

## **Framing the Measures**

A Technical Background Paper  
on Institutional Classification Systems,  
Data Sets, and Miscellaneous Assessments  
in Higher Education

Prepared for the Campus Compact  
Advanced Institute on Classifications for Civic Engagement

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### Outline/overview

This paper is being prepared as background for the Campus Compact Advanced Institute meeting scheduled for March 22/23, 2001. The agenda for the meeting is to discuss options for classifying or measuring civic contributions of higher education. This paper provides a general overview of the already existing institutional classification systems and sorting mechanisms in higher education, as a way to frame some of the issues that need to be considered in the design of a civic contribution measuring system. A second background paper is being prepared by Barbara Holland which will go into detail about assessment of civic teaching and institutional service.

At the outset, it is important to briefly clarify the meaning of “civic contributions” as the term is used in this paper. All public and non-profit institutions of higher education are chartered to serve the larger society through teaching, research and service. At one level of generality, all of these functions can legitimately be called “civic” efforts. However, for the purposes of this discussion, “civic contributions” has a more specific meaning, encompassing special efforts by institutions to distinguish themselves through civic education or institutional service. “Civic education” is the education of students to be effective citizens in a democratic society; and institutional service the myriad ways that institutions serve their communities, through individual efforts of students, faculty and staff and through organized institutional activities to communities. Measurement of these two sides of the coin—teaching and service—will require attention both to outcomes (primarily student learning and behavioral outcomes), and activities (associated with institutional service to communities).

The notion that institutions can or should be assessed in how they perform their “civic” role is relatively new in higher education. The terms are difficult to define or to make operational—there is little consensus about what they should mean let alone how they might be measured. As a result, the assessment of effectiveness in “civic” education or institutional service has barely made it onto the radar screen of the higher education quality assessment and institutional research community.

There are some small signs that “civic education” is beginning to get more attention. Just in the

last two years, three of new national instruments designed to assess quality in higher education have added some indicators that may be called “civic” dimensions: the National Survey of Student Engagement (measures students’ perceptions of their learning experiences); the College Results Index (examines the characteristics of graduates once they have left college); and the National Report Card (assigns grades to states based on how they compare to one another in various dimensions of higher education performance). (Each of these is described in more detail later in this paper.) None of these tools purport to be fully developed measures of civic effectiveness, yet it is encouraging that the conversation about the importance of civic effectiveness in higher education, as well as concern about the quality of civic life in the country, is maturing.

#### Classifications, assessments, surveys and rankings

There are many vehicles for assessing, surveying, ranking, and reporting about institutions of higher education—each designed to serve different purposes and audiences. Classification systems are typologies for sorting higher education institutions into categories based on objective criteria or performance measures. There are also many survey instruments that present information on higher education that are not organized by institutions, such as surveys of students or faculty, or comparisons by state. Finally, in contrast to public rankings and assessments, there are other measures of quality that are not geared to the consumer, such as accreditation reviews.<sup>1</sup>

This paper focuses primarily on institutional assessments. We have identified five broad categories of ways that institutional information is organized and/or assessed: 1) databases; 2) classification systems; 3) public comparisons, such as rankings systems or public competitions modeled after the Baldrige awards; 4) accreditation reviews; and 5) emerging research models, special surveys and assessments (See Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup>Readers who want to know more about student-centered data may find a monograph by Eric L. Dey and Sylvia Hurtado and their colleagues to be helpful: “Improving Research on Postsecondary Student Outcomes: A Review of Strengths and Limitations of National Data Resources.” National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 1997. A copy is included in the background materials for the meeting.

Table 1: Continuum of institutional information systems & assessments

Type	Contents	Audience/s	Uses	Examples
Databases	Measures of institutional attributes using broad definitions that can be applied to all institutions	General research community. These do not produce a “user-friendly” assessment or make comparisons.	Building block for additional research including comparative analyses	U.S. Department of Education IPEDS; Common Data Set Initiative
Classification systems	Typologies of institutional characteristics	General research community.	Basis for comparative research; often used within institutions for peer research on salaries, programs, etc.	Carnegie Classification System (mission-based); NCPI/Gumport alternative (market-based); Winston “decile” (subsidy-based)
Public Comparisons	Comparative analyses of institutional attributes based on criteria such as quality, geography, price, or program	Consumer information, particularly to prospective students; recognition of quality via awards	Used for student recruitment and information; also used within institutions for peer comparisons; can be used for competitive awards programs	US News and World Report Rankings; Peterson’s Guide; Wintergreen/Orchard House College Finder; Baldrige Awards
Accreditation reviews	Assessments of institutions or programs for “quality” as defined by agency standards.	General public, state and federal government.	Establishes that an institution meets minimum community standards to be accredited; used for federal aid, licensure, and transfer purposes.	Regional and “specialized” or programmatic accreditation
Emerging research models	Comparative analyses of institutional or state effectiveness in student engagement or outcomes	Institutions, the research community, and the public	Improve measures of effectiveness by focusing on results and/or factors that influence results	National Survey of Student Engagement; College Results Index; National Report Card

In developing options for civic assessments or classifications, it will be helpful to imagine what might be developed for “civic” measures in several of these categories:

- *data collection*: are there common measures of civic education or institutional service that might apply to all institutions, regardless of mission? What might activity or performance

indicators look like? Perhaps the most fundamental issues is how can “civic education” and “service” be defined?

