Mission, Performance Indicators, and Assessment in U. S. Honors: A View from the Netherlands

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INTRODUCTION

A mission statement that identifies the goals and aims of an honors program is a key step in program development. The NCHC's Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program states unequivocally that a successful honors program "has a clear mandate from the institution's administration in the form of a mission statement or charter document that includes the objectives and responsibilities of honors and defines the place of honors in the administrative and academic structure of the institution." According to Mrozinski, mission statements are public definitions of purpose published in a college's catalog, website, or other planning documents and are generally required by accrediting bodies. Such mission statements have now become standard for honors programs and colleges.

Before we examine the online mission statements of current honors programs, we need to look at the history of such statements outside the academic world. Mission statements have long been standard in the for-profit sector, where they specify what the company does, how it does it, why it does it, and where it is going in the future. A mission statement can transform a leader's vision into substance in the profit-sector (Drucker). Stone uses the Quaker State Corporation in 1993 as corporate example of the strength of a mission statement. The company had fallen on hard times, and, fearing a possible takeover, the Quaker State board redefined its core mission: "To funnel a wide range of lubricants through a massive network of mechanics, retailers and drive-through lube shops" (Murray). By 1995, Quaker State had transformed itself from a company selling motor oil to a branded consumer-products company, a solid number two behind Pennzoil. "Clearly, the new mission played a key role in shaping Quaker's turnaround" (Murray). In the context

of healthcare, Bart concluded in 1999 that sufficient evidence existed to "challenge those critics and cynics who liked to pronounce (unjustifiably) that mission statements were not important or that there was no direct link between a mission statement and performance" (19).

Mission statements are crucial for nonprofit organizations as well, where achieving the mission is analogous to making a profit in the private sector (Brinckerhoff). In their book *Profiles of Excellence*, a study of achieving excellence in the nonprofit sector, Knauft, Berger, and Gray found in 1999 that the key to success was having a clearly articulated mission statement along with goals to carry out the mission. At the same time that mission statements were becoming standard in the for-profit and nonprofit worlds, colleges and universities in the U.S. were also embracing the value of an articulated mission statement (Morphew). Already in 1994, the Association of American Colleges found that 80% of all universities and colleges were revising their mission statements. Finally, a well-articulated mission statement seems also a basic need for honors programs (Morphew): it gives a shared sense of purpose in the institution (457); it manages the expectations of external publics like prospective students and parents (469); it is required by accrediting bodies (458); and virtually all honors programs have one (458).

According to online mission statements of honors programs, directors and faculty want to achieve more than providing a comfortable environment for participating students. They want their students, for instance, "to become intellectually engaged and socially responsible, and to remain so throughout their lives" (Spelman College). Ideally, an honors program translates its mission into specific goals, creates a set of performance indicators, and assesses the outgoing students to see whether they live up to the mission at the end of the honors program and thereafter: "Note that goals typically flow from the mission statement, and outcomes are aligned with goals. In addition, the program's mission, goals and outcomes should relate to the mission and goals of the college and institution' (Charles Drew University). R. A. Stone has expanded on this view of mission statement in the following comments:

> If the mission is correctly formulated, it will be aligned with the organization's strategies, tactics, operations, and administrative support systems. In addition to the crucial communication phase, managers at all levels need to translate the key elements of the mission into objectives and goals that guide the execution of the mission and are meaningful to all employees. The goals and objectives should also be linked to the reward and performance evaluation system.

Our interest in honors program management is evoked by the development of honors programs worldwide: the numbers of universities offering honors

programs have been steadily growing both in the United States (Digby; Long) and in Europe (Ginkel; Kiley). As the U.S. has a long history in honors education, it constitutes a valuable point of reference. In this study we investigate the link between the content of U.S. honors programs' mission statements, goals to be achieved, performance indicators, and outcomes in order to determine if mission statements in the U.S. have served the purpose for which they are designed; such a determination can offer important guidance to developing honors programs in other parts of the world.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall question of this study is: to what extent do connections exist between mission statements, performance indicators, and program assessments that might indicate a significant alignment and indicate the effectiveness of honors programs? Therefore we investigated the following research questions:

1. What goals are described in the mission statements of honors programs?

2. What performance indicators do honors programs set to reach these goals?

3. How do honors programs assess their outcomes?

METHODS

The study has a mixed methods approach, using document analysis and open-question email surveys. To identify the goals described in the mission statements of honors programs, we randomly chose 169 mission statements from the websites of honors programs and colleges that are members of the National Collegiate Honors Council. The application of document analysis techniques identified elements that were embedded in these mission statements (Merriam). To answer the second two questions about performance indicators and outcomes assessment, we sent a short, open-question email survey to the directors of the same 169 honors programs.

SAMPLING

The sample of 169 mission statements was randomly selected from the 842 member institutions listed on its website in 2009 by the NCHC, the largest association of higher education honors programs in the U.S. (Driscoll). We systematically analyzed every fifth institution on the website list <http://www.nchchonors.org>. To be included in the subset, the institution had to meet three criteria:

1. The institution had to be a U.S. institution (membership in the NCHC is open to foreign institutions, but we limited our study to U.S. institutions);

2. The institution had to have a three- or four-year undergraduate program so that we could compare the results to universities in Europe, where undergraduate programs in general last three or four years; and

3. The institution had to have a mission statement available on its website.

If an honors program's home institution did not meet all three criteria, it was not included, and the criteria were applied to the next institution on the alphabetical list. In total, 264 U.S. universities were analyzed from the NCHC website: 262 universities had mission statements available, and 169 indicated they offered three- or four-year honors programs. This sample of 169 gives a reliability factor for the total population of NCHC members between 93% and 94%.

MISSION STATEMENT ANALYSIS

Document analysis techniques were used to identify elements embedded in the mission statements (Merriam). Two researchers independently analyzed the sample of mission statements for keywords that expressed an intention or goal. To avoid the stronger impact that longer mission statements could have on the results, we counted every key word only once per mission statement. To check our results we redid the coding, identifying key terms and key phrases (cf. Morphew 461) using the program MAXQDA (Lewins). In addition, three native English professors were asked to randomly select and code six mission statements. The inter-rater agreement was 70% on terms that we and the alternative raters selected. Our coding turned out to be in closer agreement because 96% of the key words that our alternative raters selected were also selected by us.

QUESTIONNAIRE

All 169 institutions selected for analysis of their mission statements received an email survey addressed to the honors director. Follow-up consisted of reminder emails and telephone calls. The email survey (see Appendix) consisted of six questions, with the first two concerning performance indicators.

Because the impression exists that performance indicators and assessment are often imposed by higher administration (Achterberg 37–39), we first asked honors directors to indicate which performance indicators were set by upper administration. The second question related to performance indicators set by administrators or faculty: "Which performance indicators have you set to establish the success of the honors program?"

The third and fourth questions related to the outcomes of the honors program, namely whether honors programs systematically kept track of their

alumni and, if so, whether they used a specific instrument to monitor the accomplishments of their alumni.

The last two questions related to alignment of goals as named in the mission statement and measurements related to student outcomes. We asked if directors connect the data from monitoring alumni to the goals they had set for the honors program: if yes, then how, and, if no, then why not. The last question of the survey asked if the respondents thought it was important to measure the success of their honors program.

QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

The answers to questions 1 and 2 were analyzed for key terms and separated into four categories: quantitative output, quantitative level description, perception, and qualitative, content-oriented performance indicators. The answers to question 6 were indicated on a 4-point Likert scale.

RESULTS

GOALS CONTAINED IN THE MISSION STATEMENTS

We identified 66 different keywords describing the goals of honors programs in the selection of 169 mission statements, as indicated in Table 1. The 66 keywords occurred 1,359 times in the sample of 169 mission statements, leading to an average of 8 different key words used per mission statement. The length of mission statements varied from 12 to 257 words. Our findings are similar to the findings of Morphew who found 118 elements in 299 mission statements of U.S. universities (461).

On the basis of this list of key words, a category system was developed, starting with individual keywords that were clustered into subcategories: target group description, educational benefits, educational environment, post graduation/career benefits, and ethical benefits (Table 2). The results, using MAXQDA (Lewins), showed that there was virtually no difference between the keyword clustering and the key-phrase clustering; only 4 of the 66 keywords moved to a different subcategory in key-phrase clustering, which still led to the same goal clustering.

Table 3 is a visualization of the distribution of keyword occurrences in the 5 main goal clusters. Category 1, containing the target group description, includes keywords like "gifted," "ability," "motivation," and "talented," which describe the student population at which the honors program is targeted. Of the 1359 total keyword occurrences, 403 (30%) were in this cluster. Category 2, containing keywords like "research," "project," "in-depth," and "challenge," describes methods of teaching and learning; 674 keywords (50%) belonged in this cluster. Category 3, containing keywords like

"community" (internal), "intellectual," and "smaller" (groups), describes the educational environment; 97 keywords (7%) belonged to this cluster. Category 4, consisting of keywords like "career," "employer," and "successful," advertises benefits either in graduate programs or in professional life;

Table 1. List of 66 Keywords and Number of Occurrences in 169 Mission Statements

challenge	82	social	26	inquiry (isitive)	8
intellectual	77	depth (in-)	25	nurture	8
experience	65	achievements(-rs)	23	integrity	8
research	63	discussion	22	society	6
community, internal	62	profession(al)	21	outstanding	5
excellence	49	exceptional	17	breadth	5
scholarship (-stic)	48	encouraging	15	atmosphere	4
leadership	45	ability	14	accomplished	4
motivation	44	responsibility	14	collaboration	3
enriching(d)	41	distinction	14	culture, internal	3
interdisciplinary(-ty)	41	commitment	13	global citizen (-ship)	3
talented	39	rigor	13	dedication	2
critical (thinking)	37	succesful	13	augment	2
smaller	36	stimulation	12	camaraderie	2
creativity	34	innovative	11	dialogue	2
enhance(-d)	31	career	11	credential	2
culture, external	31	gifted	10	valuable	2
community, external	29	diverse	10	discipleship	1
skills	28	potential	10	cross-disciplinary	1
project	28	communication	9	interpersonal	1
independent	27	intensity	9	revolutionary	1
engagement	26	ethical	9	employers	1

Words with an identical meaning, e.g. scholarship and scholastic, were identified as one keyword. Identical words with a distinctive different meaning were identified with a qualifier, e.g. "community, internal" to identify the learning community of honors students as opposed to "community, external" to identify, for instance, community service.

Table 2. Keyword Clustering: The 66 Keywords Identified in 169 Mission Statements Categorized into 5 Main Goal Clusters

| Keywords		Main category
talented (high) ability gifted potential accomplished achievements(-rs)	dedication motivation distinction outstanding scholarship (-stic) exceptional	Target group description
breadth challenge creativity cross-disciplinary depth (in-) discussion encouraging enhance(d) enriching(d) excellence experience	inquiry (isitive) intellectual interdisciplinary(-ty) nurture research smaller augment revolutionary stimulation skills project	Educational benefits/ aims/methods
atmosphere community (int) collaboration commitment	culture (int) camaradary intensity	Educational Environment
critical (thinking) communication career credential innovative employers	leadership profession(al) successful independent valuable	Postgrad/career benefits
community (ext) culturally (ext) dialogue global citizen (ship) society (ext) integrity ethical	social responsibility discipleship rigor interpersonal engagement diverse	Ethical benefits

109 (8%) keywords belonged to this cluster. Category 5 includes keywords such as "ethical," social" (external), "community," and "global" that describe ethical benefits to the students; 85 keywords (6%) belonged to this cluster.

The five main goal clusters focus on all phases of student participation before, during, and after finishing the honors program. Romney categorized performance indicators into two types: those related to process and to outcome. Our fist three phases (target group description, educational benefits, and educational environment) can be interpreted as process-oriented during the honors program while the last two phases (postgraduate/career benefits and ethical benefits) relate to outcome. In our results the process of offering a challenging, interesting, well-run honors program to the appropriate student population accounts for 86% of the keywords we identified. In contrast, the results related to outcome, as in the lasting, beneficial effects for students who have completed the honors program, account for only 14% of the keywords.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IN RELATION TO GOALS

Research on effective performance indicators in higher education, both inside and outside the U.S., includes Sizer's and later Ball and Halwachi's

Table 3. Distribution of 1359 Keywords Indentified in 169 Mission Statements
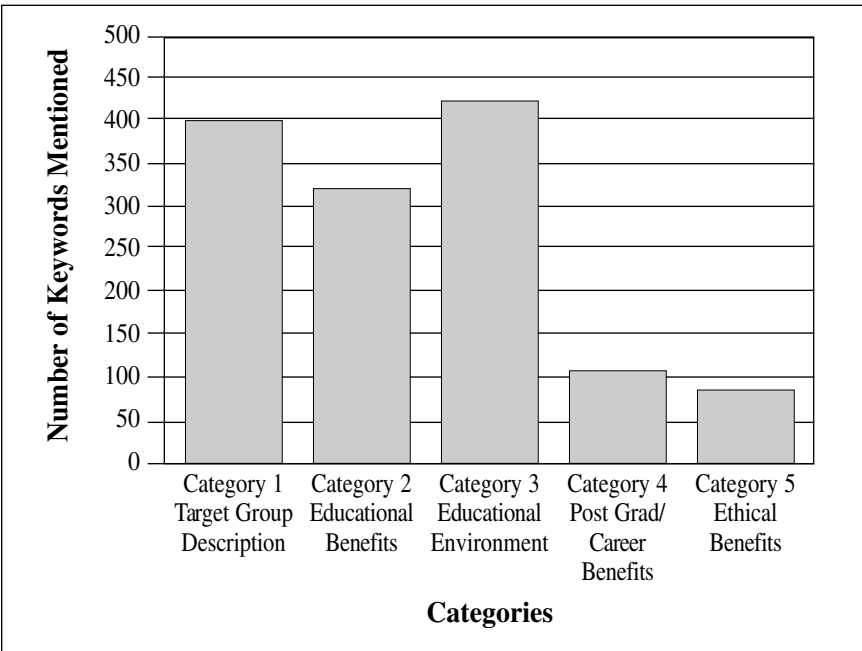
descriptors: "relevant," "verifiable," "free from bias," "quantifiable," "economically feasible," and "accepted in the institution." Our study, however, is not about passing judgment on performance indicators; we are simply trying to find out which ones are used in honors programs.

In the responses from 51 honors directors, 30% of 169 to whom we sent our survey, the idea that performance indicators are imposed on honors programs is not supported; 40 of the 51 respondents indicated that no formal performance indicators were set for them by higher administration.

A minority of 5 respondents reported they did not use performance indicators to analyze their honors programs whereas 46 respondents reported they did. The number of performance indicators used by these 46 respondents varied from 1 to 15, resulting in a total of 190 reported performance indicators. The 38 different performance indicators, together with the number of times a performance indicator was reported, are shown in Table 4.

We then subdivided the performance indicators into four categories as shown in Table 5.

Table 4. List of Performance Indicators and Number of Times Reported

| PI	No.	PI	No.	PI	No.
retention rate	23	job starts	4	lifelong Learners	2
graduation rate	20	publications/present	4	**academic**	2
GPA	14	**community (internal)**	4	visibility	2
entr. grad schools	13	**diversity**	3	quality Projects	2
thesis	12	**scholarships**	3	alumni Success	2
total enrollment	8	**volunteer**	3	SLO	2
program completion	7	**intellectual**	3	internship applicants	1
studentsatisfaction	7	**engagement**	3	**cultural initiative**	1
research	7	part.Hons Coursework	3	**creativity**	1
SAT/ACT	6	program Growth	2	assessment Instrument	1
awards	6	%freshman joining	2	Hons Adv Council assessment	1
attracting new students	5	grant applicants	2	**leadership**	1
faculty perception	5	**rigorous**	2		

A total of 46 respondents reported the above performance indicators. The bold-faced keywords (12 in total) were also identified in our analysis of mission statements.

Initially, we expected all performance indicators to be quantitative; however, a number of respondents reported performance indicators based on perception and/or qualitative in nature. Therefore, we made four categories:

1. quantitative output, e.g., retention rate, graduation rate, and percentage of freshmen joining the program;

2. quantitative level description, e.g., number of awards, number of scholarships, GPA, and SAT/ACT scores;

3. perception, e.g., student and staff satisfaction; and

4. qualitative, content-oriented indicators, e.g., thesis writing, volunteering, visibility, and leadership.

