Plenary Session I: How the West Was Won – A Discussion of How Higher Education Has Responded to Secretary Spellings’s Challenge to Be More Accountable

When Secretary Spellings’s Commission on the Future of American Higher Education issued its report in September 2006, there was much angst in the higher education community: Did this foretell of increased federal oversight? Would higher education become trapped in a downward accountability spiral, akin to the problems that No Child Left Behind caused for elementary and secondary education? Of particular concern was the focus on student-learning outcomes within the commission report. Many in the higher education community worried that standards might diminish a system that had become great because of its lack of standardization – and believed that the nature of higher education made it essentially impossible to measure its quality anyway.

Others in the higher education community and the broader policy community felt that it was about time; that this industry, which receives such substantial public financial support, has to be held just as publicly accountable as other public services and that student learning is what it was all about and thus must be measured. As Robert Pirsig states in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, “If you can’t say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn’t exist at all.”

While these debates continued, some within the higher education community decided to accept the commission’s challenge and develop an appropriate accountability system for their particularly unique types of institutions. Perhaps most notable amongst these has been the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), developed jointly by the National Association of State University and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), which represent together most of the public baccalaureate (and beyond) colleges and universities in the U.S. Impressively, a group of nontraditional institutions that specialize in providing technology-mediated distance learning also came together through an organization known as The President’s Forum to develop a system called Transparency By Design, designed to provide comparative information on the quality of services provided by individual institutions (and individual programs within institutions) that operate in this new distance education world. And while the public two-year sector of higher education has not been as aggressive, a group of community colleges that have participated in the Lumina-funded Achieving the Dream initiative have responded to the challenge.

We are fortunate to have representatives of each of these accountability efforts joining us to share their experiences to date. The panel includes David Shulenburger, vice president for academic affairs for NASULGC,
who has been the principal individual responsible for developing the Voluntary System of Accountability; Michael Offerman, vice chairman of Capella Education Company and one of the founding fomenters of Transparency By Design; and Richard Kazis, senior vice president of Jobs for the Future, who has helped guide the accountability components of the Achieving the Dream project. The session will be moderated by Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and a generally recognized guru of assessment in American higher education, as well as an expert on state policy and accountability.

Discussion leader:
Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

Speakers:
Richard Kazis, senior vice president of Jobs for the Future
Michael Offerman, vice chairman of Capella Education Company
David Shulenburger, vice president for academic affairs at NASULGC

Biographical Information on the Discussion Leader and Speakers

Peter Ewell is the vice president at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), a research and development center founded to improve the management effectiveness of colleges and universities. A member of the staff since 1981, Ewell focuses on assessing institutional effectiveness and the outcomes of college. His work involves both research and direct consulting with institutions and state systems on collecting and using assessment information in planning, evaluation, and budgeting. He has directed many projects on this topic, including initiatives funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the National Institute for Education, the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, and the Pew Charitable Trusts, and is currently a principal partner in the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning. In addition, he has consulted with over 375 colleges and universities and 24 state systems of higher education on topics including assessment, program review, enrollment management, and student retention. He has also been involved in NCHEMS’s work on longitudinal student databases and other academic management information tools. He has been a principal consultant to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education on its biennial Measuring Up reports, a consultant to the Education Testing Service on its Culture of Evidence project, an architect of the competency-based curriculum of the Western Governors University, and an advisor to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on its international benchmarking efforts. Ewell has authored six books and numerous articles – including The Self-Regarding Institution: Information for Excellence and Assessing Educational Outcomes – and has also prepared commissioned papers.
for many agencies and spoken at numerous conferences. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Yale University and was on the faculty of the University of Chicago.

