

Final Statement and Recommendations to Advance the Conceptual Framework

This work resulted in a good framework for data consideration, moving from an emphasis on quantity of data and data types to a defined set of five comparative metrics that, when considered collectively, provide a holistic perspective on how well individual institutions or groups of institutions are performing. This framework can address both policymakers' concerns about lack of good, clear data to inform debate and decision-making and institutional concerns about the growing burden of data collection for institutional improvement purposes.

This framework allows policymakers to focus on, and institutions to produce, data about a limited number of key performance indicators that yield more holistic, descriptive and comparative information while at the same time eliminating data collections that are dated and duplicative. The framework is based on viable metrics, though the metrics can and should be improved by the use of input-adjusted data to help address differences in mission and students served. Additionally, there are gaps in available data. To address these challenges, this group advances the following recommendations.

Action recommendations:

- **More fully develop the learning outcomes and employment outcomes metrics.** There is a clear need for a focused effort to overcome the lack of comparative assessments of learning outcomes at the program (major/discipline) level. When joined with existing assessments of learning at the core skills level, such assessments would provide a basis for the use of learning outcomes to inform policy decision-making. Additionally, the ability of institutions to connect their data to state UI record systems (both within and outside their home state) is inconsistent across the states and uneven by institutional type. Such data would provide a good base of information but remain inadequate in answering questions about program to occupational matches.
- **Refine the cost and progression and completion metrics, using an input-adjusted approach if possible.** The methodology developed for loan repayment and default is input-adjusted, and as such offers promise for other metrics, including progression, completion and cost per degree. The model predicts a range for loan repayment by considering certain inputs (e.g., the type of students at an institution) that could include

the proportion of Pell-eligible students or the number of students who present risk factors as identified by the Department of Education (e.g., older, part-time or working full-time). The institution's actual performance is then compared with the predicted range to see whether the institution fell above, below or within the range.

- **Address gaps in available data to fully develop the five proposed metrics.** For example, cost comparisons must include not only operating costs but also capital expenditures. There is neither a prevailing approach by which to calculate capital expenditures nor commonly available data. Replacement Cost Value is a promising approach, which this group recommends. However, these data currently are not calculated or collected by all institutions, and the definition of the types of capital expenditures needs further discussion and refinement. A broader sample of institutions could help address these concerns as well as affirm the approach. Additional work also needs to be done to incorporate certificates of less than a year as well as transfer outcomes to fully address the mission of community colleges.
- **Engage with policymakers and their staffs to inform them about our work and seek their support.** The group feels compelled to begin informing policymakers of the progress and future direction. Specifically, the presidents want to recommend that policymakers adopt this new data-driven policymaking approach. They want to demonstrate their commitment to such performance measurement, and they hope to generate support for continued efforts by engaging with policymakers early in the process.

Policy recommendations:

- **Increase access to data for all institutions.** The field would benefit greatly from a centralized, national clearinghouse of such data, not tied to any federal or state government entity or association. The existing National Student Clearinghouse could serve as a model or could be expanded to fulfill this role. Regardless, institutions of higher education and policymakers should lead the development of the clearinghouse to ensure that such a system decreases the burden of data collection and reporting. This clearinghouse should have a standing, secure link to federal and state databases (e.g., the Social Security Administration database, Bureau of Labor Statistics data) to provide information to institutions regarding transfers, mobile students and employment outcomes. Ensuring the safety of student privacy and data protection would be paramount in any such effort.
- **Reduce institutional burden.** The creation of a new framework will require a lead group of institutions to further develop the five metrics in order to address the ongoing burden of data production and reporting. This will require not only the development of new data for the key performance indicators but also the reduction or elimination of data collection that is unnecessary, duplicative or unused (e.g., federal Academic Libraries survey, Human Resources survey). It will also require the rationalization of existing data collection at the state and federal levels to reduce overall collection efforts and assure usage of common

data across governmental units. Finally, Congress should remove statutory barriers that prevent the federal Department of Education from tapping into its own administrative data systems and making better use of data already collected and warehoused there. For example, the department could make small changes to the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) that would allow it to use that system to better track and report on the progress and success of federal grant aid recipients. However, restrictions on how NSLDS data can be used prevent the department from using that information source. Thus, when new calls for data occur—for example, a Pell Grant recipient graduation rate—pressure mounts to add it to IPEDS, which increases reporting burdens on the institutions.

Overall, this effort demonstrated that collection of data on a limited number of key metrics across a variety of institution types is feasible. Additionally, many of the data currently exist—in a variety of places—to develop metrics that more accurately define institutional outcomes. However, because these data must be pulled from a variety of locations and sources, both internally and externally, the burden to collect this information varied among the participating institutions. The group also realized that even the adjustments and improvements made to the metrics identified in this project did not go as far as some hoped to distinguish among institutional missions that result in serving different student populations. There is continued room for improvement in this area by adding or further refining input adjustments (e.g., control for differences among institutions). While this cannot be done for every variable, applying an input-adjusted approach for one or more of the variables provides a filter for consideration of the other metrics. The work conducted by the group over the past two years represents a significant step forward in support of better-informed and better-focused policy development and provides a clear and practical roadmap for future work.