



# *Monitoring Academic Program Quality: The Board's Role*

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## *An Odd Irony of Board Discussions at Most Colleges and Universities*

- We Get Lots of Information About Things Like Fiscal Condition, Market Position, and Strategic Direction...
- And There is Certainly No Doubt About Its Importance...
- But We Get Relatively Little Information About the Effectiveness of Our *Core Business*—the Quantity and Quality of Student Academic Achievement





## *Rationale for Board Involvement*

- Fiduciary Responsibility for Assuring that the Institution is Meeting its Obligations (Parallel to Financial Audit)
- Responsibility to Ensure that Academic Managers Are Using Appropriate Tools and Evidence to Run and Improve the Enterprise
- Ultimate Responsibility for the Soundness of the Institution's Academic Products and the Integrity of Its Operations





## *Five Guiding Questions*

- How Good Is Our Product?
- How Good Are We at Producing Our Product?
- Are Our Customers Satisfied?
- Do We Have the Right “Mix” of Products?
- Do We Make the Grade?





## *Defining the Board's Role: Some Basic Principles*

- Running the Curriculum is the *Faculty's* Responsibility; the Board's Role is to *Remind* Them of This Responsibility
- Keep Focused on Strategic Issues
- Expect and Demand a Culture of Evidence
- Recognize that Most Evidence Raises Issues, but Does Not “Give Answers”
- Make Reviewing Evidence of Academic Quality a Regular and Expected Board Activity





## *External Interest in Academic Quality: Where Did It Come From*

- Escalating Accountability Demands
  - > The K-12 Connection
  - > The “Assessment Movement”
  - > 2004-05: “The Year of Accountability”
  
- Competitiveness
  
- Evidence-Based Management
  - > TQM/CQI
  - > Markets and Program Mix





## *Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: The Basics*

- “Assessment” Means Gathering Systematic Information About What [Undergraduate] Students Know and Can Do as a Result of Attending College
- Generally Driven by Formal Statements of Intended “Outcomes” (e.g. Oral Communications, Quantitative Reasoning, or Problem-Solving) Developed by the Faculty
- Usually Collected in the *Aggregate* (that is, to Inform Judgments About Programs, not People)





## *Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- Do We Say What and How Much Students Should Learn? Where Do We Say It?
- What Kinds of Evidence Do We Collect About Learning?





## *Characteristics of Assessment Evidence*

- Direct vs. Indirect Assessment
- Forced-Choice vs. “Authentic” Assessments
- Standardized vs. Non-Standardized Results
- Specially-Constructed vs. Naturally-Occurring Assessments





## *Types of Assessment Evidence*

- Examinations
- Tasks and Demonstrations
- Student Work
- Behavioral Outcomes
- Self-Reports (Surveys/Interviews)





## *Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- Do We Say What and How Much Students Should Learn? Where Do We Say It?
- What Kinds of Evidence Do We Collect About Learning?
- Do We Benchmark Our Performance Against External Standards?
- Who is Responsible for Assessment and How Does It Get Done?
- How Do We Use Assessment Results?





## *Assessing Learning: Final Board Reminders*

- Assessment is Increasingly Important in Accreditation—and Accreditation Certifies the Institution’s “Bottom Line”
- What the Institution is Learning—and What It is Doing About What It is Learning—Are as Important as Having Assessment in Place
- Make Sure that “Assessment is Assessed” and Appropriate Revisions Made Where Needed





## *Exercise: Standardized Assessment of Student Learning*

- Is This the Kind of Matter that Boards Ought to Take Up? Is the Proposal Appropriate?
- What are Some Arguments For and Against the Proposal?
- What are Some Potential Consequences of Going Down this Path?





## *Retention, Graduation, and Student Flow: The Basics*

- Measures Rely on a “Cohort” Method—Students Tracked Over Time from a Common Starting Point to a Defined Outcome (e.g. Earning a Degree)
- Standard Definitions of Graduation Rates are Based on Six-Year Tracking Period (Three Years for Associate Degrees)
- National Statistics Reported Only for First-Time, Full-Time Students (but Institutions Can and Should Look at All Students)





## *What Affects Graduation Rates?*

- Student Academic Background and Institutional Selectivity
- Student Demographics
- Full-Time, Continuous Attendance
- Financial Aid and Institutional Support
- Well-Designed, Targeted Retention Programs
- Active Presidential Leadership and Commitment





## *Retention, Graduation and Student Flow: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- What are Our Basic Indicators of Student Progression and Success?
- How Does Our Performance Measure Up to Our Peers?
- What Does Success Look Like for Different Kinds of Students?
- Who Is Responsible for Student Success and What are We Doing to Improve Our Performance?





## *Proven Approaches*

- Comprehensive First-Year Experience Programs
- Early Assessment of Basic Skills and Directed Placement if Deficiencies are Detected
- Academic “Early Warning” Systems
- Proactive “Intrusive” Student Advisement
- Clear “Pathways” to the Degree





## *Proven Approaches (continued)*

- Flexible and Understandable Procedures and Ways to Deliver Services
- Integrated Student Service Centers that Provide “One-Stop Shopping”
- Curricular Features that Promote Active Learning like “Learning Communities,” Service Learning and Undergraduate Research Programs





## *Retention, Graduation and Student Flow: Final Board Reminders*

- Poor Retention Costs Institutions Both Reputation and Money
- The Best Approaches are Multi-Faceted and Tailor Treatments to Different Student Populations
- Success is as Much About Institutional Culture as About Strong Programs
- Active Presidential Commitment and Leadership is Critical





## *Listening to Customers and Stakeholders: The Basics*

- Most Campuses Have a Few Centrally-Administered Student Surveys
- The Most Common are Surveys Administered on Entry and Near or at the Point of Graduation
- Many Institutions also Administer Alumni Surveys to Determine Subsequent Study or Employment
- Seeking Periodic Employer or Community Feedback May Also Be Important





## *Commonly-Used National Surveys with Peer Comparisons Available*

- The UCLA Freshman Survey (CIRP)
- The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Its Community College “Cousin,” the CCSSE
- The College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ)
- ACT’s Evaluation Survey Service (ESS)
- UCLA’s “Your First College Year” Survey





## *What You Should Know About How Surveys are Administered*

- Most are Sent and Returned by Mail, Using Multiple Reminders and Incentives, but an Increasing Number are Web-Administered
- Many Surveys are Administered to Samples Instead of the Whole Population
- The Confidence that Can be Placed in Survey Results is Affected by Sample Sizes and Response Rates (Just Like the Gallup Poll)
- Survey Results are Often Reinforced by Focus Group or Interview Studies that can Probe Opinions More Deeply





## *Customer and Stakeholder Satisfaction: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- What are Students Telling Us About the Quality of Their Academic Experiences?
- How Confident Can We Be About What We Have Found?
  - > Response Rates and Sample Sizes
  - > Can We Trust What Students Tell Us?
- How Are We Considering the Views of Other Stakeholders (like Employers and Community Members)





## *Customer and Stakeholder Satisfaction: Final Board Reminders*

- “Customer” is Not a Dirty Word
- Students: “The Product that Can Talk to You”
- Getting Beyond Student Satisfaction
- Stakeholder Voices and the “Stewardship of Place”





## *Taking Stock of Programmatic Assets: The Basics*

- Campuses as Retailers: Programmatic Range and Quality Mix
- Internal Markets for Particular Kinds of Teaching (e.g. English, Math Instruction)
- Basic Management Statistics on Academic Programs (e.g. Staffing, Productivity, Internal Subsidies)
- Regular Academic Program Review





## *Elements of Academic Program Review*

- Intended Primarily for Program Improvement
- Occurs on a Regular Cycle (e.g. 5-7 Years)  
Covering All Programs
- Self-Study/Campus Review Document
- External Look by Peer Reviewers or Employers
- Role of Internal Program Review Committee
- Links to Strategic Planning and Budgeting





## *Taking Stock of Programmatic Assets: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- Do We Have the Right Mix of Programs? Are Our Programs Consistent with Our Mission?
- How Are We Managing Program Costs?





## *Addressing Issues of Program Cost*

- Recognize that Quality and High Cost Don't Always Go Together
- Documenting Costs and Cost Drivers
- Curricular Coherence
- Restructuring the Way Time is Used
- The Role of Technology





## *Taking Stock of Programmatic Assets: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- Do We Have the Right Mix of Programs? Are Our Programs Consistent with Our Mission?
- How Are We Managing Program Costs?
- What Counts as Program Quality?





## *Dimensions of Program Quality*

- Reputation
- Admissions Demand
- Student Satisfaction
- Distinctive Curricular or Research Features
- Employer or Graduate Demand
- Ability to Attract External Recognition or Resources





## *Taking Stock of Programmatic Assets: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- Do We Have the Right Mix of Programs? Are Our Programs Consistent with Our Mission?
- How Are We Managing Program Costs?
- What Counts as Program Quality?
- How Does Program Review Drive Program Improvement?





## *Taking Stock of Programmatic Assets: Final Board Reminders*

- Boards Should Know How the Results of Program Review are Used in Planning and Budgeting
- Program Review Results are Frequently Disguised Requests for New Money
- What Strategic Themes Emerge Across Programs? Are New Market Opportunities Apparent? Are There Common Challenges that All Programs Need to Address?
- Not All of the Benefits of Program Review are Immediately Visible





## *Accreditation: The Quality Test*

- A Favorable Accreditation Report Provides a Clear Public Signal: The Institution Achieves a Recognized Level of Performance that Can be Relied Upon
- Accreditation Focuses Primarily on Institutional and Academic Processes: The Way the Institution “Does Business”
- Public and Confidential Elements: Accreditation Reports as “Management Letters”





## *Accreditation: The Basics*

- Two Types of Accreditation: Institutional (Regional) and Specialized (Programmatic)





## *Institutional and Specialized Accreditation: Important Differences*

- Institutions *Must* Be Institutionally Accredited, But Can *Choose* to Do Specialized Accreditation
- Specialized Accreditation is Often More Prescriptive and/or Requires Additional Resource Investments
- Presidents are Often Ambivalent About Specialized Accreditation Because of Outside Pressure to Reallocate Resources to “Maintain Accreditation”





## *Accreditation: The Basics*

- Two Types of Accreditation: Institutional (Regional) and Specialized (Programmatic)
- Multi-Year Cycle (Nominally Ten Years for Institutions, Three to Five Years for Program)
- Three Step Process: Comprehensive Self-Study, Review Team Visit, Report and Commission Action
- Boards Are Required to Take Part





## *The Changing Face of Accreditation*

- Greater Emphasis on Direct Evidence of Performance—and Especially Student Learning Outcomes
- Move from “Compliance” to “Constructive Engagement” through More Flexible and Thematic Approaches to Review
- More Frequent Contact and Engagement
- Growing Interest in Sharing Results with the Public





## *Accreditation: Questions Boards Should Ask*

- What Progress Have We Made in Addressing Recommendations from the Last Review?
- Where Are We in Assessing Student Learning Outcomes?
- Are Our Accreditable Programs Accredited?
- What Do We Hope to *Learn* From Our Engagement with Accreditation?





## *Accreditation: Final Board Reminders*

- Boards Have a Direct and Fiduciary Responsibility to Ensure a “Clean Academic Audit” through Accreditation
- Accreditation is a Uniquely American Approach to Quality Assurance that is Adapted to Our Large and Diverse Higher Education System as an Alternative to Government Regulation
- In their Roles as Custodians of the Academy, Boards Have a *Collective* Responsibility to Ensure that Accreditation Remains Honest and Vital





## *Closing Reflections: The Board's Role in Academic Quality*

- Two Cultures
- Questions and Anomalies: The Role of “Critical Friend”
- Recognizing and Managing Boundaries
- Honoring the Trust

