

University of Texas System Accountability and Performance Conceptual Framework

**Board of Regents
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Purpose of Discussion

The University of Texas Board of Regents and Chancellor Mark G. Yudof have emphasized the increasingly important role that accountability will play in the U. T. System's future planning and activities. They have proposed development of an integrated and strategic approach to U. T. System accountability and performance studies and reporting.

Development of this framework will be a System-wide activity, and will include a communication process to gather input and share plans with policy makers, in order to widen support for U.T.'s accountability efforts.

In this discussion the Board of Regents is asked to consider a proposed conceptual framework for this accountability and performance report. This framework addresses:

- I. Definition of accountability
- II. State and national context
- III. Purpose and scope of this work
- IV. Organizing themes and basic elements of the study
- V. Consultation and communication
- VI. Timeframe

Among the questions to be considered in discussion are the following:

- What are the key audiences for these studies and the report?
- Does the framework address the key themes that the Board would like to emphasize?
- Does the Board find the proposed organizational structure to be helpful?
- Does the proposed timeframe meet the Board's needs and expectations?

The University of Texas System Accountability and Performance Conceptual Framework

I. Defining Accountability

- A good accountability system clearly defines an organization’s mission, goals, priorities, initiatives, where it intends to add value, and lays out measures or indicators of progress toward those goals.
- Most simply, accountability means “measuring the effectiveness of what you do.”
- An effective accountability system makes it possible to answer these questions:
 - “Where do The University of Texas System and its component institutions seek to excel?”
 - “How does U. T. intend to act strategically to accomplish its goals?”
 - “How well are the System and component institutions doing to achieve their goals and add value; what needs to be done next?”

The answers to these questions give us the information we need to advance institutional improvement.

- Many stakeholders have an interest in U. T.’s accountability. This report is intended for the U. T. System itself—its Board, System officials, and administrators, faculty, and staff of component institutions. It is also intended to be a public document, for elected and appointed officials, students, alumni, parents, patients, donors, grantors, and other members of the public interested in U. T.’s plans and performance.
- Accountability is the reverse side of the coin from autonomy. As we request more autonomy for certain decision-making, we show how we will ensure U. T.’s accountability for the results of those decisions. We should also be able to show that we are efficient and responsible stewards of public resources.
- Accountability is often linked to other activities, that are related to, but not the same as, this project:
 - Assessment of learning – this is a vital and growing activity for the U. T. System. It will be an important building block of, but is not identical to the broader accountability system proposed here.
 - Quality and process improvement – higher education institutions, at every level, can use quality principles to improve service. The U. T. System has undertaken a number of initiatives that will support or provide information for the accountability report. Examples include: redesigned travel forms; the Common Data Warehouse; faculty satisfaction survey; Office of Information Resources customer satisfaction surveys; inclusion of service in employee evaluation forms; etc.

- Compliance – this relates specifically to legally mandated processes and reporting activities. Information from compliance reports may contribute to accountability studies, but accountability does not replace or subsume compliance activities.

II. State and National Context

Texas

- Texans widely recognize the importance and value of accountability in higher education. The Legislature, the Coordinating Board, and the U. T. System have developed a highly elaborate set of accountability and performance reports and studies.
- Key reports include:

Internal

- *Key Statistical Report* (Business Affairs for U. T. System Board of Regents)
- *General Academic Components Institutional Accountability Portfolios* (Academic Affairs for U. T. System Board of Regents)
- *Service to Texas in the New Century and Recommendations on Implementing the Long-Range Plan* (U. T. System Board of Regents)
- Results of learning assessment initiative, available winter 2003 (Academic Affairs for U. T. System Board of Regents)

External

- *Texas Public Universities Data and Performance Report* (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
 - *Annual Statistical Supplement* (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
 - *Performance Measures for Strategic Planning and Budgeting System* (Legislative Budget Board and Governor's Office of Budget, Planning and Policy)
 - *Agency Strategic Plans* (Legislative Budget Board and Governor's Office of Budget, Planning and Policy)
 - *Closing the Gaps* (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
 - *Excellence Funding* report (Education Code, Section 62.077 [H.B. 1839])
- A preliminary scan of the accountability reports the U. T. System and component institutions produce for internal or external purposes reveals nearly 200 measures or indicators of progress used by various offices and agencies.
 - While there is significant overlap in topic areas, there is relatively little overlap in content; much of the data among the reports is complementary (at different levels of inquiry or different cuts of the data).
 - This does not count the myriad of special-topic reports that the System and component institutions produce, programmatic and institutional accreditation self-studies, reports on sponsored research, etc.

- Administrators report that there is a significant cost to the System and each component institution in staff time to prepare multiple accountability reports. A better return on the investment is needed for these efforts.

National Context

- Accountability in higher education has become a significant national issue, spurred by rising costs of college, decreasing retention and graduation rates, employer concerns that graduates do not have the skills expected in the workplace, and questions about the value that higher education provides to students.
- Accountability in higher education is complex because higher education institutions have multiple purposes and constituencies. A number of different approaches are necessary to measure and analyze outcomes.
- A key question is, how do we define and communicate what is important to measure on an institutional level?
- A recent national study identified 158 separate indicators used by state legislatures or agencies to assess higher education performance.¹
- 60% of these are used by no more than three states: there is little national synergy in higher education accountability. The accountability wheel has literally been reinvented 39 times (the number of states with accountability legislation or requirements imposed by state agencies).
- This study found that most of the results of these reports are “invisible below the level of campus VPs.” In other words, accountability and performance information rarely is tailored to the needs and interests of relevant groups and does not get to the people who can use the information for institutional improvement.
- Florida has just begun to implement a new K-20 accountability system that will include an integrated system of performance measures.

III. Purpose and Scope of the U. T. System Accountability and Performance Report

Purpose

- Foster and monitor the U. T. System’s overall accountability, including component institution and System functions that contribute to its academic, medical, and service missions.
- Develop a well-organized, integrated annual accountability document for the Chancellor and the Board, public policy makers, and other internal and external audiences.

¹ Joseph C. Burke, Henrik Minassians, and Po Yang, “State Performance Reporting Indicators: What Do They Indicate?” *Planning for Higher Education*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (September – November 2002), pp. 15-29.

- Work across the System and with all component institutions to produce accurate, objective, consistent, and dynamic information.
- Build on the strong foundation established by the Board, System offices, and component institutions, through the *General Academic Components Institutional Accountability Portfolios*, the Board's *Service to Texas in the New Century* long-range plan, the *Key Statistical Report*, and component institution planning documents.
- Seek opportunities for synergy – the result of this work must be greater and more useful than the sum of the parts.
- Emphasize results and articulate expected consequences of U. T.'s accountability work, for continued improvement by the System and component institutions.

Scope

- Encompass all functions within the System and among component academic and health institutions that support their academic, medical, and service missions.
- Identify and articulate component institutions and System goals related to student, academic, and service performance, and accountability. Include sections on individual institutions and on System office performance.
- Identify the key measures to include, and identify national benchmarks of performance where available – this selection should be strategic and focused, reflecting what the Board most needs to have. These should lend themselves to ready quantification, and include areas where the institution is able to exert meaningful near-term influence. The report will not necessarily replace more detailed System and component institution reports required by external agencies.
- Inventory and analyze existing reports and studies – identify overlaps, gaps where additional information is needed, areas to emphasize, track, and analyze. (Even a preliminary look at these and other studies shows that there is a huge amount of data flowing in many directions.)
- Consult with component institutions and System offices to identify what is working well and what areas need improvement in their accountability work.
- Answer the questions, “What is missing?” “How can we make U. T.'s accountability work more useful and efficient?”
- Develop a reporting framework that aggregates, integrates, and simplifies presentation and analysis of data.
- Align development of component institutions' System-level Compact Process with accountability and performance reporting.
- Include current and longitudinal information.
- Provide analysis and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative information.
- Identify best practices within the System and among peer institutions.

IV. Suggested Organizing Themes

- The Board and external agencies have begun to emphasize results over inputs and process in current accountability and performance reports. That is, more often the questions are asked, “What happened?” “What value was added?” rather than, “How did it happen?”
- The integrated report will continue this focus, but will organize information and analysis within the key priority areas for the U. T. System and its component institutions.
- All measures – input, process, output, and outcome – and additional information should be grouped to show the flow of resources and activities that support these priorities.
- Four broad themes are proposed, deriving from U. T. System’s overarching mission and its long-range plan, to provide a simple integrative framework for this accountability study and report:
 - **Ensuring Access and Success for U. T. Students**
 - **Enhancing Academic Excellence: Faculty, Programs, Research**
 - **Service to and Collaborations with Our Communities and State**
 - **Enhancing Efficiency, Productivity, and Accountability**
- Within each theme, the report would include more specific priorities, initiatives, and related indicators, some for all institutions, and others for individual institutions, groups of institutions, or System offices. For example:

Enhancing Academic Excellence: Faculty, Programs, Research*

Priority Areas

- Centers of Excellence
- National/Peer Ranking of Component Institutions
- Research Concentrations
- Expanding U. T. Ph.D. Programs
- University-Industry Partnerships
- Individual Component Institution Initiatives

Sample Indicators

- Faculty Background
- Research Awards
- Research Expenditures
- Citations
- Teaching Innovation
- Patent Applications and Awards
- Postdoctoral Appointments
- Post-Tenure Review

**The U. T. System and its component institutions currently collect and report a much wider array of data related to this theme; these are cited here as example, only.*

V. Consultation and Communication

- Establish a System-wide accountability working group, to be appointed by the Chancellor, to help develop the accountability strategy, identify and define performance indicators and benchmarks, and refine the studies and report. Representation will include faculty, staff, and students from component institutions and individuals from appropriate System offices.
- Develop a process to communicate with policy makers as this project moves forward, to gather input about what they need, to widen support for U.T.'s accountability work, and build U.T.'s reputation as the leader in educational accountability.
- Collect and share information about U. T.'s accountability work on a Web page. Link to other sources that will help us benchmark U. T.'s work in this area.

VI. Proposed Timeframe

December 2002	Conceptual Framework reviewed by Board Formation of working group
January -March 2003	Expanded outline Completed analysis of indicators Recommended areas of focus Communication with policy makers (ongoing)
April – July 2003	Preliminary data collection, analysis, writing, and Design
August 2003	Preliminary draft of report for Board review
September – November 2003	Final data collection and analysis
December 2003	Final report for Board review and action