- *civic institutional classification system*: there are many different models or ways that institutions approach civic education and service, and a continuum of effort ranging from a focus on civic education of students to institutional service to communities can be imagined. What would those categories be, and what would be the sources of data to allow the measures to be developed?
- *comparisons of institutional performance*: would a ranking system designed to measure the relative effectiveness of civic education or institutional service be feasible? Might a national competition be designed to recognize exemplary models be a useful way to approach such assessments?
- *integrating civic assessments into accreditation reviews*: many accrediting agencies are experimenting with alternative review models allowing institutions to use their accrediting review to focus on performance assessments of key priority areas. Might this be a useful model for strengthening assessments of civic contributions? How should the model be developed and promoted?

All of these options are, to some degree, interdependent—components of databases are used to create classification systems and experimental assessments often influence public comparisons. Perhaps the most expeditious way to approach a civic classification system would be to develop common definitions of civic activity that apply to all institutions, have them included in the federal data base as a required reporting category, and move on from there. Although logically definitions and data should precede the development of other assessments, the complexity of the topic suggests that basic assessment research may need to precede data development. It may be the case that there is no common definition of “civic” activity that would be appropriate for all types of institutions. If that is the case, then institutional assessments or categorizations may be less effective than follow-up surveys of outcomes which can then be tied back to the institutional level. These are the issues that will be the topic of conversation at the meeting on March 22/23.

## A. Databases

A database is a collection of information about institutions using broad definitions or measures that can be applied to all types of institutions. Databases are often public information—though not particularly user-friendly to the average “consumer”—and are most useful as sources of information for subsequent research purposes. The federal government’s data collection efforts result in many large databases, including the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the Student Right to Know information. The Common Data Set Initiative—another example of a public database—is a collaborative effort between data providers in higher education and several publishers of college information.

*Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).* Postsecondary institutions wishing to establish or maintain their eligibility in federal student aid programs must annually report a wide range of data to the U.S. Department of Education. USDE’s primary means of collecting this information is through a series of surveys which together constitute the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Most of the data which is collected through IPEDS surveys are activity measures—raw data on students, staff, and finances—rather than standards or performance measures. However, basic definitions and measures are necessary even to collect the raw data, such as what constitutes a full-time or part-time student; how to categorize finances by activity area (between instruction, research, administration, and public service), and so on. These raw data are the source for subsequent analysis and research on higher education across the country. The following surveys comprise IPEDS and are collected annually, unless otherwise noted:

- Institutional Characteristics
- Fall Enrollment;
- Completions;
- Salaries, Tenure, and Fringe Benefits of Full-time Instructional Faculty;
- Fall Staff (every two years);
- Graduation Rate Survey;
- Financial Statistics; and
- College and University Libraries (every two years)

The only variables currently in IPEDS that may be relevant to civic activity are in the financial statistics information, which requires institutions to report on revenues by funding source, and expenditures by functional category. The standard IPEDS groupings include the two categories of “organized activities” and “public service,” which contain activities like hospitals and clinics; museums and galleries; and a host of other “service” expenditures. The problem with using these data as a starting point for measures of institutional service is that not all “organized activities” or “public service” can be construed as institutional community service. Furthermore, unless these activities are supported with outside revenue sources, the portion of staff or faculty time that is associated with the efforts is typically reported as an instructional, research or administrative expenditure rather than a service expenditure.

### *Student Right to Know/Campus Crime*

The federal government also requires institutions to provide the public with data that are surrogates for “performance” in the areas of student attrition and graduation (the Student Right to Know data), campus crime, as well as funding and participation in athletic programs. Under Student Right to Know, institutions are required to compile the graduation or completion rates of all first-time, full-time undergraduates seeking a degree or certificate, as well as graduation and completion rates for students receiving athletically-related aid, sorted by race and gender and sports program. The campus crime portion of the law requires institutions to publish and distribute an annual campus security report including reports on crimes and the campus security plan. The law also requires institutions to “alert the campus community” when specific crimes are reported, including murder, sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, car theft, and any of these offenses that appear to be hate crimes.

The Student Right to Know/Campus Crime data are unlikely to be useful surrogates for civic measures. Their relevance to this discussion is their political and policy history as required data elements for federal reporting. The issue of student retention, graduation and campus crime became public policy issues, and as a result Congress mandated that information about them be publicly collected. The precise measurement of retention and graduation rates remains controversial, and there are many disparities between institutions in how they report these data

(which is one reason for the development of the Common Data Set initiative described below). Despite this, the reporting requirement forced discussion about the legitimacy of the measure, and how to go about collecting the data. Whether a similar path is appropriate for measures of civic contributions is worthy of discussion.

### *The Common Data Set Initiative*

The Common Data Set (CDS) is a set of standard data items and definitions about different aspects of postsecondary education. The CDS initiative is a voluntary collaboration of data users and many publishing companies that use information about higher education for ratings services or student information: the College Board, Peterson's, US News and World Report, and Wintergreen/Orchard House. Most of the raw data included in the CDS comes from IPEDS, however, the CDS provides greater precision in definitions on measures of applications and admissions, student retention, and other measures. Thus the CDS provides a vehicle to ensure greater comparability of data across institutions than would be provided from IPEDS alone.

### B. Classification systems

Classification systems are developed for a wide range of purposes, but are generally designed to organize institutions into roughly homogeneous groups based on governance (public, non-profit private or proprietary), mission, staffing, students, finance, or other measures. Some are ways to organize information to facilitate subsequent analysis of data; others perform a more analytic function and present data in a way designed to inform qualitative judgments about an institution. There is really one commonly accepted national classification system for higher education—the Carnegie Classification system—which is described below.

### *The Carnegie Classification System.*

Developed as a framework for research about higher education, The Carnegie Classification is the most widely used and well-known typology of American colleges and universities. In the 1994 version, the system classifies all degree-granting and accredited institutions based on degree conferrals, federal support, and admissions selectivity—data sources include the IPEDS Completions survey, National Science Foundation data on federal support, and information from



The College Board on institutional selectivity. The resulting categories of institutions consist of: Research Universities I and II; Doctoral Universities I and II; Master's (Comprehensive) Universities and Colleges I and II; Baccalaureate (Liberal Arts) Colleges I and II; Associate of Arts Colleges; and Specialized Institutions.

The classification is primarily used as a context to sort information for comparison purposes, however, it has been adopted for a range of uses beyond research. To the dismay of The Carnegie Foundation, the classification has come to be seen as a ranking system of colleges, resulting in institutions wanting to “move up” in the Carnegie Classification. For this and other reasons, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has recently adopted a two-stage plan to revise the classification system. The 2000 edition (the transitional version) resembles past editions in many respects, and is intended primarily to update the classification with more current data. In 2005, The Foundation plans to replace the present system with a series of classifications. A multi-classification framework will emphasize the fact that institutions can be grouped and compared in a variety of ways and that no single classification is appropriate for all research purposes. The Foundation also hopes that this will clearly differentiate their classification from a ranking.

The 2000 edition, released in December, classifies institutions based on their degree-granting activities reported in IPEDS, resulting in: Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive; Doctoral/Research Universities-Intensive; Master's Colleges and Universities I and II; Baccalaureate Colleges-Liberal Arts; Baccalaureate Colleges-General; Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges; Associates's Colleges; Specialized Institutions; and Tribal Colleges.

The Carnegie classification system—intended to be descriptive without reaching judgments about quality—is included in many databases as well as being used as a starting point for other classification and ranking systems. For instance, an institutions' Carnegie classification code is a variable used in IPEDS data, as well as to the Wintergreen-Orchard House Common Data Set that is in turn used by many of the college guides and ranking services.

*Other classification systems.* Although the Carnegie classification is the most ubiquitous such system, it has many critics, including those who believe that the categories of institutions based

on mission and degree offerings do not accurately reflect today's postsecondary landscape. Alternative classification systems have been proposed by several researchers. For instance, Patricia Gumport and her colleagues at the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement have argued for a new typology of market segments of higher education, based on student choices about institutions.<sup>2</sup> They describe the analytical framework for their methodology as one that would:

- ☞ Use a limited number of data elements readily available for most baccalaureate institutions
- ☞ Measure market position and product of the institutions, rather than resources, reputation or the quality of the student body
- ☞ Have intuitive meaning to institutions, students, and their parents as well as to public policy makers

They use four measures to identify the relative market position for each institution: 1) student admissions and yield rates; 2) the percentage of freshmen who graduate with a BA or BS in five years; 3) the percentage of undergraduate enrollment that is part-time; and 4) the ratio of number of BA/BS degrees awarded to total undergraduate enrollment. Based on their analysis of these data for 1,215 baccalaureate institutions, they have developed seven market segments, on a continuum from "name brand" institutions to "user-friendly"/convenience institutions. (The article describing this can be included in the background papers for the meeting.)

Another example of an institutional sorting system has been developed by Gordon Winston, at the Williams College Project on the Economics of Higher Education Finance. Winston's research on trends in higher education finance led him to conclude that the conventional Carnegie categories were too broad for many sectors of the market. He has developed a stratification model based exclusively on finance, with separate models for public and private institutions. For each sector, he has segregated the institutions into deciles based on total Education and General (E&G)

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<sup>2</sup> Gumport, Patricia J., "In Search of Strategic Perspective: A Tool for Mapping the Market in Postsecondary Education," Change Magazine, November/December 1997.

spending per student. This shows significant differences among institutions in funds per student, ranging most recently from around \$25,000/\$32,000 (public/private) at the wealthiest institutions, to a low of \$6,000/\$7,000 at the bottom end. Winston has theorized that private institutions compete with one another for students, faculty and prestige, but that they compete in relatively small micro-climates of institutions in their own deciles, and in fact react most strongly to decisions made by institutions in the decile just below them. Testing his theory, Winston has found that economic and statistical modeling of institutional pricing and aid habits have greater predictive validity when the institutions are put into these deciles. Though this system is not intended to be a full-blown classification system, it is a way to sort institutions using measures of funding.<sup>3</sup>

### C. Public Comparisons

Many comparative institutional assessments are designed to reach general public audiences, in particular to reach prospective students or employers. The difference between these systems and the classifications described above is that these are intended to provide comparisons of institutions based on criteria that are either defined by the survey or by the consumer. College rankings services and student information guides are examples of these consumer information assessments.

*Rankings Systems.* The past few years have seen a tremendous increase in interest in college ranking systems. Until fairly recently, most rankings focused primarily on graduate and professional programs, and now there seem to be three primary categories among rankings: institutional/comprehensive, programmatic/specific, and graduate/professional program rankings. Institutional and comprehensive ratings are geared more towards undergraduate education, while programmatic/specific rankings are designed to capture specific aspects of an institution, such as institutions that have the best “wired” campuses for electronic purposes.

Ratings tend to rely heavily on traditional measures of “quality,” such as academic reputation,

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<sup>3</sup> Winston, Gordon C., and Ivan C. Yen, “Costs, Prices, Subsidies and Aid in U.S. Higher Education.” Discussion Paper No. 32, Williams Project on the Economics of Higher Education, July 1995. See also Winston, Gordon C., “The Positional Arms Race in Higher Education,” Discussion Paper No. 54, The Williams Project, April 2000.

faculty resources, finances, and admissions selectivity. Typically, rankings are compiled through a combination of quantitative measures that are assigned weights, which then may be complemented by more qualitative surveys of reputation, etc. However, there are some systems that survey student perceptions and opinions rather than conduct reviews and assessments of institutions. The Princeton Review, an example of a student survey, yields some of more unusual measures of quality, ranging from schools with the most parties to those with the greatest number of “birkenstock-wearing, tree-hugging, clove-smoking vegetarians.” (Readers interested in knowing more about the college rankings may view them on-line, via a web-page developed at the University of Illinois which maintains a fairly up-to-date list of rankings, as well as some analysis about them. That can be found at: <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankings.htm>)

There is a growing body of criticism of rankings, their methodologies, and their basis for setting normative standards of quality. Yet, this criticism does not diminish the fact that the estimated annual sales revenues from the major news magazines college issues generate approximately \$15 million per year (excluding advertising revenues) (McDonough, 1997). Who are these consumers and who actually uses these ranking systems? According to a 1997 study by Patricia McDonough and colleagues, while institutions seem to be captivated customers, most students do not appear to be an attracted audience.<sup>4</sup> Only those students who were planning to attend very selective institutions claimed that they paid “some” attention to the ranking—overall, 60% of students said that the rankings were unimportant. McDonough concluded that primary audience for the actual rankings were the institutions themselves (McDonough, 1997). It is unclear whether this is because of the perception that movement up and down in the rankings is important to colleges’ admissions’ prospects, however anecdotal evidence tends to support the idea that institutions are constantly trying to find ways to “look better” in the rankings.

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👉 *U.S. News and World Report.* To obtain data, U.S. News and World Report sends an extensive questionnaire to over 1,400 accredited four-year colleges. The institutions are

grouped into four categories based on their Carnegie Classification—national universities, regional universities, national liberal arts colleges, and regional liberal arts colleges. The regional colleges are then split by North, South, Midwest and West. Institutions are then compared to other schools in the same category, based on the 16 indicators.

The measures used to rank the institutions fall into seven categories: academic reputation, retention, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources, graduation rate performance, and the alumni giving rate. Each indicator is assigned a weight and colleges are ranked against their peers based on their composite weight scores. “Academic reputation” accounts for 25% of the composite weight score—the most heavily weighted indicator for national institutions.

