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ABSTRACT

Perspectives on accountability in higher education are considered. It is suggested that educational targeting be undertaken: a coalition of planners, financers, and deliverers of postsecondary education should establish goals to meet perceived societal needs. Out of these goal statements, priorities for state funding could be established and incentives offered to those institutions willing to accept the challenge. Colleges and universities must help the legislature by establishing benchmarks for measuring the effectiveness of the program. Each new educational target would contain information about starting dates, ending dates, and magnitude of expected impact. Difficulties nontraditional programs encounter in relation to state funding policies are considered, along with ways that colleges can provided needed information to help legislators evaluate programs for which funds are requested. Among the problems associated with evaluating nontraditional programs are the following: use of the credit hour as a measure of productivity poses difficulties for many nontraditional curricula; many new programs are aimed at finding more efficient ways of educating through the use of paraprofessionals, and some funding formulas do not allow faculty salary money to be transferred to other line items. Legislators have indicated a need for instructions on measuring impact, when an educational impact statement is provided. Legislators also want information on the outcomes of education. A model for assessing the value of educational programs is briefly described in terms of measuring the attainment of its content objective, actual student dollars spent for education, foregone earnings due to job dislocation for study, and psychological costs or benefits. (SW)

Inservice Education Program (IEP)

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

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Accountability in Action

In the preface to Learner Centered Reform (Jossey-Bass, 1975) Dyckman Vermilye speaks of relevance, participatory democracy, and accountability as three battlecries of the 60's. He goes on to say that "together these words amounted to a charge that institutions had drifted from serving learners to serving the people who worked for the institutions and ran them. Colleges did not meet learning needs as much as they chose students who met their own needs."

Speaking to a group of educators, the chairman of the House Education Committee of an eastern state said that while the goals of educators and legislators should be similar, they should not share the goal of self-perpetuation, which he defined as the continuation of outmoded programs in the colleges and of outmoded legislators in the state house.

In an article in Change magazine (February, 1973) Pat Cross says, "The most common position among faculty who consider themselves enlightened is that higher education should be open to all those able and willing to do the work *in the manner and form in which it is now offered*." (Emphasis added).

These statements and many more I could have quoted add up to an indictment of stagnation, if not irresponsibility, against both our higher education system and the agencies which support it. Each of us is aware of subtle or not so subtle influences in our own jobs which reinforce maintenance of the status quo. The blizzard of paper with which we must cope is in itself enough to divert our energies from making changes. I read recently that in the 1971-72 legislative sessions of all state legislatures more than 200,000 bills were introduced and 40,000 were enacted.

Before you cast this paper aside as an exercise in breast-beating, let me hasten to say that there are significant changes taking place in postsecondary education. On the faculty side the generation of more than 2,000 proposals to the new Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education is testimony to the grass roots interest in educational change. The fact that the University of Wisconsin system has designated one of its campuses (Green Bay) as an innovating institution within the state system is important. Both Vermont Community College and Empire State College, in order to survive, required acts of faith by the state budget offices and the postsecondary education agencies.

One major effort of all of the agencies interested in postsecondary education has been to increase access for more of our citizens. Indeed, Pat Cross says, "The new clientele for higher education in the 1970's consists of everyone who wasn't there in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's." (Change, February 1973). According to Dr. Cross, this new clientele includes low academic achievers, adults and part-time learners, ethnic minorities, women, and, of course, all of the usual 18 to 22 year old student population.

At Grand Valley we send faculty to local industrial plants to discuss writing skills with secretaries who have been taking the course by television. We have a mobile campus which makes a regular circuit to shopping malls and large high school adult education centers. Among our students are inmates in the two county jails and the state prison. Of course, there are also more than 6,000 students coming to the campus daily for their instruction.

Although access to postsecondary education is not universal by any means, it is already raising the question, "Access to what?" The Commission on Non-traditional Study, sponsored by College Board and by Educational Testing Service, found that the majority of the persons surveyed wanted to learn skills for daily living, including vocational skills, home repair, and sports. Next in priority was interest in personal development and community responsibilities. Fewer than 10% of these potential adult learners were interested in the basic academic tools of social, biological, and physical sciences and English language.

