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ABSTRACT

State colleges and universities (SUs) are being forced by critics of higher education to reassess themselves and redirect their efforts. There is a movement to discover a simplistic and valid means of measuring excellence in higher education. Measuring student outcomes cuts through all the difficulties created by more standard attempts to find a reliable indicator of the educational effectiveness of institutions. However, the organization, funding, objectives, and directions of many SUs are ill-suited to the outcomes movement, and they react with hostility to any attempt by a state board or accrediting agency to measure their worth on a one-dimensional scale (since it seems unfair to make "what students learn" the basis for judging institutional quality and effectiveness). The future may bring a compromise in which outcomes measurement becomes an important factor in the financial formula by which SUs are supported. An examination of the reasons behind the University of Louisville's reluctance to embrace the outcomes movement is presented to shed some light on the way other SUs might react to such a situation. Some of the suggestions for narrowing the gap between advocates of student outcomes assessment and those reluctant to adopt it are: successful measurement requires an atmosphere of openness and informality; multiple measures of student education must be used; and outcomes can be measured in all of the activities of an institution. It is noted that improving education is unlikely to be the road to fame for any institution. (SM)

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Outcomes Assessment, Excellence, and the
State University: Conflict in the Making

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State colleges and universities (henceforth SU's, for convenience) are beginning to find themselves pulled by two powerful forces they often perceive as contradictory. Accrediting agencies, state governing and coordinating boards, and public opinion (expressed through a series of reports on higher education) are joining together to proclaim that American higher education needs to be refocused, needs to concentrate its efforts and resources on what many--including the majority of taxpayers on whom, ultimately, the SU's depend for their support--say should be their primary task: the education of students, particularly undergraduates. The arguments supporting this crusade are well known: the skills of college graduates are poorer than ever before, and still dropping; the baccalaureate degree has lost its distinction; SU's are inefficient, forever asking for more of a state's resources but unwilling to demonstrate that they can use the resources they already have effectively; primary and secondary school teachers, whose education is one of the SU's

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primary responsibilities, are less well-prepared than they should be; and so on. Many, perhaps most, of the criticisms leveled against higher education by reports like Involvement in Learning are true, at least in part, and something clearly needs to be done to get our institutions back on the right track. SU's, sensitive to political pressure and dependent upon public opinion (expressed through state legislatures) are an easy target for such criticism; surely they, through a combination of pressure, legislation, and financial reward (or penalty), can be redirected to the purpose for which they are funded: educating the children of taxpayers.

The critics of higher education have, in addition, hit upon an attractive mechanism to force the SU's to reassess themselves and redirect their efforts. Measuring student outcomes--what students have learned as a result of their entire college experience--cuts through all the difficulties created by more traditional attempts to find a reliable indicator of the educational effectiveness of institutions. The more commonplace measures of quality--the resources available to an institution, the rating of faculty proficiency as teachers, the qualifications of faculty, student-faculty ratios, etc.--are all controversial to one degree or another. Trying to evaluate educational quality by examining the "inputs" to the system and the "processes" used has been unconvincing; focusing on the products--the "outputs" or "outcomes"--seems to promise a methodology for making valid comparisons between institutions that otherwise have little in common. If College A consistently produces better educated students than College B, a fact that can be documented with test scores and other objective measures, then differences in resources, proportion of Ph.D.'s, volumes in the library, educational philosophy, grading scales, and other measures matter little: A is a more

effective educational institution than B. We live, after all, in a society consistently concerned with "the bottom line," not with all the minute figures which are added up to get "the bottom line." Why should we evaluate higher education differently?

Pitted against this movement to discover a simplistic and valid means of measuring excellence in higher education are a host of SU's which have traditionally seen their missions as more complex than simply turning out students who can outperform the graduates of other schools on tests. The organization, funding, objectives, and directions of many SU's are ill-suited to the outcomes movement, and one can expect them to react quite hostilely to any attempt by a state board or accrediting agency to measure their worth on a simple-minded, one-dimensional scale. Teaching, after all, is only one of the things faculty do, only one of the activities into which institutions invest their energy and resources. It seems patently unfair to make "what students learn" the sole basis for judging institutional quality and effectiveness.

The dilemma in which, particularly, SU's find themselves may end in several different ways. As many administrators hope, the outcomes movement may simply go away, leaving SU's to argue over quality using all the traditional measures they have always used. On the other hand, the proponents of measuring student outcomes may succeed in convincing state legislators to grade--and fund--the institutions they control solely on the basis of results, hopefully thereby forcing SU's to redesign themselves into efficient factories capable of turning out the desired products--educated students. In all probability, however, neither extreme will be successful; the future will be a compromise, in which "outcomes measurement" (substantially altered in form by institutional reluctance) becomes an important factor in the financial formula

by which SU's are supported. The specific form of this compromise--and whether under it the original intentions of those supporting the outcomes movement are preserved--will be shaped both by the means of measurement used and by the nature of the institutions' resistance. If measuring outcomes is to lead to real improvements in institutional effectiveness, the nature of the SU's resistance had better be fully understood.

The University of Louisville, a state-supported university with approximately 20,000 students and 1,000 faculty, is typical of SU's torn between these forces. Louisville is undergoing review for reaffirmation of its institutional accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, a leader in the effort to make institutional effectiveness the major consideration in accreditation; and Louisville is under close scrutiny by the Kentucky Council on Higher Education, the state coordinating board for SU's in the Commonwealth, which--like state boards in neighboring Tennessee and elsewhere--is vitally interested in the question of what the taxpayers get for the money they invest in higher education. An examination of the reasons behind Louisville's reluctance to embrace the "outcomes movement" will undoubtedly shed light on the way other SU's will react to similar situations, and may help the proponents of the movement better plan their strategies for the future.

First, a few facts about the University of Louisville. "U of L" claims 1798 as the date of its founding, although it did not begin operations until 1834. Until 1972 it was a private university, supported in part by the City of Louisville; in 1972 financial difficulties forced it to join the state system (which now has eight SU's). A condition for state support was a lowering of admissions requirements--from those of a fairly selective private

university to the "open admissions" then mandated by the state--and a lowering of tuition rates to statewide standards; enrollment more than doubled in the decade following. "U of L" consists of eleven schools and colleges (including Medicine, Law, Dentistry, Engineering, and Business), offers masters degrees in 67 fields and doctorates in 20, and supports a basketball program that has won the NCAA Division I national championship twice in the last decade. Although the undergraduate student population is undistinguished (over 80% are graduates of Jefferson County, Kentucky, high schools, and the average ACT Composite score for freshmen is below 18), the University has high aspirations: the former president's goal was to make it "Harvard on the Ohio" and the current (since 1981) president's goal is to make it "one of the best urban universities in the nation."

Over the past three years, Louisville has mounted a major effort in "strategic planning," with consultative help from Bob Shirley (of NCHEMS) and George Keller (whose book, Academic Strategy, was required reading for all administrators). A strategic plan, based largely on a survey of "environmental opportunities" (and very little on a hard, critical analysis of "strengths and weaknesses") was published in early 1986, but the funding required to accomplish the plan is, under foreseeable conditions, unlikely to be provided by the state. Briefly, the plan calls for the addition of a number of doctoral programs, for the development of Louisville into a "research" university, for closer ties with the business community, and for recognition of the institution's vital importance to economic development in the city and state (largely through the efforts of its schools of medicine, engineering, and business).

Two other distinctive features of the University of Louisville should be noted. First, it has a unique arrangement concerning its teaching hospital, which, although built with state funds, is run (under a long-term lease) by a private hospital-management corporation, Humana. Second, under the leadership of the current president, Donald Swain, Louisville embarked three years ago on an ambitious fund-raising "Quest for Excellence" with a \$40 million target; to date, over \$42 million has been pledged, testimony to the strong support the school has locally in an otherwise rather poor state. In short, its ambitions for national recognition and prominence, though perhaps unrealistic, are not totally unfounded. It has come a long way under its current leadership.

Like Louisville, many SU's want to excel--to stand out among their peers as unique, as leaders. Like individuals, institutions have needs: a scale, like the one devised by Abraham Maslow in 1943 to categorize the hierarchy of individual needs, can be useful in fathoming the stage of development reached by an institution. Once a SU has passed the level of concern for its simple continued existence (in Maslow's terms, the satisfaction of physiological and safety or security needs), its attention shifts to loftier aspirations: love, esteem, and--perhaps--self-actualization. The desire to fulfill these needs can be a powerful force in explaining the motivation of behavior within an organization, in understanding why it adopts the policies it does (or doesn't) and why it pours its energies into the directions it chooses.

Normally, institutions seek to move up the hierarchy. Having achieved stable and adequate enrollments and budgets, a situation in which the majority of state-supported institutions find themselves, they turn their attention to excellence: what can we do to achieve distinction among our peers? Occasionally a crisis--either in budget or enrollment--can momentarily shift

attention back to low-level concerns, but most institutions continue, even through fiscal crises, to strive for intangibles--the admiration and respect of others.

As mentioned earlier, the University of Louisville, like hundreds of other state schools of its type, has such a lofty goal: "to be one of the best urban universities in the Nation." (Note that, not being fools, Louisville has not written a time-line into this goal statement.) That question that needs to be answered for such schools is "how do we achieve distinction?"--how do we go from where we are now to a position of national prominence and respect, and how do we do it within the serious constraints imposed by finite limits on federal and state support for higher education; disagreements among faculty, students, administrators, legislators, and the public as to the proper function and focus of higher educational institutions; and growing public and professional unease with the directions higher education has taken in recent years. How the question gets answered is determined, in part, by the position legislators and the public take on questions of institutional accountability; in turn, how state universities are held accountable is affected by the way in which state universities set their goals and directions--how they decide to strive for excellence.

