

**MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
BOARD OF TRUSTEES STUDY SESSION
JULY 21, 2010**

Board Members Present: *Chair Scott Thiss; Trustees Duane Benson, Cheryl Dickson, Jacob Englund, Christopher Frederick, Clarence Hightower, Philip Krinkie, Dan McElroy, Alfredo Oliveira, David Paskach, Tom Renier, Christine Rice, Louise Sundin and James Van Houten.*

Board Members Absent: *Michael Vekich*

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees held a study session on July 21, 2010, at Wells Fargo Place, 4th Floor, Board Room, 30 East 7th Street in St. Paul. Chair Thiss called the meeting to order at 10:18 am.

1. High Quality Learning Accountability Measure

Presenters:

Peter T. Ewell, Vice President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

Scott Olson, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs

Leslie Mercer, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Planning

Craig Schoenecker, System Director for Research

The Board of Trustees held a study session to review alternative approaches to reporting on student learning and to determine an appropriate method for adding a measure of high quality learning to the Accountability Dashboard.

Dr. Schoenecker started the session with an overview of the system's Accountability Dashboard. He said it was developed as a simple, quick way for Board members, system stakeholders, legislators and the general public to get a sense of institutional performance in various areas. It is a way to promote both external accountability and internal continuous improvement, he said.

The dashboard was launched with six fully-developed measures in June 2008. These measures were enrollment, tuition, fees, licensure exam pass rates, related employment of graduates and a facilities condition index.

Since the launch, a seventh measure on student engagement has been added. A planned but undeveloped "partnership measure" is being replaced with a measure indicating transfer credit acceptance. In addition, an "innovation measure" was determined to be unquantifiable and instead the dashboard will display descriptions of innovative practices at system institutions.

A recently-developed composite financial index measurement will be added to the dashboard soon.

High quality learning is the final measure on the dashboard yet to be defined. Assessing learning outcomes is an emerging practice in higher education, but still relatively new. Public systems in other states are taking a variety of approaches to reporting on learning outcomes.

Dr. Schoenecker said the dashboard site gets about 200-300 hits a week. The “drill down” informational areas, such as the one that offers detailed enrollment information, are the most popular.

Associate Vice Chancellor Mercer said the dashboard not only offers information on accountability, but can foster campus improvement. For example, one institution had low licensure exam pass rates. After drilling down in this area on the dashboard, campus leaders determined that modifications were needed in certain curriculum areas to bolster the rates.

Interim Vice Chancellor Olson said it was his experience that a low measurement will spur campus conversations on ways to improve in that area.

Trustee Van Houten suggested that adding a tool to the dashboard which would categorize visitors may be helpful in better determining who is using the site.

Dr. Ewell gave a presentation on the various approaches that could be adopted to examine and measure high quality learning. Accountability-based learning outcome measures are added onto instruction to “check up” on the system and ensure learning is on-track. Scholarship and continuous improvement learning outcome assessments are built into the system to ensure standards are met and to improve teaching methods and curriculum.

Both approaches are important, but they can be in conflict with each other at times, Dr. Ewell said.

Trustee Benson asked if the higher education consumer really cares about high quality measures. Often decisions on where to attend college are based on factors not related to the institution’s learning outcomes, he said.

Dr. Ewell said he believes consumers care about quality, but they often don’t know what questions to ask. The pressure to showcase high quality learning outcomes more likely comes from business people or policy leaders, rather than consumers.

Successful outcome measurements should:

- Help board and stakeholders judge progress and pursue continuous improvement;
- Be easy to understand and evaluate;
- Avoid negative incentives;
- Recognize and account for student population differences across institutions;

- Be able to accommodate the dashboard format;
- Be able to be implemented quickly and in a cost-effective manner.

Dr. Ewell offered an overview of the advantages and disadvantages related to several short-term measurement alternatives:

Publish the results of accreditation reviews

- This would require no additional work, however, accreditation reports are often infrequent and the quality of information may not be comparable across institutions. The format is not suitable for the dashboard.

Trustee Van Houten said although all the system's institutions are accredited, there is no requirement that the syllabus follow the course outline. It is difficult to foster high quality learning in the classroom if the syllabus is not reviewed by the administration, he said.

Dr. Ewell said in most institutions nationwide, faculty members are given the latitude to choose course objectives. He said this latitude is desirable to promote the richness and variety in teaching that various professors can provide, but there should be comparable learner outcomes at the end.

Narrative Reports on Local Assessment Results

- This approach would allow existing institutional assessment procedures to operate undisturbed. However, most results are not comparable across institutions and the reports are hard for general audiences to understand. The report format is not suitable for the dashboard and it would be a burden for institutions to provide information.

New Alumni Survey

- Alumni testimony is valuable and particularly credible to higher education stakeholders and the format is suitable for the dashboard. However, there are few standard surveys available which provide benchmark comparisons and this approach would involve significant expense.

National Assessment Awards

- This approach is based on credible third-party judgment of performance and the format is suitable for the dashboard. However, only a few awards are given each year and the awards focus on the assessment process, not actual learning results.

Graduate Admissions Exams

- The data in this approach is already collected and benchmarked to national standards. The format is suitable for the dashboard. Disadvantages include the fact that few system seniors take these tests and those who do are probably not typical.

NILOA Survey

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes and Assessment (NILOA) survey has data already available and is easily augmented. National benchmarks are available and the format is suitable for the dashboard. However, institutions could possibly inflate their results and the data focuses on assessment processes and not actual learning results.

Interim Vice Chancellor Olson said even if it has some weaknesses, using the NILOA survey results would be the quickest way to get a high quality measure on the dashboard.

Trustee Paskach said using the NILOA survey would be a good start. However, he said he continues to have concerns that there are classrooms in the system where the learning is not adequate and promotion of high quality learning needs to be a crucial goal for the Board.

Trustee Van Houten echoed Trustee Paskach's concerns about classroom learning outcomes. While it is not perfect, he agreed that use of the NILOA survey would be a good start.

The dashboard was developed under the premise that it would be a work in progress and that it would change and improve over time, Chancellor McCormick said.

Trustee Sundin said use of the NILOA survey is fine for now, but she would like to see the Board move quickly in the adoption of a more thorough approach to display high quality learning measurements on the dashboard.

Most of the system's institutions have completed the NILOA survey and their information would be readily available for use on the dashboard, Associate Vice Chancellor Mercer said. The Board would need to determine if the survey should be re-administered to the five or six institutions that have not completed it, or if the dial for the high quality learning measure would remain blank for those institutions. The survey will not be re-administered nationally anytime soon, she said.

During these tight financial times, the Board also must consider if filling in this measurement is worth the time, effort and cost, Chancellor McCormick said.

Dr. Ewell offered information on long-term measurement alternatives for the dashboard:

VSA and VFA

- Use of the results of surveys done by the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) for four-year universities and Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) for two-year institutions would be useful. System institutions already are participating in these surveys and the measurements

would be suitable for a dashboard. However, the VFA is not yet in place and may not be for another three years. All system universities are in VSA, but they are not all using the same tests. Another disadvantage is that testing is based on a small number of students.

New Leadership Alliance Certification

- Alliance judgment and testing measures are suitable for a dashboard. However, the certification is not yet in place and only recognizes high-end performance. The certification focuses on assessment processes and not actual learning results.

Carl Perkins Technical Skill Attainment

- This would be a direct measure of learning outcomes. This testing measure is suitable for the dashboard. However, it probably won't be available until at least 2013 and it is only suitable for technical fields.

Standardized Tests of General Skills

- There is a range of tests for general skills and the results would be suitable for the dashboard. However, this method would be expensive to implement and student motivation to take the tests may be low.

Trustee Frederick said high quality learning is an important goal and it is imperative that the Board move forward with adding some kind of measurement to the dashboard.

Trustee Sundin said there are national industry standards for technical education programs and perhaps measurements utilizing those standards could be captured and used.

She added she would like to see a report detailing if system institutions are taking advantage of existing accreditation opportunities. Interim Vice Chancellor Olson said information on program accreditation can be brought back to the committee.

Board Chair Thiss said the high quality learning accountability measure topic should go back to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee. The committee then could develop a recommendation pertaining to this dashboard measurement.

The meeting adjourned at 12:08 pm
Respectfully submitted,
Margie Takash, Recorder