When you add to the ingredients listed above a national recession, bringing with it a decline in state revenues and coupled with an increased need for welfare and health support, you have created a stew which is indigestible, if not poisonous. It is time for us to try a new recipe.

Educational Targeting Needed

We need agreement on the objectives of postsecondary education. If New York State intends to make postsecondary education available to all of its citizens, does the same hold true for Wisconsin, or California, or Connecticut? If Michigan subsidizes the education of its students who are 18 to 22 years old, why does it not do so for those who are 40? I am not suggesting that we can achieve a set of priorities and objectives which will be common to all states, even though that might be desirable. What I am saying is that much of our postsecondary education apparatus operates on principles which are the result of long established tradition. Such principles often serve the machinery of the system better than they serve its products.

There is a great need for the participants in this seminar to meet with their legislative counterparts in order to set the priorities for state-supported education. Those priorities must relate to the purposes of education. Whatever is agreed upon must be measurable. Those educational institutions which would perform the necessary services for the state must be held fully accountable for the achievement of the educational goals. The institutions must establish procedures for identifying those who need the educational service. Similarly, those institutions must be required to demonstrate the impact of their services on the clientele selected. Let us not settle for statements about the 'quality' of the program. What is needed is solid evidence of a measurable improvement in the skills or attitudes of the students being educated.

About a year and a half ago, more than 40,000 faculty members were surveyed by the American Council on Education to see what they would list as the goals of undergraduate education. More than 90% said that undergraduate education should promote critical thinking, foster mastery of a discipline, and help students to become independent learners. I submit that there are very few educational blueprints available for teaching students to think critically and to become self-motivated learners. And there are even fewer ways of measuring such attainments.

It would be folly to suggest that we have the resources necessary to restructure the entire postsecondary education apparatus, even if it were desirable to do so. It is possible to make a start toward what I call 'educational targeting,' however. A coalition of planners, financers, and deliverers of postsecondary education should establish goals to meet perceived societal needs. Out of these goal statements priorities for state funding could be established and incentives offered to those institutions willing to accept the challenge. As a part of this educational targeting, the colleges and universities must help the legislature by establishing benchmarks for measuring the effectiveness of the program. Such criteria for evaluation would have to be agreed upon in advance and made a part of each implementation grant.

Each new educational target should contain information about starting dates, ending dates, and magnitude of expected impact. Too often, we fail to build in self-destruct mechanisms when we start new programs. With programs expected to last only three to five years, for example, institutions would have a strong incentive for building in flexibility. On the other hand, once the state had committed itself to the program, institutions should be able to plan on the support for the required time, assuming they continue to meet the accountability criteria.

As with so many of our problems, we do not have the luxury of putting aside today's concerns while we plan tomorrow's solutions. Even in areas where problems have been identified and solutions proposed, there are barriers to implementation. These barriers exist at all levels within the structure. Peer pressure, departmental regulations, college rules, state funding policies, and federal regulations may all contribute roadblocks to improvement. Faculty reward systems and union contracts may be as effective as student-to-faculty ratios and credit hour production in thwarting educational improvements.

Current Funding Problems

Although I am identified with non-traditional programs and institutions in the program for this seminar, I have avoided the use of the term 'non-traditional' until now. The institutions which I represent here today are not trying to be non-traditional. The thrust of their many programs is not the downgrading of, or destructive competition with, 'traditional programs.' They should be seen as research and development efforts aimed at strengthening the best in the existing system.

There is not time to present here a description of many of these exciting new programs. It is important that we take time now to consider some of the difficulties these programs encounter. In particular, I want to address those problems related to state funding policies. In June of 1975, L. Richard Meeth produced a report for the Institute of Educational Leadership of the George Washington University on the topic, "Government Funding Policies and Non-traditional Programs." In that report he summarizes the data from questionnaires mailed to more than 300 non-traditional programs. About one-third of the programs responding indicated some serious problem with state or federal funding formulas. A number of these problems are outlined below.

