

The Many Faces of Accountability

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Accountability is the most advocated and least analyzed word in higher education. Everyone uses the term but usually with multiple meanings (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2002). Writers say it faces in every direction—“upward,” “downward,” “inward,” and “outward” (Corbett, 1996; Vidovich and Slee, 2000). It looks, in turn, bureaucratic, participative, political, or market centered. To many beleaguered leaders in colleges and universities, accountability appears two-faced, with sponsors and stakeholders demanding more services while supplying less support. To many outsiders in government and business, higher education seems more interested in autonomy than accountability—in demanding support than supplying services. Falling public funding and rising client demands contribute to the confusion by shifting the focus of accountability from governments to markets and incentives from public subsidies to private purchases. As Day and Klein comment, “[I]f there is a great deal of interest in accountability, there is also a great deal of confusion about what this chameleon word means” (1987, p. 1). Clearing up the confusion is critical, because the conflict over accountability is eroding what was once a national consensus—that higher education is a public good for all Americans and not just a private benefit for college graduates.

Accountability Definitions

Merriam-Webster defines *accountability* as “an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one’s actions” (Merriam-Webster, 2003); *answerability* is its closest synonym (Schedler, 1999, p. 14). Accountability imposes six demands on officials or their agents for government or public service organizations, including colleges and universities. First, they must demonstrate that they have used their powers properly. Second, they must show that they are working to achieve the mission or priorities set for their office or organization. Third, they must report on their performance, for “power is opaque, accountability is public” (Schedler, 1999, p. 20). Fourth, the two “E” words of public stewardship—efficiency and effectiveness—require accounting “for the resources they use and the outcomes they create” (Shavelson, 2000, p. 8). Fifth, they must ensure the quality of the programs and services produced. Last, but far from least, they must show that they serve public needs. The last five of these accountability demands represent tall tasks for higher education because of its unique purposes, collegial governance, and diverse constituencies.

Accountability Questions

The term *accountability* raises several deceptively simple but devilishly difficult questions: *Who* is accountable to *whom*, for *what* purposes, for *whose* benefit, by *which* means, and with *what* consequences? (Lingenfelter, 2003; Behn, 2001; Trow, 1996) The pronouns *who*, *whom*, and *whose* represent, respectively, the traditional trio of agent, principal, and beneficiary in political and organizational theory. In democracies, elected officers such as governors and legislators are the agents, while the “general public” plays the dual role of both principal (delegating the authority) and beneficiary (receiving the ultimate rewards). Delegation of authority down the chain of government agencies adds to the confusion about *who* is accountable to *whom*. As delegation and decentralization drop deeper in government and public service organizations, agent self-interest rises while the sense of public purpose recedes (Moe, 1984).

Delegation especially affects the academy, with its prized autonomy and collegial governance. At the state level, higher edu-

cation coordinating or consolidated governing boards are nearly always the agents exercising the authority delegated by governors and legislators as the principals, mostly over public colleges and universities but, to some extent, over private institutions as well (see Chapter Three). The beneficiaries are, ultimately, the general public and, more immediately, students, businesses, governments, and social and civic organizations.

At the campus level, senior administrators become the agents, exercising the delegated authority of their principals and boards of trustees for the immediate benefit of students and external clients and, ultimately, for the public at large. Moving down the campus-delegation ladder, professors, in theory, exercise the authority delegated through deans for the same beneficiaries. It is indeed a long distance from the initial delegation of authority from governors and legislators to state higher education boards to the professors providing the instruction, research, and service that benefit society. Not surprisingly, in such long-distance delegation, both the connection and the communication often become unclear.

Accountability Concepts

The concepts of upward, downward, inward, and outward accountability represent types of connections between principals and agents in higher education and other public services (Vidovich and Slee, 2000).

- *Upward accountability* represents the traditional relationship of a subordinate to a superior. It covers *procedural, bureaucratic, legal, or vertical accountability*.
- *Downward accountability* focuses on a manager being responsible to subordinates in participatory decision making or *collegial accountability* in higher education.
- *Inward accountability* centers on agents acting on professional or ethical standards and often appears in organizations dominated by professionals, such as in colleges and universities, where it becomes *professional accountability*.
- *Outward accountability* means responding to external clients, stakeholders, supporters, and in a democratic society, ultimately, to the public at large. It includes *market* and *political accountability*.

Accountability Purposes

Accountability for *what*—its purposes or goals—becomes even more confusing and changeable. “You can’t have accountability without expectations,” says Behn. “If you want to hold people accountable, you have to be able to specify what you expect them to do and not do” (2001, p. 7). But clarity is an uncommon characteristic in elected government and collegial governance. Both often sacrifice clarity for closure, if not consensus. In addition, higher education—the knowledge and information institution in a knowledge and information society—suffers from too many, often conflicting expectations. The purposes or goals of accountability programs for higher education have shifted over time from system *efficiency*, to educational *quality*, to organizational *productivity*, and to external *responsiveness* to public priorities or market demands. As is often the case in public policy, new purposes are always added, but earlier goals are seldom abandoned.

Higher Education: Accountability with a Difference

Academics always argue that the academy is different, and accountability is no exception. Insiders see the differences between higher education and other public services as arising from the special character of the academic profession and its responsibilities. Outsiders counter that discovering and disseminating knowledge is no more complex and challenging than the problems confronting other professions, such as medicine and law. The presence of professionalism in higher education and other specialized organizations does complicate accountability. “The growth of professionalism and expertise. . .” according to Day and Klein, “has led to the privatization of accountability, in so far as professionals and experts claim only their peers can judge their conduct and performance” (1987, p. 1). Contrary to popular opinion, professors are not the only professionals who make that claim.

The correct claim of academics for special treatment relates not to their profession but to the special role of higher education in society. Robert Berdahl (1990) vividly describes the dual demands of this unique claim. “Universities have generally had am-

bivalent relations with their surrounding societies: both involved and withdrawn; both serving and criticizing; both needing and being needed” (p. 169). Berdahl and others insist that colleges and universities must stay sufficiently safe from external pressures to safeguard their societal critique yet sufficiently responsive to external needs to sustain societal support. They must simultaneously serve and scrutinize the society that supports them.

These dual roles demand both autonomy and accountability. As is often the case, balance is the key. Too much autonomy encourages colleges and universities, both public and private, to slight society’s needs. Too much accountability produces dependent institutions subservient to society’s whims (McGuinness, 2002). Somehow, higher education and society’s representatives must reach for an agreement that seeks the middle ground of service without subservience.

The Higher Education Social Compact

Society and the academy once appeared to have such an agreement. After World War II, stimulated by the success of the GI Bill, a social compact seemed to exist between American society and higher education. Although bows to state and regional differences are always in order, this compact clearly covered the country. It rested on a few felt but unwritten principles—on trust, not rules. Americans accepted as an unquestioned act of faith that access to a college education was a public good for society, as well as a private good for students (Knight Higher Education Collaborative, 1999; Selingo, 2003). Access to college opportunities allowed our nation to champion both sides of the American dilemma of how to achieve both equality and quality. Equality meant that society offered the opportunity for college to a growing percentage of the population while leaving the achievement of quality to the talents and efforts of individuals. Americans also acknowledged the need for a surprising degree of academic autonomy from governmental control.

On a more practical plane, the compact obligated state taxpayers to provide adequate operating funding for public colleges and universities, which in turn would keep tuition reasonably low. In addition, states with strong private colleges and universities supported

some level of choice for students who wished to attend private or independent institutions. The compact depended on mutual trust that each side would keep its share of the bargain.

The federal policy of supporting basic scientific research in universities added research and service to the social compact of public benefits. People who never went to college or directly benefited from research or service saw higher education as a public good (Zemsky, 2003). They would nod with approval as leaders of colleges and universities claimed, in a paraphrase of GE's slogan: "We bring good things to life."

Decades of Decline

Like most compacts, the one between American society and higher education became strained when rights and responsibilities moved from vague generalities to specific demands and competed for funding with other public services. Specifics always strain consensus, as do funding constraints. In addition, external complaints about the rampant costs, questionable outcomes, inadequate outputs, and the internal focus of colleges and universities raised successive questions about their economy, quality, productivity, and responsiveness to societal needs (McGuinness, 1997). Not surprisingly, recessions and falling revenues contributed to these complaints. As a result, says Massy, "universities and professors began a long slide from objects of awe to subjects of accountability" (2003a, p. 20).

The social compact that provided the glue between the general public and higher education stuck fairly well through the 1950s to the late 1960s, when student lifestyles and war protests alienated some of the general public and government officials. During these decades, the older public and private colleges and universities expanded, and new campuses emerged to meet the burgeoning demand for college education spurred first by the GI Bill that encouraged returning soldiers to enroll in college and then by the so-called baby boom of their sons and daughters. The following decades brought problems that undermined the consensus of the social compact. Although the problems and programs of accountability never fall neatly into ten-year spans, the decades described next capture the changing trends.

The 1970s

By the early 1970s, fissures in the social compact opened up, beginning with the falling revenues from a recession and fears of enrollment declines at the end of the baby boom. States adopted more centralized governance through coordinating boards and multicampus systems to control development of new institutions and program duplication (McGuinness, 1994). In response to an anticipated decline in enrollment demand, more centralized governance sought to limit the resources granted to higher education. With economy as the goal, regulation became the lever of accountability and bureaucrats the agents. A pattern developed in this first decade of decline in the social compact. Each partner started holding the other side to more specific and stringent tests. States and society reduced support and demanded more services; colleges and universities requested more funding and started raising tuition, although not nearly to the degree as in the next decade.

The 1980s

By the 1980s, external concerns moved from economy to quality. Complaints about the lack of student learning in public schools, as voiced in *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), eventually moved to college campuses. Two-thirds of the states mandated, by legislation, that public colleges and universities adopt plans for assessing student learning. State officials dictated the policy but left the method of determination to campus professionals (see Chapter Five). Assessment shifted the focus of accountability from centralized state regulations to decentralized campus processes for identifying the knowledge and skills that graduates should possess, developing the method for assessing the extent of their achievement, and using the results to improve institutional performance. Although assessment programs focused on campus processes, the real goal was improving quality outcomes in student learning (McGuinness, 1997). This approach tried to combine public accountability with professional autonomy by tying external accountability to institutional improvement (see Chapter Five).

The 1990s

By the late 1980s and especially the early 1990s, the expanded services provided by federal, state, and local governments shifted the emphasis of public accountability in government and public services from procedural protection to performance production. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) called for “reinventing government,” which focused on organizational results and customer services. Governments, in line with businesses, should decentralize authority while holding unit managers responsible for reaching designated results. Reinventing government combined *decentralization* with *direction* by being tight on setting goals and evaluating performance but loose in allowing managers to choose the means for achieving the desired results. Decentralization encouraged “managerial” accountability, while direction on the desired results ensured “political” accountability (Peters and Pierre, 1998, p. 232).

In line with reinventing government, the 1990s continued decentralization for higher education but this time with definite directions. Programs in the 1990s dictated the goals of efficiency and effectiveness through indicators measuring institutional performance but generally left campus managers to determine the means of achieving these ends (see Chapter Ten). Aside from the deregulation movement, several factors forced the change. The first two stemmed from the decline in public funding and from what outsiders perceived as the slow response of higher education to the needs of a knowledge and information society. Burgeoning enrollment demand in the South and West as a result of the “baby boom echo” added to the pressure (King, 2000; Zumeta, 2001; Ewell, Paulson, and Wellman, 1997). State governments and coordinating boards adopted policies of performance reporting, budgeting, and funding (Burke and Associates, 2002; Burke and Minassians, 2002b; Chapter Ten). Whereas assessment policies focused on campus processes, performance programs supposedly centered on outputs and outcomes (McGuinness, 1997). State policymakers replaced campus professionals as the agents of the new accountability (Lively, 1992).

The Early 2000s

In the first years of the new century, the thrust of accountability seemed to shift again. Reduced state revenues from another re-

cession and competition from rising costs of Medicaid and public schools once more reduced taxpayer funding for colleges and universities. As public support diminished, public demands escalated, confirming that taxpayer support and public demands are seldom in sync.

Increasing student enrollments and exploding state needs in workforce and economic development, as well as in public schools and teacher training, call for increased responsiveness from colleges and universities. Although the rhetoric on a college education as a public good remains in speeches by governors and legislators, students and parents are expected to pay a rising share of the costs through tuition and fees for what is often seen in state capitols as more of a private benefit for graduates. Private markets increasingly drive developments in public as well as private colleges and universities. “[N]ow it’s the market, not the commonweal, that calls the shots,” says Kirp (2003a, p. 2). States leave more and more of the directions and costs of higher education to private markets, while managing them at times, by intervening to encourage public priorities through program and funding initiatives (McGuinness, 2002).

Tensions Among Three Cultures

Although recent decades brought changes in accountability concerns, the conflict continues between “civic” and “collegiate” interests and cultures (Bogue and Hall, 2003, p. 229). Recently, a third interest has arisen: the “commercial” or entrepreneurial culture. To outsiders reflecting civic and commercial interests, campus resistance to public accountability in the name of academic autonomy seems a cloak covering self-interest to protect special privileges. To academics immersed in the collegiate culture, external insistence on accountability often appears as an intrusion on the independence required for critical appraisal of society and government and for the nurturing of the arts and humanities. As usual, the motivations on and off campus toward accountability and autonomy are mixed. The civic and collegiate cultures create a series of accountability conflicts or, at least, tensions.

The following contentions between the cultures build on those presented by Bogue and Hall (p. 229). All of them represent variations on the single theme of tensions between institutional

autonomy and external accountability—internal interest coming first and the external concern second:

- Institutional improvement versus external accountability
- Peer review versus external regulation
- Inputs and processes versus outputs and outcomes
- Reputation versus responsiveness
- Consultation versus evaluation
- Prestige versus performance
- Trust versus evidence
- Qualitative versus quantitative evidence

These contentions represent not only self-interests but also realistic concerns of the academic community and society's representatives. A beginning in the process of reconciliation of societal interest and academic concern is to recognize the validity of each of these elements. Effective accountability systems should address both sides of these dualisms—a tall task in a land that all too often applies the sportlike scoring of “win” or “lose” to policy decisions.

Accountability Models

The past and present models of accountability suggest little progress in the process of reconciliation between the collegiate, civic, and commercial cultures. Higher education has featured at least six models of accountability: *bureaucratic*, *professional*, *political*, *managerial*, *market*, and *managed market* (see Table 1.1).

Each model has its own levers or drivers, agents or actors, and goals or purposes. The goals have shifted over time from efficiency to quality to productivity and, finally, to responsiveness to public priorities and market demands.

The techniques differ by model. Bureaucrats like rules. Professionals demand consultation. Policymakers prefer planning, although government officials still revert to regulation. Managers calculate costs and benefits; entrepreneurs respond to customer satisfaction and anticipate market demand. Each approach seems suited to different conditions. The *bureaucratic* model demands stability, the *professional* requires autonomy, and the *political* necessitates consensus or at least majority consent. The *managerial* model

works well in dynamic periods of considerable change. Both *market* models adjust capacity to demand, with government incentives shaping supply and demand to suit public priorities in *managed markets*.

Each model has positive or negative consequences based on performance or results. The bureaucratic rewards compliance with continuation and penalizes deviations with sanctions. Success in the professional model encourages consultation on decisions; failure results in neglect of professional advice. Financial incentives represent the positive and funding losses the negative in the political model, although performance reporting usually has only a positive or negative effect on the reputations of colleges or universities because it lacks a formal connection to funding. The management approach involves either promotion or demotion, or possibly acclaim or disapproval. Markets produce profits or losses, and managed markets add incentives to the positive consequences.

Bureaucratic accountability centralizes governance. All the other models, with the possible exception of the political, demand decentralized decision making, although the political, managerial, and managed markets add varying degrees of policy directions. The political model can lead to intrusive regulations. Some of the accountability models rest on mature theories, but others represent practices outrunning theory. Each accountability model has generated accountability programs that accent the goals of efficiency, quality, productivity, market responsiveness, and public priorities.

Of course, the accountability systems in place are seldom as pure as the above categories may suggest. Each model has advantages and disadvantages, depending on application and timing. Bureaucratic accountability lives on in many states and constantly threatens a comeback in all organizations, public or private. Recent scandals in the stock market remind us that some regulation is required to prevent outrageous behavior. Conversely, uniform regulations do not work well in diverse and complex organizations such as colleges or universities. Professional accountability (or faculty participation) is essential to effective accountability systems in colleges and universities, but it can lead to gridlock in collegial decision making and to diminished responsiveness to public priorities or market needs. Policies and politics, management and

Table 1.1. Accountability Models

		Accountability Models					
	<i>Bureaucratic</i>	<i>Professional</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Managerial</i>	<i>Market</i>	<i>Managed Market</i>	
<i>Levers</i>	Rules	Expertise	Policies	Management	Markets	Markets Policies	
<i>Agents</i>	Bureaucrats	Peers	Policymakers	Managers	Entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurs Policymakers	
<i>Goals</i>	Efficiency	Quality	Priorities	Productivity	Responsiveness	Responsiveness Priorities	
<i>Indicators</i>	Inputs Processes	Processes	Outcomes	Inputs Outputs	Outputs	Outputs Outcomes	
<i>Conditions</i>	Stability	Autonomy	Consensus	Dynamic	Demand Capacity	Demand Capacity Incentives	
<i>Techniques</i>	Regulation	Consultation	Planning	Cost-benefit analysis	Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction Priority planning	

Accountability Features

Accountability Features

<i>Consequences</i>	Continuation Sanctions	Participation Neglect	Incentives Losses	Promotion Demotion	Profits Losses	Profits Incentives Losses
<i>Governance</i>	Centralized	Collegial	Direction Decentralized	Decentralized	Market forces	Public-private partnerships
<i>Theory</i>	Scientific management	Collegial governance	Public policy	Reinventing government	Market economics	Market steering
<i>Programs</i>	Financial Program audits	Assessment Accreditation Academic audits Standardized testing	Report cards Performance reporting Budgeting Funding	Performance reports	Student-alumni satisfaction surveys Reputational ratings	Charter colleges Vouchers Financial aid

markets are necessary parts of accountability in state higher education systems and in public and private colleges and universities. Yet each of these levers can divert higher education from its fundamental purposes in favor of momentary fads.