For state universities, adopting a vague goal--to excel--may have serious and problematic ramifications. Most state-supported schools belong to groups, and are directed (or nudged) by state regulatory or coordinating boards; they are not free, entirely, to decide their individual futures and missions. Although it is difficult for any state board to reject a single institution's desire "to excel," a state may have to make tough decisions on the parameters within which each institution it supports wishes to shine.

Kentucky, for example, presently supports two state medical schools, two state schools of dentistry, three state schools of law, and two state schools of engineering. In other states (Ohio's medical school situation comes to mind quickly), proliferation of competing efforts--or out-and-out duplication--may be even more obvious. How much of a comparatively poor state's revenues can be dedicated to the understandable impulses of each of its institutions to be "stars" in the highly competitive firmament of higher education? Can a state whose income derives primarily from coal, liquor, tobacco, and manufacturing--not booming economies, at best--pour in sufficient resources to support three law schools, each of which wants to achieve national renown? The answer should be obvious. Kentucky has, among the fifty states, with the exception of Mississippi, the smallest proportion of citizens who are high school graduates. Its college-going rate is one of the lowest in the nation; its high-school dropout rate is alarmingly high (only two-thirds of students entering the ninth grade graduate four years later). [CHE Strategic Planning paper, T.L. Grissom, & R.A. Mann, "Educational Attainment and Careers: Overview and Findings" pp. 4-5.] Low educational attainment is, however, only part of the problem. Though among the contiguous forty-eight states, Kentucky ranks 47th in the per capita production of associate degrees, 44th in the production of baccalaureates, and 40th in the production of doctorates, it ranks 7th in the production of dental and 15th in the production of medical degrees. [same source] Yet 46.9% of Kentuckians 25 and over have not graduated from high school (compared to 33.5% for the nation as a whole)--the lowest proportion of high school graduates of any state in the nation. [1980 U.S. Census]

The Kentucky CHE recently went through its own process of "strategic planning" for higher education in Kentucky. In reviewing state higher educational priorities and budgetary constraints, Thomas L. Grissom, Deputy Executive Director of the CHE for Planning and Policy, concluded:

(1) that "based on the present level of state appropriation for higher education in Kentucky and given the state's financial condition, the percentage of total state appropriation going to higher education does not need to be increased." [Grissom, "Budgetary Consideration and Financial Accountability: an Overview," 1985, p. 4.] This conclusion was, naturally enough, hotly opposed by the state schools' presidents, who felt the conclusion that "Kentucky supports higher education adequately" was grossly in error;

(2) that "the present system of institutions, programs, and enrollment distribution is a high-cost system" that cannot be adequately supported by "the present tax structure or revenue allocation system of the Commonwealth"; and

(3) that "Undergraduate instruction, basic research, and educational attainment are being sacrificed by a stubborn reluctance to reduce or eliminate professional educational and service programs." In effect, the state's schools cannot all strive for excellence in all areas-- particularly in professional education.

Other states undoubtedly find themselves in similar situations, either because limited revenues cannot support a system that tries to be all things to all people, or because over-emphasis on graduate and professional education has shifted the focus of attention and interest within their systems away from the mainstay of higher education, the education of undergraduates. Unlike

many states, Kentucky's loose "coordinating" board currently lacks the authority to compel institutions to devote their resources to the things that the state finds important (i.e., the education of undergraduates, and, thereby, the raising of educational attainment for the citizens of the state): "The Council [on Higher Education] does not have authority to manage internal institutional operating budgets. Uniform financial reporting of fiscal year expenditures is required by statute but not yet fully realized. Thus, expenditure data are not always timely, comparable, or sufficiently detailed. For example, the analysis of institutional expenditures on intercollegiate athletics prepared for the Council this year required a series of specific requests for data to the institutions," [page 2, Grissom, "Budgetary..."]. Furthermore, "Despite statutory authority for the Council to require and collect all reports necessary for the coordination of the system, these efforts will likely face broad institutional resistance. The claim will be made that the information has no utility except for the purpose of budget management and control, an authority reserved exclusively to the institutions," [p. 3. Grissom, "Budgetary..."]. In effect, the Kentucky Council on Higher Education sees the need for state-wide direction of its system to focus the individual institutional missions of the state's eight state universities, but lacks the legislative authority needed to hold the schools accountable for their decisions and actions. In other states (and, I suspect, soon in Kentucky) state boards do possess such power, and will, more and more, decide those areas upon which each institution will focus its efforts.