1. Where the credit hour is used as the measure of productivity there are difficulties for many non-traditional curricula, including competency-based designs, individualized modules, learning contracts, and external degree programs, none of which use credit hours.

2. Many new programs are aimed at finding more efficient ways of educating through the use of paraprofessionals. Since some formulas and guidelines do not allow faculty salary money to be transferred to other line items, such as student wages, there is difficulty in paying these 'peer teachers.'

3. Many legitimate activities related to individualized study programs do not result in the production of credit hours. Thus, contact hours and achievement units assessed from specified learning outcomes must be translated into credit hours, even though this translation is illogical.

4. Because of the pressures of family and job, many older students start their external degree program in the winter or spring terms. Because many state reporting requirements use fall term enrollment as a basis for funding, there is a disadvantage for such programs.

5. The use of the full-time equivalent student as the basis of funding works hardships for programs with large populations of part-time students. There are many services performed for students which are unrelated to the number of credits being generated. At Grand Valley, for instance, 80% of the students entering the competency-based program of College IV between January 1 and June 30, 1974, were employed 40 hours or more per week. Because of their heavy work schedule they generated far fewer credits per person than did their full-time counterparts in the other cluster colleges. However, the functions of record keeping and faculty advising required as much time for them as for full-time students.

6. Some states give direct grants to private colleges for students studying full-time on campus. Obviously, such restrictions eliminate external degree programs, independent study, television and correspondence programs, part-time students, etc.

7. Where state formulas are based on the assumption that freshman instruction will be largely through mass lectures, there are hardships for individualized programs which reduce this mass processing phenomenon.

8. Antioch University, Servicemen's Opportunity College, and Nova University all have programs extending over many states. Many states will not give aid to students for programs whose base is located in a different state.

A problem which faces a number of institutions is the cost of assessment of prior learning. Many competency-based programs are designed to give credit for experience attained through prior study, on-the-job training, etc. In order to assess prior learning, a great deal of effort is being spent in the design and testing of evaluation instruments. Some assessment procedures are extremely sophisticated and require the talents of faculty, as well as those of non-academic professionals. Current budgeting practices in many states do not recognize either the developmental costs, or the costs of assessment of such prior learning. This is paradoxical because credit awarded for legitimate prior knowledge results in a savings to the institution. The time necessary for completion of the degree is shortened, thereby utilizing fewer resources of the university. Since less time is spent in study, there is less lost income for the student.

Student development programs within colleges and universities are legitimate means of preparing the student for the world of work. Since these activities do not generate student credit hours, they often go unacknowledged by funding formulas. Where experience shows that barriers to motivation are often more critical than a lack of specific, factual information, such developmental activities need to be acknowledged and supported.

In discussing this topic with colleagues across the country, I have found that many new programs which have characteristics outlined in some of the preceding paragraphs are not even recognized in the budget process. They are often embedded in the traditional reporting structure. Their uniqueness must remain hidden because it can not be explained in the usual terms. As a result, there is little incentive to internalize these programs as an ongoing part of the institution, even when their effectiveness is demonstrated.

A Possible Solution

I have asked several state legislators what educators can do to help in solving some of the problems already mentioned. The legislators indicated a need for information on how to evaluate new programs. When a college of university requests funds for a new program it should include not only the educational impact statement, but also instructions for measuring that impact. We need to build credibility, and we will even be given the chance to establish our own criteria for accountability.

We need to look for the outcomes of our education. What does the process actually do to and for its clients? Are the actual outcomes the ones intended? If not, let us jointly state the expected outcomes and then work toward a delivery system that will achieve them at a cost that is bearable. Empire State College has an impressive array of information about its program and students. The outcomes project of NCHEMS has provided us with access to instruments for measuring outcomes over an enormous range of skills and attitudes. Tennessee and New York have taken the lead in translating educational objectives into measurable outcomes.

Finally, let me suggest a model for assessing the value of educational programs. The model has two basic components. The first has to do with measuring the attainment of the content objective of the program. Thus, if the content objective was to graduate B.A. level social workers with skills in accounting and family planning, an evaluation plan could be constructed to certify the attainment of those skills at any specific level of competence.

This component can be further refined to take into consideration the amount of learning necessary to achieve those skills through careful pretesting of entering students to determine the 'value added" by the program. Such educational value added models are being tried in several institutions and [illegible]e been described in the literature. It is relatively easy to assign costs to this component and fiscal agencies could relate those costs to the gains made by the students and arrive at a cost/unit gain. These experiments should continue and be expanded.

But let me talk about the second component. It addresses itself to the costs borne by the student. These include 1) actual dollars spent for the education, 2) foregone earnings due to job dislocation for study, and 3) psychological costs or benefits.

Although we usually regard tuition as one of the constants in the cost of education, that is not always so. In a traditional course, the student will pay the entire cost of the tuition before the course begins. If the student has to drop out of the course midway through the term, there is usually no refund of unused tuition. For older students there are often times when classes must be missed because of family or job obligations. At Grand Valley in our competency-based College IV students may pay tuition in blocks as small as $7.50 for one-half credit. Thus, if they complete only half of the work for what would have been a traditional course, they will have mastered half of the credits of that course and will have paid only half tuition. For many of our students an initial outlay of $100 or more to begin a course of study is prohibitive. Through the use of individualized learning units they may buy credit as they are able. We have some students who are able to spend $25 per week on their education and pay tuition for as many units as that will purchase. Since the instructional units are designed to be used at home or in the library, or at any remote setting (with the exception of some laboratory work), and since those same units have no time deadlines for completion, the students are able to take advantage of leisure hours or unusual job schedules to continue their work. If illness or an out-of-town trip prevents their study for a period of time, there is no loss.

To invest in a regular course of study at a university or community college, older students, and younger, who are working full-time must often rearrange work schedules to accommodate course meeting times.

In many cases these persons must forego overtime pay or take undesirable work shifts in order to accommodate their study schedule. In College IV at Grand Valley faculty are available over a wide range of hours to accommodate students, regardless of their work schedules. Since the students need come to campus only when they are ready to be tested, or when they have difficulties, they may schedule their study time around their work. For our fireman whose shift changes each two weeks, College IV is the only possible answer for studying. He could never be accommodated in either a day course, or an evening course. Similarly, one of our students studying mathematics is the driver of an earthmoving machine. During favorable weather he is employed 12 to 14 hours per day. When it snows or rains, he takes his free time to continue his study. The economic impact on these persons can be estimated in a modular course of study as compared with a time-based lecture course.

The third factor, the psychological costs, is admittedly the hardest to measure. At the same time, it represents an area of potential loss which far exceeds the foregone earnings or actual dollars spent for education. Let me cite one example from our program which illustrates this cost benefit problem. After College IV had been in operation several months a housewife with three small children applied for admission. She had heard about College IV from a neighbor, but had been too fearful of her own lack of ability to approach the college in September. She had graduated from high school more than 15 years ago and was terribly fearful of the competition with 18 year old 'hotshots', as she called them. After some counselling, she was enrolled for one unit of study in psychology. With encouragement she completed the work and signed up for several more. Throughout that first year her investment in the program became greater as her confidence grew. During the second year she rearranged her home schedule and cross-registered for a standard course in the College of Arts and Sciences. Not only did she compete successfully with those 'hotshots' whom she had feared the year before, but she gained enough confidence to transfer full-time into that traditional program. Thus, the self-paced program of College was important in breaking down a psychological barrier and in improving her self-image to the point where she could enter the mainstream with other younger students.

There are many other variables that could be added to this model under each of the basic components. The model which for lack of a better term I call 'the program viability index' (PVI) could become a standard for comparing programs regardless of their conventional or non-conventional aspects. The PVI could become a way of incorporating as many variables as are thought to be pertinent in the assessment of a given educational program.

The title of this paper is "Accountability in Action." In too many ways we have allowed program development to be divorced from clearly designated objectives. In such cases accountability becomes a kind of obituary. To be useful we must close the feedback loop which allows our efforts aimed at evaluation to have an impact on the programs they are designed to serve. I believe that formative evaluation is an example of accountability in action.