Accountability hasn’t always been as central to the public higher education agenda as it is currently. Once upon a time, or so the lore goes, people believed in the inherent value of higher education and had faith that the institutions providing this education were serving the public good. As a result there was no need for accountability because the performance of both students and institutions was a given.

But for the last 40 years at least, accountability has been front and center. What has changed over that time is what accountability means. At its core accountability is driven by what is measured. And what is measured is dictated not only by what you choose to measure (that is, by what you value) but also by what you are able to measure (that is, by the data and information that you can gather). Both what is valued and what can be measured have changed dramatically over the past 40 years.

Forty years ago our values, at least as reflected in our accountability requirements, focused on expanding access to all those who could benefit from a higher education. Imbedded within this value statement was a pretty substantial assumption that only a portion of the population could and should benefit and that, indeed, one of the responsibilities of institutions was to assure that only the able survived to graduation. At the institutional level, our values were reflected in accountability that focused almost entirely on input and process measures, reflecting what we referred to most often as “efficiency measures” – be they the square footage of capital plants, student/faculty ratios (with lower being better than higher), program review processes, qualifications of entering freshmen, teaching course loads, etc. And at the state level – well, there simply weren’t accountability measures for state government, unless it was how one state’s share of total resources dedicated to higher education compared to another’s. At whatever level, the essence of accountability during that era was all about inputs and process, not educational outcomes – the “how to” of education, not the “how come.”

But this wasn’t simply because our values were focused on process rather than products but also because we simply didn’t have good measures of educational outcomes. We could certainly measure the number of graduates, but that wasn’t a big public policy issue because the economy was comfortably absorbing virtually all college graduates and the demand for and supply of graduates seemed to be in reasonable homeostasis. The assessment of student learning was deemed impossible to do, and rightly so. The general thesis was
that faculty knew quality in student learning when they saw it and that the accumulation of this faculty wisdom, as reflected in 120 hours for a baccalaureate or 60 hours for an associate degree, was prima facie evidence of being college-educated. Furthermore, the business community seemed comfortable with these assumptions and readily hired the new graduates. There were virtually no measurement processes available to test such assumptions or to even compare institutions on basic outcome measures, such as time to degree, completion rates, job placement rates, etc.

Accountability has changed radically in the new millennium, with a fervent increase in the emphasis on looking at performance – based not exclusively but much more significantly on outcomes, rather than inputs or processes, and measured with substantially greater availability of data to support a stronger culture of evidence than ever existed in the past. The nature of this new thrust of accountability differs, as it should, depending upon the various stakeholders’ responsibilities and proclivities.

This first session focuses on current performance measurement practices at the institutional levels. Our experts will discuss current practice among three key institutional partners: the faculty, the administration, and the governing board. Each of these three partners has unique responsibilities, proclivities, and passions with respect to performance measurement (for instance, some adore performance measurement, some abhor it, some tolerate it, and some ignore it). In addition to discussing how institutions are adjusting to a new world of accountability through performance measurement, including funding that follows demonstrated performance, our experts will suggest both best and worse practices, as well as uniquely appropriate areas of performance measurement that should be the exclusive purview of each of these three partners (at least from their perspective). One key issue is how policy objectives established at the state level can be imbedded in the performance measurement schemes of institutions. Without such trickling down, a disconnect may arise between expectations and changes in performance, further exacerbating the tensions between policymakers and those who deliver educational services.

The facilitated session following these presentations should be lively.

Speaker: Debra Humphreys, vice president for public policy and engagement, Association of American Colleges and Universities
Facilitated Discussion on Plenary Session I

Facilitator: Paul Lingenfelter, president, State Higher Education Executive Officers

Biographical Information on the Speaker & Facilitator

Debra Humphreys is the vice president for policy and public engagement at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), a position she assumed in early 2013. She leads AAC&U’s national and state-level advocacy and policy efforts related to issues of student success and the quality of student learning in higher education. Previously, she served for 11 years as AAC&U’s VP for communications and public affairs; before that she was director of programs in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Global Initiatives at AAC&U, where she directed programs on women’s issues and diversity in higher education. Currently, as part of AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise: Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College campaign, she is helping to build communications capacity on the part of college and university leaders and faculty members and educate the public about the value of an engaged liberal education to prepare for the changing global economy. Humphreys also leads the policy strand of AAC&U’s Lumina Foundation-supported Quality Collaboratives initiative, working in nine states to advance transfer and assessment policies that better account for students’ demonstrated accomplishment of learning. She also oversees all of AAC&U’s policy, public, and employer engagement and outreach, media relations, and the development of all of AAC&U’s publications, marketing efforts, and web resources. She serves often as a communications and educational consultant to colleges and universities and has conducted faculty workshops on teaching and learning issues and especially on the process of general education reform and developing diversity courses and requirements. She serves on the editorial advisory boards of University Business, Change magazine, and About Campus. In addition to her expertise on general education and campus diversity issues, she has written, taught, and published on African American women’s literature, immigrant women’s literature, and women and American film history. She received her B.A. from Williams College and her Ph.D. in English from Rutgers University.
Paul Lingenfelter’s work as president of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) has focused on increasing successful participation in higher education; accountability for improving learning; finance; and building more effective relationships between K-12 and postsecondary educators. Under his leadership SHEEO organized the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, created the annual State Higher Education Finance study, published *More Student Success: A Systemic Solution*, and substantially expanded SHEEO collaborations with the Council of Chief State School Officers. From 1985 to 2000, Lingenfelter served at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, where in 1996 he was appointed vice president to establish and lead the MacArthur Foundation Program on Human and Community Development. Earlier, he was involved in the full range of the foundation’s international and domestic programs as associate vice president for planning and evaluation and director of program-related investments. Lingenfelter was deputy director for fiscal affairs for the Illinois Board of Higher Education from 1980 to 1985 and held other administrative positions with the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the University of Michigan from 1968 to 1980. His educational background includes an A.B. from Wheaton College in literature, an M.A. from Michigan State University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in higher education with an emphasis in public policy. He is the author of numerous studies and articles related to his work in higher education and philanthropy. He currently serves on the boards of the National Student Clearinghouse and the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability.