

The Use and Abuse of Metrics in Accreditation

California Association for
Institutional Research

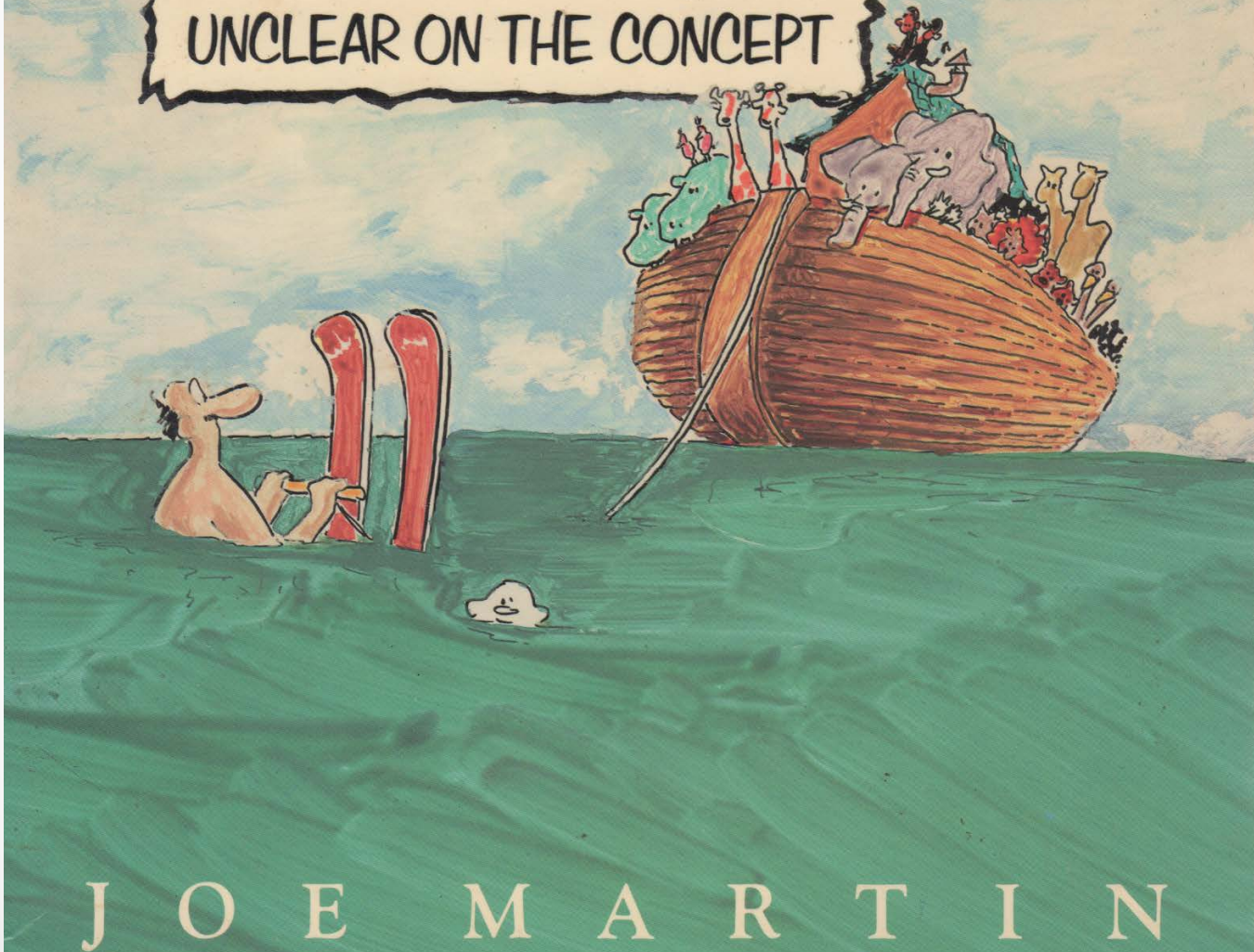
Richard Winn ~ WASC Executive Director

In the next 50 minutes:

- Appreciating the use of metrics
- My concerns about the misuse of metrics
- Thinking together about the future
- Richard
- Richard
- Us

MISTER BOFFO

UNCLEAR ON THE CONCEPT



J O E M A R T I N

One person's perspective

- Since the late 1990s WASC has emphasized development of a “Culture of Evidence” at member institutions
- With Peter Ewell, published *The Evidence Guide* in 2002

EVIDENCE GUIDE

A GUIDE TO USING EVIDENCE IN THE
ACCREDITATION PROCESS: A RESOURCE TO SUPPORT
INSTITUTIONS AND EVALUATION TEAMS

A WORKING DRAFT
JANUARY 2002



ACCREDITING
COMMISSION FOR
SENIOR COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES

WESTERN
ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOLS
& COLLEGES

One person's perspective

- Since the late 1990s WASC has emphasized development of a “Culture of Evidence” at member institutions
- With Peter Ewell, published *The Evidence Guide* in 2002. A significantly updated edition of *The Evidence Guide* will be published in 2014
- A key element of WASC reviews: Identify, obtain, disseminate, and reflect upon key metrics related to student learning and achievement
- The ALA, other educational events
- In collaboration with IR professionals, the “water table has been raised” throughout the region

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Many useful reports

Finding the “Bleeding Spots”: How to Identify At-risk Groups

Jing Wang
Director of Institutional Research
California State University, Sacramento
jwang@csus.edu

Tamara Lapointe
Data Management Analyst
California State University, Sacramento
Lapointe@csus.edu

Abstract - In order to improve retention and graduation rates, it is necessary to identify those students who were most likely to withdraw from the university or did not graduate within six years. We created a three stage research project to find the “Bleeding Spot”: The first stage is to build Cohort tracking files. The second stage is to diagnose “At-Risk Groups” by analyzing the negative factors. The final stage is to zoom in on the results of the studies and identify the group at highest risk. A regression model has been developed to predict who would be at highest risk for the in-coming cohort.

A Summary of Three Key Student Success Programs

University of California, Riverside



An Inventory of Key Performance Measures

Sacramento State University

Originally developed by the Institutional Research Office at Sacramento State to assist the Strategic Planning Council in monitoring progress on the university's strategic priorities.

| Goal | Group | Measurement | Time Period | Benchmark |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Recruitment | New Freshmen New Transfer New Graduate | On Enrollment target or % above/below Enrollment Targets | Fall Spring | Historical Comparison |
| | All Continuing Students | Continuation Rates | Term-to-Term | Historical Comparison |
| | Applicants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % Applicant Change • Admitted Rate • Yield Rate | Fall | Historical Comparison |
| Retention | Freshmen Transfer | 1-year Retention Rate | Fall-to-Fall | CSU Peer & Historical Comparison |
| | Freshmen | % Complete Remediation | Within the First Year | Historical Comparison |
| | Freshmen Transfer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Standing Rate • Cumulative GPA (Mean) | Semester | Historical Comparison |
| | Freshmen Transfer | Average Course Load (Mean) | Semester | Historical Comparison |
| Graduation | Undergraduate: Freshmen Transfer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-Year Graduation Rate • 4-Year Graduation Rate • Time-to-Degree (Median) • Degree GPA (Mean) • Degree Unit (Mean) | Annual | CSU Peer & Historical Comparison |
| | College/Department Freshmen Transfer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation Rate • Degree GPA (Mean) • Degree Unit | Annual | Historical Comparison |
| | Graduate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-to-Degree (Median) • Degree GPA (Mean) | Annual | Historical Comparison |
| | Graduating Seniors | Progress made at College (Self evaluation from Survey Results) | Annual | Historical Comparison |

Characteristics of these reports:

- Designed by research professionals
- Administered for the purpose of assessing and improving institutional performance
 - (Rather than for marketing, ranking, or drawing invidious comparisons)
- Capable of supporting nuanced analysis in support of specific action planning
- Designed for sharing with others in the academy with similar interests and goals

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IR in the Global Setting

The “International Higher Education Research and Policy Roundtable” (2-3 November 2013) of 33 higher education research and policy experts produced “The Shanghai Statement” –

The field of higher education needs to expand worldwide and requires careful attention and development if the tertiary sector is to be effectively managed and led and ultimately to deliver desired results for stakeholders. Data and analysis are required if informed decisions are to be made.”

“Academic institutions of all kinds and higher education systems need strong research capacity and the means of data collection.”



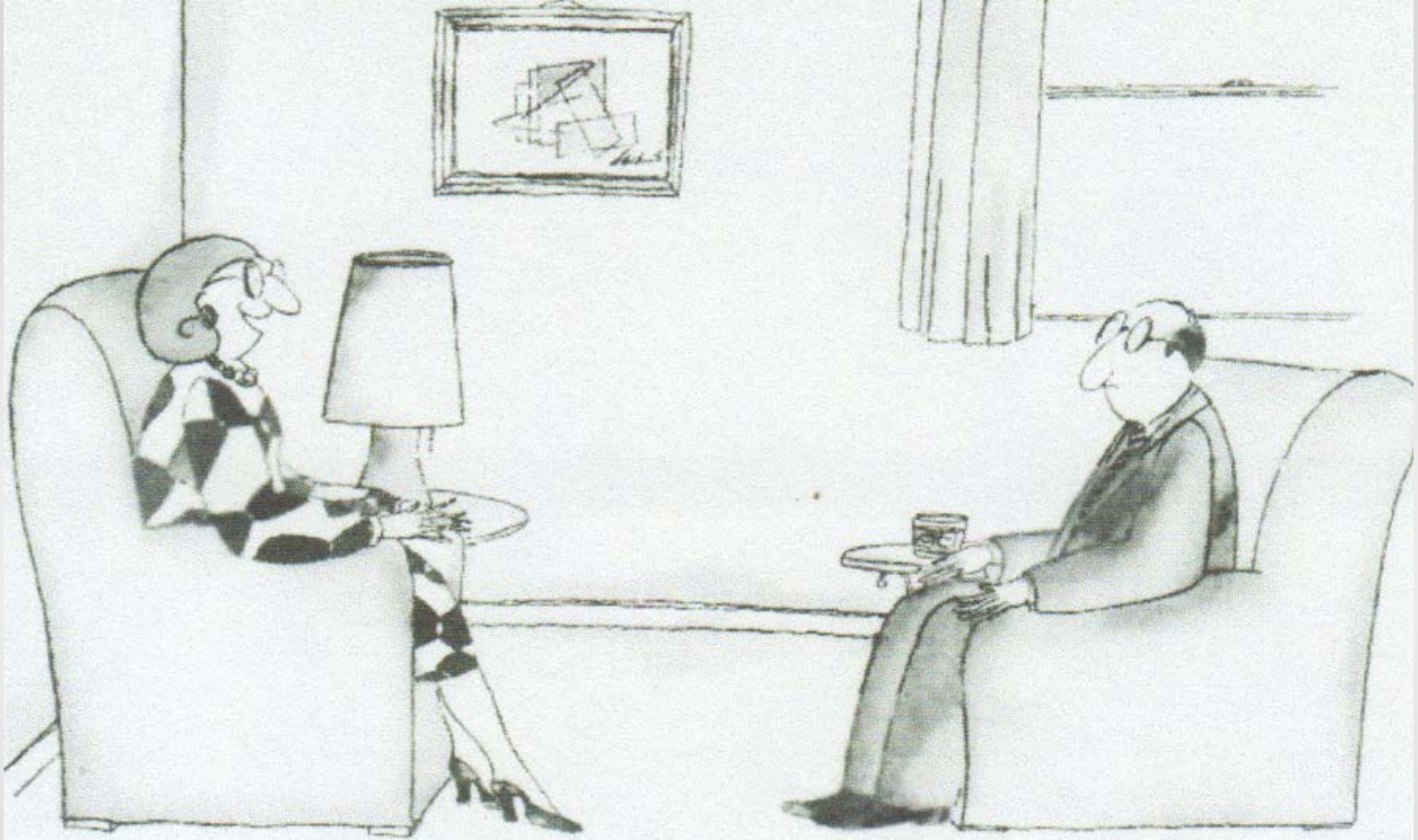
Research professionals are caught in the crossfire

- A policy world in the thrall of rankings – domestically and globally
- The unreflective assumption that “weighing the pig will fatten it”
 - (More on this in a moment)
- The assumption that “market forces” will produce change if the market only has the data
- The assumption that data from one sector or institution is directly applicable to another
- “Higher education today is just like it was when I was in college 40 years ago!”
- The assumption that data are value-neutral
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And WASC is caught in the crossfire . . .

- An appropriate growing interest in accountability, affordability, and transparency in Higher Education
- Accreditors are viewed as the agents of federal interests in view of gatekeeping role over \$175b annual student aid
- Accreditors are seen as the direct interface between the public / government / employer interests and the institutions – the one agency with the leverage to effect desired change
- Talk to legislators about the complexity and diversity of the academy: Eyes glaze over!





