

VAMAP Fall 1996 Conference Theme

The Changing Nature of Accountability

Accountability has been an issue for higher education for many years. During the 1970's and 1980's accountability primarily focused on institutional accreditation by regional agencies (such as SACS) and with programmatic accreditation required in by specific academic disciplines (such as psychology, business, etc.) Traditionally, accountability for accreditation focused on measures of inputs such as expenditures, library books, and student head counts. During the late 1980's the focus of accountability shifted toward measures of outcomes such as graduation rates, employment rates and development of master plans.

As we enter the later half of the 1990's the trends in accountability measures are changing again. Now, accountability means reporting to more external audiences and it means reporting on inputs, resources, processes, and outcomes. Activities such as academic program review, the NACUBO Benchmarking Process, and the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity have emerged as major components of accountability reporting. These changes are being driven by requests from many areas. The public increasingly wants useful information about the effectiveness of higher education institutions (as seen in the explosive growth in annual college rankings, such as the ones prepared by U.S. News) Legislators demand evidence that the funds they provide to higher education are being used wisely. College and university administrators expect information to use in the development and evaluation of strategic planning and restructuring efforts.

General Session

The changes in accountability reporting are putting increased pressure on planning, institutional research, and budget professionals to respond to an ever widening array of questions from both internal and external audiences. The General Session of the 1996 meeting will give an overall perspective on the kinds of accountability information legislators, higher education decision makers, and the public desire now and in the near future.

The format of the General Session was a panel discussion of the conference theme on accountability. The first hour was dedicated to individual presentations by the panelists. The second hour was devoted to a discussion between the panelists and the audience. The panel included:

- Steve Janosik, Deputy Secretary of Education
- Margaret "Peg" Miller, Associate Director, SCHEV
- Thomas Morris, President, Emory & Henry College

Each panel member spoke for approximately 20 minutes on the following general themes:

- From your perspective, how as accountability in higher education changed during the last few years and what changes are foreseen for the next few years?

- What types of information are most important to you in understanding and evaluating the effectiveness of colleges and universities?
- What can planning and research professionals do for you to increase the effectiveness of the information they provide?

Breakout Sessions

The format of the remainder of the program followed those used at past meetings. A series of sessions were scheduled on topics that relate to the General Session.

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