

Accountability Mechanisms in Public Multi-campus Systems of Higher Education

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Mary Todd Rothchild

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Darwin D. Hendel
Dr. David J. Weerts
Advisors

March 2011

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the many years of support from my advisor, Dr. Darwin Hendel. Dr. Hendel, from my earliest days as a student, was interested in my views and opinions of public higher education and the Minnesota State College and University system. In class, he always greeted me with the engaging question, “what’s new at MnSCU?” While this would be a friendly conversation starter, the question provided fodder for exploring insights into public higher education administration and policy. Dr. Hendel allowed me to see myself as a knowledgeable informant on topics when, in fact, I was a neophyte. I am grateful for his guidance and advice over these many years. I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee which included Dr. David Weerts, also my co-advisor, Dr. Melissa Stone and Dr. Robert Poch.

Others who supported me at critical times in my research and whom I would like to thank include: Dr. Durwin Long, classmate, study group member, informal advisor and friend; Dr. Gail O’Kane, friend, co-worker and gracious editor; and Dr. Teri Fritsma, research advisor who provided a careful critique of my research methods and analysis of data. I appreciate all of their enthusiasm for my work and willingness to help me when I needed it most. Thank you.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, children, and parents. My husband, Dan, provided loving attention to me every step of the way, and did more than any spouse should be expected to do while I indulged myself in work, school, hockey, volunteer activities and child raising (in no particular order!). As Dan and I head into spending more time with each other, we have the firm foundation of our love to carry us.

During my many years taking evening classes and working full-time, my children, Emma, Lucien and August, grew up in front of me...all but one beating me to the finish line of their high school educations before I finished my Ph.D. We will celebrate three graduations this spring: Gus from high school, Emma from college and my graduation from the University of Minnesota. It has been a wonderful time for all of us, and we have much to look forward to with the knowledge we have gained from our education.

And, last, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Ken and Nina Rothchild, whose enthusiasm for my success and devotion to my choices in life have been unconditional. They are greatest “fans” in the world!

Love to you all.

Abstract

Since the 1990s, higher education has been faced with a significantly different context for performance expectations. Public policy makers and governing boards of state systems entrusted by the public to serve them have faced increasing scrutiny for outcomes related to student access and success, tuition affordability and efficiency in operations. During this time, policy reform largely focused on the structural design of higher education but with less attention paid to governance methods and the effectiveness of accountability tools to meet performance expectations. This study is guided by the theory that public multi-campus systems of higher education, as loosely-coupled organizations, could enhance performance when utilizing governance practices and accountability mechanisms that encourage high levels of autonomy and accountability.

Using a two-part, quantitative and qualitative research methodology, this study was designed to define and measure accountability mechanisms used in the transactional environment between state higher education leadership (board members and system leaders) and institutional leaders. Using a subset of ten state systems of public higher education, each state was determined to be either high-performing or low-performing. In the quantitative study, institutional leaders were asked in an Internet survey to rate or rank 18 accountability mechanisms on five characteristics: importance, discretion, “high stakes,” and whether they reflected professional norms of higher education or were political or market-based. In the qualitative study,

interviews of system leaders examined their views on the balance between accountability and autonomy in multi-campus systems.

The results from the survey indicated that four mechanisms were considered high in importance and high stakes by institutional leaders in both low- and high-performing states: strategic planning, state funding, institutional accreditation and system policies. While these mechanisms each play different roles in system governance and accountability, system leaders can utilize these accountability mechanisms as tools to develop flexible system policies and funding mechanisms, coordinate planning between system and institutional goals, and use data systems for assessment and accreditation.

Governing leaders of public multi-campus systems of higher education could use the study results as they design normative values for accountability and autonomy by considering them as mutually supportive constructs. Evidence from the study illustrated the importance of building shared commitment through connections between campuses and the system/state. In addition, system leaders should be attentive to governance policies and practices that encompass aspects of campus self-determination and provide effective incentives for responding to the system's organizational priorities.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
Lists of Tables	ix
List of Figures	xi
List of Charts	xii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Research Focus and Design	5
Definition of Terms	8
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	13
Overview of Public Higher Education and Governance	13
Development of Systems of Public Higher Education (1950s – 1970s)	18
Designing Effective, High Quality Higher Education Systems (1980s – 1990s)	22
Emerging Public Expectations of Higher Education (1990s – 2000s)	25
Organizational Models and Nomenclature of System Governance	28
Governance and Leadership	33
Defining Public Priorities and Balancing the “Middle Ground”	35
Leadership: State Boards	36

Table of Contents (continued)

Accountability	50
Conclusion	57
Chapter Three: Methodology	59
Introduction	59
Research Overview	59
Theoretical Framework	61
Research Design and Questions	62
A Two-Part Study	64
Study Design	65
Survey Design and Data Collection	66
Accountability Mechanisms	68
Sample Selection	72
Selection of Low-Performing States	75
Selection of High-Performing States	75
Final Selection of Study States	76
Instrument Design and Testing	79
Data Collection	81
Variable Measurement	84
Interview Design and Data Collection	84
Interview Procedures and Protocols	85

Table of Contents (continued)

Interview Format	86
Interview Questions	87
Analysis of Data	89
Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data	89
Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data	89
Validity and Reliability	95
Internal Validity	95
External Validity	95
Triangulation of Data	96
Chapter Four: Results	97
Introduction	97
Part One: Quantitative Results from the Survey	97
Responses to Survey Questions	98
Categories of Accountability Mechanisms based on Survey Data	123
Part Two: Qualitative Results from the Interviews	127
Results of Data Analysis	131
Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions and Implications	158
Discussion	158
Summary of the Research	159
Conclusions	161

Table of Contents (continued)	
Further Conclusions from the Convergence of the Quantitative and Qualitative Studies	168
Implications for Practice	173
Contribution to Theory	177
Limitations of the Study	179
Recommendations for Future Research	181
Closing Thoughts	182
References	183
Appendix A: Survey Questions of Institutional Leaders and Informed Consent	192
Appendix B: Interview Questions of System Heads and Board Members and Informed Consent	197
Appendix C: List of Codes	200

List of Tables

Table 1	States Considered for the Study	76
Table 2	Funding Resource Level, by State Performance	78
Table 3	Survey Participants, by State	81
Table 4	Number of Interview Informants, by Type and State Performance	86
Table 5	Importance of Eighteen Accountability Mechanisms	99
Table 6	Importance of Eighteen Accountability Mechanisms, by High-performing and Low-performing States	101
Table 7	Discretion in Complying with Accountability Mechanisms, Ranked by Highest Discretion	104
Table 8	Level of Institutional Discretion in Complying with Accountability Mechanisms, by High-performing and Low-performing States	106
Table 9	Accountability Mechanisms Most Associated with Adverse Consequences or Rewards for Performance (“High Stakes”)	110
Table 10	Accountability Mechanisms Most Associated with Adverse Consequences or Rewards for Performance (“High Stakes”), by High-performing and Low-performing States	113
Table 11	Top Five Professional Norms of Higher Education	114
Table 12	Top Five Professional Norms of Higher Education, by High-performing and Low-performing States	116

List of Tables (continued)

Table 13	Top Five Political or Market-based Accountability Mechanisms	118
Table 14	Top Five Political or Market-based Accountability Mechanisms, by High-performing and Low-performing States	119
Table 15	Summary of Statistically Significant Differences, by High- and Low- Performing States	122
Table 16	Category 1: High Importance, High Stakes	124
Table 17	Category 2: High Importance, Low Stakes	125
Table 18	Category 3: Moderate Importance, Focus on External Mechanisms	126
Table 19	Category 4: Performance-based Accountability Mechanisms	127
Table 20	Organizing Categories and Summary of Codes	129
Table 21	Examples of Dialectical Perspective	178

List of Figures

Figure 1	Chief Decision Makers in Public Higher Education Systems	33
Figure 2	Changes in Assumptions about the State Role in Postsecondary Education	44
Figure 3	Comparison of Functionalist and Dialectical Perspective	56
Figure 4	Structure of Higher Education Governance	60
Figure 5	Matrix of Accountability and Autonomy and Legend Describing Categories of Accountability Mechanisms, by State Performance	175

List of Charts

Chart 1	Comparison of High- and Low- Performing Responses on Professional Norms of Higher Education	121
Chart 2	Comparison of High- and Low- Performing Responses on Political or Market-based Accountability	122

Chapter One: Introduction

Nearly two decades ago, during the early 1990s, restructuring of public systems of higher education governance reached a critical juncture. Responding to social, economic and political imperatives, governors across the United States sought to align higher education governance with increasing expectations for access, affordability and efficiency in operations (Novak, 1996). Today, educational leadership and governance require knowledge of and attention to addressing the cost of higher education, its productivity and the short- and long-term returns to the state's economy. As many states moved toward greater control of fiscal affairs in the public sector to include higher expectations for quality and accessible educational services, tensions over the role of the state resulted in significant implications for addressing the nature of governance and accountability in higher education (Hearn & Holdsworth, 2002).

Beginning in the 1990s, researchers pursued multiple, intertwining paths: one, how states designed structural models to respond to state policy concerns; two, how governance responsibility was assigned to higher education boards; and, three, how state governments moved policy imperatives from the political arena to higher education accountability for performance. While an abundance of literature described governance design revisions in state systems of higher education and the impact of policy initiatives, less explicit were the implications of these changes on system management for accountability. The literature suggests these shortcomings may be due to an over-reliance in higher education on governance that is historically rooted in system design, which is highly regulated, or to the nature of the policy environment, which is changeable

and unpredictable, to lead to the development of substantive and supportable accountability practices.

Kaplan (2004) defined governance as “the means and actions by which a collective entity decides matters of policy and strategy” (p. 23). While this definition is incontrovertible, added meaning for higher education governance is provided by Birnbaum (2004), who described governance as the “term we give to the structures and processes that academic institutions invent to achieve an effective balance between the claims of two different, but equally valid, systems for organizational control and influence”¹ (p. 5). The “how” of system governance and the relationship between system-level leaders and affiliated public institutions provide the framework for this research. While researchers have explored the views of board trustees of land-grant universities and their understanding of accountability mechanisms used with internal and external constituents, little research addresses the complex relations among the many institutions and external constituents that comprise a state system of public higher education.

The salient environment in this study is a natural extension of the expectations posed by market-based and policy stakeholders, yet is one that is less well-defined in the literature and research on higher education. The environment is defined by the “buffering role” of governing board trustees to enact their understanding of the interests of policy makers and the public through the system’s institutional governance. “System design

¹ Fundamental to Birnbaum’s statement is the notion of shared governance. In academic parlance, shared governance reflects the role of faculty in institutional decision making but, in a general sense, shared governance is defined as the judgment of trustees to determine when and how internal and external constituents participate in decision making for the organization (Ingram, 1993).

policy direction is shaped by and interacts with the macro level (or state policy environment) above...[and] also gives shape to the work processes or policy direction level below..." (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 22). McGuinness (1996) echoed, "What will change most dramatically is what constitutes a "system"; changes will be made in how systems are led and how they function, both internally and in relationship to multiple external stakeholders" (p. 207).

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) described how the environment impacts the success or failure of an organization. For organizations dependent upon external resources, organization control is fundamentally shifted to external forces. Understanding the environmental context, however, may not control all aspects of strategy and behavior. To understand the behavior of an organization, one must understand the interdependencies among individuals, the organization and other organizations in the environment. The authors framed these interdependencies as the "enactment process" (p. 71). The enactment process assumes that some form of human agency 'remembers' or 'replaces prior knowledge with new knowledge'. "Noting that an organization's environment is enacted, or created by *attentional* processes, tends to shift the focus from characteristics of the objective environment to characteristics of the decision process by which organizations select and ignore information" (p. 74).

This conceptual framework is valuable to our understanding of systems of higher education, its design constructs and the governance and accountability issues faced by state higher education leaders. As described by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), problems of misreading interdependencies, such as incorrectly perceiving the demands of external

groups an organization depends upon or invisibly managing the organization's operations, are potential missteps of complex higher education systems that are dependent on state financial support and subject to varying degrees of control.

The overarching focus of this research was to explore the question, how do system leaders of public multi-campus systems of higher education balance institutional autonomy and accountability to achieve their desired goals for performance? The study investigates accountability and autonomy in the "transactional" environment between system and institutional leaders of colleges and universities in public systems of higher education by posing the following three research questions:

1. What types of accountability mechanisms encourage leaders of public higher education institutions to align their institutions with the performance expectations of the system and the state?
2. To what degree do these accountability mechanisms allow for flexibility and customization in how they are implemented that would indicate a level of trust and cooperation between system and institutional leaders?
3. What attributes of accountability are associated with performance of state systems of higher education?

Some research intimates that performance in higher education may be related to how state governing boards manage the balance of autonomy and accountability in the environment between state leaders and institutions. While causality is not suggested, there may be differences between states in how accountability is managed in the transactional environment. Dee (2006) describes this phenomenon from two

perspectives: the functionalist and the dialectical. In the author's paradigm, the functionalist perspective is associated with autonomy and accountability as opposing forces or functions which result in tension between state governing authorities and higher education institutions. In the dialectical perspective, however, the author hypothesizes that high levels of both accountability and autonomy are more likely to enable systems of higher education to reach the performance expectations of public policy makers. Few studies have empirically studied accountability expectations, however, and whether differences exist in the performance of different kinds of states and the extent to which they exhibit a dialectical or functionalist perspective.

Research Focus and Design

Since the 1990s, performance expectations of public systems of higher education have increased dramatically. Public policy makers and system boards entrusted to serve them have faced scrutiny for outcomes related to student access, affordability and efficiency in operations. During this time, policy reform focused on the design of systems of higher education but with less attention paid to the effectiveness of governance and the process of managing accountability expectations. Hochwarter et al. (2007) defined accountability as “a focal entity’s phenomenological perceptions of external demands or, more simply put, the experience of being held answerable” (p. 570). The authors asserted that, along with contextual factors, the forms and functions of an organization lead to an understanding of the appropriate processes and mechanisms of accountability.

The purpose of this convergent, mixed-methods study will be to examine the transactional environment of accountability and autonomy between system leadership (board trustees and chancellors/presidents) and institutional leaders (heads of colleges and universities) in public systems of higher education. The transactional environment is populated with a variety of accountability mechanisms that are used to identify and measure institutional and system performance goals. If this study indicates which accountability mechanisms are accepted by institutional leaders as effective ways to measure performance expectations and are likely to motivate presidents to be attuned and responsive to state goals, then trustees of state systems of higher education can focus on those mechanisms that strengthen relations between system leadership and institutional leadership.

The study will be conducted in two parts. Part one of the study is designed to understand *what* is taking place in the “transactional environment” between system and institutional leadership to ensure attainment of state performance goals. By examining institutional presidents’ views of the importance of and the flexibility in implementing various accountability mechanisms, the management environment between college and university presidents and governing board trustees will be enhanced and accountability can be more effectively implemented. Specifically, the attributes of accountability mechanisms will be examined to determine:

1. The importance of each accountability mechanism based upon the amount of time, attention and resources that are devoted to that type of compliance.

2. The extent to which each accountability mechanism is linked to rewards for performance or is likely to result in adverse consequences (“stakes”).
3. The degree of flexibility and autonomy afforded to institutional leaders based upon the input they have in designing or setting performance expectations (“discretion”).
4. The way institutional leaders characterize each accountability mechanism as either a “professional norm” of higher education or as a political or market-based accountability mechanism.

Part two of the study is designed to explore *why* the “transactional environment” in each state reflects either the dialectical or functionalist perspective of autonomy and accountability, as defined by Dee (2006), from the view of system governing board trustees and system heads. First, system leaders will be asked whether they set accountability expectations based on mandates or inducements (mandates reflect a lack of flexibility and autonomy; inducements reflect a higher degree of flexibility and autonomy). Second, system leaders will be asked whether their or their state’s design and measurement of performance expectations allow for flexibility and customization and, if so, in what ways. And, last, system leaders will be asked whether their system’s accountability framework supports capacity building of system institutions and why they support or encourage that degree of institutional autonomy.

A supportive transactional environment for both accountability and autonomy should result in stronger alignment and stronger performance. High levels of accountability would assure policy makers that public higher education institutions are

well-governed and committed to serving public interests. In this way, systems of higher education are more likely to be responsive to public interests and to garner resources needed to strengthen state higher education systems and institutions.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will assist the reader in comprehending terms that may be unfamiliar or could be ambiguously construed in the literature review and to understand the general context of higher education. Operational definitions of accountability mechanisms are given on page 68.

Accountability. Accountability is “the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used and to what effect. Fundamental questions with respect to accountability are: who is to be held accountable, for what, to whom, through what means, and with what consequences” (Trow, 1996, p. 310).

Accountability mechanisms. Accountability mechanisms are defined as work processes or methods that are used to assess or evaluate expectations for performance in higher education, e.g., performance indicators, financial audits/bond ratings, institutional accreditation, program self-assessment and many others.

Accreditation. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation defines accreditation as “a collegial process of self-study and external peer review for quality assurance, accountability, and quality improvement of an academic institution or program designed to determine whether or not it has met or exceeded the published standards of

its accrediting association and is achieving its mission and stated purpose.” (Source: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Glossary of Key Terms, accessed at http://www.chea.org/international/inter_glossary01.html)

Continuous quality improvement. Adapted from corporate management practices, continuous quality improvement is an approach to quality management that builds upon traditional quality assurance methods by emphasizing the organization and systems: It focuses on "process" rather than the individual; it recognizes both internal and external "customers," and it promotes the need for objective data to analyze and improve processes.

Transactional environment (in higher education). The arena or environment between system-level governing or coordinating boards and institutions (colleges or universities) in which various factors influence their interactions, activities and communications.

Fiscal accountability. Accounting for expenditures – includes the amount of operating support and the regulations that apply to its distribution, institutional autonomy in determining capital needs and in securing funding, the amount and use of incentive funding, types and amounts of student assistance, and tax policy.

Fiscal policies. The strategies that allocate and administer the financial support state governments provide directly to institutions and the types of institutions that are eligible to receive this state aid (Richardson & Martinez, 2009, p. 23).

Governance. The means and actions by which a collective entity decides matters of policy and strategy (Kaplan 2004).

Governing board. Based on a definition from the Association of Governing Boards, the governing board is a group of people selected or appointed to hold a system of higher education institutions it serves in trust for the public that supports and depends on an effective, diverse, and competitive delivery of higher education.

Institutional review or self-study. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation identifies the characteristics of an institutional review or self-study as the review and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of an institution's own academic programs, staffing, and structure based on standards set by an outside quality assurance body and carried out by the institution itself. Self-studies usually are undertaken in preparation for a quality assurance site visit by an outside team of specialists. (Source: Council for Higher Education, Accreditation, Overview of U.S. Accreditation, Revised May 2009, accessed at http://www.chea.org/pdf/2009.06_Overview_of_US_Accreditation.pdf)

Legislative audits. A process of accountability imposed through balanced budget laws, fiscal audits and other legislative requirements, including reports and testimony, which may or may not be an official study of the office of the legislative auditor.

Market forces. When considering the entire spectrum of higher education, private and public institutions, 'market forces' are evident when referring to institutions that offer a 'medallion degree' or is a 'name-brand' institution. In other words, institutions that have a competitive advantage based on enrolling students who are most likely to succeed in four years of education and can charge the most for that education. In general, however, the definition for state-funded, public institutions is an institution

that is deemed to serve its customers particularly well based upon the results of a student- or consumer-based satisfaction instrument such as College Results Instrument (CRI) or the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Multi-campus System. A reference to several campuses or institutions (colleges or universities) under a single governing board or coordinating entity in the public sector of postsecondary or higher education.

Performance budgeting. Where state governments and coordinating bodies for higher education or university systems consider campus achievement on performance indicators as one factor in determining allocations (often in addition to the traditional formula based on enrollment, historical funding levels, inflation, etc.).

Performance funding. Performance-based funding is defined as institutional funding that is tied directly to specified (often limited) state funds and funding is based upon achievement of specified outcomes. It focuses on the distribution rather than the preparation and presentation phases of the budget process. If a campus achieves a prescribed target or an improvement level on the defined indicators, it receives a designated amount or percentage of state funding (Burke & Minassians, 2002, p. 15).

Performance indicators. A set of tangible measures, usually numeric, designed to describe the state of, or outcome from, the operation of a higher education institution or system to provide public accountability. Often includes values for public higher education expectations with such goals as access, participation, quality, degree completion, preparation and economic development.

Performance reporting. Publicizing the results of higher education at the state, system or institutional level on a group of priority indicators, i.e. accounting for results.

Policy accountability. Enforcing regulations as a means of accountability. Federal or state policies – the means by which the federal or state government establishes priorities and the amounts and purposes of federal fiscal appropriations, accountability or collaboration.

Professional norms. Conforming to the standards of skill, competence or character normally expected of a properly qualified and experienced person in a work environment. In this context, the standard pattern of behavior for professionals in higher education.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Overview of Public Higher Education and Governance

With enrollments of nearly 14 million² students and \$239 billion in expenditures,³ public higher education in the United States is living up to its moniker. Today, public higher education plays an increasingly central role in our economy and society. Growing expectations for educational attainment beyond high school are critical in the face of a post-industrial, knowledge-based, globally competitive and technology-driven economy (Duderstadt, 2008). With states alone investing \$83.5 billion in higher education in 2007, an increase of 105 percent over 1990 subsidy levels, state policy makers and public taxpayers have a significant stake in the future priorities and strategic directions of higher education (Lingenfelter, 2008).

Increasingly, however, the willingness of state taxpayers and legislators to support public higher education has come under scrutiny. With growing demands for essential state services – including Medicaid, public schools and corrections – outpacing state tax revenues, the share of state funds used for higher education has dropped from 44 percent in 1980 to 32 percent in 2003 (Selingo, 2003). In an address titled *Aligning American Higher Education with a 21st Century Public Agenda*, James J. Duderstadt, president emeritus of the University of Michigan, referring in particular to public support for major research universities, stated:

² Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2009.

³ Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 through 2006-07 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2004 through Spring 2008.

Economic, geopolitical, and demographic factors are stimulating powerful market forces that are likely to drive a massive restructuring of the higher education enterprise ... we are moving toward a revenue-driven, market-responsive higher education system because there is no way that our current tax system can support the degree of universal access to postsecondary education required by knowledge-driven economies in the face of other compelling social priorities...market forces are rapidly overwhelming public policy and public investment...the long standing recognition that higher education is a public good, benefiting all of our society, is eroding. (2008, p. 8)

Concomitant with these trends, governance of higher education increasingly reflects the influence of external interests. External governance is referred to in the literature as the response by administrative leaders to the interests of external stakeholders, such as legislators, governors, government agencies and boards, state policy groups and federal agencies (Hines, 2000; Richardson, Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999). Public officials have challenged colleges and universities to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning, particularly undergraduate education, and to convince the public that higher education is accountable for student performance and efficient use of scarce resources (McGuinness, 1994). Hines (2000) identified the core issues in external governance as “authority, power, and their distribution, along with issues of influence” (p. 105), concluding that “it is this political and distributive domain which sets the context for an analysis of higher education” (p. 105).

Contributing to strained relationships and increasing conflict over leadership and governance are escalating demands for college-educated graduates and the public perception that academic insiders are disconnected from the expectations of lawmakers and other public constituencies (McGuinness, 1999). The response by higher education leadership to these challenges reached a critical stage as a “trifecta” of growing student enrollment, reduced public support and greater interest in accountability, which required strong leadership to maintain a balance between public demands and educational autonomy. Higher education leaders argue that state investment in postsecondary education provides long-term returns for regional and state economies. The response by most public education leaders is “to become more central to the lifeblood of the state”⁴ by striving to strengthen its relationship with the public, policy makers and business leaders.

In response, public officials evaluated the need for new models to explain relations among higher education institutions, state governing authorities and the “market” or consumer constituents. As early as 1983, Clark Kerr described this phenomenon as the “triangle of tensions.” The triangle reflected two-directional interplay among three factors – higher education, the state and the market – each with the potential to influence the other. While still relevant today, the triangle limits our understanding and obscures the nuances of how two of these threads – the market and state – influence the governance of higher education.

⁴ Quote from Molly Corbett Broad, president of the University of North Carolina system in: Conkin, Kristin & Reindl, Travis. To keep America competitive, states and colleges must work together. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 13, 2004.

Addressing these issues requires increased levels of involvement, including a spirit of cooperation and collaboration among governing boards, higher education administrators and state government and other policy leaders. The primary interests of states to ensure efficient use of public resources, to support state economic development and to ensure educational access and quality are legitimate components of the public good in higher education (Johnstone, 1999). Yet, McGuinness (1999) argued that “the state needs to focus essentially on boundary control to protect institutions from direct interference, stabilize decision making, protect campus presidents and cope with public policy issues” (p. 192). Over-reliance on extensive bureaucratic control or regulatory authority tends to divert attention from key issues facing policy makers for educational access in light of increasing costs and competing priorities for state resources.

The critical role of the board in managing the affairs of higher education is described as holding in trust the mission and direction of institutional academic and programmatic goals (Gayle, Tewarie, & White, 2003; Nason, 1993). In turn, the role of trustees is to “protect the public interest in higher education by protecting the campus from improper external intrusion as well as ensuring that narrow institutional interest are not served at the expense of legitimate public needs” (Hines, 2000, p. 383). By attending to the interests of academic professionals and the public interest, trustees must strive to balance the “middle ground.” The basic premise is, of course, that higher education is a public good that relies upon an understanding between political leaders and academic professionals.

Whether referred to as a “compact,” “charter” or “relationship,” defining the public interest in higher education has been a continuing challenge. Recent commentators have raised the questions “what attributes are essential to preserving higher education’s role as servant to the needs of society?” and “what restraints on market forces [in higher education] are needed to preserve the public’s interests?” (Newman, et al., 2004, p. 58). The premise of these questions is that higher education is a “public good” that relies on an understanding between political leaders and academic professionals that can be investigated in two ways: one, how the interests of external stakeholders are played out in the context of the relationship between higher education leadership and the public good and, two, the development of strategies that reflects the interests of public constituencies in the goals of higher education institutions.

Hufner (2003) analyzed the nature of higher education as a “public good” from three perspectives: economic, legal and normative-political. From the perspective of economics, he defined a public good as “a good that people can consume without reducing what others consume (the non-rival aspect)” (p. 341). This definition rests on the premise that education should be available to all. In the legal context, the author suggested that society must see higher education as a human right, yet is still subject to the “merit” of the individual and the “capacity” of the system – both concepts that may in fact limit access. The normative-political perspective identifies constraints that create competition among governmental units for scarce resources. In his evaluation of the functions of higher education – teaching, research and public service – Hufner concluded that higher education is both a private and a public good, or a “mixed good” (p. 341).

The balance of public and private good in higher education is described by Kezar (2004) as the “charter” between higher education and society that forms the foundation of the mission and values of higher education institutions. Kezar suggested that clarity about the investment in higher education matters and that failure to understand the social and public benefits of higher education may result in other priorities gaining more [legislative] support. “The concept of the charter suggests that higher education and society are always renegotiating an appropriate relationship ... the charter is an intentional idea. To be intentional, societal and higher education leaders need information about the state of the charter” (p. 431).

Development of Systems of Public Higher Education (1950s to 1970s)

The pattern of governance in public higher education that emerged beginning in the middle decades of the 20th century was characterized by the development of “systems,” as states adopted centralized and consolidated governance designs with strong state control over public higher education (Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Johnstone, 1999; McGuinness, 2002; McLendon & Ness, 2003). In the last half century, multi-campus systems have become the dominant model of governance for public higher education. Evolution of systems varied by state, shaped by the presence of colleges and universities with diverse missions, from land-grant universities to normal schools to comprehensive universities, and organized into systems as state leaders grappled with growing demands for financing and public accountability.

While forms of state coordination of higher education existed as early as the 1930s, most formal bodies were formed in response to the rapid growth of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s (Johnstone, 1999; Mingle, 1988; Novak, 1996). As diverse institutional types emerged mid-century, such as community colleges, teachers' colleges and research universities, state government authorities sought greater control over higher education. In addition, state governments were increasingly responsible for complex and expensive government programs and systems and, in response, sought to develop efficiencies in managing and reporting in order to balance increasing demands for state funding and use of public resources (Gayle, Tewarie, & White, 2003; Hearn & Holdsworth, 2002). As institutions proliferated, limited tax dollars and the competition for those dollars were cited as prime reasons by legislators for developing objective ways to evaluate institutional needs.

Kerr and Gade (1989) cited two underlying reasons for the trend in state involvement and control over some decisions: first, to make effective use of resources and to ensure that students and state citizens are fairly served by the missions of state colleges and universities, and, second, to ensure that governors and legislators can hold a state higher education leader and board accountable without having to navigate the differing and competing interests of a multitude of institutions.

With the size of government growing, legislative leaders sought to consolidate governmental functions in order to develop capabilities for higher education planning among different types of institutions, to adapt to changing economic and workforce needs and to develop policies that would respond to state needs (Glenny, 1959; McConnell,

1962; Millard, 1980). Only 16 states had a consolidated governing board or a coordinating board with regulatory power in 1950, but by 1970 that number had more than doubled (Berdahl, 1975).

Nason (1982) described the response by states as “a more rational ordering of the educational resources” (p. 47). “The transfer of authority for major policy decisions to a system board has reduced the amount of institutional infighting with state legislators over appropriations. It has facilitated statewide planning...[and] a higher degree of accountability for increasing amounts of public money” (Nason, 1982, p. 47). Centralization in governance increased as the role of state governments changed from “enabling, nurturing and supporting nascent colleges and universities to building systems” (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 4). Supporting this trend was the need for increased public accountability for growing state-supported education budgets and responsiveness to unprecedented growth in enrollments and academic programming. Governance within higher education systems focused on centralizing functions and the development of bureaucratic forms of decision making to improve efficiency in operations and state-level decision making.

Beginning in the 1970s, efficiencies in higher education became increasingly important as enrollments waned and public resources drew scarce. By 1971, all but four states had established either statewide governing boards encompassing most, if not all, their public institutions or statewide coordinating boards. In 1972, a requirement in the federal Education Amendments of 1972 required states to establish postsecondary education planning commissions in order to be eligible for planning and other categorical

grants. State governments continued to exert control by adjusting the authorities of boards (i.e., from coordinating to governing) and by expanding the areas of board responsibility into program approval and budgeting. During this time, two states adopted governing board structures and 12 states expanded areas of regulatory oversight of their coordinating boards (Hearn & Griswold, 1994; McGuinness, 1994, 2002).

Mingle (1988) cited extensive advances in the 1970s in the “procedures for state coordination” (p. 411) including: “master planning” that determined the type and number of institutions and programs; funding priorities based on formulas and capital expenditures based on need, rather than “district” politics; and regulations to ensure that institutions met minimum standards for eligibility for state and federal aid programs. States also expanded their data collection and management information systems and developed new “administrative” responsibilities (e.g., grant programs, work-study programs, counseling, library networks, licensing centers, etc.).

Organizational forms of state-level control also evolved during the decades between 1970 and 1990. While some states created new state boards and others strengthened existing ones during the 1960s, it was evident by the 1970s that state coordination in most states was well-developed. Most state systems employed processes such as “master planning” to control growth in programs and capital expenditures and to balance costs and enact regulations on proprietary institutions that sought state support (Mingle, 1988). To support these functions, state boards also greatly expanded their data collection and management information systems in the 1970s, a trend that continues

today with calls for greater accountability for academic outcomes and financial responsibility.