**Richard Kazis**, senior vice president of Jobs for the Future (JFF), leads JFF’s policy and research efforts. In the early 1990s, he directed the organization’s initial multisite initiative on school-to-career models. Since then, he has led projects on local organizations that link schools and employers; community colleges and low-income populations; policies to promote low-wage worker advancement; and the emerging role of labor market intermediaries in workforce development. Kazis directs JFF’s contributions to Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative that promotes change to improve student success at community colleges. The initiative works on multiple fronts – including efforts at community colleges and in research, public engagement, and public policy – and emphasizes the use of data to drive change. JFF coordinates the initiative’s effort to improve policies in seven targeted states. Kazis also directs JFF’s Double the Numbers initiative, designed to advance state and national policies that can significantly increase the number of young people who make it to and through college. Kazis is a former teacher at an alternative high school for returning dropouts. He has also supervised a Neighborhood Youth Corps program, helped organize fast food workers, managed a cooperative urban food production wholesaler, built labor-environmental coalitions around jobs, and studied informal experiential learning in Israel. He is president of the board of the Brookline Education Foundation and a graduate of Harvard College and M.I.T.

**Michael Offerman** is president emeritus of Capella University and vice chairman of Capella Education Company. He served as the president of Capella University from 2001 through 2007 and continues to work on external university initiatives in his role as vice chairman of Capella Education Company. Prior to Capella University, he served at the University of Arizona and the University of Wisconsin, where, as dean, he created the University of Wisconsin Learning Innovations Center, which develops, delivers, and supports online degree programs for all 15 University of Wisconsin institutions. He received an Ed.D. in educational policy studies from Northern Illinois University, a master’s degree in adult continuing education from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and a B.A. in history from the University of Iowa.

**David E. Shulenburger** is vice president for academic affairs for the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). Shulenburger’s position at NASULGC is a new one for the organization. His immediate areas of concentration are on accountability and assessment in higher education. Before joining NASULGC in 2006, Shulenburger was provost and executive vice chancellor of the University of Kansas. He served there as chief academic officer for 13 years. He came to the university in 1974.
as an assistant professor and currently holds the faculty rank of professor in the School of Business. He previously served as a faculty member at Clemson University and as a labor economist for the U.S. Department of Labor. His teaching areas are business economics and labor economics, and his most recent area of research focuses on the economics of scholarly communications. He has been active nationally and internationally as an advocate for reform in the areas of accountability, scholarly communication, and academic accreditation. He was chair of the board of directors of the Center for Research Libraries from 2005-07 and is currently a member of that board and of BioOne’s board, a member of the National Commission on Writing, and consulting editor for Change magazine. He received his Ph.D. and master’s degrees from the University of Illinois and his undergraduate degree from Lenoir Rhyne College.
Voluntary System of Accountability

The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) communicates information on the undergraduate student experience through a common web-reporting template, the College Portrait. The VSA is a voluntary initiative for four-year public colleges and universities. Developed through a partnership between the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), the VSA is designed to help institutions: demonstrate accountability and stewardship to the public; measure educational outcomes to identify effective educational practices; and assemble information that is accessible, understandable, and comparable. Participating institutions are listed below.

**Alabama**
- Alabama A&M University
- Auburn University
- Jacksonville State University
- The University of Alabama in Huntsville
- Troy University

**Alaska**
- University of Alaska Fairbanks

**Arizona**
- Northern Arizona University

**Arkansas**
- University of Arkansas

**California**
- California Maritime Academy
- California Polytechnic State University
- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
- California State University, Bakersfield
- California State University, Channel Islands
- California State University, Chico
- California State University, Dominguez Hills
- California State University, East Bay
- California State University, Fresno
- California State University, Fullerton
- California State University, Long Beach
- California State University, Los Angeles
- California State University, Monterey Bay
- California State University, Northridge
- California State University, Sacramento
- California State University, San Bernardino
- California State University, San Marcos
- California State University, Stanislaus
- Humboldt State University
- San Diego State University
- San Francisco State University
- San Jose State University
- Sonoma State University

**Colorado**
- Colorado State University
- Colorado State University–Pueblo
- Metropolitan State College of Denver
- University of Colorado Denver
- University of Northern Colorado

**Connecticut**
- Central Connecticut State University
- Eastern Connecticut State University
- Southern Connecticut State University

**Delaware**
- Delaware State University
- University of Delaware

**Florida**
- Florida Gulf Coast University
- Florida International University
- Florida State University
- University of Central Florida
- University of North Florida
- University of South Florida
- University of West Florida

**Georgia**
- Armstrong Atlantic State University
- Fort Valley State University
- Georgia Southern University
- Georgia State University
- University of Georgia

**Illinois**
- Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
- University of Illinois
- Western Illinois University

**Indiana**
- Indiana State University
- Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne
- Indiana University Kokomo
- Purdue University
- Purdue University Calumet
- University of Southern Indiana

**Iowa**
- Iowa State University
- The University of Iowa
- University of Northern Iowa

**Kansas**
- Emporia State University
- Fort Hays State University
Pittsburg State University
University of Kansas
Washburn University
Wichita State University

Kentucky
Kentucky State University
Morehead State University
University of Louisville
Western Kentucky University

Louisiana
Grambling State University
Louisiana State University in Shreveport
Louisiana Tech University
McNeese State University
Nicholls State University
Northeastern State University of Louisiana
Southeastern Louisiana University
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Louisiana at Monroe
University of New Orleans

Maine
University of Maine at Fort Kent
University of Maine at Presque Isle

Maryland
Coppin State University
Frostburg State University
Salisbury University
Towson University
University of Baltimore
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
University of Maryland–Baltimore County
University of Maryland–College Park

Michigan
Central Michigan University
Michigan State University
Michigan Technological University
Western Michigan University

Minnesota
Bemidji State University
Metropolitan State University
Minnesota State University Moorhead
Minnesota State University, Mankato
St. Cloud State University
University of Minnesota–Twin Cities

Missouri
Missouri Southern State University
Missouri State University
Missouri University of Science & Technology
Southeast Missouri State University
Truman State University

University of Missouri
University of Missouri–Kansas City
University of Missouri–St. Louis

Montana
Montana State University
Montana State University Billings

Nebraska
University of Nebraska–Lincoln
University of Nebraska at Kearney
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Nevada
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
University of Nevada, Reno

New Hampshire
Keene State College
Plymouth State University

New Jersey
Montclair State University
The College of New Jersey
The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey
William Paterson University

New Mexico
New Mexico State University
University of New Mexico–Main Campus
Western New Mexico University

New York
SUNY Buffalo State College
SUNY College at Purchase
SUNY Fredonia
SUNY Oneonta

North Carolina
Appalachian State University
Carolinas College of Health Sciences
East Carolina University
Elizabeth City State University
Fayetteville State University
North Carolina Central University
The University of North Carolina at Pembroke
University of North Carolina at Asheville
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill
University of North Carolina–Wilmington
Western Carolina University
Winston Salem State University

North Dakota
Minot State University
Ohio
Kent State University Stark

Oklahoma
Cameron University
Northeastern State University
Oklahoma State University
University of Central Oklahoma

Pennsylvania
Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania
Clarion University of Pennsylvania
East Stroudsburg University
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
Lock Haven University
Mansfield University of Pennsylvania
Millersville University
Shippensburg University
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania
West Chester University

Puerto Rico
University of Puerto Rico–Mayagüez

Rhode Island
Rhode Island College

South Carolina
Clemson University
Coastal Carolina University
University of South Carolina
University of South Carolina Aiken
Winthrop University

South Dakota
Black Hills State University
Dakota State University
Northern State University
South Dakota School of Mines and Technology
South Dakota State University
The University of South Dakota

