ewell, “The Changing Nature of Accountability in Higher Education,” 2.

for using the resulting knowledge to continuously improve its operations in the light of its mission and the needs of its stakeholders.<sup>16</sup>

### **Accountability: What Is It?**

How does one define accountability? As frequently utilized in higher education, *accountability* includes a range of policy issues, not all of which are related to one another. As a general policy construct, the term refers to the responsibility (if not legal obligation) of campus and system administrators, as well as governmental officials, to provide superiors (ultimately the public) with reports of their stewardship of public funds. Such officials have always had a professional responsibility to account for their use of public dollars, but since the mid-1970s, deteriorating state and national economic conditions have generated demands for greater accountability.

Accountability requires that higher education produce evidence that it has fulfilled, in some measure, its various obligations. Critics argue that, in fact, most institutions have not produced evidence of successful performance on most points of interest or obligation, and are unable to do so. Statements about higher education accomplishments should be outcome-oriented rather than process-oriented.

While different interpretations have been given to the meaning of “*accountability system*,” for purposes of this discussion on Accountability in Higher Education, the following definition is applicable: *Accountability systems for higher education are the systematic collection of input, process, and outcome data, their analysis and information dissemination, contributing to internal and external decision making by policy makers, educational leaders, and other stakeholders in the higher education enterprise.* Also, the use of the term “*accountability*” within this discussion has the following intended definition: *Accountability is a systematic method to assure those inside and outside the higher education system that colleges and universities—and students—are moving toward desired goals.*

### **Conclusion**

With respect to the design of an accountability system—if one is to be developed in a state—there is a need to reconcile three objectives:

- institutional independence (autonomy) and diversity (of institutions),
- the need for greater coordination and collaboration and clearer pathways for students, and
- accountability to the public to ensure that strategic goals are being accomplished and that money is being spent wisely.

All three principles are important. A strongly centralized approach, such as we have seen in the past, will not work well in the years ahead. Autonomous, flexible institutions working within a framework of public accountability is a better direction.

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<sup>16</sup> Peter T. Ewell, “The Changing Nature of Accountability in Higher Education,” 2-5.

The strength of a state's economy, the quality of its workforce, the vitality of its communities, and the productivity and well-being of its citizens depend on an education system that provides residents of all ages with the knowledge and skills needed to live, learn, and work in a changing world. A strong system of higher education is essential for the continuing development of any state.

The challenge is to determine how higher education can best meet the needs of the citizenry within available resources. States must recognize and support the many strengths of their colleges and universities, while simultaneously encouraging them to implement new strategies that promote continuous improvement. To encourage innovation while ensuring responsible stewardship to taxpayers, higher education should seriously consider a commitment to a program of accountability for colleges and universities that will:

- assure citizens and state policy makers that public colleges and universities are investing their public support wisely;
- encourage public post-secondary institutions to continually improve their programs and operations, fostering innovations that will better serve their customers' needs; and
- provide information to assist parents, students, employers, and other consumers in making appropriate choices about post-secondary options.

Public trust and confidence in higher education are among its most important assets. Thus, leaders within the nation's colleges and universities and policy leaders must be diligent in upholding the highest standards of ethical behavior.

The organization Independent Sector reminds us that "those who presume to serve the public good must assume a public trust." They must hold themselves to high standards of public accountability. For those working in the higher education enterprise, this means commitment beyond themselves, and commitment beyond the bare minimum. It means adherence to a standard of ethical behavior that assures all stakeholders—particularly the public—that their best interests are being served.<sup>17</sup> In this time of public scrutiny and economic uncertainty, such a statement has never been so appropriate.

To help frame this issue, the following questions are offered for reflection:

1. To whom is higher education accountable?
2. What is the proper balance in reviewing institutions between ensuring that that the institution has established adequate internal mechanisms and standards of academic achievement, and examining actual levels of performance?
3. What is appropriate accountability between higher education and the people for whom it is a steward in the public trust?
4. What are effective public policy principles that are integral to accountability policies at the state level?
5. What new approaches and provisions—if any—are needed to enhance autonomy, increase accountability, and promote trust?

In addressing these illustrative questions, it is important for higher education institutions and the states in which they reside to place the consideration of an accountability

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<sup>17</sup> Independent Sector, "Obedience to the Unenforceable: Ethics and the Nation's Voluntary and Philanthropic Community" (Washington D.C.: 1991, revised 2002), 11.

system within the context of what is needed in the state in terms of its vision for the future. An accountability system for the sake of having one rings hollow, unless it is within the framework of addressing how the higher education enterprise is addressing issues requiring short- and long-range attention, such as:

- *ensuring* that accessibility to effective, quality colleges and universities is being realized at affordable prices and costs.
- *increasing* the effective and efficient use of resources.
- *identifying* student achievement and outcomes, linkages between K-12 and higher education, and financial resources and expenditures.
- *developing and strengthening* an independent coordinating, research, and policy entity as an agency able to bring focus to the issues and direct some portion of the state allocation to higher education towards achieving the kinds of changes identified. (It is especially important for a state to consider a shift from a traditional regulatory role—e.g., program review and approval—to more emphasis on strategic leadership for a Public Agenda.)
- *monitoring and ensuring* that more individuals are acquiring the basic knowledge and skills that will prepare them for meaningful participation in some form of education beyond high school. This means that more high school students must (at the most basic level) graduate and, equally important, complete a rigorous high school curriculum. It also means that a large number of young adults who have not finished high school must be encouraged to get involved in programs designed to significantly enhance their basic literacy skills.
- *providing* a focus in the state's research and/or Land Grant universities on increasing highly competitive research, technology transfer, and graduate education, especially in—but certainly not limited to—areas critical to state's future economy. This increased focus on research and technology transfer relates not only to the capacity in those areas of research institution presence but also the links between that capacity and each of a state's regions through regional campuses, including community colleges and other means.
- *overcoming* the organization of higher education into large, autonomous, and vertically structured universities and systems, which creates significant barriers to efficient coordination, sharing of resources, and coordinated collaboration, in order to meet regional education needs and contribute to economic development initiatives. The "silos" within higher education only exacerbate the high degree of fragmentation in other related policy areas reflected in overlapping of planning and service delivery regions for higher education, adult and vocational education, workforce preparation, and economic development.
- *creating* an exciting, vibrant, and relevant higher education system to serve the public and those that take advantage of the higher learning as thoughtful people, as participants in the economy, and as citizens.

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