Accountability In Higher Education:
Déjà Vu All Over Again

Richard J. Shavelson
CRESST/Stanford University
The Demand For Accountability

- New York State Education Department plans to evaluate public and private colleges publishing a “report card” by 2001
- Virginia’s State Council of Higher Education announces its intention to put public colleges and universities on a performance budgeting and auditing system
- New York and Virginia follow a trend in the United States (and other countries such as Britain and Australia) toward higher-education accountability. Better than half the states have policies designed both to ensure quality and to hold institutions accountable to a higher authority.
Accountability Based On Faulty Logic

• Accountability must be inferred from observing outcomes in any system where all actions cannot be observed directly.

• To do this “inferencing,” the performance measure is an indicator of the desired behavior, not the behavior itself.
  – In business, there is a clear outcome measure (revenue or stock price) to guide business decisions and actions. You can’t manage a business if you can’t measure it’s outcome.
  – In education, outcomes are many and debated. The outcome indicator--most often a multiple-choice achievement test, is but a *proxy* for the desired outcome. When this indicator becomes an end in itself, and it does in education, well-intentioned accountability may very well distort the system it was intended to improve.
Alternative Models For Higher Education Accountability

- **Value-Added** where a system’s performance is compared against its expected performance given the nature of its inputs.
- **Standards of Performance** where the system’s performance is measured against some internal or external standard of minimally acceptable (or high level) of performance.
- **Time-Series** that monitors system indicators (e.g., graduation rates, achievement scores) over time.
- **Internal Audit** that links assessment of learning with the teaching and learning mission of the institution, with an externally verifiable internal quality-control mechanism.
- **External Audit** that ties a system’s funding to indicators such as graduation rates, retention rates, and faculty teaching and research productivity.
- **Approximation** that evaluates a system against **predictors of student achievement** over time such as active learning, student-faculty interaction, and student time on task.
Déjà Vu All Over Again: K-12 Lessons

Impact of *proxies* as if “real thing” for education outcomes:

- Distorts curriculum—mile wide inch deep with facts
- Teachers teach to test outside curriculum
- Schools may cheat in various ways
- Average test scores drift upward over time
Some Possible Design Principles

• Expand notion of “achievement”
• Align formative and summative assessments
• Account for and foster variability among institutions
• Differentiate purposes of assessment and accountability
  – Public accountability
  – Teaching and learning improvement
• Others
Expand Notion Of Achievement

Characteristics That Vary According to Proficiency Level

Extent
(How much?)

Structure
(How is it organized?)

Others
(Precision?
Efficiency?
Automaticity?)

Declarative Knowledge
(Knowing the “that”)

Domain-specific content:
• facts
• concepts
• principles

Procedural Knowledge
(Knowing the “how”)

Production system--
condition-action rules

Strategic Knowledge
(Knowing the “which,”
“when,” and “why”)

Problem schemata/
strategies/
operation systems

Cognitive Tools:
Planning
Monitoring
The Mismatch Between Summative And Formative Evaluation

• Summative Evaluation: Audience External to Educational Process
  – *Externally mandated, high-stakes, cost and time economical accountability tests*
  – Teacher assigned student grades

• Formative Evaluation: Improvement of student learning (etc.)
  – *Teacher classroom assessments*
  – *Student self-assessments*
Conceptual Framework For CLAS

Aggregate Level of Performance

A. Matrix Sample Benchmark: Multiple-Choice & Performance-Based Assessment

“Moderated” Score: Individual, School & District Score

Individual Level of Performance

B. Standardized Curriculum-Embedded Assessments

Teacher Moderation

Sample from Class for Aggregation

C. Portfolios

Teacher Calibration & Professional Development
Account For And Foster Variability

• Student characteristics
• Learning environments
• Student outcomes
  – Achievement
  – Motivation
  – Civic responsibility
Good And Bad News

• **Good News**: Demand for accountability is warranted and if done well, could improve teaching and learning in higher education

• **Bad News**: If current K-12 high-stakes accountability systems serve as models, the demand for accountability will harm not benefit higher education by significantly narrowing diversity of educational environments