Tennessee
Tennessee State University
University of Memphis
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Texas
Lamar University
Prairie View A&M University
Sam Houston State University
Sul Ross State University
Tarleton State University
Texas A&M University
Texas A&M University–Commerce
Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi
Texas A&M University–Kingsville
Texas A&M University–Texarkana
Texas Tech University
Texas Woman’s University
The University of Texas at Arlington
The University of Texas at Austin
The University of Texas at San Antonio
The University of Texas at Tyler
University of Houston
University of Houston–Victoria
University of Houston–Clear Lake
University of Houston–Downtown
University of North Texas
University of Texas at Dallas
University of Texas at El Paso
University of Texas of the Permian Basin
University of Texas–Pan American
West Texas A&M University

Utah
Utah Valley State College

Vermont
University of Vermont

Virginia
Longwood University
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

West Virginia
Fairmont State University
Marshall University

Wisconsin
University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire
University of Wisconsin–Green Bay
University of Wisconsin–La Crosse
University of Wisconsin–Madison
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee
University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh
University of Wisconsin–Parkside
University of Wisconsin–Platteville
University of Wisconsin–River Falls
University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point
University of Wisconsin–Stout
University of Wisconsin–Superior
University of Wisconsin–Whitewater
Transparency By Design

Transparency By Design is a new initiative developed by a consortium of adult-serving higher educational institutions to elevate accountability and transparency in higher education. The initiative is designed to provide access to data that allows adult students to make informed decisions about their education. Transparency By Design was developed by the Presidents’ Forum, which was established in 2002 by Excelsior College to provide adult-serving institutions the opportunity to exchange knowledge and perceptions of current models and tools.

Michael Offerman, leader of the working group that developed the initiative observed: “The members of Transparency By Design are united in the belief that students should be well-informed about their education options – what they will learn and how well other students have performed at a specific institution. To meet the education needs of adult students, we as an industry must provide them with trustworthy and transparent ways to choose among many available options and to gauge the potential of each one to further their careers and achieve their dreams.”

In the first quarter of 2009, Transparency By Design will unveil its website, displaying information on student demographics, completion rates, costs, student satisfaction or engagement, and alumni experiences. The initial website rollout will include outcomes for select program specializations, allowing prospective students to assess how well a program will prepare them for their professional pursuits. Information on additional program specializations will be added over time.

In 2008 participating institutions are working on standard definitions, defining what data will be reported, and piloting the information with focus groups of adult learners. The institutions will examine standard student measures (e.g., Adult Learning Inventory, Priorities Survey for Online Learners, National Survey of Student Engagement) for their suitability to be adopted by all Transparency By Design institutions. By employing the measures selected, information will become more comparable over time. As a side benefit to this project, participating institutions are finding the initiative to be the start of an ongoing process of quality improvement in institutional research methods.

WCET’s role is to serve as a neutral third party that will challenge the institutions to meet their stated goals, to audit data submitted for publication, and to publish Transparency By Design information in a format that is accessible and understandable for prospective students. WCET will also coordinate, conduct, and publish research using the data.

Charter Institutions
American Public University System
Capella University
Charter Oak State College
Excelsior College
Fielding Graduate University
Franklin University
Kaplan University
Regis University
Rio Salado College
Southwestern College
Union Institute & University
Western Governors University

First institution to join beyond the charter institutions
American Intercontinental University Online
Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a multiyear national initiative to help more community college students succeed. The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that traditionally have faced significant barriers to success, including students of color and low-income students. Achieving the Dream works on multiple fronts, including efforts at community colleges and in research, public engagement, and public policy. It emphasizes the use of data to drive change.

Community colleges enroll almost half of all U.S. undergraduate students, and the American public appreciates their commitment to providing broad access. But access alone isn’t enough. Currently, fewer than half of community college students meet their educational goals. Achieving the Dream is working to help more students earn certificates or degrees that open the door to better jobs, further education, and greater opportunity. The following list shows the colleges that joined Achieving the Dream by year.

**Colleges that Joined in 2004**

**Florida**
- Broward Community College, Fort Lauderdale
- Hillsborough Community College, Tampa
- Tallahassee Community College, Tallahassee
- Valencia Community College, Orlando

**New Mexico**
- Central New Mexico Community College, Albuquerque
- New Mexico State University–Doña Ana, Las Cruces
- Santa Fe Community College, Santa Fe
- Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, Albuquerque
- University of New Mexico–Gallup, Gallup

**North Carolina**
- Durham Technical Community College, Durham
- Guilford Technical Community College, Jamestown
- Martin Community College, Williamston
- Wayne Community College, Goldsboro

**Connecticut**
- Capital Community College, Hartford
- Housatonic Community College, Bridgeport
- Norwalk Community College, Norwalk

**Pennsylvania**
- Community College of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh
- Community College of Beaver County, Monaca
- Delaware County Community College, Media
- Montgomery County Community College, Blue Bell
- Northampton Community College, Bethlehem
- Community College of Philadelphia, Philadelphia
- Westmoreland County Community College, Youngwood

**Washington**
- Big Bend Community College, Moses Lake
- Yakima Valley Community College, Yakima
- Highline Community College, Des Moines

**Texas**
- Alamo Community College District, San Antonio (Northwest Vista College, Palo Alto College, San Antonio College, St. Philip's College)
- Brookhaven College, Dallas
- Coastal Bend College, Beeville
- El Paso Community College District, El Paso
- Galveston College, Galveston
- Houston Community College System, Houston
- South Texas College, McAllen
- Southwest Texas Junior College, Uvalde

**North Carolina**
- Durham Technical Community College, Durham
- Guilford Technical Community College, Jamestown
- Martin Community College, Williamston
- Wayne Community College, Goldsboro

**Connecticut**
- Capital Community College, Hartford
- Housatonic Community College, Bridgeport
- Norwalk Community College, Norwalk

**Pennsylvania**
- Community College of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh
- Community College of Beaver County, Monaca
- Delaware County Community College, Media
- Montgomery County Community College, Blue Bell
- Northampton Community College, Bethlehem
- Community College of Philadelphia, Philadelphia
- Westmoreland County Community College, Youngwood

**Washington**
- Big Bend Community College, Moses Lake
- Yakima Valley Community College, Yakima
- Highline Community College, Des Moines

**Texas**
- Alvin Community College, Alvin
- Brazosport College, Lake Jackson
- College of the Mainland, Texas City
- Lee College, Baytown
- North Harris Montgomery Community College District, The Woodlands
- San Jacinto College, Pasadena
- Wharton County Junior College, Wharton
- Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View
- Texas Southern University, Houston
- University of Houston–Downtown, Houston
Tacoma Community College, Tacoma
Renton Technical College, Renton
Seattle Central Community College, Seattle

Colleges that Joined in 2007

**Arkansas**
National Park Community College, Hot Springs
Ouachita Technical College, Malvern
Phillips Community College, Helena
Pulaski Technical College, North Little Rock

**Hawaii**
The University of Hawaii Community Colleges, Honolulu

**Massachusetts**
Bunker Hill Community College, Boston
Northern Essex Community College, Lawrence
Roxbury Community College, Roxbury
Springfield Technical Community College, Springfield

**Michigan**
Bay de Noc Community College, Escanaba
Henry Ford Community College, Dearborn
Jackson Community College, Jackson
Lake Michigan College, Benton Harbor
North Central Michigan College, Petoskey
Wayne County Community College District, Detroit

**Oklahoma**
Oklahoma City Community College, Oklahoma City
Rose State College, Midwest City
Tulsa Community College, Tulsa

**South Carolina**
Aiken Technical College, Aiken
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College, Orangeburg
Technical College of the Lowcountry, Beaufort
Trident Technical College, Charleston

**Texas**
Paris Junior College, Paris
The Victoria College, Victoria
University of Houston, Houston

**Virginia**
Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale