To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kristi Roberson-Scott entitled "Tennessee Higher Education Accountability Policies & Practices: A State Legislative Perspective". I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Administration and Policy Studies.

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Vice Chancellor and Dean of Graduate Studies

TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY POLICIES & PRACTICES: A STATE LEGISLATIVE PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Education Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kristi Roberson-Scott
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DEDICATION

To my Mom, Vickie McCray, who gave me endless support and encouragement and instilled a passion for lifelong learning. Thank you for a lifetime of sacrifices. I love you.

This work is also dedicated to my husband, Paul Scott, and my baby boy, Tyler Jacob Scott, whose sacrifices made this long and tiring learning journey possible. I promise to make up for lost time. I love you both.

And finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the late Gilmer R. Smith, my granddad, who always supported my educational efforts and inspired me more than he could ever possibly know. I wish you were here to see what you helped me achieve.

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this descriptive, exploratory study was to describe Tennessee legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and/or programs. Legislators' perceptions of the following: What it means and what is expected for accountability (research question 1), What is considered to be prime and important evidence of accountability (research question 2), To whom should higher education institutions be accountable (research question 3), and whether current policies and/or program are effective (research question 4) were all answered by the emerging research themes of this study.

A sample (approximately half) of Tennessee Senate and House legislative members serving on their respective education committees served as the population for this study. Fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were completed.

Overall perceptions held by legislators triangulated the following finding: Public higher education institutions in the state of Tennessee were not effectively demonstrating accountability, and respective policies and practices have not resulted in increased confidence or better management. A variety of diverse themes emerged relative to their perceptions of accountability. This study sheds light on how legislators perceive the current status of higher education's accounting of resources (fiscal and human); how they comprehend, interpret and perceive data or reports that are intended to evaluate higher education's effectiveness and efficiency; and generally their viewpoints on accountability for higher education. Most importantly, this study provides meaningful data, offers policymakers insight on how to adopt, modify and/or revise higher education accountability policies, and contributes to an increased understanding of political officials viewpoint on this complex policy issue. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations for policy/practice and for future research are made.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Clearly, a focus on accountability has been one of the premier policy accents in American higher education since the latter half (1960s) of the 20th century, and continuing now into the 21st century. Few higher education public policy issues have garnered the attention or have created the emotion that accountability has engendered. Concerns have been articulated through journal articles, state and national reports, educational organizations, and private and public agencies, all asserting the need for higher education institutions to provide clear and broadly acceptable measures of quality and accountability (Aper & Hinkle, 1991; National Governors Association, 1991; Resnick, 1987; Bogue & Hall, 2003; Peters, 1994; Marchese, 1991). What factors have provided the impetus for the emergence of this accountability policy accent within American higher education's landscape?

Demands for accountability in higher education are largely a phenomenon arising from higher education's internal concern about the quality of teaching and learning, political culture and socioeconomic circumstances. Higher education gave birth to an assessment movement, emerging in the 1980s, with the underlying belief that is was the role of higher institutions and academic programs to evaluate student learning.

An accountability movement emerged in the 1990s focusing attention on a number of public policy issues such as access and affordability. This movement gave rise to state report cards that compared institutional performance on various indicators. By 2000, many states had implemented programs for measuring student learning to foster institutional improvement or accountability (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2004). Concerns for higher education accountability also stem from shrinking public resources and concomitant demands for those resources coupled with an erosion of public trust. Thus, this movement has emerged as a result of three major influences: 1) higher education's internal desire to evaluate student learning; 2) declining public confidence and demands for quality and productivity; and 3) decreasing public resources that are used to fund higher education. Numerous forces have given rise to what is known as accountability, but what exactly is meant by accountability?

The term accountability is used in many ways, so perhaps a word is in order on the meaning of "accountability". There are several definitions of higher education accountability. Accountability is the use of assessment to link state, institutional or programmatic goals to measure student outcomes (Terenzini, 1989). Bogue & Hall (2003), state that accountability puts an emphasis on results and what comes out of the education system rather than inputs. Wellman (2001) offers a definition of accountability systems: "state-level indicators of institutional performance designed to reach public audiences, using quantitative and qualitative measures that allow comparisons among institutions (pp. 46-47)." These systems can be referred to as performance indicators, report cards, benchmarks, or accountability measures. Often state-level accountability systems are directed toward legislative or gubernatorial audiences. Assessment and/or evaluation can potentially provide institutions with regular opportunities to be accountable to the three cornerstones of higher education, teaching, research, and scholarship.

According to Wellman (2001), accountability systems and/or policies typically are designed for three main purposes: 1) to motivate internal improvement, 2) to assess state higher education goal attainment, and 3) to deregulate higher education by providing institutional performance data to constituents. Moreover, "Statewide accountability models being developed raise questions about the gap between promise and performance in these systems (Wellman, 2001, pg. 46)". With consumerism at a crest in society, accountability seems necessary to preserve higher education's credibility and the compact between higher education and society. There appears to be no dispute that higher education must improve its capacity to demonstrate how and to what end it serves its constituents (Wellman, 2001). Let us turn our attention to the evolution of what has become known as higher education accountability.

The Accountability Movement's Evolution

The major forces that have propelled the accountability movement, internal desire by higher education to evaluate quality and/or student learning outcomes, internal reduced state revenue/cost containment and serious questions of public trust, have provided the momentum for this movement over the last four decades and have resulted in increased demands for assessment-based accountability. The national assessment movement began in the 1960's and exerted pressure on states to produce more information about the process and products of higher education. Over the years, state legislative budgetary processes have included both formal and informal comparisons, part empirical and some intuitive assessment and/or evaluation, of higher education institutions within statewide systems to arrive at conclusions about institutional quality (Aper & Hinkle, 1991).

At all levels and in various ways higher education institutions are being called upon to "account" for programs and actions. Feelings of mistrust on the part of higher education's stakeholders (legislators, governing boards, corporate/civic leaders, alumni, students, parents, and others) have all given credence to this movement. In addition, the funding of public higher education with state dollars has become increasingly difficult with restricted revenue patterns and an over-proliferation of expensive programs and all of these have contributed to the accountability milieu.

Funding

In the 1960s and 1970s, the assessment based accountability movement was influenced by the desire to systematize and measure the resources committed to institutions of higher education and to measure outputs against resources committed to such institutions. Such interests did not abate in the 1980s, but shifted toward demands for evidence of student learning outcomes though accreditation (Folger, 1977; SREB, 1988; Aper & Hinkle, 1991; Burke, Shahpar, Serban, 1999). Concerns about quality seemed to rise in tandem with growing demands on public fiscal resources. These conditions fostered an environment where a need for both budgetary efficiency and educational effectiveness was viewed as necessary by many state legislatures (Trow, 1988; McConnell, 1981, Boyer & Ewell, 1988; Boyer, et al., 1987). As a result, in the 1990's many states adopted policies of various types through legislative mandates or other means to enhance institutional accountability and to provide the impetus for reform and/or improvement of educational policy and/or practice (National Governors Association, 1991). The beginning of the accountability movement marked the ending of an era during which higher education institutions would simply be trusted to be accountable for the funding allocated to them.

During the last half-century, college-level learning has become increasingly important to the economic prospects of states and to the nation, as well as to individuals who continue their education (Callan, & Finney, 2002; Burke, Shahpar, Serban, 1999). Virtually every sector of the economy requires workers with skills, knowledge and competencies beyond those acquired in high school (Kuh, 2001). It is no surprise that there has been widespread interest in the quality and higher education's accountability over the last several decades. State legislators, accreditors, parents, employers, and others want to know about student outcomes.

Higher education serves broad social purposes and can be seen as both a private and a public good. It is typically heavily subsidized with public funds and it can open the gateway to social opportunity and economic productivity. As state revenues have decreased, legislators and government executives have called for more accountability of all tax-supported organizations, including higher education (Laurence, 1984). For many years, institutions of public higher education have avoided being put under the legislative microscope, but legislators now want and expect tangible evidence of effectiveness and efficiency for appropriated public funds.

The fiscal changes in states and the accompanying politics have not been sudden cataclysms; these conditions have been developing for many years. Decreasing resources and/or revenues have been seen by many as one of the primary reasons for the plethora of accountability initiatives; however, higher education's fiscal woes are intertwined with a multitude of other factors. States have experienced escalating demands for funding of other programs such as, K-12 (often court-ordered spending) and Medicare/Medicaid, leaving little choice but to limit appropriations to higher education (Ewell,1994). In addition, the private sector has experienced sluggish economic conditions; thereby, putting direct pressures on operating budgets and a growing inability to raise tuition year after year.

Another origin of accountability stems from discussions in the 1980s that centered around questions about the public purpose of higher education (Ewell, 1994). Discussion of this issue by state legislative officials proliferated, because higher education began to be viewed as an economic development engine. Many of higher education's leaders presented convincing arguments, ranging from economic development to quality of life, that the net return was far greater than the investment in higher education in terms of overall benefits to the public. Higher education was, in essence, sold to state officials as a "real deal" and this was appealing to many political officials, but they now want some accounting for this and hold higher education to certain expectations (Ewell, 1994). They expect cost consciousness, return on the investment, and better performance outcomes. There are certain outcomes that the political process has deemed appropriate, such as student retention and graduation, completion rates, and success in the labor market (Anonymous, Change, May/June, 2000). The demands for such evidence have resulted in a number of requests related to institutional performance, quality, efficiency and effectiveness.

State policy makers, in the wake of financial shortfalls and instances of mistrust, continued to propel this movement throughout the latter half of the last century. As a result, legislators, executive offices of government, trustees and board members have been increasingly more concerned about higher education's purpose and performance (Bogue & Hall, 2003). This has yielded a multitude of policies or circumstances that have arisen with an accountability emphasis: 1) increasing number of states mandating formal assessment and testing; 2) increasing number of states implementing forms of consumer protection regulation against private institutions; 3) increasing number of states requiring performance indicator reporting; 4) growing number of states adopting or experimenting with performance based budgeting; 5) debate over the effectiveness and reform of accreditation; 6) growing curiosity of boards of trust about curricular matters and faculty tenure issues; and 7) increasing state regulation of higher education curriculum, assessment and faculty workload policies (Bogue & Hall, 2003).

With the evolution of this movement has come the expectation for more reporting to external constituents on inputs, outputs, resources, processes and outcomes. Legislators now feel they have a responsibility to the public to demand accountability for dollars spent and expect evidence of outcomes (Heaney, 1990). Legislators want the evidence to ensure that funds are being used wisely. The public increasingly wants information about the effectiveness of colleges and universities. Higher education administrators want information to evaluate strategic planning and reform efforts. Furthermore, there have been a growing number of exposés in higher education, resulting in volumes of public scrutiny and criticism of some university practices. In turn, the calls for accountability continue with hopes that evidence of outcomes might keep the public at bay (Prewitt, 1993).

Mistrust

There have been many critical accounts of both faculty and administrators taking their students and the institution in harm's way, while forsaking their personal and professional integrity (Bogue, 1994). These sad instances of integrity and disappointing lack of integrity have certainly created cynicism and mistrust; these instances have provided an observable stimulus for increased expressions of mistrust by higher education stakeholders. The disappointing departures from professional integrity within the higher education enterprise have continued to fuel the fire for this increased scrutiny throughout the recent history of higher education.

Along with credibility issues, financial stringency and mounting educational costs continue to provoke this major sweeping policy accent on accountability in American Higher Education. This policy expectation, amid the demands for reform and reconstruction, has resulted in a clamor for increased expressions of accountability. All who make claims of their "outcomes" are being asked to provide evidence to support such claims, and although there are numerous other reasons for institutions to study themselves carefully, thoughtfully, and systematically.

During times of a questionable economy and existing mistrust, it is not surprising that there is a demand from state legislatures and other stakeholders for institutional accountability with the primary purpose of ensuring that the money being allocated to higher education is being judiciously and honestly spent.

Political leaders in many states have embraced assessment as a means of accountability by asking higher education institutions to demonstrate the value of what they do and to use findings for continuous improvement of their practice. This information is taken to assist legislators and policy makers, to evaluate and justify large public expenditures on public higher education (Shavelson & Huang, 2003). However, it is unfortunate that some of the most valued attributes and outcomes of higher education cannot be measured by the current psychometrics being used for evaluation (Shavelson & Huang, 2003). The most valued outcomes of higher education cannot always be measured in dollars and cents, raw numbers, percentages, or anecdotal information. To focus on those things that are measurable for the sake of accounting could obviously distort educational values and the integrity of the enterprise.

Assessment-based accountability is not a bad thing. The higher education community has tried to embrace this movement with conviction and constancy of purpose, because colleges and universities are under widespread attack due to, claims of academic productivity problems and, charges of abuse, collusion, mismanagement, and outright fabrication, in areas such as research, state and federal spending, and intercollegiate athletics (Ewell, 1994; Massy & Wilger, 1995). All of these departures from integrity continue to undermine the public's confidence that higher education is able to manage its own affairs (Ewell, 1994).

At the state-level, assessment-based accountability is often advanced as a policy solution with a one-size-fits-all mentality. Unfortunately, it is the diversity of our higher education learning environment that gives higher education character and strength and makes assessment difficult. A coherent conceptual framework for assessing higher education is necessary to change stakeholders' perceptions of higher education's integrity. "The perception of integrity is not a variable commodity that can be influenced by politics or persuasion…when we have lost it, it is gone—only to be earned back again by example and right action (Ewell, 1994 pg. 24)". An accountability system that represents a genuine partnership between public authorities and higher education institutions is needed, and if a partnership can be forged with a common interest in restoring faith to public constituents and a commitment to core values, this would represent the best possible spirit of accountability.

The eagerness of state legislators to use outcome measures to help sort through competing demands for reform has brought both public scrutiny and political controversy. State policymakers together with leaders of public higher education institutions have sought effective accountability strategies to assess college outcomes. As a result, more than three-quarters of American states, including Tennessee, have implemented some form of accountability (Banta,1996).

In 1979, Tennessee was first among those states, to implement a program that would base a portion of state higher education funding on performance, linking student learning outcomes to assessment (Bogue, Creech, & Folger, 1993; Bogue & Trout, 1980; Banta, et al., 1996). The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), a statewide coordinating board with broad regulatory powers (created by statute in 1967), instituted a policy that gave all public higher education institutions the ability to earn a budget supplement of two percent above and beyond formula funding, which is based on institutional student headcount (Banta, 1996; Dumont, 1980). Currently this program is still in existence and institutions have the ability to earn a 5.45 percent budget supplement of the instructional component of an institution's education and general budget (E&G) by monitoring and carrying out each year a set of prescribed standards as defined by THEC. This program is a major attempt by Tennessee to grapple with some of the central questions of higher education accountability.

During the past decade, many states, including Tennessee, have placed stronger requirements for higher education accountability, as well on the government in general (Measuring Performance in Higher Education, 2001). State legislators typically drive higher education accountability policies (designed to stimulate institutional improvement or movement toward clearly specified state goals), so it is of considerable importance to determine how they perceive the effectiveness of current Tennessee higher education accountability policies?

Statement of the Problem: Purpose and Significance

Accountability has emerged as a major policy focus, but what is not so clear is the impact and decision utility of accountability policies and/or programs. There have been and continue to be mandated and voluntary approaches to accountability; however, there is little if any, research on how responsible stakeholders, such as legislators, perceive the effectiveness of existing accountability policies and/or programs (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 1998). Policymakers and educators have been struggling for several decades to design satisfactory strategies to achieve educational accountability (Lingenfelter, 2003). While there has been some progress, it has been slow, both in developing satisfactory strategies and in improving effectiveness and efficiency (Lingenfelter, 2003). The current status raises the following questions: 1) are the activities and reports associated with accountability reporting simply empty exercises, or 2) is this information being used actively by stakeholders for the purposes it was intended and 3) to what end is it being used? What we do not know is the decision value and utility of these accountability policies/programs. Have these policies/programs led to better management of institutions and/or increased confidence and awareness in higher education specifically among state legislators?

The Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe Tennessee legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and/or programs. This research inquiry was framed and guided by the following research questions:

1. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the meaning and expectations for higher education accountability?
2. What are considered to be prime and important evidences of accountability as perceived by Tennessee legislators?
3. To whom is higher education accountable as perceived by Tennessee legislators?

4. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the effectiveness of Tennessee's higher education accountability policies and/or programs?

Significance

If public higher education institutions continue to be funded by state dollars allocated through the legislature, evidence of quality and accountability will remain an expectation of state legislatures, policymakers and various other stakeholders. As this legislative expectation remains, it seemed worthwhile to describe state legislators' perceptions of what it means for higher education to be accountable, to whom and to what end. There is a paucity of research on state legislators' perceptions as their voices and actions have promulgated this demand; therefore, it is of interest to find out the particulars of their intent. This study provides needed data regarding current accountability policies and programs to determine if the current accountability policies: 1) have had the perceived beneficial effect, and 2) have provided the basis for improved decision-making in relation to funding allocation. The purpose of this study was to describe Tennessee legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and/or programs

This study provides an in-depth description of legislators' perceptions of Tennessee higher education accountability. It sheds light on what legislators perceive as higher education being accountable. The disconnect between accountability policies and/or programs, in terms of expectations, indicators and outcomes, these results could be used to improve planning, practice and implementation of statewide accountability programs.

The findings from this study should provide the basis for formulating a set of recommendations for improving planning, practice and policy related to accountability policies and programs in the state of Tennessee. The results of this study should inform other state policy makers, legislators and stakeholders as they formulate accountability policies and/or programs. This study should also benefit the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and the two state higher education governing boards to more closely align their policies, mandates, and requirements in relation to legislative expectations of higher education accountability. In addition, this study should contribute to the growing body of higher education accountability literature. This study explored the perceptions and evaluations of those expressions of accountability policy deemed most effective by the various state legislators, examined indicators of activity and performance deemed of greatest importance by the various legislators, and solicited input on the enhancement and strengthening of accountability policy in Tennessee. The study also may be seen as the forerunner for further and expanded investigations of accountability with various other stakeholders across the state.

Delimitations

By design, this study examined legislators' perceptions of accountability in only one state, the state of Tennessee; specifically, legislators who serve on the education committees in both the Tennessee General Assembly's House of Representatives and Senate. Moreover, it was delimted to a purposeful sample of legislators who serve on the Senate Education Committee and those that serve on the House Higher Education Committee. A purposeful sample of half of the legislators in the House and Senate was selected. Legislators were selected to ensure that the sample is bipartisan and that individuals have served for a number of years. Individuals who are likely to have knowledge about higher education accountability policy were also sought to interview. This study was conducted over a period of several months during the academic year 2003-2004. Results of the study may not be applicable to all Tennessee legislators' perceptions, because only those members serving in the House and Senate Education Committees were interviewed. Last, results may not apply to other state legislatures or to future Tennessee legislators who may be serve on the education committees, because this study was conducted in the spring of 2004. Finally, legislator perceptions of higher education accountability policies may not be representative of other stakeholder groups; whereas, governing and coordinating higher education board members, executive higher education staff members, college campus leaders, civic and corporate leaders, students and parents might offer multiple different and valuable opinions.

Limitations

A descriptive qualitative research design was employed for this study. This design has inherent weaknesses and tradeoffs. The design allows for considerable depth of findings and rich descriptions of perceptions but sacrifices breadth. A purposeful sample of legislators serving on the House and Senate Education Committees was selected for this study. Due to the small sample size, qualitative research design of this study, and the focus on Tennessee legislators, the findings are not generalizable to other state legislators in state or out of state.

Assumptions

According to Harre and Secord (1972), researchers employing an interview data collection method can assume that participants are truthful and convey their opinions during interviews; therefore, for this study this assumption will be made. It was assumed also that interviewees (legislators) participated voluntarily, but with this comes the threat of possible low participation. However, multiple advocacy venues were used to increase willingness to participate in this study.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be used and are operationally defined below.

Accountability – In the context of higher education, may be defined as evidence offered on the extent to which an institution achieved its mission and goals, with a particular accent on educational outcomes (Bogue & Aper, 2001). "State-level indicators of institutional performance designed to reach public audiences, using quantitative and qualitative measures that allow comparisons among institutions (Wellman, 2001)". Accountability can be defined by college outcomes, that is, differences in knowledge, in skills, in attitudes and in values from college entrance to college exit (Bogue & Hall, 2003). Accountability can be viewed as results, that is, what comes out of an educational system rather than what goes into it (Mortimer, 1972).

Education Committees – refers to Tennessee General Assembly House Higher Education Subcommittee and Senate Education Committee

Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) – refers to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, which is the state of

Tennessee's higher education coordinating board (provides oversight of performance funding program).

Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) – refers to the Tennessee Board of Regents, which is the state of Tennessee's governing board for all public postsecondary schools except the University of Tennessee system

Performance Funding Program – Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) program that promotes principles of equity, excellence, accessibility, and accountability through a fundamental commitment to promote improvement in quality and performance of public colleges and universities (THEC, Performance Standards 2000-05, 2000)

Performance indicators/evidences – An indicator of program or institutional performance effectiveness or efficiency as it relates to inputs, processes, and outcomes

Organization of the Study

This study is comprised of five chapters. In Chapter One, a general overview is presented including the following elements: Introduction, Problem Statement, Purpose Statement, Research Questions, Significance, Delimitations, Limitations, Definitions of Terms and Organization of the Study. Chapter Two contains a critical review of the pertinent literature as it relates to higher education accountability. Chapter Three describes the research design and methods employed in this study.

Chapter Four contains the findings of the study, organized by research questions. Chapter Five contains a Review of the Study (purpose, research questions, and methods), Summary of Findings, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Future Studies and Policy Recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Whether welcomed, resisted, or debated, the accountability of postsecondary institutions seems to have become the mantra for those scrutinizing higher education. Everyone seems to want to know about the quality of the higher education system. Few policy issues have vexed the academic world with so many voices as this elusive concept. One would be hard-pressed to pick up an issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Change* or the *Journal of Higher Education* and not find this topic alluded to, discussed, or commented on over the last several decades. A flurry of national reports has hailed the need for substantive higher education accountability. One of the many national reports expounding the need for higher education accounting is the National Governors Association 1986 report, *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 report on Education.* In the preface of the report, Task Force Chairman John Ashcroft, voiced his opinion on the need for higher education accounting:

> "The public has a right to know what it is getting for its expenditure of tax resources; the public has a right to know and understand the quality of undergraduate education that young people receive from publicly funded colleges and universities. They have a right to know that their resources are being wisely invested and committed."

Through the lens of a political official, this statement embodies the spirit and rationale for the accountability movement in higher education. However, the state context or governance structure, sociopolitical climate and the public's perceptions also contribute to the tenor of state higher education accountability policies and programs.

This chapter, which reviews the literature on higher education accountability, will provide a concise and descriptive summation of the emergence of this policy issue. The first section of chapter will trace the evolution of accountability and provide some historical context. This section will allow the reader to understand the historical development of this policy issue and stakeholders' concerns for higher education accounting. The second section of this chapter will examine the policy evidences and instruments of higher education accountability. The third section will examine the face of accountability in the state of Tennessee. The final section will include a brief discussion of the impact and effectiveness of higher education accountability policies. Because, this research is directed toward higher education accountability in Tennessee, pertinent details related to Tennessee's policies/and or programs will be intermingled among the text of this chapter.

Evolution of Accountability: Historical Context

Higher education accountability did not suddenly evolve, and this movement is not the result of a sudden cataclysm. Instead it is the product of some long-term developments. Perhaps, in fact, this policy accent should no longer be referred to as a movement, because, although many have waited for accountability to go away as a fad in higher education, external political forces and various stakeholders continue to call for results and for higher education accounting (Ewell, 2003). Accountability has become a prominent and enduring higher education policy issue and it appears that conversations are only intensifying, rather than dissipating, in advance of the planned re-authorization of the Higher Education Act (Ewell, 2003; Burd, 2003;Burd, 2002; Morgan, 2002; Schmidt, 2002). Lawmakers recently tried, and failed to reauthorize the Higher Education Act in September 2004, they raised concerns about whether or not colleges and universities have been accountable for both quality and performance (Christ, 2004). With tuition on the rise, students, parents and other stakeholders expect proof that students are getting what they pay for and learning what they need to know. Congress will revisit the higher education accountability debate when it takes up reauthorization again early next year (Christ, 2004). To fully understand the roots of this movement, a historical discussion of the academic, sociopolitical and cultural origins is necessary.

The demand for higher education accountability may have commenced as a quiet whisper in the 1960s with questions such as, "Where does all that money go?", "Which college is most effective and efficient?", and "What are students learning? The public (stakeholder) may have been the first to ask, but many inside higher education and others outside were curious. By 1968, a consortium of insiders established the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), and subsequently developed standardized data definitions of finances, enrollments, and staffing (Tierney, 1998). Concurrently, the federal government began collecting data about higher education institutions known first as HEGIS (Higher Education General Information Survey) and now known as IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) (Tierney, 1998).

Since that time higher education institutions have tried to be responsive to public and government cries for accountability, but apparently not with sufficient success (Tierney, 1998). No longer are there simply soft whispers for higher education accounting. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s higher education responded to calls for accountability in some ways that parallel the health care industry, in which, doctors, like faculty, know best, and higher education sent messages like, "Trust us, we're the experts," " What we do can't be measured", "We are different", "How dare you". Higher education has dealt with accountability demands slowly and painfully. Higher education should embrace the opportunity that accountability can provide to prove its noteworthy outcomes, before cost controls (diagnostics-related groups, third-party reviews, etc.) similar to those in health care are instituted (Tierney, 1998),

What has prompted calls for outside intervention? Higher education in the United States is a $280 billion enterprise with more than 15 million students, more than 3,800 colleges and universities, and over 1 million faculty and staff running these institutions (Kinser & Forest, 2002; NCPI, 2001). This multibillion dollar enterprise has many stakeholders: public officials, governing boards, community leaders, higher education faculty and staff, parents, the general public, employers and most important the students entrusted to these institutions. These stakeholders have voiced concerns about quality, and too often higher education has avoided the issues. This has only intensified the cries for accountability, because it has made higher education appear to be disdainful, fearful, disinterested in public opinion and uninterested in higher education outcomes. In order to prevent more intense outside intervention, higher education needs to embrace the opportunity to share accountability information with stakeholders. The future of public and private higher education is different than in the past, and stakeholders expect higher education to meet increased accountability demands. Stakeholders' confidence lies in the ability of higher education to confront and respond to their concerns to be accountable, in the fullest sense, to the constituents served by higher education.

A confluence of political, economic and demographic trends are fueling the appetite for better public information about higher education performance, in particular, learning results. Accountability is now a permanent feature in the higher education landscape.

In terms of demographic trends, nationwide, enrollment demand is expected to grow almost 20% in the next 10 years, increasing the number of undergraduate college students from 13.4 million to about 16 million, according to a recent study from the Educational Testing Service. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 8 out of 10 new jobs created over the next 10 years will require an education beyond that of high school (Carnevale & Fry, 2000). The number of graduates from public high schools in the southern region, including the state of Tennessee, is projected to grow by 12 percent between 2001 and 2011 (SREB Factbook, 2003). With college and university enrollment growth expected, one can only expect that stakeholders will continue to put higher education under the microscope.

Politically, many states view higher education as an economic development engine; and when extreme financial pressures face state legislatures, it is easy for political officials to look to higher education for the answers (Ruppert, 2001). Many states want to use higher education to propagate knowledge and develop human capital, ensuring prosperity (Zumeta, 2000). Therefore, most states have goals that relate to educational attainment, because they see the link between economic health and higher education.

Economics, politics, instances of administrator and faculty misconduct and demographic trends help explain why accountability demands began in the 1940s and have accelerated in the last decade (Zumeta, 2000). Higher education is paramount to our nation's economy and continued growth and prosperity. Higher education is a thermometer to our nation's health and as long as it remains vital, a culture of accountability will continue to be cultivated. The sheer scope and magnitude of higher education in the United States means that the outcomes of higher education are too important to our nation to go unexamined.

Historically, issues of higher education accountability and quality have been sources of tension among stakeholders within and outside of academe (Bogue & Hall, 2003). Calls for greater educational accountability became prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s, subsided momentarily, and then made a strong reemergence in the 1980s and 1990s as legislators, government officials, governing and coordinating boards, and accrediting bodies demanded reliable information and a more public engagement of quality and performance issues (Linn, 2000). These efforts provided the springboard for accountability policy development that included assessment-based accountability practices such as, performance indicators (Bordon & Banta, 1994; Gaither, Nedwek & Neal, 1994), performance funding and budgeting systems (Bogue & Hall, 2003), and assessment practices (Ewell, 1999).

The last four decades of the 20th century paint a picture of how higher education accountability developed. The policy shifts from one decade to another speak to the dynamics of enduring and changing accountability milieu.

During the 1960s and 1970s, state higher education policy focused on planned expansion and on access to higher education (Bogue, Creech & Folger, 1993). Institutions faced new growth, public spending on colleges and universities grew and a new demand for quality arose concomitantly. This resulted in state leaders responding to the growth by forming coordinating and governing boards. While these boards varied in form, shape and purpose their responsibilities included planning, program review, and budgetary oversight for their respective institutions.

From the 1980s to present 21st century the accountability movement did nothing but gain serious momentum. During the 1980s, the beginning of the assessment and outcomes movement, the focus shifted to improving quality and teaching including: improving pre-college preparation, assessing the cost and effectiveness of remedial and/or developmental programs, increasing minority enrollment with successful retention, improving teacher preparation, promoting centers of excellence, stimulating research initiatives and business partnerships to strengthen economic development, and developing more effective strategic plans (Bogue, Creech & Folger, 1993).

A flurry of national reports were produced in the 1980s decade all hailing the need for substantive higher education reform in search of academic quality. Accountability as a means of educational reform, as we know it today, really has its origins in the report, *A Nation at Risk* (Mathers, 2000). This report served as the catalyst for undergraduate reform, assessment of higher education performance, improvement in quality program and policies, and increased accountability reporting. *A*

Nation at Risk describes the decline in student reading, writing and mathematic performance and a growing need for America's competitiveness. Other major reports repeatedly emphasized the need to assess knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the need to evaluate the design of academic and student services programs (NIE, 1984; American Association of Colleges, 1985; National Governors' Assocation, 1986). These reports only raised public concern about higher education's purpose and educational outcomes.

By 1986, the governors of all states called upon higher education institutions to significantly strengthen and expand their assessment programs (NGA, 1986). Thus, as one might expect this laid the groundwork for assessment-based accountability to be guided by external forces. The number of public colleges and universities requiring assessment and formal reporting of learning outcomes went from zero to more than 40 states (Gaither, et al., 1994). For example, the state of Tennessee led the way by implementing an innovative performance funding policy, the first of its kind, designed to stimulate instructional improvement and student learning (Bogue & Hall, 2003). By the close of that decade, all regional and programmatic accreditations had included assessment in their self-study and evidence of assessment was required for approval (Erwin, 1998). These policies and actions spoke loud and clear to the higher education community, sending a message that no longer would they just trust the enterprise to simply be accountable, because now they expected "proof" of educational outcomes, effectiveness and efficiency.

In the 1990s, state policy interests centered around the assessment of educational performance and outcomes, the development of new higher education accountability measures, the improvement of management and educational productivity, and the refocus and revision of institutional missions (Bogue, Creech & Folger, 1993). The policy shift in the 1990s was promulgated by increased interest in accountability, stemming from the public's diminishing trust in higher education, and greater competition for state revenues. In addition, policymakers had little discretion on ways to reduce spending on secondary education, Medicaid, corrections, and welfare because federal and judicial mandates and caseload demands largely determined resource allocations. The resulting squeeze led to a closer examination of higher education (Zumeta, 2000). Many state leaders felt there was a disconnect between higher education's priorities and public priorities. The proposed remedy: closer monitoring and oversight by state and federal governments, despite the risk of lessened academic autonomy. Consequently, some understood the dangers of political interference and the contending cultures of accountability and autonomy that had been brewing since the early 1980s, which marked the assessment movement. Balancing demands for accountability with the need for academic autonomy, a key desideratum, requires attention to changing circumstances and expectations.

Some educators embraced accountability efforts and became engaged in assessment, accreditation, and many forms of accountability. As a result, the focus of many national education associations was on assessment-based accountability as topics for professional development (Angelo & Cross, 1994). Accountability-based actions in pursuit of improving higher education quality spread like wildfire. However, disputes related to assessment methods and dissent about the purpose of this information lingered. Some institutions and faculty viewed this as simply something that was externally imposed and required of the institutions, but many faculty members felt it had little or nothing to do with teaching, research or service (Holyer, 1998). Insiders also objected to the oversimplification of the task of producing meaningful educational outcomes measures, in part, because many stakeholders inside and outside of the academy have little understanding of the psychometrics involved in producing meaningful value-added assessment results. Most of the dispute, among higher education officials, came from the change in purpose and process of accountability policies

Prior to the decade of the 1990s assessment-based accountability efforts were more decentralized and institutions were left with wide discretion, complementing the heritage of higher education's institutional autonomy, as to how to implement assessment-based activities. New accountability policies, centered on the need for norm-referenced indicators or measures that allow inter and intra-institutional comparisons (Lucas, 1994). In sum, the added element of publicly reporting on a set of performance indicators facilitated a better understanding of the achievement of educational outcomes with public resources; however, many educators begrudged this movement, as this meant a loss in institutional autonomy (Lucas, 1994).

A focus on accountability continued through the close of the 20th century, and this focus was seen by stakeholders as a means of achieving higher education quality. Higher education faced depleting confidence in education, decreasing state budget support, and perceptions of eroding academic standards. Many appointed officials continued to become impatient with the scarcity of reliable information about the effectiveness, efficiency and overall performance of higher education. This spurred several accountability policy developments and/or instruments: increased state regulation of higher education, state mandated assessment and testing, performance indicator reporting, performance funding and budgeting, curriculum reviews, interest in faculty personnel issues, the emergence of state and national reports cards, and changing accreditation standards designed to require more substantive student assessment (Marchese, 1994). The next section of this chapter will examine more closely the accountability policies and instruments that have developed.

Evidence of Accountability: Policies and Instruments

Over the last four decades, state policymakers, leaders of public colleges and universities and various stakeholders have sought an effective set of accountability policies and instruments to assess academic quality. Policymakers and educators have been struggling for decades to design satisfactory policies and or instruments of accountability (Lingenfelter, 2003). As a result a variety of approaches to accountability in colleges and universities have evolved (Lingenfelter, 2003).

Higher education accreditation is the best-known and oldest approach to accountability in this country; the emergence of higher education accreditation dates back to the early 1900s (Brubacher & Rudy, 1999). Higher education accreditation can be characterized as a voluntary, self-regulating, evaluative process that combines internal assessment/self-study with outside peer review. Accreditation is a process by which an institution evaluates its educational activities and seeks an outside judgment to determine if its objectives are being met and to determine how it compares to other comparable institutions (Gaither, 1998).

Accreditation of institutions as total entities largely occurs through six national institutional accrediting bodies and six regional accrediting associations. The national bodies are: the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, the Distance Education and Training Council, the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology, and the Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools. The regional bodies include the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (Bogue & Hall, 2003, pg. 45). A stamp of approval by any of the accrediting bodies for many years has been tantamount as a condition for funding by both the federal and state government.

Accreditation and discussions of self-improvement and accountability were in the air as early as the beginning of the 20th century. In 1906, the National Association of State Universities convened a committee of organizations interested in the matter of educational standards. This committee was more interested at first in standards of admission from secondary school to college, but by the end of World War I the discussions had expanded to matters of college standards (Brubacher & Rudy, 1999).

This commendable effort began to be viewed by many as rigid and overdone. From the beginning, higher education institutions were resisting the enforcement of outside imposed standards as indicators of higher education quality. The quantitative indicators of each category in a set of standards, it was argued, could easily overlook some of the most notable higher education student outcomes. At that time, there was a temptation to assume if a college or university had adequate physical facilities (buildings, labs, libraries), high school graduates, and a well educated faculty then it must be a good institution. Some institutions, upon examination, met the physical requirements but were inferior in terms of student performance (Brubacher & Rudy, 1999). Accreditation began to be viewed as encouraging uniformity at the expense of individuality.

By the World War II, some higher education officials were ready to abandon accreditation. However, others were not willing to do so, because they felt there were still a vast number of institutions that fell short of acceptable educational standards. These competing forces found refuge in the formation of the National Commission on Accrediting (NCA) at mid-century. The National Commission was composed of the major public and private associations of universities and colleges, but excluded accrediting agencies. The objective of NCA was to accredit the accrediting bodies. By 1966, six regional and 30 professional accrediting agencies met the NCA criteria for acceptance (Brubacher & Rudy, 1999). By 1972, the NCA had accredited 2,700 of the 3,000 higher education institutions in the United States. The National Commission wanted to maintain some uniformity and coordination between the professional and regional organizations in an attempt to prevent the chaos and confusions that had existed previously. Unfortunately, their attempts did not extinguish the criticism of the accreditation system. Critics inside and outside higher education thought the accrediting agencies were lacking in their ability to hold higher education institutions accountable for the teaching, learning and overall quality of college and universities.

As indicated in the previous section, the cost of higher education soared. Concerns about higher education and student learning were rising across the country and this resulted in increasing criticism of institutional accreditation as a primary means for assuring quality in colleges and universities (Dill, Massy, William, Williams, Cook, 1996; Nettles et al, 1997; Morgan, 2002). Many critics have charged that the standards used by regional accrediting associations still place heavy emphasis on inputs, such as admissions scores of entering students, library holdings, size of endowment and physical plant, faculty credentials, etc., and neglect student learning outcomes and results. For example, in a recent *The Chronicle of Higher Education* article (Morgan, 2002), a meeting of the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee was discussed. The discussions during this meeting centered around criticism of the country's 50-year old accreditation system as the subcommittee members contended that accrediting agencies are imposing standards on institutions that have relatively little to do with academic quality and/or accountability. Much of this type of discussion will continue to take place among lawmakers since the Higher Education Act is scheduled for reauthorization this year (2003).

There are numerous criticisms of accreditation. Many think accreditation is no more than "professional back scratching" (Bogue & Hall, 2003). Many feel accreditation has little to do with the performance of graduates, that is, student learning outcomes. The public wants to know what difference accreditation makes to graduates. Another criticism is the perception that accreditation is a self-serving process for professionals rather than a public benefit. According to Bogue & Hall (2003), the public has little appreciation of the results that accrue from the accreditation process, including things such as the self-study process. The genuine advantages of accreditation are not likely to sway skeptics, because they would rather see hard cold quantifiable facts.

Perhaps as a result of recent assertions by lawmakers and the National Policy Board on Higher Education Institutional Accreditation, there have been a series of modifications made to the standards by which the regional accrediting agencies engage in assessing the quality of their teaching and learning process (Nettles et al, 1997; Dill, et al, 1996)). There is good bit of variation in the standards among the six regional accrediting bodies. The standards are not prescriptive in terms of requiring specific assessment instruments, methods, and or processes. This may explain the reason state policymakers feel compelled to develop statutes and policies around accountability and quality assurance. These reasons may not be justified; however, public criticism continues to exist.

Although accreditation is the oldest and most well known approach to accountability another method, a precursor to other accountability methods, known as compliance auditing emerged early in the 20th century as a way of ensuring compliance with laws and regulations. This type of audit was designed to discourage fraud and abuse of the public trust. Higher education institutions that receive any form of federal assistance are required by law to follow standard definitions of enrollment, provide institutional data, and comply with the various laws and regulations regarding employment, students, and financial practices. In addition, higher education must comply with state regulations and laws.

In order to effectively map the terrain of accountability policies and instruments a word about the assessment and outcomes movement is warranted, because many accountability policies and instruments arose out of this movement. This movement focused primarily on the acquisition of multiple indicators, garnered through assessment methods, in order to effectively evaluate institutions, students and program performance (Bogue & Aper, 2000).

Accrediting bodies folded into this movement by changing their standards requiring more assessment-related activities. Colleges and universities began to develop offices of institutional effectiveness and/or research and alternate forms of student assessment emerged. The states propelled this movement as legislatures questioned higher education's ability to demonstrate results. The assessment movement and calls for accountability perhaps precipitated other expressions of accountability throughout the latter part of the 20th century. Total quality management, performance indicators policy systems, performance based funding and budgeting, and various other accountability expressions emerged, and the states responded by implementing accountability polices and/or programs of their own.

Total quality management (TQM) became the watchword in the mid-1980s in American industry and a small number of higher education institutions pioneered TQM in the 1980s, but the formal emergence of this expression of accountability in the larger national higher education audience did not occur until the beginning of the 1990's (Birnbaum, 2000). Specifically, the academy followed this trend as it was prompted by Ted Marchese's 1990 article "TQM Reaches the Academy" and after organizations such as the American Association for Higher Education promoted the concept. Suddenly, quality improvement discussions and activities seemed to saturate higher education institutions.

A flurry of activities titled as TQM activities ensued on college campuses across the country. This frenzy seemed, at first, a "natural" for higher education, especially the Q (quality) after all this was in line with the assessment and outcomes movement. However, higher education is not structured like businesses in the private sector; and critics within higher education began to question both the T and the M. Few higher education institutions could point to anything that was "total" (T) due to the organizational structure of colleges and universities. Although institutions were "managed" (M), even the putative managers would not admit to this, because they saw their roles as administering or serving. Hence, higher education changed the name from TQM to continuous quality improvement (CQI).

A handful of success stories were publicized as early as 1991; however, the documented evidence and data of best practices were scant and primarily non-existent (Birnbaum, 2000). The higher education community finally realized that perhaps there was a better way to be accountable, because, after all, can one really compare the acquisition of knowledge and achievement of student learning outcomes to the purchase of cheeseburgers or cars?

The assessment and outcomes movement perhaps also had a hand in birthing what are known as performance indicators. During the 1990s, performance indicators dominated accountability discussions (Bogue & Hall, 2003). Performance indicator policy systems could be viewed as another means of higher education accountability.

Performance indicators can be seen as a policy instrument to achieve higher education accounting at both the institutional and state levels (Bogue & Hall, 2003). Perhaps a word is in order to speak to what is meant by performance indicators. According to Bogue & Hall (2003), "A performance indicator is a publicly reported quantitative measure or evidence of educational resources, activity, or achievement (a) that furnishes intelligence on strategic operating conditions, (b) that facilitates evaluation of operating trends, goal achievement, efficiency and effectiveness in benchmark relation to historic, comparative, or criterion standards, and (c) that informs decision making on resource allocation and program/service improvement (pg. 324)." Furthermore, performance indicators can be developed at various levels within the higher education structure. The purpose of performance indicators embodies the spirit of the accountability movement. The rationale behind these indicators is to 1) monitor conditions of education, 2) identify progress toward goals, 3) illuminate potential problems, and 4) identify the source of any potential problems (Bogue & Hall, 2003).

States began to use performance indicators systems to monitor a variety of things, such as state and institutional goals, undergraduate access, fiscal efficiency, educational quality and, in general, overall efficiency and effectiveness. Some examples of accountability performance indicators for the state of Tennessee are the following: number of accredited programs relative to accreditable programs, admission rates, retention rates, graduation rates, transfer rates, degrees awarded by degree program, job placement rates, and other.

Performance indicators are the foundation for what is known as performance funding policy systems.

According to Bogue & Hall (2003), "performance funding policy systems have emerged as an instrument to link institutional budgets and their educational performance, serving as both incentive and reward for performance achievement and improvement (pg. 332)." This has been a prevalent accountability policy development throughout the decade of the 1990s and continuing into the 21st century. Accountability switched gears in the 1990s to more linkage of funding to demonstrable performance compared to the emphasis on assessment in the 1980s. A number of states have implemented performance funding policy systems. Tennessee was the first state to adopt such a policy, linking assessment/performance to funding.

According to Banta (1996), since the first financial incentives for evidence of student learning and program quality were proposed by Tennessee's Higher Education Commission, three-fourths of the other states and all of the regional accrediting bodies have called for institutions to be accountable for the use of public funds. Although, these policies vary in their form and administration, in general, performance funding policy systems similarly have a set of performance indicators and evaluative measures for the indicators, and funding is awarded based on institutional results. This funding is typically a supplemental award above and beyond instructional budgetary appropriations. Performance funding is in essence a state-based response to accountability that offers a useful linkage between funding and performance, and an incentive to focus on issues of higher education quality. Finally, states that are faced with budget shortfalls may view this as a way to share the wealth with institutions that are willing to provide evidence of their student learning outcomes.

State Response to Higher Education Accountability:

Tennessee's Approach

States recognize the importance of higher education to the economic and civic prosperity of the states and the nation. Knowledge is the way to propel society to a prosperous future and how well colleges and universities succeed in educating students is critical to state and national economic development. Hence, higher education will remain under the lens of the public microscope.

Governors, legislators and stakeholders are demanding better measures of quality in higher education. State governments are the largest revenue source for public higher education institutions (Hossler, Lund, Ramin, Westfall, and Irish, 1997; Engel, 1984). The estimated share of federal funding of higher education has declined simultaneously with decreases in state government appropriations, grants and contracts. This has caused higher education institutions to respond by increasing tuition and fees, resulting in students and families having to shoulder a greater burden of college expenses. The shift in responsibility has been startling. For example, it is estimated that students and their families are paying 142% more compared to their level of effort in 1980 (Hossler et al., 1997). Sharp tuition increases at public colleges and universities are one way that state governments and higher education institutions can offset state revenue shortfalls.

As states have been forced to redirect funding to other needs, appropriations have been increasingly diverted from higher education toward spending priorities such as K-12 education, state Medicaid programs, transportation and corrections (Hossler, et al., 1997). Either by choice or because of mandatory spending requirements, many states have failed to exempt higher education from budget cuts to the same extent as other programs. "In short, higher education has, of late, found itself situated at the bottom of the fiscal food chain" (Hossler, et al, pg165).

State and national economic trends affect higher education financing. State policymakers have been faced with a conundrum as a result of these lean budgets. The stakes have risen for state political officials, in the wake of hard economic times, to create an environment of educational effectiveness and budgetary efficiency (Aper & Hinkle, 1991; Terenzini, 1987; Trow, 1988). The need for evidence of accountability has become paramount. States have begun to adopt policies and or programs of assessment-based accountability to reform, improve, and enhance higher education practices.

State legislative officials became more and more eager to use higher education outcome measures to assist in the decision-making process and to help sort out demands for competing and dwindling funds. By the 1990's, three-quarters of the states in the nation had adopted various polices and/or initiatives to account for their funding, improve effectiveness, and maximize efficiency (Aper & Hinkle, 1991; Boyer, & Ewell, 1988). There is great variation, however, among state accountability policies due to sociopolitical and cultural circumstances.

State Higher Education Executive Officers, in a 1997 survey, found that 37 of the 50 states reported to have some type of accountability or performance reporting and another five states indicated plans to establish such policies (Wellman, 2001). The Center for the Study of Higher Education and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan for the National Center for Postsecondary Improvements recently completed a research project to examine accountability/assessment related policy documents in each of the nation's states (Nettles, Cole & Sharp, 1997). Findings from this investigation revealed that higher education accountability policies cover a broad spectrum of activities. These activities can be viewed on a continuum: from relatively low expectation/intrusiveness at one end, to very high expectations and externally measured outcomes at the opposite end. Some states have similar accountability polices, but actual content and activities differ widely. Approximately half of the states have policies designed to both ensure quality and make institutions accountable to a higher education authority. Nine states have policies with a primary focus on quality assurance; five emphasize accountability (Nettles, Cole & Sharp, 1997).

The most prevalent accountability policies among the states are those designed to provide information to the governor, the state legislature or the public (Nettles, et al., 1997). More than half of the states now have accountability policies on their books. Another type of policy found, although less common, is regulatory policy. Also an expression of accountability, regulatory policy is designed to ensure compliance in order to distribute resources based upon successful compliance. The least common policy found in this study is reforming policy, designed to encourage or ensure proper management and regulation.

State-level accountability initiatives are set in the following ways: policy, statute, or both (Nettles, et al, 1997). Policy means it was prompted by legislative venues, typically by a higher education governing or coordinating board. Statute means it was created through legislation. The

National Center for Postsecondary Improvements research (Nettles, et al, 1997) reviewed the ways in which policies are set in the 50 states. The results indicated that assessment-based accountability activities were established by legislation in 21 states, by statute in 14 states, and by a combination in eight.

In the aforementioned study, higher education governance structures were compared to the ways in which accountability initiatives are set. Nineteen states that have consolidated governing board and accountability initiatives were instituted by policy. This may be due in part to the advocacy role of state higher education governing boards. States with coordinating or regulatory boards had an even mix of policy and statutes that created their respective accountability initiatives. The remaining five states had planning agencies, and four of these had no state-level accountability-based assessment.

The approaches to state-level accountability vary. Some states use performance budgeting to engender participation and performance among their higher education institutions to promote quality and/or accountability. According to Nettles et al. (1997), states use at least four variations of this type of accountability initiative: 1) performance funding; 2) reimbursement for assessment activities; 3) budgetary lines for assessment-based accountability activities; and 4) student fees for assessment purposes.

It seems some states are using common accountability measures and assessment instruments (Nettles et al (1997). Seventeen states currently have common indicators and eight states use common instruments. This may constitute a general trend among legislators that there is commonality in expectation, and common measurements can be one way to foster comparisons across institutions and states. What do these common instruments measure? In some states, standardized instruments are used to assess students' entry-level knowledge and skills. For example, in Tennessee, the ACT is used as a standard measure of entry-level knowledge and skills. There also are a handful of states that measure students' achievement upon exiting colleges or universities. In Tennessee, public institutions use College-Base, Academic Profile or ACT-Comp as rising junior and exit exams as a means of evaluating students' general education competency. Most states use student licensure and certification scores. In addition, satisfaction is often gauged through a series of enrolled student, alumni and employer surveys.

The National Education Association (2001) commissioned a study to investigate state legislative views on higher education. The primary source of information for this study was the Higher Education Issues Survey (2001), which consisted of in-depth personal interviews, using a standard interview protocol, with 64 house and senate education leaders in all 50 states. The interviews provided the higher education community an opportunity to better understand and respond to state policy concerns. In addition, the results help elected officials inform their decision-making and craft sensible policy outcomes (NEA, 2001). This study strengthened communication between and among policymakers and the higher education community. Key findings from the study outlined legislators' views of the three key roles for higher education: 1) strengthen and diversify the economy, 2) prepare and train a high-skill, high-wage workforce, and 3) raise the level of educational attainment of the state's population. Thus, it is clear that economic development interests are driving state legislative policy and funding agendas for higher education (NEA, 2001). Information like this is vital to higher education officials' understanding of accountability policies.

Tennessee Higher Education Accountability

In 1979 Tennessee was the first state to implement a performance funding policy which links a portion of state higher education funding to assessment and performance; thereby, assessing student learning outcomes (Bogue, 1977; Bogue, 1980; Banta, et al., 1996). The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), a statewide coordinating board with broad regulatory powers (created by statute in 1967), in partnership with the state government instituted a policy that gave all public higher education institutions the ability to earn a budget supplement of two percent above and beyond formula funding, which is based on institutional student headcount (Banta, 1996; Dumont, 1980). Currently this program is still in existence and institutions have the ability to earn a 5.45 percent budget supplement of the instructional component of their E&G (education and general budget) by monitoring and carrying out each year a set of prescribed standards as defined by THEC. The criteria on which performance funding is based have been revised several times since its 1979 inception. The Performance Funding Program (PFP) operates on five-year cycles and standards are modified as needed. The following activities are required for the PFP: 1) general education foundational testing; 2) obtaining and monitoring accreditation; 3) testing graduates in major fields of study; 4) surveying enrolled students, alumni and employers; 5) conducting peer reviews, etc. This program is Tennessee's central accountability mechanism for higher education.