Zemsky, the author of Chapter Twelve, makes the point, at least in part. He calls for triple-threat leaders for higher education who are mission centered, politically savvy, and market smart (Knight Higher Education Collaborative, 1999). He might have added several other talents, such as bureaucratically wily, academically chaste, collegially committed, and managerially keen. Leaders of colleges and universities need not walk on water, but they must know how to wade the waves of accountability.

From Public Benefits to Private Commodities

Declining state funding, strong market pressures, and growing political involvement in state coordination and campus governance are undermining consensus on the public benefit of postsecondary education. Mark Yudof, the chancellor of the University of Texas System, declared the basic compact between state government and public universities dead or dying. Though he spoke only of public research universities, his claim resonates on baccalaureate campuses, especially those where enrollment demands far exceed available spaces.

“State governments and public research universities developed an extraordinary compact. In return for financial support from taxpayers, universities agreed to keep tuition low and provide access for students from a broad range of economic backgrounds, train graduate and professional students, promote arts and culture, help solve problems in the community, and perform groundbreaking research. Yet over the past 25 years, that agreement has withered, leaving public research institutions in a purgatory of insufficient resources and declining competitiveness” (Yudof, 2002, p. B24).

In response, Yudof (2002) proposed a “hybrid university”—public in some purposes but private in most operations, including the tuition charged, the markets served, and the programs offered. The governor and the Texas legislature approved Yudof’s proposal, and policymakers have adopted and are discussing similar initiatives in a number of other states (Couturier, 2003). Stanley Fish (2003,

p. C4) would go all the way. “Give Us Liberty or Give Us Revenue,” he cries, in a less heroic but more commercial slogan than Patrick Henry’s “liberty” or “death.” The governor of South Carolina accepted Fish’s challenge and proposed to let some public colleges and universities become private, provided they agree to forgo state funding (Schmidt, 2003). So far the governor has no takers.

Yudof and others laud the attractions of market-driven universities, but Derek Bok sees some inevitable sins in the “entrepreneurial university” that responds mostly to markets. In the struggle for competitive positions and increased revenues, Bok believes a few colleges or universities will succumb to the temptation to enter questionable commercial ventures. In time, he says, “suspect behavior will become accepted practice” (2003a, p. B7). Bok fails to mention the greatest problem with market accountability. If colleges and universities become too accountable to market forces, they diminish their autonomy to criticize the business or popular interests that drive those markets. Moreover, markets led by the ratings from *U.S. News & World Report* really reward prestige, not performance. “Institutional behavior has become increasingly market driven,” declares Massy, “but markets generally reward prestige—they don’t gauge the true quality of education, and therefore they produce a perverse set of incentives” (2003a, p. 5). In Chapter Twelve, Zemsky claims that this struggle for prestige means that markets neither constrain tuition nor improve quality in the competitive parts of higher education (see also Volkwein and Grunig’s Chapter Eleven).

Arthur Levine, president of Columbia Teachers College, cites a more disturbing reason for the weakening of the compact than market pressures or declining funding. He argues that a decline in the appeal of access has undermined the compact. Higher education remained, until the late 1990s, a growth industry driven by the access goal of enrolling an ever-increasing percentage of high school graduates. Levine (1997) believes that governors, legislators, and opinion leaders may have privately abandoned that goal of continued expansion. “More than 60 percent of all high-school graduates now go on to some form of postsecondary education, and many state officials see that rate as sufficient or even too high. I see no enthusiasm among government officials for increasing the college-attendance rate to 70 or 80 percent of high-school graduates” (p. A48).

Perhaps Levine is mistaken when he says that government officials no longer support expanded access. Still, access has clearly declined as a priority in state capitols, in comparison with education from early childhood through high school. Moreover, a recent study for the Education Commission of the States notes that the United States has been falling behind other developed nations in its college participation rates for over a decade (Ruppert, 2003). What the commission and Levine do not mention is the questionable commitment of some segments of higher education to access. Too often, baccalaureate colleges and universities respond to increasing enrollment demands, when they can, by raising admission standards and tuitions rather than expanding access.

Additional anecdotal evidence may support the thesis of a declining real interest in access in relation to highly visible initiatives in economic developments. Governors and legislators do seem more willing these days to fund expensive high-tech research ventures that stimulate economic development than they are to pay fully for rising enrollments (Hebel, 2003). Perhaps this shift suggests the next stage of higher education markets, in which states will purchase what they want from any source rather than provide general funding for public colleges and universities. This shift is relatively recent; governors and legislators in the early 1990s criticized professors for stressing research and neglecting undergraduates. It may also explain the irony that governors and legislators say higher education is a public good in a knowledge and information society but see it as a private benefit when limiting general funding for enrollment growth and approving (or at least allowing) tuition increases. Moreover, outside supporters and critics and increasing numbers of inside champions now agree that access is not enough. The priority has shifted from mere access to degree attainment and even to job placement in critical fields such as nursing, teaching, and the high-tech sciences. Finally, equity and diversity, twin partners to access, apparently have diminished support in state capitols and the national government, despite the recent ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The strongest threat to higher education autonomy these days comes not from government power, whether state or federal, but from market forces. Market accountability leaves the setting of public priorities to market demands. Its supporters doubt the efficacy

of collective planning of program initiatives and funding decisions and believe that market forces are more efficient and effective in allocating programs and resources. Others counter that markets reflect private interests of dominant segments of society and not the public interests of society as a whole. A new approach combines public and private interests called *managed market* accountability. It follows the admonition in reinventing government of “steering” rather than “rowing.” Instead of owning and substantially funding organizations of service delivery, governments can shape or “manage” markets by purchasing or subsidizing the services they want. This approach allows government to shape higher education’s response to market mechanisms to achieve greater efficiency in the use of scarce public resources. (Old examples of managed market approaches are federal financial aid and research funding, which go to students and professors rather than institutions.) Again, balance is the key. Effective accountability systems must include enough market pressure to ensure reaction to external demands and sufficient policy direction to ensure responsiveness to public needs while considering legitimate academic concerns.

Creating a Public Agenda

The lack of agreement on those public needs—what states and society need most from colleges and universities—agitates the antagonism between academic organizations and external groups. Absent agreements on expectations from higher education, commitments remain open-ended, demands unrestrained, and stakeholders dissatisfied. Governors, legislators, and business leaders continually call for colleges and universities to start new programs and services while constantly castigating them for trying to be all things to all people. In turn, academics complain about being labeled unresponsive, when government and business leaders are unclear about their priority needs or change them with election or market cycles (Knight Higher Education Collaborative, 2002).

Few forums exist that bring academic and civic and business leaders together in ways that produce mutual understanding. The two groups too often see each other at their worst rather than their best. Governors, legislators, and business leaders see administrators

and professors mostly at budget times haggling for more money like other special interests rather than at work delivering relevant programs in teaching, research, and service. Academics often complain of shortfalls in state and private funding instead of recognizing the sizeable support that governments and businesses already supply. The widening gap between stakeholders and academics undermines the one characteristic that all the writers see as essential to the balance between accountability and autonomy—*trust* (Lingenfelter, 2003; Massy, 2003a; Trow, 1996; Graham, Lyman, and Trow, 1995). Contrary to the cliché, familiarity is more likely to bring appreciation than breed contempt.

From 360-Degree Harassment to 360-Degree Accountability

Outsiders criticize the lack of accountability in higher education as an inalienable right but accept no responsibility for creating effective accountability systems. The role of critic without commitment has long been popular in civic circles, no less than on college campuses. Behn, in *Rethinking Democratic Accountability*, talks of moving from “360-degree harassment” of government from all sides of society for failing to satisfy their special interests to “360-degree accountability,” where civic and business groups accept responsibility with government officials for setting priorities and ensuring their achievement (2001, p. 199). His approach transforms criticism into commitment. In some states, business, civic, government, and education leaders are beginning to move from 360-degree harassment to 360-degree accountability in higher education.

Roundtables supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts and summit meetings of government, business, civic, and education leaders sponsored by the Association of Governing Boards and other organizations have tried to develop comprehensive public agendas for higher education in several states, including North Dakota and Mississippi (Burke, 2003; North Dakota Roundtable, 2000; Mississippi Steering Committee, 2002). Representatives of government, business, civic organizations, and higher education in commissions, summits, and roundtables have identified, collectively, priorities of what their states need most from their public and private colleges and universities in instruction, research, and service, especially for workforce and economic development and K–16 partnerships.

Such forums can transform complainers into creators with a commitment to ensuring that higher education responds to priority needs and receives the public and private support to address that public agenda. Although these gatherings are still too few and their recommendations too new to assess their ultimate impact, they appear to offer the hope of moving higher education from a debate of 360-degree harassment to at least a discussion of 360-degree accountability.

The North Dakota Roundtable has brought a continuing commitment from state, business, and education leaders to its “accountability with flexibility” program (North Dakota University System, 2002). That roundtable report advocated something close to 360-degree accountability:

The Roundtable report calls for all parties to the relationship to change their behaviors and methods of doing business in important ways. While the report contains many specific recommendations, the overarching themes call for:

- The [North Dakota University System] to cease thinking of itself as a ward of the state and to take greater responsibility for its own future.
- The legislative and executive branches of government to free up and unleash the potential of the [University System]—to change the budget-building, resource allocation, and audit practices to reflect the new compact between the state and the University System.
- The private sector to meet [the University System] half-way in establishing mutually beneficial partnerships and to provide mentors and learning opportunities for a new generation of North Dakota entrepreneurs.
- All parties to keep alive the spirit of the Roundtable, continuing the dialogue which has already borne fruit and maintaining the momentum that has been achieved through a process of bringing together leaders, many with conflicting views, to deal in an atmosphere of mutual respect with the problems they have found to be their common concern. (North Dakota Roundtable, 2000, p. 3)

Higher education has a long list of participants who must become partners in accountability. They include, internally, students,

faculty, staff, and trustees and, externally, leaders of schools, governments, business, labor, civic organizations, and electronic and print media—all of which benefit from higher education programs, activities, and services. Collaborative or 360-degree accountability suggests the truth in the cliché, “If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.”

The *Report from the Steering Committee for the Mississippi Leadership Summit on Higher Education* echoed that theme: “The Mississippi Leadership Summit on Higher Education has worked hard to identify what all of higher education—public and private, two-year and four-year institutions—can do to advance the competitiveness of our state and to improve the quality of life of our people. Through this package of priorities and initiatives, our intention is to provide a shared framework for educational, economic, and social progress. . . . It will not be easy to implement that framework. We feel, however, that with concerted and collegial effort, we can make our dream of the future a reality” (Mississippi Steering Committee, 2002, p. 1).

The Joint Committee on the new California Master Plan (2002, p. 78) stressed the importance of such collaborative goal setting: “Too often goals are only casually considered if they are considered at all. . . . The more important objective, however, should be to derive consensus on what is meant by performance. What is it about education that is important to individuals, the State, and society at large? What are our expectations about effectiveness and efficiency? What about breadth of opportunity and depth of achievement? These are the questions that give accountability its deeper meaning, and efforts to collaboratively generate answers to them are what provide the ‘buy-in’ from stakeholders that ultimately will make or break any accountability system.”

Although the recommendations of the Joint Committee on the new California Master Plan fall far short of that state’s needs, they call for collaborative goal setting by all the stakeholders as the key to accountability for higher education.

Sticking, Serving, and Selling

“360-degree accountability” calls for courageous leaders of colleges and universities. Zemsky’s trinity of mission-centered, market smart, and politically savvy leaders for higher education suggests the con-

flicting requirements for preserving autonomy while producing accountability. Colleges and universities must *stick* to their missions, *serve* their society, and *sell* their services. Each of these actions in some ways fights with the others. A college or university, public or private, that sticks with its mission may well miss the next market wave. One that “sells” usually tells customers what they want to hear; one that “serves” often sends a needed but unwelcome message. Indeed, the college or university that serves society best may well be the one that criticizes and resists a slavish devotion to market forces, which are often momentary fads. A single campus cannot do everything that markets demand. It should do what it does best or better than others, which means sticking to its mission while selling to clients who need its services most. Finally, the politically savvy leader in higher education is the one who can distinguish public needs from partisan demands and persuade the general public and hopefully government officials to see the difference.

The current monolithic model of excellence for colleges and universities encourages not “mission centeredness” but “mission creep.” The diversity of American higher education is a wonder of the world, with its marvelous mix of community and technical colleges, liberal arts and comprehensive campuses, and doctoral and research universities. But at home, our academic culture and the general public confer the hallmark of quality only on large, graduate, research universities and, to a lesser extent, on small, selective, liberal arts colleges. This narrow notion of quality flourishes in the national ratings of universities and colleges published by *U.S. News & World Report* and a growing number of popular magazines (see Chapters Eleven and Twelve). Effective accountability systems must honor multiple models of academic excellence based on performance not prestige, on results not reputations, on mission centeredness not mission creep.

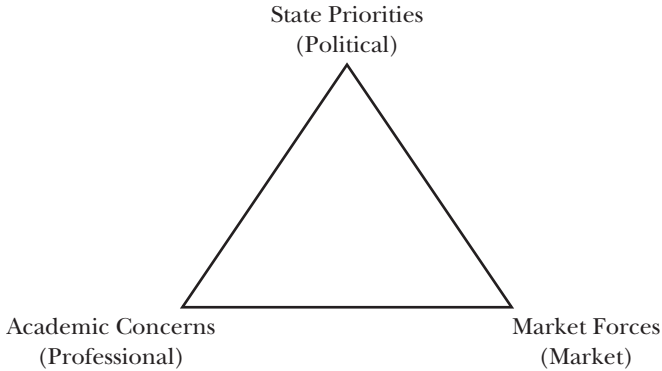
The Accountability Triangle

Burton Clark’s famous triangle used *state control*, *academic oligarchy*, and *market model* as the three forces dominating coordination of higher education systems in a comparative international context (Clark, 1983). His governance triangle estimates the influences of these three factors in coordinating national systems of higher education. The following figure substitutes *state priorities*, *academic*

concerns, and *market forces* to create an Accountability Triangle (Figure 1.1) for higher education in the United States. It assesses the responsiveness of accountability programs to the three interests and pressures that most affect higher education in this country: (1) *state priorities* reflect the public needs and desires for higher education programs and services, often as expressed by state officials but also by civic leaders outside government; (2) *academic concerns* involve the issues and interests of the academic community, particularly professors and administrators; (3) *market forces* cover the customer needs and demands of students, parents, and businesses, as well as other clients of colleges and universities. State priorities, academic concerns, and market forces also reflect, respectively, the civic, collegiate, and commercial cultures and interests. State priorities represent political accountability, academic concerns reflect professional accountability, and market forces push market accountability.

Each of the three corners of the Accountability Triangle has a bright and a dark side, reflecting both broad needs and special interests. State priorities can constitute what the citizens of a state need most from higher education, such as better schoolteachers, an educated workforce, and an informed citizenry. It can also replicate the partisan interest of the party in power. Academic concerns can encourage free inquiry and discussion of ideas, beliefs, and institutions infused by openness, scholarship, and objectivity. It can also reflect the resource-reputation model of higher education that views institutional quality as mostly a matter of recruiting the brightest students, hiring the faculty stars, and raising the most resources. Market forces can mean meeting the real needs of citizens and society for programs and services or responding to the dominant economic interest in a state or to commercial schemes or consumer fads.

By and large, state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces present conflicting demands, with some interesting exceptions. At times, the drive for prestige and reputation merges academic concerns, public priorities, and market forces and succumbs to the wiles of the resource-reputation model of excellence for colleges and universities. This odd coupling produces more lawyers and physicians than society needs rather than the nurses and teachers that society requires. At times, the demand for research in an

Figure 1.1. The Accountability Triangle

economy driven by innovation unites the interests of state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces. State priorities and market forces have some common interests, but the former calls for public priorities, whereas the latter relies on private preferences. In addition, state priorities should last longer than market forces.

Higher education and its colleges and universities, both public and private, are inevitably accountable to state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces. They should serve all while submitting to none of these imperatives. Being accountable to each of the three corners of the Accountability Triangle means balancing the response to ensure service without subservience to public priorities, academic concerns, and market forces.

Given the importance of state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces as representing political, professional, and market accountability, the center of the Accountability Triangle seems the ideal spot for an effective accountability system and perhaps for some of the accountability programs. The following chapters and the conclusion place the practice of current accountability programs in the appropriate spot on the triangle. Some of the authors also suggest changes that could move their programs more toward the center of the triangle and discuss whether such changes are feasible or even desirable. They may also propose linkages between programs that could contribute to an effective accountability system by combining state priorities, campus concerns, and

market forces. Whatever the accountability programs of the past and present, effective efforts in the future must combine each of these angles of the Accountability Triangle.

Conclusion

Accountability in higher education in the United States has run the gamut from trust and self-regulation, to bureaucratic rules and stipulations, to performance goals and results, to policy initiatives and political intrusions, and, finally, to private markets and government incentives. As often happens, policymakers introduced new initiatives without abandoning earlier efforts. Three higher education leaders complained in perhaps the fullest discussion of accountability: “Higher education does not lack accountability. Rather it lacks enough of the proper kind and is burdened with too much of an unproductive kind” (Graham, Lyman, and Trow, 1995, p. 4). Readers may dispute their prescription for achieving accountability, but few would quarrel with their diagnosis. The key is to clarify the reaches and limits of accountability and to develop effective and integrated systems of accountability. Higher education is too important to society to become either off-limits to external influence or the passive object of external control, whether by state priorities or market forces.

Accountability has assumed many faces and has seen many changes. But its critics, as well as its champions, agree on at least one point: accountability is here to stay. For too long, outsiders have advocated accountability for their special interests in higher education without accepting responsibility for developing realistic accountability systems. All too often, academics have resisted outside scrutiny as an invasion of their academic autonomy and have failed to hold themselves accountable for their results. If higher education is to escape the curse of 360-degree harassment from all sides of society, it must turn complainers into creators of a 360-degree accountability plan designed and defended by all segments of society. If accountability for higher education is here to stay, it is time for all supporters to devise an acceptable way to balance public, academic, and market concerns.