These forces combined to create the contemporary state policy environment for higher education. By 1974, only three states *did not* have some form of state-level control over public higher education (Berdahl, 1975). The premise was that centralized governance would replace “poorly informed, inadequately coordinated actions ... [with] knowledgeable planning, adaptation, and policy development” (Hearn & Griswold, 1994, p. 161). By the latter years of the 1980s, at least 27 states studied or recommended changes in the structure of higher education governance, resulting in 14 states making structural changes in areas such as board authority, state governance of community colleges and adding new governance responsibilities for some, if not all, state institutions (McGuinness, 1994).

Designing Effective and High Quality Higher Education Systems (1980s to 1990s)

The 1980s saw the emergence of higher education on the political scene of most states. State leaders increasingly grappled with appropriate and “effective” structures to achieve the goals they sought. Mingle (1988) identified four important functions for effective organization and coordination of higher education: (1) master planning and strategic planning; (2) budget management; (3) academic program review; and (4) policy analysis.

As to the first, Mingle defined master planning as focused on role and mission development for program growth, campus facilities priorities and enrollment

management. Distinctly, strategic planning requires leaders to consider long-range issues that may affect future conditions in higher education, including high school graduation rates, labor market trends and state policy inclinations. The second area of coordination is budget management that carefully reflects the priorities of system governance and appropriates funding to institutions accordingly. Review of academic programs and institutional accreditation is a third function. Program review allows the system to avoid unnecessary duplication of program offerings, thus averting excessive competition among institutions or campuses and inefficiencies in use of state funding. These reviews can also be tied to the goals set through planning, thus aiding accountability and assuring quality.

The fourth function is policy analysis, which Mingle (1988) described as “one of the most constructive and valuable functions...for these reports and discussions serve to break down the barriers between sectors and focus attention on long-term issues that campuses may be avoiding” (p. 420). Whether a coordinating board or a governing board, Mingle concluded that “effective coordination begins with the goals of the state and its citizens” (p. 418).

Academic quality in the 1980s was also defined by policies that set standards for pre-college testing, admission and graduation standards. Assessment of outcomes, common in secondary education, migrated to higher education with a renewed emphasis on teaching and learning and concerns about access to higher education for new populations of students. The economic slow-down in the early 1980s heightened state interest in economic and workforce development, and state leaders sought new ways for

universities to engage their communities, particularly business communities, in economic endeavors, such as applied research and business growth strategies (Mingle, 1988).

Structural changes in the 1980s emerged as boards responded to national reports calling for closer evaluation of the quality of higher education. “In the past, the traditional state coordinating functions of planning, budget review, program review and administration were carried out with little expectation or intent of affecting the internal dynamics of institutional autonomy. Now, governors and legislators...expect [boards] to be agents of change, to use a variety of policy tools as levers to affect the overall direction of the state’s higher education system...” (McGuinness, 1994, p. 145).

As policy directives emerged in the early 1990s – many concerning performance or accountability standards – state systems and governing board roles continued to evolve. Lawmakers responded with structural changes or changes in authority that reflected issues that were more complex than those initially of concern to policy-makers in earlier decades. State leaders considered the relative balance between: centralization versus de-centralization; bureaucratic control versus educational leadership; a “one-size-fits-all” mentality versus unique institutional missions; and system office services versus directing responsibility to campuses (MacTaggart, 1996). “As in the previous period, “accountability” remained a watch word of reform, but public perceptions about how best to achieve accountability shifted during the 1980s and 1990s; markets, rather than governments, became viewed as offering the surest mechanism for achieving important state policy goals and for improving institutional quality, effectiveness, and efficiency” (McLendon & Ness, 2003, p. 69).

Designers or reformers of higher education governance began to consider both the policy environment and system design – the structural construct – of higher education. Governance of public higher education began to be characterized by a growing trend toward *external* governance. A comprehensive study by Gayle, Tewarie and White (2003) described the influences that affect governance structures for the 21st century. The authors cited that leaders must view higher education in multiple ways as “organized goal-oriented structures, as sociopolitical and economic entities, as human resource-driven enterprises, and bearers of symbolic meaning, defining and depicting the relationship between the college or university and the community” (p. 7). External governance is commonly recognized as the response by administrative leaders to the interests of external stakeholders, such as legislators, governors, government agencies and boards, state policy groups and federal agencies (Hines, 2000; Richardson et al., 1999).

Emerging Public Expectations of Higher Education (1990s to 2000s)

Growing expectations for public higher education to meet students’ educational needs and satisfy public expectations emerged in the 1990s. Broad demands for access, coordinated academic programming, increasing financial allocations and setting educational missions that meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population compelled lawmakers and government leaders to expect higher education leadership to balance institutional autonomy and accountability for state-imposed goals in its management practices (Burke, 1994). Hines (2000) cited five major themes that emerged

in the 1990s related to governance: first, the complexity of balancing internal and external interests, which he describes as “multiple claimants on authority” (p. 105); second, the emergence of corporate styles of governance; third, a focus on higher education as a public good; fourth, structures of system governance that are diffuse; and fifth, higher education as an instrument of state policy. These trends are supported in research that illustrated in a variety of ways that external “claimants on authority” are evidenced in higher education governance structures, policies and practices.

Richardson et al. (1999) described influences that shape state higher education performance. An influential factor cited by the authors is the way state governments choose to balance academic values and “the market.” With increasing fiscal pressures for state resources, competition from the so-called “knowledge industry,” and a call for state agencies to work more efficiently, states encouraged systems of higher education to consider market forces in developing strategies, policies and practices.

The market is defined as “the broad array of interests and influences that are *external* to the formal structures of both state government and higher education” (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 6). This concept includes economic interests, such as competitive pressures, customer satisfaction, cost and price, as well as other factors influencing public needs such as demographic changes, workforce development and use of new technologies. Influential non-economic factors in higher education include student satisfaction, public perceptions and value judgments. The authors also cited the importance of system processes to manage the interface between higher education, state government and the market.

Governance trends in the 1990s also reflected conflicts over the efficacy of centralization and de-centralization as state governments struggled over the traditions of autonomy in higher education and perceived cost controls if freed from government regulation and increasing expectations to meet public needs (Novak, 1996). Other state leaders expressed frustration with academic leadership unwilling or unable to innovate on public higher education policy. Of particular interest were newly developed empirical methods to examine the relationship between *types* of governing bodies and the import or impact of structures on policy development. Questions emerged, such as, has the adoption of more centralized governance arrangements in postsecondary education influenced the nature of the policy climate in the states, and have more effective or innovative policies been developed and implemented in those states with the more clearly centralized arrangements? (Hearn & Griswold, 1994).

Other researchers viewed the development of centralized higher education governance systems, not from a policy perspective, but relative to the emergence of business management practices in higher education – specifically, how system leaders identified short-term and long-term goals, and how funding resources and budgeting were a reflection of system priorities. Researchers traced the roots of these practices to ascertain their effective migration from business into public higher education governance (Harclerod, 1975).

As governing bodies grew in both number and authority during the 1990s, and it was evident that systems would be more prevalent, not less, in American higher

education, researchers focused on identifying different forms of state governance structures and their characteristics.

Organizational Models and Nomenclature of System Governance

McGuinness (1994) distinguished between two fundamental types of state board structures: those that have governance over public colleges and universities and those that coordinate all postsecondary education institutions, public and private. Within the realm of the former, and drawing on categorizations defined by Clark and Gade (1962), the author identified a three-part typology for state governing boards:

Consolidated governance systems. Typically this type of system governs either all institutions (two-year and four-year) or similar institutions (research and four-year or community colleges); each type may have its own governing board.

Segmented systems. Separate boards cover each separate type of institution, including, perhaps technical colleges or adult-learning colleges.

Single-institutional boards. Each institution is autonomous and does not operate under the authority of a governing board or multi-campus system.

Coordination is described as those “formal and informal approaches taken by states to handle the interconnections between the state and the higher education enterprise” (McGuinness, 1994, p. 127). These “interconnections” may occur through a group of staff to the board, but may also include staff in the governor’s office, a licensing agency, a student financial aid office or other such state-sponsored organizations for higher education. Functions typically carried out through coordinating agencies are: planning, policy analysis and setting state policy directions, approving and or defining

institutional missions, academic program review, budget formulation and funding allocation, administering financial aid programs, designing and implementing information and assessment systems, and authorizing or licensing institutions.

The difference between governing boards and coordinating agencies is that governing boards usually carry out all the functions of coordinating agencies in addition to governing functions. Governing boards typically have authority to: develop and implement policy; appoint, compensate and evaluate system executive leadership; set faculty personnel policies; have authority to allocate resources among institutions; set rates of tuition and fees; and advocate for the needs of institutions to the legislature and governor.

In general, therefore, states' structures fall into one of three classifications: consolidated governing boards, regulatory coordinating boards and planning agencies/advisory boards; each emphasizing different roles and responsibilities (Millard, 1980) and often falling within a continuum that reflects relative state control over institutions (Wellman, 2006). While governing boards manage institutional missions and allocate resources, coordinating boards emphasize comprehensive long-range planning, policy development and consumer advocacy with little budgetary control. Coordinating boards seek to balance the interests of both public and private institutions, which may result in a lack of support from both sectors of higher education. In addition, given their lack of direct influence on budgets, policy recommendations by coordinating boards are often largely ignored (Mingle, 1988). Wellman (2006) suggests the distinction between coordinating and governing is more linguistic than reflective of control.

Notwithstanding these general classifications, most state structures are more specifically designed to reflect the culture of the state with respect to institutional autonomy; historical or traditional relationships between state government and its people or organizations, political exigencies, state population and student enrollment; and the relative quality of state and board leadership (Hines, 1988; McGuinness, 1994; Millard, 1980; Mingle, 1988).

Based on emerging policy concerns over quality, rising costs, the need to serve low-income students and competitive market pressures, Richardson, Bracco, Callan and Finney (1998) questioned whether traditional forms of state systems could adequately address the growing tensions between the policy initiatives at the state level and the academic interests of higher education leaders. “An effective balance within and across three policy levels – the macro state policy environment, system design and practical work processes – promotes the general welfare. The goal of state policy is to exercise state authority to achieve public priorities by balancing, within and across complex policy levels, the influence of academic institutions and the influence of the market broadly defined” (p. iv).

MacTaggart (1996) cited four reasons to expect systems to remain a part of the higher education landscape. Foremost, systems mediate conflicting institutional demands among regions of the state, or areas of growth and decline, as they vie for state resources to gain access to higher education. Systems facilitate political and economic equilibrium in states undergoing dramatic demographic shifts. Second, aspects of shared governance, namely faculty collective bargaining and student representation in governance, are more

adequately addressed by systems. While campus differentiation may hold some appeal, ultimately most state systems favor equal treatment in the bargaining process that provides access to decision makers at the highest level of governance. Third, international trends at the time favored centralization to facilitate greater student mobility across institutional types. And, last, states have come to expect higher education to be a form of reinvented government, where greater efficiencies and accountability are close at hand and freed from competing institutional interests.

Using a comparative study of seven states, Richardson et al. (1999) analyzed how state governance structures affect performance by seeking to ascertain a structure that most adequately balances the interests of institutions and educational professionals with broader societal concerns. “States that uncritically preserve policies and systems that were created to respond to a different set of priorities may be indulging either the self-serving tendencies of institutions or the most immediate demands of the market at the expense of emerging needs of greater long-term consequence” (p. 14).

Based on their analysis, the authors designated three system designs: segmented, unified and federal state systems. Segmented systems have multiple, largely autonomous governing boards for one or more institutions and tend toward preserving academic interests over state policy interests. Unified systems are governed by a single board, are interdependent with state government and institutions are closely identify with the system. Federal systems typically have a state coordinating board, but individual governing boards manage the affairs of institutions. Federal systems are similar to

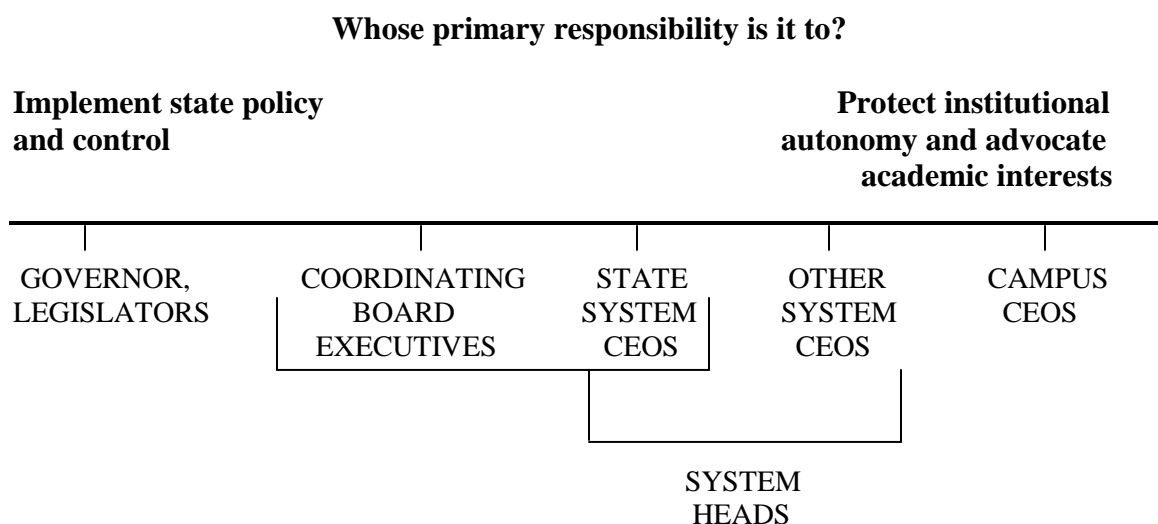
unified systems, but individual institutions have greater autonomy over strategic direction, accountability and advocacy.

These design types reflect the extent to which states fall on the continuum of state influence versus academic control, yet Richardson et al. (1999) concluded that compared to control mechanisms at the operational level, system realignment or reform may not result in policy changes desired by state leaders. Notwithstanding political issues that challenge states to reform higher education, “the appropriate role of states is to use the policy tools at their disposal at each level – policy environment, system design and work processes⁵ – that will most likely result in the desired education performance” (p. 23). Before considering reorganization, McGuinness (1994) advocated that states reflect on both the potential disruption and cost of reorganization, consider alternative relationships among policy makers and institutions to ensure accountability and clarify problems that reorganization may or may not address.

Figure 1 illustrates the continuum of responsibility ranging from addressing issues of concern to state policy makers to protecting the interests of colleges and universities. Straddling the middle to balance these interests are system boards and system heads (Hines, 1988).

⁵ Work processes are practices and procedures of governance and administration, including data management, budgeting, institutional and program planning, articulation and collaboration.

Figure 1

*Chief Decision Makers in Public Higher Education Systems*⁶

While there is consensus in the literature regarding recent trends in governance structures for public higher education, less explicit are the implications of these trends for state board leadership and system heads. The development of “multiple claimants on authority” and external forces indicate that governance, as traditionally defined, is obsolete and should be reinterpreted to respond to the dynamic and global nature of higher education.

Governance and Leadership

Interpreting the exigency of the public agenda is the role of “intermediaries” – system boards of trustees and system heads – as they govern and provide leadership to public higher education. Fundamental to board and trustee responsibility (albeit not often understood by many lay board members) is the notion of *shared governance*. In

⁶ Source: Petitt, 1997, p. 197, as cited in Hines, 1988.

academic parlance, shared governance reflects the role of faculty in institutional decision making, but, in a general sense, shared governance is defined as the judgment of trustees to determine when and how internal and external constituents participate in decision making for the organization (Ingram, 1993).

Robert O. Berdahl (1989) in his essay *Shared Governance and External Constraints* suggested that while academic freedom is widely understood as a concept⁷, it has evolved significantly over time such that traditional notions of “freedom” and “autonomy” have broad boundaries subject to interpretation and that are now more reflective of shared governance. Whether considering the influences of alumni, donors, foundations, research funders, accrediting bodies, faculty unions, state or federal government policies, it is essential that academic interests (e.g., faculty) take note.

Birnbaum (2004) argued that shared governance is essential to an academic institution but may be counterproductive in educational institutions where serving the *market* is preeminent in their mission and goals.⁸ Institutions that strive to be academic tend to value shared governance. He concluded, “People are more likely to defer to the moral authority of structures and processes when they are developed so as to be

⁷ Berdahl (1989) suggests this common understanding of academic freedom refers to the areas of political, social and religious orthodoxy and the need to prevent some external agent from finding that some faculty member has offended an element of orthodoxy, thereby creating tensions between the academy and society (p. 217).

⁸ Birnbaum cited as an example the corporate university, which may be conceived of, not as an institution of higher education, but a division of a private corporation that engages in training of its employees and typically limits its scope to providing job-specific or company-specific training.

consistent with existing social norms”⁹ (p. 16). Governance in public higher education systems is *a priori* a reflection of both external “claimants on authority” and academic and programmatic goals. Current criticisms of governance focus on the explosive nature of external influences and often portend reorganization of governance structures as the likely result (Kaplan, 2004; McGuinness, 2002).

Defining Public Priorities and Balancing the “Middle Ground”

In his introduction to *Conflict in Higher Education*, Millet (1984) explicitly set forth the thesis for his study of 25 state higher education governance systems as a conflict between state government coordination and institutional independence:

...state government interest in higher education is different from the campus and governing board interest in higher education. Faculty members, campus executives, and even governing board members are wont to declare that institutional interests and state government interests are one and the same...[yet] in a state government with limited resources and with conflicting claims upon those resources, there must be means whereby governors and legislatures can determine the urgent priorities of higher education in the light of state interests.

(p. xiv)

The current challenge to meet the expectations of lawmakers, governors and other public constituents to address changing demographics in race and ethnicity, access to

⁹ Birnbaum described this as distinguishing between *hard* and *soft* governance. Hard (or rational) governance refers to the structures, regulations, and systems of sanctions in an organization that define authority relationships, prescribe certain organizational processes and encourage compliance with enacted policies and procedures. Soft (or interactional) governance encompasses the systems of social connections and interactions in an organization that help to develop and maintain individual and group norms” (p. 10).

education for traditionally underserved populations and efficiency and cost-effectiveness requires that state board leaders be attuned to addressing these complex policy imperatives. McGuinness (1999) cited escalating demands for college-educated graduates, the tendency of higher education to resist change, the public perception of disconnection from academic insiders and the instability of political leadership as contributing factors to strained relationships and increasing conflict over public leadership and governance.

Leadership: State Boards

The tradition of appointing lay – non-academic and non-elected citizen – appointees to public boards of trustees is traced by several authors to European institutions centuries ago as a way to curb perceived excesses by the professoriate (Ingram, 1993; Kerr & Gade, 1989). While the model of lay trustees is often traced to corporate America, these authors argue that early American higher education institutions had ‘councils’ or advisory roles for business and religious leaders that predated most corporate board entities. Brubacker and Rudy (2002) noted that, while governing boards adopted many of the techniques of corporate boards, “the colleges in other respects reflected in their system of organization the atmosphere of democratic control and freedom which gave higher education in the United States a distinctive cast” (p. 434). The independent status of lay boards provides ways for public citizens and the private sector to influence higher education policy, on the one hand, and, on the other, affords a layer of protection to faculty to pursue academic interests without undue influence of partisan politics (Lingenfelter, 2004).

In general, volunteer lay boards are seen as non-intrusive and sympathetic supporters of higher education, often having an interest in and some knowledge of the higher education field and, while vested in financial and other oversight responsibilities, they afford presidents and system leaders (e.g., chief executive officers and their staff) latitude to manage most aspects of their organizations (Ingram, 1993; Zumeta, 2001).

As public higher education systems emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, free-standing boards – boards that governed a single public college or university – became the exception rather than the rule (Kerr & Gade, 1989) and, with it, came greater political influence by trustees who were either elected as trustees or appointed by governors. Gubernatorial appointment is the most common way trustees are selected for service on governing boards, but some community colleges and state university systems elect public trustees. While political intrusions are inherent in either instance, certain advantages may result from relationships with government officials in ways that concern state funding or policy development (Hines, 1988).

Brubaker and Rudy (2002) described this as a way to create “checks and balances,” reminiscent of democratic federal government structures, thereby mitigating the potential for undue influence by any one group, whether administrators, faculty or alumni. “We are thus presented with a picture of college and university government whose main emphasis is on initiative rather than uniformity, freedom rather than constraint, responsiveness to the public will rather than imposition by remote authority” (Brubaker & Rudy, 2002, p. 434).

In 1973, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education devised a “Pattern for Distribution of Authority” between public control and institutional independence. Referring specifically to governance rights, the public has the right to insist on political neutrality of institutions of higher education; to appoint (or elect) trustees to governing boards; reports and accountability on matters of public interest; and appropriations of government funds that reflect the “quantity and quality of output,” among others (Millet, 1984, p. 218).

Nason (1993) described the traditional responsibilities of boards of trustees as: (1) appointing, supporting and monitoring the president, (2) insisting on clarity of mission, (3) understanding the educational programming of the institution in order to shape budgets, (4) ensuring the financial stability of the institution or system, and (5) interpreting the campus to the community. As to the last, the author described this role as “interpreting the expectations, needs, and changes in society to those whose lives are largely bound up in the academic community. Society is always changing, but established institutions tend to resist change” (p.109).

Nason (1982) recognized distinct challenges for trustees of public higher education systems. The concerns of system trustees were characterized in terms of responsibility to the citizenry of the state writ large, such as ensuring that citizens receive the educational services they need and that institutions are supported to provide these services – as institutions with distinct missions. Nason also advocated that system trustees protect institutions from direct political control, support institutional autonomy to the extent possible and, potentially, allow institutions special consideration from rigid

state requirements or regulations. System trustees are also expected to provide leadership for long-range planning. "...the trustees' role in demanding and approving long range plans is...*a fortiori* applicable to the trustees of statewide systems. In the best of times plans are an enormous asset. In the worst of times they are essential" (Nason, 1982, p. 50).

Ingram (1993) described 11 responsibilities of governing board trustees, noting the importance that trustees carefully distinguish between board responsibilities and administrative or executive leadership responsibilities. Navigating overlaps in roles applies to all areas of trustee responsibilities including: selecting and evaluating the chief executive officer; financial and facilities management; fundraising and other development activities; interacting with campus representatives; working in the political arena with legislators and members of the executive branch; faculty issues; and responding to political, social and ethical issues.

Johnstone (1999) described nine essential functions or decisions of public multi-campus systems. Fundamental, at the outset, is the determination of or adjustment to institutional missions, not only each institution individually, but in ways that are congruent with the system's mission as a whole. Arriving at consensus on the mission of a multi-campus system reflects the organization's ability to artfully employ processes of both shared governance and strategic planning. An additional function, the appointment and evaluation of the head of the system, follows an understanding of the mission, vision and goals of the system.

Johnstone (1999) described board functions in terms of two-directional advocacy: advocating to the state the needs of campuses *and* advocating to the campuses the needs of the state. “The public multi-campus system is at its best when this natural tension between the traditions and priorities of the academy and those of government are in a constructive balance, with the governing boards, and especially the system head, tipping the direction to best serve the very long range public interest” (p. 14).

Other multi-campus system functions track closely with the traditional areas of trustee responsibilities described by others – albeit with more complexity – such as, fiscal management and allocation of resources among campuses; acting as a liaison between state government and the system and its institutions; and determining and assessing programmatic priorities. Unique to systems of public higher education, Johnstone (1999) mentioned ways in which governing boards can foster cooperation among campuses. He cited, for example, system-wide agreements for system human resource or financial systems, articulation agreements between two- and four-year programs, common general education courses and joint purchasing.

In the 1980s, however, a distinctive period emerged in the evolution of higher education governance as policy makers became disillusioned with institutionally focused board trustees and insufficient attention focused on quality (Heller, 2001; Mingle & Epper, 1996). Inattentiveness to the complexity of issues in the public arena, many of which diverged from issues traditionally addressed by trustees (particularly those governing independent or private institutions), created public tension over higher education. Public meetings, politicization of issues, and public scrutiny of student

success (or failure) were additional challenges faced by trustees of public institutions or systems. When the political process was involved, the potential for tensions arose over whether decisions were made for political reasons that might overshadow the most pressing educational concerns.

The role of interpreting public priorities for both internal and external constituents, neither of whom directly appoints trustee members, may be where problems emerge (Hines, 1988, p. 385). Lingenfelter, Novak, and Legon (2008) in *Excellence at Scale – What is required of public leadership and governance in higher education*, described the relative “autonomy” of public higher education as a “social institution” rather than as a direct government service, yet suggest, today, that it is a questionable construct. Changing conditions may require new priorities in higher education that more directly address the delicate decision-making balance higher education leaders must create between excellence in education and solutions to important human problems.

In *Pursuing the public’s agenda: Trustees in partnership with state leaders* (MacTaggart & Mingle, 2002), the authors encouraged board trustees to step beyond traditional roles to address a larger set of objectives to “promote the common weal” (p. 2) by placing the “educational, economic, and social needs of the larger society first, above the priorities of higher education institutions” (p. 2). This ‘public agenda,’ as the authors promoted, may address such issues as raising low college participation rates, promoting rural economic development, addressing adult illiteracy, working with under-prepared adult workers and, depending on institutional mission and purpose, addressing such social problems as health care, the environment or housing.

Bastedo (2005) characterized the emergence of boards in the 1990s and early 2000s as *activist boards*.¹⁰ The author used this nomenclature to describe a kind of board that has specific roots and characteristics. The increasing activism of boards and trustees appears to be a result of both public pressures for accountability and transparency and the failure by academic administrations to address serious problems of cost containment, productivity, development of private resources, and diversity (Kezar, 1999). Bastedo (2005) defines activist boards as “those who take an independent and aggressive role in the policy-making process, resulting in organizational characteristics that are appreciably distinct from traditional boards” (p. 552). Participating in “strategic action” is cited by the author as characteristic of activist boards, using the case study of Massachusetts as an example of implementing significant policy change that reflected state policy goals, yet allowing for some campus autonomy.

Bastedo (2005) used a case study of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education to study the extent to which policy change is influenced by board members/leaders whom he characterized as *institutional entrepreneurs*. In describing the legacy of board activism in Massachusetts, Bastedo revealed several surprising results, among them: by giving campus presidents discretion in implementing board policies and holding them to

¹⁰ In 2000, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges formed a new center for trustee information and education that is now known as the Ingram Center for Public Trusteeship and Governance. Initially, the Center was controversial with officials of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and appeared to be founded in response to “single-minded activists with personal agendas.” Leadership of the new Center, however, cited a need to emphasize the role of governing boards in persuading politicians to value colleges’ contributions to the state and to serve a balancing role between college presidents and state policy makers. The Center vowed to help boards select “level-headed leadership” and, as stated by the founding center executive director, Richard Novak: “We need to help elected leaders develop clear qualifications and expectations so we can get intelligent and active – but not activist – trustees.”

specific policy results, he concluded that each campus is even more closely tied to state government than previously; and, board autonomy is similarly compromised as an independent voice by close ties to the executive branch of Massachusetts. Yet, the author concluded that the political power amassed by board leadership had remarkable effects:

Consistently engaging higher education institutions over time provided credibility for board actions among powerful policy makers in the legislative and executive branches, leading to increased power. Increased power allowed the board to pursue increasingly ambitious policy agendas, helped shape policy statewide and nationally, and led to change in higher education institutions themselves. (p. 568)

Bastedo (2005) cautioned, however, that board trustees who pursue blatantly partisan agendas, whether rooted in personal conviction or political persuasion, are likely to encounter stiff resistance from deep-seeded norms of practice by higher education's academic professionals.

This phenomenon is noted by Zumeta (2001) who stated that determined governors or legislatures have the power, whether through board appointment or funding mechanisms, to affect policy, although the degree to which this occurs varies significantly. "Thus, the traditional buffering role of state higher education boards, like that of trustees, seems to be weakening. Increasingly, the boards are being used as instruments in states' efforts to enforce more business-like accountability standards on institutions" (Zumeta, 2001, p. 165). Higher education governance today can be characterized as a "significant ramp-up in the degree of government involvement in academic matters" (Zumeta, 2001, p. 155).

Figure 2 summarizes significant trends or shifts from a macro-perspective of higher education governance in the last 25 years.

Figure 2

*Changes in Assumptions About the State Role in Postsecondary Education*¹¹

A SHIFT FROM:	TO:
Rational planning for static institutional models	Strategic planning for dynamic market models
Focus on providers, primarily public institution	Focus on clients, students/learners, employers and governments
Service areas defined by geographic boundaries and monopolistic markets	Service areas defined by the needs of clients served by multiple providers
Tendency toward centralized control and regulation through tightly defined institutional missions, financial accountability and retrospective reporting	More decentralized management using policy tools to stimulate desired response (e.g., incentives, performance funding, consumer information)
Policies and regulation to limit competition and unnecessary duplication	Policies to “enter the market on behalf of the public” and to channel competitive forces toward public purposes
Quality defined primarily in terms of resources or inputs, e.g., faculty credentials or library resources, as established within postsecondary education	Quality defined in terms of outcomes and performance as defined by multiple clients (students/learners, employers, government)
Policies and services developed and carried out primarily through public agencies and public institutions	Increased use of nongovernmental organizations and mixed public/private providers

¹¹ Adapted from: McGuinness, 2002, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/37/76/3776.doc>

In view of shifting expectations for higher education to solve economic and social problems, growing levels of activism in policy development by board trustees, and higher expectations for accountability by public constituents, it is no surprise that the roles of board trustees have reached a level of complexity unimagined 10 years ago. Ingram's (1993) comprehensive governance handbook provides critical guidance for trustees of colleges and universities and public multi-campus systems. The handbook extensively details the changing environment of higher education and the transitions trustees are expected to navigate. Making strategic decisions about the future direction of higher education in the state is one of the key roles of trustees of multi-campus systems.

As mentioned earlier, much of the research in the last decade investigates the state-level policy effects of different higher education governance structures and institutional arrangements. The relationship between policies and state centralization or control over higher education is explored, if not widely studied, yet the actual congruence of these same state policies as they are crafted at the state level strategies and implemented by public four-year colleges and universities has not been explored.

Szutz's (1999) research, based on an analysis of nine states and their system strategic plans, showed how strategic priorities of public higher education systems are grouped around four themes: educational, political, operational and social. All nine systems had similar strategic planning processes (both formal and informal) and the extensive involvement of many constituencies, including faculty. Within these four general themes, specific priorities emerged, many of which were common to at least six

of the nine states, including: access, economic development, enrollment planning, quality, adequate funding, efficiency/effectiveness, diversity and technology.

By cross tabulating specific priorities against the general themes, Szutz found, however, significant aspects of system strategic plans driven by the political arena with educational and operational themes (e.g., technology, diversity and enrollment planning) underlying less dominant remaining priorities. Szutz concluded from this analysis that, "...college and university systems, especially publicly supported systems, prosper or languish in the very real world of politics, economics, public opinion, budget exigency, downsizing, external competition, and numerous other vicissitudes" (p. 97). Szutz (1999) was careful to note, however, that strategic planning will remain an important mechanism by which higher education systems address challenges and take advantage of opportunities. Szutz (1999), quoting McGuinness, concluded, "the relevant issue is not the abstract question of whether systems should exist but rather how systems should be designed and structured so that they stimulate, support, and sustain an outstanding, highly diverse, and responsive higher education enterprise" (p. 82).

A key issue discussed in the literature is the extent to which various governance designs for higher education affect state financial support or have an impact on educational outcomes. Researchers presented conflicting viewpoints on the benefits of centralization or decentralization of state control and noted that evidence supporting either is difficult to find (McGuinness, 1999). Volkwein's 1987 study of academic regulation found that states with low levels of public financial support tended to have loose regulatory policies over higher education, yet, based on later research, Volkwein

found few specific factors, either socioeconomic or political, that predict the level of regulation in states (Nettles & Cole, 2001).

While centralization of state coordinating and governing functions was a significant phenomena in the 1980s and 1990s, at least 16 states enacted legislation decentralizing authority from the state to the campus level between 1981 and 2000 (McLendon, 2003). Described in the literature as “flexibility legislation,” public-private institutions (“charter colleges”) or disaggregating systems, the rationale for a more decentralized approach is a result of both state control and financing. “Among its implications, the decentralization phenomenon raises important questions about the nature of public policymaking to reform the campus-state regulatory relationship, questions to which scholars have paid surprisingly little attention” (McLendon, 2003, p. 482-483).

Describing these changes as “regulatory restructuring,” McLendon (2003) reviewed case studies of states that provided greater autonomy to institutions. He identified a variety of benefits that accrued to institutions, both in terms of governance effectiveness and clarity of academic mission, but higher education governance restructuring was less successful with outcomes that supported statewide objectives (e.g., statewide planning, resource allocation and program duplication). McLendon’s (2003) research concluded that structural governance reform may not result in the policy changes desired by state leaders. “Despite initial progress in testing varied approaches to the effects question, an insufficient number of empirical studies exist to make a

determination about the extent to which different regulatory relationships may be associated with particular campus- or state-level outcomes” (McLendon, 2003, p. 95).

Governance decentralization (deregulation) and funding of state public higher education are inextricably linked in the public policy literature. Wellman (2006) illuminated:

At the public policy level, a changing labor force, demographic developments, and educational delivery trends are forcing greater need for policy-level attention to statewide and cross-sector interest than in previous generations. But the political pressures are moving away from public policy in preference for institutional and market-based solutions, accompanied by the rhetoric of accountability in the name of performance. (p. 56)

Another framework for market-driven change is privatization. Whitney (2004) defined privatization as “the shifting of the proportion of public, state-appropriated funds to non-state sources ... as the principal institutional funding sources” (p. 30). Further, the author posited a conceptual framework to facilitate an understanding of the complex relationship between state funding and control of public higher education:

$$\text{Control} + \text{Finance} = \text{Likelihood of Privatization}$$

This equation provided the basis for an analysis of states’ likelihood of privatization by measuring the level of state control and the level of current funding to create a privatization index that benchmarked each state¹². Whitney’s findings showed

¹² Whitney (2004) examined 369 public four-year institutions from all 50 states for this study.

that public institutions of higher learning have become funded proportionally more from private sources than from state-appropriated sources over the past 30 years.

What remained unexplored in Whitney's (2004) analysis, however, were measures that would describe control and funding of *systems* of higher education, different types of institutions within governing systems or other types of institutions such as smaller, regional universities. In addition, while many possible effects of privatization on areas of academic importance (e.g., research, demand for college access, remediation) are noted, the literature does not examine any one of these aspects in depth. And only a few states, e.g., Virginia and Colorado, have moved purposely and deliberately toward privatization, suggesting that trends in privatization are areas for future exploration (Kelderman, 2009).

Leslie and Novak's (2003) study of the journey of governance reform in five states and a review of current literature clearly indicate that the unpredictable and political nature of the policy making process had a substantial effect on governance reform in higher education. They posited that "higher education governance reforms – along with many other substantive issues decided by states – may be best understood as a direct (not indirect) product of political factors" (p. 104). Political factors, among them power and control by political leaders to attain voters' attention, were found to be instrumental in explaining the "story of reform."

Notwithstanding political pressures in states to reform higher education governance structures, "the appropriate role of states is to use the policy tools at their

disposal at each level – policy environment, system design and work processes¹³ – that will most likely result in the desired education performance” (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 23). States that “fail to establish an appropriate role for managing the conflicting pressures of professional values and the market end up with less satisfying outcomes than those that do” (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 15). The influential role of governing boards and system leaders is to “recognize that a good system takes the needs of the state, society, and colleges and universities into consideration but recognize also that state interests are not necessarily the same as the sum of institutional interests” (MacTaggart & Mingle, 2002).

Accountability

Economic challenges encountered in the 1990s gave rise to increasing expectations for accountability in public higher education (Heller, 2001). As the private sector struggled to compete in international markets, there was growing awareness that the education and skills of the American workforce provided a competitive advantage to U.S. firms. In addition, business leaders applied pressure for political leaders to manage state resources in line with common business practices. “Business leaders want educational institutions to pay more attention to quality control, customer satisfaction, and other “outcomes” of their activities” (Heller, 2001, p. 157). Financial pressures on states, along with increases in tuition rates that grossly exceeded the rate of inflation, caused lawmakers to scrutinize the efficiency of higher education, particularly as

¹³ Work processes are practices and procedures of governance and administration, including data management, budgeting, institutional and program planning, articulation and collaboration.

pressures grew to finance other essential state services (McGuinness, 1999; Mingle & Epper, 1996).

Historically, higher education institutions were able to address external accountability concerns by demonstrating their commitment to self-regulation through accreditation and other means (Ewell & Jones, 2006; McLendon, 2003a). Accrediting agencies emphasize ongoing evaluation and assessment processes to provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly inform strategies for continuous improvement. Rethinking of accreditation, however, was evident in proposals during the 1990s that included multi-tiered structures for accreditation, public reporting and common baseline standards that would apply across regional accrediting bodies (Ewell, 1994). The publication of *Measuring Up 2000* demonstrated this change in direction by applying common measures to benchmark state results in higher education (Ewell & James, 2006).

Burke (2005) defined new expectations for accountability by exploring the “accountability triangle”¹⁴ (p. 21): the response by higher education to balance state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces. These forces are described by Burke as sometimes presenting conflicting demands on higher education, yet accountability should assist in finding the appropriate balance among them. “Given the importance of state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces as representing political, professional, and market accountability, the center of the accountability triangle seems the ideal spot

¹⁴ Burke (2005) adapts the accountability triangle from Burton Clark’s triangle of state control, academic oligarchy, and market forces. The reference is: Clark, B.R., *The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

for an effective accountability system and perhaps for some of the accountability programs” (p. 23).

The extent to which state governance structures facilitate effective ways to measure and report outcomes in higher education is not entirely clear. It is argued that higher education systems that are highly regulated by state authorities run the risk of the state owning accountability, not institutions (Hines, 2000; Richardson & Smalling, 2005). At the other end of the spectrum, systems with single, strong governing boards are not necessarily successful in promoting accountability due to competing allegiances between priorities of faculty and administrators and those of external stakeholders. Coordinating boards and planning agencies able to access and report data, on the other hand, can be key drivers for effective accountability, “...they serve as independent and reliable sources of information about higher education performance in relation to statewide goals and priorities” (Richardson & Smalley, 2005, p. 64).

Accountability systems and measures designed around *institutional* purposes and effectiveness rather than around *public* purposes and needs were found to be a significant issue in the literature (Callan & Finney, 2005; Gaither, et al., 1999; Ruppert, 1995). Historical measures were heavily reliant on institutional inputs or procedures (process measures) and the reporting of data rather than direct ties to financial rewards or performance funding. Burke and Serban (1997), as cited in Heller (2001), identified in their research that most indicators (42 percent) are process indicators, a measure of how resources are allocated, and 20 percent were indicators of output, how much of something is produced, e.g., number of graduates, numbers of published research studies.

Alternatively, output measures, which Burke (2005) classified as focusing on efficiency, quality, equity, and choice, were less predominant in most states.

Today, the impetus and motivation for higher education to develop and adopt performance measures are significantly influenced by external forces. Burke (2005) described two initiation methods of accountability by state legislatures, mandated-prescribed and mandated-not prescribed, and accountability initiated by coordinating or governing boards, non-mandated. Legislative action by mandate can disrupt the delicate balance between the level of participation and commitment by academic leaders to accountability and their willingness to engage external interests.

In addition, Burke's (2005) research indicated that legislative requirements for performance funding and/or performance data rarely resulted in increased state funding or improved institutional performance. While performance-based funding was evident in about one-third of the states in the 1990s, these funds comprised only a nominal amount of most states' allocations to higher education (Hauptman, 2001; Zumeta, 2001). Funding decisions continue, for the most part, to be based on enrollment or other historical patterns of funding. State leaders did not minimize the value of accountability for external policy makers and the intended impact on public policy decisions, yet the transcendence of state accountability expectations with concomitant funding were not evident in substantial ways.

According to Page (2006), there are five types of accountability: hierarchical, legal, professional, political and market. Each type features a particular set of mechanisms by which an institutional leader is held to account. While Page asserted that

different mechanisms are employed by different stakeholders, leaders of higher education institutions are expected to address expectations of many stakeholders. In addition, board trustees use all of these mechanisms, some to a greater or lesser degree, to influence the work of presidents in meeting system expectations for performance. The author used the following definitions for types of accountability:

(1) Legal – the fiduciary or contractual obligations imposed by legislatures or other outside agencies through legal mandates. An example of a legal mandate is a compliance audit.

(2) Hierarchical – an obligation to obey the commands of a hierarchical superior. Examples include rules or procedures dictated by an individual's position or the performance goals specified by a superior.

(3) Professional – accountability that is based on specific standards and norms of the profession or that attest that a professional possesses expertise specific to the field or work. Examples include a professional credential or accreditation status.

(4) Political – the influence of external constituents (e.g., clients, organized interest groups, media general public) on the organization through advocacy or working through political officials to get their interests met or heard.

(5) Market – performance expectations of the market to offer products or services that hold sufficient appeal to prevent clients from foregoing them or seeking alternative sources or comparable substitutes.

A theoretical framework explored by Dee (2006) and informed by Dill (2001) indicated that enhanced performance in higher education may be related to alignment in

the transactional environment between state leadership and institutional leadership. Performance alignment in Dee's taxonomy is a form of dialectical perspective where accountability and autonomy are mutually supportive and there are strong connections between state and campus interests that lead to "both-and" rather than conflicting "either-or" thinking. Dialectical discourse is rooted in the notion that dialogue among individuals with differing views is a form of truth-seeking, and that through the exchange of ideas and the process of reasoning people can reach a mutually agreeable course of action.

According to Dee (2006), the dialectical perspective works to overcome the seeming paradox of accountability and autonomy in higher education. State systems should strive to manage the contradictory, yet interdependent, expectations between public leadership and institutional actors rather than focus on oppositional points of view. The alternative perspective, referred to as "structural-functionalist," identifies accountability and autonomy as independent "functions" that, while part of the whole management structure, compete with one another and where more of one means less of the other. The functionalist perspective of management tends to draw a line between campuses and the states such that accountability and autonomy are seen as dichotomous. Figure 3 more fully describes these two perspectives (Dee, 2006, p. 139).

Figure 3

Comparison of Functionalist and Dialectical Perspective

	<u>Functionalist Perspective</u>	<u>Dialectical Perspective</u>
Conceptualization of accountability and autonomy	Accountability and autonomy as oppositions, additional increments of one variable diminish the other	Accountability and autonomy as mutually supportive constructs, additional increments of one variable may strengthen the other
Campus-state relationships	“Drawing a line” between campus and state; maintaining appropriate boundaries	Building connections between campuses and state government
Policy goal	Finding a “midpoint” between accountability and autonomy	Maintaining high levels of both accountability and autonomy
Social cognitions of policy actors	Social construction of separate interests, “either-or” thinking	Social constructions of shared commitments, “both-and” thinking

Dee (2006) drew on the concept of loose coupling to frame the issues surrounding institutional autonomy and public accountability. Loose coupling “is an adaptive social structure that facilitates accountability to the external environment, and preserves the organization’s autonomy from the environment” (Dee, 2006, p. 144). The author described the essential notion that the dialectic of autonomy and accountability be framed in terms of “both-and” rather than “either-or” perspectives.

By asserting mutual co-existence, Dee (2006) argued that a loosely coupled organization can be designed to support flexibility and creativity, essential to adapting to changing environments, yet reflect the domain to which it is coupled – in this case, the external environment, which controls higher education financing and regulation. Tight coupling, on the other hand, reflects an organizational structure where everything is connected to everything else (Weick, 1976). In practice, Dee (2006) described tight

coupled organizations as favoring accountability mechanisms that relied upon prescriptive regulation, external oversight and affiliated institutions with little discretion in managing strategies and goals. Accountability mechanisms used in tightly coupled organizations include performance-based funding or performance indicators.

Dee concluded that, “Organizational change depends upon “both-and” thinking; change requires flexibility, autonomous work arrangements *and* clearly defined accountability relationships among employees” (Dee, 2006, p. 140). Dee recognized that public benefits result from state systems that support both institutional autonomy – flexibility in responding to external changes and control over management – and accountability that measures the alignment of strategic goals, is a campus responsibility and provides appropriate incentives. Successful governance systems, Dee asserted, facilitate strengthened relations between campus and state leaders and which are based on shared commitment and mutual trust.

Conclusion

Extensive research has addressed critical questions of policy implementation to determine the ways in which systems are accountable to public constituencies and government leaders. Yet, there is little empirical evidence that policy directions and other processes adopted by system-level boards have a direct correlation to college and university priorities, planning, or actions. This issue raises questions regarding the specific nature of the relationship between state governing boards and the institutions they govern. How do state boards of multi-campus systems know and understand the ways in which their intended goals for institutional accountability and performance

measurement meet public expectations for higher education? What factors enhance the accountability environment between system- and institutional-level leadership? How do boards and their trustees steer their “fleet” of institutions when winds of policy change blow from multiple directions?

While one might argue that broad accountability measures are sufficient for policy-makers, they are less practical and normative for boards and executive leaders charged with governing a system of higher education. Multi-campus system board trustees should have tools to effectively gauge the readiness of their institutions to strategically and intentionally respond to the competing claims of state-level accountability and institutional autonomy. What do we know about the mechanisms used by system leaders to engage and align their colleges and universities in meeting the performance expectations of state leaders?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The goal of this research is to answer the question, how do leaders of public multi-campus systems of higher education balance institutional autonomy and accountability to achieve their desired goals for performance? The goals of this study were to understand the characteristics of various accountability mechanisms used in state systems of higher education and how system leaders balanced expectations for accountability with the autonomy valued by college and university leaders. Topics of discussion in the chapter include an overview of the research, the study's mixed methods strategy, data sources, data collection strategies, the analytical framework, and methods of data analysis for the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

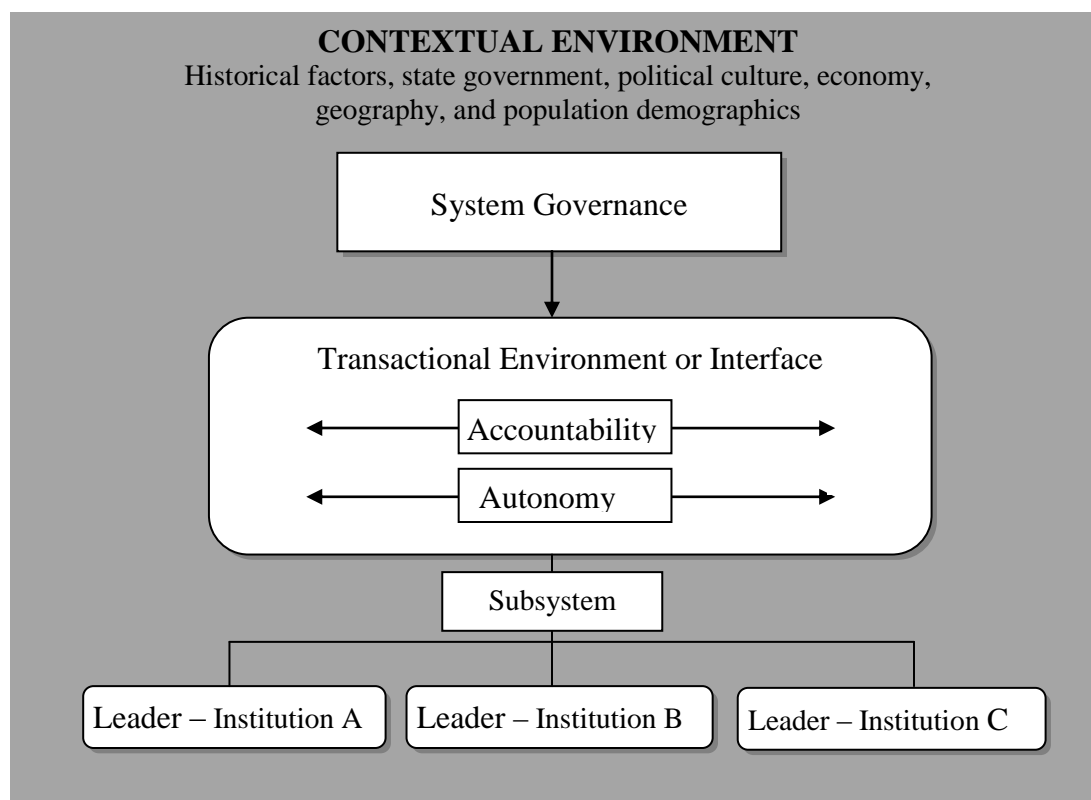
Research Overview

The research sought to uncover the normative aspects of higher education accountability in the context of multi-campus systems of higher education. In Richardson et al.'s (1999) comparative study of seven state higher education systems, the authors concluded that structural realignments of higher education or policy reforms may not result in the performance results desired by state leaders when compared to the manipulation of "control mechanisms" at the operational level, i.e., the processes of executive management such as the development of plans, deployment of resources and performance monitoring. Bowen et al. (1997) described the system of higher education as "a collection of *subsystems* that takes one or more kinds of inputs and creates an output that has value to the larger system of which it is, in turn, a part. Higher education

subsystems are linked to each other and to state government through a *transactional environment* or *interface* that both the state and the higher education subsystems influence, but neither controls. This transactional environment is dominated by *work processes* that involve some actors representing state government and others representing higher education” (p. 1). Figure 4 depicts the structure of governance including the contextual and the transactional environments. This research is influenced by the contextual environment, but is not directly an investigation into the influences that inhabit it, e.g., policies of state government, legislative partisanship, and the structural designs of systems of higher education.

Figure 4

Structure of Higher Education Governance



Theoretical Framework

The research design was based on a theoretical framework examined by Dee (2006) in his article *Institutional autonomy and state-level accountability: Loosely coupled governance and the public good*. The author used Weick's (1976) framework of loosely- and tightly- coupled organizations to illuminate how contemporary systems of higher education were initially drawn to forms of accountability that favored the use of data, policies and regulations, financial accountability, program oversight and performance measurement to control higher education institutions in these newly formed systems. As the market-place of higher education required further adaptation to changing conditions, systems decentralized in ways that eventually alarmed those accountable for public expenditures and higher education outcomes.

Dee (2006) proposed, however, a different lexicon and framework that positioned loosely coupled organizations of higher education with a dialectical perspective. According to the author, a dialectic perspective is one that supports the mutual interdependence of system leadership and institutional leadership, and can be created using certain structures and policies. He recommended that leadership in loosely coupled organizations consider five approaches to promote both high levels of accountability and autonomy in dialectical systems: one, create policy inducements rather than mandates; two, customize performance measurement rather than expect one size to fit all; three, promote capacity building, i.e., empower institutional leaders to define problems and craft solutions that uniquely fit their institution; four, promote campus-based assessments

rather than mandated measures; and, five, provide autonomy in academic program creation rather than require centralized approval.

Using this framework, this study was intended to analyze the characteristics of 18 types of accountability mechanisms found in the transactional environment between system leadership (heads of systems and board members) and institutional leaders (college and university presidents or chancellors), and to more fully understand whether and how system leaders approach development of dialectical relationships. The research was designed to explore the balance of accountability and autonomy between system leaders and institutions using a two-part, mixed methods research model. The rationale for using a two-part methodology was, first, to identify characteristics of accountability mechanisms – importance, flexibility and customization – from the perspective of institutional leaders who are expected to respond to the performance expectations of system leaders and, second, to examine how closely system leaders followed the dialectical path recommended by Dee (2006) for successful governance of loosely coupled organizations.

Research Design and Questions

Using survey data of institutional leaders, I explored characteristics of 18 accountability mechanisms, e.g., performance indicators, state and system policies, institutional and program accreditation, planning. The first part described *what* is happening with accountability in the transactional environment from the perspective of institutional leaders. The study also examined whether perspectives of accountability mechanisms differed between institutional leaders in low- and high-performing states.

This comparison was used to examine the possibility that, in states with different performance results, institutional leaders might view accountability differently. The second part of the study explored through qualitative research *how* system leaders seek to balance accountability and autonomy in the transactional environment. Although many state leaders also discussed their relationship with state policy makers in the external environment, that phenomena was not a primary research topic for this study.

The exploratory aspect of the research was to determine if “levels” of accountability and autonomy (in states with different performance outcomes) could be measured and placed on an axis from low to high. Dee (2006) indicated that high performance may be linked to state systems of higher education that have both high levels of accountability and autonomy (dialectical perspective), and that low performance may be linked to low expectations for accountability and a high degree of autonomy and vice versa. The qualitative aspects of the research also examined whether system leaders could identify governance structures or policies that supported shared commitment and trust in meeting state and system priorities.

The three primary research questions that guided the investigation were:

- (1) What types of accountability mechanisms encourage leaders of public higher education institutions to align their institutions with the performance expectations of the system and the state?
- (2) To what degree do these accountability mechanisms allow for flexibility and customization in how they are implemented that would indicate a level of trust and cooperation between system and institutional leaders?

- (3) What attributes of accountability are associated with performance of state systems of higher education? Specifically, are there differences between low- and high-performing states in how accountability is managed in the transactional environment between system leaders and institutional leaders?

A Two-Part Study

The first part of the study used an Internet survey of institutional leaders (college and university presidents or chancellors) to identify the relative importance of 18 accountability mechanisms. The study also examined the degree to which institutional leaders believed they were afforded flexibility and customization in the implementation of these accountability mechanisms on their campuses and which accountability mechanisms were reflective of the professional norms of higher education or were political or market-based. Another aspect was to provide a descriptive analysis of the 18 accountability mechanisms (the independent variable) that would lead to an explanatory strategy in relation to the phenomena of state performance (the dependent variable) (Creswell, 2003, p. 215).

In the second part, qualitative data based on interviews of state system heads and members of the state's higher education board were used to understand the extent to which these leaders afforded their college and university heads latitude and discretion to devise and measure ways to meet performance goals. The interviews provided depth to my understanding of which accountability mechanisms system leaders used and how they viewed the effectiveness of these mechanisms in ensuring performance consistent with system and state expectations.

In order to fully understand the transactional environment and the level of shared commitment, the two parts of the study were converged to reach conclusions about the importance of various accountability mechanisms and which mechanisms institutional leaders felt provided them with autonomy and discretion to meet the needs of their individual institutions. In addition, the purpose of the research was to ascertain the extent to which system leaders (heads and board members) attempt to improve performance by managing the interdependency of various mechanisms to balance accountability and autonomy.

Study Design

The study used a purposive, or criterion-based, sampling method as described in the literature (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998). The selection of study states was deliberate so as to explore particular settings in order to gain important information that could not be obtained from other choices. According to Merriam (1998), purposive sampling is “based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (p. 48). Purposive sampling also provides utility to the researcher to discern differences between units of analysis along a specified spectrum. Depending on the design of the study, purposive sampling may also allow for an analysis of maximum variation in the study results (Patton, 1990, p. 105).

In the present study, a comparative, multiple-case study of low- and high-performing states, as distinct from a single-case design, was selected to identify a range of factors in the research questions. Case study researchers have demonstrated that the

case study method can be used successfully to probe beneath the surface of a situation and to provide a rich context for understanding the phenomena under study (Yin, 2003).

The multiple case method was the most appropriate for this inquiry based on the researcher's interest in understanding the transactional environment of accountability and autonomy within the context of state performance and relations between the "actors" in the system of higher education, including system leaders, board members, institutional leaders, and, to a limited extent, legislatures. The goal was to explore multiple facets of accountability and autonomy including how system and institutional leaders view policy mandates, inducements and incentives, which mechanisms reflect the professional norms of higher education and which reflect political or market-based accountability.

The development of an explanatory theory also contributed to selecting this research method. Comparing a group of high-performing and low-performing state systems of higher education allowed for an explanation of two contrasting categories of states to identify factors that contributed to how and why system leaders strategically select different accountability mechanisms.

Survey Design and Data Collection

The three primary research questions guided the inquiry of institutional leaders' views of accountability using an Internet survey instrument. In addition, the survey was designed to examine the characteristics of various accountability mechanisms (the independent variable) with levels of performance in state systems of higher education (the dependent variable). The first research question was, *what types of accountability mechanisms encourage leaders of public higher education institutions to align their*

institutions with the performance expectations of the system? This question was explored on two levels in the survey: one, respondents were asked to rate the importance of each accountability mechanism, and, two, respondents were asked to identify accountability mechanisms considered to be “high stakes.” The specific questions asked in the survey were: 1) how important is each accountability mechanisms to you measured by the amount of time, attention and resources you expend? For this question, institutional leaders were asked to rank the importance of each mechanism on a scale of 0 (least important) to 10 (most important); and 2) rank the top five mechanisms you believe are most closely associated with rewards for meeting performance expectations or that may result in adverse consequences. Respondents were asked to rank the top 5 from 1 (highest) to 5 (lowest) to designate the five mechanisms they felt were most “high stakes.”

To answer the second research question, *to what degree do these accountability mechanisms allow for flexibility and customization in how they are implemented that would indicate a level of trust and cooperation between system and institutional leaders?*, respondents were asked to identify the degree to which he or she is provided discretion in setting accountability expectations. The attributes of flexibility and customization were defined by providing a choice of one of the following five answers: (1) I am able to set or determine a performance target or compliance standard for my institution with this accountability mechanism; (2) I am able to able to comment on or negotiate, but not determine a performance target or compliance standard for my institution; (3) The performance target or compliance expectations are set without feedback; (4) I am not

informed of the expectations of this performance target or compliance standard; and (5)

This accountability mechanism is not used in my state system of higher education.

The third research question, *what attributes of accountability are associated with performance of state systems of higher education?*, was explored through two questions in the survey that helped define characteristics of each accountability mechanism. The first question was, which mechanism(s) do you feel most represent professional norms of higher education? Respondents were asked to identify the top five out of the 18 defined accountability mechanisms, in no rank order. This question is reflective of institutional autonomy and the expected standard of behavior for professionals in higher education.

The second question was, which mechanism(s) do you feel most reflect political or market-based accountability? Respondents were asked to identify the top five out of the 18 defined accountability mechanisms, in no rank order. Political or market-based accountability is reflective of influences somewhat outside of the transactional environment of the state board, system head and institutional leaders; instead these accountability mechanisms reside closer to the contextual environment of state policy and other external market forces.

Accountability Mechanisms

The accountability mechanisms that were identified and defined in the survey were adapted from research by Tikalsky (2003). Tikalsky (2003) identified “accountability tools” in use by trustees of public research universities. Definitions of each accountability mechanism were written based on dictionary meanings, research literature and common usage, and were evaluated for clarity and meaning by two college

presidents of institutions in the Minnesota State College and University system. These definitions were included in the first survey question to ensure that respondents had a consistent understanding of each mechanism. The list of 18 mechanisms and their definitions are:

1. State funding allocation: State funding allocations are financial allocations that support the general operating budget of the college or university. These allocations may be raised through means other than state appropriation including local levies, property taxes, etc.
2. Performance- or incentive-based budgeting: Performance budgeting is defined as funding allocations that are awarded based on performance achieved in some area of interest to a state funding agency, legislative body or executive branch of government.
3. Performance indicators: Performance indicators are also known as “dashboards” or indicators of system performance that are determined by the state governing or coordinating board, usually in the context of a system strategic plan, and that are often published or made public through a system dashboard or other Web-based media.
4. Legislative reporting: Legislative reports are required by state legislative bodies in response to specific requests for information about the performance of higher education, and which may or may not be a requirement in law or statute.
5. Financial audits: A financial audit examines an institution’s internal controls and fiscal compliance. A financial audit is conducted by an independent third party,

such as an independent accounting firm or a legislative auditor, either annually or on some other agreed-upon schedule.

6. Federal policies: The system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning higher education promulgated by the federal government.
7. State policies: The system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning higher education promulgated by the state as the governmental entity.
8. System policies: A program of actions and requirements developed and adopted by a board responsible for the state's system of higher education.
9. Institutional Accreditation: The process of reviewing higher education institutions and programs for quality by private, non-governmental organizations created for the specific purpose of conducting evaluations of quality.
10. Quality rankings: A ranked list or comparison among higher education institutions that attempts to measure quality using common factors or indicators — explicit or implicit — among peer or like institutions.
11. Independent self-studies of the institutional programs: The process of establishing and applying standards that assure quality and continuous improvement, and that reflect the evolving nature of education, research, and practice in a program of study.

12. Strategic planning: The process of aligning an institution with its environment, establishing a context for accomplishing goals, and providing a framework and direction to achieve the organization's desired future.
13. Annual planning: A short-term plan that describes the institutions current situation, its objectives, strategy, planned actions, and budgets for the year ahead.
14. Master or facilities planning: A long-range planning process that considers first the academic plans of the institution, expected changes in student enrollment or faculty needs (and other academic considerations, including information technology), and subsequently maps out or plans facility needs (buildings, grounds, heating, ventilating) that would permit the institution to fulfill the academic goals of the institution.
15. Performance appraisal or review of the institution head: A performance review of the institutional leader by the system head (chancellor or president) based upon an annual work plan or other agreed-upon measures of performance or employment. Decisions regarding the pay or bonus of the institutional leader are usually a part of this review.
16. Union contracts: Compliance with faculty and/or staff contracts for labor where an audit or review may identify work rule issues or other aspects of non-compliance with a contract for employment.
17. Market factors: Published reports of quality or measures of success identified by clients. These measures often reflect on the reputation of the institution as perceived by the general public or known throughout professional circles in

higher education. Many market factors may have an influence on the competition for state or local financial resources in public systems of education.

18. Political factors: The interests of political officials that are not in policy.

Sample Selection

The process for selecting the two groups of study states was determined by comparing states that had high and low composite scores on three of six performance indices of higher education as identified in *Measuring Up 2008*. The *Measuring Up* reports, published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education since 2000, consist of a national report card for higher education and 50 state-specific report cards. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that conducts research and analyses of policy issues with a particular focus on opportunity and achievement in higher education. Because the current research was not intended to create a comparative measure of state performance, *Measuring Up 2008* provided a uniform and expedient way to make appropriate distinctions among states using its measures of postsecondary performance.

In *Measuring Up 2008*, state performance is evaluated, compared and graded in six key areas: preparation, participation, affordability, completion, benefits and learning. The preparation index reflects primarily the impact that *pre-college* education has on students and is defined by how well high school students are prepared to enroll in higher education and succeed in college-level courses. State scores on preparation were used as an initial selection criterion for states to be included in the study so there would be comparability in the students entering postsecondary education.

Three of the measures – participation, completion and benefits – specifically relate to outcomes in higher education and states’ performance. Participation is defined as access to opportunities for education and training beyond high school. Completion is defined by whether students persist in and complete certificate and degree programs in college. Benefits is a measure of the how college-educated residents contribute to the economic and civic well-being of the state. Composite scores on these three measures were used to select high-performing and low-performing states.

Two indices, affordability and learning, were *not* factored into the selection of study states. Affordability, a measure of the difficulty in paying for college when family income, the cost of attending college, and student financial aid are taken into account, was not considered since every state in the nation scored a failing grade (F), so no distinction among the states was possible. The other measure, learning, is defined by how college-educated residents perform on a variety of measures of knowledge and skills and is not currently scored in the *Measuring Up 2008* report.

In summary, based on *Measuring Up 2008*, states were eligible for the current study if they had: (1) a B- or better grade (raw score of 80 or higher) on the Preparation Index to hold constant pre-college student achievement, and (2) a composite score on participation, completion, and benefits below 240 for low-performing states (reflecting an average of less than 80 [B-] on the three indicators of participation, completion, and benefits) and 240 and above for high-performing states.

Two additional factors (not part of *Measuring Up 2008*) were also taken into account in the final selection of the low- and high-performing state systems. The first

factor was the percentage of students in the state enrolled in public postsecondary institutions. The states selected had between 74 percent and 89 percent of students enrolled (for both high-performing and low-performing states). By selecting states with comparable percentages of publicly enrolled students, the selectivity of private institution enrollment in the state would be less of a factor in the performance of the state's higher education system.

The second factor was the structural design of the state's governance system. The state governance model in the case study states are described by Richardson et al. (1999) as unified systems. Unified systems are defined as being governed by a single board that is interdependent with state government and has institutions that closely identify with the system. While state governance structures vary tremendously state-to-state, the selected states have a state board that provides a significant role in the governance of the state's public higher education system. States with only institution level governing boards, as distinct from multi-campus governing or coordinating boards, were not selected for the study since their transactional environment and control mechanisms are affected by their institution's board of trustees and institutional leadership. By holding constant state systems with similar, though not identical, governance protocols, the study states fall within a general continuum of state control over institutions. This allows other accountability factors that reside in the transactional environment to be more easily distinguished.

Selection of Low-performing States

Based on the selection criteria of a score of 80 or above on the preparation index and a composite score below 240 on three indices, all of the states in the low-performing category, except Texas, were selected to be part of the study. Texas was excluded because each university has its own institutional governance. The remaining five states, South Dakota, North Carolina, Ohio, Maine and Montana, also had the requisite percentage of public student enrollments over 74 percent.

Selection of High-performing States

Based on the selection criteria of a score of 80 or above on the preparation index and a composite score above 240 on three indices, 19 states were considered for the study. Of these, seven did not have public higher education enrollment above 74 percent (i.e., Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Illinois, Connecticut and Pennsylvania) and three had only institutional governance (i.e., Maryland, Colorado and New Jersey). In addition, several states were not included in the study for the following reasons: a) Virginia's system includes only 2-year institutions; b) New York has two public state systems and few states match the complexity of the environment of higher education in New York with one for the city of New York (City University of New York with 19 campuses) and another state system (State University of New York (SUNY) with 64 campuses); and c) Minnesota was not selected as a study state because the researcher works for the state system of higher education and there could have been perceived a lack of objectivity in the collection and analysis of data.

Final Selection of Study States

Table 1 summarizes the methodology that was used to select the set of states in the study and the five states identified as high-performing and the five states identified as low-performing, including reasons why some states were not selected due to a high percentage of private higher education enrollment or their governance structure.

Table 1

States Considered for the Study

Criterion 1:	Criterion 2:	Criterion 3:	Notations
States graded B-(80) or better on participation index	Composite of 3 indicators	Enrollment in public higher education ¹⁵	Type of governing arrangement and percent of public enrollments
<u>High Performing</u>			
Iowa	277	66%	Too few public student enrollments
Massachusetts	266	50%	Too few public student enrollments
Minnesota	265	76%	See explanation above
Maryland	256	87%	Institutional governance
Nebraska	256	79%	Coordinating board (4-year)
Utah	254	75%	Governing board (2- and 4-year)
Virginia	253	80%	Only 2-year colleges
Colorado	250	80%	Institutional governance

-- Table 1 Continued --

¹⁵ Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS), 2006.

Table 1 (continued)

States graded B-(80) or better on participation index	Composite of 3 indicators	Enrollment in public higher education ¹⁶	Type of governing arrangement and percent of public enrollments
Illinois	250	72%	Too few public student enrollments
New Hampshire	249	62%	Too few public student enrollments
North Dakota	247	86%	Governing board (2- and 4-year)
Vermont	246	63%	Too few public student enrollments
Connecticut	245	68%	Too few public student enrollments
Kansas	245	89%	Governing board (2- and 4-year)
Wisconsin	245	83%	Governing board (4-year)
New York	242	93%	See explanation above
New Jersey	241	84%	Institutional governance
Pennsylvania	240	58%	Too few public student enrollments
<hr/>			
<u>Low Performing</u>			
South Dakota	237	76%	Governing board (4-year)
North Carolina	229	83%	Governing board (4-year)
Ohio	227	75%	Governing board (2- and 4-year)
Maine	225	74%	Governing board (2-and 4-year)
Montana	216	89%	Governing board (2- and 4-year)
Texas	208	89%	Institutional governance

¹⁶ Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS), 2006.

The final factor that was reviewed relative to the selection of the 10 states was the relationship between state performance and funding levels. A study by Doyle (2007) using *Measuring Up 2000*, indicated no clear pattern of funding resources and performance in the 10 states identified for the study. Table 2 illustrates the variation of funding levels using three levels of funding (high, moderate and low)¹⁷.

Table 2

Funding Resource Level, by State Performance

High-performing States	High/Moderate/Low Resources
Nebraska	Moderate
Utah	Low
North Dakota	Low
Kansas	Moderate
Wisconsin	Moderate
Low-performing States	
South Dakota	Low
North Carolina	Moderate
Ohio	Moderate
Maine	High
Montana	Low

¹⁷ High, medium and low resources were determined by the author using data from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2004). High resources are determined as 80 percent or more of the top spending states (tuition, state and local spending); medium resources are 60-80 percent of the top spending states; and low resources are 60 percent or less of top spending states.

A selection of five states in each category, high-performing (Nebraska, Utah, Kansas, Wisconsin and North Dakota) and low-performing (South Dakota, North Carolina, Ohio, Maine and Montana), was considered a sufficient sample of states for the following reasons. Overall, the study size comprised 10 states out of the 24 that met the initial criterion of an 80 or better score on preparation, for a 42 percent sample selection of study states, and comprised 20 percent of all 50 states. The 10 study states are geographically dispersed throughout the nation and have no discernable pattern of control by specific political parties in the recent past.

A potential limitation of the research was the applicability of the findings to those states considered in the middle of the performance range. Alternative explanations may be required to fully understand the phenomena surrounding the performance of these states. The qualitative exploration of successful strategies by respondents in high-performing states may be of value to mid- and low-range states to improve their performance, however. Another limitation was the performance criteria for selection states focused solely on the instructional effectiveness of the institutions in each state. To the extent that a method that measured institutional performance that included service or research missions, the selection of the states may have been different than those identified for this study.

Instrument Design and Testing

Given the large number of potential survey participants and the broad geographic reach across 10 states, an Internet survey was designed to measure accountability mechanisms in the transactional environment between system and institutional

leadership. I followed a series of best practices in Internet survey research as identified by Umbach (2004). The author reviewed literature on best practices in Internet surveys in which important design, language and protocol conventions were found to reduce errors associated with coverage, measurement and non-responsiveness.

The design elements that were recommended and that I generally followed included: 1) use a simple survey design and limit the amount of color (test the survey on different computers); 2) use a welcome screen that is motivating and provides an estimate of the amount of time the survey will take, along with clear instructions and navigational hints; 3) make the first question interesting and easy to answer; 4) use a conventional format similar to paper surveys, such as avoiding open-ended questions and limiting line length, and divide the survey into meaningful sections; and 5) allow respondents to scroll from question to question and do not restrict a respondent from continuing by requiring answers.

As cited by Umbach (2004), other researchers have found that survey invitation protocols also increase response rates. The practices recommended included: (1) electronic communications should be personalized and written in a professional manner to reflect the position of the recipient; (2) communications should indicate how the prospective respondent was selected to be a part of the survey; and (3) the invitation should provide a link to the survey and an estimate of the length of time the survey will take to complete. Multiple e-mail contacts, such as one invitation and two or three reminders, were also recommended, although research showed that with each reminder returns drop off at a rapid rate.

The Internet survey tool I used was available through the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development's Academic Technology Department (the tool is called "CEHD Survey Tool"). After an initial design and layout was completed, I asked five presidents of community colleges and universities in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system to test the survey. These presidents provided feedback on the survey instructions, the language used in each of the six questions, the definitions of each accountability mechanism, the scale for each question's answer and the visual appearance of the survey. Based on this feedback, changes were made to improve the survey's readability and clarity.

Data Collection

Survey participants were identified as presidents or chancellors of two-year and four-year institutions that are part of a state system of higher education in each of the ten selected study states designated in either the high-performing or low-performing group. The survey participants were found through Web searches that identified them as presidents or chancellors of public higher education institutions in each state. Their electronic mail addresses were found on the system's website, on their institution's website or through a request to the system's central administrative office.

The total number of study institutions and study participants (one institutional leader per institution) was 172. I excluded excluding medical centers and non-postsecondary institutions that may have been a part of the system. The states ranged from six institutions in Nebraska (all four-year universities) to 37 two-year colleges and four-year universities in Ohio.

Based on Umbach's (2004) study of best practices in Internet research that recommended that survey researchers explain to potential participants the importance of a survey to their work, I conducted interviews of system heads first (see Part Two: Interviews described on page 83), and then solicited their assistance in notifying institutional leaders of the forthcoming Internet survey. This sequence provided me with the opportunity to familiarize the system head with the nature of the study and enlist their assistance in improving the response rate to the Internet survey. After the conclusion of the interview with each system head, I requested on the phone or in writing that the system head alert his or her institutional leaders that a survey would be forthcoming via a link in an electronic mail message. System heads were also given the opportunity to preview the survey before responding to my request.

With the exception of one state leader, all of the state system heads agreed to send a note to their institutional presidents or chancellors asking them to complete the Internet survey. A written, electronic invitation to participate in the survey was then sent to each institutional leader in the state. Approximately one week after receiving the original survey invitation, unresponsive participants received a reminder. In all, each institutional leader (who had not completed the survey) received three reminders sent approximately one week apart. Survey participants were notified at various times during the period from April 2010 through July 2010.

Using this protocol, the average response rate of all institutions in the 10 states was 41 percent. Seventy-one institutional leaders (chancellors or presidents) out of 172 potential participants responded to the Internet survey. In the one state where the system

head did not agree to send out a notification to the institutional leaders, the response rate was 24 percent. Among high-performing states, the response rate was 43 percent and for low-performing states the response rate was 39 percent. Table 3 summarizes the number of institutional leaders invited to complete the survey and respondents in each state.

Table 3

Survey Participants, by State

High-Performing States	Number of Institutions	Number of Respondents	Percent that Participated
Nebraska	6	3	50%
Utah	9	3	30%
North Dakota	10	6	60%
Kansas	35	17	49%
Wisconsin	30	10	30%
Sub-total	90	39	43%
<i>Low-Performing States</i>			
South Dakota	6	4	66%
North Carolina	17	4	24%
Ohio	37	13	35%
Maine	7	6	86%
Montana	15	5	30%
Sub-total	82	32	39%
Total	172	71	41%

Variable Measurement

The survey asked brief demographic and descriptive information of each survey respondent, including type of institution (two-year or four-year institution), gender, and number of years of service as president or chancellor of the institution. In order to identify the location (state) of each respondent, the survey tool automatically recorded an Internet Protocol (IP) “address.” IP addresses are specific to each state (and locale). To identify the state of origin for each respondent, I used an Internet search engine that identified location of each survey respondent (providing a distinction between low- and high- performing states).

Interview Design and Data Collection

In part two, open-ended interviews and respondent answers provided a second set of data and analysis to add depth to the researcher’s understanding of accountability mechanisms in use by state higher education leaders and the level of autonomy afforded to institutions based on Dee’s (2006) functionalist and dialectical perspectives. The interviews of key informants provided narrative and descriptive data in the participants’ own words so that insight was gained into how participants interpret their context, experience and judgments (Patton, 1990; Began & Biklen, 1992) in their role as higher education leaders with responsibility for accountability and autonomy. The purpose of the qualitative inquiry was to determine whether these two groups of states differed in the way they reflect Dee’s (2006) dialectical perspective of degrees of autonomy and accountability.

Interview Procedures and Protocols

Prospective informants were identified through the state's system of higher education's website. System heads were contacted by the researcher in writing and subsequently called by telephone to arrange an interview. Board members were contacted only after phone and written requests were made to the board secretary to assist in identifying willing participants.

Convenience was a factor in selecting the method for conducting interviews given the geographic locations of the 10 states. System leaders and board members were interviewed by phone with the exception of one system head and one board member who were interviewed in person at the 2010 National Conference on Trusteeship (Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities) meeting in Florida in March 2010, and one system head who was interviewed by Internet television.

In the aggregate, a system head from each state was interviewed for a total of 10 interviews. In seven states, one board member was also interviewed, and in three states two board members were also interviewed for a total thirteen board member interviews. One state leader responded to the questions in writing instead of an in-person telephone interview. In all, 23 key informant interviews were conducted between March and June 2010. Two interview groups consisting of key informants from high-performing and low-performing states were also created as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Number of Interview Informants, by Type and State Performance

Number of Interviews	Low-performing States	High-performing States
System Heads	5	5
Board Members	6	7

Prior to being interviewed, each prospective interviewee was provided with an informed consent form, a description of the purpose of the study and the interview questions. Other guidelines and policies provided by the University of Minnesota's Internal Review Board were followed to inform respondents of the risks and benefits of participating in the study and to protect the anonymity of key informants' comments.

Interview information was collected in one interview and each interview typically lasted between 25 and 35 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. The taped interviews generated 174 transcribed pages of raw data that were coded for analysis.

Interview Format

The standardized open-ended interview format as described by Patton (1990) was designed, and consisted of six pre-written questions asked of each individual in the same order. The interview protocol included standard introductory and explanatory remarks and confirmation that the study participant was a willing participant. The standardized format was used to reduce researcher bias and provided a systematic and thorough line of inquiry for consistent data analysis. On occasion, I asked follow-up questions when it

appeared the individual might have more information about a topical area, misunderstood the question or could illustrate with an example. Patton (1990) noted that the objective was to understand the perspective of the person being interviewed, and this format provided opportunity for informants to provide examples or describe in detail the methods of accountability in the specific context of their state system of higher education.

Interview Questions

The interview questions were organized around the topical areas of Dee's (2006) perspective of the relationship between accountability and autonomy. The questions explored the views of system leaders and board members¹⁸ on the nature of accountability in their system of higher education and whether systems are "tightly coupled," favoring accountability through prescriptive regulation and little discretion in managing strategies and goals or "loosely coupled," where there is greater autonomy and system leadership prefers assessment that reflects performance outcomes. In summary, the study examined the extent to which system leaders (system heads and board members) and institutional leaders shared a commitment to work together toward an accountability process and what that process entailed in terms of autonomy and flexibility.

First, key informants were asked an opening question that was general in nature and assisted in establishing rapport (Patton, 1990): The question was, *in general, how would you describe the relationship between your board and the institutions that are a part of your system?* Questions two and three explored two opposing approaches to

¹⁸ Questions were stated slightly differently for board members and system heads to reflect their different roles. The questions cited here reflect the way questions were posed to board members.

accountability, which are often referred to as “carrots and sticks.” According to Dee (2006), accountability that is managed using “sticks” is an indication that accountability and autonomy are in opposition. This question asked generally about the role of policy compliance. Specifically, the question was: *To what extent do you see your board relying on policy mandates to ensure that institutional leaders reach expected accountability goals?*

The other end of the spectrum, the “carrots,” examined accountability mechanisms that are based on inducements and incentives, such as performance-based funding, performance indicators, and performance evaluations of the system head. These mechanisms allow for high levels of both accountability and autonomy as institutional leaders are given flexibility to how to respond for their institutions. Specifically, the interview question was: *Alternatively, to what extent do you feel the board relies on inducements or incentives to achieve results?*

The third and fourth questions explored the degree to which institutional leaders are afforded discretion in achieving accountability expectations. According to Dee (2006), higher levels of discretion would indicate greater autonomy, thus a more loosely coupled system, but that policy priorities are also met. Specifically, the two questions were: *In terms of performance design, do board policies or practices allow for customized measure for individual institutions?* and *In terms of performance measurement, do board policies or practices allow for flexibility in reporting information or data?*

The last interview question asked key informants, in general, do you think the accountability measures that have been defined by your board [your system leadership] support capacity-building in your system institutions? For example, what degree of autonomy in program offerings do you feel institutions have or should have? This question was designed to explore the commitment of system leadership to providing opportunities for institutions to achieve the highest level of performance. Answers to this question would indicate whether there is a high level of shared commitment for, and mutually-supportive environment of, policies and practices that help build connections between state and system leadership and institutions.

Analysis of Data

Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data

Each survey question was analyzed using both descriptive data and statistical analyses for significance. For each question, the 18 accountability mechanisms are either rated using the mean of the answers; ranked based on the percentage of respondents who listed the mechanism as “top 5” or ranked the mechanism from 1 to 5; or described based on how flexible or customizable the mechanism was perceived to be by respondents. In addition, differences in means and statistical significance (if found) between respondents from low-performing and high-performing states were provided for each question.

Given the large number of independent variables (18 accountability mechanisms), the survey data was summarized in a matrix that ordered and categorized the accountability mechanisms into four groups. To form each group, the “importance” of each mechanism was ranked each on a scale of low to high (based on a numerical

ordering of the mean). Second, each accountability mechanism was given a rating of “high,” “moderate,” or “low” on four characteristics: (1) “high stakes”; (2) flexibility and customization; (3) professional norms of higher education; and (4) political or market-based accountability. By summarizing the data in this fashion, groups of accountability mechanisms were identified with similar characteristics. The four groups were labeled: (1) High Importance/High Stakes; (2) High Importance/Low Stakes; (3) Moderate Importance – Focus on External Mechanisms, and (4) Performance-based Mechanisms. The accountability mechanisms in each category are described in Chapter 4 Results.

Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe the process for the analysis of qualitative data collection as one of carefully searching through the interview data for regularities, patterns, and topics, all of which become *coding categories*. This process of categorizing interview data allows for separation and classification of information that follows from the research questions and from the data itself. In general, the analysis of the interview data was inductive, meaning that the categories and themes of the analysis come from or emerge from the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection (Patton, 1980).

For this data analysis, I followed a four-stage process: (1) free coding the textual content of each interview (also known as “emergent” coding), (2) creating major codes or code “families”, (3) assigning code families to one of three categories of data: subject matter category, direction category and interaction category, and (4) analyzing each code

family for themes that reflected the perspectives of respondents from high-performing and low-performing states.

Stage 1: Emergent Coding

A software program, Atlas.ti, was used to facilitate the process of identifying units of data, also known as “quotations.” Each quotation was either a string of 3-5 sentences or a long paragraph that contained both the context of the key informant’s statement and the actual words that reflected a “code.” Holsti (1969) describes this unit of analysis as a “theme” or a “single assertion about a subject” (p. 116), and it is often considered the most useful unit of content analysis. As a computer-aided program, Atlas.ti allowed for multiple coding of quotations, electronic notations, re-coding, and printing codes in various configurations with identifying information about code categories and locations of quotations.

Each quotation was then assigned a code or codes. Since no standard typology exists for research on accountability mechanisms in higher education, an “emergent” coding strategy was used for codes to be developed freely from the interview data. To manage the larger thematic units of analysis, multiple codes were assigned to most quotations. Prior experience had indicated that using longer quotations and assigning multiple codes to a single quotation in the initial stage resulted in fewer misunderstandings of the thematic context and a greater understanding of the key informant’s intended point of view. Refinement of coding categories took place in the fourth stage of analysis.

In the first reading and analysis of text, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) recommend developing a limited number of codes – between 30 and 50. In the first stage of analysis, 42 codes were initially identified (see Appendix C). During this initial coding process, no distinctions were made between respondent groups, i.e., key informants from high-performing or low-performing states were all coded in an identical manner and without the researcher’s knowledge of which quotations belonged to the high- or low- performing groups.

Generally speaking, the initial coding process I used would be considered an intermediate level of coding so that the “material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 166); yet not be too general or sweeping. An example of a quotation and its assigned codes is as follows:

“After that point, we worked with the board on choosing which of these strategies we would focus on first, set metrics for, measure them. We ultimately came up with about 18 of those. Over time, then, when we seemed to be pretty consistently hitting the goals, we would either change them or we would then move them to a report section of the board’s agenda so they would be regularly reported on with a lot of other data at the board meetings but not be the subject of presentation at the board discussion.”

Assigned codes: [role or responsibility of board] [standardization or common accountability framework] [use of strategic plans or directions].

Stage 2: Major codes or code “families”

After the initial coding of quotations was completed, each code was printed to separate it from other codes and the quotations in each code were re-read to correct any errors in coding. Many quotations were re-coded and one new code was created with quotations assigned to it. In addition, based on the commonality among quotations and codes, major codes or code “families” were created. Arranging codes into families

allowed for thematic ideas to emerge in subsequent phases of analysis. The name of each family was determined by the general characteristics of the codes in each family. A second reading of all quotations and their assigned code families also resulted in re-coding of some quotes, deletions of codes assigned to quotes (a process of prioritizing described by Patton, 1990), patterns of codes to be identified and reassignment of some codes to different families.

The initial 43 codes were grouped into 13 code families as follows:

1. Board responsibilities
2. Capacity building
3. Challenges in board and institution relations
4. Customization or flexibility
5. Financial mechanisms
6. Legislative relations
7. Performance-based funding
8. Performance expectations of institutional leaders
9. Policy
10. Standardized data
11. Strategic planning
12. Strong system
13. System head's role or responsibilities

Stage 3: Categories of data

Categories of data as described by Holsti (1969) should primarily reflect the investigator's research question as a *valid* representation of the analyst's concepts and be sufficiently precise to guide the development of *reliable* judgments. For this study, I determined that three broad categories would provide clarity in understanding the views of the interview respondents: (1) a "subject matter" category that described what the research is *about* (accountability mechanisms), (2) a "direction" category that facilitated understanding of the respondents' treatment of the subject at hand, i.e., the degree of autonomy afforded institutions with flexible or customized accountability mechanisms and (3) an "interaction category" that described relations among and between various "actors," i.e., board members, system leaders and institutional leaders. These broad categories relate to my research questions about the use of accountability mechanisms in higher education and the views of higher education leaders over the dichotomous position of ensuring accountability for performance and the autonomy sought by academic leadership in colleges and universities. These categories were used as a general framework for the qualitative results section in Chapter 4.

Stage 4: Thematic analysis using sub-codes by respondent group

After completing the segregation and categorization of quotations (into appropriate code "families" and into one of three categories – subject matter, direction or interaction), the fourth and final stage of analysis was a thematic analysis by the two respondent groups: high- and low-performing. Holsti (1969) describes this process as one of "contingency analysis" (p. 118). "In this method of content analysis, inferences

are based on co-occurrences of content attributes within the same unit” (p. 118). By reviewing all quotations in this manner, thematic differences between the two groups of key informants were used to answer the research question, *What attributes of accountability are associated with performance of state systems of higher education?*, which will be more fully explored in the analysis and conclusions in Chapter 5.

Validity and Reliability

The following methods and principles were used to ensure that the data collected were valid and reliable.

Internal Validity

Internal validity is an indication of factors that can influence the results of a research study. From the study’s inception, my research questions were guided by findings in the peer-reviewed literature on higher education governance and accountability. In turn, the research questions guided the design of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research and the description of results. Because no causal relationship is intended to be made from this study, there are no specific measures of validity. The description of the methodology used, however, clearly delineated the origin of data sources, the descriptive data and statistical measures used for the quantitative research, how categories and themes were developed in the qualitative research and how triangulation was accomplished.

External Validity

External validity refers to the generalization of results to the larger population. In this study, the selection of 10 out of 50 states provides an expectation that the results

from this study may apply to the governance of other state systems of higher education. While there may be characteristics of the 10 study states that are unique, overall the diversity within those states in terms of their governance structures, political and cultural histories, funding sources and other factors may indicate that the general response to accountability mechanisms would be similar to other state systems.

Triangulation of data

Triangulation involves using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce a well-developed understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The use of the quantitative and qualitative data in this research study permits characteristics of accountability to be identified by institutional leaders and for the use of those mechanisms, including indications of their effectiveness, to be explored by interviews of system leaders. This research study involved both triangulation of methods and triangulation of sources (Patton, 2001). Using both methods permitted an exploration of the complementary and divergent aspects of accountability and autonomy, as well as an opportunity understand these phenomena from the perspective of people with different viewpoints.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a two-part study of a group of five high-performing and five low-performing public systems of higher education that, one, characterizes the use of accountability mechanisms in these states, and, two, explores the views of higher education leaders (system heads and board members) on the accountability expected of and autonomy afforded to institutions that are a part of their multi-campus public systems of higher education.

The chapter includes results from two data collection methods: descriptive statistics and statistical comparisons between five high- and five low-performing states based on the responses to an Internet survey of leaders of colleges and universities in 10 states and qualitative data from interviews of system leaders, i.e., heads of systems and board members. The qualitative data were analyzed using an emergent coding system with the consequent development of themes that explore the views of key informants on accountability and autonomy. In Chapter 5, a discussion of the convergence of the principal results from the quantitative and qualitative data is presented.

Part One: Quantitative Results from the Survey

The first part of the study utilized an Internet survey of institutional leaders (college and university presidents or chancellors) to assess 18 accountability mechanisms for a variety of attributes. Survey questions were posed to respondents regarding the importance of each accountability mechanism, whether they were associated with risks or

rewards for performance and the extent to which they reflected professional norms of higher education or were reflective of political or market-based accountability.

Three areas of analysis are provided. First, descriptive statistics are presented with an exploration of statistically significant differences between survey participants from high- and low-performing states. Second, statistical differences between respondent answers are provided with possible explanations for those differences and, third, a summary matrix of the accountability mechanisms into four categories is formulated.

Responses to the Survey Questions

Each research question is addressed in the order presented beginning on page 66:

Question 1: *What types of accountability mechanisms are deemed important (measured by time, attention and resources) to college/university presidents?*

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of each mechanism on a scale of 0 (least important) to 10 (most important) based on the amount of personal time, attention and institutional resources devoted by the institutional leader. Mechanisms not used in the state were not to be rated. Table 5 provides the mean score and standard deviation for each reported mechanism. The means ranged from a high of 8.58 to a low of 4.95. The three highest reported mechanisms were, in order, strategic planning, state funding and annual planning. The three lowest reported mechanisms were legislative reporting, performance incentives, and union contract compliance.

Table 5

Importance of Eighteen Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability Mechanism	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Strategic planning	69	8.58	1.42
State funding	70	8.46	2.41
Annual planning	71	8.41	1.40
Accreditation	71	8.27	2.21
System policy	71	7.73	2.25
Master planning	70	7.56	2.11
Program accreditation	71	7.25	2.35
State policy	71	6.97	2.69
Financial audit	70	6.79	2.79
Federal policy	69	6.46	2.86
Market factors	67	6.31	2.75
Performance appraisals	66	6.06	2.79
Political factors	70	5.97	2.64
Quality rankings	69	5.96	2.84
Performance indicators	66	5.94	2.53
Legislative reporting	70	5.34	2.79
Performance incentives	64	5.16	3.07
Union contract compliance	58	4.95	3.93

Question 2: *What types of accountability mechanisms are deemed important (measured by time, attention and resources) to college/university presidents in high performing states compared to low performing states?*

Table 6 shows a comparison of importance by respondents from high-performing and low-performing states. Means for high-performing states ranged from a high of 8.84 (state funding) to a low of 4.88 (performance incentives). Means for low-performing states ranged from a high of 8.81 (strategic planning) to a low of 4.88 (union contract compliance). To facilitate an understanding of the differences between the two respondent groups, a rank of each mechanism was assigned from 1 to 18 based on the mean from highest to lowest. Based on this ranking, high-performing and low-performing states had the same top nine mechanisms, but the rank ordering was different. Two-sample t-tests comparing high-performing and low-performing states were also calculated for each of the 18 accountability mechanisms. No statistically significant differences ($p < .05$ or less) were found for any of the 18 accountability mechanisms.

Table 6

Importance of Eighteen Accountability Mechanisms, by High-performing and Low-performing States

Accountability Mechanism	<u>High Performing</u>			<u>Low Performing</u>			t-test	<u>Rank Order Between States</u>	
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.		High	Low
State funding allocation	38	8.84	1.99	32	8.00	2.70	.84	1	3
Institutional accreditation	39	8.64	1.44	32	7.81	2.84	.83	2	5
Annual planning	39	8.44	1.31	32	8.38	1.52	.06	3	2
Strategic planning	38	8.39	1.50	31	8.81	1.30	-.42	4	1
System policy	39	8.00	2.20	32	7.41	2.31	.59	5	6
State policy	39	7.46	2.49	32	6.38	2.85	1.08	6	9
Program accreditation	39	7.33	2.47	32	7.16	2.84	.17	7	7
Master planning	38	7.29	2.19	32	7.88	2.00	-.59	8	4
Financial audit	39	6.95	2.83	31	6.58	2.78	.37	9	8
Federal policies	37	6.84	2.94	32	6.03	2.74	.81	10	12
Market factors	36	6.50	2.46	31	6.10	3.09	.40	11	10
Performance appraisal	37	6.19	2.91	29	5.90	2.66	.29	12	15

-- Table 6 Continued --

Table 6 (continued)

Accountability Mechanism	High Performing			Low Performing			t-test	Rank Order Between States	
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.		High	Low
Political factors	38	5.97	2.69	32	5.97	2.62	0.00	13	13
Performance indicators	35	5.94	2.51	31	5.94	2.59	0.00	14	14
Quality	37	5.86	2.95	32	6.06	2.75	-.20	15	11
Legislative reporting	38	5.74	2.74	32	4.88	2.81	.86	16	17
Union contract compliance	29	5.34	4.01	29	4.55	3.87	.79	17	18
Performance incentives	34	4.88	3.08	30	5.47	3.07	-.59	18	16

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Opinions about importance were similar between respondents from the two groups of states for accountability mechanisms related to: “planning” (strategic planning, annual planning, and master planning); “performance” (performance incentives, performance indicators and performance appraisal of the institution head); and “market or political factors.” Respondents opinions diverged substantially on five mechanisms: 1) state policy (1.08 difference); 2) legislative reporting (.86 difference); 3) state funding (.84 difference); 4) institutional accreditation (.83 difference); and 5) federal policy (.81 difference). Four of these mechanisms could be classified as “government-based

accountability mechanisms,” i.e., state policy, legislative reporting, state funding and federal policy.

Question 3: Do college/university presidents from high-performing states feel they are afforded the ability to customize or respond in a flexible manner to accountability mechanisms designed by system leadership compared to presidents from low-performing states?

Survey respondents were asked to characterize each mechanism by the degree of flexibility or customization afforded to them as head of their institution in achieving or complying with accountability expectations. Table 7 ranks the mechanisms by “discretion” from high to low based on the percent of respondents whose answers reflected the highest level of discretion, i.e., “I am able to set or determine a performance target or compliance standard for my institution with this accountability mechanism”). The mechanisms with the highest level of discretion fall into the category of “planning,” i.e., annual planning (83.8 percent), strategic planning (82.4 percent) and master facility planning (76.1 percent). The mechanisms deemed to have the lowest levels of discretion reflect governmental influences on accountability. These accountability mechanisms are legislative reporting (14.3 percent), state policy (6.4 percent) and federal policy (3.4 percent).

Table 7

Discretion in Complying with Accountability Mechanisms, Ranked by Highest Discretion

Accountability mechanism	Total N	<u>Four Levels of Discretion</u>							
		<u>Percent</u>		<u>Percent</u>		<u>Percent</u>		<u>Percent</u>	
		N	Able to set	N	Able to comment	N	Set w/o feedback	N	Not informed
Annual planning	68	57	83.8	10	14.7	1	1.5	0	0.0
Strategic planning	68	56	82.4	10	14.7	2	2.9	0	0.0
Master planning	67	51	76.1	15	22.4	0	0.0	1	1.5
Market factors	55	25	45.5	20	36.4	10	18.2	0	0.0
Performance indicators	52	23	44.2	24	46.2	3	5.8	2	3.9
Institutional accreditation	61	26	42.6	21	34.4	14	23.0	0	0.0
Performance budgeting	46	16	34.8	27	58.7	2	4.4	1	2.2
Program accreditation	67	21	31.3	28	41.8	15	22.4	3	4.5
Performance appraisal of head	66	19	28.8	42	63.6	4	6.1	1	1.5
State funding	64	16	25.0	33	51.6	10	15.6	5	7.8

-- Table 7 Continued --

Table 7 (continued)

Accountability mechanism	Total N	N	<u>Four Levels of Discretion</u>						
			<u>Percent</u> Able to set	N	<u>Percent</u> Able to comment	N	<u>Percent</u> Set w/o feedback	N	<u>Percent</u> Not informe
Quality rankings	49	11	22.4	24	49.0	10	20.4	4	8.2
System policies	67	14	20.9	47	70.2	5	7.5	1	1.5
Financial audit	64	13	20.3	26	40.6	23	35.9	2	3.1
Political factors	56	11	19.6	30	53.6	11	19.6	4	7.1
Union contract	44	7	15.9	26	59.1	7	15.9	4	9.1
Legislativ e reporting	56	8	14.3	20	35.7	17	30.4	11	19.6
State policies	63	4	6.4	34	54.0	22	34.9	3	4.8
Federal policies	59	2	3.4	18	30.5	33	55.9	6	10.2

Table 8 presents levels of discretion for high-performing and low-performing states. While a chi square test found no statistical differences in discretion between high- and low-performing states, a comparison of responses resulted in the following divergences in viewpoints:

1. Institutional leaders from low-performing states report less control in being able to set or determine factors related to the mechanisms state funding allocation and state policy (they are “able to comment upon” but not “set or determine” the mechanisms).
2. Leaders from low-performing state also indicate that they have less control over financial audit (41.2 percent indicate this mechanism is set without feedback compared to 31.4 percent for high-performing) and institutional accreditation (30.8 percent indicated that it was “set without feedback” compared to 17.1 percent of leaders from high-performing states).
3. Institutional leaders from high-performing states also report greater control over institutional accreditation: 82.9 percent indicate they are “able to set” or “able to comment upon” this mechanism compared to 69.3 percent of leaders from low-performing states.

Table 8

Level of Institutional Discretion in Complying with Accountability Mechanisms, by High-performing and Low-performing States

Accountability Mechanisms, By Four Levels of Discretion ^a	<u>High-Performing</u>		<u>Low-Performing</u>		Chi Square
	N	Percent	N	Percent	
<u>Annual Planning</u>					.63
Able to set or determine	12	34.3	4	13.8	
Able to comment	15	42.9	18	62.1	
Set without feedback	5	14.3	5	17.2	
Not informed	3	8.6	2	6.9	

-- Table 8 Continued --

Table 8 (continued)

Accountability Mechanisms, By Four Levels of Discretion ^a	<u>High-Performing</u>		<u>Low-Performing</u>		Chi Sqr
	N	Percent	N	Percent	
<u>Strategic Planning</u>					.40
Able to set or determine	29	80.6	27	84.4	
Able to comment	5	13.9	5	15.6	
Set without feedback	2	5.6	0	0.0	
Not informed	0	0.0	0	0.0	
<u>Master Planning</u>					.26
Able to set or determine	24	64.6	27	84.4	
Able to comment	10	28.6	5	15.6	
Set without feedback	1	2.9	0	0.0	
Not informed	0	0.0	0	0.0	
<u>System Policies</u>					.73
Able to set or determine	8	21.7	6	20.0	
Able to comment	26	70.3	21	70.0	
Set without feedback	3	8.1	2	6.7	
Not informed	0	0.0	1	3.3	
<u>Performance Appraisal</u>					.66
Able to set or determine	10	27.8	9	30.0	
Able to comment	22	61.1	20	66.7	
Set without feedback	3	8.33	1	3.3	
Not informed	1	2.8	0	0.0	
<u>Institutional Accreditation</u>					.22
Able to set or determine	14	40.0	12	46.2	
Able to comment	15	42.9	6	23.1	
Set without feedback	6	17.1	8	30.8	
Not informed	0	0.0	0	0.0	
<u>State Funding</u>					.27
Able to set or determine	12	34.3	4	13.8	
Able to comment	15	42.9	18	62.1	
Set without feedback	5	14.3	5	17.2	
Not informed	3	8.7	2	6.9	
<u>Program Accreditation</u>					.66
Able to set or determine	10	28.6	11	34.4	
Able to comment	17	48.6	11	34.4	
Set without feedback	7	20.0	8	25.0	
Not informed	1	2.9	2	6.3	

-- Table 8 Continued --

Table 8 continued

Accountability Mechanisms, By Four Levels of Discretion ^a	<u>High-Performing</u>		<u>Low-Performing</u>		Chi Sqr
	N	Percent	N	Percent	
<u>Market Factors</u>					
Able to set or determine	14	46.7	11	44.0	
Able to comment	10	33.3	10	40.0	
Set without feedback	6	20.0	4	16.0	
Not informed	0	0.0	0	0.0	
<u>Performance Indicators</u>					
Able to set or determine	13	52	10	37.0	.73
Able to comment	10	40.0	14	51.2	
Set without feedback	1	4.0	2	7.4	
Not informed	1	4.0	1	3.7	
<u>Performance, incentive-based</u>					
Able to set or determine	9	42.9	7	28.0	.35
Able to comment	12	57.1	15	60.0	
Set without feedback	0	0.0	2	8.0	
Not informed	0	0.0	1	4.0	
<u>Political Factors</u>					
Able to set or determine	7	24.1	4	14.8	.84
Able to comment	15	51.7	15	55.6	
Set without feedback	5	17.2	6	22.2	
Not informed	2	6.9	2	7.4	
<u>Financial Audits</u>					
Able to set or determine	7	20.0	6	20.7	.53
Able to comment	15	42.9	11	37.9	
Set without feedback	11	31.4	12	41.2	
Not informed	2	5.7	0	0.0	
<u>State Policies</u>					
Able to set or determine	4	12.2	0	0.0	.21
Able to comment	16	48.5	18	60.0	
Set without feedback	12	36.4	10	33.3	
Not informed	3	8.6	2	6.9	
<u>Union Contract Compliance</u>					
Able to set or determine	5	22.7	2	9.1	.46
Able to comment	12	54.6	14	63.6	
Set without feedback	4	18.2	3	13.6	
Not informed	1	4.6	3	13.6	

-- Table 8 Continued --

Table 8 continued

Accountability Mechanisms, By Four Levels of Discretion ^a	<u>High-Performing</u>		<u>Low-Performing</u>		Chi Sqr
	N	Percent	N	Percent	
					1.0
<u>Quality Rankings</u>					
Able to set or determine	5	20.8	6	24.0	
Able to comment	12	50.0	12	48.0	
Set without feedback	5	20.8	5	20.0	
Not informed	2	8.3	2	8.0	
<u>Legislative Reporting</u>					.79
Able to set or determine	5	16.7	3	11.5	
Able to comment	9	30.0	11	42.3	
Set without feedback	10	33.3	7	26.9	
Not informed	6	20.0	5	19.2	
<u>Federal Policies</u>					.52
Able to set or determine	2	6.7	0	0.0	
Able to comment	8	26.7	10	34.5	
Set without feedback	17	56.7	16	55.2	
Not informed	3	10.0	3	10.3	

a

A fifth answer, “not used in my state system,” was offered to respondents, but is not included in the chi square test. Institutional leaders from high-performing states reported to a much greater extent that three mechanism are “not used” than leaders from low-performing states: performance-based budgeting (difference of 26 percent); performance indicators (difference of 18 percent); and quality rankings (difference of 18 percent).

Question 4: *Which accountability mechanisms do presidents believe are most strongly linked to rewards or adverse consequences?*

Respondents were asked to choose the top five mechanisms most closely linked to rewards for meeting performance expectations or that may result in adverse consequences or what will be labeled “high stakes.” Respondents were then asked to rank their top five from 1 to 5 with 1 representing the accountability mechanisms most associated with adverse consequences or rewards for performance, 2 the next most, etc.

For data analysis, respondents' answers to this question were categorized in three ways as shown in Table 9: first, the percent of respondents who ranked the mechanism in the top five; second, the average score of the ratings each accountability mechanism received from one to five; and, third, the rank based on an average score. To illustrate how the average score was calculated, if 10 respondents ranked a mechanism number "1" and fifteen respondents ranked it number "2," the total score would be $(1 \times 10) + (2 \times 15)$ which equals a total score of 40. The average would be the total score of 40 divided by 25 responses or an average score of 1.6. The rank for each accountability mechanism is based on the lowest to highest of the average scores.

Table 9

Accountability Mechanisms Most Associated with Adverse Consequences or Rewards for Performance ("High Stakes")

Accountability Mechanism	Percent In Top Five	Average Score	Rank based on Average Score
State funding allocation	72%	1.73	1
Institutional accreditation	65%	2.48	3
Strategic planning	51%	3.50	13
System policy	40%	3.04	8
Financial audit	35%	3.00	5
Performance or incentive-based budgeting	30%	2.29	2
Performance indicators	30%	2.86	4

-- Table 9 Continued --

Table 9 (continued)

Accountability Mechanism	Percent In Top Five	Average Score	Rank based on Average Score
State policies	28%	3.95	16
Market factors	20%	3.21	11
Political factors	20%	3.29	12
Annual planning	18%	3.85	15
Program accreditation	17%	4.17	17
Federal policies	14%	3.20	10
Quality rankings	14%	3.00	6
Legislative reporting	11%	3.00	7
Master planning	11%	4.38	18
Union contract compliance	8%	3.67	14
Performance appraisal	8%	3.17	9

The five highest stakes mechanisms (based on percent of respondents who listed a mechanism in the top five) were: state funding (72 percent), institutional accreditation (65 percent), strategic planning (51 percent), system policy (40 percent) and financial audits (35 percent). With the exception of strategic planning, the other four accountability mechanisms reflect influences of accountability external to the institution, i.e., state funding, accreditation, financial audits, and system policy.

Several mechanisms that were not ranked in the top five (based on percent) had the same or lower average scores than those in the top five:. Two of these mechanisms

were performance or incentive-based budgeting (2.29) and performance indicators (2.86) and, based on these scores, ranked 2nd and 4th respectively. These average scores would indicate that, for those respondents whose systems use these accountability mechanisms, they were associated with adverse consequences or rewards for performance and can be considered high stakes.

Table 10 compares high stakes by high- and low-performing states. Respondents from high- and low- performing states had identical rankings for the top five accountability mechanisms based on the percent of respondents who chose that mechanism as one of the top five. Alternative views emerged with some of the mechanisms – respondents from high-performing states were more likely than respondents from low-performing states to find master planning, performance appraisal of the institutional head and legislative reporting to be high stakes activities. The only mechanism that was found to have a statistically significant difference between high- and low-performing states for high stakes was master facility planning – 18 percent of respondents from high-performing states considered master planning to be high stakes compared to 3 percent from low-performing states, a statistical difference at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 10

Accountability Mechanisms Most Associated with Adverse Consequences or Rewards for Performance (“High Stakes”), by High-performing and Low-performing States

Accountability Mechanism	Percent Ranked in Top Five		Z-value for Difference
	High-Performing	Low-Performing	
State funding allocation	69%	72%	-0.24
Institutional accreditation	67%	59%	0.63
Strategic planning.	46%	56%	-0.85
System policy	36%	41%	-0.41
Financial audit	33%	34%	-0.09
State policy	31%	25%	0.54
Performance incentives	28%	31%	-0.28
Performance indicators	26%	31%	-0.52
Political factors	21%	16%	0.53
Annual planning	18%	19%	-0.09
Master facility planning	18%	3%	1.97*
Market factors	15%	25%	-1.01
Program accreditation	15%	19%	-0.38
Quality	13%	16%	-0.34
Performance appraisal	13%	3%	1.46
Federal policies	13%	16%	-0.34
Legislative reporting	13%	9%	0.46
Union compliance	8%	9%	-0.25

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Question 5. *Which accountability mechanism(s) do presidents feel most represent professional norms of higher education?*

Respondents were asked to identify the top five mechanisms, in no priority order, that they felt reflected professional norms of higher education. Professional norms of higher education were defined as conforming to the standards of skill, competence or character normally expected of a properly qualified and experienced person in a work environment. Table 11 lists the top five accountability mechanisms that reflected professional norms of higher education.

Table 11

Top Five Professional Norms of Higher Education

Accountability Mechanism	Percent
State funding allocation	69%
Strategic planning	67%
Institutional accreditation	64%
System policy	39%
Program accreditation	33%
Financial audits	31%
Performance or incentive-based budgeting	29%
Performance indicators	23%
State policies	23%

-- Table 11 Continued --

Table 11 (continued)

Accountability Mechanism	Percent
Annual planning	20%
Master facility planning	17%
Federal policies	16%
Performance appraisal	14%
Quality rankings	14%
Market factors	13%
Political factors	11%
Legislative reporting	9%
Union contract compliance	9%

Respondents from high- and low-performing states were consistent in their rankings of four of the five accountability mechanisms that represent the top five professional norms of higher education as shown in Table 12. A greater percentage of respondents from low-performing states linked performance or incentive-based budgeting among the top five professional norms of higher education (38 percent), whereas, respondents from high-performing states ranked program accreditation in the top five (34 percent). No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups of respondents from high-performing and low-performing states in their views of professional norms of higher education.

Table 12

Top Five Professional Norms of Higher Education, by High-performing and Low-performing States

Accountability Mechanism	Percent Ranked in Top Five		Z-value for Difference in Proportions
	High Performing N=38	Low Performing N=32	
State funding allocation	68%	69%	-0.03
Institutional accreditation	63%	66%	-0.21
Strategic planning	68%	66%	0.25
Program accreditation	37%	28%	0.77
System policies	37%	41%	-0.32
Financial audits	32%	31%	0.03
Annual planning	26%	13%	1.44
State policies	24%	22%	0.18
Performance or incentive-based budgeting	21%	38%	-1.52
Performance indicators	21%	25%	-0.39
Master planning	18%	16%	0.31
Performance appraisal	16%	13%	0.39
Market factors	13%	13%	0.08
Political factors	13%	9%	0.50
Federal policies	16%	16%	0.02

-- Table 12 Continued --

Table 12 (continued)

Accountability Mechanism	Percent Ranked in Top Five		Z-value for Difference in Proportions
	High Performing N=38	Low Performing N=32	
Legislative reporting	11%	6%	0.64
Quality rankings	8%	22%	-1.67
Union contract compliance	8%	9%	-0.22

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Question 6: *Which accountability mechanism(s) do presidents feel represent most reflect political or market-based accountability?*

Respondents were asked to identify the top five mechanisms, in no priority order, they felt represented political or market-based accountability. Political or market-based accountability reflects the influences by external actors on higher education, such as the expectations for performance by governmental bodies or consumer-oriented opinions of an institution that are based on market considerations. The top five accountability mechanisms reflecting political or market-based accountability identified by respondents, by percent, are identified in Table 13. State funding (62 percent) and state policy (61 percent) were the two highest-ranked accountability mechanisms along with market factors and political factors (both 51 percent).

Table 13

Top Five Political or Market-based Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability Mechanism	Percent
State funding allocation	62%
State policy	61%
Market factors	51%
Political factors	51%
Legislative reporting	45%
System policies	31%
Federal policies	30%
Performance or incentive-based budgeting	28%
Quality rankings	25%
Financial audits	24%
Performance indicators	20%
Institutional accreditation	20%
Strategic planning	14%
Union contract compliance	13%
Program accreditation	11%
Annual planning	6%
Performance appraisal	6%
Master planning	3%

Respondents from high- and low-performing states differed somewhat in their views of what they considered to be the top five political or market-based accountability mechanisms. While both groups identified state policy, state funding and political factors in the top five, the two groups selected two other accountability mechanisms they considered to be most closely reflective of political or market-based accountability mechanisms in the top five. Respondents from low-performing states rated market factors and quality rankings in the top five, whereas respondents from high-performing states rated legislative reporting, system policy and federal policies to round out the top five. Table 14 shows the comparison between high- and low-performing states. Statistically significant differences using a two-sample test were found for four accountability mechanisms: state policy, legislative reporting, market factors and quality rankings.

Table 14

Top Five Political or Market-based Accountability Mechanisms, by High-performing and Low-performing States

Accountability Mechanism	Percent Ranked in Top Five		Z-value for Difference in Proportions
	High-Performing N=39	Low-Performing N=32	
State policies	77%	41%	3.11**
State funding	69%	53%	1.39
Legislative reporting	62%	25%	3.08**
Political factors	46%	56%	-0.85

-- Table 14 Continued --

Table 14 (continued)

Accountability Mechanism	Percent Ranked in Top Five		Z-value for Difference in Proportions
	High-Performing N=39	Low-Performing N=32	
System policies	38%	22%	1.50
Federal policies	38%	19%	1.81
Market factors	38%	66%	-2.28*
Financial audits	31%	16%	1.49
Performance budgeting	21%	38%	-1.58
Performance indicators	21%	19%	0.19
Institutional accreditation	13%	28%	-1.61
Quality rankings	10%	44%	-3.23**
Program accreditation	10%	13%	-0.30
Union contract compliance	10%	16%	-0.68
Strategic planning	8%	22%	-1.71
Annual planning	3%	9%	-1.24
Performance appraisal	3%	9%	-1.24
Master planning	0%	6%	-1.58

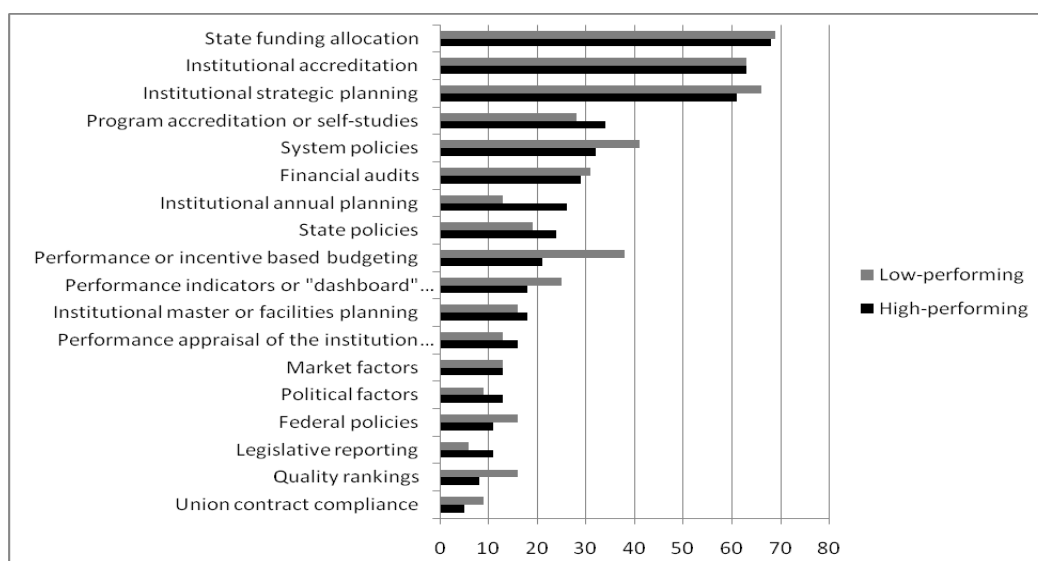
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

In general, therefore, respondents from high- and low- performing states were more likely to agree on accountability mechanisms that reflected professional norms of higher education than accountability mechanisms considered to be political or market-

based. Chart 1 shows responses by high- and low-performing states on professional norms of higher education. Respondents from high- and low-performing states had very similar views of which accountability methods reflected professional norms of higher education, with the exception of annual planning and performance or incentive-based budgeting.

Chart 1

Comparison of High- and Low- Performing Responses on Professional Norms of Higher Education



Contrast the similarity of the responses to professional norms of higher education with those illustrated in Chart 2, where political or market-based accountability were viewed quite differently between high- and low-performing states.

Chart 2

Comparison of High- and Low- Performing on Political or Market-based Accountability Mechanisms

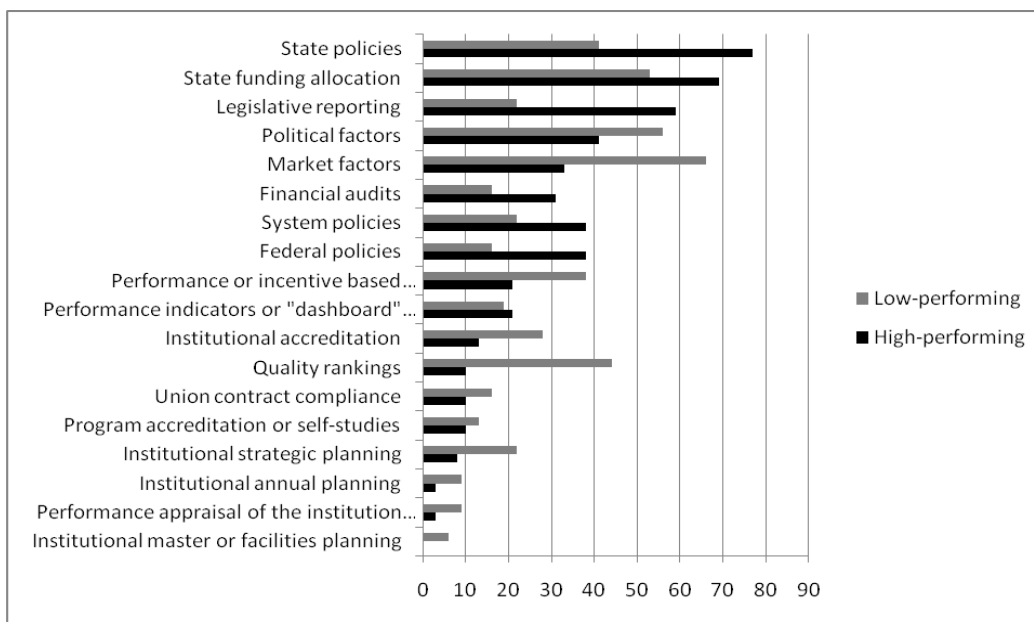


Table 15 summarizes statistically significant differences by respondents from high- and low-performing states for the five attributes of accountability mechanisms.

Table 15

Summary of Statistically Significant Differences, by High- and Low-performing States

Attribute	High-performing States	Low-performing States
Importance	No differences	No differences
“High stakes”	Master planning	No differences

-- Table 15 Continued --

Table 15 (continued)

Attribute	High-performing States	Low-performing States
Discretion	No differences	No differences
Reflective of professional norms of higher education	No differences	No differences
Reflective of political or market-based accountability	State policies Legislative reporting	Quality rankings Market factors

Overall, these few differences in attributes do not indicate any discernable pattern in views of accountability mechanisms that would influence or affect state performance.

Categories of Accountability Mechanisms based on Survey Data

The following categorization of accountability mechanisms groups together similar accountability mechanisms based on the ratings and rankings by survey respondents. To define the four categories, first, each mechanism was ranked based on the numerical ordering of the mean for importance. Second, each accountability mechanism was given a rating of “high,” “moderate,” or “low”¹⁹ on four characteristics: (1) “high stakes”; (2) flexibility and customization or “discretion”; (3) professional norms of higher education; and (4) political or market-based accountability. Each of the four categories and the accountability mechanisms in each category are described as follows.

¹⁹ The high category included mechanisms that were ranked in the top five by 40 percent or more of respondents. Moderate was defined as between 20 – 39 percent selected; and low was defined as 19 percent or fewer selected.

Category 1: High Importance, High Stakes

Accountability mechanisms in the High Importance, High Stakes category include: strategic planning, state funding, institutional accreditation, and system policy. As identified in Table 16, these accountability mechanisms ranked generally high in terms of importance, professional norms and discretion, but low on political or market-based accountability (with the exception of state funding).

Table 16

Category 1: High Importance, High Stakes

Accountability Mechanism	Imp. (Rank)	Imp. (Mean)	“High Stakes”	Discretion	Prof. Norms	Pol. or Mkt.
Strategic planning	1	8.58	H	H	H	L
State funding	2	8.46	H	M	H	H
Institutional accreditation	4	8.27	H	H	H	M
System policies	5	7.73	H	H	M	M

Category 2: High Importance, Low Stakes

Table 17 lists accountability mechanisms in the High Importance, Low Stakes category. These mechanisms ranked high in terms of importance, discretion, and professional norms of higher education, but low on “high stakes” and the extent to which they reflected political or market-based accountability. Category 2 mechanisms include: annual planning, master planning and program accreditation.

Table 17

Category 2: High Importance, Low Stakes

Accountability Mechanism	Imp. (Rank)	Imp. (Mean)	“High Stakes”	Discretion	Prof. Norms	Pol. or Mkt.
Annual planning	3	8.41	L	H	M	L
Master planning	6	7.56	L	H	L	L
Program accreditation	7	7.25	L	M	M	L

Category 3: Moderate Importance, Focus on External Mechanisms

Table 18 lists mechanisms that are categorized as Moderate Importance, Focus on External Mechanisms. The seven accountability mechanisms in this group are: state policy, federal policy, market factors, political factors, quality rankings, legislative reporting and financial audits. These mechanisms fall in the mid-range of importance and are generally defined as being controlled more by those outside of the institution than those inside of it from the perspective of institutional leaders. These mechanisms also tend to be low in flexibility and customization (“discretion”) and professional norms of higher education, but high on political or market-based accountability.

Table 18

Category 3: Moderate Importance, Focus on External Mechanisms

Accountability Mechanism	Imp. (Rank)	Imp. (Mean)	“High Stakes”	Discretion	Prof. Norms	Pol. or Mkt.
State policies	8	6.97	M	L	M	H
Financial audit	9	6.79	M	L	M	M
Federal policy	10	6.46	L	L	L	M
Market factors	11	6.31	M	H	L	H
Political factors	13	5.97	M	L	L	H
Quality rankings	14	5.96	L	L	L	M
Legislative reporting	16	5.34	L	L	L	H

Category 4: Performance-based accountability mechanisms

The three performance-based mechanisms comprise category 4: performance appraisal of the institutional head; performance indicators and performance incentives. As shown in Table 19, these accountability mechanisms ranked low in importance and moderate to low on the other four characteristics: “high stakes,” discretion, professional norms and political or market-based accountability. Performance appraisal was considered high in discretion, however.

Table 19

Category 4: Performance-based Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability Mechanisms	Imp. (Rank)	Imp. (Mean)	“High Stakes”	Discretion	Prof. Norms	Pol. or Mkt.
Performance appraisals	12	6.06	L	H	L	L
Performance indicators	15	5.92	M	M	M	M
Performance incentives	17	5.16	M	M	M	M

One mechanism, union contract compliance, is not included in any of the four categories. It ranked the lowest (18th out of 18 accountability mechanisms) in importance and was considered low in all four characteristics measured by the survey of institutional leaders.

Part Two: Qualitative Results from the Interviews

The second part of the study provided an in-depth examination of accountability from the viewpoint of state higher education system leaders. Interviews of the system head and one or two board members in each of the 10 study states explored the use of accountability mechanisms in higher education and the autonomy afforded to institutions based on Dee’s (2006) functionalist and dialectical perspectives. The interview questions were open-ended and explored the use of policy mandates, inducements or incentives for performance, the flexibility and customization of accountability mechanisms and the ways in which system leaders supported institutional capacity-building.

As shown in Table 20, the results of the interviews will be described using three organizing categories: (1) subject matter category; (2) direction category; and (3)

interaction category. The *subject matter* category is comprised of six accountability mechanisms that were discussed by interview informants:

1. System policies
2. Strategic planning
3. State legislative funding
4. Standardized data reporting
5. Financial mechanisms, specifically performance-based funding
6. Performance expectations of institutional leaders

The second category is the *direction* category, which describes how relevant subjects are treated and whether a topic is discussed in a favorable, unfavorable or neutral way. The code families that comprise the direction category are: (1) evidence of weak or strong system; (2) the degree of autonomy (customization or flexibility); and (3) the degree to which system leadership supports capacity-building.

The third category is the *interaction* category, which describes relations among “actors.” The two code families that are a part of this category are: (1) board and institution relations and (2) legislative relations. In some instances, the codes that describe board responsibilities and system head responsibilities also inform how relations are described both with institutions and with state legislatures.

Table 20

Organizing Categories and Summary of Codes

Organizing Categories	Code Families	Codes
<u>Subject Matter Codes</u>		
<i>System policies</i>	Policy	challenges of policy implementation reliance on policies
<i>Strategic planning</i>	Strategic planning	study commissions use of strategic plans or directions
<i>State legislative funding</i>	Financial mechanisms	financial expectations financial support~not incentive based
	Legislative relations	role of the legislature or governmental (governor) relations
<i>Standardized reporting</i>	Standardized data	dashboard of performance measures standardization of reporting data/info standardized or common accountability framework
<i>Financial mechanisms, performance-based funding</i>	Financial mechanisms	financial expectations financial support~not incentive based
	Performance-based funding	evidence of inducement or incentive lack of interest in inducements or incentives performance-based funding
<i>Performance expectations of institutional leaders</i>	Performance expectations of institutional leaders	annual planning institution ~individualized reporting institutional leaders' performance evaluations
	System head's role or responsibilities	characteristics of system head role or responsibility of system head

-- Table 20 Continued --

Table 20 (continued)

Organizing Categories	Code Families	Codes
<u>Directional Codes</u>		
<i>Evidence of a strong or weak system</i>	Strong system	board and institution relationship~positive characteristics evidence of a strong board or system examples of consensus building or process lack of autonomy lack of flexibility or customization presidents' councils or leadership groups shared commitment
<i>Degree of autonomy (customization or flexibility)</i>	Customization or flexibility	competition among institutions indications of autonomy indications of customization or flexibility
<i>System leadership support for capacity-building</i>	Capacity-building	capacity-building capacity building~based on local needs capacity building~different types capacity building~based on state needs non-duplication of programs or program differentiation program approval~centralized
<u>Relational Codes</u>		
<i>Board and institution relations</i>	Challenges in board and institution relations	board/institutional relationship negative characteristics evidence of a weak system or central office
	Board responsibilities	characteristics of board role or responsibility of board role of coordinating board
<i>Legislative relations</i>	Legislative relations	role of legislature or governmental (governor) relations

Within each organizing category, general themes for each code family will be discussed and differences between the views of key informants from high- and low-performing states will be noted by using illustrative comments from key informants.

Results of Data Analysis

Subject matter code: System policies

The interview question, *to what extent do you see your board relying on policy mandates to ensure that institutional leaders reach expected accountability goals*, provided a clear entre into how boards and system heads view policy as an accountability mechanism. In general, key informants acknowledged that while policy development and enforcement was in the purview of system leaders, it was often described as only one part of a very complex system of accountability. System leaders also indicated that the use of policies was one of the more difficult mechanisms to use and leaders were not always sure when to use policies. Most informants viewed the development of new policies judiciously. One system head remarked, “To the extent that we rely on [policies], I would say we don’t run out and create a lot of new policies to take care of every situation, but there are certain fundamental ones that, of course, everybody is expected to follow.”

Interview data showed, however, that key informants from high-performing states, and less so from low-performing states, consistently described the use of policies by system leadership in specific ways. General themes from statements made by system leaders from high-performing states are summarized as follows:

1. Policies are a fundamental responsibility of the board and system head.

2. There is an expectation that *all* institutions comply with system policies.
3. Policies are enforced, and there are consequences for failure to comply.
4. Policies are linked to metrics that help inform and ensure compliance.
5. Policies are created in a way that permits input from institutional leaders.

The following quote from a system head of a high-performing state was representative of how policy is characterized by key informants from high-performing states:

“Policy is carefully reviewed here to make sure that the institutions, through their presidents in fact, comply with board policy and board directives as well as state statutes, state policy, and state directives. That is one of our very main functions here. Every time we have a board meeting and there are action items to be taken or information items just for discussion and review, there is as part of the write up a link back to board policy or strategic policy so we all understand why we are doing and what we are doing.” (system head)

Key informants from low-performing states, on the other hand, were sometimes ambivalent when describing the role of policy, suggesting, in fact, that policies could be negotiated, that “one size fits all doesn’t really work for everybody,” and “on the specifics of policy, it kind of falls apart a little bit.” The following statement by a system head from a low-performing state elaborates on this perspective:

“Well, one of the things I often say is that policy is a blunt instrument. Policies themselves really don’t work in and of themselves. You can put a good policy on the books but if it’s implemented clumsily, if it’s not monitored properly, then you can have some pretty bad results as a result of it. Policy has to be sharpened by people working in good faith together to make sure that the policy has integrity, that it works, and that you minimize unintended consequences. The reason policies are blunt instruments is that they do produce unintended consequences from time to time. It’s hard to think through all of those consequences in advance. They have to be refined over time. So, how this gets navigated is, I think, more important than the policy itself.” (system head)

Similarly, other system heads and board members from low-performing states characterized policy making as a process that is somewhat “distant” from the colleges and universities and that many expectations for accountability and management of institutions are not in board policy. In addition, policies were often described as “too broad,” “dictatorial” and “not prescriptive so that those policies can be adapted or adopted by the institutions in ways that fit their profile” or that “campuses and their leaders have had lots of chances to persuade us if something is not worth being formalized into policy.” One board member said, “Our policies don’t go too deep. I mean they really are sort of a broad, high altitude governing policy.” Another board member said, “we attempt to be guided by policy...I think we try to.”

While the differences in language by key informants from high- and low-performing states are subtle, these differences were uniform among the two types of respondent groups. Informants from high-performing states spoke with confidence and clarity about the role of governance policies in their system, whereas informants from low-performing states expressed reservations toward using policy as an accountability mechanism. A system head from a high-performing state stated, “Policy is carefully reviewed here to make sure that the institutions, through their presidents in fact, comply with board policy and board directives as well as state statutes, state policy, and state directives. That is one our very main functions here.” In contrast, a board member from a low-performing state remarked, “I think our lack of policy does create confusion for the campuses...and soon it became clear to us, I guess, that the kinds of policy we developed as a ‘one size fits all’ didn’t really work for everybody.” The nuance expressed by many

of those interviewed from low-performing states – policy requires “professional judgment” – compared to a statement from an informant from a high-performing state – policies are “fundamental” or unequivocal – are representative of this difference. A statement by a system leader from a high-performing state reinforces this notion,

The board just says this is the way it will be done. This is our policy and then the institutional leaders are expected to do that and to reach it and to be able to, if need be, as identified by our office, to explain where they may be falling down or where they’re having some particular success. I would say the reliance is almost exclusively on this is our policy.

Subject matter code: strategic planning

While none of the interview questions specifically asked about strategic planning, respondents from all but one state²⁰ made reference to their system’s strategic plan. Key informants from high-performing states often offered their strategic plan as direct evidence of a system that had a strong vision and a plan of action to accomplish ambitious goals. A board member from a high-performing state expressed it this way,

“In order to have an effective agenda for our governance processes, we need to set, or define, an agenda because, obviously, we have to focus in times of limited resources. So, we have invested ourselves very heavily in a clear and focused, tightly designated strategy. And, our agenda for our governing interaction with our executive leadership is that strategy. And, if we find ourselves devoted to and hooked on to an issue, and it is not strategic, we need to question ourselves. Does it need to become strategic or should we move on to something else?” (board member)

²⁰ The state that did not discuss strategic planning provided written comments to the interview questions and, because no question specifically asked about strategic planning, it was not included in the statement. A review of the state system’s website, however, indicates that the system office has an office for academic planning with responsibility for a biennial revision of a long-range plan. The most recent plan available on the website, however, covers the period from 2004-2009.

Another system head from a high-performing state mentioned, “We spend most of our time talking about how to interrelate with the state, of course, and build support for higher education, [and] the presidents are engaged in that way.”

Other general themes that were commonly expressed among system leaders from high-performing states included:

1. Goals and plans *for the system* are clearly identified in a written, published strategic plan.
2. Alignment by system institutions to the system plan is expected.
3. Goals identified in the plan are described as “measurable.”
4. Outcomes are reported to the public.
5. Resources (internal to the higher education system) are aligned with plan goals.
6. The state legislature expects accountability in line with the goals.
7. The plan allows for an assessment of institutional capacity – institutional “niches” or focus-areas are encouraged

The following statement by a board member from a high-performing state illustrates many of these approaches to using strategic planning as a complementary activity to accountability.

“We as the board have developed a good strategic plan, and the strategic plan is set for the university system...as a system. And now, each campus, each president has to align his or her school with that plan and quite frankly, they’ve done a very good job. Each institution when it says goal number one, objective one, dash one, here’s what they’re doing. These are our tasks to meet it. We’ve really tried to [make it] be, you know, instead of a feel-good plan, it’s a no-kidding checklist. I’m a pilot – I like to check things off. When I’m done with the checklist, the engine ought to be running fine. Well, if you look at what we laid out, it is exact percentages to either increase retention or, you know, we’ve laid out percentages, and [the institutions] should meet them.” (board member)

Key informants from low-performing states, on the other hand, described their planning efforts as “in transition” or they indicated they were still studying issues and working with the institutions on alignment. One informant from a low-performing state stated it this way: “We also are just in the middle of a vision/mission re-look and trying to get strategic planning alignment better with the missions and visions of the individual campuses.” The informant indicated that the system does not intend to set a state-level mission and vision first; rather system leaders expect institutional leaders to have a strategic plan which, subsequently, would inform the system plan.

Planning in these low-performing systems was also less comprehensive around public higher education goals and accountability for meeting the state’s education needs. One informant described it in terms of the system’s facility or master plan. Another used language that talked about a system plan in terms of operational strategies, such as shared services and centralization of back office functions for greater efficiency. A third described the current plan as a “vision statement with no measurable goals or objectives.” Two informants from low-performing states indicated that their strategic plan was conceived through a political process: one state system prepared “condition reports” requested by the legislature, and another said the plan was developed by a governor’s commission (separate from the board). Other informants mentioned difficulties in the process of strategic planning – one due to the turnover of board members and another where the plan, while directed by the board, was “written by interns.”

Subject matter code: State funding

State funding and the resultant financial accountability were often discussed by key informants when asked questions about incentive funding or in the context of how states support capacity building in higher education. The data from the interviews of system leaders reflect two aspects of state funding: one, how the funding is used as an accountability mechanism and, two, how the state higher education system *interacts* with the legislature. In this section, only the former will be described. Relations between higher education system leaders and the legislature or the government will be discussed in the *interaction* category on page 151.

Overall, there were no discernable differences in the way informants from high- and low-performing states discussed financial accountability for state funding. As a mechanism of accountability, state funding was described by system leaders from both respondent groups in the following thematic ways:

1. System leaders use control over the allocation formula or model and the funds distributed to institutions (based on appropriations of the state legislature) to manipulate or reward, most commonly, enrollment growth and, increasingly, retention.
2. The allocation model is used by some leaders to focus and encourage institutional efforts on specific priorities, i.e., to improve transfer, support diversity, approve specific programs or support certain types of institutions.
3. Systems leaders are considering or moving toward performance-based funding.

4. Given tight state budgets, system leadership scrutinizes spending by institutions more carefully than in the past, particularly in response to new program requests.

A statement by a board member from a low-performing state reflected many of these themes,

“I would say that politically, there’s been a lot of solidarity during the past several years in order to ensure that higher education receives its resources from the state budget during a very challenging, economic context. So, when the chancellor has adjusted certain changes in the allocations in the budget, the institutions have supported those policies at the statewide level in order to ensure that there is a united front to the legislature to protect those resources.” (board member)

A board member from a high-performing state, described state funding for the system this way,

“We still have a fairly sizeable stake of funding that comes from our legislature. So, we work very hard at being transparent and accountable to them, and reporting to them routinely about how we’re doing with the funds they grace us with.” (board member)

One informant described financial accountability and state funding in terms of expectations for clean audits, and another described the expectation for a balanced budget. While a balanced budget was only mentioned by one state leader, it had clear connotations for accountability, as stated by a system head from a high-performing state.

“One of the ways that we operate here, and this sounds more harsh than it really is, and that is each institution has to have a balanced budget. It cannot operate at a deficit circumstance. The kind of phrase that goes around is, ‘A dollar short and we are going to be president short.’ We have never had to face that, but that is clearly an inducement to presidents to stay on board and make sure that they are running an efficient and economic and balanced budget operation.” (system head)

Subject matter code: Standardized data reporting

Standardized data reporting is a code family that included themes from three codes: 1) standardized or common accountability framework; 2) “dashboard” of

accountability measures; and 3) standardized *reporting* of data or information.

Comments were made by informants in response to the interview question, *in terms of performance measurement, do board policies or practices allow for flexibility in reporting information or data? If so, in what ways?*

Again, differences in how the characteristics of standardized data collection and reporting surfaced in the comments of key informants from high- and low-performing states. In general, the differences were related to system capacity to manage data reporting and expectations from system leadership surrounding the role of standardized reporting to ensure accountability and for what. This accountability mechanism was often described by informants from high-performing states as “systematic.” A board member from a high-performing state described it this way,

“I don’t think there’s too much flexibility because most of this is pretty much hard and fast figures...that are easily attained. All the data, it’s the same national stuff that everybody uses. So, it’s available, and it’s measurable. We’re certainly trying to get away from the feel-good stuff, the subjective things.” (board member)

Another board member from a high-performing state said, “we give them indicators, and ask them for certain data on it...you know, you’ve got to give us the data that shows you either did or didn’t, so there’s no flexibility in the data reporting in that sense.” A system head from a low-performing state, however, expressed less clarity about data reporting, stating, “I would say that the measures that we use are more on the generic side than they are tailored” and another system head from a different low-performing state said, “It [data collection] is not as formalized as one might like.”

Other general themes that described characteristics of data reporting in high-performing states were as follows:

1. Data are linked directly to the system's strategic plan or strategic policies.
2. A centralized system or research office ensures consistency in data collection and presentation.
3. Data are *used* by the board, and it is a public, transparent system.
4. Indicators can be customized to reflect institutional differences.

One high-performing state made extensive use of formal "performance agreements" that facilitated both flexibility and customization for institutions, but reflected, at the same time, the characteristics described above, i.e., links to the system's strategic goals and reliance on standardized data. This statement by a board member from a high-performing state reflects this accountability expectation:

"...when we establish our strategic goals there are then pretty clear metrics attached to all of them. And, each campus has its own set of roll ups for those metrics. And, so, we wouldn't feel it's necessary to layer another layer of policies, for instance, that says, now listen dammit, we told you this. We're going to tell you again. And, so, we look at those metrics and then we can be serious about them. And the old story: the more layers of 'hey, get serious' you have, the less obligation somebody has to follow any of them. So, we have a lot of metrics. We are very accountable for those metrics. They are public documents and we discuss them openly in our meetings. And, was a metric wrong or were we wrong, or how do we reconcile when it isn't." (board member)

Several key informants from low-performing states also described centralized systems for data reporting, but were also more likely to describe nascent efforts to be data-driven in their decision making or in how consistently the information is used. Phrases from respondents elucidate: data collection is "not formalized," "we're putting time and money and talent towards [data systems] ... we'd like some consistency in

information,” and “[we are] trying to get it more data driven than it has been in the past.” One informant mentioned his state has a very formal, extensive system of data collection, but the system uses a consultant to prepare reports . Another informant said their system does not have integrated data collected by the system office because of a lack of resources, and they rely upon affiliated institutions to collect data for the system.

An informant from a high-performing state was careful to point out that reported data may not tell system leaders all they need to know about institutional performance:

“Because it tells you two things; it tells people like me (a board member) that on the one hand what the challenge is, and then, as you look from year to year especially, how well you are doing, which is always the issue with data to me. You know, you can look at the numbers but unless you look at what’s behind the numbers and use some judgment about them, it can put you into some big trap.”
(board member)

Subject matter code: Performance-based funding

Performance-based funding was discussed by key informants in response to the interview question, *to what extent do you feel the board relies on inducements or incentives to achieve results?* The discussion of performance-based budgeting was difficult to distinguish from how some states allocate tuition dollars based on increased enrollment or other aspects of funding that are tied to student outcomes. Some informants viewed tuition-driven allocation as a form of incentive-based budgeting, while others discussed performance that is rewarded by “set-asides” or as a result of achieving a “performance agreement.”

Notwithstanding, the general tone of responses to the question varied somewhat by the two groups of respondents from high- and low-performing states. System heads and board members from 4 of 5 high-performing states embraced the notion of

performance-based funding, through either increasing tuition revenue as a performance incentive or incentivizing high priority programs through a competitive process or “set-asides.” These key informants also spoke of their interest in financially rewarding quality and excellence in programming. While acknowledging that funding is becoming increasingly tight in state budgets, these same informants self-identified their state as being in transition to or having plans in place for greater performance-based budgeting. One system leader mentioned that even with limited funding, the risk of public embarrassment in failing to meet stated goals is sufficient incentive.

Key informants from two low-performing states also mentioned an interest in performance-based budgeting – one acknowledging their leadership “might look into it in the future” and the other informant stating that his state appears to be moving in that direction, but no funds are currently available (other than tuition revenue). Informants from the other low-performing states were less enthusiastic: responses ranged from expressing a fear of “unintended consequences” to frustration that extra funding that *was* allocated to performance-oriented funding had been stripped away by the state legislature. In general, both high- and low-performing states acknowledged that performance-based funding had its limitations – both in practicality, given the funding situation in most states, and in the ability of system leadership to implement a program that is perceived to be legitimate. Yet performance funding appeared to be on the horizon in many states, perhaps in combination with other ways to reward system priorities. These statements, by informants from low-performing states, reflect the difficulties many state leaders expressed:

“I mean, we do collect tuition in a pool, and we allocate it back to the institutions. Of course, we allocate it back in ways that reflect what the institution has been able to do in recruiting and retaining students. So, there’s a direct relationship there with performance...[however] I am not a strong believer in large amounts of money allocated for performance funding. Because over time you have the unintended consequence of the high-performing institutions getting richer and the poorer institutions getting poor as a result of performance. I generally prefer, if you’re going to do that, to have a mix of performance funding rewards. I think they’re not inappropriate; the question is, how much of it do you do?” (system head)

“We haven’t had great systemwide initiatives that are followed up with any type of incentive-type behavior. It is something that we’re looking at [and] that’s interesting timing on your questions because it is a fairly big piece of what this reinvention work group is talking about.” (board member)

Subject matter code: Performance expectations of institutional leaders

Performance expectations of institutional leaders was an unprompted topic of conversation during the interviews, as none of the questions specifically asked key informants to discuss this accountability mechanism. Some informants raised performance evaluation of institution leaders in connection with the customization of accountability afforded to institutions or in the discussion of inducements or incentives. Only two key informants from two different low-performing states made reference to performance evaluations of institutional leaders, but informants from all five high-performing states made extensive comments about the leader’s accountability for institutional performance.

Generally, informants from high-performing states referred to the system head’s responsibility to evaluate institutional leaders, and several informants referred to sharing this information with the board or deeply involving the board in creating institutional goals and expectations of institutional leaders. As stated by one system head, “We look

at each president individually and ask them to create their own goals and standards for the coming year that we can all agree on, [and] that I then share with the board.”

Key informants from high-performing states were also likely to use formal performance tools, such as performance agreements, and to relate the performance of the institutional leaders to the system’s strategic plan. This quote by a board member from a high-performing state illustrates how the board expects alignment of goals in the system of higher education:

“I mentioned the new strategic planning policy requiring a clear linkage with institutional plans. Our board members are also very interested in seeing clear linkages between president’s objectives at the institution level and the state board strategic plan and goals.” (board member)

Informants from two low-performing states also described a similar approach to evaluations of institutional leaders, but one indicated that evaluations are done by affiliated institutions, not the board or system head.

Direction code: Evidence of a strong or weak system

Key informants from both low- and high- performing states had similar characterizations of their state system as “strong.” A system head from a high-performance state expressed a similar position, “I would consider that the [name of system] is what I would call a strong system, strong in the sense that there is a reporting line from the system board to the CEO of the system, the president.” Two board members from different low-performing states said respectively, we have “a board with strong governance powers” and we have “a strong system...it isn’t a collection of pretty autonomous university campuses...this is a system.”

Two key informants from low-performing states also described a strong system as one that had a singularity of purpose and where support for strategic goals was evidence of a strong system. A board member from one state described it this way: “I think there are a variety of models around weak boards, coordinating boards, but [this system] would be regarded as a strong board. We clearly set the priorities and expect our presidents to follow them. We set exclusively the legislative priorities.”

This description was also stated by informants from all five high-performing states where there was shared commitment with the goals of the system. The statements below by two system heads and one board member from high-performing states are illustrative:

“I like to use the metaphor, the mosaic, you know, that we like to see each of the institutions get as highly polished, and finely designed, sharp-edged, great colors, baked on as they possibly can that will be, we acknowledge, different from the way the other pieces, the other campuses design themselves. Then, put them together, that mosaic should have a meaning or value to the people of the state beyond some of its parts.” (system head)

“... there's not dissension about what we need to do. There's broad agreement about what we need to do. The issue, how do you do it and under what conditions and who is making the decisions and stuff like that.” (system head)

“It [the design of performance goals] is a very much a top-down driven process. I would say when we first established strategy as an essential part of how we were going to govern and manage the university, there were a lot of rolled-up sleeves and board engagement in it.” (board member)

Several system leaders from both low- and high-performing states described what might be termed “sub-accountability” mechanisms when speaking about *how* their system is a strong system. For example, three states mentioned the important role that a leadership council of presidents plays (further described in the *interactive* category on page 151), two state informants described “performance agreements” with institutional

leaders as evidence of a strong system and others described the “common purpose” of working on legislative relations as a motivating factor in a strong system.

Two informants from low-performing states and one from a high-performing state spoke of weaknesses in their system or “lack of acting as a system.” The informant from the high-performing state felt the lack of a state-designed allocation formula was evidence of a weak system. The informant from the low-performing state felt the system never emerged as intended stating, “Frankly, before this board – the current make up of it – we seemed to be more focused on trying to finally achieve the [19XX] reorganization, which in a lot of our minds never happened. Before then, we were almost completely autonomous.”

A system head from a different low-performing state described his state system this way,

“I spent six years in [another state] system, so I understand what a tightly organized system is. There is financial oversight, the data definitions, the processes are just enormously centralized. We are more in the bottom quartile towards the decentralized model, but we’re inching our way up to find what is a reasonable level of centralization and oversight.” (system head)

Interestingly, informants from low-performing states, but not high-performing states, tended to characterize their system in terms of how the “system” utilized centralized services or tried to create operational efficiencies. Statements made by informants from low-performing states included the following examples of centralized services:

1. Information technology (IT) resources
2. Enrollment services
3. Standardized purchasing and account procedures

4. Budget advice
5. Online delivery of education
6. Common course numbering
7. Managing minimum enrollment standards for courses

Descriptions of strong and weak systems, while an indication of a directional point-of view, were not uniformly distinguished by state performance type. The distinctions between whether a system is characterized as strong or weak may hinge on the leader's definition (centralized versus decentralized) or other factors, such as the state's approach toward governance, relative alignment of strategic goals, relations among system and institutional leaders. Low-performing states, overall, were, however, represented by this quote, "I think it's a delicate balance, but I would say we are probably, at the moment, erring on the side of saying 'please, behave more like a system'."

Direction category: Flexibility and customization of performance measures

Key informants were asked, *in terms of performance design, do board policies or practices allow for customized measures for individual institutions?* As a directional category, I reviewed codes that gave a sense of direction as to the degree to which institutional performance was tightly controlled or was allowed to reflect institutional differences. Three codes were included in this code family: 'indications of customization or flexibility', 'indications of autonomy' and 'competition among institutions.'

All informants were generally articulate about recognizing the need to design measures of performance that were customized to reflect different institution types, e.g.,

two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities and research institutions and different institutional histories, missions, locations and regional economies. One informant stated, “When we set graduation goals, the targets vary by the type of campus and the selectivity of admissions.” And, “we have [the institutions] figure out in conversation with us how they can best, given their local mission, tradition, faculties, strategic plan, other needs of their region, which might be different from one part of the state to the other, given all that, how they can best contribute to the overall framework.”

Customization and flexibility were described by the institutions as applying to many types of accountability mechanisms including: allocation of funds, policies, data reporting, financial controls, strategic planning goals, performance indicators, presidential leadership and program approval. Comments from high- and low-performing states were consistent in reflecting various ways that flexibility and customization of performance expectations were accommodated through these mechanisms in their state system.

Many informants expressed the view that customized measures provide greater control over accountability than standardized measures. The following two quotes, both from high-performing states, illustrate:

“So, we really let the [campuses] propose what they would like to do for those customized indicators. And they work with our institutional research office at a system level to really get that in place. But, when I do the annual evaluation of chancellors, they give me a written piece in advance based on the memo I sent out to them asking for certain things. We also use their individual institutional performance report as one of the review items in that process. So, that gives us a chance to talk about, you know, what their customized indicators are. How they’re doing on them. If they want to change, they can introduce a new one, and drop one. So, those conversations go on at least...” (system head)

“So, these broad categories, the six broad categories of our strategy, we believe they apply to every, absolutely every, campus. But, the metrics might be different because each of the campuses has a little bit different role and responsibility and scale, and those sorts of things. But, to answer your question; yes, there is adjustment from campus to campus...it’s around where they are versus where they need to be and how long we give them to get there.” (board member)

Preserving institutional differentiation was a common thread in these comments.

System leaders were uniformly unequivocal that customization and flexibility were complementary to how institutions contribute in unique ways, could establish a niche in their state system of higher education, be responsive to regional constituents, support competition that drive institutions toward excellence and preserve authority to manage institutional budgets. One system head from a low-performing state commented, “...our vision is not to strip campuses of their current identity and somehow we brand everyone, as oh well, they are the university system of [name of state]. The vision is that everyone maintains their own identity and should work to differentiate themselves in those places where they are excellent.”

Direction category: Capacity building

The definition of capacity building has its roots in how developing countries are supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is defined as the “process of developing, strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in the fast-changing world”²¹. The role of system leadership in building capacity in the institutions was explored through the interview question, *in general, do you think the accountability measures that have been defined by your board support capacity-building in your system*

²¹ Ann Philbin, *Capacity Building in Social Justice Organizations*, Ford Foundation, 1996.

institutions? The objective in asking this question was to elicit feedback on whether accountability was perceived to be a constraining activity for the institutions or one that pushed institutions toward any of the following: improved governance, leadership, strategy, administrative functioning, program development, partnerships and “positioning” in the legislative arena.

During the interviews, many system leaders asked for a definition of capacity building. The example used based on Dee’s (2006) dialectic was, *what degree of autonomy in program offerings do you feel institutions should have?* In higher education, capacity building is a concept often related to the development of excellence in programming, and the supposition that, through excellence, greater autonomy can be afforded to colleges and universities.

Because interview participants have fiduciary and governance responsibilities for public systems of higher education, informants were quick to acknowledge and affirm their role in building institutional capacity in many ways. Generally, system leaders were supportive of capacity building in terms of enrollment growth (where it is occurring), and the implications of this growth on new facilities or the need to develop online or distance learning capacity.

The overall caution, however, was that capacity building, whether in programs, facilities, online learning or research, must be balanced with fiscal realities both at the system and institutional levels. Accountability for new programming, therefore, was significantly informed by fiscal realities. The way that system leaders and boards constrained growth in programming was to ask institutions to justify the need for

delivering a new program. The following two quotes, one from a board member and the other from a system head respectively, describe this phenomenon:

“I think that they should have some flexibility as long as they can...I’ll use the term, can they prove to us that it’s absolutely essential. They have to submit a plan, with all the defense mechanisms in it, what is your anticipated enrollment, what is it going to cost you, how many more faculty do you have to have, how much more money do you need...all those particular things.” (board member)

“The real question for the board would be, justify it; just tell us why this makes sense. Tell us your assessment of the need. Institutions can almost always do that when they present a new program, and the board would generally tend to approve it. But it’s almost exclusively because the regents are wondering, ‘gosh, nobody has any money, so if you’re creating something new how are you going to make that work?’ I mean, what are you not going to do so that you can do this? Or do you have some robust private fundraising agenda associated with establishing this program that’s going to fund it? So, now there’s more questioning, but it’s really about resources, not about the institution. I mean, there’s almost no question of the institution’s determination that it would be good to start this. [The board] doesn’t tend to quibble with that. I think in a lot of ways they figure you know your business. So, if you can articulate a good reason for it, it sounds good to us. But now they do have the resource question layered on as well.” (system head)

Along with financial considerations, informants from both low- and high-performing states spoke of the struggle to balance the plethora of programs with the idea that quality programming emerges from focused differentiation and non-duplication of offerings across the system. These struggles were described as emerging from local, community interests by a board member – “I think we succumb as a board to community lobbying for programs that might duplicate things that are available elsewhere...” rather than emerging from carefully assessing state needs and the available resources to support new programming. A system head from a high-performing state explained, “But, as part of the system, we think there’s an obligation to look at how it sits in the program array and the program needs across the state.” Another informant from a low-performing state

stated, “We have to support institutions becoming more unique and offering one-of-a-kind programs and then protecting that market share for them.”

System leaders from all states affirmed their authority for program approval yet expressed concern over the approval process and how institutions are often able to justify their capacity building needs regardless of financial constraints. Informants from high-performing states, almost exclusively, however, went beyond the expectations of program differentiation and enrollment growth (and its impact on facilities) to describe other forms of capacity building encouraged by their state system. These forms of capacity building included partnerships, advocacy campaigns, focus on strategic goals, expansion of best practices, centers of excellence and use of earmarks. A common refrain from system leaders in several high-performing states is illustrated in this quote:

“It strikes me as a bit of a non sequitur: the notion that capacity building is measured by expansion of programs. I would suggest that we support to a great extent capacity building, and that perhaps we err on the side of too much autonomy in developing programs. I would suggest that one area of capacity building might be the creating of programs at a higher level of excellence, which is perhaps something that I am more interested in. I think that there may be at [our system] and many other places, sort of too much autonomy and there can be more focus and more emphasis on creating unique programs of excellence that could serve more than one campus.” (system head)

Interaction category: Board and institution relations

Informants’ comments on board and institution relations were explored through the opening question in each interview: *In general, how would you describe the relationship between your system (board) leadership and the institutions in your system?* The question was intended to be a way to engage the interview participant and begin the dialogue. In addition, comments about relations between the board and its institution

were interspersed throughout the interviews as informants discussed how accountability occurs in their state system.

Many positive descriptive terms were used by key informants from both high- and low-performing states regarding relations between system and institutional leadership. These terms included: good relations, positive, quite close, cordial, respectful, excellent, professional, highly regarded, supportive, collegial and engaged. Beyond expressing positive relationships, many system leaders also described ways in which system and institutional leaders engage with one another, such as: robust interaction, somewhat remote, broad agreement, reaching out to engage, solidarity (in bad economic times), works well together, closest colleagues, a consensus approach and collaborative. Several informants referred to how relations are managed in both positive and negative ways. Informants described “carrots and sticks,” “embarrassment and good will,” and “pushes and prods.”

Several informants’ statements reflected the challenges inherent in board and institution relationships. Many of these challenges are related to program approval, lack of financial resources, policies related to common courses or course numbering systems, consequences resulting from institutional leaders ignoring board policies and board interference in institutional management. Two statements, both made by board members from two different low-performing states, illustrate the nuances inherent in board and institution relations:

“I think there is always a certain amount of tension between institutions and boards about what their respective roles might be, and in the past our board has maybe gone into more of a management mode than institutions might like, but I think overall they're very cooperative. They are very respectful of the board’s

position and board members. They may not like some of the decisions that we make, but they have always been very willing to comply with the information that we have requested and that type of thing. So, I think of course almost any institution would like to be totally independent.” (board member)

“I think where there is vulnerability in the political relationship is where the institutions are very wary that a strong Board of Regents and a strong chancellor could usurp the autonomy that they have historically enjoyed. They watch that very carefully. Even though there is no intent to, you know, usurp that in any material way, I think that’s always a concern.” (board member)

One board member provided a valuable reflection as to why informants described their relations in a positive light:

“I don’t mean to be flip about it, but it seems to me that people at the top of the governance structure always think things are going better than the people. And I think that’s good for good reason. I mean I think that’s very understandable because of where some of the decision-making lies and also because everybody has a different viewpoint when they’re on the ground.” (board member)

To refine my understanding of system and institutional relations, I reviewed the interview data for two additional aspects of relations – shared commitment and evidence of formal structures that support relationships. Since shared commitment was often evident in the way formal relationships were structured, these two concepts were often coded together. Shared commitment was coded, as well, when informant comments specifically reflected sharing strategic goals and there was a description as to *how* shared commitment was put into practice.

The following two statements, each from system heads of high-performing states, illustrate:

“So, I think our role as system watchers working with the system wide board is to develop a framework and direction. And we do that with the institutional leadership, not separate from them, and then, have them figure out in conversations with us how they can best, given their local mission, tradition, faculties, strategic plan, other needs of their region, which might be different from

one part of the state to the other. Given all that, how they can best contribute to that overall framework?” (system head)

“So, the board enters into these bilateral, three-year agreements where the institutions propose an agreement. The agreement has to include measurable goals to be achieved over a specified timetable. It’s the most difficult part of the process in terms of the engagement between the board and the institutions. So, there’s a lot of negotiation between, first, staff and institutional representative and then ultimately the board and institutional representative regarding whether what an institution proposes is enough of a stretch, a big enough set of students that they’re trying to affect. Does the board believe it’s an ambitious enough goal? Is it a meaningful enough goal? Is the board satisfied that the metric is an appropriate metric to use for measurement with regard to movement toward the achievement of the goal?” (system head)

In contrast, a statement from a board member from a low-performing state expressed positive relations, but there is a subtle difference in how consequences are portrayed:

“In my opinion, we have a good relationship with the presidents of the institution. However, we are very diligent in trying to make sure that what is decided is in the best interest of the system. We hold the presidents accountable to...if there’s a decision to be made that affects the institution and is harmful to the system, we would probably step pretty hard on that president for doing that.” (board member)

Another organizational construct that might indicate shared commitment is the existence of a council of presidents. Six states, four high-performing and two low-performing, mentioned having a formal council to facilitate relations and governance between system and institutional leaders. Since many of these governance and management structures were beyond the scope of this study, it is difficult to determine the extent to which they contribute to shared commitment. A board member from a low-performing state eloquently described what this would look like, however:

“So, the vision for how things would shift is that, as individuals, and as a body, they would first, see themselves as custodians of the higher education legacy for the state. Second, they will have greater input in a coherent way as individuals and a body to the key policy decisions affecting higher education. We can create

avenues of communication and avenues of input whereby the next strategic plan that's developed by the next chancellor, or presented by the next chancellor, will have been developed from the grass roots up to the trustees. So, when it is fully flushed out, they say, yes, we did that ourselves." (board member)

Interaction category: Legislative relations

Feedback from key informants on legislative relations was limited. The interview questions focused on board and institution relations for accountability, not political or other external influences on governance. As mentioned in the discussion of funding mechanisms, however, legislative influences are evident as both an accountability mechanism (state funding) and in terms of relations between systems of higher education and state government.

Informants described legislative relations in terms of legislative and statutory authority and expectations held by lawmakers, and the influence they have through state funding appropriations. Relations were sometimes described in terms of the state higher education board members' appointments by the governor. In general, there was only some indication (mentioned by two state informants) that accountability *mattered* to state legislatures in terms of reporting and/or accountability as compared to the role system heads and board members play in advocating for state funding allocations. The influence of state legislators, while considered something that "can't be ignored," nevertheless was only described in terms of required reports to the legislature on various aspects of higher education or an evaluation of the system head rather than meaningful efforts to share a commitment for improved results. A board member from a low-performing state, however, provided an example of a fairly integrated accountability system with his state legislature.

“...what we do have though is accountability measures that have been developed in conjunction with a legislative subcommittee called [name of committee]. Those measures have been developed and refined, I think now, over about four legislative sessions. And our legislature meets bi-annually. So, you know they have been around for almost 10 years now and that has allowed us to not only capture more institutional buy-in...when institutions see those accountability measures come through this conversation with the legislature, they understand what the buy-in is...And so that I think has helped us move campuses along in those accountability measures that we have agreed to with the legislature. Whether that has been particularly successful in translating to additional legislative funding for anything is probably up for debate. They [the legislature] have bought in to some strategies in the areas of data collection and distance learning, and provided some additional funding for those things, but overall our funding from the legislature in [name of state] has been pretty stagnant for some time.” (board member)

A sense of mixed commitment to legislative relations was described. Systems felt both accountable to state governments to ensure adequate funding levels *and* discouraged by the lack of support. The following two quotes from two different informants express this dichotomy, and illustrate the current situation regarding state funding in many states.

“I would say that politically, there’s been a lot of solidarity during the past several years in order to ensure that higher education receives its resources from the state budget during a very challenging, economic context. So, when the chancellor has adjusted certain changes in the allocations to the budget, the institutions have supported those policies at the statewide level in order to ensure that there is a united front to the legislature to protect those resources.” (board member)

“They [the legislature] are just trying to survive and it has just been continued funding on a base that is dated, so there are no particular outcomes that are generated by the state appropriations for the bulk of the education funds.” (system head)

These statements reflect a sense of system leaders being beholden to the state, and that state funding is, by default, a part of the system’s management of accountability, but which may provide no clear opportunity for a “win-win” in securing additional resources.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions and Implications

Discussion

During the evolution from college and university autonomy to centralized and consolidated systems of higher education in the mid-20th century, researchers focused on governance structures of higher education and the effects of state policy on system performance. While the benefits of centralization were evident to state governing authorities and higher education agencies, the responsibility for managing the environment between system and institutional leadership was confounded by the multiple types and varying missions and cultures of institutions in these systems.

My research is grounded in a theoretical framework that suggests that enhanced performance in higher education may be related to “alignment” in the transactional environment between state or system leadership and institutional leadership. Dee (2006) drew on the concept of loose coupling to frame the issues surrounding autonomy and accountability in higher education governance. Dee (2006) suggested that loosely coupled organizations are designed to support flexibility and creativity, essential to adapting to changing environments, yet reflect the domain to which it is coupled – in this case, the external environment, which controls higher education financing and regulation. Tight coupling, Dee (2006) explained, favors accountability, which he described as resulting from prescriptive regulation and little discretion in managing strategies and goals.

The purpose of this research was to answer the question, *how do system leaders of public multi-campus systems of higher education balance institutional autonomy and*

accountability to achieve their desired goals for performance? The study was designed to examine characteristics of various accountability mechanisms used in state systems of higher education. The research also provided a comparison of high-performing and low-performing states as determined by state performance of levels of student participation and completion of higher education and benefits derived from attending postsecondary institutions as determined in the report on higher education accountability, *Measuring Up 2008*.

The accountability mechanisms studied in this research reside in the transactional environment between system and institutional leadership. While a few of these accountability mechanisms are not in the direct control of system heads or board trustees, they are, nevertheless, integral to how boards and system heads manage expectations for system and institutional performance. By focusing on the available tools to support effective governance, this research sought to provide a normative way for system and institutional leadership to align performance expectations. For system leaders, the key concept is to use these accountability mechanisms to balance the autonomy valued by postsecondary leaders with state and system expectations for performance.

Summary of the Research

Data examined included the results of a quantitative survey of 71 institutional leaders of colleges and universities in ten states and qualitative interviews of 10 system heads and 13 board trustees. According to the American College President Study of 2007, presidents serve an average of 8.5 years in office and 23 percent are female. In this study, survey respondents were generally newer to their positions than the 2007 national

average: 34 percent have a tenure between 0 – 3 years; 37 percent between 4 – 7 years; 14 percent between 8 – 11 years; and 16 percent 12 or more years. The number of female presidents in the study was similar to the population of presidents with 26 percent of survey respondents identifying themselves as female. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest for Education Statistics (2009)*, the general distribution of two-year and four-year institutions in 2007-2008 in the United States is 39 percent two-year colleges and 61 percent four-year colleges. In this study, 45 percent of respondents were heads of two-year colleges; 52 percent were heads of 4-year institutions; and 3 percent identified themselves as “other.”

The 10 states selected for the study were identified as either low-performing or high-performing based upon composite scores on levels of participation, completion, and benefits reported in *Measuring Up 2008*. In addition, the 10 study states were determined to operate in similar governance structures, and enroll similar numbers of public students. However, levels of financial support (tuition, state and local resources) for higher education varied across the sample.

An Internet survey was designed to ask college and university heads that are part of the public multi-campus systems in the 10 states to rate or rank 18 accountability mechanisms for five attributes: importance, discretion, “high stakes,” whether they reflected professional norms of higher education and political or market-based accountability. The 18 mechanisms reflected different kinds of planning (strategic planning, annual planning and master facility planning), government policies and funding (federal, state and system), accreditation (institution and programmatic), performance-

based accountability (performance indicators, incentive-based funding, and evaluation of the system head) and other mechanisms that reflected external judgments of performance (quality rankings, financial audits, union contracts, market factors and political factors).

Conclusions

Three research questions framed the scope of this study. These questions were designed to examine various facets of what is seen by many governing leaders in higher education as the paradox of accountability and autonomy. Dee's (2006) theoretical framework, however, suggests that loosely coupled organizations can create structures and policies that support reconciliatory relationships. Recognizing and utilizing accountability mechanisms that are deemed important, flexible and effective in the eyes of higher education leaders would be an integral part of these structures. Each research question is discussed based on findings from the survey of institutional leaders and interviews of system leaders to indicate ways that accountability mechanisms support campus autonomy while responding to system priorities.

What types of accountability mechanisms encourage leaders of public higher education institutions to align their institutions with the performance expectations of the system?

Data from the survey indicated that institutional leaders identified four accountability mechanisms as most influential in achieving performance expectations: (1) strategic planning; (2) state funding; (3) institutional accreditation; and (4) system policies. These mechanisms scored uniformly high on four characteristics: importance; "high stakes," i.e., mechanisms that could lead to adverse consequences or rewards for performance; "discretion," i.e., mechanisms that were customizable or flexible; and

mechanisms that reflected professional norms of higher education. With the exception of state funding, these accountability mechanisms also scored *low* in reflecting political or market-based accountability. Judging accountability mechanisms as *low* in political or market influences indicates that institutional leaders feel they have relatively more control over their implementation than the presumed influences external to the organization.

As defined by Dee (2006), alignment is viewed as reflecting “both-and,” rather than “either-or” thinking. The goal for system and institutional leaders is to share a commitment for high levels of autonomy and accountability, and to build relationships that are mutually supportive in seeking high levels of performance. In the interviews of system heads and board members, it is notable that three of the four accountability mechanisms that were deemed important to institutional leaders – strategic planning, system policies and state funding – were the same mechanisms discussed extensively by system leadership.

Notwithstanding critics of strategic planning who fault unproven methods and lack of evidence regarding its effectiveness (Birnbaum, 2000; Mintzberg, 1994a), both institutional and system leaders share a mutual reliance on this mode of accountability. During the interviews, system leaders elucidated on the importance of shared commitment specifically for system strategic goals. Identifying and implementing “strategic actions” is consistent with higher education literature on the role of boards that govern multi-campus systems (Bastedo, 2005; Ingram, 1993; Johnstone, 1999; Nason, 1982). System heads and board members mentioned in the interviews that strategic goals

should be aligned between system leadership and system institutions, and the process should result in the development of measurable goals, transparency in reporting progress toward those goals, and flexibility by reflecting unique aspects of institutions and institutional programming.

Discussion of system policies was also prominent in the interviews of system leaders. McGuinness (2002) described the evolution toward more sophisticated use of policies, which were echoed in comments by system leaders. The author noted that policies can be utilized to decentralize management rather than create centralization, can help promote appropriate kinds of “competitive forces” rather than limit competition and can help stimulate desired responses through performance incentives. Use of policies in this way reflected the views of system leaders from high-performing states who affirmed that system policy can be relied upon as a formal yet adaptable management tool.

State funding was described by both institutional and system leaders as perhaps the most unambiguous tool of accountability. Although perceived to be somewhat less flexible than other mechanisms rated among the top four “most important,” system leaders clearly saw the distribution of state funds as one way to manipulate or reward common expectations for higher education outcomes, i.e., growth in enrollments, improved rates of retention and graduation or other state and system goals. State funding, however, was also considered to be the top ranked mechanism subject to political or market-based influences. In some respects, therefore, the management of this tool is influenced by the duality of how higher education relates to state legislatures *and* the internal processes by which system leaders allocate state funds to system institutions.

This interdependence with the political environment of state government can have potentially dire consequences if institutions are provided too much autonomy, and, yet, system leaders do not feel overly compelled to rely on state legislatures for effective means of accountability.

To what degree do accountability mechanisms allow for flexibility and customization?

Data from the survey of institutional leaders clearly pointed to planning mechanisms (strategic, annual and master planning) and accreditation (institutional and programmatic) as providing the greatest degree of flexibility and customization. This finding is not surprising given the almost exclusive purview of institutional leaders to enact these processes on their campuses. Notwithstanding, system heads and board members also saw strategic planning as providing an effective means of managing system and institutional accountability. Cited throughout the literature on higher education governance for board and system leadership are concepts that support leadership as strategic thinkers and agents of change on behalf their public constituents. System heads and board members clearly pointed to the development and implementation of system strategic plans as direct evidence of a strong system with a vision and plan of action to strengthen public higher education.

It is interesting to note that market factors were judged to be high in discretion by college and university leaders. With a high ranking in discretion (fourth out of 18 mechanisms), it appears that institutional leaders perceive that their efforts at improving the quality of their institutions will be rewarded in the market. Market factors are defined as published reports of quality or measures of success identified by clients, the media or

peer groups. These measures often reflect the reputation of the institution as perceived by the general public or known throughout professional circles in higher education. From the responses by institutional leaders, it is evident that, while this mechanism is not the most important or the most “high stakes,” institution heads anticipate a level of control over the perception of their institution in the marketplace of higher education, including rankings or reports by peer groups and the opinions of clients or independent organizations such as the news media.

Other mechanisms identified as providing a greater degree of discretion to institutional leaders were the three performance-based mechanisms (appraisal of the institution head, performance indicators and performance-based budgeting). Data from the interviews and the surveys indicated these mechanisms provide an opportunity for system and institutional leaders to share responsibility for their design and implementation. The customization and flexibility of these forms of accountability appeared to be linked, as well, to how *relations* are formed and managed between system leadership and institutional leaders. Perhaps inherently, these methods of accountability open channels of communication where institutional leaders are able to comment upon or negotiate the goals for which they will be held accountable, often through formal structures such as performance agreements or a council of presidents.

In general, system leaders uniformly expressed a willingness to manage system accountability in a manner that reflected institutional differences in mission, history, culture and location. For most system leaders, flexibility and customization were not abstract concepts. Many examples were cited in how system leaders build familiarity

with system institutions – from being “assigned” to learn about different institutions to negotiating performance goals with institutional leaders to informal get-togethers. The following statement by a system head accurately described the way leadership for the system is shared between system and institution leaders:

“I would also say that most of the policy decisions are made in concert with the leadership from the campuses. So, once we identify a problem that needs to be resolved, most of the time it’s not just a dictatorial thing from the board. Most of the time it is very agreeable, very much involved with campus leaders. We don’t wait for perfect harmony when something has to go forward for political reasons, but the policy thing is used a lot here, and most of the policies, well; I shouldn’t say it that way. Many of the policies are, from my point of view, are very forward thinking.” (system head)

What attributes of accountability are associated with performance of state systems of higher education?

Data from the survey of institutional leaders regarding the use of various accountability mechanisms were not uniformly conclusive regarding effects on or association with state performance. Overall, very few statistically significant differences were found in respondents’ rankings or ratings of the 18 accountability mechanisms with the exception of those mechanisms considered to be political or market-based.

As to the measure of “high stakes” (the potential for adverse consequences or rewards for performance), only one mechanism, master planning, was considered by respondents from low-performing states to be significantly *lower* than the views of respondents from high-performing states. The difference between respondents from high-performing and low-performing states may indicate that respondents from high-performing states viewed master planning as an extension of strategic planning or institutional accreditation, both of which were considered to be of “high importance” and

“high stakes.” Statements made by system leaders from high-performing states emphasized, with clarity, that planning was an integrative process from the system-level to the institution-level. Because master planning is seen as a flexible and customizable accountability mechanism, yet low in political or market-based influences, it has the potential to be an effective way for institutional leaders to control and manage the implementation of goals identified by state leaders.

Differences in what is viewed as a political or market-based accountability mechanism were significant for four mechanisms between the two respondent groups. Respondents from low-performing states considered two mechanisms *less* political or market-based than respondents from high-performing states: state policies and legislative reporting. A possible explanation for the views of respondents from low-performing states that politics or external influences are infused in these mechanisms would be the lack of involvement by state leadership generally in higher education; therefore, the process of developing legislative policies or reporting are less evident as a political mechanism. This explanation is consistent with the view by respondents from low-performing states that state policy is less important compared to the view of respondents from high-performing states.

Respondents from low-performing states considered two mechanisms to be *more* political or market-based than respondents from high-performing states. These mechanisms were: market factors and quality rankings. Respondents from low-performing states may view these mechanisms as more political or market-based because they feel they have less control over performance outcomes measured by quality rankings

and market factors, which are defined as quality reports or measures of success identified by clients.

While not a statistically significant difference, the importance of state policy was reflected differently by institutional leaders from low-performing states than high-performing states. This difference may indicate that state leaders in high-performing states, e.g., governors, legislators or state higher education officials, have greater involvement in or place greater expectations on higher education institutions for compliance with state policies than low-performing states. Reflecting on interview statements made by system leaders, it would appear that the mixed response to this mechanism could also be related to unique political or governmental factors in each state. Viewpoints expressed in the interviews about legislative relations, both as to funding and state policy, indicate that higher education leaders are beholden to states financially as well as for compliance with a limited set of requirements, but that state policies for the purpose of accountability are not significant in the transactional environment between system and institutional leaders, particularly in low-performing states.

Further Conclusions from the Convergence of the Quantitative and Qualitative Research

It is notable that, from the interviews of system leaders, three of the most extensively discussed subject matter categories, i.e., system policies, strategic planning and state funding, are also three of the highest ranked accountability mechanisms by institutional leaders in terms of importance. In addition to “importance,” institution heads also rated these mechanisms “high stakes,” high in “discretion” and reflecting professional norms of higher education. These attributes and the extensive articulation of

expectations by system leaders to comply with system policies, engage in strategic planning and acknowledge the importance of state funding, clearly indicate that management of these mechanisms is critical for successful state performance.

Two of the three other accountability mechanisms discussed extensively in the interviews of system leaders – financial mechanisms, specifically performance-based funding, and performance appraisal of the institution head – fall into the category of performance-based accountability. While these two mechanisms were judged by institutional leaders to be less important than many other accountability mechanisms, (ranking in the bottom third on “importance” and moderate to low on “high stakes,” discretion, professional norms of higher education and political or market-based accountability), they are considered standard methods of accountability by system heads and board members. Yet, statements by system leaders also reflected a “mixed reception” for other forms of performance-based accountability mechanisms. These leaders expressed both the potential value of performance-based accountability in supporting strategic priorities *and* the risk of unintended consequences by incenting a singular set of activities on campuses or by rewarding one group of institutions at the expense of other institutions in the system.

Interestingly, however, system leaders from high-performing states spoke more confidently about the potential value of performance-based mechanisms than informants from low-performing states, particularly when discussing the potential to enact performance *funding* mechanisms. Notwithstanding the challenge of declining state budgets, performance funding was described as an opportunity for system leaders to

improve accountability and manage institutional autonomy. In addition, system leaders from high-performing states expressed greater reliance on performance appraisals of institutional leaders than did system leaders from low-performing states.

The third accountability mechanism in the performance-based accountability category, performance indicators, relies on the availability of standardized data. Standardized data were discussed extensively by system leaders when asked about flexibility in reporting institutional information or data. System heads and board members from high-performing states were clear about the expectations for effective use of data for decision making, including: collecting and reporting data that are linked to the system's strategic plan, managing data through a centralized research office and reporting data and information in a transparent manner. System leaders also indicated that institutional autonomy can be accommodated through the use of customized data or accountability measures that reflect institutional differences. Similar to the other two performance-based mechanisms, performance indicators or "dashboards" provide a potential balance between accountability and autonomy, as it was judged by institutional leaders to be high in "discretion" (ranked fifth out of 18 accountability mechanisms).

The *direction* categories from the interviews of system leaders explored evidence of a strong or weak system and flexibility and customization of performance measures. The views of institution heads on these topics were explored in the survey question regarding the level of "discretion" in how accountability mechanisms are set or determined. While the survey found no statistically significant differences between responses from institutional leaders from high- and low-performing states, there were

divergences in opinions about which accountability mechanisms provided greater autonomy and discretion than others.

First, mechanisms rated by institutional leaders as permitting the highest levels of discretion, i.e., “able to set or determine” or “able to comment upon,” are a form of planning. These mechanisms include strategic planning, annual planning and master facility planning. In the interviews of system heads and board members, these system leaders also identified planning as part of a “strong system.” These informants described strong planning boards as having a singularity of purpose and a shared commitment with institutional leaders in their support of system strategic goals. In the interviews, system leaders from high-performing states, in particular, were able to articulate *how* shared commitment is formed – both through planning and formal structures of governance, such as a leadership council of presidents or jointly designed or determined performance agreements with the institutional leader.

Institutional accreditation and program accreditation were two other mechanisms that institutional leaders felt provided discretion and flexibility. System leaders did not refer to accreditation specifically, primarily because none of the interview questions asked about accreditation, but it was viewed as an important accountability mechanism by institutional leaders (ranking fourth out of 18 mechanisms). Accreditation was also rated high in “high stakes” (second out of 18 mechanisms) and as reflecting professional norms of higher education (second out of 18 mechanisms), but low on political or market-based accountability (twelfth out of 18 mechanisms).

Given the emphasis placed on flexibility and customization of accountability by system leaders in the interviews, it would appear that state systems of higher education should examine those mechanisms that are most conducive to being managed at the institutional level. In the interviews, system leaders were asked to reflect on how they supported capacity building in their system institutions. System leaders from high-performing states, in particular, enunciated how capacity building should reflect expectations for excellence in programming, such as centers of excellence and relations involving external constituents. These aspects of accountability go beyond many traditional measures and reflect a nuanced view of performance expectations that could take into account unique institutional missions and cultures

The mechanisms identified as most restrictive, i.e., institutional leaders perceived them to be “set without feedback” or were “not informed of performance expectations,” included federal policies, state policies, legislative reporting, financial audits, quality rankings and political factors. These mechanisms were categorized based on the results of the survey of institutional leaders to be more influenced by external forces than mechanisms in the control of system heads or board members. For example, system heads were clear that financial compliance and balanced budgets were important expectations for institutions. Institution leaders appeared to agree as they indicated that financial audits were “high stakes” and lacked discretion.

Statements by system leaders regarding legislative relations reflected a financial tether, but no strong commitment to the way legislatures expect reporting or accountability for performance. The other mechanisms – state and federal policies,

quality rankings and political factors – while considered important, also ranked high in reflecting political or market-based accountability. These mechanisms are enacted by external forces and may involve political influences from legislatures or government leaders where no specific policies are enacted, but where their perspectives hold sway over accountability expectations. System leaders have some influence over the transactions of these mechanisms, but not full discretion, thus having limited direct value for accountability.

Implications for Practice

Burke's (2005) assessment of accountability in higher education relative to external forces is represented by a "triangle" of state priorities, academic concerns and market forces. Balancing this trifecta of influences is the major challenge for accountability in higher education. Burke (2005) states:

At the state level, higher education...governing boards are nearly always the agents exercising authority delegated by governors and legislators as the principals...The beneficiaries are, ultimately, the public and, more immediately, students, businesses, governments, and social and civic organizations. [However,] at the [institutional] level, senior administrators become the agents, exercising the delegated authority over their principals and boards of trustees for the immediate benefit of students and external clients and, ultimately, for the public at large. (p.3)

While informants from high-performing states provided some guidance in the ways these factors – state priorities, academic concerns and market forces – are balanced, the research did not permit a definitive measure for how Dee (2006) described alignment between state and institutional interests such that "additional increments of one variable may strengthen the other" (p. 139). Although finding accurate measures of "increments" of accountability and autonomy through this research proved challenging, the results

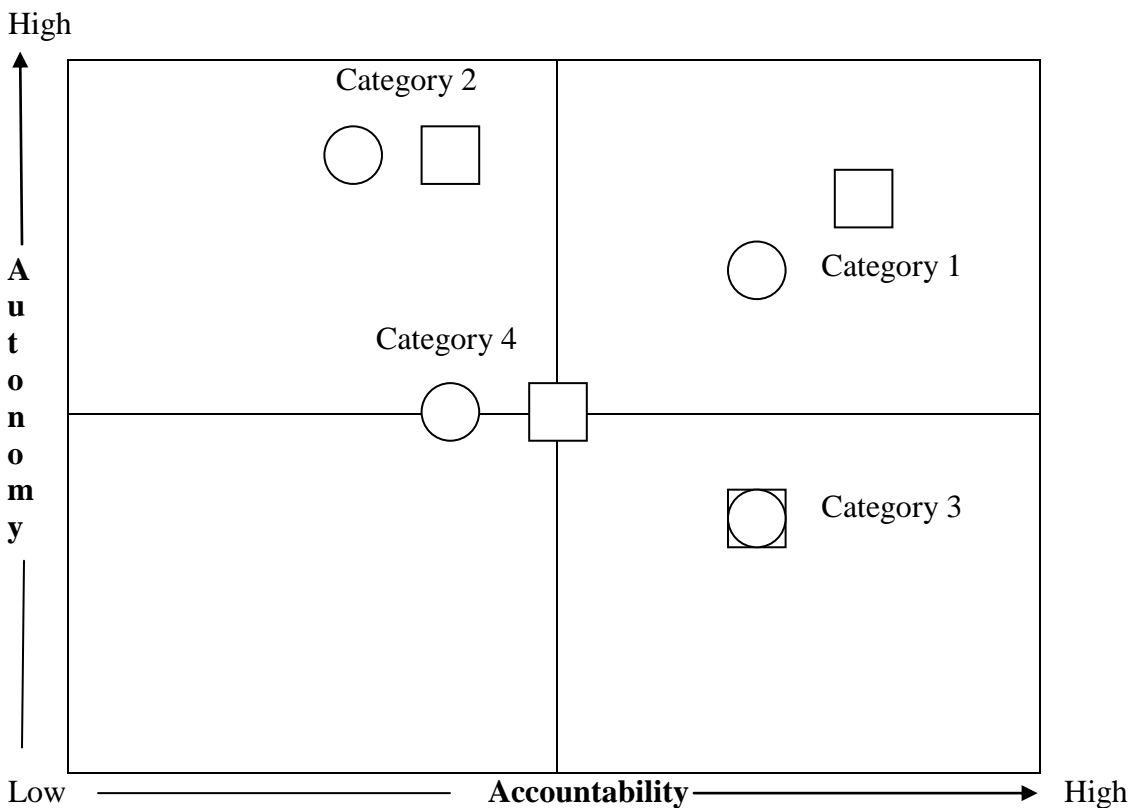
from the interviews of system leaders and the survey of institutional leaders described effective accountability methods and permitted some differentiation between high- and low-performing states.

As illustrated in Figure 5, high- and low-performing states are placed in one of four “quadrants” of autonomy and accountability, ranging from low to high on the x and y axes. To identify groups of accountability mechanisms, the four categories (Categories 1 – 4) from the survey data were used, but further differentiated to reflect: (1) statistically significant differences between high- and low-performing states and (2) qualitative differences as noted or expressed by system heads and board members in the interviews.

Given the slightly different placements of high- and low-performing states in the matrix in Figure 5, the general movement of accountability mechanisms used by state and system leaders should be toward the upper right-hand quadrant of high accountability and high autonomy. For Categories 1, 2 and 4, the utilization or management of mechanisms from low-performing states have further to “travel” toward that quadrant than mechanisms used in high-performing states, whereas in Category 3 (moderate importance, focus on external mechanisms) high-performing and low-performing states both have mixed views on how accountability and autonomy are impacted by external forces. As noted earlier, low-performing states are more likely to find quality rankings and market forces to be greatly influenced by external influences; whereas, high-performing states are more likely to find state policies and legislative reporting to be reflective of political or market-based accountability.

Figure 5

Matrix of Accountability and Autonomy, and Legend Describing Categories of Accountability Mechanisms, by State Performance



LEGEND High performing □ Low performing ○

Category 1: High importance, High Stakes
 Accountability mechanisms: strategic planning, state funding, institutional accreditation and system policy

Category 2: High importance, Low Stakes
 Accountability mechanisms: annual planning, master planning, program accreditation

Category 3: Moderate importance, with a Focus on External mechanisms
 Accountability mechanisms: state policy, financial audit, federal policy, market factors, political factors, quality rankings and legislative reporting

Category 4: Performance-based mechanisms
 Accountability mechanisms: performance assessment of system head, performance indicators and performance incentives

Using Figure 5 and the four categories of accountability mechanisms, the following recommendations for practice should be considered by system leadership.

Category 1: High importance, High Stakes (strategic planning, state funding, institutional accreditation and system policy). System leaders should promulgate expectations that institutional strategic planning, state funding and system policies align with state goals or are financially supported by state funding, but this alignment is largely achieved through a process that is not overly influenced by political or market-based priorities. System leaders should also consider ways for institutions to be attentive the expectations for external accreditation standards.

Category 2: High importance, Low Stakes (annual planning, master planning and program accreditation). System leaders can recognize institutional efforts of planning and program accreditation to support the implementation of the institution's broad strategic goals and to recognize the development of quality programming and facilities.

Category 3: Moderate Importance, with a Focus on External Mechanisms. These mechanisms were identified by system leaders as both moderate to high stakes *and* moderate to high in political or market-based accountability. These mechanisms overall reflected influences of external bodies or agencies on accountability: state and federal governments; audit requirements; rankings or reports by constituents, peers or independent organizations; and political influences.

Mechanisms in this category are placed in the lower, right-hand quadrant of the matrix, i.e., a “moderate” ranking in terms of importance but considered “high stakes” for accountability resulting in an overall placement fairly high in accountability, but low in

autonomy, i.e., low in flexibility and professional norms of higher education.

Respondents from high- and low-performing states had different views about the political nature of these mechanisms, so no differentiation between the two groups of states was made for this attribute.

Management of mechanisms in Category 3 requires deftness. These mechanisms are especially important for board trustees in their role as “buffer” between external agents and institutions, and they require system leaders to be cognizant of their responsibility to protect institutional autonomy and advocate for institutional interests.

Category 4: Performance-based Mechanisms. Performance-based mechanisms are placed in the mid-section of the quadrant, since these mechanisms were perceived favorably across the spectrum of characteristics for both autonomy and accountability. They were not clearly differentiated in the responses by institutional leaders in the survey, yet they were more likely to be identified as important mechanisms in high-performing states where system leaders spoke of formal processes for performance appraisals, expressed interest in designing and implementing performance incentive programs and described clear examples of how data are used as indicators of performance.

Contributions to Theory

This research provided an opportunity to explore and discuss aspects of Dee’s (2006) theoretical framework of loosely coupled organizations and how a dialectical perspective of relationships between system and institutional leaders could be practiced and nurtured. Dee’s dialectical framework reflected on concepts of accountability and autonomy as mutually supportive constructs, the importance of building connections

between campuses and the system/state, development of policies that encompass aspects of both campus self-determination and incentives to respond to organizational priorities and social constructions of shared commitment or “both-and” thinking. The potency of this framework was evident throughout this research in the way system leaders, particularly from high-performing states, described their working relationships with institutions to achieve desired performance results. Table 21 provides an overview of findings from interviews of system leaders that reflected Dee’s dialectical framework of accountability and autonomy.

Table 21

Examples of the Dialectic Perspective

	Accountability	Autonomy
Policies	Policies are enforced, and there are consequences for failure to comply.	Policies are created in a way that permit input from institutional leaders
Planning	Alignment by system institutions to the system plan is expected and outcomes are reported to the public.	Plans allow for assessment of institutional capacity. Institutional “niches” or focus areas are encouraged.
Assessment	A centralized system ensures consistency of data, and data are linked to expected outcomes.	Indicators can be customized to reflect institutional differences.
Shared commitment	System leadership has responsibility for development of a framework and a direction with institutional leadership, not separate from them.	Meaningful and measurable goals result from negotiation between system and institutional leaders.

Limitations of the Study

This research was largely exploratory in nature on two complex topics, autonomy and accountability, in public higher education. While a foundational theory framed the study, i.e., that high levels of autonomy and accountability result in higher performance, the measurement of the two concepts required an unproven construct around the characteristics of accountability that considered participants' views of importance, "high stakes," discretion, reflecting professional norms of higher education and political or market-based accountability of 18 accountability mechanisms. Future studies may provide greater clarity about each of these mechanisms individually, rather than as a comparison group.

Performance distinctions among state systems of higher education were also difficult to determine. While the two groups of states showed similarities on the performance measures in the *Measuring Up 2008* report, a number of other performance measures could have been used or controlled for. While the two groups of states showed similarities on a number of characteristics, e.g., public-to-private higher education student enrollment and governance structures, other state characteristics could have also distinguished state performance and resulted in different pairings of states or have found statistical differences between respondents from the two groups of states. For example, the history of the state's higher education system, state population, political influences, different requirements for state financial support or other factors related to varying institutional mission, are all factors that may have resulted in aggregation of results in a different manner than what is presented in this study.

Another limiting factor of the study is clearly distinguishing between the *state's* and the higher education *system's* priorities and performance goals. The study does not necessarily assume that state and higher education interests see eye-to-eye on all expectations, but the role of the board is to interpret and manage these interactions. This study focuses primarily on the way system leadership interprets its role in ensuring accountability for higher education outcomes on behalf of the citizens of the state. In addition, even the most effectively designed accountability systems or use of accountability mechanisms by system leaders may not insulate a state system of higher education from political influences. Governors and legislative leaders confront numerous policy issues, including conflicts between public and private institutions, faculty unionization, teacher education, urban growth and rural decline, and economic development, and may, with seemingly little notice, introduce intrusive or bureaucratic policies that cross the boundary of healthy relations with state institutions (Mingle & Epper, 1996; Newman, 1987). "The appropriate role for the state in higher education is to protect the public's interest through mechanisms for accountability and to create a climate where institutions of higher education thrive" (Hines, 1988, p. 399). This concept recognizes the critical interplay between campuses and government. To the extent that governmental leaders recognize the vital role of board trustees as key policymakers for higher education, institutions will be protected from inappropriate government intrusion resulting from excessive ideological or political influences. "If the education enterprise is badly fragmented and if the general environment is dominated by

win-lose conditions, then higher education may have a difficult time in the political arena” (Hines, 1988, p. 378).

Recommendations for Future Research

Several investigatory paths are suggested by this research. First, the research showed that institutional leaders have a common view of mechanisms that reflect professional norms of higher education, yet differ to a much greater extent on mechanisms that reflect political or market-based accountability and what effect those differences have on performance. A focused research study of how institutional leaders factor these mechanisms into their expectations for performance would add to the literature on board and system management of higher education when external influences are prevalent or ubiquitous.

Research has made some in-roads into understanding the number of states and the extent to which they have used performance incentives in their financial allocations to state institutions. Research by Burke and Serban (1997), Hauptman (2001), and Zumeta (2001) is now relatively dated, and current research and perspectives may assist system leaders sort through the potential to incent performance and to manage unintended consequences. Research could also explore more explicitly the different forms of performance incentives and which among them have the greatest effect on performance. A review of recent literature on performance-funding, including a study marking 25 years of a performance incentive policy in Tennessee (Bogue & Dandridge Johnson, 2009) and a recent study by Dougherty, et al. (2010) of the adoption and subsequent dissolution of performance-based funding initiatives in Florida, Illinois and Washington State,

demonstrates the challenges leadership of public systems face in enacting these programs. The latter study found that both a lack of support from public institutions and the political influences on design and funding caused a lack of commitment to the potential success of these policies or programs. The findings, in particular, reveal the importance of institutional “discretion” in performance design.

Closing Thought

The findings of this study provide both an enrichment of the theoretical framework developed by Dee (2006) and normative guidance for system leaders to examine how to balance autonomy and accountability in higher education. While the study may not have resulted in a precise definition of “alignment” between state systems and institutions that are part of a multi-campus system of higher education, system and institutional performance can be managed by understanding the attributes of accountability mechanisms and their effective use. Depending on the performance goal, system and institutional leaders can make appropriate selections among accountability mechanisms that, depending on the circumstances, permit institutional customization or flexibility (“discretion”), may result in rewards for performance or adverse consequences (“high stakes”), or reflect professional norms of higher education. In addition, recognition that management of external market and political forces are important roles for board members and system heads will assist institutions in developing the capacity to seek partnerships with students, faculty and state citizens for excellence in educational delivery and advocacy for appropriate levels of state support.

References

- Bastedo, M. N. (2005). The making of an activist board. *The Review of Higher Education*, 28(4), 551-570.
- Berdahl, R. O. (1975). Problems in evaluating statewide boards. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2(1), 1-14.
- Berdahl, R. O. (1989). Shared governance and external constraints. In M.W. Peterson, E. E. Chaffee, & T. H. White (Eds.), *Organization and governance in higher education* (4th Ed.), 217-224.
- Bess, J. L., & Dee, J. R. (2008). *Understanding college and university organization: Theories for effective policy and practice*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Birnbaum, R. (1988). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Birnbaum, R. (2004, Fall 2004). The end of shared governance: Looking ahead or looking back. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 5-22.
- Bogdan, R.C. & Bicklen, S.K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster.
- Bogue, E., & Johnson, B. (2010). Performance Incentives and Public College Accountability in the United States: A Quarter Century Policy Audit. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 22(2), Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Bolman, L.G., & Deal, T.E. (1991). *Reframing organizations: artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bowen, F.M., Bracco, K.R., Callan, P.M., Finney, J.E., Richard C., Jr., & Trombley, W. (1997). *State structures for the governance of higher education: A comparative study*. San Jose: California Higher Education Policy Center. Accessed November, 2009 at: <http://www.capolicycenter.org/comparative/comparative.html>
- Brubacher, J. S., & Rudy, W. (2002). *Higher education in transition: a history of American colleges and universities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Burke, J.C. (2005). *Achieving accountability in higher education: Balancing public, academic, and market demands*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Burke, J. C. (1999). Multicampus systems: The challenge of the nineties. In G. Gaither (Ed.), *The multicampus system: perspectives on practice and prospects*, 40-81. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Burke, J. C., & Others. (1994). New perspectives on system and campus roles in a public multi-campus system. *Studies in Public Higher Education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, Office of the Chancellor.
- Burke, J.C. & Minassians, H.P. (2002). Reporting higher education results: Missing links in the performance chain. *New Directions for Institutional Research*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.
- Burke, J.C. & Serban, M.A. (1997, December). Performance funding: Fashionable or emerging trend? *Community College Journal*. 68, p. 27-29.
- Callan, P. M. (1975). Evaluating planning by statewide boards. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2(1), 15-26.
- Callan, P.M., & Finney, J.E. (2005). State-by-state report cards: Public purposes and accountability for a new century. In J.C. Burke and Associates (Ed.), *Achieving accountability in higher education: Balancing, public, academic, and market demands*, 198-215, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Chafee, E. E. (1985). Three models of strategy. In M.W. Peterson, E. E. Chaffee, & T. H. White (Eds.), *Organization and governance in higher education (4th Ed.)*, 225-238.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Dill, D. (2001). The regulation of public research universities: Changes in academic competition and implications for university autonomy and accountability. *Higher Education Policy*, 14(1), 21-35.
- Dee, J. (2006). Institutional autonomy and state-level accountability: Loosely coupled governance and the public good. In W.G. Tierney (Ed.), *Governance and the public good*, 133-156. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Dougherty, K. J., Natow, R. S., Hare, R. J., Vega, B. E., & Columbia University, C. (2010). The Political Origins of Higher Education Performance Funding in Six States. CCRC Brief. Number 47. *Community College Research Center, Columbia University*, Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Doyle, W.R. (2007). Challenges in collecting cross-state measures of resources for higher education. In Shaw, K.M. and Heller, D.E. (Eds.), *The Challenges of Comparative*

- State-level Higher Education Policy Research*. 97-121. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Duderstadt, J. (2008). *Aligning American higher education with a 21st century public agenda*. Washington, DC: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Retrieved November 1, 2008, from <http://www.agb.org/user-assets/Documents/center/Duderstadt%20White%20Paper.pdf>
- Ewell, P. (1994, November). Accountability and the future of self-regulation. *Change*, 26, 25-29.
- Ewell, P.T. & Jones, D.P. (2006). State-level accountability for higher education: On the edge of a transformation. *New Directions for Higher Education* (138), 9-16.
- Gaither, G., Nedwek, B.P., & Neal, J.E. (1994). Measuring up: The promises and pitfalls of performance indicators in higher education. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No.5*.
- Gayle, D.J., Tewarie, B., & White, A.Q., Jr. (2003). Governance in the twenty-first-century university: Approaches to effective leadership and strategic management. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*. Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series.
- Glenny, L. A. (1959). *Anatomy of public colleges: The challenges of coordination*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Harclerod, F.F. (1975). Can state systems adapt models of business decentralization?. *New Directions in Institutional Research*, 2(1), 27-42.
- Hauptman, A.M. (2001). Reforming the ways in which states finance higher education. In D.E. Heller (Ed.), *The states and public higher education policy: Affordability, access and accountability*, 64-82. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hearn, J. C., & Griswold, C. P. (1994). State-level centralization and policy innovation in U.S. postsecondary education. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 16(2), 161-190.
- Hearn, J. C. & Holdsworth, J. M. (2002). Influences of state-level policies and practices on college students' learning. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 77(3), 6-39.
- Heller, D. E. (2001). *The states and public higher education policy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Hines, E. R. (1988). State Leadership in Higher Education. In L. F. Goodchild, C. D. Lovell, E. R. Hines, & J. I. Gill (Eds.), *Public policy and higher education*, 376-404. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Hines, E. R. (2000). The governance of higher education. In John C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, 105-155. Bronx, NY: Agathon Press.
- Hochwarter, W., Ferris, G., Zinko, R., Arnell, B., & James, M. (2007). Reputation as a moderator of political behavior-work outcomes relationships: A two-study investigation with convergent results. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(2), 567-576. Retrieved from Business Source Premier database.
- Hufner, K. (2003). Higher education as a public good: Means and forms of provision. *Higher Education in Europe*. XXVIII(3), 339-348.
- Hughes, J. F., & Mills, O. (1975). *Formulating policy in postsecondary education*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Huisman, J. & Currie, J. (2004). Accountability in higher education: Bridge over troubled water? *Higher Education*, (48), 529-551.
- Ingram, R. T. (1993). Responsibilities of the governing board. In R. T. Ingram and Associates (Eds.), *Governing public colleges and universities*, 93-111. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnstone, D. B. (1999). Management and leadership challenges of multicampus systems. In G. Gaither (Ed.), *The multicampus system: perspectives on practice and prospects*, 3-20. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Kaplan, G. (2004, Fall2004). Do governance structures matter?. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 23-34.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. (2001). Organizations and the system concept. In Schafritz, J. M., & Ott, J. S (Eds.), *Classics of organization theory*, 257-267. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc.
- Kelderman, E. (2009, May). Public colleges consider privatization as a cure for the common recession. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(34), A16-A17.
- Kelley, D. L. (1999). *Measurement made accessible: a research approach using qualitative, quantitative, and quality improvement methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

- Kerr, C. (1993). *Troubled times for American higher education: The 1990s and beyond*. Buffalo, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kerr, C., & Gade, M. (1989). *The guardians: Boards of trustees of American colleges and universities, what they do and how well they do it*. Washington, DC: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.
- Kezar, A. (1999) Higher education trends (1997-1999): *Policy and governance*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. Washington, DC: George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development.
- Kezar, A. (2004). Obtaining integrity? Reviewing and examining the charter between higher education and society. *The Review of Higher Education*, 27(4), 429-459.
- Kezar, A. (2004, fall 2004). What is more important to effective governance: Relationships, trust, and leadership, or structures and formal processes?. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 35-46.
- Leslie, D.W., & Novak, R.J. (2003). Substance versus politics: Through the dark mirror of governance reform. *Educational Policy*, 17(1), 98-120.
- Lingenfelter, P. (2008). *State support for higher education*. Washington, D. C.: Association for Governing Boards. Retrieved November 20, 2008 at www.sheeo.org
- Lingenfelter, P. (2004, Fall2004). The state and higher education: An essential partnership. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 47-59.
- Lingenfelter, P., Novak, R. & Legon, R. (2008) *Excellence at scale – What is required of public leadership and governance in higher education?*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards, of Universities and Colleges. Retrieved November 20, 2008 at http://webstorage3.mcpa.virginia.edu/conferences/whitepaper/conf_2008_0609_cole.pdf
- Longanecker, D. A. (2006). The “new” new challenge of governance by governing boards. In W. A. Tierney (Ed.), *Governance and the public good*, 95-115. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- MacTaggart, T. J. (1996). *Restructuring higher education: what works and what doesn't in reorganizing governing systems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- MacTaggart, T. J. & Mingle, J. R. (2002). *Pursuing the public's agenda: Trustees in partnership with state leaders*. Washington, D. C.: Associations of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Retrieved November 20, 2008, at http://www.agb.org/user-assets/Documents/center/pages/public_agenda.pdf

- McConnell, T. R. (1962). *A general pattern for American public higher education*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McGuinness, Jr., A. C. (1996). A model for successful restructuring. In T. J. MacTaggart & Associates (Eds.), *Restructuring higher education*, 203-229. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McGuinness, Jr., A. C. (2002). *Reflections on postsecondary governance changes*. Retrieved November 20, 2008, from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/37/76/3776.doc>
- McGuinness, Jr., A. C. (1993). Strengthening relationships with government agencies and political leaders. In R. T. Ingram and Associates, *Governing public colleges and universities*, 196-225. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McGuinness, Jr., A. C. (1994). The changing structure of state higher education leadership. In L. F. Goodchild, C. D. Lovell, E. R. Hines, & J. I. Gill (Eds.), *Public policy and higher education*, 125-159. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- McGuinness, Jr., A. C. (1999). The states and higher education. In P. G. Altbach, R. O. Berdahl, & P. J. Gumport (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic Challenges*, 183-215. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- McLendon, J. K. (2003a). State governance reform of higher education: Patterns, trends, and theories of the public policy process. In J. S. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research volume XVIII*, 57-143. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- McLendon, M. (2003, September). Setting the Governmental Agenda for State Decentralization of Higher Education. *Journal of Higher Education*, 74(5), 479. Retrieved June 13, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- McLendon, M. K., & Ness, E. C. (2003). The politics of state higher education governance_reform. *The Peabody Journal of Education*, 78 (4), 66-88.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Millard, R. M. (1980). Power of state coordinating agencies. In P. Jedamus & M. W. Peterson (Eds.), *Improving academic management: A handbook of institutional planning and research*, 65-95. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Millett, J. D. (1984). *Conflict in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass .

- Millett, J. D. (1975). State coordinating boards and statewide governing boards. *New Directions for Educational Research*, 2(1), 65-70.
- Mingle, J. R. (1988). Effective coordination of higher education: What is it? why is it so difficult to achieve?. In L. F. Goodchild, C. D. Lovell, E. R Hines, & J. I. Gill (Eds.), *Public policy and higher education*, 410-420 . Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Mingle, J R. & Epper, R. M. (1996). State coordination and planning in an age of entrepreneurship. In L. F. Goodchild, C. D. Lovell, E. R Hines, & J. I. Gill (Eds.), *Public policy and higher education*, 476-490. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Nason, J. W. (1993). Responsibilities of the governing board. In R. T. Ingram and Associates, *Governing independent colleges and universities: A handbook for trustees chief executives and other campus Leaders*, 97-113. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Nason J. W. (1982). *The nature of trusteeship: The role and responsibilities of college and university boards*. Washington, DC: The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.
- Nettles, M., & Cole, J. (2001). A study in tension: State assessment and public colleges and universities In D.E Heller (Ed.), *The states and public higher education policy: Affordability, access and accountability*, 198-218. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Newman, F. (1987). Choosing Quality. In L. F. Goodchild, C. D. Lovell, E. R Hines, & J. I. Gill (Eds.), *Public policy and higher education*, 453-466. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Newman, F., Couturier, L. & Scurry, J. (2004). *The future of higher education: Rhetoric, reality, and the risks of the market*. The Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series. Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated
- Novak, R. J. (1996). Methods, objectives, and consequences of restructuring. In T. J. MacTaggart and Associates, *Restructuring higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Page, S. (2006). The web of managerial accountability: The impact of reinventing government. *Administration and Society*. (38)2, 166.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. New York: Harper and Row.

- Porter, M. (1985). *Competitive advantage: creating and sustaining superior performance*. New York: Free Press.
- Presley, J. B., & Leslie, D.W. (1999). Understanding strategy: An assessment of theory and practice. In John C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research, vol. xiv*, 201-239. Bronx, NY: Agathon Press.
- Price, A. D. F. & Newson, E. (2003). Strategic management: Consideration of paradoxes, processes, and associated concepts as applied to construction. *Journal of Management in Engineering, 19(4)*, 183.
- Richardson, R. C., Jr., Bracco, K. R., Callan, P. M., & Finney, J. E. (1999). *Designing state higher education systems for a new century*. Phoenix: The Oryx Press.
- Richardson, R. C., Bracco, K. R., Callan, P. M., & Finney, J. E. (1998). *Higher education governance: Balancing institutional and market influences*. San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
- Richardson, R. C. & Martinez, M. (2009). *Policy and performance in American higher education: An examination of cases across state systems*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Richardson, R.C., & Smalling, T.R. (2005). Accountability and Governance. In J.C. Burke and Associates (Ed.), *Achieving accountability in higher education: Balancing, public, academic, and market demands*, 25-54, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Ruppert, S.S. (1995). Roots and realities of state-level performance indicator systems. In Goodchild, L. F., Lovell, C. D., Hines, E. R., & Gill, J. I. (Eds.), *Public policy and higher education*, 315-324. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Scott, William G. (1961). Organization theory: An overview and an appraisal. In J. M. Schafritz. & J. S. Ott (2001). *Classics of organizational theory*, 248-256. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc.
- Selingo, J. (2003, February 28). The disappearing state in public higher education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 49(25)*, pA22.
- Szutcz, J. (1999). Higher education systems and strategic planning. In G. Gaither (Ed.), *The multicampus system: perspectives on practice and prospects*, 82-97. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Tikalsky, Julie Ann Bubolz (2003). The role of public research university trustees in accountability. Ph.D. dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, United States --

- Pennsylvania. Retrieved February 25, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses @ CIC Institutions. (Publication No. AAT 3106335).
- Trow, M. (1996). Trust, markets and accountability in higher education: a comparative perspective. *Higher Education Policy*, 9(4), 309-324.
- Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. In M.W. Peterson, E. E. Chaffee, & T. H. White (Eds.), *Organization and governance in higher education (4th Ed.)*, 103-117.
- Wellman, J. V. (2006). Rethinking state governance of higher education. In W. A. Tierney (Ed.), *Governance and the public good*, 95-115. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Whitney, K.M. (2004). The privatization of public higher education: The relationship between state control and state funding of public institutions of higher learning. Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, United States -- Texas. Retrieved June 13, 2009, from Dissertations & Theses: A&I database. (Publication No. AAT 3126132).
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Zumeta, W. (2001). Public policy and accountability in higher education: Lessons from the past and present for the new millennium. In D. E. Heller (Ed.), *The states and public higher education policy*, 155-197. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Appendix A: Survey of Institutional Leaders and Informed Consent

Title: Accountability Mechanisms in Public Multi-campus Systems of Higher Education

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to examine how institutional presidents of colleges and universities that are part of a state system of higher education view accountability mechanisms used by their governing boards to improve performance of the state's higher education system.

Part 1 of the survey has three questions and will ask you for demographic information about yourself and your institution. In Part 2, you will be given a list of 18 accountability mechanisms that are evident in most state systems of higher education. These accountability mechanisms may influence your work as head of your institution in meeting state board or system's expectations for performance.

Part 1: Participant information

Number of years you have served in this position for this institution:

Your gender: M/F

Identify institution type: Two-year college
 Four-year college or university
 Other

Part 2: Institutional leaders' views of accountability mechanisms in higher education

1. For each accountability mechanism [LISTED BELOW], consider the amount of time, attention and institutional resources devoted to achieving or complying with the accountability mechanism for your institution. Based on those factors, how important is this mechanism to you and your institution? Choose between 0 (least important) to 10 (highest importance).
2. Which mechanisms do you believe are most strongly linked to rewards for meeting performance expectations or may result in adverse consequences? Please rank the top five you believe are "high-stakes" from a reward or consequence perspective. Start with one (1) as the highest to five (5) as the lowest.
3. For each accountability mechanism, identify the degree of flexibility and customization you feel is afforded to you as president of your institution in achieving or complying with the accountability mechanism.
The scale for this measure is as follows:
 1. I am able to set or determine a performance target or compliance standard for my institution with this accountability mechanism

2. I am able to comment on or negotiate, but not determine, a performance target or compliance standard for my institution
 3. The performance target or compliance expectations are set without feedback
 4. I am not informed of the expectations of this performance target or compliance standard
 5. This accountability mechanism is not used in my state system of higher education
4. Which mechanisms do you feel most represents the professional norms of higher education? You may identify up to five accountability mechanisms; in no order of priority.
 5. Which mechanisms do you feel represents most reflect political or market-based accountability? You may identify up to five accountability mechanisms; in no order of priority.

List of accountability mechanisms and definitions [included in the survey]:

1. State funding allocation – Financial allocations that support the general operating budget of the college or university. These allocations may be raised through other means other than state appropriation including local levies, property taxes, etc.
2. Performance- or incentive-based budgeting – Funding allocations awarded based on performance achieved in some area of interest to a state funding agency, legislative body or executive (governor) branch.
3. Performance indicators (“dash-board measures” or “system reporting”) – Indicators of performance that are determined by the state governing or coordinating board, usually in the context of the system strategic plan, and that are often published or made public through a system report or Web-based media. May also be referred to as a “digital dashboard” where graphics similar to a car dashboard has gauges that simplify information for the public.
4. Legislative reporting – Legislative reports are required by state legislative bodies in response to specific requests for information about the performance of higher education; may or may not be a requirement in law or statute.
5. Financial audits – A financial audit examines an institution’s internal controls and fiscal compliance. A financial audit must be conducted by an independent third party, such as a CPA firm or a legislative auditor, either annually or on some other agreed upon schedule.
6. Federal policies – The system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning higher education promulgated by the federal government.
7. State policies – The system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning higher education promulgated by the state as the governmental entity.

8. System policies – A program of actions developed and adopted by the governing board to govern the system’s colleges and universities. Policies reflect broad general directions.
9. Institutional accreditation – The process of reviewing higher education institutions and programs for quality by private, nongovernmental organizations created for the specific purpose of conducting evaluations of quality.
10. Quality rankings or peer-comparisons using metrics – An attempt to measure the quality of higher education using common factors or indicators of quality — explicit or implicit — that are weighted to produce an outcome which, in turn, is ranked in comparison with other institution’s results.
11. Program accreditation or independent self-studies of institutional programs – The process of establishing and applying standards that assure quality and continuous improvement that reflect the evolving nature of education, research, and practice in a program of study.
12. Institutional strategic planning – The process of aligning an institution with its environment, establishing a context for accomplishing goals, and providing a framework and direction to achieve the organization’s desired future.
13. Institutional annual planning – A short-term plan that describes the institutions current situation, its objectives, strategy, planned actions, and budgets for the year.
14. Institutional master academic or facilities planning – A long range planning process that considers first the academic plans of the institution, expected changes in student enrollment or faculty needs (and other academic considerations), and subsequently maps out or plans facility needs (buildings, grounds, HVAC) that would permit the institution to fulfill the academic goals of the institution.
15. Performance appraisal - Review of the institution head’s performance by the system head (chancellor or president) based upon an annual work plan or other agreed upon measures of employment. Decisions regarding the pay or bonus of the institutional leader may or may not be a part of this kind of review.
16. Union contracts – Compliance with faculty and/or staff contracts for labor where an audit or review may identify work rule issues or other aspects of non-compliance with a contract for employment.
17. Market factors, e.g. published reports of quality, measures of success identified by clients. These measures often reflect on the reputation of the institution as perceived by the general public or known throughout professional circles in higher education. Many market factors may have an influence on the competition for state or local financial resources in public systems of education.
18. Political factors, e.g. interests of political officials (not in policy)
19. Other mechanisms identified by respondents

You may return to an earlier part of the survey at any time. You may leave the survey and complete it at another time without losing the answers to the questions you have completed. When you have completed the survey to your satisfaction, click SUBMIT. At that time you will no longer be able to change your responses and you will receive an acknowledgement of your successful survey submission.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH STUDY
The University of Minnesota

Title of Research: Accountability Mechanisms in Public Multi-campus Systems of
Higher Education

Researcher: Mary Rothchild, Ph.D. candidate, Organizational Leadership, Policy &
Development
College of Education and Human Development
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
E-mail: roth0048@umn.edu

Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to examine how institutional presidents of colleges and universities that are part of a state system of higher education view accountability mechanisms used by their governing boards to improve performance of the state's higher education system.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked questions using an Internet survey. Your responses, along with those of other institutional leaders from ten different states, will be used to understand what accountability mechanisms are deemed important and the extent to which these mechanisms afford you a degree of flexibility and autonomy in their implementation.

Part 1 of the survey asks you three demographic questions about yourself and your institution.

Part 2 of the survey asks your views of various accountability mechanisms. You will be asked for your judgments regarding these accountability mechanisms in the following ways: 1) how important it is for your institution to achieve or comply with each mechanism; 2) to identify which mechanisms are most strongly linked to rewards or adverse consequences for your institution; 3) the degree to which you are afforded flexibility or customization in achieving or complying with each accountability measure; 4) to identify which mechanisms most represent the professional norms of higher education and institutional leadership; and 5) to identify which mechanisms you perceive are most associated with political or market-based accountability measures.

Your participation in the survey will take a total of approximately 20 - 30 minutes. To complete the survey you must click the "SUBMIT" button. Any questions regarding the survey or research procedures should be directed to Mary Rothchild by electronic mail at roth0048@umn.edu.

Your Rights as a Study Participant

The following section describes the rights of those agreeing to participate in the research:

1. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in this research at any time during the survey procedure.
2. Participation poses minimal risks and none that one would harm your physical or mental well-being.
3. Your identity will remain confidential and only the researcher will have access to your identity and affiliation. Your identity will be coded so that only the researcher can match a name to a code number. Only aggregate data will be presented.
4. Both the Internet-based survey and any printed copies will be destroyed upon completion of the research and conferral of the doctoral degree in 2011.

Consent Agreement

This section indicates that you have read this document and are giving your informed consent to participate in the research.

I agree to participate in an investigation to understand accountability mechanisms that influence the transactional environment between system leadership and institutional leadership in public higher education and the degree to which those mechanisms can be customized or allow for flexibility in implementation. I understand this study is an authorized part of the education and dissertation requirements of the Ph.D. program in the College of Education and Human Development of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I understand the information provided in this consent form and any other instructions given to me to understand the nature of the research. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I will receive no compensation for my participation. I understand that by providing my name below and by checking the acknowledgement box below, I am giving my implied consent to participate.

Appendix B: Interview of System Heads and Board Members and Informed Consent

Interview opening statement:

Thank you for agreeing to participate. (Review informed consent statement form, answer questions and have the respondent sign two copies, one for him or herself and one for the researcher). The purpose of this interview is to ask for your views on accountability mechanisms in systems of public higher education. In your role as board member, I am interested in how you view the often dichotomous position of ensuring accountability for performance with the autonomy sought by academic leadership in colleges and universities.

Interview questions:

1. In general, how would you describe the relationship between your state governing board and the institutions that are a part of your system?
2. Let's focus now on accountability. To what extent do you see your board relying on policy mandates to ensure that institutional leaders reach expected accountability goals?
3. Alternatively, to what extent do you feel the board relies on inducements or incentives to achieve results?
4. In terms of performance design, do board policies or practices allow for customized measures for individual institutions? If yes, can you describe this or provide examples of measures that can be customized or modified by institutional leaders in your system of higher education?
5. In terms of performance measurement, do board policies or practices allow for flexibility in reporting information or data? If yes, in what ways?
6. In general, do you think the accountability measures that have been defined by your board support capacity-building in your system institutions? For example, what degree of autonomy in program offerings do you feel institutions should have?

INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH STUDY
The University of Minnesota

Title of Research: Accountability Mechanisms in Public Multi-campus Systems of Higher Education

Researcher: Mary Rothchild, Ph.D. candidate, Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development
College of Education and Human Development
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
E-mail: roth0048@umn.edu

The purpose of the research in which you will be participating is to examine how governing boards of public higher education ensure alignment of system priorities with the priorities that influence decision-making by the leadership of the system's colleges and universities. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked questions about both your role on your state's governing board for higher education and your views of accountability for performance by the system institutions. Your responses, along with those of other governing board trustees and systems heads, will be used to understand accountability mechanisms in use by higher education systems in the United States.

Your participation in the interview will take a total of approximately 30 minutes. I will be tape recording our discussion. Any questions regarding the interview or research should be directed to Mary Rothchild by electronic mail at roth0048@umn.edu.

The following section describes the rights of those agreeing to participate in the research:

1. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in this research at any time during the interview.
2. Participation poses minimal risks and none that one would harm your physical or mental well-being.
3. Your identity will remain confidential and only the researcher will have access to your identity and affiliation. Your identity will be coded so that only the researcher can match a name to a code number. Only aggregate data will be presented.
4. The interview tape and the researcher's notes will be destroyed upon completion of the research and conferral of the doctoral degree in 2011.

This section indicates that you have read this document and are giving your informed consent to participate in the research.

I agree to participate in an investigation to understand accountability mechanisms that influence the transactional environment between system leadership and institutional leadership in public higher education and the degree to which those mechanisms can be

customized or allow for flexibility in implementation. I understand this study is an authorized part of the education and dissertation requirements of the Ph.D. program in the College of Education and Human Development of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I understand the information provided in this consent form and any other instructions given to me to understand the nature of the research. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I will receive no compensation for my participation. I understand that by signing my name below, I am giving my implied consent to participate.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Appendix C: List of Codes

annual planning
 board and institution relationship - negative characteristics
 board and institution relationship - positive characteristics
 capacity-building
 capacity building ~ based on local needs
 capacity building ~ different types
 capacity building~based on state needs
 challenges of policy implementation
 characteristics of accountability
 characteristics of board
 characteristics of system head
 competition among institutions
 dashboard of performance measures
 evidence of a strong board or strong system
 evidence of a weak system or central office
 evidence of an inducement or incentive
 examples of consensus building or process
 financial expectations
 financial support ~ not incentive-based
 indications of autonomy?
 indications of customization or flexibility
 indications of straightforward expectations
 institutional leaders' individualized reporting
 institutional leaders' performance evaluations
 lack of autonomy
 lack of flexibility or customization
 lack of interest in inducements or incentives
 non-duplication of programs or program differentiation
 performance-based funding for institutions
 presidents' councils or leadership groups of institutional leaders
 program approval~centralized
 reliance on policies
 role of coordinating board
 role of the legislature or governmental (governor) relations
 role or responsibility of board
 role or responsibility of system head
 shared commitment
 standardization of reporting data or information
 standardization or common accountability framework
 study commissions~advisory councils
 use of "performance agreements"~with presidents
 use of strategic plans or directions