The most frequently named performance indicators belong to categories A and B, which have a strong organizational focus. Category C, performance indicators were relatively rare: only 2 of the 38 terms and 12 of the 190 performance indicators reported to us (6%). One might conclude that honors directors have taken to heart the warning of Moore and Kuol that "the perceptions of students' definitions of good teaching are both invalid and misleading" (134). Category D indicators are mentioned 59 times, but some of these indicators are partly qualitative and partly quantitative. The top three in this category are research, thesis, and publications/presentations, which can be seen as similar to a citation index: quantitative in nature but a strong indicator of qualitative impact.

Table 5. PIs from 46 Respondents Divided into Four Categories
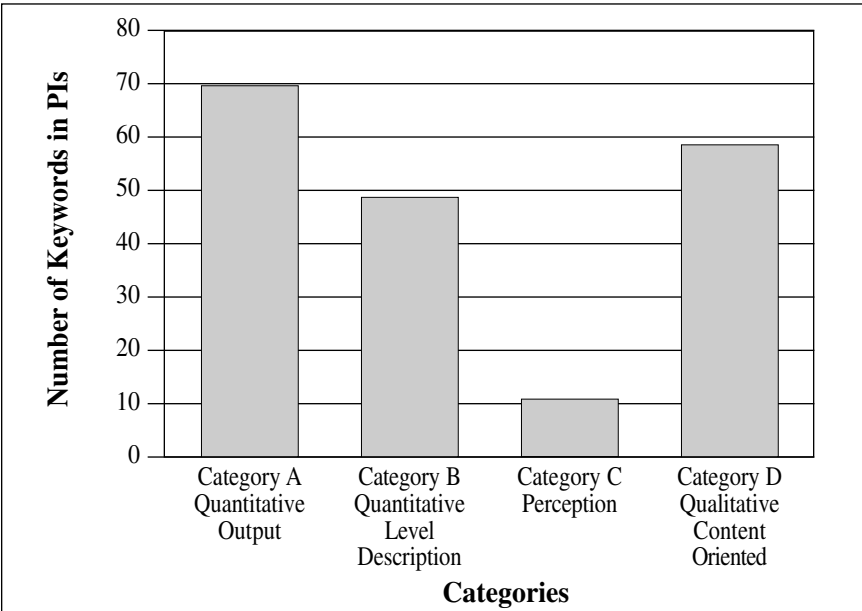
Applying Romney's categorization of performance indicators, our research categories A, B, and C can be seen as relating to process goals and category D as relating to outcome goals. We see a strong emphasis on process (131 occurrences) and little on outcome (59 occurrences)—the same pattern we identified in the mission statement analysis.

ASSESSMENT OF OUTCOMES

Finally, we were interested to know if and how honors directors assessed the success of their program after students completed it. In addition to identifying a number of key terms in mission statements that indicated lasting effects on students (category 4 describing post-graduation/career benefits and category 5 describing ethical benefits), our survey asked about the alumni of the honors program. Half of the 51 respondents indicated they had no alumni tracking at all, a smaller group (14%) was in the process of developing an alumni tracking system, 8% had only informal contact, and 28% indicated that they did have an alumni tracking system.

Alumni tracking appears to be a work in progress among respondents as 42% have a tracking system in place or are in the process of developing one. That leaves 58% of institutions having no formal alumni-related assessment, making it difficult to determine if the long term goals of these honors programs are being met.

CONNECTION BETWEEN MISSION STATEMENTS, PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, AND PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

The mission statements of all respondents were compared with their reported performance indicators to find identical key terms suggesting alignment between the two. We saw little alignment between goals as described in the mission statements (Table 1) and the list of key terms in the performance indicators (Table 4). Only twelve key terms appeared in both lists (bold in Table 4).

We also analyzed the connections between mission statements and performance indicators at the level of individual honors program, taking into account that 30% of institutions responded to our survey. Forty of the 51 respondents (78%) showed no common key terms between the mission statements as published on the website and the performance indicators they reported to us. Of the eleven that did show overlap, four respondents had one key term in common in their mission statement and performance indicators, six had two or three overlapping key terms, and one showed five overlapping key terms. Of course, the length of the mission statement and the number of keywords used influenced the results of these analyses.

In the survey, we asked honors directors whether they thought that the three elements—mission statement, performance indicators, and assessment—were connected in their honors program. Five of the respondents (10%) indicated that they were, 8 were working on improving the connection (16%), and 38 (75%) thought the three elements were not connected in their programs. In addition, two respondents denied the importance of the connection.

Of the five respondents who thought their mission statement, performance indicators, and outcomes assessment were connected, only one demonstrated a significant overlap between keywords in the mission statement and performance indicators: half of the keywords identified in the mission statement were also found in the performance indicators. This respondent was also developing a specific instrument to monitor the accomplishments of honors alumni. This respondent, Debra Schroeder of the College of St. Scholastica, gave us permission to quote her response: "I think that it is of utmost importance to measure the success of the Honors Program. Although I believe that it adds value to the college experience of our honors students, there are empirical data relevant to whether it really does. Moral, professional, and fiscal pressures require such measurements. That doesn't mean I've yet succeeded at doing it well. But, I'll keep trying!"

The last question of the survey asked if the respondents thought it important to "measure" the success of their honors program. On a 4-point Likert scale, 23 respondents answered very important, 20 answered somewhat important, 2 answered of minor importance, and 5 answered not important. One respondent commented, "These questions are both motivating and discouraging. We have much to do." Another wrote that assessment of success is "[c]ritical. Of course, the debate comes in defining success. Yet, if you can't agree on some definition and use this definition to justify resources and efforts, how can you conclude that an honors program makes an impact?"

DISCUSSION

The National Collegiate of Honors Council proposes that, in order to be "fully developed," an honors program should have a mission statement. NCHC members comply with that guideline; we found that over 99% of the websites gave a mission statement. Whether members comply with the NCHC's definition of a mission statement as a document "that includes the objectives and responsibilities of honors" is debatable. The strong emphasis we found in the mission statements is on process (87% of the key terms) as opposed to outcome (14%). In the performance indicators the same pattern is visible, though less clear: 69% of the key terms deal with process and 31% with outcome. Monitoring the accomplishments of alumni is not yet standard

practice for honors programs, with fewer than half having a tracking system in place or developing one.

The finding of this study is that a connection between mission statement, performance indicators, and program assessment is not clearly visible in U.S. honors programs. The small overlap between key terms in the mission statement and the performance indicators, combined with the small number of programs that have follow-up with their alumni, leads to this conclusion. While honors programs in the United States, which have been well-established throughout the country for half a century, are showing movement toward aligning these three elements, other countries that are starting to develop honors programs might do well to build such an alignment into the design of their programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX

Dear NAME HONORS DIRECTOR,

The honors program of NAME UNIVERSITY has been randomly selected from the member list of NCHC as a research subject, together with 168 other honors programs in the US.

As research team Excellence in Higher Education and Society of the Hanze university of Applied Sciences in Groningen, the Netherlands we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the practice of honors education.

Our 6 questions below focus on two aspects of honors education. The first part is about performance indicators of honors programs. What targets do you set yourself or are set for you to deem your honors program successful? The second part is about how you establish the results of your honors program in alumni.

We hope for your cooperation in this matter, you are kindly requested to reply to this email before April 18th 2011. If we have not heard from you by then we will send a reminding email.

Attached you will find a supporting letter from the previous President of the NCHC, Mr. J. Zubizarreta.

Kind regards,

Marca Wolfensberger, research team leader

Lindsay Drayer, Ph.D., researcher

Vladimir Bartelds, Bsc, researcher

Start of Survey

1. Which performance indicators are set for you to establish the success of the honors program (e.g. by the Board of the university)?

2. Which performance indicators have you set to establish the success of the honors program?

3. Do you keep track of your alumni systematically? If yes, how? If no, why not?

4. Do you use a specific instrument to monitor the accomplishments of your alumni? Please elaborate.

5. Do you connect these data to the goals you have set for the honors program? If yes, how? If no, why not?

6. Do you think it is important to "measure" the success of your honors program?
   ☐ not at all
   ☐ minor importance
   ☐ somewhat important
   ☐ very important

END of Survey.

The results of this research will be presented at the Annual NCHC-conference in Phoenix, 2011. Of course we will provide you with the results personally as well. These results will be anonymous and untraceable beyond the raw data, might you be worried about public disclosure of university policies.