National reports second the concerns highlighted in Kentucky's efforts to come to terms with its own system. The Mortimer report, Involvement in

Learning (1984), and a host of successors have pointed out the tendency of institutions and their faculties toward policies and practices which de-emphasize the importance of basic undergraduate education in order to pay attention to those areas of potential "excellence" chosen by each institution as its goals. The problem here is not in wanting to excel--one can hardly fault any educational institution for wanting to be excellent. Excellence, however, is a murky concept, whose interpretation changes according to context. In large organizations (and state "systems" of higher education qualify as large organizations) excellence in a sub-unit can be at the cost of excellence somewhere else in the organization as a whole; every choice has consequences, not all of them desirable, including the decision to strive for excellence. In cybernetic terms, there is need for constant vigilance against suboptimization, the tendency of organizational units to achieve their goals at the expense of more important overall organizational goals. In a university, for example, one can do a number of things to run a library efficiently while at the same time destroying the very reasons why universities have libraries. Policies which restrict the circulation of books (to cut down on loss through stealing or carelessness), acquisition policies designed to maximize the number of items in a collection (by buying, for example, cheap government documents or microform materials that are little used), purchase policies which prefer the more costly acquisitions (since there is less staffwork consumed in buying, cataloging, and shelving one \$90 volume than ten \$9 volumes) may all make a library "look" good, but may work strongly against the reasons for having a library in the first place. Suboptimization can occur within a state university, when the individual schools, colleges, and departments set their own (individually admirable)

goals; and within a state system, when each state university decides for itself how it will excel. The imposition of a single yardstick for measuring results--such as the notion that state universities should be judged solely on how well they educate students--makes such suboptimization intolerable.

There is growing awareness that the measures used to identify excellence in educational institutions can easily be perverted. Institutional accreditation, for example, has for too long been narrowly overconcerned with educational resources through a simplistic assumption that the presence of resources automatically implied educational sufficiency and that a surplus of resources correlated with excellence. One need only scan the standards for accreditation of both regional and professional accrediting agencies to discern the overemphasis placed on facilities, volumes in the library, proportion of faculty with advanced degrees, teaching loads and student-faculty ratios, and the like. This fascination with the surface of education--"surface" in the sense of its most superficial aspects--is, however, declining; among others, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) has rewritten its Criteria for Accreditation (1986) to de-emphasize the counting of material resources as a means of determining whether or not an institution offers a quality education, to shift attention from the number of volumes in the library to the more important question of whether students ever visit the library and read the books it has. This shift has been slow in coming, perhaps for good reasons: during the explosive expansion of the American Higher education system during the sixties and seventies, accrediting agencies spent their energies simply in keeping up with the growth of new institutions and the expansion of existing ones (all those community and state teachers colleges which suddenly became universities with

doctoral programs); a superficial overview of whether new or expanded institutions had the minimal resources necessary to their intended missions seemed to be enough.

Now, with demographic projections which indicate that the U.S. probably has more places for students in higher education than it needs (and certainly has more places in graduate and law schools for students than society needs Ph.D.'s and lawyers--although lawyers, unlike Ph.D.'s, seem to be consistently able to create new demand for their services), the concern is shifting from adequacy to quality, from looking at the superficial resources to the processes and products of our higher education system. Folklore (which may, in fact, be true) has it that SACS' change in emphasis was motivated by a threat from (of all places) Florida to withdraw from the SACS Commission which accredits secondary schools in the south: the Southern Association had threatened with loss of accreditation one of Florida's best high schools (best as judged by the proportion of students going on to college) because it was located too close to a railroad track. Supposedly, Florida threatened to leave the association unless quality were taken seriously in accreditation matters; as a consequence, SACS rewrote its criteria for granting and renewing accreditation. SACS is a leader in this area, but it is not alone; the criteria used to judge higher education are changing quickly.

Often, the form in which a question is asked determines its answer, a truism which holds for the question "what is excellence?" in higher education. To foresee how institutions will react to this growing tide of sentiment in favor of tightly focusing individual institutional missions and of measuring student learning as an index of educational excellence, it is useful to rephrase the question "what is excellence?" into a form that

reflects the perspective of an individual college or university: what can we, as an institution, (or I, as a president or chief academic officer) do to make my institution stand out, to make it receive the admiration, respect, or envy of others? Phrased this way, the question often invites answers very different from those offered by the authors of reports and essays that suggest outcomes assessment as a way out of the "crisis" in current American higher education. Moreover, the answers to this question that occur to administrators in state-supported institutions fall into a narrower range than those available to private schools.

There are traditionally five or six different avenues to excellence--to making a college or university known and respected by others. These include: (1) amassing resources (people, buildings, equipment, endowments, etc.) so that the institution is materially superior to its peers; (2) restricting the quality of "inputs" (i.e., students admitted) to a high level; (3) acquiring prestige on the basis of outstanding accomplishment in a relatively narrow area of enterprise, either academic (e.g., a strong honors program, a respected medical school) or non-academic (e.g., a winning athletic program); (4) attracting and nurturing a prolific faculty who can win fame for the school through their scholarship and research; (5) graduating only those students who will achieve a record of distinction after college; or (6) incorporating into the structure of the educational process some distinctive element which makes comparison with other institutions difficult (e.g., individualized self-directed study programs, like those at Empire State College in New York). Not all of these avenues are equally available to all schools, even fewer to state universities.

First, to excel in higher education traditionally has meant to have greater resources than others, to succeed at the very things measured by the scorecards accrediting agencies traditionally use. Size of endowments; square footage devoted to classrooms, offices, and laboratories; number of doctoral faculty; low faculty-student ratios; size of library collections; and the like are all objective facts that enable schools to compare themselves to others. The difficulty with striving for excellence by amassing material wealth (money, manpower, machines, etc.) is that, for a state university, the contest is already too competitive. State schools are not only in competition with each other, but with all the other agencies supported out of a state's budget: prisons, health care, welfare, roads--many of which are perceived by the public (and, consequently by legislators) to be of more immediate import. It is difficult--probably impossible today--for a state university to argue for an increase in its appropriation when the alternative uses for the money are so obvious: improving mass transit, keeping criminals off the streets, stopping the drug trade, insuring a decent life for the elderly, etc. Add to this competition for funds the worn approach that higher education uses--"just give us the funds, and we'll use them wisely to improve things"--and you have a notably unconvincing argument for most legislators. Thus the institutional impulse to seek distinction through increased resources has, more and more, been stymied or redirected. Although state universities still lobby for bigger state appropriations and state approval of tuition increases, they have also turned their attention to fund-raising for affiliated foundations (where permitted) and to increasing their share of a shrinking pot of federal and private grant and contract money. For evidence of this, one need only look at

The Chronicle of Higher Education, particularly at turnover in and competition for "institutional development" officers.

Louisville's successful "Quest for Excellence" has produced nearly \$38 million in "unrestricted" (i.e., not accountable to the state) funds. In itself, private and corporate support for public higher education is not a problem, although it does create difficulties for state systems which have comprehensive strategies for how they would like to see their institutions develop; the privately-raised money sometimes takes institutions off in directions which do not fit the state's plan. The quest for grant and contract money, sought because the overhead allowance also provides the institution with a "margin for excellence" does, however, have profound effects on the functioning of an institution. To push its faculty into the competition for research grants, many institutions have made profound shifts in personnel policy: the relative attention given to teaching versus research has declined dramatically, and even lackluster former state teachers colleges which prided themselves on a long tradition of focusing attention on students have become "publish or perish" institutions. Moreover, there are, even at schools with longer traditions of that faculty research, disturbing trends--especially an increasingly obvious tendency to favor applied over "pure" research, a favoring of short over long-term research projects, and a blatant preference for the hard sciences and engineering (where grant and contract money is more abundant over the arts and humanities). One can expect state-supported schools to continue to seek resources through these devices, with perhaps, one additional, consideration: lobbying for state support has taken a new tack, with institutions appealing to legislatures for increased appropriation on the grounds that the presence of a university in an area,

particularly a university with a host of doctoral programs staffed by active researchers, will stimulate the area's economic development. Although the evidence is sketchy that business relocate and entrepreneurs spring up in areas with state universities, this argument may be convincing for a while and may benefit institutions (particularly those with engineering and business schools), the strategy will be effective only if rather direct casual connections can be drawn between increased economic activity and increased state support for an institution. Given the crisis in confidence over the use universities have made in the past in turning their increased appropriations into better educated graduates, the chances of an institution enriching itself and achieving distinction on these purely economic arguments seem slim. It may not hurt to try for more state money, but it is probably more realistic for SU's to seek distinction.

Another traditional measure of excellence has to do with what, for lack of a better term, can be called the quality of raw materials. Selectively and incoming student quality is often cited as a mark of distinction; the best schools are the ones to which the best students come, the ones which admit only those who can be educated with the least effort. For state schools, distinction through selective admissions is difficult: often there are quotas or differential tuition rates which discourage out-of-state recruiting efforts, and the pool from which the schools draw is rather narrow. Many state schools have a largely regional or local prospective student population and--with declining numbers of 18 years olds and falling entrance exam scores--the desire to be more selective must be balanced against the desire to continue to exist. Fearful of lowering enrollments (and laying off faculty), most schools are happy to take whomever they can get. The increased

permanence of remedial programs is testimony to the impossibility, for most SU's, of attaining distinction by rejecting applicants. Moreover, concerns about educational opportunity for minorities and federal rules concerning desegregation make truly selective admissions a near impossible route to distinction. Louisville, for example, lives under an Office of Civil Rights agreement to remove the vestiges of segregation in the Kentucky state system; its target is to graduate the same proportion of undergraduate Blacks as are present in the local population, no mean goal in a city where the rate of college-going among Blacks is on the decline and where recruiting out-of-state Blacks supposedly undermines the state's purpose in maintaining a higher educational system. Truly selective admissions is a strategy for excellence best left to private institutions.

These two approaches--increase resources and limiting the pool of students admitted--are traditionally the marks of outstanding institutions. Astin's (1986) study shows clearly that the institutions most people perceive as best are those which have these traits. These are not, however, workable strategies by which SU's can hope to attain distinction.

Prestige can, nevertheless, be earned in other ways. Sports is one: Louisville, winner of the 1980 and 1986 NCAA national basketball championship, gained more attention through athletics than it ever garnered academically. Sports are popular with legislatures; money flows much more easily during the thrill of victory than at other times. But sports are costly; schools don't win championships by doing well the things for which educational institutions evolved, and sports sap a great deal of attention away from other areas of concern. Competition, of course, is intense; all Division I schools in the NCAA are out to be champions, and excelling in such a selective arena has a

high price. In the wake of Louisville's 1986 championship came three lasting achievements: the legislature approved the construction of a new student center (more properly a physical education-student center); Louisville committed itself to seeking national prominence in football (hiring as coach Howard Schnellenberger of the Miami Dolphins); and approximately one million dollars per year in gifts were diverted from the annual campaign used to support academic operations into the annual athletic fund-raising drive (where contributions of given amounts became prerequisites for the purchase of season football and basketball tickets). Sports can make an institution famous, but sports in themselves can do little to make it more famous as an educational institution.

Athletic prominence is just one possible area for a "pocket of excellence"; many others are possible, and they can be directly connected with a SU's educational mission. SU's with distinguished individual colleges or departments are not uncommon, and the institutions which have such "pockets of excellence" ought to be proud of them. Too often, however, "pockets" do not seem enough--what institutions want is an overall reputation that draws rave reviews, not simply an art or history program that shines. Moreover, conscious attempts to create individual outstanding programs often create internal havoc, since the programs which have not been "targeted" for a starring role understandably feel neglected. Then too, it is difficult (from, say, a statewide perspective) to understand why a disproportionate share of an institution's resources should be vested in a department which benefits only a relatively small number of faculty and students. Legislators or accreditation teams may ask why the funds, if available, were not used for more far-reaching improvement of a SU's overall program.

Graduates and alumni, if distinguished, can do much for a school's reputation, but the fame and wealth of alumni is heavily dependent on the social and economic level of students admitted in the first place. As Astin's data demonstrates, student social class (measured on a variety of variables) is highest among those institutions with selective admissions policies. In the competition for distinguished alumni, the Harvards and Yales and Stanfords have quite a head-start on the Slippery Rocks, Akrons, and Louisvilles of the world. Theoretically, one might conceive of a state school so excellent at educating students that, in spite of students' origins and entering ACT scores, its graduates go on to head corporations and win fame as artists and writers, but the theory on which such a conception is based is risky--too risky for most college administrators. To rededicate and restructure an institution in hopes that it will win fame through its graduates is unlikely to become a common strategy for the nation's state colleges and universities.

Given the difficulty of competing for prestige on these traditional grounds, several state institutions have attempted to find for themselves a distinctive niche--a category which will allow them to achieve distinction primarily because there are few (if any) others with whom to share it. New York's Empire State College, for example, is a leader in individualized, distance-learning programs for adults--both because the College's faculty and administration are good at what they do and are dedicated to doing it, and because there are few, if any, other schools fighting for that particular title. Similarly, Northeast Missouri State, under the far-seeing leadership of Charles C. McClain, embarked on a comprehensive and rigorous program of measuring student outcomes as early as 1972--then, after the evidence was in, asked for an additional state appropriation to reward and encourage their

distinctive efforts. Unfortunately, strategies like these cannot work for every school in a state: if every SU in a system collects student outcome data and asks for appropriations based on these results, all will find themselves locked in competition for a single pot. To be the only school in a state measuring outcomes provides a certain distinctiveness; if all do it, results are what counts (as, for example, in the limited outcomes-based formula-funding experiment in Tennessee). Yet, simple and direct as it sounds, staking the future of an institution on the hope that one's students will learn more than similar students at similar institutions is a risky and dangerous venture, particularly for administrators who can envision more traditional (and potentially less damaging) ways of striving . distinction. Without outside pressure (from state boards and legislators, in particular), the SU that chooses to pursue fame and fortune by demonstrating that its students learn more will be rare indeed.

Although measuring the effectiveness of an institution in achieving its primary function--educating students--seems like an uncontroversial idea, it is likely to face extreme resistance within institutions, particularly SU's. The reasons for this resistance are numerous, and differ from one campus group to another. Administrators, faculty, students, and alumni can all be expected to fight the impulse in one way or another, and the nature and degree of each group's resistance will, in the end, be important in determining the ultimate form that evaluation takes.

From the administrative perspective, assessment has clear minuses and uncertain pluses. First, it's expensive; Ewell and Jones [The Costs of Assessment] figure that a minimal, basically one-dimensional assessment program for a mid-size school will run \$125,000 per year. Costs either have

to be passed on to students, or funds have to be reallocated from other projects. If an assessment program is to be truly institutional--if it is to examine the effectiveness of not just the educational programs of an institution, but all of the myriad research, service, and administrative programs which compete with the educational programs for funds and attention (and upon whose effectiveness, ultimately, the educational programs depend)--the expense of assessment will rise meteorically; yet to measure carefully and hold accountable instructional programs only, while allowing all the other programs which eat up an institution's resources to go their own merry ways, seems unconscionable. A narrowly focused institutional evaluation effort has the potential to split (further) the faculty from the rest of an institution's employees, to reduce (further) faculty morale, etc.

Imposing an evaluation program is, therefore, a dramatic and expensive move, one that had better hold in store clear benefits: otherwise, no clear-thinking president, provost, or dean would subject his or her institution to the ordeal. What makes it worthwhile? When do the prospective benefits outweigh the costs?

Clearly, the benefits lie in improving the educational process--in using the results of the assessment system to make appropriate changes in curriculum, scheduling, personnel systems (i.e., appointment, assignment, development, and evaluation in reward of faculty), and in adjusting all of the other factors which may contribute to a better education for students. Taking on this challenge requires forceful leadership, in most cases at the presidential level (especially if the assessment program is to be institution-wide), yet estimates indicate that less than 2% of university presidents are directly involved in academic affairs: and presidents have

more pressing matters before them than the improvement of undergraduate education. More importantly, perhaps, assessment systems will add a plethora of computer printouts to an administrative environment which is already drowning in data. As George Keller points out in Academic Strategy, the model for the modern university president is the forceful decision-maker, the action-oriented mover--not the studious seeker of additional data. Without a clear vision of how the data from assessment studies can be translated into action (a difficult translation at best in an academic tradition which requires an endless series of committee meetings and debates before even the simplest curricular change can be permitted), it is unlikely that many presidents will take it upon themselves to lead their campuses to a comprehensive system of measuring student outcomes.

Pressure from administrators below the president might move outcomes assessment up in a SU's list of presidential priorities, but other problems interpose themselves. To advocate student outcomes as the final measure of quality is to admit inadequacies in the current system by which programs and students are certified, yet the current system is, in most cases, largely the creation of those charged with administrative responsibilities. To lambast it, to say it needs to be replaced with a new system that looks at product rather than process, is to risk the ire of the faculty, who will naturally rile at the idea that the curriculum, programs, and teaching for which they are responsible could be dramatically improved by the imposition of a new bureaucratic creation--outcomes assessment.

The faculty, of course, cannot be expected to embrace a bureaucratic procedure designed to test whether or not the curriculum (which is organized and delivered by the faculty) is effective: if the faculty thought it needed

revision or that their teaching needed improvement, they would take action. It might, however, be possible to alleviate this faculty fear that outcomes assessment is designed to "check up on whether the faculty are doing their job well" by instituting an outcomes measurement system throughout an institution: to use measures of all institutional activities to determine the effectiveness with which all parts of a university contribute to the "mission."

Faculty fears spring from other sources as well. One is the belief, hopefully wrong, that outcomes must be measured by paper-and-pencil tests. Although SACS and other groups favoring assessment have gone to great lengths to suggest alternatives and complements to testing (e.g., exit interviews, job placement data, alumni surveys, library usage information, etc.), plans to assess the outcomes of a college education, where they have been implemented, have depended heavily on testing--particularly on the ACT COMP battery and on the subject area GRE examinations. Yet few faculty would use a single test as the measure of student progress in a course--grades are usually based on multiple measures including participation, papers, and other factors. To use one or two tests to measure the collective impact of a department or an institution on a student seems ludicrous. When faculty discuss the issue of outcomes assessment, they raise a series of valid concerns, all of which will have to be addressed before they will accept and cooperate with a systematic attempt to measure educational effectiveness: the tendency of such a system to encourage "teaching for the test"; the tendency of a measurement system to encourage the setting of lower goals than would otherwise be desirable; the need to recast educational goals into a form that will permit their achievement to be observed or measured; the belief that many of the "benefits" of an education do not become visible (much less measurable) until years or

decades have passed; etc. Then, too, there is the substantial problem of what one does with the results of such an assessment: if the faculty of College X learn that their graduates are inferior to those of College Y, how can this information be used to improve College X? These are all serious concerns, and must be addressed if institutional effectiveness is to be measured for the benefit of an institution.

Students, too, are likely to be concerned, as will alumni. First, testing is time-consuming (if not expensive); few students advocate more testing. Second, students are concerned, rightfully, about the use to which the results will be put. If only outcomes are measured (i.e., if the tests are designed and used to assure a minimal level of quality control among graduates), their impact--in the long run--may be to restrict the admission of freshmen, since the better-prepared admittees can be expected to outperform others, even on exit exams. On the other hand, if outcomes are measured as part of a system designed to determine "value-added" (i.e., the average gain in scores made by the students of a given institution between admission and graduation), then the pressure may be in the reverse direction: a college can make itself look good by accepting only those with the greatest potential for improvement. (In a few cases in which institutions have experimented with the "value-added" approach, comparative scores show a net loss as a result of four years' of education; clearly, such schools would have done better had they started with more ignorant students.) If the results of assessment are made public--and one can hardly expect a school with documented evidence that it provides a better education than its competitors to keep a secret--these concerns will be aggravated. How would it feel, for example, to be the alumnus of an institution which advertises that it now provides a vastly better education

than the one you received? Kentucky now formally prohibits its SU's from publishing claims that one offers a better education than another, but, if the evidence were available, could such information be suppressed? If it were not suppressed, what would the effects be on a state system? Plunging blindly into outcomes assessment when so many important questions remain unanswered is extremely dangerous.

In spite of all the resistance with which the movement will be met, it is clearly a force that will continue to exert pressure on higher education for some time to come. Legislators, unable to see the subtle problems with outcomes assessment that are so obvious to faculty, will press to see the "bottom line," and accrediting agencies (through COPA's influence and SACS' example, among others) will undoubtedly continue to insist that institutions demonstrate their success in achieving the goals they have set for themselves. If chaos is to be prevented, and if all the energy which will be invested in the attempt to measure effectiveness is to come to some good, compromises will have to be struck, and the objections of administrators, faculty, students, and alumni will have to be reckoned with. The following are some suggestions (from Louisville's experience and from the growing literature on the subject) that may help narrow the gap between those advocating the assessment of student outcomes and those reluctant to adopt the notion:

- (1) Astin's term, "talent development," is preferable to the alternatives. "Value-added," with its economic metaphor, strikes faculty as naturally offensive; "outcomes" seems to ignore process and focus solely on results. In addition, "talent development" can apply both to students and faculty; the goal of an institution can be seen as the

development of both groups' talents. Given that many institutions place great stress on faculty development (especially the development of active researchers and publishers), Astin's term provides room for existing institutional goals to be included. Its wider use (and adoption of the concept on which it is based) will go far in reducing faculty hostility to the notion of assessment.

(2) At large, complex institutions, common goals cannot be assumed. Yet the construction of an assessment system, in which all students are measured to determine the degree to which they have achieved common goals, demands this assumption. To establish an outcomes measurement system, one must either define, ex cathedra, the goals of an institution, or be willing to experiment with possible goals and possible ways of measuring their achievement. To succeed at implementing a system, administrators would do well to follow the latter course, to let the common goals and the instruments to measure them evolve through a long period of discussion and experimentation--perhaps several years.

(3) Successful measurement requires an atmosphere of openness and informality. Faculty need time and freedom to try out potential goals and measures; if they are held accountable for their "results" too quickly, they will inevitably settle for the most easily attainable goals and the least useful measures.

(4) Multiple measures of student "education" must be used; a system cannot depend on one or two paper-and-pencil tests. The measures must be appropriate for each program as well. Using a variety of measures, ones which must often be custom-designed for specific purposes, is both expensive and time-consuming, yet necessary.

- (5) Professional schools, which have had long experience with certification and board exams, may see the issue very narrowly; the impulse to define a "well-educated" dentist as one who passes the Dental Boards must be resisted at all costs.
- (6) Focusing on student outcomes alone may create serious conflicts with the other goals to which an institution wishes to devote its energies: research, public service, etc. Most SU's claim that the "transmission of knowledge" is only one of their goals; an outcomes measurement system should also record success in the creation of new knowledge (i.e., research) and the application of knowledge to specific problems (i.e., service).
- (7) The question of "what will we do with the results?" must be faced in advance. Institutions which have experienced the greatest success with outcomes assessment are those in which the concern with effective education preceded the imposition of a measurement system--where the faculty adopted an evaluation scheme because they seriously wanted to know what they were doing well or poorly. In such a setting, the results of evaluation are the answer to a question already asked. A real concern for improving education must exist before a measurement system is imposed.
- (8) The entire process of developing an assessment system must be done in a climate of openness and trust--administrators, faculty, and students should know and discuss with each other the purpose of the system and the intended use of the results before the system is implemented.
- (9) Outcomes can be measured in all of the activities of an institution; measurement should not be limited solely to educational activities. Limiting the focus sends the wrong message to faculty: if there are

inefficiencies in this institution, you are responsible. A more comprehensive system of measurement, in which the effectiveness of the payroll department, the student housing department, and the English department are all measured and improved, will be good both for faculty and for the institution.

In conclusion, measuring outcomes is a risky path for an institution, and must be approached with care and planning. Improving education--turning out more educated students--is unlikely to be the road to fame for any institution; improvements are gradual, difficult to perceive, and hard to communicate to others. Many, perhaps most, schools are likely to continue to search for other means of achieving distinction. Yet, at base, education is the reason colleges and universities exist, and--particularly for SU's--those who support higher education are certain to continue to demand hard evidence of the success institutions have in doing the job they are funded to do. Resisting the assessment tide is foolish; wise institutions will seize the initiative, and begin the long task of developing ways of measuring their effectiveness--both to satisfy their state boards, accrediting agencies, and publics, and to help them become better at their primary function.