There are other instruments of accountability in the state of Tennessee including: Regional accreditation, programmatic accreditation, state audits, required governing board reporting (TBR and UT), condition of higher education annual reporting (THEC), self-imposed institutional assessment, and various other approaches to achieve quality. It is clear that no one approach to accountability provides state policymakers and higher education officials with the “best measures” of higher education quality, but stakeholders continue to demand better measures of quality across the nation and in the state of Tennessee.

The various activities associated with Tennessee’s accountability policies have provided a snapshot of the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education institutions in the state. The state of Tennessee and other states within the nation have played a key role in the proliferation of accountability within higher education. Legislatures in many states, including Tennessee, face the daunting task of providing high quality and affordable higher education to a growing and more diverse group of students with, at best, a marginal amount of public resources. State accountability policies are intended to ensure quality, effectiveness, efficiency and productivity. However, how are these policies formed and is the information gleaned being used to make better decisions? Are these polices producing only gross, surrogate measures that gloss over the fundamental question of student and institutional success or failure?

Summary

There are numerous accountability policies and practices within the state of Tennessee and across the nation, but are these yielding better decisions, educational outcomes and quality? The ultimate goal of higher education accountability is often lost in the hustle and bustle of trying to determine appropriate performance indicators, benchmarks, assessment methods – and of colleges and universities trying to avoid penalties and/or gain rewards. Higher education institutions are diverse in their mission, and this can muddy the assessment waters when trying to establish criteria for evaluating effectiveness and efficiency. Policymakers and higher education institutions are faced with the challenge of determining reasonable indicators of success and defining these indicators with as much clarity as possible. According to Lingerfelter (2003), "effective accountability systems are likely to have a few elements in common... they work best to improve performance when they target obviously important objectives, can identify problems in practice, monitor results publicly, stress positive incentives, affect individuals who play critical roles, involve all parties responsible for results, build capacity, and invest in results (pg.21)". No accountability system, program or policy is likely to be perfect even after being thoughtfully crafted and with the best of intentions. Just as educators are being held accountable for their performance, accountability policies should be accountable to achieving their specified objectives. Policymakers should examine the effectiveness of accountability policies and/or programs, and strategies should be continuously refined and changed.

Through a review of the evolution and history of this policy issue, the policy evidences and instruments of accountability and the states' response to accountability: it is clear this policy issue has become a staple as it appears to have deeply saturated the walls of academe, the halls of legislatures and the tables of governing and coordinating boards. The numerous means of accountability outlined in this chapter are common practice in academe throughout the nation and in the state of Tennessee. Academe has been faced with serious data demands and engaged in assessment and has produced data on demand. However, are the activities and reports associated with accountability reporting simply empty exercises, or 1) is this information being actively used by stakeholders for the purposes it was intended and 2) to what end is it being used? What we do not know is the decision value and utility, confidence and awareness of these policies specifically among state legislators. Thus, the purpose of this study is to seek answers to these questions.

This research is designed to help illuminate the way by shedding light on how Tennessee legislators, particularly those in educational leadership positions, view the current landscape of accountability policies and programs in relation to decision utility. The direction of higher education, including accountability policies and programs, depends in large measure on the leadership exercised by state legislators, who along with the state governor, share primary responsibility for setting policy and appropriating funds to higher education in this state. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission does act as an advocate on behalf of the state's higher education system. However, most policy actions and decisions are implemented by the state legislature. Thus, it is of vital importance to examine legislators' perceptions of current accountability policies and programs as these relate to higher education.

Public colleges and universities are economically parasitic, relying on external funding, and as long as this relationship exists it will be necessary to be accountable for the funding expended on higher education. Educational accountability requires serious commitment to the substance and quality of educational performance. The demand for collective accountability is legitimate. A college degree represents the collective efforts of many faculty and staff and society regards such degrees as significant credentials. Therefore, legislators, college administrators and faculty, students, parents, trustees, and the like have a right to expect results. However, accountability requires a partnership between higher education constituents to truly measure progress toward the achievement of state, institutional, programmatic and student learning goals (Holyer, 1998). This partnership needs to have open lines of communication and a continual flow of information.

This proposed study will bring into light the perceived impact of Tennessee's accountability policies and programs based on Tennessee legislator's perceptions. Against the political and economic backdrop, this study is designed to explore the knowledge, experience and values legislators hold about higher education accountability and how these might be shaping policy decisions. It will provide an opportunity for legislators to voice their concerns, ideas about improvement, and thoughts related to accountability. These, in-turn, will be examined with the intent of forming recommendations for improvement of current statewide accountability policies and/or programs. Previous research has left legislators virtually unexamined in terms of their perceptions of higher education accountability. Statewide accountability systems are in place all across the nation and it seems worthwhile to examine policymakers' perceptions of accountability systems to illuminate their view of efficiency and effectiveness of higher education's resources. Higher education accounting should be about our commitment to values, self-examination and change.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description and rationale for the research design selected for this study, as well as, the methods of data collection, procedures, and analyses.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe Tennessee legislator's perceptions of higher education accountability policies and programs. This research inquiry was framed and guided by the following research questions:

1. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the meaning and expectations for higher education accountability?
2. What are considered to be prime and important evidences of accountability as perceived by Tennessee legislators?
3. To whom is higher education accountable as perceived by Tennessee legislators?
4. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the effectiveness of Tennessee's higher education accountability policies and/or programs?

Research Design

A qualitative research design method was selected for this descriptive, exploratory study; specifically, in-depth semi-structured interviews served as the method of data collection. Qualitative research designs are well suited for understanding, describing and/or explaining the meaning of social or human phenomena or problems as in this study (Merriam, 1998; Creswell; 1998). Furthermore, the intent is to build a complex and holistic understanding of the topic being investigated based on detailed views of research participants from the field with as little disruption to the natural field as possible. Since the purpose of this study was to describe and more fully understand legislators' perceptions of what it means to be accountable in higher education, the use of a qualitative method and particularly in-depth semi-structured interviews seemed to be the most appropriate method of inquiry for producing rich descriptive results.

According to Merriam (1998), "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them". Interviewing allows one to find out how people have organized the world and the meanings or interpretation that they attach to a particular thing or subjects. In this study, interviews were selected as the method of data collection to allow the researcher to enter into the other person's perspective and explore and discover their perceptions related to higher education accountability. Finally, this method was selected because it will result in better and more data due to the nature of this study.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. This type of format allowed the researcher to respond to the interviewee as needed based on his or her views and to emerging ideas related to accountability (Merriam, 1998). There was some specific information that the researcher wanted to probe from all respondents, which called for a highly structured section of questions during the interviews.

Population

For this study, a sample (approximately half) of Tennessee Senate and House legislative members serving on their respective education committees served as the population for this study. Fifteen interviews were completed for this study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were completed with fifteen participants and these included: twelve Tennessee legislators (7 senators and 5 representatives), a Director of Legislative Budget Analysis, a Senior Research Analyst, and a Gubernatorial Policy Chief. Of the legislators interviewed, seven were republicans and five were democrats. Interviews were conducted with legislators from each major geographic area (Upper-East, East, Middle, Mid-West and West Tennessee) across the state.

The interviewees were purposefully selected with the assistance of a key informant, John Morgan, State Comptroller, to ensure a bipartisan sample. In addition, the key informant helped select individuals who represented each area of the state geographically and that he believed had a strong interest in higher education and were to share their opinions on accountability. A diverse interviewing pool was desired.

Data Collection

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were completed to collect data about legislators' perceptions of Tennessee higher education accountability policies and/or programs.

The interview protocol was developed based on the research questions for this study in collaboration with key informants (Dr. E. Grady Bogue, Committee Chair, and Randy McNally, State Senator). The interview protocol was developed in two stages. In stage one, the key informants reviewed the interview protocol and made suggestions for improvement based on the research questions to ensure these were addressed adequately. In stage two, the interview protocol was field tested with a legislator who was not involved in the study to determine if the interview questions were conceptually clear and relevant, culturally and socially sensitive, and elicited responses that answered the research questions. Necessary changes were made based on the field test to maximize validity. The interview protocol questions inquired extensively about legislators' perceptions of accountability and accountability policies in the state of Tennessee. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

Because human subjects were utilized in this study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of University of Tennessee, Knoxville was petitioned to procure permission to conduct this study. Full review (Form B) was sought and approved (approval date: 12/17/2003).

Prospective participants for the study were identified with the assistance of the key informant. Subsequently, each legislator was sent a letter of introduction (see Appendix B) that invited him or her to participate in the study. Included with the introductory letter was a copy of the consent form, (see Appendix C) which allowed the interviewee to review the form prior to the actual interview. Participants were encouraged in the introduction letter and consent form to contact the researcher if they had had any questions or concerns. The introduction letter described the purpose of the interview and nature of the study and explained its confidential and voluntary nature of the study. Moreover, it explained what they were being asked to do, how the data would be reported and the measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality. It also explained that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any point. Finally, the letter alerted participants that the researcher would contact them to schedule an interview. In-depth interviews were scheduled based on their availability. Letters were followed-up with phone calls and/or e-mails in which interview dates, times and locations were determined. Thank you letters were sent after the interviews were completed (see Appendix D).

Before the interview began, the researcher and the interviewees review the aforementioned items discussed in the letter of introduction and the interviewee was asked to sign an informed consent form. After consent had been obtained, using the interview protocol, each interview was audiotape recorded unless the participant objected. Interview field notes were also taken as needed by the researcher to record any noteworthy non-verbal cues, interviewee reactions and the researcher's personal impressions.

Data Analysis

The interview audiotapes and field notes were transcribed and entered into Microsoft Word and subjected to content analysis. An analog cassette recorder and a microphone were used to tape the interviews on full-size Sony HF 60 audiotapes.

The interview audiotapes and field notes were transcribed by a certified transcriptionist. Interview transcripts subsequently were reviewed for accuracy by both the transcriptionist and the researcher. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix E). The interview audiotapes and verbatim transcripts are stored in a locked file in the researcher's office.

The interview transcripts and field notes were subjected to inductive, abductive (Shank, 2002) and deductive analyses, based on the interview questions, to identify thematic patterns of perceptions across interviews. The interview field notes and interview transcript were examined for content, patterns, and overall impressions by each interview protocol question as it related to the research questions for this study.

Thematic coding was completed through the use of the verbatim transcript to assign codes, categories and themes for each question. Non-numerical Unstructured Data with Indexing Search and Theorizing (NUD*IST N6) qualitative data analysis software was used to augment analyses after the interviews were transcribed and imported. Codes and categories were sorted, compared, and contrasted until saturation was achieved for each interview protocol question, that is, until the analyses produced no new codes or categories for each research question. Research findings are organized by the research questions. Overall impressions of both the process and content of the interview are presented in the findings. General themes revealed a thick description of legislative perceptions of accountability.

Validity and Reliability

Internal Validity

Internal validity deals with credibility and with how congruent the findings are with reality (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998). High internal validity relates to measuring what one purports to be measuring and internal validity hinges on what is perceived as reality. An assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is not fixed and must be viewed as holistic, multidimensional, and ever changing. In qualitative research, then, how does one assess validity? Merriam (1998) suggests that in this type of research it is critical to understand the perspectives of those involved in the research, to always be aware of the contextual framework, and to present a holistic portrait of reality.

According to Merriam (1998), internal validity is strengthened by the use of a number of basic strategies. For this study the following strategies were employed to enhance internal validity: 1) field-testing the interview protocol; 2) peer examination; and 4) examining researcher's biases.

The interview protocol was designed in collaboration with key informants and was subsequently field tested and refined based on feedback. Peer examination also was used to strengthen internal validity through the use of a colleague working on a similar study. This colleague was asked to review and comment on the analyses. Moreover, the researcher attempted to identify her assumptions, biases, and theoretical orientations to consider how these may have influenced the collection and/or analyses of the data.

External Validity

External validity deals with the extent to which findings or conclusions of a study are transferable and/or generalizable to other contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998). Many have questioned generalizability of findings in qualitative research. Merriam (1998) suggests that part of the difficulty is that generalizability cannot be viewed in the same manner in qualitative and quantitative studies; that statistical generalization from a sample to a population is not possible in typical qualitative inquiries. One of two positions is generally taken when considering external validity in a qualitative research design. Some assume qualitative research is not generalizable and that this is simply a limitation of this type of inquiry. Others try to strengthen external validity by using various procedures.

According to Merriam (1998), several strategies can be used to enhance external validity. For the purposes of this study, the following strategies were used to enhance generalizability. Readers will be provided with a rich, thick description.

Merriam suggests that providing a rich, thick description allows the reader to "be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence whether findings can be transferred" (pg. 211, 1998). Moreover, she suggests that describing how typical the program, event or individual is, compared to other similar things, allows users to make accurate comparisons with their own situation. Both of these strategies were employed in this study to strengthen external validity or generalizability.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which research results can be replicated if the study were to be repeated (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam, "reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results" (pg. 205, 1998). Reliability in the social sciences is often problematic due to nature of human behavior not being static. However, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), reliability seems not to apply in the traditional sense when applied to qualitative inquiry and it is suggested that reliability should be viewed as "dependability" or "consistency" of the results obtained from the data.

For the purposes of this research the following strategies were used to strengthen the reliability of this study. A detailed description of the researcher's position vis-à-vis the legislators and the issue of accountability was provided and an audit trail was maintained. The establishment of an audit trail, or chain of evidence, allows outside judges to authenticate the findings of the study by following the trail of the researcher. The researcher provided enough details about data collection procedures and how results were arrived at that others could follow the trail and see the logical thread to findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe Tennessee legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and/or programs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the meaning and expectations for higher education accountability?
2. What are considered to be prime and important evidences of accountability as perceived by Tennessee legislators?
3. To whom is higher education accountable as perceived by Tennessee legislators?
4. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the effectiveness of Tennessee's higher education accountability policies and/or programs?

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were completed with 15 participants and these included: 12 Tennessee legislators (7 senators and 5 representatives, a Director of Legislative Budget Analysis, a Senior Research Analyst, and a Gubernatorial Policy Chief. Of the legislators interviewed, seven were Republicans and five were Democrats. Interviews were conducted with legislators from each major geographic area (Upper-East, East, Middle, Mid-West and West Tennessee) across the state. The majority of legislators interviewed had numerous years of legislative experience. Interviews were held at the Legislative Plaza, the War Memorial Building and the Capitol Building in Nashville, Tennessee.

Two legislators (one representative and one senator) identified as potential study participants were not interviewed after repeated attempts to schedule and reschedule interviews. Verbatim transcripts were completed for each interview except for two interviews where participants requested not to be audio taped. For those two exceptions, detailed notes were taken during and after the interview was completed. Information gathered therein was analyzed for themes to answer the research questions for this study.

The findings of this study are presented in this chapter. The first component of this chapter includes a brief description of the overall higher education organizational structure in the state of Tennessee and a brief overview of current notable events that occurred in public higher education institutions in the state. Both of these will provide context for the information that follows. The second component of this chapter includes the findings. The presentation of findings has been categorized by themes that emerged from the interview responses. The themes answer the research questions set forth for this study and will be revisited in the last section of this chapter. Quotations are cited from research participants in order to illustrate and elaborate on themes. Text added by the researcher within a parenthetical quote for explanatory purposes are enclosed in brackets (e.g., [ ]).

Tennessee's Higher Education System

Public higher education in Tennessee is coordinated by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) and consists of two systems: The University of Tennessee (UT) campuses, governed by the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, and the state universities, community colleges, and technology centers governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents (Tennessee Blue Book, 2004). In 1967 the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) was founded. THEC is a coordinating body with responsibilities regarding planning, control and regulatory advice regarding institutional budgets and program coordination (approval of new programs). The operational governance authority is located in two public boards: the Board of Trustees of the University of Tennessee, responsible for five senior institutions and the Board of Regents of the State University and Community College System, responsible for 20 four-year and two-year campuses and 26 non-degree-granting vocational-technical schools. This administrative structure has been in existence for more than 30 years. Each board administers about half of the state higher education budget.

Current Events in Tennessee Higher Education

In order to put some of the findings of this study in context, a brief overview of the contemporary events that have taken place in the state higher education system is warranted. Both state higher education systems, the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents, have recently had highly visible instances or accusations of misconduct from executive-level higher education administrators. The University of Tennessee has recently employed two system presidents who have resigned under allegations of misconduct and questionable performance. UT recently ended an unusually lengthy and open presidential search process to hire a third university president in just five short years. There has been unprecedented turnover in this position and the university has also had two interim presidents. John Shumaker's presidency ended in August of 2003 and J. Wade Gilley's ended in 2001. J. Wade Gilley, married, abruptly resigned citing health concerns. However, emails later revealed that an extra-marital affair may have taken place with a UT administrator, Pamela Reed, who resigned in lieu of termination after questions arose about her resume and rapid rise in administrative levels through the UT system. President John Shoemaker resigned after audits revealed lavish spending on personal travel, entertainment and the remodeling of the presidential house.

Middle Tennessee State University President (Tennessee Board of Regents institution), Sidney McPhee, was accused in a civil lawsuit in February 2004 of sexually harassing a former administrative assistant. The McPhee incident came just months after the Shumaker debacle and during the time interviews were being conducted for this study. All three of these accounts, as well as other similar events that have taken place in more recent months in the state of Tennessee represent critical accounts of administrators taking their students and their institutions in harm's way, while forsaking their personal and professional integrity.

These highly publicized instances of departure from nobility and integrity have only given credence to calls for higher education accountability in the state of Tennessee. These departures from professional integrity continue to fuel the fire for increased scrutiny of Tennessee's higher education system by state legislators, key constituents and the public. The results from this study suggest that these events and others have research participants concerned about higher education accountability.

Research Findings

The research findings that emerged from the in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 research participants are presented in this section. Several themes emerged from direct responses to the research questions guiding the interviews. Participants had the freedom to discuss their views on higher education accountability and were openly candid about their thoughts on institutional accountability. The research themes that emerged from this study will be presented throughout this chapter.

Leadership Behavior Overshadows Accountability Data

How does executive-level higher education leadership behavior affect a state-level higher education accountability system that should inform policy makers about the collective effectiveness of higher education institutions and public policies in relation to educational outcomes? Based on participants' comments, the recent misbehavior and absence of integrity of higher education administrators predominantly overshadows any impact that higher education accountability data could potentially have at the legislative level. One participant discussed higher education leadership and recent events in relation to accountability,

> Participant 2: "Legislators are always frustrated by higher education. To become a leader in higher education you've got to be smart. In most instances you've got to be crafty. When you possess those skills and you're dealing with a community that's got thousands of issues and not enough time to handle them all, by being crafty, smart and articulate you'll usually skate out a problem until a train wreck happens. You know, I think, unfortunately the

presidency of UT with Wade Gilley and Shoemaker and Board of Regents has its problems. We've [recent events] shown accountability and the performance in this state is very, very lax."

The recent instances of ineffective leadership at the executive-level in Tennessee have diluted and/or diminished the intended effect of accountability data.

Legislators were asked what it means for higher education to be accountable. Although participants did not always ascribe a specific meaning or offer an operational definition, they described instead or alluded to what they perceived to be leadership characteristics necessary for a credible higher education accountability system or provided examples of ineffective leadership. One participant stated, (participant 4) "I don't necessarily think we have good people running the university system in this state. They're not strong and they don't think from an accountability perspective." The same legislator provided the following example:

> Participant 4: We had a vice president not too long ago spend about $60 thousand dollars on revamping his suite of offices. He spent several thousand dollars on mahogany furniture, and carpets and you know all kinds of things, and that's at a time when they were laying off a lot of little people at the university....This was at a time when they [higher education institutions] were telling the

> community and us in the legislature that they were broke and got to have money. Okay, who is accountable for that? Obviously the president said it way okay.... Why does the chancellor, Charles Manning, not see this? Is he so far removed that he doesn't see that we spent money on something like that?"

This was one of several examples that legislators from their perspectives demonstrated poor fiscal leadership, misplaced institutional priorities and an ineffective accountability system. Other examples were provided for numerous institutions across the state. One legislator hoped that these unfortunate examples might raise awareness and result in, (participant 3) "strong efforts made by governing boards to see that their administrators simply do the right thing."

Every participant interviewed, with the exception of one, mentioned or discussed the UT presidency, Shoemaker's misappropriation of funds; but the underlying meaning of these comments related to their concerns about the credibility of any higher education accountability system when you have questionable executive-level leadership in higher education institutions. One participant alluded to the importance of this leadership, especially at UT, (participant 2) "The president of UT sets the tone for higher education for the whole state and if there's not a strong commitment coming from the flagship university for accountability then there's not a guiding force to make it [higher education accountability] happen". The UT president should be an exemplar leader to others. Despite the fact that higher education institutions expend significant time, effort and resources to demonstrate accountability, these efforts seem to lessen the intended impact when you have college administrators who lack character and integrity.

According to participants, fiscal leadership is needed to demonstrate accountability. As one legislator pointed out,

> Participant 5: It all starts with money, you know, at some point you all have to make decisions, you all being higher education, have to make decisions as to how you spend your money and I try not to be in the position of second guessing those decisions; although, obviously we have had our fill of that over the last year or so and probably should be second guessing a little bit better."

Another participant stated, (participant 12): "I mean Shoemaker wasn't accountable to the UT students. He spent a million dollars renovating his residence." Thoughtful, careful, and efficient stewardship of fiscal resources was an accountability expectation expressed by the majority of participants. The highly publicized and recent instances of misconduct on the part of higher education administrators in this state has affected the perceptions held by participants regarding higher education's accountability. Despite the fact that these departures from integrity do not represent the quality leadership displayed every day on college and university campuses across the state, these administrators' behaviors are shaping legislators' perceptions.

Leadership qualities deemed necessary by participants to foster a credible accountability system include: personal and professional integrity, honesty, openness, and responsiveness. Interviewees provided poignant illustrations of ineffective leadership and explained the importance of responsible, effective leadership behavior relative to higher education institutional accountability efforts. These leadership qualities seem to be key to a higher education accountability system; exemplifying high standards for our personal and professional relationships might encourage higher education accountability. Leadership and character does seem to count when trying to demonstrate institutional higher education accountability

The recent highly visible instances and accusations of misconduct of executive-level higher education administrators within this state were clearly still on participants' minds, leaving them concerned about higher education accountability. Efforts to provide systemic evidence of accountability are overshadowed by these examples and the recent highly publicized events. As the famous scholar, Emerson, once wrote, "What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say.", his prose captured this theme with special discomfort" (pg. 145). One participant closed his interview by suggesting presidential search committees would be well served to assess leadership capabilities rather than fund raising capabilities,

> Participant 6 "They [presidential search committees] are not looking for anyone who has anything, any bright idea or principles involving education. They are looking for somebody who can raise the bucks to offset the fact they're not getting as much from the state government. I think college presidents all the way from the University of Tennessee to Cumberland College, that the first criteria they look for in a leader is can he raise money, and the concept of hiring a Woodrow Wilson to be the president of Princeton, because he's an outstanding educator and he has principles that he wants to implement is gone."

This participant recognized the paradigm shift in presidential responsibilities from an "educator" to more of a "developer/fund raiser". Research participants were cognizant of the misconduct of the UT presidents and others; they were even more determined to ensure that higher education demonstrate accountability and to safeguard against future similar incidences of misconduct. Legislative officials recognize the importance of credible and competent higher education leaders and their impact on a system of higher education accountability.

Trust and Openness

These departures from sound leadership of educational executives in our state have diminished legislative trust. The numerous disappointing exhibitions of higher education leadership have diminished truth and trust, and openness and responsiveness, which are needed for an effective higher education accountability system. When the following participant was probed about the utility of accountability information provided by THEC, TBR or higher education institutions his remarks captured the essence of most participants' opinions,

> Participant 4: "It [accountability data provided by THEC, TBR or higher education institutions] helps but I don't think we totally *trust* it. Because we know that there's an inherent problem in the administration of higher education and when the materials you get come from that system then the information and data you get from them – well, there's a lack of *trust* amongst all of us [legislators]. The only way to becoming trusting in it, I think, is when we actually call them before us and we question the material and form oversight committees. I don't know maybe if you had the Comptroller's office [State of Tennessee Comptroller's office]

recheck it for us. In many cases we have the comptroller's office to do studies [of higher education] for us when we don't trust the information. It's just not good to rely on figures relative to higher education that you get from higher education and TBR and THEC are higher education. You need someone completely removed from the system to provide independent information."

Based on the above comment and others, it appeared that executive educators have failed to foster a spirit of truth (leads to trust) while leading higher education institutions, which is paramount to an effective accountability system. Without the establishment of trust between higher education leaders and legislators, the fruits of Offices of Institutional Effectiveness and Research and any other accountability efforts across the state succumb to less or no "accountability" impact.

Openness and sharing of accurate information with legislators and the public on matters concerning resource allocation, revenue or anything related to their fiscal bottom line is inextricably related to trust between higher education and legislative officials. Every participant indicated that higher education institutions and/or their representatives should be open, be honest and be trustworthy, if higher education hopes to have a credible accountability system. One seasoned legislator remarked,

> Participant 2: There are so many ways I've seen in the 20 years in the legislature I've seen the University of Tennessee and The Tennessee Board of Regents give just enough *cover* to legislators and governors to make them believe they're doing something, when in fact, in terms of accountability, at the end of the day whatever they did was meaningless toward the true outcome [accountability goal/outcome].... The information is usually slanted to support the perspective they're presenting."

Not only did the above participant indicate they provided "just enough cover", but he suggested that due to the precarious position that institutions are in at budget hearings the information might be slanted. In addition, he questioned the meaningfulness of the information provided. Another participant argued that, (participant 8) "I took everything they said and presented with a grain of salt". His rationale was,

> Participant 8: " I didn't put a lot of emphasis on the reliability in it because I knew they [higher education institution] were under pressure to show something they knew looked pretty or what they needed under those circumstances and made them look like they needed more money"

Legislators are quick to point out that higher education institutions are under a fair amount of pressure to justify more funding to the legislature, which could provide the conditions to possibly distort information. Clearly, the majority of participants do not trust the data; therefore, the utility of any information communicated to them becomes weakened.

Legislators were asked what they thought was the most important improvement in policy or practice to demonstrate higher education accountability. It appeared that most participants thought being honest and forthcoming with information was one of the most important things needed to foster a culture of accountability. The following was a legislator's response to what needed improvement,

> Participant 3: "Total complete reports, honest, you know, I don't think anybody has been completely dishonest, but sometimes they [higher education institutions] have not been forthcoming in information. I'll use UT as an example. They didn't tell the whole story. I think we [legislators] see that too frequently. When there are questions about things, they only share information about so much information, which may not provide all the information – Just lay it out on the table!"

This participant thought this building and bonding force known as truthfulness, which leads to trust was paramount to an improved accountability system.

Truthful and open communication inspires trust and cultivates a system of accountability with real utility. One legislator commented that, (participant 5) "They [higher education institutions aren't very open. A lot of stuff we find out by accident. Then when you [a legislator] ask them about it they pretend to have no clue." Another legislator commented on the importance of keeping legislators informed, (participant 9) "All of them [higher education officials] fail to keep the legislators informed. They need to get us details on their budget... Get rid of this John Shoemaker syndrome...". One participant indicated that higher education, (participant 3) "has a lot to prove right now".

The participants' opinions, more than half of the interviews, were jaded by instances of ineffective leadership, misconduct, dishonesty and/or discrepancies, which perhaps led participants to believe this is a system-wide problem. More than half of those interviewed contended that an objective external party was needed to raise their level of confidence in accountability information. Specifically, it was suggested by a few that an outside evaluator, auditor, or someone who could check, verify and validate the data being provided and/or used by higher education officials would be helpful.

What does it mean to be accountable according to legislators? Legislators reflected on their notions of what it means to be accountable and invariably this included honesty, trustworthiness and being forthcoming in pertinent information. The following comment made by a legislator further illustrated the existing mistrust between the legislature and higher education institutions,

> Participant 1: "Well, I don't know whether they [higher education institutions] are really doing that [being accountable]. What happens is that they are getting caught and it doesn't look good. Obviously, Shoemaker [UT former president] is a big thing"

If truth is the foundation for trust, which is necessary for legislators to be confident in accountability information the state system of higher education accountability is failing.

Legislative Relations: Be Present, Be Prepared, Be Candid

A fourth of the legislators specifically pointed out that higher education institutional and board representatives' actions and behaviors during legislative sessions are shaping legislators' opinions relative to higher education institutional accountability. Educational administrators' behaviors are, again, highlighted, but in a different forum. Who, how and what information is provided during personal contact and during budget hearings with legislators can have tremendous influence over policy or budgetary decisions according to a small percentage of participants. It was suggested that an effective accountability approach involved being physically present, available, and prepared to answer questions effectively. This opinion is supported by the following comment,

> Particpant 6: “The only effective approach they [higher education representatives] seem to take is to be there to answer questions. To me that’s a form of accountability. Because if the legislator gets a prompt answer and a reasonably accurate answer then they [legislators] feel like, you know, these folks are doing the right thing. And I can feel comfortable with this.”

Accenting this idea, another legislator spoke in a similar vein, (participant 3) “I think the most effective approach is really when representatives from higher education come in and tell us either one-on-one or in committee, respond to questions, and having availability”. For these participants, perceived reliability or usefulness of information is affected by their personal experiences with higher education representatives during committee and personal meetings. This is yet another facet of the relationship between legislative and executive higher education officials and emphasizes the importance of educational executives being present and being prepared during legislative sessions.

Higher education representatives’ actions are shaping, often, negative opinions relative to higher education institutional accountability. Being present was recommended by a few; however, it was recommended that representatives come prepared to answer questions. Emphasizing their concern and disappointment, a few participants commented that higher education institutions are not always well represented at the legislature irrespective of the college administrators' positions. One legislator provided an example of an institution that was presenting their report card during legislative session,

> Participant 5: "Their own data [TBR higher education institution] showed the college professors are working, not on a 40 hour week, they [professors] were working six months out of 52 weeks. That's what the number came out to be. Of course, they were totally blown away and they were doing their best to try to figure out how to cover it up... I wasn't mad at them but that's what their numbers said. So you know what they [higher education institution and their representative(s)] did next year? They left those numbers out! They didn't report that anymore. You know what I did? I spend twice as long with them the next year...You know they gave me the numbers. Then they came up here and said the numbers were wrong. Well if the numbers are wrong, go make them right. Don't just quit reporting that category anymore... That's what I mean. Is that accountable? No."

Six legislators implied there is a disconnect between the academic and administrative side of college and universities; and this has not always inspired informed responses to their questions during higher education hearings. Research participants quickly pointed out that several high-ranking higher education administrators have not possessed the requisite knowledge to answer their questions related to accountability. One explained, (participant 13) “These administrators infrequently do their homework before coming up here”. Legislators expect higher education representatives to be prepared.

A tone of disappointment appeared as legislators shared personal experiences with the researcher that provided examples of higher education representatives being ill prepared. Some indicated that higher education institutions and/or board representatives should anticipate their questions and be ready to give them the information they seek, but several pointed out that each year it is common for higher education representatives to ask for a recess to regroup and to determine how to best answer the legislators' questions. The following is an example of three executive-level administrators' ill preparation in responding to what was needed to fully fund higher education,

> Participant 5: I took them through a line of questioning. It went something like this: If the formula were fully funded would you tell

> me that, and I remember using this term, that we had reached utopia in Tennessee higher education? They said we would be pretty close to it. I responded by saying, you're telling me that if we were doing 100 percent of what the formula suggested should be provided, irrespective of where it came from higher education would be doing just fine? I asked them that question about six different ways to make sure I got consistent answers. So, then I said, well from the statistics I put together... over the last five years.... the total funding pot has been between 98 percent and 101 percent of the funding formula and I can't see where the crisis is as severe as you suggest it to be. They had to take a 15-minute recess to regroup. I mean, it showed me they, when you look at accountability from a business world or from the elected government world, you have to be able look at it from all angles and justify why your need competes with every other need. We had Rich Rhoda [THEC Executive Director], Charles Manning [TBR Chancellor] and the UT president sitting there.

This same seasoned legislator explained that he thought the formula was antiquated and needed to be reassessed and simultaneously he expressed his desire to fund higher education at a higher level, but he wanted higher education representatives to clearly articulate, (participant

5) “where that marginal dollar is going to make a difference”. He stated with conviction,

> Participant 5: It [higher education funding formula] is in no way, in my opinion, a fair and accurate representation of the needs of the campuses around the state. Technology has changed. Learning patterns have changed. All those things that drive the major components of the funding formula, many are not relevant today”.

Participants thought if higher education administrators spent more time preparing for hearings and/or meetings they could more effectively demonstrate institutional accountability through their informed responses. Being prepared seems to relate back to the qualities of an effective leader. Higher education institutions might be well served in demonstrating accountability by having respective higher education representatives be open, be honest, and be trustworthy, be present and be prepared during legislative session (higher education hearings).

Based on the aggregate comments made by research participants, their experiences with higher education institutions during legislative session, instances of higher education administrators’ misconduct, media portrayals, and reports received have shaped their current opinion of current higher education accountability efforts. Some of the most valued expectations cited by legislators are for higher education administrators to be open, honest, forthcoming and truthful and this may improve trust, form or renew alliances, and maximize the utility of accountability information. Just as fiscal assets are important there are important intangible assets also: competent leadership, public trust and reputation. The information gleaned from these interviews suggests that legislators do not perceive that higher education governing boards, coordinating board or institutions are demonstrating accountability through their behavior; therefore, the accountability information being produced, shared, and provided has less impact.

Higher Education Governance and Accountability

The formation and maintenance of appropriate and constructive relationships between higher education institutions, governing and coordinating entities, and states' elected leaders affect overall governance of a higher education system and, ultimately, accountability efforts. The proper stewardship of higher education's assets relies heavily on a sound governing structure. Accountability might be strengthened by virtue of strengthening the governance system of higher education and this may avoid stronger regulatory intervention.

Approximately half of the interviewees called for greater attention to the broader issues of higher education governance to strengthen accountability. Seven of the interviewees questioned whether the state's higher education system facilitates and governs the goals and purposes of accountability; although, one interviewee favored the current structure and stated (participant 11), “So far, it’s working pretty well. Some would like to see it as a super board, but I don’t think that’s a good idea”. The remaining participants did not specifically address the need or mechanics of modifying the governance structure; instead, they shared noteworthy ideas about how to become more efficient and effective and to create partnerships with common system-wide interests above institutional interests that were commensurate with statewide priorities. Those legislators in favor of changing the governance structure cited concerns about overall disorderly coordination of the entire system’s resources, politicized decision-making processes, a bureaucratic system without proper checks and balances, and needed improvements in student outcomes.

Approximately half of the participants pointed out that the state has two distinct governing bodies (TBR and UT Boards) and a coordinating board (THEC) within the public higher education system and the current governance structure does not cultivate optimal governance, collaborative partnerships or communication that affects utilization of the system’s resources. For example, one legislator expressed this viewpoint, (participant 6) “We’ve got three or four different levels where the buck stops and there is really no coordination of the whole thing (entire state education system) together."

Several legislators questioned the governing boards' purpose. In the words of one legislator, (participant 3) "It seems to me that too many times our accountability is to the governing boards. Governing boards are there for one purpose, and they serve kind of an ego booster. They [boards] are really not too concerned about what students are learning or paying for tuition." Another felt like, (participant 6) "There's a lot of turf protection, and all that, that goes on in higher education and the governing boards. So, I don't have a lot of confidence there. I mean the board of trustees and board of regents is more of a big head type thing. They do not really know what's going on."

Approximately half of the participants mentioned that the two higher education systems, as well as individual institutions, compete for resources that are used for the same purpose within the same region. As one legislator became incensed,

> Participant 2: We had bidding wars going on between the UT Board and Board of Regents for satellite campuses. They both want to go into the same community and they were actually bidding against each other, raising the bar that diluted the limited resources that remained for existing campuses. We need institutions to quit

> competing for students, money and focus on their missions and begin working more collaboratively to educate the population in the state of Tennessee.

This indicates there is break down in governance across institutions and a lack of collaborative partnering in pursuit of common educational outcomes. One participant stated, (participant 15) "We can no longer justify funding two governing bodies and a coordinating board. One governing body could serve students just as well". Another participant articulated his rationale for changing the governance of higher education,

> Participant 6: I think there would be some advantages to a large scale restructuring of the governance of education in Tennessee for two reasons. One, I think having a streamlined governance structure where there's one person at the top reporting to the governor and to the legislature would basically have one person where the buck stops. The second thing it does is it increases the perception of the public that you've improved the governance of higher education, just by changing it. So, you've actually improved the governance and you have improved public perception. Then I think you've got a real chance of having that occur [improved governance and higher education accountability].

Those who proposed changing governance thought the benefits of such a change would include: better planning, coordination and execution among individual institutions to work toward common statewide educational priorities. For many of those who did not voice a need for changing the governance structure, they still pointed out alignment of higher education system efforts with state-level priorities would be a constructive move toward more effective higher education accounting.

In addition to the two governing boards, the state's coordinating higher education board, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, was created to achieve coordination and foster unity in higher education in this state. Approximately half of the participants thought that the commission was not effectively coordinating the state's public higher education system. Two interviewees thought THEC does a fair job of keeping political influence out of academics, but in terms of funding it was suggested that this process is highly politicized. Overall participants' comments related to THEC's effectiveness were mixed; some praised and others criticized the commission. One legislator concerned about the politicization of both THEC and TBR had the following comment:

Participant 6: "THEC and TBR do a pretty good job of keeping political influence out of areas where you don't need political

> influence, like, faculty hiring, tenure and teaching. As far as who gets the money, and who gets to build it, I think it's political as hell!"

Likewise, several legislators concerned about the politicization voiced concerns that THEC does not have enough insulation from higher education institutions, governing boards and even legislators to resist the undue political pressures thrust upon them, which results in them not being able to achieve optimal effectiveness as a coordinating body.

Another governance issue emerged within the context of the interviews, but this one at the institutional-level. Traditionally, in higher education institutions there has been consensus-shared authority in responsibility of governance between higher education administrators and faculty. Shared governance is built upon a set of practices under which college faculty, administration and staff participate in significant decisions concerning the operation of their institutions. A small number of participants, four legislators, questioned the effectiveness of shared governance. To illustrate, a long-time legislator, and a seasoned higher education faculty member of 38 years from a TBR institution, reflects on shared governance,

> Participant 7: "I disagree with administration in that too many schools, school administrators, have come to the point of seeing that they own the school…The only reason you have higher

education administration is to make it easier for professors to do their job in the classroom. "

To expand on this relationship between administration and faculty the following legislator reflected on this,

> Participant 4: "In higher education the money is controlled under the umbrella of administration. They [administration] give the academic people what they [administration] want and they [faculty] don't get much. You've got to find a way to totally change the relationship between academics and administration...It needs to be totally re-looked at, and I don't know how you do that, but there are some studies, I think going on now at the legislative-level relative to the structure and the management of higher education....It's a systemic problem. Obviously, if your chancellor says, it's okay to pay a vice president $120,000 a year and a professor $60,000 a year, well, that's not okay to me."

The notion of contending cultures between administration and academic within higher education emerged within the context of several interviews. Approximately half of the participants either mentioned or alluded, to what they perceive to be an imbalance between higher education institutional administration and academics (faculty). A specific facet of the relationship questioned was the discrepancy between what was perceived as excessive administrative salaries verses marginal faculty salaries.

The current governance structure is not adequately promoting collaborative partnerships between legislative officials and higher education institutions, including their respective governing and coordinating boards, with a common interest of demonstrating accountability and aligning efforts. Some legislators proposed more stringent regulatory policies or laws to govern higher education as a viable solution, while others disagreed and felt like collaboration and partnerships may offer a solid solution to these issues of governance.

Strengthening Accountability via Partnerships

According to approximately one-fourth of the participants, collaborative partnerships are needed within higher education entities (institutions, governing and coordination boards) and between their communities, corporate employers and the K-12 education system. Legislators spoke to the need for better collaboration, partnerships, and recognition in pursuit of educating the citizenry of Tennessee. One interviewee discussed the importance of partnerships within higher education, (participant 2) "There could be better coordination among higher education institutions and I do believe it is better than it was five years ago, but it could be even better than currently exists." Another legislator stated, (participant 6), “There needs to be better cooperation between higher education and K-12.” Likewise, another legislator remarked, (participant 1) “Higher education needs to become creative and work closer with businesses to fill all these positions out there”. While another reflected on his recent experience,

> Participant 2: “What came out of a recent Public Agenda Meeting was interesting.... It was an admission of K-12 and higher education that this was the first time they had sat down and had a discussion of this nature. And, it was the first time the three: employers, K-12 and higher education had done it [come together for a common discussion on education]...In my opinion, those types of discussions ought to be taking place on a regular basis.”

This partnership theme emerged within a smaller portion of the sample, but it was an important concept that stressed the importance of working partnerships, effective communication and ongoing dialogue among key constituents.

It appeared that some thought demonstrating state leadership in P-16 (school-college) initiatives and establishing working collaborative partnerships between colleges would enhance and improve the effectiveness of accountability efforts. Their comments emphasized the importance of extending partnerships beyond that of the higher education system. According to one legislator,

> Participant 2: "Man, there is a huge disconnect between K-12 and higher education that requires more remedial work, requires more postgraduate training by the employer"

The underlying meaning of these comments supported the need for the two state public educational systems (higher and K-12) to partner, communicate and have ongoing dialogue and action plans in pursuit of mutual goals. The findings further suggested the need for state-level strategic plans based on common priority areas that encompass the entire educational system. Both the K-12 Board of Education and the THEC maintain strategic master plans, which are revised annually and they meet jointly to review their progress. Despite the joint public policy leadership efforts and initiatives of the State Board of Education and THEC aimed at the types of educational reforms suggested by legislators, there seems to be either little awareness of these collaborative efforts or negative perceptions of the effectiveness of efforts designed to improve educational attainment and/or performance.

Accountability Evidence

The majority of legislators interviewed thought proper higher education accountability evidence should be centered heavily on indicators related to workforce readiness. Legislators specifically referenced retention, graduation and placement rates as three prime and important evidences of higher education accountability. The majority of legislators expect higher education institutions to retain enrolled students, to graduate students in a timely manner and to prepare them to become gainfully employed. The emphasis on these three indicators, collected annually on a statewide basis for public institutions, match their expressed expectations; they want returns on their state investment in the form of prepared and employed graduates to increase the supply of workers in areas of employment shortage. According to one legislator, participant 6: "I just think that universities ought to be required to fill those vacancies that are available in their local job market. That's what you [higher education institutions] are there for, to train the people for the future". Workforce readiness skills were of particular importance to many participants. The following illustrated the importance of college graduates achieving appropriate workforce competencies relative to workforce demands,

> Participant 5: I want to see that when the people [graduates] come out of there [higher education institutions], they're capable of going on and doing things and they are being hired. I mean the whole purpose of getting an education at some point in time is to help you

earn a better living or at least have maybe a livelihood as opposed to just earning a living, and in something you're are interested in doing.

The majority of legislators' comments can be tied in some form to building higher education-community employment partnerships and capacity that results in developing human capital in response to major and continuing change in the workforce sector.

Is higher education's primary purpose one of workforce development and how does this relate to creating a fabric of partnership with community employers for sustainable job-led economic growth? Legislators perceive higher education's ability to equip the workforce with the skills needed for jobs in the ever-changing, increasingly global, economy will determine the prosperity of the state of Tennessee. To illustrate, one long-time revered legislator stated,

> Participant 2: "I think as we look at the measurement of the performance of higher education, it's looking at what students are individually able to contribute to the economic well-being of the community and the state."

Likewise, another legislative member remarked,

> Participant 9: "We've got to train people to go into the workforce, and we've got to train them in the field that's available out there....If

they [higher education institutions] are going to be accountable they've got to change and show me they're putting [graduates] into the workforce. Show the results of what [higher education institutions] they are doing."

Another individual thought,

> Participant 1: We need to go back and look at what is our [Higher education's] mission, that is, to train students for the work world, and in doing that, can we not do it better?... We really haven't changed the way we deliver the product in some time. We just keep doing it [educating students] the way we've been doing it....It would appear that we could do a better job of putting people in the workplace than we [higher education institutions] do.

Numerous comments reinforced the emerging perception held by legislators, that higher education is inextricably tied to the state's economic development.

According to some, developing the correct skills sets for today's workplace, and demonstrating the "fit" of educational programs is vital to demonstrating proper higher education accountability. If partnerships, communication and dialogue between higher education and community employers were solid, demonstrating the "fit" of programs would be easy. According to one legislator, (Participant 5) “Higher education needs to be providing programs that are needed and be able to adapt to take away programs that are duplicative...We need to be careful about the duplication of services, but at the same time we have to keep in mind the geographic features of Tennessee”.

It was suggested that, there is a (participant 2) “disconnect between higher education and the workforce sector”. The contention was made that higher education needs to more effectively demonstrate the fit of education programs with that of the workplace.

Complex Higher Education Mission

Is higher education’s primary purpose one of workforce development? Many of the expectations voiced were based on the notion that higher education’s central mission should be critically aligned to the state’s economic development. However, several participants recognized and appreciated the complex mission and culture of higher education. Participants’ comments could be grouped by: “public good”, “private good”, and some favored both higher education contentions. Higher education is a vital public enterprise that responds to a variety of crucial educational, economic, and societal needs. Because of higher education's importance, and the substantial public state support it receives, legislators want meaningful and credible accountability information, but its complex mission and culture does not always lend itself to psychometrics.

Understanding and appreciating higher education's complex mission and culture is necessary to comprehend the difficulty of demonstrating meaningful accountability. As one participant put it,

> Participant 6: "Well the essence of education is that you can't quantify it all. It involves a lot of thinking". There is the accountability thing is played up so much that I don't have a good suggestion for improving their [higher education institutions'] accountability because most folks want now when they say accountability, they want you to be able to prove by the numbers that you've done some good.

Another legislative member explained,

> Participant 7: "I think we need to think of higher education as something to allow a person to grow and develop and that certainly in terms of a profession, but also in terms of an individual....Higher education improved the quality of my life. I would never enjoy the wide range of music I enjoy, been able to listen to different ideas, so all that's, I think, very important for this country and for our future, not only of the person but for the future of democracy. People don't understand it [higher education] sometimes.... I think

> you need to know a whole lot more than just black and white numbers and that's what we're talking about; the philosophy for higher education."

The philosophical undergirdings of higher education create a culture that is different than that of a corporate-sector business. Most corporations value productivity, efficiency, accountability, hierarchical organizational structures, technical leadership, customer-orientation and the "bottom-line". Whereas, corporate values are *at times* in stark contrast to those values of the collegial culture, which emphasizes autonomy, shared governance, peer leadership and the search for unfettered truth. Several legislators, at least a fourth of interviewees, grounded in the corporate world, suggested that a culture change is needed within higher education; that is, for higher education to effectively demonstrate accountability the culture needs to be modified to more closely mirror that of the corporate world. Those participants suggested that higher education protects itself from change by contending that higher education is different. In their opinion, higher education institutions contend that they have been effectively educating students for years in the same manner and do not see the reason to change. The following illustrates this point,

> Participant 2: "Higher education is probably the only business activity, if I can term it that way, that is able to protect itself by

saying, we've done it this way for 60 years, 80 years, 100 years, so we can't change. Every other business has to reinvent itself as its economics and its market changes, but in higher education we justify that we can't change it because it has been this way. Therefore, it protects efforts at true accountability."

One other legislator indicated that, (Participant 1) "We really need to just scratch everything we've got in higher education, go back to the drawing board and start over and define what the mission of higher education is." Participants suggested that higher education has been up on a pedestal in relation to other state agencies and that institutions should revisit their missions and the respective strategies used for mission achievement.

It was clearly acknowledged by three well-educated participants that it is difficult to measure meaningful higher education outcomes, while only a few others alluded to this difficulty. One long-time higher education faculty member and legislator spoke to the complexity of measuring higher education outcomes in the following comment:

Participant 7: " You know, I think education still, you know, philosophically has things that you can't measure too well. We've already talked about, you know, if I'm successful in my life both personally because of higher education and professionally or financially in my life then that can't be judged for many years, but that is half, to me, accountability.

This participant acknowledged that the value and/or outcomes of higher education extend well beyond the short-term benefits and, ultimately, enhance the quality of one's life. Another legislative member realized that educational outcomes are not always easily quantifiable and many indicators do not represent the totality of a higher education,

> Participant 5: "It's [higher education] getting more and more pressure on people to try to put into numbers something that's hard to quantify. And I think that's the general push in higher education as well; that we're going to want to see how much per hours and how this and what are grade levels and much more statistical information, which I'm not sure sometimes really provides the true picture."

Evidence of both short-term and long-term benefits is not always easy to present in numbers. There are definitive and positive outcomes to American higher education that will not yield to quantification.

Value-added student learning indicators were deemed as important evidence of higher education accountability. This legislator recognized the importance of measuring student-learning outcomes, Participant 2: "I felt that those in higher education failed to understand meaningful forms of accountability. My opinion is that higher education has focused on measuring inputs, how many students, how many books, how many buildings, you know, how many items of input without having any real weighting toward the value of the output. They'll talk about the aggregate value of college education or a certain degree, but in looking at justifying their funding or their performance, they really fail to incorporate output-based measurements"

Meaningful outcomes for higher education are not only difficult to measure, due to the nature of the enterprise, but the understanding, validity, reliability and communication of information affects perceptions of accountability.

Tennessee state legislators and other interviewees expressed a desire for better evidences of quality in higher education, but some acknowledged this is a daunting and difficult task. Those participants who had achieved higher personal education levels readily acknowledged the difficulty with quantifying higher education outcomes; whereas, those with less education were quick to point out that this should be a simple task for higher education institutions.

Despite the complexity of higher education's mission and culture accountability evidence was desired by all participants, but some recognized the limited utility of some indicators and others failed to fully recognize the individual and social value of higher education. The investment in higher education reaps a multitude of non-monetary benefits and some of the most significant outcomes are not easily measured, albeit, participants desired objective, accessible evidence of accountability.

Research participants mentioned a multitude of indicators of higher education accountability and some have been discussed at length in this chapter. However, some did not emerge as a significant theme, but these were still viewed as important by one or more of the research participants. For this reason, the researcher deemed it important to include a list (see Table 1.0) of principle indicators of interest to legislators. It should be noted that this list does not include a number of accountability indicators of reasonable acceptance such as: accreditation, professional licensure pass rates, state financial audit reports, and enrolled student survey satisfaction. Legislative participants desired comparative norm-referenced statewide, regional, and nationwide institution data. Legislators thought the reliability, validity and objectivity of accountability evidence critically affected the utility of the information. The following legislative member

Table 1.0: Higher Education Accountability Indicators of Legislative Interest

Accountability Indicator	Collected by	Frequency of Collection
Retention Rate	THEC, Performance Funding Program (PFP)	Annual
Persistence to Graduation Rate	THEC, PFP	Annual
Placement Rate	THEC, PFP (only community colleges)	Annual
Alumni Survey Data	THEC, PFP & Institutions for Accrediting Bodies	Collected every 2 years & as needed
Employer Survey Data	THEC & Institutions for Accrediting Bodies	THEC Collects every 3 years & as needed
In-state employment rate (percent of employed graduates retained within state upon graduation by state, region, institution, and major)	None	None
Professional Development	Institutions-Human Resources	As needed
Budget Documents (including capital outlay)	Legislature	Annual
Evidence of mission achievement (strategic plans)	THEC/TBR	Annual Strategic Planning Progress Reports
Comparative Cost Differential Rate for educational costs per major across institutions	Unknown	Unknown

spoke to the importance of objectivity, (participant 2) "I guess I'm a believer that coming from the business world, that your data ought to make your case, but it ought to be objective data. If you can't make your case on objective data, then there is no use wasting anybody's time." The legislature is a stakeholder, legislators' represent a constituency, and higher education accountability evidence should provide a basis for stakeholders to make informed value judgments relative to higher education's effectiveness and efficiency.

How does higher education get the right information to the right people and align accountability systems so that institutional, state-level and national systems can utilize the information? Many of the legislators pointed out that the accountability information would be useful, if they had time to review it. One participant expressed this by stating,

> Participant 5: I know there is more data out there than I can possibly, you know, read and study and understand. So, it's not a question of lack of data. It's a question, from my standpoint, of lack of time. It's just not very effective when you're looking at a budget document and then are expected to try to ask questions and vote on it over an hour period. But that has to do as much with our procedure as it does with our education."

Higher education's charge is being able to effectively communicate the desired information to maximize the utility of the evidence. Despite higher education's efforts to communicate accountability information, the position of state legislator is part-time and limits the time available for review of materials prior to legislative sessions and weakens effective utilization of such materials. This suggests the legislative process is not conducive to careful review of higher education accountability evidence and information provided should be concise and brief. The venues, form and content of information intended to evaluate higher education's efficiency and effectiveness provided to the legislature may need to be modified, improved or abbreviated to foster legislative review and utilization.

Accountable to Whom?

When interviewees were asked to reflect on whom they thought higher education should be accountable to the responses varied. The majority of interviewees were quick to respond by saying that primarily they are accountable to the governor and legislature. One experienced legislator remarked, (participant 6) "Well, there are three principal entities: the governor, primarily; legislature, secondarily; and with ultimate responsibility to the people". Other mixed responses included:

- Students;
- People of Tennessee;
- Governing boards;
- Themselves (higher education institutions);
- Presidents; and
- "Every person on the payroll of the state of Tennessee" (participant 4);

Legislators and others interviewed offered their opinions on the multiple stakeholders whom higher education must be accountable. Most responses emphasized the importance of being accountable to the governor, legislature, and elected officials. One interviewee put it like this, (participant 4) "they should be accountable to the people through us [legislators]". It was pointed out that the legislature (participant 11) "controls the purse strings or a good portion of their budget"; therefore, from a monitoring standpoint it is imperative that higher education be accountable to the state legislature. Many interviewees, although not all, emphasized the importance of being accountable to multiple constituents.

Revisiting the Research Questions

Legislators' perceptions of the following: What it means and what is expected for accountability (research question 1), What is considered to be prime and important evidence of accountability (research question 2), To whom should higher education institutions be accountable (research question 3), and 4) Whether current policies and/or program are effective (research question 4) were all answered by the emerging research themes presented in this chapter. Aggregate responses triangulate one of the most notable findings: the overall effectiveness of accountability policies and programs is dependent upon a confluence of perceived factors, but many participants perceived current accountability policies, programs and efforts were ineffectively demonstrating higher education accountability. Legislators' answers to whether or not higher education's accountability policies and programs are effective at times equated to a firm response of (participant 1) "no they [higher education institutions] aren't doing that [being accountable]". However, the overall perceived effectiveness of accountability system appears to be extremely complex. One retired faculty member and seasoned legislator reflected on the effectiveness of current accountability initiatives,

> Participant 7: Well, I think it's damn near difficult [to demonstrate accountability] unless you have some kind of background to understand that we're [higher education] not getting the right resources, and I think institutions are struggling and to try to be accountable to the legislature.

Throughout the course of the interviews, legislators shared their stories that shaped their overall perceptions of higher education accountability. The personal experiences shared with the researcher took into account higher education leadership behavior, mistrust, legislative relationships with higher education representatives, governance, partnerships, evidences of accountability and higher education stakeholders. Some interviewees pointed out the difficulty of effectively demonstrating accountability and pleasing stakeholders,

> Participant 7: "I'm not sure there is good accountability. We keep trying to use various tests and I don't know that everyone is happy with whatever we have. I don't think we have anything that really, you know, shows it [accountability] real good. "

Higher education institutions, governing boards and the coordinating board expend a tremendous amount or energy, time, effort and resources implementing accountability policies and practices with what appears to be little impact. Some participants were able to fully articulate and ascribe meaning to higher education accountability and were also able to discuss indicators that currently demonstrate effectiveness and/or efficiency, but many other study participants in this sample exhibited only limited awareness of accountability initiatives or evidence.

Regardless of the complex set of factors affecting the perceived effectiveness of accountability policies and programs, participants in this sample did not reflect favorably on the current accountability efforts or outcomes. Therefore, many participants accentuated the need for changing current efforts.

Because legislators reflected negatively on current efforts, they were probed about perceived reasons for changes, needed changes, and what they perceived to be the future direction. They spoke to the precipitating factors driving calls for higher education accountability citing the following factors: declining state revenues, competing state budget items (TennCare, K-12 education, and others), increasing negative public perception of higher education, increasing public involvement through political officials, growing recognition of the need for accountability with scare resources, lax higher education spending practices, emerging K-12 accountability trends, and recent resignations of UT presidents for allegations of misconduct and questionable performance were all contributing to the changing higher education accountability milieu. The overarching theme indicated higher education's past and current policies and/or practices do not encourage sound fiscal stewardship of their resources. Many legislators emphasized the need for higher education to be accountable due to the extremely tough economic times and competitive environment which demands higher education institutions to be better stewards of public resources.

Legislators discussed or alluded to possible policy or practice changes foreseen in the future of higher education accountability. Several participants discussed the importance of the new governor's, Phil Bredesen, leadership in forming, shaping and/or modifying current higher education accountability initiatives. One participant stated, (participant 4) "The governor is going take on higher education after he is finished with TennCare (state Medicaid program)". It was noted among several legislators that more regulatory steps may be taken to ensure that higher education is being accountable. According to some legislators, regulation could take the form of new laws, state higher education governance structure changes, new and improved policies, and other measures aimed at demonstrating accountability at the higher education level. Interviewees mentioned that several proposals were currently underway directed at enacting some form of legislation to ensure annual higher education accounting to the legislature, governor and other stakeholders. One veteran legislator expressed his view on the prospect of imposing more regulatory authority,

> Participant 2: What I would rather see, I'm, a believer that laws end up creating new opportunities to get around the intended or desired

> result. What I'd rather do is see incentives. I think every college president and every university head works toward taking advantage of whatever incentives are there to get more for their mission. If there were more financial incentives it would put more financial resources in the system. So make the resources contingent upon the types of accountability people want, people expect, and the stakeholders expect. That then allows the resources to flow and you can measure success against or lack thereof against the benchmarks you've established.

Interviewees thought future changes were inevitable, but many did not articulate the exact types of change needed. The one sweeping theme among all interviewees was that change is an absolute necessity. Many thought the new governor would exercise his authority to modify current higher education policies and practices in pursuit of a system that effectively measures and demonstrates accountability .

Overview of Findings

A brief summary of the most significant findings based on this research follows. A discussion of each of these findings will be presented in Chapter 5, conclusions will be drawn, and recommendations will be made for higher education accountability policies and practice and for future research studies based on results from this study.

Major findings indicate that public higher education institutions in the state of Tennessee are not effectively demonstrating accountability as perceived by research participants. Higher education accountability policies and practices have not resulted in increased confidence or better management according to the majority of research participants. Results suggest the need for a policy and practice level changes to maximize the planning, coordination and execution among the two state governing boards (TBR and UT), coordinating board, and institutions to work toward common state-level priorities in pursuit of accountability. Preliminary recommendations for additions and/or modifications of state-level accountability policies for improved practice will be formulated based on the results of this study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe Tennessee legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and/or programs. Given this purpose, the following four research questions framed this study.

1. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the meaning and expectations for higher education accountability?
2. What are considered to be prime and important evidences of accountability as perceived by Tennessee legislators?
3. To whom is higher education accountable as perceived by Tennessee legislators?
4. What are Tennessee legislators' perceptions of the effectiveness of Tennessee's higher education accountability policies and/or programs?

A qualitative research design method was used for this descriptive, exploratory study; specifically, in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews were completed with 15 participants and these included: 12 Tennessee legislators (State senators and representatives), a Director of Legislative Budget Analysis, a Senior Research Analyst, and a

Gubernatorial Policy Chief. Interviews were held at the Legislative Plaza, the War Memorial Building and Capitol Building in Nashville, Tennessee.

Data from interviews with research participants formed the basis of the findings for this study. Supplemental documentation (proposals, reports, legislation drafts and other) was provided by participants and was reviewed during the course of data collection and analyses. Transcripts were made of interviews. The transcripts were read, coded, and analyzed for themes. Common themes emerged from the data collected. The information gleaned from this study revealed common perceptions among legislators and others with regard to higher education accountability. The emerging themes answered the research questions set forth for this study.

A summary and discussion of findings follows, conclusions, and recommendations are made for Tennessee's higher education accountability policies and practice and for future research studies based on results from this study.

Summary of Findings

Research participants thought public higher education institutions in the state of Tennessee were not effectively demonstrating accountability and respective policies and practices have not resulted in increased confidence or better management. Major findings that emerged from the answers to research questions are as follows: 1) Duplicitous and disappointing leadership behavior has overshadowed the potential impact of accountability data at the legislative level. 2) Departures from ethical leadership of some educational executives in our state have eroded trust between legislative and higher education officials. 3) From the perspective of legislators, an effective accountability approach means being physically present, informed, open and candid when testifying before the legislature. 4) As perceived by legislators, higher education's governance structure (Tennessee's organizational structure) and complex mission do not adequately foster higher education accountability. 5) More collaborative partnerships are needed within educational entities (institutions, governing and coordinating boards) and between K-12 educational system and corporate employers with a common interest of demonstrating accountability and aligning efforts. In other words, accountability would likely be more effective if the multiple stakeholders – academic, political and civic leaders, were converging at the same table in meaningful discussion to identify acceptable accountability evidence and/or indicators of performance. 6) From the perspective of legislators, proper accountability evidence centered heavily on workforce readiness indicators and secondarily on student learning outcomes; 7) From the perspective of legislators, one of the complexities of higher education is that it is accountable to multiple constituents.

Discussion

As a result of interviews with research participants this study permitted the researcher to gain helpful insight into Tennessee legislators and other key constituents opinions and/or perceptions of higher education accountability. Several themes emerged from the interviews conducted with state legislators.

Higher Education Leadership

The disappointing displays of unethical and ineffective higher education leadership behavior among a small number of administrators have overshadowed the potential impact of higher education accountability data at the legislative level. The state's higher education accountability system, designed to inform policy makers about the collective effectiveness and efficiency of institutions has become overshadowed by the recent unethical and ineffective leaders. The intended impact of accountability efforts to provide systemic evidence has been lessened due to the misconduct, accusations and ineffective strategies employed by Tennessee higher education leaders. Leaders of higher education must cultivate a culture of accountability through proper leadership, which includes: honesty, openness, trustworthiness, responsiveness, and accessibility. Leaders of higher education include representatives from institutions, governing boards and coordinating boards. Although these departures from integrity do not represent the quality leadership displayed every day on college and university campuses across the state, these administrators' behaviors are encouraging negative perceptions.

Legislative Relations: Be Present, Be Prepared, Be Candid

The formation and maintenance of appropriate relationships between higher education and legislative officials might improve perceived accountability by simply being present, being prepared, being informed and being candid with legislators. These efforts have the potential to improve relationships and might affect the perceived utility of accountability information.

Trust and Openness

Another troubling dimension of this study was the departures from sound leadership by educational executives in our state have diminished trust between legislative and higher education officials. The disappointing exhibitions of some higher education leadership have eroded the foundation of an effective higher education accountability system. Trustworthiness, openness, and responsiveness are the building blocks for relationships that inspire confidence and credibility, which are needed for an effective accountability system that officials can rely on to make value judgments relative to higher education's efficiency and effectiveness.

Due to some recent disappointing leadership displays, legislators did not fully trust accountability information provided by higher education (institutions, TBR and THEC). The recent critical accounts of both administrators and faculty, in this state and perhaps across the nation, taking their students or institutions in harm's way by misconduct or allegations of such have clearly fostered mistrust of higher education. A variety of factors including lack of communication with constituents, constituent expectations differing from institutional reality, and of course negative media attention have all likely contributed to this tenor. Without trust between higher education leaders and legislators the fruits of accountability efforts across the state succumb to less or no accountability impact.

As our state has been forced to direct state funding toward other needs (K-12, TennCare and others), appropriations have increasingly been diverted from higher education. With declining public and political trust and decreasing public resources for higher education, it came as no surprise that Tennessee legislators are searching for evidence of higher education quality and productivity. Legislators want to ensure that the appropriations for higher education are being spent judiciously. They need evidence of quality to justify expenditures on higher education in relation to other state-level expenditures and budget items. State legislative officials are eagerly seeking objective, responsible, and accurate education outcomes to sort out competing demands with dwindling state funds.

How does higher education reestablish trust to formulate an effective system of accountability? According to Grantham (1999), the challenge for public higher education institutions is to regain that trust or to redress the imbalance between responsibility to society and the issues of wide public concern, while preserving higher education's unique and complex culture. This is no small task.

Higher education institutions expend an inordinate amount of time, energy, effort and resources to provide evidence of accountability with what appears to be little return on the investment of human and fiscal resources to produce such information. Tennessee Board of Regents, University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, and THEC all promote higher education accountability and institutions already produce voluminous accountability information. Higher education associations, accrediting bodies, research centers, and federal and state governments promote higher education accountability reporting data to Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, to regional, national, specialized accrediting associations, and to state legislatures and/or higher education governing or coordinating boards.

A number of Tennessee specific accountability reports are produced annually or more frequently. Each year THEC produces *The Condition of Higher Education in Tennessee,* a report that presents a series of goals for Tennessee higher education that should facilitate informed decision-making and re-focusing of the state's institutional efforts on issues of greatest concern. The goals for this report were developed in concert with UT, TBR and independent colleges and universities. All public higher education institutions also produce an annual performance funding report. The performance funding program requires reporting on a number of accountability indicators: obtaining and maintaining accreditation for accreditable programs, testing graduates in their major fields and in general education using standardized externally developed examinations, assessing student, alumni and employer satisfaction with the institutional academic programs and student services, conducting peer reviews or academic audits of programs, and implementing the results of assessment activities for campus improvements and programmatic revisions (THEC, 2000). In addition, the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury office conducts financial compliance, performance and other audits.

The legislature, higher education institutions, and governing and coordinating boards need to be working in tandem to inspire a increased level of confidence in the accountability information being produced to promote a better informed citizenry, and understanding of the information being produced. The challenge faced by higher education, in this state, is to build a culture of evidence, that is, get the right information to the right people, and make sure the information is credible, objective and understandable.

Several participants expressed a fair amount of trust in the state Comptroller of the Treasury office. Legislators had already called upon this office to conduct external studies and to provide independent data. If legislators already trust this office, it could be argued that this office might offer an existing and trusted venue to validate, collect, and/or disseminate accountability information. Why waste all of this talent, time, energy and resources in pursuit of accountability if it does not have a solid impact? Perhaps, the comptroller's office could conduct more performance audits that could include information on: retention, persistence to graduation, placement, finance, student satisfaction (enrolled and alumni), general education learning outcomes, exit exams and other indicators of performance. A working solution might be simply to redistribute or move some current accountability efforts to the auspices of the comptroller's office. This may necessitate a rethinking of governance roles and structures, which will be addressed in the next section of this chapter. A wealth of information is already being produced that could inform legislators. There is already a high level of interest in the information being produced; therefore, why not fully utilize a trusted venue to improve the return on the investment?

Higher Education Governance

Participants questioned whether the way in which the state's entire educational system is governed facilitates the goals and purposes of accountability. According to some participants, the state's current education governance structure does not foster optimal collaborative partnerships or communication that affects accountability efforts. Some participants offered a more streamlined governance structure to improve accountability. Approximately half of the interviewees called for greater attention to the broader issues of educational governance to strengthen accountability. Accountability might be improved by strengthening the governance system of education, higher education and K-12, and this may avoid stronger regulatory intervention.

The necessity of two higher education governing boards, a coordinating board and a separate state board of education for K-12, was questioned. Although many did not address the mechanics or structure of a modified organizational or operational governance system, it was suggested that a more streamlined governing structure with a "single boss or single board" might allow for better planning, coordination and execution among education entities to work toward common state-level priorities.

Strengthening Accountability via Partnerships

Whether or not a change in governance is needed is independent of the need for establishing effective partnerships among several key constituents. It was suggested that collaborative partnerships are needed within higher education entities (institutions, governing and coordinating boards) and between the K-12 educational system and corporate employers with a common interest of demonstrating accountability and aligning efforts. The interviewees expressed a desire to increase collaborative actions through open, ongoing, and meaningful dialog among partners to better account for educational actions.

The backbone of these partnerships is based on enhanced and effective communication channels between and within key constituencies. This means representatives from the executive office (governor or other representative), house, senate, state comptroller's office, THEC, TBR, corporate sector, city/county government need to come together to determine what it means for higher education to be accountable. The lines of communication need to be open among these stakeholders to establish a comprehensive and effective educational partnership. This partnership is critical to restoring faith to public constituents, developing an effective accountability system, reestablishing communication channels and aligning educational efforts. Based on the findings from this study, there appears to be a culture gap between, often, corporate-minded policy makers and educators, but that gap can be bridged with careful attention to clear definitions of expectations, open communication lines, and establishing a collaborative partnership with common goals, objectives and benchmarks of achievement.

Accountability Evidence / Complex Higher Education Mission

The majority of legislators deemed workforce readiness indicators as proper evidence of accountability. Legislators expect higher education institutions to retain enrolled students, to graduate students in a timely manner and to prepare them to become gainfully employed. They had a primary interest in three accountability indicators: retention, persistence to graduation and placement rates. Legislators want returns on their state investment in the form of prepared and employed graduates to increase the supply of workers in areas of employment shortage. Specifically, retention, graduation, and placement rates were some of the most valued accountability indicators. Most study participants emphasized outcomes related to workforce readiness or employability. The majority of legislators' comments can be tied in some form to building higher education-community employment partnerships and capacity that results in developing human capital in response to major and continuing change in the workforce sector.

Is higher education's primary purpose one of workforce development and how does this relate to creating a fabric of partnership with community employers for sustainable job-led economic development and growth? Legislators perceive higher education's ability to equip the workforce with the skills needed for jobs in the ever-changing, increasingly global, economy will determine the prosperity of the state of Tennessee. This study was conducted at a time when participants, obviously thought higher education should be strengthening and diversifying the economy, preparing and training high-skill, high-wage workforce and raising the level of educational attainment of the state's population through the state's higher education system.

Legislators realize that higher education is inextricably tied to the state's economic development and when they are faced with extremes financial pressures, widespread unemployment, shortages they expect higher education to help them propagate knowledge and develop human capital that can foster prosperity.

The opinions conveyed by this sample of legislators are consistent with what the literature refers to as the reasons for renewed interest in higher education accountability at the state-level. College-level learning and achievement have become increasingly important due to the strong ties between the state's economic prospects and higher education's ability to produce human capital (Callan & Finney, 2002; Burke, Shahpar & Serban, 1999; Christ, 2004). Nearly every sector of the economy now requires workers with knowledge, skills, and competencies that extend beyond that of a high school diploma (Kuh, 2001). Clearly, participants were cognizant of the profound connection between the state's economic development and higher education.

A minority of participants recognized and appreciated the complex mission and culture of higher education. Higher education is a vital public enterprise that responds to a variety of crucial educational, economic, and societal needs. Because of higher education's importance, and the substantial public state support it receives, legislators want meaningful and credible accountability information, but its complex mission and culture do not always lend themselves to measurement and numbers.

Understanding and appreciating higher education's complex mission and culture is necessary to comprehend the difficulty of demonstrating meaningful accountability. The philosophical tenets of higher education create a culture that is different than that of a corporate-sector business. Most corporations value productivity, efficiency, accountability, hierarchical organizational structures, technical leadership, customer-orientation and the "bottom-line". Corporate values are *at times* in stark contrast to those values of the collegial culture, which emphasizes autonomy, shared governance, peer leadership and the search for unfettered truth.

Diversity of institutional mission and students and decentralized governance are unique strengths of American higher education. But, this variability can present a major issue: With no single national or statewide curriculum, it can be difficult to prescribe meaningful statewide accountability standards. Some of the most valued outcomes of higher education cannot always be measured in dollars and cents, raw numbers, and/or percentages. Several legislators pointed out the difficulty of demonstrating true value-added student learning outcomes. A couple of highly educated participants realized that focusing on only numerical measures could potentially distort the educational values and integrity of higher education.

A minority of participants suggested that the current accountability policies and practices may produce only gross surrogate measures that perhaps gloss over the fundamental outcomes of a higher education.

However, what was clear is that legislators want higher education to demonstrate the value of what it is doing and use this information to justify funding this state budget item

Accountable to Whom?

Higher education has multiple stakeholders. Legislators reflected on to whom they thought higher education should be accountable. Most responses emphasized the importance of being accountable to the governor, legislature, and elected officials. Other noteworthy higher education stakeholders included: goveming boards, presidents, higher education institutions (themselves), students, and Tennesseans, all of whom have a vested interest in higher education.

Conclusions

The following conclusions have been derived from this study:

1. Duplicitous and disappointing leadership behavior of some higher education administrators can overshadow the potential impact of accountability data at the legislative level.
2. If higher education leaders are not present, prepared, informed and candid at the legislature it can produce negative perceptions among legislators.

3. The departures from sound leadership of educational executives in our state have diminished trust between legislative and higher education officials.
4. The state's current education governance structure does not always encourage collaborative educational partnerships. Collaborative partnerships are needed within higher education entities (institutions, governing and coordinating boards) and between legislative officials, the K-12 educational system and corporate employers with a common interest of demonstrating accountability and aligning efforts are needed.
5. Legislators deemed workforce readiness indicators as proper evidence of accountability and secondarily student learning outcomes.
6. Decentralized governance, complexity and diversity of institutional mission, students can present a major challenge when trying to prescribe meaningful uniform accountability standards.
7. Higher education has multiple stakeholders, to whom it is accountable.

Recommendations

The results of this study led to the following higher education accountability policies/practice and future research recommendations:

Policy and Practice Recommendations

1. As higher education governing/coordinating bodies and/or institutions search for administrators and faculty they would be well served to carefully consider candidates past and potential leadership capabilities and ethics.
2. Higher education entities should be well represented (be physically present, be open/honest, be prepared and be candid) at the legislature. Legislators could provide a list of questions and/or concerns to the higher education representatives prior to legislative sessions/budget hearings this might lead to better responses. This would allow representatives to consult with members of their Institutional Effectiveness and Research or other respective areas to prepare and provide accountability evidence as needed. This process could enhance the relationship between legislators and higher education officials and improve accountability.
3. Evaluate the current effectiveness of the state higher education organizational structure (TBR, THEC, UT System). Determine the overall effectiveness of having two systems (TBR and UT). Also, determine the overall effectiveness of THEC against its established and current purpose (Several participants pointed out that THEC does not have any "teeth".) Redefine roles, as needed.

4. A collaborative accountability partnership needs to be formed, comprising the legislature, governing boards, coordinating board and higher education institutions, K-12 educational representatives and community employers. The newly formed partnership needs to mutually agree upon a statewide long-term strategic plan that encompasses public state educational priorities designed to raise the state's education performance and attainment. The partnership should collectively determine reasonable indicators of higher education success and design performance indicators with as much clarity as possible to measure annual progression toward goals/objectives. It should be determined who, when and how these data will be collected, analyzed, interpreted and reported. The partnership would need to consider regional, geographic and institutional missions throughout the state in the plan. Align accountability policies with this comprehensive strategic plan. *A statewide master plan for higher education already exists, but the creation of this plan was not designed through working collaborative partnerships.* A panel of officials from the partnership should continuously review state-level accountability policies and practice to determine if such policies are achieving specified objectives. If it determined that these are not, then this panel should

be responsible for refining, modifying or adopting new measures of quality. Accountability information (statewide, regional and institutional) should be communicated to the legislature every year in multiple venues (annual forum on progress, executive summary, full report, mid-year report).

5. The comptroller's office in collaboration with THEC should implement an accountability awareness program for legislator and the public. This program could raise the level of awareness of current data, reports, indicators designed to evaluate higher education's effectiveness and efficiency. This could make legislative officials more aware of the information and/or data that are currently collected. Legislators also need to be informed about the process in which this information is collected, analyzed and interpreted to raise their level of confidence.

Future Research Recommendations

1. This study should be replicated to include all Tennessee state legislators. This would further determine if the findings presented in this study could be generalized to the entire Tennessee General Assembly. Such replication would significantly inform the findings that emerged in this study.

2. A mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) study should be replicated to enhance the validity and reliability of these findings. Additional interviews and a survey could be completed with all legislative officials in the Tennessee General Assembly. Such data could affirm, refute, clarify, or add to these findings.
3. This study should be replicated to include numerous states with similar higher education structures and funding. This would further determine if the findings presented in this study could be generalized to other states. A greater understanding of legislative officials perceptions would emerge and could help shape states' higher education accountability policies and practices.
4. This study should be replicated with other key constituents (governing Boards, coordinating Board, higher education executive officials, community representatives) in higher education to examine their views of accountability. Such studies could lead to a comprehensive picture of perceptions of higher education accountability and demonstrate how these converge or differ. These studies, in combination, would offer a comprehensive understanding of higher education accountability.

5. A meta-analysis of the above three of four studies with the multiple higher education stakeholder groups and determine converging and/or diverging trends across the diverse stakeholder groups.

6. Further research should focus on the *specific* policy and practice changes needed to formulate responsible and meaningful statewide higher education accountability policies and practices. Knowledge of such information would inform reform efforts.

Concluding Remarks

The endless media attention concerning higher education accountability might lead one to conclude that higher education has failed in major ways to accomplish its goals. However, the Chronicle of Higher Education (Christ, 2004) opinion survey found the last two years that public trust in higher education ranks at the top in comparison to other types of institutions. We must carefully and continuously instill that trust just as one would with a child. Why, then do we continue to have endless calls for accountability? The recent *Chronicle of Higher Education Article*, suggested that the answer lies, paradoxically, in how much stakeholders and society value higher education.

In conclusion, through this qualitative research study, the researcher has gleaned a greater understanding of the perceptions that Tennessee state legislators and other constituents hold regarding higher education accountability. Specifically, this study sheds light on how they perceive the current status of higher education's accounting of resources (fiscal and human); how they comprehend, interpret and perceive data or reports that are intended to evaluate higher education's effectiveness and efficiency; and generally their viewpoint on accountability for higher education. Most importantly, this study provides meaningful data; offers policy makers insight on how to adopt, modify and/or revise higher education accountability policies; and contributes to an increased understanding of political officials' viewpoints on this complex policy issue. Higher education institutions carry the burden and responsibility to be accountable; stakeholders just want to know whether or not students are being successful and how much knowledge or skills were gained.

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Appendices

Appendix A

<u>Interview Protocol</u>

Time	Questions
5 Minutes of 5	1. Personal introductions – Introductions and purpose of interview – Informed Consent (SIGNATURE)
10 of 15 minutes	2. What is the most effective approach TN higher education is using to demonstrate accountability to political leaders? Evidences of higher education accountability? Awareness of the current available data intended for evaluating HE's effectiveness and efficiency?
5 of 20 minutes	3. What do you see as the most important improvement needed in policy and/or practice to demonstrate HE accountability?
5 of 25 minutes	4. What does it mean for higher education to accountable? What are your expectations for higher education accountability? ▶ PROBES ▶ To what extent do you think your current activities/resources are able to help you fully understand if higher education institutions are being accountability? If these are not adequate, what is needed?
2 Minutes of 27	5. Thinking about the information that has been provided to you from either coordinating boards, governing boards, or higher education institutions... Has this information aided improved decisions in terms of funding (decision utility)? ▶ What type of information has been most useful in terms of decision utility?
3 minutes of 30	6. To whom is higher education accountable? In other words...In your view who is responsible for what and to whom, in terms of higher education accountability? ▶ PROBES: ▶ Governing boards ▶ Coordinating board ▶ Higher Education institutions
5 Minutes of 35	7. From your perspective, how has higher education accountability changed during the last few years and what changes are foreseen in the future?
5 Minutes of 40	8. Is there anything else you would like to discuss, add or comment on related to the issues we have discussed? If not, THANKS...

Record after interview	9. Demographics (record information on interview protocol for each participant) ► NAME: ► What is your date of birth? ___________ ► Are you a Republican or Democrat? (circle) ► What is your highest level of educational attainment? _____________ ► Record gender Male Female

(Note: 30-60 minutes total proposed interview time)

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction

Dear Research Participant:

As you know, each year we maintain taxpayer support for public higher education and, in turn, we must provide constituents with the confidence that their dollars are being spent in an appropriate manner and that institutions are being accountable. This means that tangible evidence must be available to allow constituents (legislature, students, parents, campus leaders, etc.) to make educated decisions about higher education institution's effectiveness and efficiency.

In Tennessee, the Performance Funding Program is designed to stimulate instructional improvement and improve student learning and this program calls institutions to demonstrate their accountability for the use of public funds. This program gives institutions the ability to earn a budget supplement of 5.45 percent above and beyond each institution's annual budget appropriations. We know that institutions are expected to be accountable, but, to date, few studies have investigated legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and programs, especially in the State of Tennessee.

As a doctoral student in Educational Administration and Policy Studies (Higher Education) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), I am interested in your perceptions of higher education accountability policies and programs. You recently received a letter from Dr. E. Grady Bogue, UTK Professor, alerting you that I would be contacting you to request an informal in-depth personal interview related to higher education accountability. I would like to ask if you would consider participating in my dissertation study by allowing me to conduct an interview with you that will last a little under an hour. I am examining legislators' perceptions of accountability related to higher education in the State of Tennessee. As part of my study, I am conducting interviews with legislators across the state that serve on the Senate Education Committee and the House Higher Education Subcommittee.

By participating in this study, you will be contributing to a better understanding of what it means for higher education to be accountable. The outcomes, of this research, have the potential to inform assessment/accountability policies, programs, and practice in the State of Tennessee. This study could also benefit the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and/or the two state higher education governing boards to more closely align their policies, mandates, and/or requirements to legislative expectations of higher education accountability. In addition, this study will contribute to the growing body of higher education accountability literature.

I am requesting your participation in this study by completing the attached form that outlines your availability the week of _____. Your participation only requires about 60-90 minutes of your time for an in-depth personal interview and the completion of the enclosed informed consent form. I will contact you by phone and/or e-mail in the next two weeks to confirm an interview time and location.

Your participation would be extremely helpful to the completion of this important research, and I would greatly appreciate your consideration and support of this research project. If you should need to contact me for any reason, please do not hesitate to do so. I can be reached at 865-354-3000 extension 4259 (office), 865-717-6620 (home), or kroberso@utk.edu. I hope this topic is of interest to you and that you will consider participating. Each participant will receive a copy of the findings if desired upon request. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Respectfully,

Kristi Scott, MPH, Doctoral Candidate
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Tennessee Higher Education Accountability Policies and Practices: A State Legislative Perspective

Purpose

You are invited to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to describe Tennessee legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and/or programs. A qualitative research design method will be utilized for this descriptive, exploratory study, specifically; in-depth semi-structured interviews will serve as the method of data collection. For this study, a sample (approximately half) of Tennessee Senate and House legislative members serving on their respective education committees will serve as the population for this study. In the Senate, at least 5 of the 9 total education committee members will be interviewed. In the House, at least 7 of 14 higher education subcommittee members will be interviewed. Thus, it is estimated that approximately 12 interviews will be conducted for this study. All research participants will be interviewed for approximately 90 minutes, using the same interview protocol.

Benefits and Risks

There are no foreseeable risks expected if you choose to participate in this study. Participation in this study will allow you to reflect on your opinions related to higher education accountability and may not have any real personal benefit. However, participation in this study will benefit higher education by advancing our knowledge and understanding of this subject. The results of this study will be presented as part of my doctoral dissertation.

Participation & Confidentiality

As a participant of this study, you will be asked for your permission to conduct a personal in-depth interview that will last approximately one to one and half hours. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. Your identity will be kept confidential throughout the study. Only the primary investigator will have access to consent forms, audiotapes, and the transcripts. Data will be stored in my office at Roane State Community College (Institutional Effectiveness and Research Office, Harriman, TN). The transcriptionist will only be allowed to transcribe the audiotapes after she has signed an agreement of confidentiality. Materials from this study will be maintained for a period of three years after the conclusion of this study. After this period, the data will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty at any time. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be returned to you or destroyed for your protection. As a participant of this study, your identity will be kept confidentially unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise.

Contact

If you have questions at any point throughout this study, or you experience any adverse effects as a result of your participation, please do not hesitate to contact Kristi Roberson-Scott, Principal Investigator, at Roane State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research by calling (865) 354-3000 extension 4259 or by e-mail at kroberso@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Research Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

Consent

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant Name (please print) Date

Participant Signature

Appendix D

Letter of Thanks

Date

Address

Dear _____:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study related to higher education accountability. I am writing to confirm our interview scheduled for

______________________ at ________________ in
___________________.

Date Time Location

This study will be completely confidential and all findings will only be reported aggregately. This study will be completed by December 2003 and will be available upon request.

Thank you,

Kristi Scott, MPH, Doctoral Candidate
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Appendix E

Confidentiality Agreement

Research Title: Tennessee Higher Education
Accountability Policies and Practices:
A State Legislative Perspective

I, ______________________________, understand and agree to keep

Name (please print)

all information transcribed from this study completely confidential. I understand these transcripts will only be discussed with the Principal Investigator, Kristi Roberson-Scott, for the purposes of clarification. I agree to maintain confidentiality, including the identity of the research participants. I understand the confidential nature of the information transcribed for this study, and as such, will take the necessary precautions to keep all transcripts confidential while in my possession.

I understand and agree with the above conditions.

__________________________ __________________________

Signature Date

VITA

Kristi Roberson-Scott was born in Johnson City, Tennessee on February 17, 1972. She graduated in 1990 from Elizabethton High School in Elizabethton, Tennessee. In 1995, she graduated from East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, with a Bachelor of Science with a double major in Public Health and Psychology. In 1998, she earned her Masters of Public Health at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City. While working full-time, she earned her doctoral degree in Educational Administration and Policy Studies, with a concentration in Higher Education, from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in May 2005.

Most of her work experiences were in the area of Public Health until she began her higher education career in 2000 at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Currently, she works in Institutional Effectiveness and Research at Roane State, which is located in Harriman, Tennessee.