The methodology of the U.S. News and World Report college rankings changes from year to year, resulting in changes in the rankings of institutions. U.S. News and World Report insists that these changes are made in order to improve on the methodology and reflect the ongoing debate about how to best measure quality in education. Critics, however, have accused the magazine of changing the methodology for marketing purposes—if the rankings stayed the same from year to year, customers would stop buying the magazine.



*Kiplinger’s Personal Finance Magazine.* Kiplinger’s Personal Finance Magazine aims to identify the “Private Colleges Worth the Price” to help higher education consumers get the best education for their money. First, a measure of academic quality is applied to all private institutions that Peterson’s defines as “competitive,” resulting in a preliminary list of schools. To arrive at a final list of 100 institutions, financial data are factored in. All raw data used for this ranking is supplied by Peterson’s, though Peterson’s did not participate in the actual ranking of schools.

The measure of academic quality—overall weighted twice as heavily as the financial data—is comprised of selectivity measures, student outcome measures, and what schools offer their students (e.g. ratio of students to teaching faculty, etc.) The financial/cost

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia M. McDonough, Anthony Lising Antonio, MaryBeth Walpole, Leonore Xochitl Perez, “College Rankings:

measures are comprised of the cost to student's paying in full, cost to students receiving merit-based financial aid, and cost to those receiving need-based aid.

Kiplinger's has also ranked "State Universities to Cheer About," using data from Wintergreen/Orchard House and Kiplinger's original survey of public colleges. Though similar, the methods of ranking private schools versus public schools do differ in important ways. The initial list of 200 schools was created based on selectivity, namely SAT scores of the freshman class and the admission rates. To this list, a "quality" formula—based on graduation rates, freshman retention, SAT scores and admission rates, and computer and library resources—was applied. This resulted in the final 100 schools to be ranked.

The remaining schools were sorted based on the quality measure as well as financial factors, weighted so that quality accounts for 60% and financial factors account for 40% of an institutions score. Finally, because data on faculty and the average size of freshman lecture classes were unreliable, small schools were given a slight advantage—an extra point on their score (worth about 1.5% of the total score) to schools with fewer than 5,000 undergraduates, and an extra half point to those with fewer than 10,000. This size adjustment is believed to, at least partially, take class size and faculty to student ratios into account, since students at smaller schools tend to receive more personal attention.

👍 *Yahoo.* Now in its' third year, Yahoo's "America's Most Wired Colleges" is relatively new to the ranking community. It focuses specifically on the network infrastructure of colleges and universities, as opposed to measuring overall educational quality. The on-line survey collects data from accredited two- and four-year institutions—approximately 1,300 out of the 3,631 accredited institutions contributed data. Institutions are grouped into four categories based on their Carnegie Classification: Top Universities/Research Schools, Top Colleges/Baccalaureate Schools, Top Two-Year Institutions, and Top Less Selective Baccalaureate Colleges.

More than 40 factors are examined, including the amount of web space guaranteed to students, technical support, and recent computer purchases. These indicators can be divided into four general categories: Access and Infrastructure, Administrative Services, General Resources, and Student Support.

*Yahoo*, like other ranking systems, weights the indicators differently depending on the type of institution. However, though Yahoo does openly list their criteria, they do not reveal the actual formula used to rank the schools. For this reason, a number of colleges, including Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Duke, and the Universities of Chicago, Michigan, and California at Berkeley declined to participate.

👉 *The Princeton Review*. Unlike the other rankings described above, The Princeton Review's search for the "best" colleges surveys students at the institutions as opposed to the institution itself. The opinions of nearly 60,000 students are included in each annual edition of "The Best Colleges." Colleges are on a two- to three-year cycle for being surveyed—each year about 100-125 campuses are visited and surveyed. Initially the list of colleges to be surveyed was going to include the 300 top colleges, decided upon by consultation with a variety of expert sources. Since then, new institutions have been added annually and a few have been dropped—the most recent guide by The Princeton Review included 331 colleges.

The survey results in 9 ranking categories: Academics, Administration, Demographics, Parties, School Type, Politics, Quality of Life, Extracurricular Life, and Social Life. These include ranking everything from aesthetically pleasing campuses, to class discussions, to the use of drugs at the institution. There are 74 questions on the survey, most of which are multiple choice—6 questions offer the opportunity to expand on answers. Based on the student responses, each college is given a "GPA" for each individual multiple-response question, allowing for comparison across institutions for individual questions.

👉 *The Templeton Foundation*. The Templeton Foundation in its' guide, "Colleges That Encourage Character Development: A Resource for Parents, Students, and Educators,"

recognizes—as opposed to ranks—the exemplary character development programs, identifies college presidents who demonstrate strong commitment to character development, and names 100 institutions to the honor roll for character building colleges. Nomination packets are sent to all four-year accredited institutions as well as higher education associations that promote character development, inviting them to nominate programs, institutions, and presidents that deserve special recognition. Each nominated program, institution, and president are then invited to apply.

The Institute on College Student Values at Florida State University, developed a set of criteria for the 10 exemplary program categories, presidents, and the honor roll designations and then reviewed and rated each application. The exemplary program categories include programs focused on: The First-Year, Academic Honesty, Faculty and Curriculum, Volunteer Service, Substance-Abuse Prevention, Student Leadership, Spiritual Growth, Civic Education, Character and Sexuality, and Senior Year. Each program, institution and president is evaluated on many criteria, including whether or not the program impacts a significant percentage of students on campus, is integrated into the core curriculum or academic program, and has a clear vision and statement of purpose. This guide is intended to stress the importance of character development in college, stimulate conversation about what may be “the best practices” in character development, and encourage institutions to improve on or create programs of their own.

*Student information services/College Guides.* Like the ranking systems described above, student information services are also explicitly geared toward the public consumer. However information in these guides is not ranked, although the services allow students or other consumers to compare the institutions using their own criteria for selections. The myriad guides and programs that exist to help students, parents, and counselors make informed decisions about which colleges are the “best fit” for the prospective student show what an enormous industry this has grown to be. Below are several examples of these guides and their online search functions to help students find “the right” college.

👉 *Wintergreen/Orchard House.* Wintergreen/Orchard House, a private database compiler



and provider, publishes the “College Admission Data Handbook”—a directory of 1,650 accredited four-year colleges and universities. The directory, available in print or on CD-ROM, includes a two page profile on each institution, providing admissions data, contact information, enrollment data, tuition, financial aid, housing, athletics, etc.

In addition to the handbook, Wintergreen/Orchard House produces a computer program, “The College Finder.” This allows students to select answers that are right for them in many different categories such as: majors; athletics; admission requirements; school size, location and control; percent of graduate students; ratio of men to women; diversity of student body; cost/tuition; services for disabled students; campus activities; and student to faculty ratio. Then students assign an importance value (0-9 scale) to each answer they selected; items that are rated more important weigh more in the search for appropriate colleges. Finally, students select the regions of the U.S. (and as many states within the regions as they choose) and The College Finder searches for schools that meet the criteria. A list is produced with each school’s “score” based on the student’s weighted answers. Readers interested in seeing how the “College Finder” works may give it a one-month free trial on their website: <http://www.wgoh.com/catalog/colfinder.html>.

👉 *Peterson’s*. Similar to Wintergreen/Orchard House, Peterson’s produces a college guide. The “4 year Colleges” guide profiles every accredited college and university in the U.S. and Canada, including information on academic programs, campus life, and tuition.

An adaptation of the College Results Index (described in Section D below) has now been incorporated into the Peterson’s website—it combines CRI data from the 80 institutions surveyed with data such as enrollment and graduation rates in order to extrapolate to 1,600 institutions. Students answer questions about their current involvement in activities and knowledge as well as what they would like to learn and what they feel they should know more about for life after college. The program then provides the student with a “pickture” of how they measure up against 15 personal attributes related to personal values, abilities, work skills, and lifelong learning. The attributes include values such as community/civic, art, and religion in addition to work skills such as writing/presenting, and analytic skills.

This profile combined with the selection of preferences for tuition, enrollment size, and location are used to create a list of “best college picks.”

👍 *The Princeton Review (Review.com)*. In addition to producing “The Best 331 Colleges,” The Princeton Review has a student information component of their website. A student can conduct an “advanced search” which creates a list of institutions based on student preferences in 6 different areas: general (location, control, etc.), admissions selectivity, finances, student body (enrollment, percent of students who live on-campus, male to female ratio, percent of minority enrollment, etc.), academics (major, class size, student to faculty ratio), and campus life (percent of students in fraternities/sororities, athletics, and activities). Students can “compare” schools to each other by displaying their statistics next to each other. Finally, the “Counselor-O-Matic” will generate a list of 15 schools that are computed as a good fit for the student (5 safeties, 5 matches and 5 reaches) based on personal information that the student provides.

#### *Competitive Awards (Baldrige, NACUBO)*

Competitive awards to recognize outstanding quality are another way that institutions are coming to be compared to one another. The most prominent national “quality” competition may be the so-called “Baldrige” awards, created by Congress in 1987 to recognize outstanding business models in America. Named to honor the deceased Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige, the awards are administered and funded by a non-profit foundation created for that purpose, and maintains a relatively modest endowment of \$17 million annually. The Baldrige awards are administered by the National Institute for Standards in Technology (NIST), and have only recently been expanded to allow for competition in quality in health care and education. Both K-12 schools and higher education institutions are eligible to compete for the awards, although no education winners have been announced as yet.

A version of the Baldrige award is being administered by the National Association for College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), to recognize and reward best practices in cost savings among colleges and universities.

#### D. Alternative Accreditation Reviews.

Accreditation—one of the oldest forms of external quality assurance—is the peer-review process of institutions or programs. Originally an entirely voluntary process of review by peers, it has evolved into a complicated system of assessment and certification, combining some elements of voluntarism with government certification, as both the states and the federal government rely on accreditation to certify institutions as meeting “community” standards. Accreditation is carried out by private membership organizations of institutions or programs that meet the standards of the association. The two types of accreditation are institutional review by regional or national organizations, and specialized or programmatic accreditation. There are almost eighty different recognized accrediting agencies: 8 regional agencies; 11 national agencies; and around 60 specialized agencies.

The agencies that are most germane to the discussion of civic assessment are the regional agencies, because they certify quality in the traditional “higher education” sector of degree-granting institutions. Institutions must first become eligible to be reviewed for accreditation, through a screening process to determine that the institution meets the criteria. Once they are accepted for review, there is a five-stage assessment and certification process, beginning with an internal review using the association’s standards as the basis for assessment. The self-study report then becomes the basis for an external review by a visiting team of individuals selected because of their familiarity with these types of institutions. The team visits the campus, after which they prepare a report of their review with recommendations for action by the commission. Although the final decisions of the accrediting commissions are made public, the other elements of accreditation review usually are private documents.

The criteria for “quality” review in accreditation tend to focus on institutional characteristics and the undergraduate teaching program. All agencies maintain fairly generic standards for review in the following areas:

- success with respect to student achievement in relation to mission;
- curricula;
- faculty;
- facilities, equipment and supplies;

- fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the scale of operations;
- student support services;
- recruiting and admissions practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications, grading, and advertising;
- measures of program length and the objectives of the degrees or credentials offered;
- record of student complaints received by, or available to, the organization; and
- record of compliance with federal student aid (Title IV) requirements.

Graduate and professional education are not seriously reviewed as part of institutional accreditation, and research, institutional community service, and organized activities are also not encompassed in accreditation reviews.

There are many debates about the purpose and usefulness of accreditation, particularly for established institutions where basic accreditation is not in dispute. Despite this, most observers agree that the self-study can be an effective tool for institutional improvement. To strengthen the role of accreditation as a vehicle for improvement within the institution, most of the regional agencies are experimenting with alternative accrediting models that allow established institutions to conduct focused-self studies on areas that are priorities for improvement. Most institutions that have participated in these alternative reviews use them to focus on undergraduate instruction, planning and change management. This alternative review model could be developed into a vehicle for the assessment of civic teaching and institutional service, if an institution wanted to use it for that purpose, and the accrediting agency agreed to it.

#### D. Emerging research models.

Frustration with the limits of traditional measures of institutional effectiveness has made research in new models for quality assessment a fertile field. Three examples of relatively new models for assessing and reporting on performance follow: the National Survey of Student Engagement, the College Results Index, and the National Report Card.

*NSEE (National Survey of Student Engagement).* NSEE is a survey of student views about their experiences in higher education. The questions are built around five benchmarks of effective educational practices; these are described in the 2000 NSEE Report as follows:

1. The level of academic challenge—time spent preparing for class, amount of reading and writing, and institutional expectations for academic performance;
2. Active and collaborative learning—participating in class, working collaboratively with other students inside and outside of class, tutoring and so forth;
3. Student interactions with faculty members—talking with faculty members and advisors, discussing ideas from classes with faculty members outside of class, getting prompt feedback on academic performance, and working with a faculty member on a research project;
4. Enriching educational experiences—talking with students with different racial or ethnic backgrounds or with different political opinions or values, using electronic technology, and participating in such activities as internships, community service, study abroad, co-curricula activities, or a culminating senior experience;
5. Supportive campus environment—the extent to which students perceive the campus helps them succeed academically and socially, assists them in coping with non-academic responsibilities, and promotes supportive relations between students and their peers, faculty members, and administrative personnel and offices.”<sup>5</sup>

NSEE is a new tool, first tested in 2000 through a survey of more than 63,000 randomly selected students enrolled in 276 four year colleges and universities. It is administered at Indiana University under the directorship of George Kuh, and the national research design team is chaired by Peter Ewell at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

The survey will be repeated in 2001, sampling roughly equal numbers of first-year and senior

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<sup>5</sup>The NSEE 2000 Report: National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice, from <http://www.indiana.edu/nsse/>

students. In the first year, national reports were generated showing the range of responses to each question, separated by freshmen and senior students, and organized by five Carnegie classification types: Bachelors/Liberal Arts institutions; Bachelors/General institutions; Masters' Colleges and Universities; Doctoral/Research Intensive Institutions; and Doctoral/Research Extensive Institutions. In addition, each participating institution was given a report of the responses from their students to see how their institutions compares to other institutions nationally, as well as within its Carnegie classification. (A summary of the first year report from NSEE is included in the background materials.)

### *The College Results Index (CRI)*

Another very recent instrument for assessing institutional effectiveness is the College Results Instrument (CRI), a new tool designed under the directorship of Robert Zemsky at the University of Pennsylvania branch of the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI). The purpose of the CRI is to characterize college results by surveying the characteristics of graduates in four different clusters: personal interests, skills, work habits, and interest in continuing education. Information is obtained about levels of participation in arts and culture, religion, and community organizations.

The premise of the CRI is that college costs are increasing because they compete for students by padding their reputations and adding resources, rather than by demonstrating results in student learning and behavior. The goal of the CRI is to give students tools that will shape their choices about colleges based on effectiveness rather than resources or reputation.

The CRI is just now being made public, and results are available only for a single year. Like the NSEE, results are published for national norms, organized by Carnegie classifications, and each participating institution is given a private analysis of how their students responded along with the national and comparison group information. The CRI has been designed to serve three audiences: student consumers; institutions; and national researchers. To do this, exclusive rights to the CRI have been given to Peterson's College Guide, which is using the CRI kind of information as a

way to code college information for prospective students.

*The National Report Card.*

Another new instrument for assessing performance in higher education is the State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education developed by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in *Measuring Up 2000*. Unlike other assessments, the Report Card does not focus on institutional performance, but rather compares states to one another in six different categories: preparation; participation; affordability; completion; and learning: The element that is most relevant to measures of civic contributions is the “benefit” measure that assesses voter participation and charitable contributions. The complete list of measures are:

- 👍 Preparation
  - High School completion (including GED awards)
  - K-12 Course Taking (math and science course taking; 8<sup>th</sup> grade algebra course taking)
  - K-12 Student Achievement (math, reading and writing proficiency; math proficiency among low-income students; college entrance exams; advanced placement exams)
- 👍 Participation
  - Young Adults: High school to College Rate; Young Adult Enrollment
  - Working-Age Adult Enrollment
- 👍 Affordability
  - Family ability to pay at community colleges; public four-year colleges; and private colleges
  - Strategies for affordability (need-based financial aid; low-priced colleges)
  - Reliance on Loans (low student debt)
- 👍 Completion
  - Persistence (students returning at 2 and 4-year colleges)
  - Completion (Bachelor’s Degree Completion; all degree completion)
- 👍 Benefits
  - Educational Achievement (adults with bachelor’s degree or higher)
  - Economic Benefits (increased income from higher education)
  - Civic Benefits (population voting; charitable contributions)
  - Adult Skill Levels (quantitative literacy; prose literacy; document literacy)
- 👍 Learning
  - \* *All states lack information on learning as a result of education beyond high school.*

Comparisons were made only in areas where existing data allowed statewide performance to be assessed, with the exception of measures of student learning. Benchmarks for performance are created by converting state results to a scale from 0 to 100 using the 5 top performing states as the comparison point. Each state is then given a score in each category, and is then given an overall grade. (A summary description of the tool is included with the background materials.)

### Building Civic Assessments.

This paper concludes with more questions than answers, which will be the starting point for the day's discussion at the March 22/23 meeting.

The most important issues to address in the design of a system of “civic assessments” are scope; audience and imagined uses; content or design; and process.

Scope: Is it important that measures be developed that can be applied to all public and private non-profit institutions? Even if all institutions may not want to use the tool, should “custom” tools be developed that are designed to fit particular kinds of institutions (e.g., community colleges; liberal arts institutions; comprehensive institutions?)

Audience/Uses: Who are the primary and secondary audiences that are envisaged, and how is it imagined that they will use the tools? Most assessment tools are designed to influence “consumer” behavior. Yet, as McDonough's research points out, most of the “consumers” of information about higher education are people who are already inside the institutions – not students or parents. If institutions are a primary audience, is institutional improvement the primary purpose of assessment?

Content or design: What goes into “civic assessments?” What are the measures and definitions, and what evidence is there that they are the right ones? Is it necessary to try to measure community service as well as civic teaching and learning? Are measures of institutional activity (such as funding generated, or students in service learning) reasonable proxies for some dimension of civic effectiveness? Is internal institutional governance a component of a “civic” institution?



*Process:* What is the process that should be used to start new assessment instruments? Options that might be considered are: 1) seek a federal government mandate to assess civic education and service; 2) solicit support to sponsor a national competition for a “civic award;” 3) build interest among target institutions (such as Campus Compact members) in using alternative accreditation reviews as for civic assessments; and 4) build the capacity for using peer review for “civic assessments” by supporting the development of a “Civic Assessment” group of experts who can perform civic reviews, and generate demand for “civic assessments” through governing boards, legislatures, the national report card, and other vehicles.