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Assumptions Underlying Governmental Assessment and Accountability Practices

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Introduction

Governments have an important and legitimate interest in promoting accessibility to higher education and the efficiency and effectiveness of colleges and universities. However, there is a growing body of evidence that processes employed by state governments in the United States, and by governments in number of other countries, that rely primarily on data to assess and make decisions on college and university quality, are based on many inaccurate assumptions. Consequently, these processes are not likely to be effective and may, in some instances, actually harm institutions. The motivations and purposes that lie behind a growing world-wide governmental interest in assuring the quality of institutions through formal assessment techniques and accountability processes undoubtedly are complex. However, much of the increasing interest in the United States appears to result from the following factors:

- an emerging view of higher education as an industry rather than as a social institution;
- doubts about the efficient allocation of resources and effective cost containment;
- a lack of trust and confidence between governmental and institutional officials;
- uncertainty in relationships between government and higher education; and
- a lack of confidence in institutional governance processes.

As a result, governments increasingly are conducting or sponsoring assessment and accountability practices based on “industry” assumptions, “rational decision making” theory, and “bureaucratic” concepts of governance. However, the results of research and scholarly examinations of organizational decision processes suggest that:

- the “industry” model is applicable only to limited aspects of higher education;
- data reporting systems rarely provide an accurate basis for making decisions on complex resource allocation issues although they are an essential tool for identifying areas as candidates for more in-depth inquiries;
- lack of trust between governmental bodies and those they fund has spawned increasing numbers of bureaucratic interventions that have increased institutional costs;
- Effectiveness and accountability in higher education traditionally have been achieved through peer review processes, sensitive to complex institutional circumstances and local constraints and tradeoffs, rather than through bureaucratic oversight thus increasing governmental uncertainty, because of limits on its ability to exercise control over decisions,

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while increasing institutional certainty by permitting them flexibility and professional control of key decisions; and institutions are not perceived as employing “rational” decision making process concepts that commonly underlying governmental assessment and accountability processes but these concepts are inconsistent with the complex nature of institutional decision making, particularly the political, social, cultural, and context variables that must be part of decisions.

The nature of each of the propositions set forth above are described, together with their consequences for governmental quality assessment and accountability practices.

Factors Promoting Government Assessment and Accountability Processes

Higher Education Perceived As an Industry

Gumport (2001) describes the emerging view of higher education as an industry producing and selling goods. For those holding this conception:

Harsh economic challenges and competitive market pressures warrant better management, which includes swift programmatic adjustment, maximum flexibility, and improved efficiency in the direction of greater accountability and, thus, customer satisfaction (p. 87).

McCulloch (1997) provides a useful history of this changing view of the character and function of higher education and its implications.

As evidence of the growing acceptance of this paradigm, in the United States higher education budget requests commonly are justified to state governments, particularly since the 1970s, in terms of the economic benefits the states accrue from students obtaining a higher education and from the economic growth derived from university research. Aggressive assessment and accountability measures frequently are promoted to alter the orientation of institutions to this “new reality.” This new industry paradigm implies that hierarchal corporate bureaucratic management structures are appropriate to assure quality and, at least in the United States, there are many calls to strengthen the roles of presidents, governing boards, and state higher education agencies to help them bring about this transformation.

In contrast, Gumport observes that institutions traditionally have been viewed as social institutions, responsible for a broader range of functions, including cultivation of citizenship, preservation of culture, and formation of character and critical habits of mind, in addition to economic development. These complex, value laden, objectives are not easily susceptible to data-based external evaluation. In contrast to the bureaucratic model, this traditional paradigm implies a professional governance model (Etzioni, 1964), with assessment and accountability being the responsibility of professional peer review processes. Faculty are accorded academic freedom to determine the values, ends, and processes that should be pursued in their teaching and research. As a result, a major institutional objective is to avoid imposing popular and/or “official” points of view on instruction and research that will limit faculty creativity and the unfettered pursuit of truth. The character of these two paradigms, and their implications for assessing colleges and universities, will be explored further on.

Doubts About Resource Allocation Efficiency and Cost Containment

Governments have a legitimate concern about the efficient and effective allocation of public resources. Consequently, they seek ways to lessen the amount of resources devoted to higher education without damaging, if possible, its effectiveness. This search for reducing resources becomes particularly intense when tax revenues decline and budget reductions are necessary (Zumeta, 2001). In the United States, higher education typically is a “discretionary” item in state budgets. The amount of funds to be appropriated for higher education is up to the judgment of state governors and legislatures without any changes in substantive legislation. This is unlike state funding for elementary/secondary education, and many other government programs, where appropriations of funds are based on a formulas established by laws and the governor and legislature cannot change the appropriation without changing the legislation. As a result higher education budgets can be cut quickly and are particularly vulnerable when state tax revenues decline. Given these circumstances, one of the most effective ways for governments to justify higher education budget reductions is to obtain information that indicates institutional funds are not used effectively.

This search for a politically acceptable way to cut budgets for popular programs undoubtedly is one of the motivations behind quality assessment. Interest in assessing quality appears to increase during periods when states are experiencing revenue short falls. Furthermore, in the United States, the public has resisted both increased taxes to support higher education and increased tuition levels. Citizens apparently believe that higher education, if it operates more efficiently, can do without additional financial support, even though enrollments are increasing (Zumeta, 2001).

Lack of Trust and Confidence In Public Agencies and Institutions

Since the mid-1960s there appears to have been a growing distrust of public agencies and institutions in the United States. Some of this distrust is evident in relationships between higher education institutions and state governments. Neither party fully trusts the other to have a sympathetic understanding of its interests and circumstances. This lack of trust and confidence between the two parties appears to be one factor that has led states to create processes for imposing greater oversight and controls on institutions.

In addition, higher education has been subject to cultural critiques (Zumeta, 2001), various critics charging that it is too elitist, biased toward the political left, and is experiencing declining standards with less rigorous student grading. Governmental and public trust of institutions also has been affected by occasional reports of institutional financial scandals and researcher misconduct (Zumeta, 2001). With an increasingly larger proportion of the population attending colleges and universities with diverse missions and student qualifications, institutions’ mystery and prestige have declined, making them vulnerable to the critiques commonly experienced by elementary/secondary education.

Uncertainty in Relationships Between Government and Higher Education

Meisinger (1976) points out that the relationships between state government and institutions are highly complex and involve a great deal of uncertainty. Consequently, the two parties tend to negotiate policies and procedures to reduce this uncertainty. However, reducing uncertainty

involves reconciling conflicting interests. Government's uncertainty is reduced by making institutions' behavior more predictable through imposing policies and processes that restrict their autonomy and flexibility. Institutions' uncertainty is reduced by having the freedom to respond flexibly to opportunities and threats presented by their environments. Governments typically have the greater power in these battles to shift uncertainty to the other party. Assessment and accountability processes appear to be one method employed by states to achieve more predictable institutional behavior, although traditionally accepted principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy have provided some shield for colleges and universities in the United States.

Lack of Confidence in Institutional Governance Processes

As noted earlier, the "corporate" view of higher education is compatible with the concepts of a bureaucracy set forth by Weber (1946), with an organizational hierarchical structure and with leadership from the top setting directions and coordinating the work of the organization. The expertise for making substantive decisions is assumed to rest at the higher levels of the organizational pyramid. However, as Etzioni (1964) points out, in organizations composed of professionals the primary substantive expertise is located at the bottom of the organizational structure and the higher echelons are viewed primarily as facilitating the professionals' work. The chief engineer in a automobile factory can give technical directions to an assembly line worker but a university president who is a historian cannot provide substantive directions to a physics professor. Consequently, public and government officials, perhaps as a result of their education in our schools of public and business administration, frequently appear to view colleges and universities from bureaucratic perspectives and, thus, see them as rather anarchic, weakly coordinated, and lacking strong central leadership. This gap, between what government officials view as appropriate governance structures and processes and what they observe at institutions, appears to be a further reason for the interest in establishing governmental assessment and accountability processes.

Assumptions That Underlie Assessment and Accountability Processes

A number of assumptions appear to underlie these motivations to impose governmental quality assessment and accountability processes on institutions. They assume that: 1) faculty and administrators know how to improve quality but fail to do so, 2) government officials represent the public interest more than do those at institutions, 3) agreement is possible on what constitutes quality, 4) information systems can provide the evidence needed to for government officials to take action, and 5) improving quality requires strong bureaucratic coordination and control. Each of these assumptions is described below.

Faculty and Administrators at Institutions Know How To Remedy Quality Concerns

Public officials appear to assume that college and university faculty and administrators know how to improve the quality of their institutions but are not doing so for a variety of reasons. Therefore, the government must develop processes to monitor and address institutional shortcomings. Traditional peer review processes are viewed with skepticism. Those participating in institutional and program reviews, such as accreditation processes in the United States, frequently are thought to be unlikely to point out embarrassing circumstances because of professional bonds and peer

pressures. Critics point out that accreditation processes seek to ensure that minimum standards are met by institutions and, therefore, do not promote attainment of the highest possible levels of quality.

Identifying and correcting deficiencies in quality, however it is defined, is extremely complex. Communicating the implications of the diverse values and concepts of the various parties, and resolving complex internal conflict and achieving consensus, are difficult tasks for faculty and administrators. The external imposition of definitions of quality, and establishing criteria for its achievement, typically conflict with this essential academic competition among ideas and values. Faculty, who professionally place a high value on criticism and on revealing the complexity of issues, find it hard to provide the less critical, and easier to comprehend, arguments institutions require to convince external agencies that they are effectively seeking and achieving quality. These diverse interests of the various stakeholders make agreement on outcomes hard to achieve:

Within institutions of higher education, each discipline and profession has competitive as well as complementary interests. The same is true among faculty, administrators, students, and staff. Governmental interests frequently conflict with those of institutions. Parents, alumni, and commercial organizations pursue conflicting as well as common objectives for an institution. The balance of power among all of these and other parties shifts over time and with changing issues. In these circumstances, all such parties have notions about what institutional characteristics should be sought. The actual results, however, are the consequence of the shifting outcomes of their complex interactions. The interests of particular participants are served to greater or lesser degrees at various times. What decision makers seek is a balancing of multiple interests to achieve a distribution of resources that maintains all essential members participation. (Schmidtlein, 1999, p. 571)

Governmental Officials Represent the Public Interest

Institutions' decisions often appear unresponsive to governmental concerns and often are viewed as inconsistent with current government priorities. Consequently, administrators and faculty frequently are accused of pursuing their own narrow self interests and not undertaking changes presumed to improve their programs and processes; for example, failing to increase their use of educational technology. Faculty often are viewed as neglecting instruction to engage in research and more concerned with "teaching" than promoting student learning. In the United States faculty frequently are viewed as having a leisurely life. Public officials observe that faculty often are found to be away from their offices and classrooms. A Maryland state government official, some years ago, recommended placing time clocks in University buildings to keep a record of when faculty members were at work! Based on these presumptions, governments often seek greater involvement in decisions affecting faculty.

Such conflicts over the centralization and decentralization of decision making in organizations have gone on throughout history. Since different kinds of information are available to persons in different locations, one would assume that decisions should be located where relevant information is most readily available. Time and cost constraints on information collection and analysis impose severe limitations on accessing and evaluating information which is not readily accessible at a

particular organization level.

Those located at the top of the organizational hierarchy have easier access to information about the relationships among local units and, typically, more contact with the external world. Consequently, information concerning decisions about relationships among local units, and relative priorities across the entire higher education system, are more easily accessible to higher level officials than to those at lower levels. This information should enable higher level officials to be more sensitive to the collective interests of the entire organization than is the case for those further down the hierarchy. However, when decisions involve local circumstances, central officials are likely to have oversimplified views of the factors involved. They are likely to delay decisions by requesting increasing numbers of costly reports and data to assure themselves that they are making correct decisions because they often are aware of their relative ignorance of local complexities. Government officials, lacking intimate knowledge of local complexities, also appear more likely to be susceptible to management fads and focus more on processes for obtaining information and making decisions than on the substance of decisions. This focus on process rather than substance has been evident in Maryland. Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) staff recommendations regarding the initial institutional reports it received on its mandated institutional accountability reports concerned almost entirely how closely the institution's reports conformed to MHEC reporting requirements rather than any substantive concerns that may have been revealed in the reports.

Those located at or near the bottom of the organizational hierarchy possess more information about local circumstances and the trade-offs involved in making decisions affecting local issues. This is particularly true in professional organizations, such as colleges and universities, that provide services based on complex and often emerging fields of knowledge. The concept of self regulating professions arose because fields such as medicine, law, and higher education require practitioners to undertake many years of education and training before they possess a sufficient mastery of the field to engage in practice. These professions historically have benefitted from considerable autonomy and employed peer review processes to assure quality and to guard against malpractice. These peer review processes frequently have been criticized when cases of poor quality and illegal practice were discovered, as they always are in human endeavors. However, in recent years, the remedy too frequently has been to impose time consuming and expensive regulatory processes on professions, affecting all members, rather than to deal with the specifics case by case.

In practice, higher education systems need to achieve a balance between the benefits and costs of central and local decision making. Government oversight and steering are needed to assure that a set of institutions exist whose missions serve the diverse needs of the public. Policies also are needed to counter a tendency for two year colleges attempting to become four-year institutions and four-year teaching institutions attempting to become graduate/research universities. Changes in institutional missions should serve the public interest; not be based primarily on institutional ambitions to move up the prestige ladder. Government oversight also is needed to assure that a diverse set of academic programs exist that meet the legitimate needs of the public while avoiding unnecessary duplication. Institutions, however, should have the freedom to design the content of

their academic program and courses and their research initiatives. They also should have the procedural freedom needed to pursue their programs in an efficient manner. As Berdahl (2001) notes, governments need to retain authority over the substantive issues related to the character of higher education systems while institutions should be given a very large measure of freedom over procedural aspects of their programs.

One must avoid the failures to serve the public interest that occur from an unregulated free market approach to higher education policy while also avoiding costly policies and procedures restricting institutions' managerial flexibility and entrepreneurship. This balance is achieved best by employing highly competent persons and changing leadership when necessary; it is not achieved by unstructured competition or by excessive regulation. Unstructured competition reduces diversity and increases costs while excessive regulation restricts the ability of competent institutional leaders and does not improve the performance of those lacking competence.

The Characteristics of Quality Can Be Identified and Agreed Upon by Central Officials

Quality appears to be popularly defined as the extent to which the sum, or particular aspects, of institutional operations meet contemporary standards of performance. These standards of performance are applied to a variety of input, process, and output values; or to the consequences of complex interactions among these sets of variables. However, various parties employ differing standards. Consequently, nearly anything an institution does, with some justification, can be viewed as affecting quality and, thus, the term has limited practical utility.

Since decision makers frequently differ over what constitutes "quality," and the term is ambiguous, as noted earlier, government officials tend to focus on its procedural rather than its substantive characteristics. Also, governmental interests frequently change, particularly following elections. At institutions, faculty pursue a great variety of competing concepts and interests in their pursuit for knowledge without consensus on which will prove accurate and prevail over time. A primary function of universities is to pursue unpopular beliefs and truths. Diverse and conflicting opinions compete in the market place of ideas and lead to clearer understandings and shifts in consensus.