Victoria Roberts

"Don't worry, Howard. The big questions are multiple choice."

Brewing in the current cauldron (1):

- Performance-based funding
- Being pursued in 16 states based on “degree production and completion rates”
- Promoted by Gates Foundation, “Complete College America,” the Obama administration
- Proponents range from 1% to nearly all funding linked to performance; average is about 25%
 - So this is high stakes!
- Who determines a “supportable” level of achievement?



Can one game the system?

- Screen out the low performers, the high-risk applicants, to ensure higher completion rates
- Lower the exit standards
- Grant easy transfer of credits even if they don't apply
- Give credit for prior learning on generous terms
- Base graduation on accumulated credits earned rather than on assessed learning

Brewing in the current cauldron (2):

- Ratings based (in part) on graduate's earnings ("Gainful Employment" legislation also linked to debt repayment, per Duncan)
- What about the economy?
- What about public service, the Peace Corps, public education, the military?
- What about poorer students who have to finance their education rather than have Dad write checks?
- Would there be an impact of the career services unit as undecided students would be steered to the higher paying jobs?



Brewing in the current cauldron (3):

- Ratings based (in part) on average tuition and loan debt
- What metric will be used for either? What level of control do institutions have over student borrowing?
- Is “average tuition” an indicator of uncontrolled costs, the size of the endowment, the discount rate, or of the institution’s location? Or all of the above?
- How to avoid punishing those who are more in need of financing their education or going into low-paying service-oriented careers



Brewing in the current WASC cauldron:

§602.19(b) The agency must demonstrate it has, and effectively applies, a set of monitoring and evaluation approaches that enables the agency to identify problems with an institution's or program's continued compliance with agency standards and that takes into account institutional or program strengths and stability. These approaches must include periodic reports, and collection and analysis of key data and indicators, identified by the agency, including, but not limited to, fiscal information and **measures of student achievement**, consistent with the provisions of 602.16(f).



The good news:

- Significant reduction in required data exhibits at the WASC comprehensive review
- Shifting most data requests to the Annual Report
 - Able to generate trend lines
 - Can download IPEDS data from public sites in spreadsheet
 - Reduces reporting to a few institutional personnel
- Avoid any duplicative data requests
- Ask only for information to support key decisions
- Financial and Retention & Graduation (R&G) data reviewed by special committees who will build expertise and adapt to context



The challenging news:

- What is the meaning of “measures of student achievement” in the federal requirement?
- An earlier ED battle: “If the ABA can set a bright line floor of bar pass rates for JD graduates to approve law schools, why can’t WASC do the same thing?”
- We noted: “USC has 160 BA, 277 MA, 48 professional doc, and 101 research doc degrees. What metric do we use? Do we accept one measure for all degrees?”
- Does the onus shift from the institution to the accreditor to ensure achievement?
- There is now a tacit agreement that Retention and Graduation measures are a proxy for achievement



The R&G dilemma

- WASC is collecting R&G data on the Annual Report; but what will we do with it? What conclusions will the Commission draw, and based on what criteria?
- Some voices demand, “Why would you accredit an institution with a 22% 6-year pass rate!?”
 - “When I was in college . . .” [<18% traditional students today]
 - “Students must not incur school debt without earning a credential.”
 - “This stuff about institutional context (mission, student demographics) is irrelevant. Just post the numbers!”
- We all know that current IPEDS data are quite inadequate to this expectation
- WASC’s experiment with a “balanced scorecard” to report R&G data more equitably

It's an analogy . . .

- Weighing the pig does not fatten the pig.
- Weighing the pig signals to its owner that the pig's weight *does* matter.
- Will publishing the pig's weight cause the owner to care even more than it presently does about adding weight?



Then there is Obama's Ranking System

"By the 2015 school year, Obama said, his administration will begin evaluating colleges on measures such as the average tuition they charge, the share of low-income students they enroll and their effectiveness in ensuring students graduate without too much debt.

"He pitched the ratings system as a consumer guide for prospective students and parents, evaluating which schools offer 'the bigger bang for the buck.' His idea is that accountability will yield affordability.

" 'Colleges that keep their tuition down and are providing high-quality education are the ones that are going to see their taxpayer money going up,' Obama said."

Washington Post 27 October 2013

Is this the future?

“We are going to use these ratings, we hope, by working with congress to change the way we allocate federal aid to colleges. We’ve got to stop subsidizing schools that are not getting good results, start rewarding schools that deliver for the students and deliver for America’s future. That’s our goal.”

—President Obama

August 22, 2103, Henninger High School
Syracuse, New York



The announced timeline:

- A 'datapalooza' in spring 2014 to obtain and vet ideas on what counts as meaningful metrics
 - (Have any of you been invited?)
- A plan ready for testing in fall 2014
 - Will ED make changes to IPEDS?
 - Will it categorize Stanford and Caltech differently from (say) CSU Dominguez Hills?
- A linkage to Title IV by 2018, or earlier



"The dip in sales seems to coincide with the decision to eliminate the sales staff."

Assumptions:

- We have reliable metrics and decision criteria by which a high-stakes ranking can be implemented
- The practice of ED rewarding high-performing institutions and punishing low-performing schools will be effective in improving the effectiveness of higher education in terms of learning outcomes
- The 6,000+ institutions in this formula are largely monolithic in character, mission, and maturity
- The data mavens of higher education (read CAIR?) will deliver the desired metrics – to the satisfaction of all the stakeholders!





California Institute of Technology (Caltech)

Pasadena, CA

Primarily bachelor's degree granting

Undergraduate enrollment: 978

Costs




What does it typically cost to attend Caltech?

The average net price for undergraduate students is \$25,382 per year. Net price is what undergraduate students pay after grants and scholarships (financial aid you don't have to pay back) are subtracted from the institution's cost of attendance.

\$25,382 / yr

The average net price has **decreased 2.7%**  from 2007 to 2009.

 [Click here to see listings of changes in college costs.](#)

 [Click here to go to the Net Price Calculator for a better estimate of what your costs would be.](#)

Graduation Rate



(86.7%)



What percentage of students graduate?

86.7% of full-time students received their bachelor's degree within 6 years. Graduation rate data are based on undergraduate students who enrolled full-time and have never enrolled in college before. This may not represent all undergraduates that attend this institution.

Loan Default Rate



(13.4%)

(0%)

This Institution

National

Are students able to repay their loans after they graduate?

0% of borrowers defaulted on their Federal student loans within three years of entering repayment.



California State University-Dominguez Hills (CSUDH)

Carson, CA

Primarily bachelor's degree granting

Undergraduate enrollment: 11,636

Costs





What does it typically cost to attend CSUDH?

The average net price for undergraduate in-state students is \$2,520 per year. Net price is what undergraduate students pay after grants and scholarships (financial aid you don't have to pay back) are subtracted from the institution's cost of attendance.

The average net price has **decreased 65%**  from 2007 to 2009.

\$2,520 / yr

 [Click here to see listings of changes in college costs.](#)

 [Click here to go to the Net Price Calculator for a better estimate of what your costs would be.](#)

Graduation Rate



(24.4%)



What percentage of students graduate?

24.4% of full-time students received their bachelor's degree within 6 years and 5.1% transferred to another institution. Graduation rate data are based on undergraduate students who enrolled full-time and have never enrolled in college before. This may not represent all undergraduates that attend this institution.

Loan Default Rate



(6.3%)

This Institution

(13.4%)

National

Are students able to repay their loans after they graduate?

6.3% of borrowers defaulted on their Federal student loans within three years of entering repayment.

Some questions about the College Scorecard

- How many college-bound students reference these data?
 - NCHEMS suggests about 17% -- mostly to confirm a choice already made
- Students take many factors into account when choosing a school:
- What are their academic goals, their self-understanding?
- What doors will their GPA, SAT scores in fact open?
- What institution is convenient, close to place of employment, to their family?
- What can they afford? (aid packages, etc.)
- Do they have a ranked football team?
-

Paradigms for Benchmarking

Improvement

Learning-linked analytics



Faculty-driven Program Review



Data-supported decisions to improve learning



Share best practices to Increase effectiveness

Ranking & Comparisons

Market-focused metrics



Add: Value Added Measures (VAMs)



Skew financial support



"Trust the Market to bury the bad players"

This morning's take-aways

- Keep doing the fabulous work you are already doing!
- Don't get co-opted by the quest for simplicity; the great questions in life are *not* multiple choice!
- Context matters. No two institutions should be seen as identical. Insist on nuance
- Keep an eye on the needs and goals of the individual student
- Ranking is reductionist by nature
- Speak out! Show up at public sessions. Write white papers. Create alliances with policy makers [Kay Gilcher's perspectives]



“I do not give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity. But I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes