

## Part III: The Years Ahead

### The National Context

Several reports suggest a changing environment for higher education accountability—*Measuring Up*, *U.S. News & World Report: Best Colleges* rankings, and federal legislation for K-12 known as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*. A growing emphasis on accountability in K-12 education is likely to spread into higher education in the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 2004.

During the reauthorization process, Congress is expected to consider issues of accountability that could shape the OUS initiative. Some of the issues mentioned include:

- Effectiveness of the HEA programs in increasing post-secondary access;
- Factors influencing college prices and the appropriate federal role, if any, in addressing price increases;
- Impact on HEA student aid programs of the growth in federal tax benefits for post-secondary expenses;
- Measures that might be used to hold participating institutions accountable for educational outcomes; and
- Impact of the growth in post-secondary distance education.

Congress may consider what would be reasonable and effective measures to hold institutions accountable, such as student loan default rates, graduation rates, and pass rates on professional licensing or certification examinations. The HEA already supports pass rates on professional licensing exams as an accountability measure for teacher education programs at higher education institutions.

There is also concern at the federal level that the appropriateness of accountability measures may be affected by changes in the demographics of postsecondary education students. Are the relevant outcomes measures different for non-traditional students than they are for traditional students, given potential differences in such areas as educational objectives between these two groups of students? At a recent SHEEO meeting, a federal official invited to address the participants was critical of targets that appear to “ride the wave” of improvement and will be looking for “stretch targets.”

In addition to the debate leading up to the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 2004, the *Measuring Up* Report Card grades state policy related to preparation, participation, completion, and benefits of a college education. For the first two Report Cards, all 50 states received an “Incomplete” for learning outcomes. A handful of states are looking at how to

remove these incompletes by identifying and measuring, “What every college graduate should be able to do.”

## **Accountability in Oregon in 2003-04**

Apart from these national developments, OUS is at a place where several issues related to accountability, specifically the performance indicator component need attention. Among these are:

- Whether targets should be set differently given the current fiscal environment;
- Whether we have capacity to make improvements, serve more students, serve different groups of students, or serve students differently;
- Whether the broad goals, which were examined productively in the Board’s System Strategic Planning Committee and the Joint Boards Working Group last year, can be translated into more specific goals that reflect the unique mission, opportunities, capabilities, and challenges facing each university;
- Whether we continue to use aggregate versus institutional performance data in reports to the public;
- Whether OUS should revisit earlier OUS discussions about learning outcomes begun in the mid-1990s;<sup>1</sup>
- Whether we need a system for reconsidering indicators in the context of what indicators make sense in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century including the full range of students served by OUS campuses as the multiple pathways to college become more the norm for some campuses than the traditional, full-time student;<sup>2</sup>
- Whether performance funding has a place in the rebuilding and fine-tuning of RAM.

These questions are intended to provoke discussion. We may think of other questions that are more relevant and should be added to the list. In thinking ahead, we need to establish priorities and a work plan for considering the issues deemed most important to consider. For your

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<sup>1</sup> The OUS Academic Affairs assessment effort focused on this question at the same time PASS was developing college admissions standards. Although we were unable to come to a shared understanding in the Assessment Council about the “essential abilities and competencies” of a bachelor’s graduate, every campus made some progress towards examining the general education component of the curriculum, determining the courses associated with improved learning outcomes, and designing appropriate assessments with the support and direction from the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.

<sup>2</sup> Dolence and Norris (1995) labels some of the performance indicators included by OUS as internally defined indicators (e.g., average high school GPA of incoming freshmen, graduation rate of incoming, full-time freshmen, numbers of degrees awarded, administrative cost per FTE student, student/faculty ratio, tuition revenue). Indicators that are externally defined by primary and secondary customers look very different

reference, the timetable for producing the performance report for 2003-04 is in Figure 7. The 2002-03 Performance Reports for the System and each OUS institution are in Appendix G.