Strengthening Bureaucratic Coordination and Control Structures and Processes Is Needed To Overcome Institutional Inaction On Quality Concerns

The most effective ways to address the forgoing concerns, from a "corporate" perspective, are seen as strengthening the role of institutions' chief executives and governing boards and increasing governmental oversight. With greater authority, institutional and governmental officials believe they will have the means to overcome the perceived unwillingness of faculty to address quality concerns. Traditional shared faculty/administration governance practices are seen as outdated and ineffective. A more corporate governance model, employing "rational" decision making processes, is viewed as necessary.

Government attempts to assess and improve quality often employ concepts from "rational" decision making theory. These concepts assume that:

- sufficient knowledge of current conditions can be obtained to discover circumstances that are detrimental to quality,
- relationships between ends and means can be determined to identify alternative courses of

action,

specific ends and measures of their attainment can be defined and agreed upon, and effective methods for attaining selected ends are available.

Lindblom (1959) and Schmidtlein (1983) describe why these conditions do not exist, particularly in “professional” organizations such as colleges and universities. Birnbaum (2000) recounts the long history of unsuccessful attempts by state governments and accrediting agencies to impose so-called “rational” decision making processes, such as management by objectives, strategic planning, total quality management, and the like, on colleges and universities.

The alternative approach to decision making commonly is termed “incrementalism.” Its underlying assumptions are that:

that it is difficult to specify, obtain consensus on, and measure the ends or goals of public programs;

the nature of policy choices in a complex environment is discovered by the reactions to choices more often than by analysis and forecasting;

agreement on goals is obtained largely through political bargaining rather than by analysis and central decision making; and

limitations of time, knowledge, and location are accommodated through permitting inconsistencies, flexibility and experimentation, and locating decisions where the most detailed knowledge exists of relevant circumstances (Schmidtlein, 1983).

These concepts of decentralized incremental decision making are compatible with concepts of shared governance, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy that most scholars, and public officials in many countries, believe are essential characteristics of an effective higher education institutions. Research on organizations reveals that incremental concepts, or as Mintzberg terms it “adaptive strategy,” accurately describe actual organizational decision making, even in the corporate world (Mintzberg, 1994). The normative literature on higher education decision making and management processes commonly ignores this growing body of research.

Given the complex trade-offs that are involved in institutional decisions, wise leaders do not seek narrow goals but try to achieve an acceptable balance among a variety of competing values and constraints (Schmidtlein, 1983). They try to achieve consensus on a broad set of objectives that have to accommodate, to varying degrees, competing and contradictory sets of interests. Seeking narrow outcomes, goals and bench marks typically results in sub-optimizing with respect to a single or limited set of values rather than achieving a balance appropriate for the entire institution (Schmidtlein, 1999). This problem was illustrated in an article by E. Planin (2003) in the Washington Post newspaper. It reported that the effects of a performance measure, that rewarded a contractor for launching the space shuttle on time, may have negatively influenced making delays indicted by safety concerns. In addition, centrally established goals frequently are based on normative judgments of what is desirable rather than on comparisons with peers or with institutional progress over time. Normative goals commonly lack sensitivity to the trade-offs, constraints, and complexities that are likely to frustrate their achievement.

When governmental officials attempt to impose decisions on institutions that do not recognize the

complex trade-offs and constraints involved, institutions give the appearance of compliance but actually engage in a variety of unacknowledged behaviors to cope with the complex realities of their circumstances. A type of “organizational black market” behavior emerges that is similar, in concept, to the black markets that occur when governments impose values on goods and services that are inconsistent with economic realities. Unfortunately, these behaviors by institutions appear, when visible, to be viewed by government officials as confirming their suspicions that institutions are not acting responsibly.

Government Officials Can Make Appropriate Decisions To Improve Quality Based On Data Systems and Institutional Documentation

The quality assessment and accountability systems created by government agencies responsible for governing and “steering” higher education tend to rely primarily on the collection of data and documentation from institutions as a basis for making decisions affecting institutional quality. These systems occasionally involve using academic professionals in the interpretation and assessment of the information and, even less frequently, include institutional site visits by governmental officials and/or academic professionals. These efforts proceed on an assumption that central officials can obtain the information needed to understand complex local circumstances sufficiently well to make effective decisions that promote institutional quality or, at least, to redirect institutional efforts.

Research by Trower and Honan (2002) reveals that this assumption is not correct. They found data rarely were linked to decisions and discovered many reasons why this was the case. For example, data are not politically neutral and are supplied and interpreted with various parties’ political interests in mind. What is measured becomes what is important. Data also do not provide a complete picture of the circumstances under consideration. They only provide a starting place for undertaking more detailed investigations of the area under review. However, additional data collection is always time consuming and generally expensive. These time and cost constraints greatly restrain collecting data that is not currently available. Consequently, decision makers rely heavily on informal and anecdotal information, particularly when they distrust the motives of those providing the data. Even with the advances made in modern systems of data collection and analysis, most of the information brought to bear on decisions continues to come from personal experience and knowledge obtained from sources other than formal data systems. The impact of informal information is evident in the frequent cases where recitation of a few concrete examples has more weight on a policy decision than a statistical portrait of the area. Policy makers sense the problems of data accuracy, the loss of detail in aggregations, and are suspicious of the motives of those who furnish and use data. Often the advice of a friend or associate whose judgment is valued counts for more than an analysis of data. Policy makers have a tendency to evaluate higher education in terms of their own past experiences attending a particular institution.

McNay (2002) provides an excellent analysis of the difficulties encountered in the United Kingdom’s attempt to use information submitted by universities to assess the quality of their research. The British newspaper has reported that “...a top-level inquiry” has recommended that this system for funding research “...must be scrapped because of abuse by universities” (Garner,

2003). The article pointed out numerous ways the institutions could select the data to fit their interests.

A distinction often is made between formative and summative types of evaluation of institutional quality. The former seeks data and information to assist an institution to improve its quality. The latter seeks data and information for external decisions to achieve substantive ends that will affect institutions' resources, structure, or processes. Experience reveals that when institutions believe that the data they supply will be used for adverse summative decisions by external agencies, they can very creatively provide data that is "accurate" but which does not reveal circumstances that could provoke unfavorable actions.

Institutions differ greatly in their character and circumstances, making use of data for quality assessment very complex. United States institutions have a variety of missions and exist in differing social, political, cultural, economic environments. Graduate/research universities typically admit only high ability students, provide doctoral programs, and engage in extensive research. Comprehensive universities primarily provide instruction, have more modest criteria for admission, and offer programs through the master's level. Two-year community colleges have both academic and vocational programs and typically admit any prospective student who has completed a high school degree. Specialized institutions have programs limited to specific subjects such as engineering, music, and the visual arts. In addition, there are independent, or private, institutions who are not part of the public higher education system. Institutions also reflect the economic, political, cultural, and social conditions in their areas.

Government agencies typically find it difficult to deal with the complexities of these circumstances when they interpret data. As a consequence, they often are not sensitive to differing missions and environmental circumstances. They tend to simplify their oversight by creating common policies and procedures to be followed by all institutions. This tendency frequently results in failures to recognize the differing standards for "quality" at institutions. College and universities are frustrated by such "one size fits all" approaches to quality assessment.

Many highly relevant kinds of information affecting decisions on quality are hard to quantify and difficult to evaluate. As a result, external officials commonly focus primarily on data related to economic concerns when examining institutional decision making. They often neglect human, political, social, psychological, and cultural factors that have to be weighed along with economic concerns (Schmidtlein, 1999). However, these generally unquantifiable factors are difficult to identify and, typically, impossible to quantify. Effective decision making involves examining trade-offs among a variety of resources, including available human skills and qualities, political power, legitimacy, prestige, status, constituent trust, and cultural values, as well as economic resources. For example, a decision to save funds by establishing a more efficient process may not create an optimum result if it causes the loss of key employees, alienates important constituencies, violates cultural norms, or reduces an institution's prestige. Effective decisions also must be sensitive to constraints of time, knowledge, and data availability. Consequently, an understanding of the complexities of local situations is necessary, along with knowledge of the trade-offs involved, circumstances that are difficult to communicate to external decision makers and, indeed, often are

highly sensitive and, therefore, would have adverse effects if made public.

Conclusions

The Nature of Quality

Quality results from the characteristics and interactions of all of the aspects of an institution. It does not come from the achievement of a few limited goals. Decisions on what constitutes quality are determined through political processes where participants compete to achieve their differing interests and values. In complex professional fields, such as higher education, assessing quality is particularly difficult because of the professional expertise required to make accurate judgements and the intentional pursuit of differing theories and lines of inquiry. Consequently, the determination of what constitutes quality in higher education requires a mix of political and professional judgments that should be made where the requisite knowledge exists. This process cannot be reduced to the simplistic, selected measures that typically are included in reporting systems that seek to enable officials, who are unfamiliar with local complexities, competing values and local expert knowledge, to make appropriate decisions.

The academic quality movement, in countries which accept the “corporate” perspective, appears to place a premium on customer satisfaction. Accommodating student taste appears to be outweighing faculty expertise and authority, and student aptitude, as a legitimate measures of quality. Necessary governmental judgments on institutional capacity, resource requirements, student access, distribution of institutional missions, and needed academic programs (responsibilities which currently are sometimes inappropriately neglected in the interests of promoting more unfettered “free market” conditions) need to be combined with professional peer review processes to assess the quality of academic and research programs, thus achieving the necessary balance between the public interest and the preserving critical academic values. Government officials frequently appear unfamiliar with the very extensive quality assessment practices that already are in place in institutions (Schmidlein, 2003) when seeking to place additional assessment requirements on institutions.

Competing Concepts of Appropriate Governance Processes

Colleges and Universities are professional organizations and their academic operations do not conform to the assumptions underlying “corporate” views of higher education. The so-called “rational” approaches to decision making that frequently are associated with this “corporate” perspective are in fact irrational since they typically exclude variables that must be considered when making effective decisions. They do not recognize the appropriate locations for decisions in complex professional organizations. Approaches to decision making that ignore non-economic variables, failing to include political, social, and cultural variables, will not help improve quality; in fact they will harm quality by diverting resources and faculty and staff time to unproductive coping activities. Again, Birnbaum (2000) describes the failures of such simplistic management processes.

Effective institutional decision making requires great sensitivity to the special characteristics of a college or university and to maintaining a balance between seeking to anticipate emerging events and being able to react quickly and effectively to events as they do emerge. Many important factors affecting institutions are not predictable. Institutional success results from the wisdom and ability

of decision makers at all levels to discern significant variables in their spheres of responsibility, their complex interactions, and the diverse values of participants. In doing this, as noted earlier, they do not seek goals so much as they seek an equilibrium among a host of competing values.

In the competition to achieve various values, the location of decision making authority will always be a matter of great contention. Those at various levels in national higher education systems will always seek to reduce their uncertainty by attempting to maintain control over decisions they consider important. In these circumstances, great effort is needed to preserve the principle that decisions should be located where the most relevant information is available. As a Maryland university official once said: "The further away one is from an area affected by a decision, the simpler the solution appears and the less accurate the decision." He noted that complexity does not travel well! To address these concerns, more attention needs to be given to ways to increase the trust and confidence among officials at all levels in higher education systems.

What Should and Can Be Done To Improve Quality

When governments seek to examine quality, are they really concerned about the integrity and performance of the academic enterprise or are they seeking some other less politically appealing objectives such as budget reductions? The essential character of higher education appears incompatible with the premises of the "corporate" management concept. Yet when one points out the difficulties encountered by management practices based on corporate concepts, and on so-called "rational" decision making processes, the common response is: "if these processes don't work then what can you do?." Those posing this question apparently assume that these ineffective approaches are the only alternative to chaotic and ineffective decision making processes. However, if the assumptions in this paper are correct, that many emerging governmental approaches to quality assurance are based on faulty assumptions, then the appropriate answer is to give government decision makers a broader understanding of the actual nature of higher education institutions and their functions. After all, our institutions train most of them! Unfortunately, as Thomas Kuhn (1970) has shown, changing the paradigms through which a professional field is viewed typically requires a "revolution" in the thinking of the participants and generally is strongly resisted. However, the current growing acceptance of corporate management and marketplace views of higher education shows that paradigm shifts are possible, even when they are based on an inaccurate understanding of the character and role of higher education institutions.

The shortcomings of data and documentation based governmental accountability and assessment processes make it highly unlikely that they will assure government officials that institutions are maintaining and improving their quality. Government officials frequently appear to become concerned about quality only after they become convinced it is lacking and these preconceptions are very difficult to dispel. The search for information on quality often appears to be motivated by a desire to prove these firmly held a priori assumptions and theories but they are not likely to be substantially affected by institutional data. The data submitted will always be incomplete and fail to provide clear indications of what needs to be done. For example, there is no certain answer to the question of whether more money should be provided to correct a perceived shortcoming or if money should be withheld to create incentives for improvement. Suspicions about the selectivity and

quality of the information submitted by institutions will remain after reports are examined because of the lack of trust and confidence among the parties and the many ways data can be tailored to promote the interests of the supplier. Data inevitably will reveal many unanswered questions and raise suspicions about the character and interpretation of the data provided, leading to an unending and costly search for more information to support decisions that should be made locally by those possessing requisite expertise.

Institutions are faced with a very difficult challenge of pointing out the shortcomings of government quality assessment processes, and resisting their added costs and damages to the academic enterprise, while avoiding appearing to be self-serving and resisting sincere efforts to improve performance. Institutions need to communicate better the quality assessment practices they currently engage in and take leadership in designing processes for quality evaluation and assessment that are compatible with the character of colleges and universities and the complex of political and professional judgments faculty and institutional administrators must make to maintain and achieve quality.

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別 紙

[要 旨]

政府による大学の評価及び説明責任実施の諸前提

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政府は種々の要因から、大学の評価及び説明責任の実施に乗り出している。しかし、そのための前提は、どれもが正しいとは言えないものであり、大学は厳しい挑戦を受けている。大学は、現在実施している評価の価値をうまく社会に伝え、大学の活動に即した評価の方式の形成にリーダーシップを取っていかなければならない。

本論文は、以下の構成からなっている。

1. 序 論
2. 政府による評価及び説明責任実施を推進する要素
 - 高等教育を産業として認識する
 - 資源配分の効率性と費用の抑制への疑念
 - 公的機関や組織の信用及び信頼の欠如
 - 政府と高等教育との間の相互不信
 - 大学の統治方式への信頼の欠如
3. 政府による大学の評価及び説明責任実施の諸前提
 - 教員や管理職者は質の問題を解決する方法を知っている
 - 政府当局者は公的な利益を代表している
 - 政府当局者は質の特性を特定でき、確立できる
 - 大学の質の問題への不活発を克服するには構造と方法への官僚的な調整と制御が必要とされる
 - データ・システムと大学提出の書類を基礎に、政府当局者は質の改善のための適切な意思決定ができる
4. 結 論
 - 質の性格
 - 適切な統治方式の考え方の競合
 - 質を改善するために何をすべきで、何ができるのか

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